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Finger on the pulse - Positive Organisational Scholarship

In 2003, a movement began in organisational behaviour called Positive Organisational Scholarship, which is a measure of organisational health that looks beyond the merely financial and focuses on companies creating a positive work life and performance.

New research

A new piece of research into the effectiveness of Positive Organisational Scholarship has just been published in the British Journal of Education, Society & Behavioural Science.

One measurement of an organisation's performance, the most common, is obviously its financials. This however does not say how the organisation may be performing for instance, during an economic downturn, where even the best organisations may be functioning very well as organisations, but failing financially due to macroeconomic factors. Positive Organisational Scholarship shows how the business is running as opposed to just its output.

The Four key components of Positive Organisational Scholarship

There are four main components of Positive Organisational Scholarship (also known as POS)

1. Self-efficacy
2. Hope
3. Optimism
4. Resiliency

In effect, Positive Organisational Scholarship is a health check for any organisation which is not unlike an annual medical health check-up to understand how you're doing physically and take any remedial action.

Organisational effectiveness – a precedent

Organisational effectiveness was once seen as a measure of an organisation's health. The problem was that there was no agreed on definition or measurement. Though no concrete definition has ever been given of this, it was broadly defined in terms of "human judgments about the desirability of the outcomes of organisational performance from the vantage point of the varied constituencies directly and indirectly affected by the organisation".

There were a number of weaknesses to this as a measurement system because it had too broad a definition and no concrete parameters that could compare one organisation to another.

Encompassing

Positive Organisational Scholarship encompasses a range of other previous attempts to describe and measure the health of an organisation or business, including:

1. Positive psychological behaviour
2. Organisational effectiveness
3. Organisational performance
4. Positive organisational ethics
5. Virtuous behaviour
6. Psychological capacity
7. Positive deviances
8. Negative deviances
9. Human issues
10. Social context

Positive Organisational Scholarship – concrete and comparable

As well as the four key components of Positive Organisational Scholarship there are four parameters for measuring Positive Organisational Scholarship:

1. The rational goals in each of the key components
2. The internal process which support the components
3. The openness systems of the organisational systems and
4. A measure of human relations within the organisation.

If the human capital of an organisation is functioning well (a good atmosphere and positive outlook among employees for example) and the organisation is heading towards its stated goals with good internal processes easing the way forward, then the organisation is heading in the right direction. Factor in the financial output and one can make decisions as to how to trim the sails for better outcomes.

The research was aimed at looking at the state and usefulness of Positive Organisational Scholarship and found that it "is not necessarily a solution or cure for a problematic organisation. However, it keeps an organisation in good shape just analogous to fitness of the human body."

Conclusions

Organisations that focus on the four key components of the

1. Self-efficacy or self-belief,
2. Hope
3. Optimism and
4. Resiliency

of their staff and teams, as well as the financials, invariably tend to do much better than those that don't, especially in times of change and challenge.

Reference

Chow, KM, "A Meta-analytic Study of Positive Organizational Scholarship and Organizational Performance" (2016) British Journal of Education, Society & Behavioural Science 17(3): 1-11, 2016, Article no.BJESBS.27802

Overview

Positive Organisational Scholarship, which is a measure of organisational health that looks beyond the financial to see how healthy the workforce and therefore the organisation or business is.

There are four main components of Positive Organisational Scholarship (also known as POS)

1. Self-efficacy
2. Hope
3. Optimism and
4. Resiliency of the staff and teams.

The measure looks at

1. The rational goals in each of the key components
2. The internal process which support the components
3. The openness systems of the organisational systems and
4. A measure of human relations within the organisation.

Whilst using Positive Organisational Scholarship may not cure a failing organisation, it is a good measure of the businesses health and ability to deal with change and disturbance.

Creating a 'Just Culture'

The idea of the 'just culture' has been around since the 1990s and was originally introduced to deal with blame culture situations, which has been found to significantly reduce error reporting in the workplace and has well documented negative safety and operational consequences.

A study just published by researchers from the Centre for Innovative Human Systems, School of Psychology, Trinity College Dublin surveyed more than 3000 aviation maintenance professionals in the US and Europe at an organisation that used the just culture safety ideology to see what real effects it was having.

Just culture is the ideology behind a process of adjudicating errors made in a wide range of professions including nursing, aviation and in the railway industry, where safety errors could lead to deaths among the public. The intention being to have open reporting and a focus on dealing with errors rather than hiding them.

The problem of the blame culture

The problem of blame culture, from a safety perspective, is that people are less likely to report errors or collaborate fully with investigations, hampering learning from events and potentially leaving serious hazards hidden in the system.

The problem of the no-blame culture

Previous research has found that the relatively simplistic solution of a no-blame culture (individuals are not punished if they report an event and collaborate with the investigation) runs into two difficulties:

1. Individuals who were clearly reckless escape discipline and
2. There is an increased risk of intentional violations of procedures in the knowledge that subsequent reporting would grant immunity.

The just culture

A just culture is one which distinguishes between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, not punishing those who make genuine errors in an honest attempt to do a good job, but applying discipline where there is clear recklessness, unjustified risky behaviour or evidence of practices like substance abuse for example.

A previous study prescribed 3 organisational responses to error in the workplace:

1. Console human error
2. Coach at-risk behaviour and
3. Punish reckless behaviour.

The concept of the just culture is designed to encourage the reporting of incidents or errors on the basis that people who expect a fair hearing will report errors more readily.

Whilst the blame culture focuses on finding culprits and apportioning blame for punishment, regardless of the nature of the error and the no blame cultures focuses on obtaining open reporting, a just culture, in order to achieve the aims of a fair and balanced outcome, requires rather more work on the part of managers and supervisors.

A just culture, "requires the gathering and evaluation of information on a much wider range of information. Relevant is the presence and nature of error, the previous history of the individual, the pressures that may have been on the individual, whether other equally experienced and qualified individuals could have made the same decisions, whether the actions or consequences were intended, and whether substance abuse was involved. Additionally, culpability decisions in just culture focus critically on whether any deviations from standard operating procedures occurred, whether those deviations were norms within the company and the intent of the individual in deviating."

