

Talent Management and Knowledge Management –Bringing your vision to life

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Introduction:

An organization is initially formed primarily to bring to life the vision of the entrepreneur or the promoters . The three pillars of the organization may be looked at as People, Processes and Technology . the management of all of which determines how effective the organization is and continues to be . In this context what people bring to the table in terms of competencies , talent and knowledge is critical to the Organization.

Today, in globally competitive environments , a new paradigm is emerging where the focus is on organizational outcomes and behaviors which lead to superior performance. The nature and characteristics of the environments may be different for different organizations with respect to their complexity and turbulence. Organizations ,then, buffer themselves from the damaging effects of environments through boundary spanning departments like Marketing, Research and Development and through the processes of developing networks and relationships outside the organization. In this context competencies are relatively stable behaviors which create continuously the processes that enable the organizations to learn , adapt to new environmental demands and change the environment so that it is better suited to the needs of the stake holders. Managers make meaning from experiences , raise their awareness of theories in use , develop the critical self reflection capacity so essential for continuous learning from experiences and explore the beliefs and assumptions that underpin the theories in use that guide behavior. These then give a chance for managers to become and remain competent , in a fast changing environment.

An organization has to factor in the challenges faced with respect to , globalization, an imperative for profitability through the growth route, staying ahead of the technology curve and the information curve , managing knowledge and making it available to the users towards goal achievement thereby making for competitive advantage through intellectual capital and building organizational capability and ability to embrace change with an agility to do business in newer and better ways.

This paper attempts to review various competencies studies, need for talent management and knowledge management and their role in institution building .

Objectives :

Review the role played by talent management and knowledge management in bringing to life organizational vision .

Research questions /hypothesis

Can Organizations continue to survive and perform without an institutionalized process for managing talent and knowledge ?

Methodology : This article is based on literature survey on the internet as well as various reports and publications by business journals , leading social scientists and management thinkers supplemented by organizational experiences .

Competency, Talent and Organizations :

Historically a job competency has been seen to be an underlying characteristics of a person which result in effective and superior performance in a job as described by Boyatzis (1982). Competence studies in the past have begun by identifying the attributes of individuals who occupy a given type of role – either managerial or clerical – herein jobs are classified into different types and sub types and individuals attributes applicable to each identified . A wide range of attributes – including motives , aptitudes, traits and behaviors are identified by job competency analysis. The direction recent research studies have taken focus attention more on the behavior enacted by the job holders- drawing further a distinction between “ relevant” behavior and “ performance related “ behavior . Relevant behavior is used by job holders – “ concern with close relationships” (the behavior of spending time talking with sub ordinates and co workers when there is no particular task requirement) has been determined to be the behavior used by managers , but not associated with superior performance . In contrast , “ conceptualization “ (the behavior of developing a concept to recognize a pattern or structure in a set of information) is both used by managers and is also associated with superior performance . Usually relevant behaviors are called threshold or basic competencies whilst performance related behaviors are called competencies or high performance competencies as described in Nicholson(1995).

There has been an increasing use made of job competency analysis approach to the development of people and there has been a shift in research away from simply describing what job holders do typically, toward prescribing what job holders ought to do based on the behaviors which distinguish outstanding performers. Competency is one critical part of a new paradigm based on interconnected concepts which have emerged from the study of Total Quality Management , Organizational Core Competence and Organizational Learning and the stages of team and organizational development. Competency represents a new line of inquiry stemming from a concern for organizational performance rather than career advancement , dynamic rather than stable environmental conditions and normative rather than descriptive social science.

