Self development and attaining my smart goals

I have a dream. I see myself as the chief HR strategist of a world renowned media company or a top HRD consultancy. Sound academic understanding of HR is a priority developmental need, as highlighted in " 11 Qualities of Effective Managers" Pedler et al. (2006). I am from Pakistan and am staying in the UK for my wife's PhD. Utilising this as an opportunity I have enrolled on the MSc. HRD & Consultancy course. Different learning style assessments helped frame my understanding of myself as a learner/manager. My learning style is Tactile/Kinaesthetic according to Jester (2000). I view my career as an opportunity to achieve meaningful objectives in a larger context. Here Schein's (2006) assessment sees strength: SV/Dedicated to Cause. I qualify as Directive on the Rowe (1987) Inventory and on Belbin's (1981) I am an Implementer, Team-worker and Monitor/Evaluator. A Reflector on Honey Mumford (1986) assessment, my personality type/signature on Personal Style Inventory Hogan and Champagne (1980) is ESTJ (Extrovert, Sensing, Thinker, Judger – Stabilizer), whereas I am the Confronting Owl on the Conflict Questionnaire Thomas & Kilmann (2007, 1974). An example linking and defining most of the above findings may be that I want to make a difference by devising and implementing HR strategies which have a durable impact on employee well-being [dedication to cause]. With objectives like this, I like to be at the helm of affairs, preferring full autonomy and control over the situation [directive]. This brings independence to organize and move things at the required yet desired pace and affords me time to think things through, listen to everybody before deciding and carefully consider outcomes before concluding [reflector]. I love to be involved in community activities. Persevering, realistic, practical, loyal, steadfast, logical, are keywords for describing me [ESTJ]. However, my career plans are under

threat as I face redundancy at work. My wife is expecting a baby so I may have to either defer the degree or roll back completely due to monetary solvency issues. This write-up critically reviews results of various learning styles assessments and derives a Personal Development Plan agreeing with the assertion that individuals are responsible for their career development and not just organizations CIPD (2010, 2003). It suggests possible ways for self-development and attaining my SMART goals. Guidance is provided on overcoming weaknesses to minimise and prevent current and future threats. I cannot and do not rule out the possibility of this being revised as my career evolves in future (maybe 5-10 years).

Career history, Life situations, Overall purpose of planIntroduction

I started my career as HR/Admin Officer working for an NGO after completing M. A. in English from Pakistan. The experience proved to be the diving deck to the field of HR. After 4 years in the role, I joined as Senior HR Officer at GEO TV Network, one of Pakistan's leading news channels. A year later I moved to London when my wife was awarded a scholarship for PhD. At present, I am free-lancing at one of UK's leading courier companies as Training Support Co-ordinator. My wife is expecting a baby and I may face redundancy.

My degree in English was my father's choice and since the very start of my career in HR, I felt the need of complementary formal education. Thus, I had two objectives: first, acquiring a sound understanding on academic level; second, enhancing professional competence, personal/self development. Being in London has helped as I have enrolled for a specialist degree in HR.

Developing a personal development plan is an exercise in organizing oneself, identifying development needs, and setting priorities. The very first positive effect of this exercise I noticed was that I learned how not to prioritise and discovered that I could always use the PDP as a tool/meter to keep a check on personal development. I can see that the PDP will serve as my guide towards developing a ' resilient sense of personal efficacy' (Bandura, 1994: 72).

Self-description & Analysis

I want to continue my career in HR. Miles and Snow (1996: 97) following Arthur et al. (1989) see career as " the evolving sequence of a person's work experiences over time."

At present I am working as Training Support Co-ordinator at a company's Technical department. However, I am looking to switch back to HR as soon as I get a HR related job. Given that I was Senior HR Officer before moving to London, in my new job i. e. in the UK, I expect to be at least on the same position if not an associate manager or manager. If, however, I have to go back to Pakistan, I will join my parent organization GEO TV Network and continue with my plans.

Between the next 5-10 years I plan to concentrate on developing expertise in strategic decision-making and policy formulation. I aim to work my way to achieving a top position e. g. Director HR in a leading company like Reuters.

It is the sense of fulfilment and effectiveness that I am seeking. Effective careers profit individuals, organizations, and society, notes Wilensky (1961; cited in Miles and Snow, 1996). Garnering sufficient expertise while moving

step-wise up the career ladder, I will ensure that I have sound understanding of and experience in roles like ' partner in strategy execution, administrative expert, employee champion, and change agent' Ulrich (1998).