The research

Three scenarios where incidents occurred were given to 3136 aviation maintenance professionals in the US and Europe who worked for one company. They were asked to make a judgement about what the appropriate level of response should be in each case.

Once they had made their initial judgement they were then provided with five new mitigating pieces of contextual information about each case and then asked if they wanted to re-assess their original response.

What the researchers found was that the participants, who were all part of a just culture, were largely able to determine the appropriate response and work out when a disciplinary approach would be the most appropriate. They also discovered that the new information (which should be uncovered in a proper investigation) usually lowered the level of disciplinary action.

However, what they also found was that there was a marked difference in the level of softening of approach by the Americans (who were less likely to reassess their original evaluation of the situation) and the Europeans (who were more likely to reassess their original decision and lower the level of discipline in the light of the new mitigating information).

Additionally, they found that people with more experience were more likely to reassess their original decision and lower the level of discipline applied. They also found that, compared to other staff, engineers and managers were more likely to reassess their decisions.

Conclusions

With regard to the geographical differences, the authors suggested that this might be: "not so much in the way they reason about culpability and the emphasis put on different pieces of information but on the level of discipline considered appropriate. North American sites start off with a more stringent sanction than European sites; this may be due to different cultural expectations or disciplinary procedures or both." With a tougher discipline culture, so the North Americans may have responded differently to their less blame focused European counterparts.

With regard to the differences in response according to the roles that those surveyed had in the organisation, this is harder to assess. The most obvious issue to leap out was that the longer someone had spent working for the company, the more lenient they would be:

"It suggests that the company has a more forgiving culture than employees may have experienced in previous companies and that older workers, who may have been around before just culture was introduced, have adapted to its principles."

The authors concluded that, "Just culture is not an objective system that can simply be implemented in a company by specifying the policy and procedures. It is a social and organisational process of negotiating the meaning of an event using culturally-defined concepts of responsibility, culpability and mitigation." Though some have tried to turn the just culture adjudication process into a science, there are real decisions in the process that come down to the culture and background of those making the judgements, and as such it cannot be scientific.

Reference

Cromie, S., & Bott, F. (2016). Just culture's "line in the sand" is a shifting one; an empirical investigation of culpability determination. Safety science, 86, 258-272.

Overview

In safety critical industries like health, engineering and aviation, for example, organisations are often trying to move away from a blame culture for the primary reasons that it reduces error reporting and critically prevents learning and prevents mistakes and issues being fixed.

The no blame culture, which is often the initial response, causes problems because it fails to distinguish between genuine error, reckless and intentional behaviour.

A just culture on the other hand aims to investigate and have an appropriate response for each of the three possible scenarios:

1. Console human error
2. Coach at-risk behaviour and
3. Punish reckless behaviour.

The research found cultural and other differences (position and experience) in levels of flexibility and leniency when presented with extra mitigating evidence.

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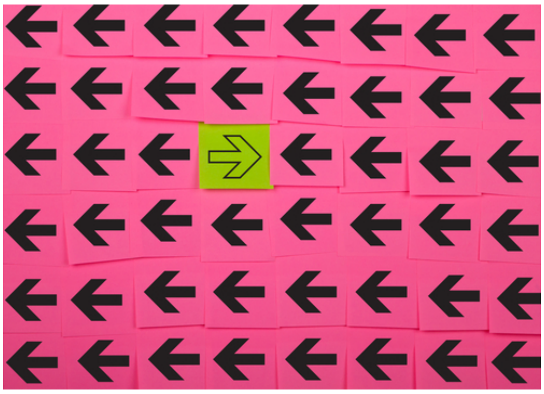
The 3 Critical points for successful paradigm change – new research

A fascinating study just published by a team of researchers from the Hedmark University of Applied Sciences, Norway and The University of Texas, USA has some important findings about creating change in situations where there is paradigm paralysis or legacy thinking (where people's thinking and behaviour is stuck in old ways and habits) and resistance to change.



Forms of knowledge

There are two broad forms of knowledge in psychology –

1. Tacit knowledge and
2. Explicit knowledge.

Explicit knowledge

This is the more typical knowledge people think about when thinking about knowledge. It is formalised and codified and is sometimes referred to as 'know-what'. It is in effect information and the role of management and knowledge management systems in organisations is to ensure that the right explicit knowledge gets to the right people at the right time.

Tacit knowledge

In comparison, tacit knowledge is described often described as 'know-how' as opposed to 'know-what' and refers to intuitive, hard to define knowledge that is largely experience based.

Important implications for learning and knowledge management in organisations

What follows is a case study about a situation in Vietnam that has important implications for learning in organisations.

Malnutrition in Vietnam

The rest of this article will be written in the light of a situation in Vietnam described in the research where 65% of children were malnourished and growing below their ideal growth curves. Government programmes of top down interventions had failed.

Positive deviants

Two Save the Children NGO workers asked themselves, "Are there any well-nourished children who come from very, very poor families?" There were and the pair of workers visited them to see how they managed to feed their children. These families are known in psychology as 'positive deviants ' – people who had learned a solution yet because their solutions did not fall within social norms their knowledge wasn't widely used.

The positive deviants fed their children with shrimp, crab and greens from the paddy fields. Small children were not normally fed these in Vietnamese society but the positive deviants did. Further, contrary to tradition, the positive deviants fed their children four times a day as opposed to two.

Sharing knowledge – self-discovery

Excited, the NGO workers tried lecturing other families on this method of feeding their families. Natural suspicion and a certain level of negative facing tacit knowledge toward outsiders bred resistance. As a result the lecturing (explicit knowledge transfer) was replaced with a process more akin to developing tacit knowledge.

Rather than trying to teach the other families with malnourished children, the families were instead asked to undergo the process themselves. They met the positive deviant families.

They accompanied the positive deviant families to the fields to collect the protein and greens. They then cooked them themselves and fed their children.

As they gave the children their new diets, so the children were weighed by the NGOs. Within a very short space of time the children no longer suffered malnutrition.