Competencies are related to the job on hand with the state of preparedness to do a task well whereas a related term ,namely , talent can be looked at as the skills , the knowledge and the attitude an employee possesses, The talent possessed at any point of time by an employee is the ingredient which helps add value to the job and the organization the employee works for . Whereas Competence management is the continuous process of developing and fine tuning the competencies and talents of an employee to the achievement of organizational goals ,Talent management describes the process by which employers anticipate their human capital needs and go about meeting them .The decisions in the realm of talent management both shape the competencies that the organizations have and are also driven by the core competencies as well as position specific competencies . Talent management in isolation will serve no purpose if not linked by competency management to the organizational goals and objectives

The issue of competencies and need to manage talent arise due to the imperatives of organizational growth, individual performance and organizational performance /effectiveness in a fast changing dynamic environment. Hence any design of management competencies and design of processes for management of talent, has to be made in the context of organization development – how to create adaptive organizations capable of repeatedly transforming and reinventing themselves as needed to remain effective. The focus is on planned, systematic change with the knowledge base in the behavioral sciences and with the goal of improving performance or effectiveness.

Organization development seeks to create self – directed change to which people are committed as the problems and issues to be solved are those identified by the organization members directly involved. Further as it is typically a system wide change effort, it is a process of fundamental change in an organization culture, placing equal emphasis on solving immediate problems and on the long term development of an adaptive learning organization, preparing employees to solve future problems- this means both organizational effectiveness and human fulfillment are derived simultaneously through work experience. A lot of emphasis is placed on action research – a collaborative process of data collection, diagnosis and action planning designed to create widely supported solutions to organizational problems.

In future, Business organizations are expected to gradually become virtual organizations – that is the removal of the constraints of time, place and form, made possible by the convergence of computing, telecommunications and visual media. There may be infinite variety of organizational structures, all of them fluid and changing. Due to the de-emphasis on the physical assets, adding value is expected to become more dependent on mobile knowledge and less dependent on immobile physical assets. The virtual organization is also more ephemeral than the corporations of the past and therefore it becomes more difficult to define its corporate history as it has no repository of long term memory, namely the individual who has worked for the organization for a long period of time. As the typical business of the future will be increasingly information and knowledge based, the management of knowledge and information is becoming an increasingly important skill. Knowledge which existed in the heads of its employees or in formal data bases, patents, copyrights and so on is increasingly seen as a company's most valuable asset. Knowledge management is seen not only as the key to creation of business wealth but also increasingly as the creation of national wealth as discussed by Thurow(1987). Then, both Talent Management and Knowledge Management give an edge to an organization in a dynamic environment to be able to be competitive, survive and grow.

Organizational Effectiveness

Organizational effectiveness is basically a construct(cannot be pinpointed, counted or objectively manipulated), grounded in the values and preferences of its constituents(different measures of effectiveness and changing with time) and has to be bounded enabling measurement(whose perspective, what domain of activity, what level of analysis, purpose for judging effectiveness, time frame employed, type of data used for judgment, referent against which effectiveness judged).

The earliest models of organizational effectiveness emphasized ideal types, that is, forms of organization that maximized certain attributes- from bureaucracy through participation(human

relations movement) to organizational goal achievement – all advocated one definitive , universalistic definition and set of criteria for assessing organizational effectiveness . This was challenged by the contingency approach to effectiveness , as indicated by Lawrence and Lorsch (1967) which argued that effectiveness is not a function of the extent to which an organization reflects the qualities of an ideal profile ; instead, it depends on the match between an organization's profile and environmental conditions . In a third approach to effectiveness termed the strategic constituencies approach, as illustrated by Pfeffer and Salancik(1978),effective organizations were defined as those that had accurate information about the expectations of strategically critical constituents and that had adapted internal processes , goals and values to meet those expectations. Effectiveness therefore became linked to concepts such as customer satisfaction , learning, adaptability and legitimacy with the organization's publics .A fourth approach, called the Paradox approach , also emerged which suggests that organizations in dynamic and competitive environments require opposite yet complementary attributes – high specialization of rules with broad generalist perspective , continuity of leadership and the infusion of new blood , deviation amplifying processes associated with innovation and deviation reduction processes linked to efficiency .

