

Developing a learning organisation: hrm



You are a HRM manager in a global company. Your CEO has made it a strategic priority that the company should become a learning organisation. You have been asked by the CEO to manage this project. Discuss what is meant by a 'learning organisation', why it is important and as a HR manager how you would establish and develop a learning culture in the organisation.

WHAT IS HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT?

WHAT MAKES STRATEGIC HRM 'MORE STRATEGIC' THAN HRM

Strategic HRM has become topical in recent years but years but definitions as to what is meant by the term vary widely. XXX. Typically, strategic HRM bridges business strategy and HRM and focuses on the integration of HR with the business and its environment.

The main rationale for strategic HRM thinking is that by integrating HRM with the business strategy, rather than HR strategies being a separate set of priorities, employees will be managed more effectively, organizational performance will improve and therefore business success will follow. This in itself may not be enough. Tony Grundy (1998) suggests:

Human Resources Strategy in itself may not be effective. Integrating Corporate Strategy and HR matters into an 'Organization and People Strategy' may prove more successful.

Human resources management needs to be closely integrated with managerial planning and decision making (i. e., international human resources, forecasting, planning, and mergers and acquisitions).

Increasingly, an organization's top management is aware that the time to

consider organizational HRM strengths or limitations is when strategic organizational decisions are being formulated, not after critical policies have been decided. A closer integration between top management's goals and HRM practices helps to elicit and reward the types of behavior necessary for achieving an organization's strategy. For example, if an organization is planning to become known for its high-quality products, HRM staff should design appraisal and reward systems that emphasize quality in order to support this competitive strategy. Strategic HRM is an outcome, as organizational systems are designed to achieve sustainable competitive advantage through people. For others, however, SHRM is viewed as a process, ' the process of linking HR practices to business strategy (Armstrong, 2006).

Strategic management of human resources includes HRM planning. The HRM planning process involves forecasting HRM needs and developing programs to ensure that the right numbers and types of individuals are available at the right time and place. Such information enables an organization to plan its recruitment, selection, and training strategies. For example, let's say an organization's HRM plan estimates that 12 additional information systems (IS) technicians will be needed during the next year. The organization typically hires recent IS graduates to fill such positions. Because these majors are in high demand, the organization decides to begin its recruiting early in the school year, before other organizations can "snatch away" the best candidates.

WHAT IS AN LEARNING ORGANISATION

According to Peter Senge (1990: 3) learning organizations are:

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...organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together.

A learning organization is simply put an organization that learns and encourages learning among its people and knowledge which innovates fast enough to survive and thrive in a rapidly changing environment. It provides exchange of information hence creating a more knowledgeable workforce. This produces a more flexible organization encouraging risk taking with new ideas, allows mistakes, learn from experience and adapt to new ideas and changes through a shared vision.

Learning organizations are not simply the most fashionable or current management trend, they can provide work environments that are open to creative thought, and embrace the concept that solutions to ongoing work-related problems are available inside each and every one of us. All we must do is tap into the knowledge base, which gives us the “ ability to think critically and creatively, the ability to communicate ideas and concepts, and the ability to cooperate with other human beings in the process of inquiry and action (Navran Associates Newsletter 1993). (Navran Associates Newsletter.)

THE FIVE DISCIPLINES

Peter Senge is a leading writer in the area of learning organizations, whose seminal works *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, and *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook: Strategies and Tools for*

Building a Learning Organization explain that there are five disciplines, which must be mastered when introducing such an organization:

Shared Vision: The key vision question is ‘ What do we want to create together?’. Taking time early in the change process to have the conversations needed to shape a truly shared vision is crucial to build common understandings and commitments, unleash people’s aspirations and hopes and unearth reservations and resistances. Leaders learn to use tools such as ‘ Positive Visioning’, ‘ Concept-shifting’ and ‘ Values Alignment’ to create a shared vision, forge common meaning/focus and mutually agree what the learning targets, improvement strategies and challenge-goals should be to get there. (Senge 1990: 9)

Mental Models: One key to change success is in surfacing deep-seated mental models – beliefs, values, mind-sets and assumptions that determine the way people think and act. Getting in touch with the thinking going on about change in your workplace, challenging or clarifying assumptions and encouraging people to reframe is essential. Leaders learn to use tools like the ‘ Ladder of Inference’ and ‘ Reflective Inquiry’ to practise making their mental models clearer for each other and challenging each others’ assumptions in order to build shared understanding. (Senge 1990: 8)