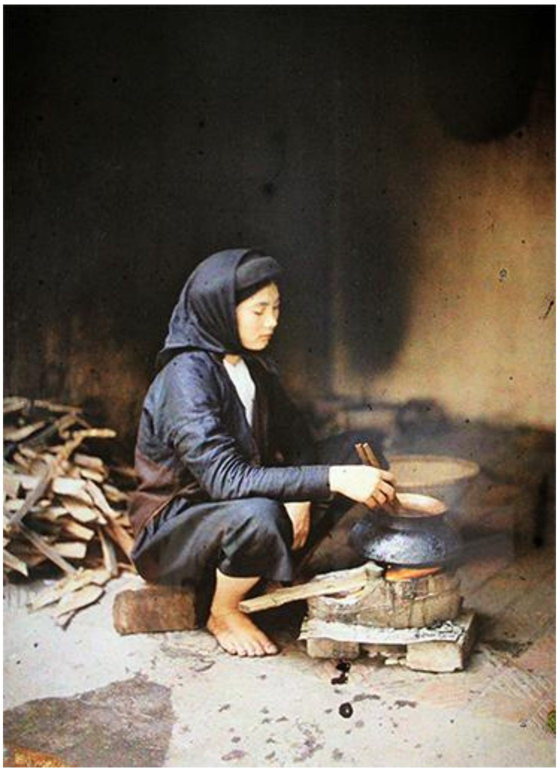
This method of exposure to new methods and coaching to develop tacit knowledge (experience) alongside the transfer of explicit knowledge was found to be very powerful in changing people's beliefs and agency, or their ability to solve their own problems and not rely on charity (learned helplessness).

Explore the terrains of the unknown

The researchers commented "These conditions should invite people to explore the terrains of the unknown: to see things in a new perspective, to question their old customary ways of doing things, to understand the consequences of the habitual behaviours and to investigate other existing opportunities which transform the deep-seated beliefs, attitudes and praxis."

Challenging failing paradigms

Everyone knew that the problem was real, the starvation and malnutrition was observable and measurable, yet they had learned from the society around them just one solution and one that was failing at that. The ordinary families were unable to see outside of that solution (paradigm paralysis). In seeing and vitally experiencing a new solution gave them the ability to solve their own problem. One that would bring them and their children the strength to live the lives they should, so the positive solutions challenged the old paradigm.



Merely being told ‘this works better than your way’ created resistance. Finding for themselves not only developed acceptance but created change. The authors of the paper concluded, “the community members dedicated their time and intellectual efforts in search of the new solution. Further, they participated in the investigating procedures and designed the experiments: by visiting and studying the [positive deviant] families with well-nourished children, by observing and interviewing others. These elements of discovery, together with the feeling of ownership and participation provided emotional and intellectual satisfaction to the participants, and that is why empirical self-discovery was an important mechanism of learning and amplification of knowledge.”

Transferring the learning

This case study exemplifies the vital role of developing tacit knowledge rather than ‘teaching’ explicit knowledge in creating change.

Three critical points this case study makes about successful paradigm change

This case study highlights three critical factors which promote paradigm (and practice) change

1. The search for and discovery of ‘positive deviants’ or role models
2. Contact with those role models – not to tell but to *show and experience the solutions in situ*
3. Allow for the development of experience both of
    a. The method or approach and
    b. The results

Reference

Slettli, V.K., & Singhal, A. (2016). Amplification of tacit knowledge through the positive deviance approach. In S. Moffett and B. Galbraith (Eds), Proceedings of the 17th European Conference on Knowledge Management (pp. 841-847). Belfast, Northern Ireland: Ulster University.

Overview

In a case study about families learning to feed their children to avoid malnutrition in Vietnam, researchers found that there are 3 critical points which need to be fulfilled to overcome resistance to change and paradigm paralysis or legacy thinking.

1. The search for and discovery of 'positive deviants' or role models.
2. Contact with those role models – not to tell but to *show and experience in situ.*
3. Allow for the development of experience both of
   a. The method or approach, and
   b. The results.

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that you promise not to change anything."

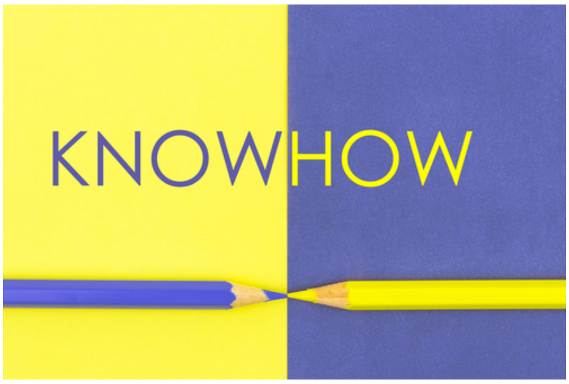
The relationship between tacit knowledge and change processes

In a second paper this month about tacit and explicit knowledge, an interesting study looked at the relationship between tacit knowledge (know-how) and change.

Where explicit knowledge is codified and can be communicated relatively easily Tacit knowledge is the experience based knowledge of how to get things done.

The researchers estimate that in any organisation tacit knowledge forms about 90% of the organisation's knowledge and productivity base.

New research focusing on three large companies has shown that tacit knowledge both has a negative and positive effect on change processes and that change processes can have a negative impact on the tacit knowledge within the organisation.



Tacit knowledge

The authors of the paper on tacit knowledge and change processes defined tacit knowledge as being, "difficult to articulate with normal language. It is learned through actual, direct experience involving factors such as: beliefs, points of view, mental models, intuition and values. Such knowledge, which is deeply rooted in actions and routines".

The authors used the Reiter-Palmon taxonomy of tacit knowledge:

1. Knowing how to do something (individual level): that is, the knowledge people use to operate (competence, skill, practical intelligence, suitability, ability, expertise, procedural knowledge or "techne").
2. Knowing how to do something (collective level): relating to tradition, where the acquisition of tacit knowledge has been collective, largely due to cultural factors (intergenerational experience).
3. Knowing how to solve something (individual level): this refers to decision processes arising in dynamic contexts relating to real-world contexts and are defined by their:
    a. urgency
    b. pressure
    c. incomplete information
    d. assumption of responsibility,
    e. risks
    f. loosely structured problems
    g. uncertain or changing objectives, ambiguity and uncertainty
    h. intuition
    i. insight
    j. chance findings or serendipity
    k. inspiration and
    l. heuristics.
4. Knowing how to solve something (collective level): or common sense, practical social

savoir-faire or “phronesis ”.