Excellent companies , learn how to manage paradox , possessing both loose and tight properties , a soft concern for people and hard bias for action , both entrepreneurship and focus as argued by Peters and Waterman (1982) . The mere recognition that two contradictory elements are simultaneously true may create a constructive tension that facilitates organizational development according to Pascale (1990).People learn by doing . They want to practice skills repeatedly in safe environments until they are well honed , understanding their roles and roles of the larger systems around. Whereas experiential learning and action learning are continuing to be used , slowly recourse is also taken to new generational educational simulations having authentic and relevant scenarios , applied pressure situations that tap users' emotions and force them to act as also having a sense of unrestricted options and replayability. These e – learning methods will afford flexibility and train for attaining capability levels that may be useful in future in a fast changing environment as espoused by Aldrich,C(2004). Research also indicates that environment plays a critical part in study and design of management competencies as in Aldrich,H(1979).

Organization and Environment

Essentially, an organization's environment is everything that lies outside the organization boundaries- that is, other organizations, the society in which it operates, governmental agencies and institutions , the economic system , labor markets, financial systems and so on. These factors make up what is known as the “general environment ”

Organizations usually deal with those particular parts of the environment which have a special importance , named “ task environment” – this includes the organization's own customers, suppliers, shareholders, bankers and so on , also called stake holders. Each sub unit of the organization like finance , purchase manages the interface themselves and a segment of the total task environment , acting on behalf of the organization as a whole.

An Organization , in order to survive and grow has to interact with its environment , obtain resources from it , transform them into products or services and export them back into it. As

environment represents uncertainty , instability and unpredictability, organizations buffer themselves from the possibly damaging effects of the environment through boundary spanning departments like research and development , marketing and human resources , part of whose work is environment scanning and forecasting change. However all organizations do not face the same environment across space and time. Further the nature and characteristics of environments may vary with respect to the degree of complexity and turbulence leading to varying levels of uncertainty .

Theories of organization differ about what managers have to do to cope with this situation and the degree to which they have the freedom to manage environmental demands. Contingency theory takes as its central focus the way in which organization needs to adapt to environmental constraints , the successfulness of an organization predicted on the fit between the organization and the environment in which it operates. This approach has been modified later to a view which states that more strategic choices are available to managers to shape their own environments by choosing to operate in particular markets and offering particular products – this means that the allocation of power in the organization and the use of influence by sub units has a greater part to play than the contingency theory allows as argued by Lawrence and Lorsch (1967) . The resource dependence approach holds that the key function of managers is to manage the interface as well as managing internal organizational processes.

Pfeffer and Salancik(1978) posit that Organizations can either try to change their environments(political lobbying or choosing to operate in different sectors) or form inter organizational relationships to control or absorb uncertainty (joint ventures, mergers and acquisitions).However differing may the theories be with respect to the constraints of externalities or the degree of strategic choice had by managers, it is true that as environments are perceived and interpreted by organizational actors , managers can and do shape their own environments. The behavior of the actors , then , is a critical determinant in the organizational performance. Hence the processes of managing talent and competencies as well as knowledge have a critical role to play in bringing to life organizational vision .

Talent ,Competencies and capabilities:

Organizational capabilities represent a firm's ability to purposefully utilize an integrated set of resources in order to achieve a desired end. The pursuit of organizational capabilities requires the development of management capabilities and difficult to imitate combinations of organizational , functional and technological skills. Thus although some technical capabilities may be assembled through market mechanisms , organizational capabilities require managerial action and have consequences in the market. Capabilities, then, reflect an organization's ability to achieve new and innovative forms of competitive advantage given path dependence and market positions. Capability can be viewed at different levels

- At the macro(management) level , organizational capability involve the design of structures and systems that ensure and monitor the operation of project teams (that is, Micro levels). These structures and systems embed lower level capability in the organization and create the context for their operation. Thus organizational capabilities need to be understood mainly in terms of the organizational structures and managerial

processes – coordinating/ integration, learning and reconfiguration – that support productive activity according to Teece et al(1997).

- At the inter-temporal level, organizational capability is actualized through replication. The focus is not on the accomplishments of a specific team but on the degree to which an organization can replicate certain performance features, say speed of execution in a top down drug development initiative through autonomous cross functional project teams.