Learning/Development Needs Analysis

Identifying learning style is pivotal to developing a PDP. Learning Styles can be identified by taking learning styles assessments which highlight learning/development needs, identifying core competencies and strengths and detecting gaps. Table 1 on the next page shows results from various assessments.

Learning Style, Keefe (1979: 2) is a " composite of characteristic cognitive, affective, and physiological factors that serve as relatively stable indicators of how a learner perceives, interacts with, and responds to the learning environment." While with Stewart and Felicetti (1992: 1) learning styles are " educational conditions under which a student is most likely to learn." Thus, learning style is not about " what" is learned, rather " how" it is learned.

Table 1: Learning/Development Needs Analysis

There is greater consistency in the final results of the analysis than in-consistency.

Sound academic understanding of HR is a priority developmental need, as highlighted in " 11 Qualities of Effective Managers" Pedler et al. (2006). In consonance with my aim of heading the HR department of a renowned company, this questionnaire assesses most of the qualities likely to be needed to achieve my aim. As the title suggests, the questionnaire seems designed for on-job professionals.

11 Qualities of Effective Managers

Command of basic facts

Relevant professional knowledge

Continuing sensitivity to events

Analytical, problem solving,

decision/ judgement-making skills

Social skills and abilities

Emotional resistance

Pro-activity

Creativity

Mental agility

Balanced learning habits and skills

Self knowledge

Pedler et. al (2006)

Table 2: 11 Qualities of Effective Managers

While taking the Honey and Mumford (1992) assessment a noteworthy point was that even after I took the assessment twice, with a gap of almost two weeks I scored the highest for being a Reflector, considered to be more thinking and less practical.

Honey and Mumford (1986) proposed the Learning Styles Questionnaire (LSQ) claiming it to be more meaningful than Kolb's (Swailes and Senior 1999). However, this model owes its inception to Kolb (1984: 41), " learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping experience and transforming it."

Kolb's (1988) postulate is based on the concept of experiential learning with the learning process involving four distinct learning abilities/styles, based on a four-stage learning cycle. Kolb devised his Learning Styles Inventory (LSI) to measure an individual's relative preference for the four learning styles (Swailes and Senior 1999; Kolb, Rubin and Osland 1995).

Fig. 2, Honey & Mumford Learning Style

Source: http://www. nwlink. com/~donclark/hrd/styles/honey_mumford. html

Honey & Mumford use different terminology

Activist for Concrete Experience

Reflector for Reflective Observation

Theorist for Abstract Conceptualization

Pragmatist for Active Experimentation

Fig. 1: Kolb's Learning Style

Source: http://www. nwlink. com/~donclark/hrd/styles/kolb. html

Kolb's Learning Process

Learning from:

CE – Concrete Experience

RO – Reflective Observation

AO – Abstract Conceptualization

AE – Active Experimentation

The result on the LSQ i. e. Reflector is in sharp contrast to the diagnosis on the Personal Style Inventory, Hogan and Champagne (1980) where my personality signature is ESTJ (Extrovert, Senser, Thinker, Judger) – the Stabiliser. The Personal Style Inventory, Hogan and Champagne (1980) works with four pairs of personality dimensions: Introversion/Extraversion; Intuition/Sensing; Feeling/Thinking and Perceiving/Judging. These constructs are based on the original work of Carl Jung (1921) and are a variance of Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (in Myers and Mc Caulley, 1985).

Learners/managers with ESTJ personalities are thought to be more practical than thinking unlike reflectors. However, there is a streak of similarity as well. The Thinker in ESTJ is analytical, so is a Reflector Honey and Mumford (1992) thought of as. The Senser in ESTJ works with ' tedious detail' Hogan and Champagne (1980) so does the Reflector take every detail into account before decisions. The Thinker in ESTJ has critical ability, the Reflector weighs pro's and con's.

I view my career as an opportunity to achieve meaningful objectives in a larger context. This scores high as a strength on Schein's (2006) assessment and identifies me as SV/Dedicated to Cause. The same assessment shows my strong GM/General Management competence, liking for AU/Autonomy

and Independence, and a desire for SE/Security and Stability. The finding completely correspond to Rowe (1987) Decision Style Inventory where I qualify as Directive. The best organizational fit for Rowe's Directive type and Schein's AU/Autonomy type is ' structured, such as bureaucracies, or where power and authority are important,' notes Rowe (1987).

My learning style is Tactile/Kinaesthetic according to Jester's (2000) which seems linked to being Reflector, working with detail.