5. Where something is done or decided from (individual level): mental model or theories in use.
6. Where something is done or decided from(collective level): a set of shared values and example solutions adopted by a community.

Research findings

The research looked at three major companies that had to go through change processes due to changes in the market or legislation.

It found that “tacit knowledge is decisive in order to develop capabilities to adapt to change and to innovate … whereas, at the other extreme, some authors regard it as something that obstructs change processes in general.”

With regard to change processes, “all change rests on the individual’s willingness to change (motivation for change), which has been identified in this research as a type of tacit knowledge (mental models which operate as the driving forces behind an individual’s behaviour).”

Overall the paper found, “the way the change process is managed has an impact on organisational tacit knowledge, mainly involving a transformation of collective mental models.”

“Second, tacit knowledge management has a positive influence on the change process, especially through the development of new competences based on the experience of people who facilitate consolidation of the change.” Those who run the process will form a deep understanding of the process that they may not be able to codify as explicit knowledge.

Some of the major problems to do with resistance to change arise from tacit knowledge: “tacit knowledge arises as a source of resistance to change, basically due to some people overvaluing their experience, making them reluctant to change their working routines.”

Finally, it found that “as a consequence of the change process, a significant amount of tacit knowledge has been lost due to people leaving the organisation.” Those leaving the organisation take away with them the knowledge of the ‘way the system works in their part of it’. This cannot easily be replaced as tacit knowledge is not easily codified.

What this means for organisations

What this means is that

1. The ability to think about, incorporate and enact change is itself a form of tacit knowledge.

2. The tacit knowledge (know-how) about change is often decisive in change situations in informing people whether to change (resistance to or readiness for change).
3. The way change is managed and led will have a direct impact on the change tacit knowledge and can create an enabling or drawing out of that tacit knowledge or a boxing in and disabling effect.
4. Organisations that have a positive tacit knowledge management process tend to do better in times of change than those organisations that don't.
5. That change can often inadvertently either decrease the tacit knowledge present in the organisation or render previous tacit knowledge redundant. Often these losses are permanent as the organisation has not recorded the tacit knowledge or has no system for dissemination of tacit knowledge.

Reference

Aramburu, N, Zeballos, F (2016) "The Interplay between Tacit Knowledge and Change Processes in Organizations in Uruguay" In publication

Overview

A study based on 3 organisations has found that tacit knowledge (know-how) is a key enabler in change. Further, that

1. The ability to change is a form of tacit knowledge.
2. That tacit knowledge (know-how) about change is often decisive in change situations .
3. The way change is managed and led has a direct, often negative, impact on the tacit knowledge within the organisation if not managed properly.
4. Organisations that have a positive tacit knowledge management process tend to do better in times of change than those organisations that don't.
5. That change can often inadvertently either decrease the tacit knowledge present in the organisation or render previous tacit knowledge redundant.

The best staff have emotional intelligence

A new piece of research has found that those employees with greater emotional intelligence tend to be better employees. Looking at 262 low level staff in the retail and wholesale sectors the study concluded that those who have greater emotional intelligence also have better organisationally directed citizenship behaviours.

The research

Through the medium of Affective Event Theory, the research asked whether those with greater emotional intelligence made better all round employees. Affective Event Theory (AET) is a psychological model designed to explain the connection between emotions and feelings in the workplace and job performance, job satisfaction and behaviours.

This study, just published in the International Journal of Workplace Health Management found that those with greater emotional intelligence had better mental health outcomes than people with lower levels of emotional intelligence.

The critical importance of mental health

The paper concluded that "psychological well-being of employees plays a key role in understanding how employees' ability to perceive and manage their emotions can directly and indirectly influence their work behaviours." In effect what the researchers found was that emotional intelligence leads to a better ability to manage our emotions (emotion regulation) and that it is this ability to recognise (emotional literacy) and manage or regulate emotions which leads to better mental health outcomes (less stress, depression, negative thinking). This more positive mental healthleads both directly and indirectly to better work outcomes.

The study found that poor mental health outcomes lead both directly and indirectly to poor work outcomes and productivity.

What this means

As with physical trip and fall hazards in the workplace, there are mental health hazards that need to be taken seriously in organisations. If properly dealt with, the workplace can avoid issues with poor employee output and outcomes by dealing with mental health, emotional intelligence and resilience issues and the precursors in the work place that can lead to poor mental health. If there is excessive and relentless pressure on staff, this should be dealt with by reducing their hours for a time or changing practices to tackle the problems at root. The paper found, "Other interventions should also focus on identifying mental health hazards and assessing and minimising the associated risks as a means of improving the overall psychological health of employees."

Hiring and firing

Emotional intelligence should be considered an important personal quality in any hiring decisions. Someone with greater emotional intelligence is more likely to be a better employee over time than one who is not so well equipped and resilient. The paper found: "managers and supervisors should emphasise the importance of emotional intelligence in their hiring decisions, training and development planning efforts and activities, and overall performance management systems if there is a need to enhance and optimise employee performance at work."

Emotional intelligence training

Emotional intelligence can be taught, developed and nurtured. The paper found that, "Building and implementing interventions (emotional Intelligence-based training, mentoring and coaching for example) for improving emotional intelligence levels among employees can add further value to employees who may be constantly exposed to significant mental health risks at work."

Conclusions

Emotional and mental health hazards are as damaging to output as the traditionally observed physical hazards as defined in the Health and Safety at Work Act. Those with greater emotional intelligence have greater resilience to such hazards and this can be trained in those who have less, though hiring those people with greater emotional intelligence should be a priority over those who do not.