Both the criteria are related- managers create the internal context that allows for systematic creation, operation and dissolution of fast cycle project teams- that is, inter-temporal replication. The capability building can be visualized, designed, constructed and described as a process model identifying systematic regularities in the sequencing of events for specific phenomenon, terming the regularities in temporal proximity as stages. The capability building is a multi layered process involving multi level organizational actors. The capabilities are also context dependent in that the resources and routines which constitute a specific capability and the pathways by which capabilities are built are likely to be determined by the firm's specific context. Organizational capability building may be in a number of stages – in a particular case, the first three stages could be –activation, articulation and mobilization, the fourth stage – implementation as project capability and the last two stages – diffusion of routines and retention of capability – institutionalization processes.

Senior managers embarking on capability building should pay significant attention to the later stages of development to ensure perpetuation of structures and systems that support the organizational capability. Further as capability building is time consuming managers may either accomplish the results with specific projects without necessarily focusing on developing a capability that will alter the internal behavioral context or view projects as a way of building organizational capability, depending on both the economics as well as the manager's comfort level with that choice.

In various research, as in Teece et al (1997), Wernerfelt (1984), Stalk et al(1992), Prahalad and Hamel (1990), Itami (1987), Grant (1996), that has focused on organizational antecedents to sustained competitive advantage, a wide variety of labels have been developed to describe related organizational phenomena -Resources, capabilities, dynamic capabilities, core competencies, invisible assets or even knowledge assets. However the corresponding theories to match the proliferation of labels all seem to have a common structure. They all focus on independent variables that have numerous common attributes – they tend to be intangible, hard to buy and sell, and so forth, with the same dependent variable, namely, some way of characterizing firm competitive advantages. The hypothesized causal linkages between these variables is generally consistent across the above studies. Barney (1991) indicates the logic tends to emphasize the importance of firm heterogeneity, why that heterogeneity can last over time and how it can generate competitive advantage in ways that are consistent with the earlier works in this area.

It would be interesting to note that the area of inquiry on the resources and capabilities of organizations has played an important role in fields such as strategic management, human resources management, international business, technology management, industrial organization economics and organization theory. How do resources and capabilities of organizations emerge,

develop and change over time? Organizational resource refer to an asset or input to production (tangible or intangible) that the organization owns, controls or has access to on a semi-permanent basis . An organizational capability refers to an organizational ability to perform coordinated task , utilizing organizational resources , for the purpose of achieving a particular end result . Firms may differ in the utility and effectiveness of their resources and capabilities. Underlying any adaptation in capabilities is capability learning- once an initial learning process ends , changes in an organization's aspiration level may re-ignite learning. The success of these attempts depends on the abilities and cognition of senior executives and top management have a tremendous impact on the evolution of organizational dynamic capabilities.

The need for identifying and retaining talent ,then, becomes important .Talent Management is then a means to the end of achieving Organizational objectives . Companies with highly committed and engaged employees do not depend only on compensation packages , health care plans , training and development and any of the myriad talent management practices but create what is called as signature experiences by differentiating themselves from others . These experiences are an unique blend of processes and practices and style of doing things which collectively determine the company culture and ethos . By articulating and communicating their core values , these companies like Texas based Whole Foods Market, Trilogy software and Dallas based The Container Store are able to identify, target and help potential recruits make educated choices and also by engendering their work experiences as what they expect it to be , in the process increasing chances of retention as described by Erickson and Gratton (2008) .

Another approach to differentiation involves a portfolio approach to workforce management wherein the very best employees are placed in Strategic positions which have variability in terms of sensitivity to value add , the good performers in support positions which are important as the company can lose with them if not managed well and also eliminating / outsourcing non value add C positions as followed by GlaxoSmithKline , IBM , Roche and as espoused by Huselid et al(2008).