On Belbin's (1981) I am an Implementer, Team-worker and Monitor/Evaluator. I am the Confronting Owl on the Conflict Questionnaire by Thomas & Kilmann (2007, 1974). Consistent with findings on the LSQ – Reflector, Implementers dislike unproven solutions or ideas. Team Workers are risk-averse and work well with clearly defined goals like Reflectors. Team worker also matches Owl the Confronter who seeks to resolve differences until all stakeholders agree on a solution. Monitor/Evaluator are slow deciders like Reflectors and prefer to think things through and see pro's and con's of opinions and decisions.

While Learning Styles are the " composite of characteristic cognitive, affective, and physiological factors that serve as relatively stable indicators of how a learner perceives, interacts with, and responds to the learning environment." Keefe (1979: 2), what such an analysis may fail to consider is the context in which a learner/manager behaves in one or the other way. An agreeable assertion in this regard would be by Sadler-Smith (2001: 295) warning against the application of learning style " in an indiscriminate fashion. A necessary element of any argument that seeks to generalize is

some comparison of the domains which one seeks to generalize from and to."

Personally, I find " 11 Qualities of Effective Manager" Pedlar et al (2006) and the Hogan and Champagne (1980) Personal Style Inventory others as both clearly indicate aspects which are developed or are otherwise.

SMART Goals

Get a career job (HR related)

Get a job which facilitates personal development on strategic and decision-making and policy formulation skills

Work towards aim: to be Director HR at a leading company like Reuters

Keep in mind: Learning and Development needs and improve upon

Toolkit: Detailed PDP

Table 3: SMART Goals

3. 1 Learning and Development Needs

Different learning style assessments helped frame my understanding of myself as a learner/manager. These exercises have been thoroughly helpful in highlighting my learning and development needs.

REQUISITE LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

DESCRIPTION

PRIORITY

Acquire relevant professional knowledge

High – Immediate

Proactive Attitude

High

Mental Agility

High

Time Management

Medium

Table 4: Learning and Development Needs

Theoretical background/academic understanding, which will augment my professional competence, is what I am keen to work on and thus have enrolled myself on the course at Birkbeck. Successful managers must exhibit ' career resilience' and should " participate in the management of their careers by taking greater responsibility for their learning" Thomson et al., 2001 Waterman et al., 1994, as quoted in Martin and Butler, 2000.

Absence of professional courses induces a sense of under-confidence and sometimes professional insecurity. The immediate negative effect is that it makes my job very demanding and requires use of creativity. On the other hand however, I have thorough knowledge regarding my company and its areas of specialisation. I have been actively involved in various projects, drawing up policies and procedures, organizing job fairs, employer branding, dealing with ER issues, disciplinary, exit interviews, etc.

The sense of under-confidence may well be a source of lack of pro-active attitude and mental agility. Given the fact that on my job there are other colleagues with more qualifications and trainings under their belt, this may be holding me back from being active and agile.

I am fairly good with Time Management. However, I do see the need to be more effective at this. Green and Skinner (2005) believe that managing time has positive impact on career and life.

Proposed Learning

" Learning is perceived as a result from four main sources/activities namely ' experience' (from everyday life and on-the-job), ' training', ' modelling others in the workplace' and ' coaching' (i. e. apprenticeship and being looked after)" Antonacopoulou, (1999).

There is an observable inter-dependence between the learning and development needs. This translates into a reliable PDP. As mentioned earlier, I will use the PDP to keep a check on my progress. This means that the PDP will be revised from time-to-time.

Table 5: Personal Development Plan

Conclusion

This write-up critically reviewed results of various learning styles assessments and derived a Personal Development Plan agreeing with the assertion that individuals are responsible for their career development, not just organizations CIPD (2010, 2003). Under the following two sub-headings, I will carry out a learning review as well as give a self-reflective account.

Learning Review

Various assessments have given me a clear picture of what my learning priorities should be and that in order for this to be a learning exercise and experience that delivers, it is essential that my goals be interdependent as well as SMART.

At present, figuratively speaking, I am miles away from where I should be working i. e. my current job in a technical department of a courier company is no help to my career plans. However, I am now redundant and this might be a blessing in disguise.

I want to be in a HR job. This will help me continue my journey towards my goals all the way developing strategic decision-making skills. Also it will alleviate the sense of professional in-security as I am seeking complimentary formal education. I see that this fear has done me damage in terms of reduced mental agility and low level of proactive attitude. I will keep a check on my progress through the PDP.

All of the above is time dependant. Green and Skinner (2005) put it as having ' positive impact' and I will work towards achieving excellence in time management.

Self-reflection

Under learning review above, I have tried to review my goals as set above to and prove that they are inter-dependant.

Further immediate improvement is direly needed in terms of theoretical concepts and formal specialist knowledge-base which will help me gain more professional competence and boost confidence.