Reference

Dwayne Devonish , (2016),Emotional intelligence and job performance: the role of psychological well-being, International Journal of Workplace Health Management, Vol. 9 Iss 4 pp. – 12pp

Overview

This study has found both direct and indirect connections between emotional intelligence, work performance and outcomes, mediated by mental health. In effect better levels of emotional intelligence leads to better mental health outcomes which in turn leads to better work performance over time. The paper recommends recruitment decisions include emotional intelligence indicators and that emotional intelligence development in organisations would have a positive effect on work outcomes and performance.

Challenges of the 70:20:10 learning ecosystem

The concept of 70:20:10 learning has been around for some time and was derived from a combination of efficiency savings in companies seeking to maximise employees' time at work whilst reducing their abstraction time and from a concept that informal 'on the job' learning is 'natural learning'.

The 70:20:10 model is a system where:

- 10% of an employee's time is spent in a formal learning environment such as a classroom or training events
- 20% in supervision or under coaching or mentoring from a line manager, while
- 70% of their learning experience is at work practising those skills taught in the other 30% of the time.

The move from traditional teaching structures which often don't have defined amounts of contact with any particular aspect of learning or development to a 70:20:10 learning methodology requires a change of the 'learning ecosystem' on the part of learning development professionals and, crucially, the organisation's management.

What is meant by 'learning ecosystem'

A learning ecosystem "…is an entity made up of components that work together to create a whole learning experience. The relationship between the components means that the overall experience becomes more than the sum of its parts."

Self-directed learning

One of the core factors to consider in creating a learning ecosystem is the overall aim of developing self-directed learners who eventually take responsibility for their own learning as individuals and as groups of workers at whatever level they operate.

The author points out that people learn in different ways and at different speeds, so a set of resources needs to be put in place that matches their needs. They need guidance as to how the 'ecosystem' works and how to successfully operate in the system.

The critical role of management in 70:20:10

With something over 90% of the learning experience now taking place away from the learning and development practitioner it is the line managers who become the designers and guardians of learning quality and effectiveness. "Managers have a dual role: providing feedback to their team member about their performance and leading conversations that encourage reflective thinking and continuous learning." This means that the managers need to be equipped not just to give feedback and encourage thinking and learning, but also to be able to spot issues and design interventions.

It is this point which often fails in 70:20:10 systems. Either the managers have not been equipped to carry out these roles, or don't take these responsibilities seriously enough, often preferring to get on with 'operational activities' rather than being the overseers of quality through learning.

Natural learning

According to some learning and development practitioners, informal learning is 'natural learning'. The paper comments "Informal learning is often a process of looking at what peers are doing inside and outside of an organisation and copying them. In many "70" learning approaches involving job rotations or mentoring, this type of reproducing is just what peers are doing."

Hothouses

Hothouses are where, "learners are provided with somewhere to practise the decision making that they will be doing on the job and gain rapid feedback." In short, the learner is given practice away from the work environment but supervised by peers rather than directly by L&D practitioners. Because this is neither supervision or directed learning, this concept is rarely used in places where the 70:20:10 model is used, yet it is shown to be a very effective method of increasing learning, improving decision-making and developing the coaching skills of supervisors. L&D practitioners set the system up, helping to coach the managers and supervisors, and sit with them to improve their practice.

Final note – resources

The study found that it is important that employees and supervisors have access to quality learning resources, including online resources, so they can access them quickly when they need them to solve or deal with the issue at hand. These materials can be used both as a reference and for self-directed learning. The lack of such resources often undermines attempts at developing at 70:20:10

Reference

Petterd, R, (2016) 70:20:10 based learning ecosystems. Journal of Training and Development Vol. 43, No. 4, Aug 2016: 10-11.

Overview

70:20:10 learning model describes a system where:

- 10% of an employee's time is spent in a formal learning environment such as a classroom or training events
- 20% in supervision or under coaching or mentoring from a line manager, while
- 70% of their learning experience is at work practising those skills.

The paper found that there are 4 critical factors which make 70:20:10 work:

1. Having the aim to develop self-directed and peer learning among employees.
2. Supervisors and management being equipped and able to take on the central role of coach / mentor if 70:20:10 is going to work.
3. Hothouses where people learn and practise decision making and supervisors practise coaching and mentoring.
4. Providing learning resources that can be accessed from anywhere at any time.

Teaching resilience in high pressure courses

A newly published pilot study has shown that among nursing students, teaching them resilience techniques reduces the dropout rate both professionally and on their courses and enables them to focus better on their studies. This shows that resilience techniques may be useful for course designers to ensure a lower attrition rate among their students.

High pressure courses

It has been found that high pressure courses such as those for nurses, doctors, lawyers etc. produce better professional outcomes than courses with lower standards.

However whilst such courses actually produce better outcomes, there is a lot of waste with a significant number of students failing to complete the courses or being so burnt out by them that they become less effective afterwards.

A study just published by researchers in the International Journal of Emergency Mental Health and Human Resilience looked at whether teaching resilience techniques on such courses provided better outcomes.

One of the problems is that whilst the courses are high pressure the students also have to deal with and manage high workloads as well as dealing with their own career, personal and social needs.

Resilience

Resilience for the purpose of this research is described as, "

1. The ability to become strong, healthy, or successful again after something bad happens and
2. The ability of something to return to its original shape after it has been pulled, stretched, pressed, bent, etc."

Whilst it has been found that resilience cannot be taught directly per se through knowledge transfer alone, it can be developed through exposure and mindset development, particularly self-belief or self-efficacy, or the belief that the individual has control, at least internally and that this can impact the situation positively.

As fully qualified practitioners for example they will need believe that they can tackle an emergency-situation and be confident in that situation. This comes from practice and understanding how to operate in such situations. Additionally, resilience engenders "the ability to deal with change and the use of a repertoire of social problem-solving skills".

Self-regulation

Emotional self-regulation is a key aspect of resilience. Self-regulation is often taught to a degree as we grow up. We learn to cope away from our mothers or care-givers when we first go to school and then we later learn we no longer need our mummy to make it better for us. As stress builds later in life we need new techniques to help not just to cope but also to operate effectively and to flourish in difficult situations.