A company which hopes to serve its customers anywhere they do business requires a talent pool that can not only move across regional , functional and unit boundaries but also have the capacity to find and develop local talent . According to Ready and Conger(2007),the talent management processes, as exemplified by P&G and HSBC ,need to have twin focus on functionality (sourcing, assimilation, development, deployment , performance management , rewards , engagement and retention) and vitality manifested by the passion for talent management by the four major constituencies : Top management, line management , Human Resources and talent itself , with vitality reflected on the dimensions of commitment, engagement and accountability .

Other challenges faced in talent management include managing middle aged workforce , retiring / retired workforce , keeping the A players productive and integrated in the system and how to retain and get the best out of committed and talented women workforce who choose to opt out of workplace due to family / other constraints , with different companies having specific strategies to address these issues.

Just as Talent management is related to people so too is Knowledge management(KM) based on the concept that the most valuable resource of an organization is the knowledge residing in the people and organizational effectiveness in a large part depends on how new knowledge is created, how knowledge is shared in the workplace and on how knowledge is used to advantage. The Merriam- Webster dictionary defines knowledge as “the fact or condition of knowing something with familiarity gained through experience or association” – also “acquaintance with or understanding of a science, art, or technique.” In Organizational context, Knowledge is Know how or applied action, in that the knowledge per se is of no organizational use if not used as a means to act towards achievement of organizational goals. That Knowledge which can be captured in databases / written down with a sequencing logic is termed explicit knowledge either structured like instruction manuals, research findings or unstructured like e mails, videos, training courses and that knowledge which is not generally amenable to being written down residing primarily in the head of the job holder is tacit knowledge.

According to Japanese Organizational theorist Ikujiro Nonaka (1998), it is by tapping the tacit and often highly subjective, intuitions and hunches of the employees through soft forms like slogans, metaphors, symbols and analogies to link imagination with logical thinking, that Organizations like Honda(Honda City car developed using the metaphor “Theory of automobile evolution”), Canon(mini copier with low cost disposable drum and subsequently other office automation machines like laser printers, typewriters etc), Matsushita(Home bread making machine) and Sharp(LCD projection systems and broad range of products based on LCD and semiconductor technologies under the overarching term optoelectronics) have continuously innovated and holistically created knowledge. The process of KM is also seen to have two dimensions: a collecting dimension wherein people are linked with information so that explicit knowledge and content is collected for ready retrieval and accessibility for users and a connecting dimension wherein people are linked with people to facilitate flow and diffusion of tacit knowledge throughout the organization – as for example through collaborative working, communities of practice etc.

Garvin (1998) defines a learning organization as an organization skilled at creating, acquiring and transferring knowledge and at modifying its behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights. The learning organization is skilled at five main activities: one, systematic problem solving (example Xerox’s famed six step problem solving process), two, experimentation (generally motivated by opportunity and expanding horizons, taking the form of ongoing programs for continuous improvements and designed to produce incremental gains in knowledge – Corning glass and Allegheny Ludlum, the specialty steel maker and demonstration projects designed from scratch – Copeland corporation the compressor manufacturers), three, learning from past experiences (“Lessons learned” as at Boeing, Xerox wherein the company exhibits the mind set that enables it to recognize the value of productive failures leading to insight and understanding as contrasted with unproductive success wherein nobody knows how or why leading to no addition to the commonly held wisdom of the organization), four, learning from others (art of open attentive listening and benchmarking as at Xerox, Milliken, Motorola and five, transferring knowledge in an environment with the right incentive for information sharing. The companies use measures like learning curve, experience curve, half life curve etc to track progress as a learning organization.

There is a large variety of tools and techniques used in a KM initiative including exit interviews, sharing best practices, knowledge harvesting, peer assists, story telling, After Action Reviews, Knowledge Audits, Communities of practice, Social Network Analysis etc. However any KM technique or tool need to be supported by the right kind of environment - the people, the processes and the technology may act either as enablers or barriers to effective knowledge management. The individual behavior and organizational culture are the people related dimensions which can make or break KM initiatives and implementation. In a knowledge sharing culture people are rewarded for sharing knowledge and contributing to team efforts using the knowledge base and technology infrastructure. At the individual's level behavior can be modified by encouraging one to incorporate KM activities into the daily routines – learning from others and helping others learn collaboratively instead of competitively. The process needs to be encouraged and rewarded, knowledge champions / Knowledge Experts / Early adopters celebrated and publicly recognized.