Personal Mastery is centrally to do with ‘ self-awareness’ – how much we know about ourselves and the impact our behaviour has on others. Personal mastery is the human face of change – to manage change relationships sensitively, to be willing to have our own beliefs and values challenged and to ensure our change interactions and behaviours are authentic, congruent

and principled. Leaders learn to use tools like ‘ Perceptual Positions’ and ‘ Reframing’ to enhance the quality of interaction and relationship in and outside their teams. (Senge 1990: 139)

Team Learning happens when teams start ‘ thinking together’ – sharing their experience, insights, knowledge and skills with each other about how to do things better. Teams develop reflection, inquiry and discussion skills to conduct more skillful change conversations with each other which form the basis for creating a shared vision of change and deciding on common commitments to action. It’s also about teams developing the discipline to use the action learning cycle rigorously in change-work. Leaders learn to use tools like the ‘ Action-Learning Cycle’ and ‘ Dialogue’ to develop critical reflection skills and conduct more robust, skillful discussions with their teams and each other. (Senge 1990: 10)

Systems Thinking is a framework for seeing inter-relationships that underlie complex situations and interactions rather than simplistic (and mostly inaccurate) linear cause-effect chains. It enables teams to unravel the often hidden subtleties, influences, leverage points and intended/unintended consequences of change plans and programs and leads to deeper, more complete awareness of the interconnections behind changing any system. Leaders learn to use ‘ Systems Thinking Maps’ and ‘ Archetypes’ to map and analyse situations, events, problems and possible causes/courses of action to find better (and often not obvious) change options/solutions. (Peter Senge (1990: 23)

THREE TYPES OF ORGANISATION LEARNING

- Single-Loop Learning
- Double-Loop Learning
- Triple-Loop Learning

Are we doing things right?

Are we doing the right things?

How do we decide what is right?

Single-Loop Learning

Single-loop learning assumes that problems and their solutions are close to each other in time and space (though they often aren't). In this form of learning, we are primarily considering our actions. Small changes are made to specific practices or behaviors, based on what has or has not worked in the past. This involves doing things better without necessarily examining or challenging our underlying beliefs and assumptions. The goal is improvements and fixes that often take the form of procedures or rules. Single-loop learning leads to making minor fixes or adjustments, like using a thermostat to regulate temperature.

Are we doing things right? Here's what to do-procedures or rules.

Double-Loop Learning

Double-loop learning leads to insights about why a solution works. In this form of learning, we are considering our actions in the framework of our operating assumptions. This is the level of process analysis where people become observers of themselves, asking, "What is going on here? What are

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the patterns?” We need this insight to understand the pattern. We change the way we make decisions and deepen understanding of our assumptions. Double-loop learning works with major fixes or changes, like redesigning an organizational function or structure.

Are we doing the right things? Here’s why this works-insights and patterns.

Triple-Loop Learning

Triple-loop learning involves principles. The learning goes beyond insight and patterns to context. The result creates a shift in understanding our context or point of view. We produce new commitments and ways of learning. This form of learning challenges us to understand how problems and solutions are related, even when separated widely by time and space. It also challenges us to understand how our previous actions created the conditions that led to our current problems. The relationship between organizational structure and behavior is fundamentally changed because the organization learns how to learn. The results of this learning includes enhancing ways to comprehend and change our purpose, developing better understanding of how to respond to our environment, and deepening our comprehension of why we chose to do things we do.

How do we decide what is right? Here’s why we want to be doing this-principles.

LEARNING ORIENTATIONS

CREATING A LEARNING ORGANISATION

The very first thing needed to create a learning organization is effective leadership, not based on traditional hierarchy, but a mix of different people

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from all levels of the system to lead in different ways (Senge 1996).

Secondly, there must be the realization that we all have inherent power to find solutions to the problems we are faced with, and that we can and will envision a future for our library system and forge ahead to create it. As Gephart and associates point out in *Learning Organizations Come Alive*, “ the culture is the glue that holds an organization together”; a learning organization’s culture is based on openness and trust, where employees are supported and rewarded for learning and innovating, and one that promotes experimentation, risk taking, and “ values the well-being of all employees (Gephart 1996, 39).

Here we will look at the three aspects of leadership that he identifies – and link his discussion with some other writers on leadership.

Overall, to create a culture and environment that will be the foundation for a learning organization, people must realize the beginning comes with “ a shift of mind – from seeing ourselves as separate from the world to connected to the world” (Senge 1996, 37); from seeing ourselves as integral components in the workplace, rather than as separate and unimportant, robotic caricatures. Finally, one of the biggest challenges that must be overcome in any organization, is to identify and breakdown the ways people reason defensively. Until then, change can never be anything but a passing phase (Argyris 1991, 106). Everyone must learn that the steps they use to define and solve problems can be a source of additional problems for the organization (Argyris 1991, 100).

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