The author described self-regulation thus: “Self-regulation is the ability to switch from a state of excitement or hyperarousal to a state of calm.”

The research

This was a pilot study that focused on 40 students on a four-year nursing degree as they did their mental health module. They were taught techniques in resilience and self-regulation and were surveyed pre-and post-intervention. Only one person dropped out of the course.

Findings

The study found that resilience increased significantly, as did general self-efficacy as a direct result of the interventions and structuring of experience.

The course was designed to equip the students with the skills to manage their world. In increasing resilience and self-efficacy, it seems to have achieved its goals of enabling them to tackle the course.

The core elements of this course comprised mindfulness and core emotion regulation skills.

The author believes that follow up research needs to be done as a longitudinal study – perhaps beginning with the students during their first year, then completing the survey after their finals and again sometime into their professional lives. The number surveyed also needed to be increased.

Reference

Boardman, L “Building Resilience in Nursing Students: Implementing Techniques to Foster Success” (2016) International Journal of Emergency Mental Health and Human Resilience, Vol. 18, No.3, pp. 1

Overview

Pressurised professional development courses that include an element of developing emotional resilience (emotion regulation and self-efficacy) reduce stress and increase the ability of the student to continue with the course and provides better outcomes.

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Six steps to a pragmatic approach for talent development

Talent development is both extremely important for the organisation and for the individuals you are developing. It has been repeatedly shown in research that developing talent helps motivate the workforce to go above and beyond the call of duty and in turn this benefits the organisation with a more happy, motivated and well-equipped workforce.

A study in the Journal *Training and Development* found that there are six factors which create a pragmatic talent development framework in organisations.

1 **Assess what competitors are doing**

Co-optition. Finding out who your closest competitors are in the market and making contact with them. What are they doing to improve their talent? How does this talent improvement process alignment with their core business strategy? What are the challenges they face? What tools have they used to achieve this? It was found that many talent development frameworks in organisations operate in a bubble with little learning from outside.

2 **What does your Human Resources team think?**

Human Resources teams are not solely focused on hiring and firing people. They often hold information that can help to enhance a talent development programme. In many cases they will have had experience of developing talent in other organisations.

The author warns however that the HR view needs to be checked out with the reality within the organisation. Compare their vision with reality before designing development processes.

3 **Make needs analysis an organic discussion**

Rather than having a single needs analysis, make talent development and the current and future needs of the organisation a continual discussion or set of discussions across the business. The point here is that needs are dynamic. They change, sometimes slowly and sometimes quickly. Keeping abreast of the change in needs is essential for a robust and pragmatic talent development process.

4 **Plan and optimise resources**

Continually optimising and improving development and talent development resources is the key to meeting the changing needs of the organisation.

5 Unlearn, learn and relearn

"Unlearning is the most difficult, but also most necessary component in implementation of talent development. This is especially so when people have been successful through doing things the way they have always been done and trying to convince them to try a new idea."

The author explains that for an integrated competency model linked to talent,

> learning and development is going to be that little bit harder: "Implementing an integrated competency model that's linked to talent, performance and remuneration requires a longer roll out time, many alignment checkpoints and multi-dimensional assessments and measurement strategies to ensure that the desired impact is tracked and accounted for."

6. Measure, acknowledge and scale up

As with every new programme in business you need to measure its effectiveness, both qualitatively and quantitatively.

When opportunities to scale up emerge, do it. This could come from the team or from stakeholders.

Finally, acknowledge your stakeholders' contributions at every chance. Passing on praise helps motivate those in receipt.

Reference

Teoh, J "A pragmatic approach for talent development" (August 16) *Training and Development*

Overview

A recent paper in the Journal Training and Development found that there are six factors for a successful talent development programme in organisations:

1. Assess what competitors are doing.
2. Get the views of HR and calibrate.
3. Make needs analysis an organic continual process.
4. Optimise resources.
5. Focus some effort on helping people to unlearn previous habits and thinking.
6. Measure and scale up.

Making a business plan an active process

A study just published in the journal, Advances in Production Engineering & Management, has made some interesting findings about developing business plans.

When looking at an organisation, investors, banks, suppliers and high level employees will all want to see its business plan. While it is well known that this should be updated regularly to reflect changes in the status of the organisation, in theory it should be an active document that informs the continual business development process. Business plans are often used as reporting mechanisms rather than core influencers on the business itself. A new computer software model has been proposed by two academics that shows how a business plan can be an influencer as opposed to just a reporting mechanism.

The problem of business planning

Start-up businesses in particular generally provide a solution to an unresolved problem. At the outset before trading it can't really be known how the business will perform – where the Sinclair C5 electric pedal tricycle was pilloried in its time, some delivery companies are using almost identical machines 20 years later. Prior to the development of the concept of the 'app' by Apple, there were touchscreen smartphones but they never got off the ground quite like the iPhone. Until it is operating, a business cannot know if it will succeed or fail and what the challenges are really going to be.

Equally, once operational, the business environment can change very rapidly due to several factors including political, economic, market and technological changes. If it wins a major contract such as a million-unit order from a supermarket for example, things can look very rosy but at the same time provide issues of scaling. If it has problems in production and cannot fulfil that order, this is a variable that can sink the business.

Feedback loop

Factoring in all potential variables is impossible, as some things just cannot be predicted, but having an agile feedback system in the business plan can enable the organisation more accurately to adjust to the major developments.

The processing and modelling of a complex feedback system in a business plan is often beyond the realms of a paper business plan and humans. It really requires a computer system that can help factor in the variables and adjust the plan and create working models accordingly. Factoring in every external and internal influence can, of course, generate silly amounts of useless data. The authors instead propose that the following factors are the most useful and employable in such a system:

A. Automatic calculation of the profit with feedback (reduction in sales volume, production price, increase in costs of business operations)
B. Analysis of [external] influences only for the calculation of the future business results on a one - time basis without any corrections and feedback (increase in the price of raw materials and energy prices, increase in employees' incomes, increase in values of external services and internal costs)."