A number of KM processes like Knowledge audits, Knowledge strategies, connecting people with people to share tacit knowledge using approaches like community of practice or learning events, collaborative work practices, inspiring people using story telling techniques and an enabling KM infrastructure with knowledge managers, steering committees, knowledge champions to drive and support the KM processes. Technology can be an enabler of many KM initiatives helping people to store and share explicit knowledge through best practices databases and helping people connect with people through Groupware, intranet and collaborative tools like e mail broadcasting, video conferencing, discussion boards, E-learning tools, virtual working tools etc. To check out if KM is contributing to the overall organizational performance, logically one can tie –in measurement of KM with the organization's overall performance measurement systems. One approach is to measure both outcomes (to what extent has the project or process achieved its stated objectives) and activities (the specific KM practices that were applied in the project or process). Another popular approach is to use the Balanced Scorecard wherein learning is directly linked to process performance which in turn is related to overall organizational performance. Here, in contrast to the traditional accounting measures, the Balanced Scorecard shifts the focus to three measures of intangible success factors which approximately equate to three components of intellectual capital – namely human capital (learning and growth with respect to knowledge, skills, abilities), structural capital (processes and systems) and customer capital (customer relationships, meeting of their needs and expectations in addition to the financial measures).

Challenges to an organization:

Line managers have ultimate responsibility for both the processes and the outcomes of the company –answerable to the shareholders for creating economic value, to customers for creating product or service value and to employees for creating workplace value. Competitive success is a function of organizational excellence. The challenges face by organizations can be captured under the following headings

- Globalization
- Profitability through revenue growth
- Technology- how to stay ahead of information curve and learn to leverage information for business growth

- Intellectual capital – how to use this distinct competitive advantage
- Change, Change and More Change – how to engender a discomfort with the status quo, nurture an ability to detect emerging trends , how to take rapid decisions and seek new ways of doing business.

Experiential Learning cycle and approaches to management learning such as action learning and action science offer an epistemology that can help managers make meaning from experiences , raise their awareness of theories-in –use and help them develop , test and continually refine subjective theories of action that will facilitate their becoming and remaining competent managers . The programs and systems would be such as to develop the capacity for critical self reflection that can facilitate continuous learning from experiences and exploration of beliefs that underpin the theories-in-use that guide behavior.

Findings/Results :

Whereas traditionally competency denoted the qualities needed by a job holder , in a fast dynamic environment with the advent of globalization, it was imperative for organizations and academicians to understand the uncertainties in the environment and interact with it through planned change interventions using various approaches to development of human resources, organization development etc , all with the ultimate goal of organizational effectiveness. Management Development earlier was viewed from the single dimension of task learning (acquisition of necessary competencies – knowledge & skills needed to fulfill management functions) and establishment of key relationships. Further on additional themes emerged wherein management development has been seen as changing the attitudes and professional identity(personal learning) and in some emphasis placed on experiential and action learning models. The recent themes involve a shifting emphasis from a purely individual development to achieving strategic goals or transforming organizational culture – leading to organizational effectiveness .As seen a large number of organizations have effectively institutionalized processes for managing talent as well as knowledge and have provided conducive environments where talent flourishes and knowledge is shared and built upon to bring to life organizational vision .

Conclusions/Recommendations :

In a globalized world with fast paced changes and extreme competition , organizations can differentiate themselves with respect to their offerings through drivers like people , processes or technology . However the main differentiator is the people as the talent , competencies and the knowledge resident in them may not be amenable for replication or emulation . Hence organizations become effective by having talent management and knowledge management processes in place .

Limitations :

The study is basically done using secondary data . A survey method using questionnaire Would have helped to understand the extent to which talent management and knowledge management processes are entrenched in the organizational context today .

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