These can be then 'plugged in' to the system to give a pretty contemporaneous running and working model of threats (and opportunities) to the business.

The issue here is to have a business plan based on movement as opposed to fixed points.

Conclusions

In having an active business plan that takes in the business's progress, it can better inform decisions on how to adjust operations to help drive it forward. To some extent added complexity is a good thing that can help make better informed decisions. In a highly dynamic business environment such as tech or biotech, this can be useful in boiling down the decision making process on how to act, when and to what extent. Using a computational business plan can drive science into the art of management decisions.

Reference

Ivanisevic, A et al, "Business plan feedback for cost effective business processes" Advances in Production Engineering & Management Volume 11 | Number 3 | September 2016 | pp 173–182

Overview

This study is the first salvo in dynamic business planning - the argument being that business planning needs to consider movement and change, as opposed to fixed products in a fixed environment. It is important to have a fairly constant ability to see changes in variables, particularly:

1. Profit, as conditions change and predicting profit for major possible change situations
2. Analysing external influences as they pop up

This will help to develop a more accurate, responsive and living business plan.

Watch for dynamic business planning software – coming your way soon!

What the emotions that arise from workplace incivility and disrespect actually do

A series of previous research studies have unsurprisingly shown that workplace incivility and disrespect is a major cause of stress that undermines both personal and professional wellbeing.

A new study about to be published in the International Journal of Stress Management looked at how people's emotional response to disrespect and incivility in the workplace interacts with the individual's organisational commitment or sense of connection that an individual has with the organisation and the effect it has on their ability to work. In effect what the researchers wanted to do was identify and isolate the emotions that occur when people are subjected to workplace incivility and disrespect and find out what impact those emotions have on an individual's work. Additionally, they wanted to see whether a person's commitment to the organisation changes this response. In other words, are people who feel a closer connection to the organisation less affected by workplace incivility?

The researchers ran two separate but interconnected studies to look at the effects of workplace incivility and disrespect on people. The first study looked at 419 female workers in the Midwest of the US and the second study looked at 479 men and women workers across the US and then spoke to 160 co-workers of these 479 people to validate the findings.

Findings

The first (previously documented) finding was that the two main emotions that people have when being subjected to workplace incivility are anger and guilt.

These emotions then in turn have a range of effects on people's day to day working and personal lives. These include:

1. Lower achievement of goals
2. Decreased overall performance
3. Reduced feelings of empowerment
4. Lower levels of self-esteem
5. Greater levels of intention to leave
6. Greater levels of work withdrawal.

People who suffer from guilt as a result of the workplace incivility or disrespect predicted the decreased levels of performance and achievement of goals.

They also found that the more organisational commitment an individual has the more negative the emotional response is likely to be to that incivility. Additionally, people with high levels of organisational commitment are more likely to feel guilt in workplace incivility situations. The higher the level of commitment to the organisation the higher the level of guilt which results in a greater decrease in performance and achievement.

Anger as a response to workplace incivility on the other hand was found to be a predictor of lower levels of empowerment, lower levels of self-esteem, greater levels of intention to leave and greater levels of work withdrawal.

In both cases (anger and guilt), the power or level of the emotion is directly correlated to the level of organisational commitment. This the researchers point out is a particular dilemma for organisations as workplace incivility and disrespect has a disproportionally larger effect on the very people organisations want to retain – those with high levels of organisational commitment. It is these people who are the most harmed and feel the most stressed after being subjected to workplace incivility or disrespect.

Reference

Kabat-Farr, D., Cortina, L. M., & Marchiondo, L. A. (2016) The Emotional Aftermath of Incivility: Anger, Guilt, and the Role of Organizational Commitment. International Journal of Stress Management, Volume 23, Issue 4

Overview

Workplace incivility and disrespect carries a high price for organisations. A new study looked at the emotions and outcomes of cases of workplace incivility and disrespect across two large studies in the US.

What they found was that workplace incivility and disrespect gives rise to two primary emotions:

1. Guilt and
2. Anger.

These emotions in turn bring about a series of negative reactions:

1. Lower achievement of goals
2. Decreased overall performance
3. Reduced feelings of empowerment
4. Lower levels of self-esteem
5. Greater levels of intention to leave
6. Greater levels of work withdrawal.

Guilt (and not anger) results in lower goal achievement and decreased performance.

The greater the commitment to the organisation a victim of workplace incivility has the greater the negative emotional response and the greater the negative impact.

Corporate Social Responsibility is important inside and out

Corporate Social Responsibility is not just a PR policy to make your organisation look good in glossy external communications – a new piece of research shows how important it is for reducing staff turnover and increasing employee motivation.

Much previous research has found that by being active in the community a business can improve its reputation considerably through the work it does, even when its community engagement is not connected to or is peripheral to its core output.

Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate Social Responsibility is about the activities that an organisation engages in to benefit society as a whole, beyond its immediate business activities. For example, one major international delivery company sends its employees to volunteer on a number of projects around the world and they do this in 'company time', showing that the business cares about things other than profit.

Attracting the best

The study, published in International Journal of Applied Research, looked at a wide range of companies engaged in Corporate Social Responsibility activities and found that, not only did the companies involved give back to communities, but that the activities in themselves often acted as an advertisement to prospective employees. Further they discovered that the types of potential employees who are attracted to companies because of their Corporate Social Responsibility activities are often of a higher calibre than those who are attracted solely by potential income generation or career progression.

Job satisfaction

As well as drawing in the best employees to the business, the research shows that engagement in Corporate Social Responsibility activities tends to improve the job satisfaction ratings of not only those employees engaged directly in the activities but also that of others in the organisation who aren't directly engaged in the activities.

Turnover

Additionally, the study found that intention to leave is significantly lower in those companies who engage in Corporate Social Responsibility activities compared to companies who don't.

Improving motivation

The study also found that companies that engage in Corporate Social Responsibility activities in a way that was seen by the staff as a genuine wish to help as opposed to a cynical method of increasing its standing also had a motivational 'bounce'. In effect employees who believe that the company is genuinely attempting to 'do good' also tended to be more motivated in their daily work. The authors found that genuine Corporate Social Responsibility activities aligns their workers values with their own, creates a greater sense of ownership and pride which in turn has a positive effect on employee motivation.

Corporate Social Responsibility done for the wrong reasons

However, the researchers discovered that where employees perceived or suspected that the Corporate Social Responsibility activities of the company were cynical, largely aimed at improving its standing or to manipulate people's views of the organisation, to make it look better than it is, then the effect on job satisfaction, turnover and motivation is reversed.

Further, where employees think that an organisation has or is acting irresponsibly, these reversal effects are exacerbated. "if an employee perceived that his or her organisation behaves in a clearly socially irresponsible way (e.g. has damaged the environment, has offended a protected group or has engaged against the general public), he or she will be likely to exhibit negative work attitudes and behaviour."

Conclusions

In effect this study seems to show the concept of karma on an organisation – if the organisation does good things for the community and is well received for that activity then it will attract the best staff who will tend to be better motivated, more satisfied with their job and less likely to leave. If, however, the organisation uses Corporate Social Responsibility for its own gain or worse, acts irresponsibly, then such actions tend to have a significantly negative effect on job satisfaction, turnover and motivation.

Reference

Divya V., & Preetha, S. (2016) A review of studies on impact of employee's perception on corporate social responsibility" International Journal of Applied Research 2016; 2(6): 220-225

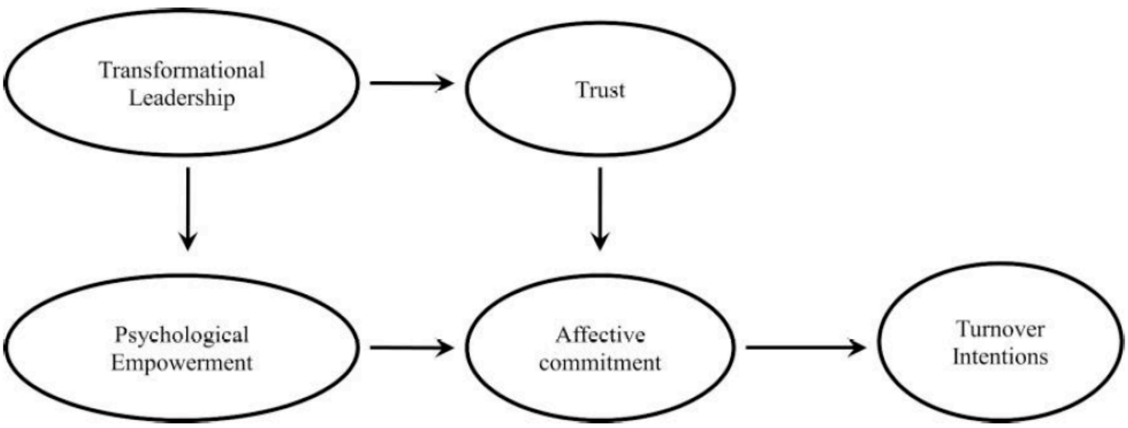
Transformational leadership can tackle employee turnover

Some issues run a little deeper than others. Where a problem such as the office being too cold can simply be remedied by turning up the thermostat, other issues need a slightly more complex route to success.

Employee turnover is something that many industries would like to be able to tackle to reduce the costs associated with hiring staff to replace leavers. In some industries employee turnover is rife, particularly in the lower skilled jobs like –catering and hospitality, for example. In other industries where the skills and qualifications are higher, software engineers for example, replacing staff becomes very expensive.

New research just published in the International Journal of Manpower looked at IT engineer turnover in small and medium enterprises and has shown that there is a solution to high turnover in highly skilled areas, however it requires a few steps back from the problem itself.

The researchers have shown how transformational leadership can tackle employee turnover. This is done through a series of steps as can be seen in the diagram below:



Essentially, transformational leadership works on two pathways to reduce employee turnover intentions. On the one hand it builds trust in the employee and this helps them with their commitment to the organisation. On the other it engenders psychological empowerment in the staff member and this also tackles their turnover intention. Let's look at the key concepts below.

Transformational leadership

Transformational leadership is a style of leadership where a leader works with subordinates to identify needed change, creating a joint vision of the future and to help guide the change through inspiration and executing the change in tandem with committed members of a group.

A transformational leader can make working for the organisation an engaging and rewarding experience which creates a scenario where people are motivated to act and improve things without being tied only to the pay packet.

Psychological empowerment

Previous research has defined the concept of psychological empowerment as "a group of practices that combine information sharing, delegation of authority and increased employee autonomy". Giving staff a longer leash and allowing them to use their own initiative to carry out their work is something many value.

Accordingly, transformational leadership will imbue the sense of empowerment and help people work so much harder for the organisation as a result.

Affective commitment

What the researchers found was that both trust and psychological empowerment create affective or emotional and values based attachment to the organisation. In such cases people tend to then associate themselves strongly with the organisation and espouse its values. It is at this point that people become wedded to the goals and mission of the organisation. Then and only then do people tend to transcend from a pure interest in increasing their own wealth and position into a place where they want the organisation as a whole to succeed. It is at this point that turnover intentions tend to tumble.

Resolving problems at core

Transformational leadership has been shown to have a positive impact on many organisational factors. Staff retention is the latest positive association with organisational outcomes. It is however, by no means an easy fix, as turnover intentions tend to be one of the last things that transformational leadership affects, due largely to the necessity for strong affective commitment to the organisation to be developed. However, if organisations focused on developing strong affective commitment, they would make a significant impact on turnover and a range of other issues as well.

Reference

Swati Mittal, (2016),Effects of transformational leadership on turnover intentions in IT SMEs, International Journal of Manpower, Vol. 37 Iss 8 pp.

Overview

As well as a whole host of other positive effects, this study has revealed the mechanism through which transformational leadership - where a leader works with subordinates to identify what change is needed, creates a joint vision of the future and works with people to execute that change. The interesting point this study makes is that transformational leadership builds trust and psychological empowerment, which in turn creates the components for affective or emotional and values based attachment to the organisation. It is this latter factor which reduces turnover intentions.


End