Talent Management
Solution to Organizational Competitiveness

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Organizations are of the people, by the people and most importantly for the people. Put it simply, people occupy pivotal position in the organizational chores. Organizations that adequately serve the interests of their stakeholders, customers, suppliers, employees, investors and community at largely, are truly synergistic and sustainable. That said, performance of the people drives meaningful organizational productivity while other resources i.e. technology and environment augment people's performance. Thus, to bring about meaningful transformation, talent management should come first.

Traditionally, human resource management ("HRM") operates in isolation, assuming that it is a staff function. Consequently, its output remains within the realms of mobilizing generalized skill set, compensation, retention, discipline and last but not the least legal and regulatory compliance. In short, it remains focused on administration of human resources with simple goals of ensuring equity, fairness and employee satisfaction rather in isolation of corporate strategy. Hence, it remains short of unleashing organizational synergy.

Case in Point: Typical organizations in the local environment are largely organized along administrative hierarchies, ministerial job designs and are dominated by generalist skill set. Work culture is control centric, with strong status orientation. Managers remain focused on operational issues and firefighting. The permeable environment promotes employees' behaviors within a narrower band. Consequently ownership, innovation and rationality remain much compromised. Last but not the least, organizations reckon profits as the sole indicator of performance rather than long term competitive advantage and sustainability.

Paradoxically, such a scenario not only prevails amongst conventional organizations, but ironically pseudo modern organizations that propagate vision and values and talk about strategy are no different. Unfortunately, it is so because they ignore to build strategically aligned people competencies and redefine their jobs accordingly. Consequently, performance evaluation and feedback continue to focus on non-core anchors. Such as, relationship with seniors, obedience, general intelligence, social behavior and last but not the least personality charisma and grooming.

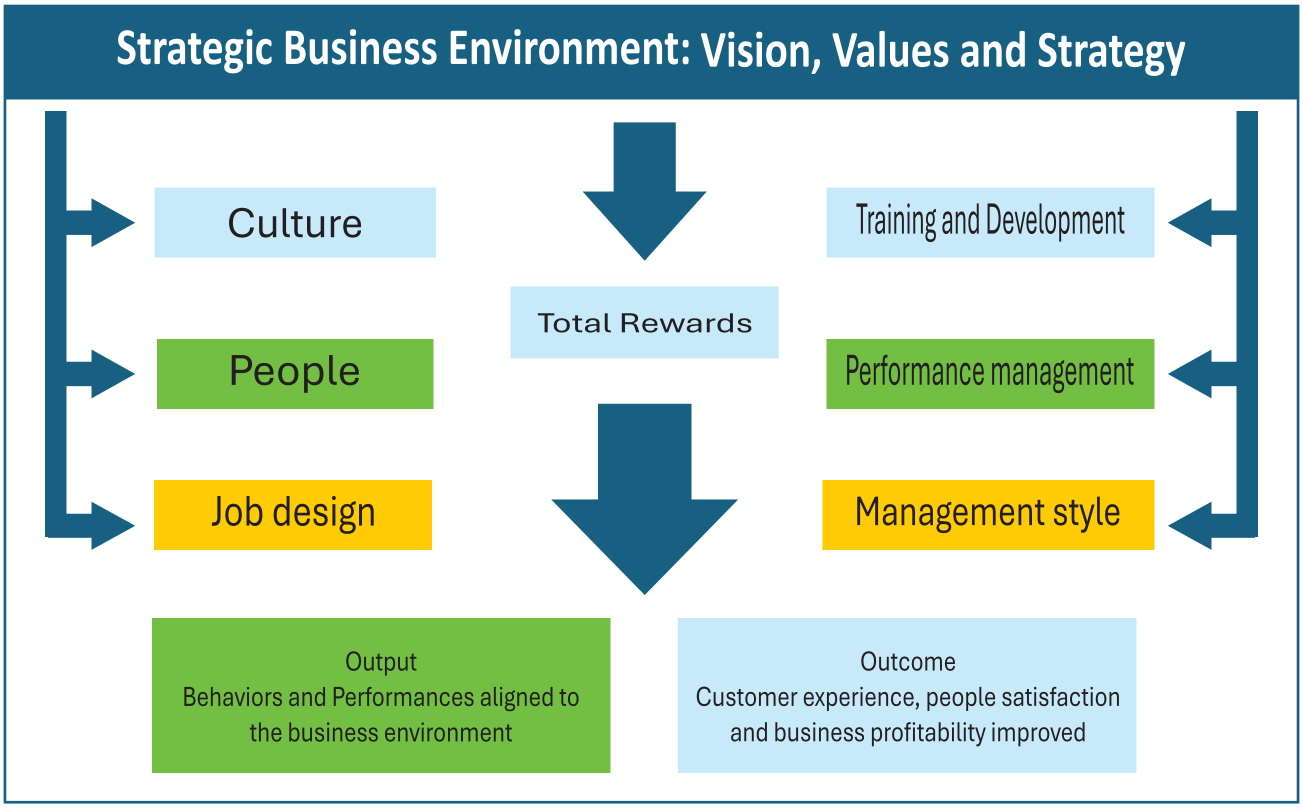
Obviously, when the focus on organizational competitiveness remains in shadow, the organizational performance continues to be short term profitability alone while long term vulnerability remains high. Among other factors, most significant cause is divorced employee-behaviors.

Translating human resource performance into organizational synergy entails advancing human resource management to a strategic level. In this transformation, the most imperative of all is to build strategically aligned people competencies across the echelons, which is referred to as "Talent management". It aims to align employees' performance with organizational vision, values and strategy thus augmenting the competitive advantage.

That said, talent management is a strategic level HRM intervention. It advocates aligning people's competencies with organizational vision, values and strategy. The schematic diagram given above explains component of a typical talent management.

Talent Management Paradigm

Talent is not an evergreen inventory organizations can bank upon. Changes in the job context as well as employee's vertical and horizontal movements in the hierarchy make talent irrelevant if not totally obsolete. That said, inducting employee based on specific competencies can only guarantee short-term success. In the long run the same employee tends to become a liability. Hence, it is imperative that the potential employee should bring compatible values and the acumen to learn and develop. This broadens the scope of talent management beyond recruitment and onboarding. It comprises of three dimensions, namely; talent acquisition, talent development and talent retention.



- **Talent acquisition** is the first step. It refers to recruiting and onboarding individuals with compatible personality-type (values, motivation and learnability). An employee can learn skills but without compatible values, constructive motivation and learnability, an employee can never be a manageable resource. Let me clarify that here motivation is not craving for rewards but conscientious orientation towards work responsibility and commitment.

  Academic preparation, professional training and relevant experience are relevant criteria. It should, however, be considered as basis to one's ability to learn and adapt to the specific job context rather than as a success factor in itself. This is evident from multiple real-life situations.

- **Talent development** is the second step. A product must keep getting better to sustain its competitive advantage in the face of changing needs and expectations, so is the employee's competencies. Job context keeps changing, so is the locus of an employee. S/he must unlearn existing and learn newer competencies to keep up with the changing work challenges.

  Learning does not occur in vacuum. Besides employees' values and learnability, a host of influences within the permeable environment contribute towards employee's learning. Such as culture, management style, opportunities and more importantly reinforcements for learning and developing, empowering job design, last but not the least policies that harness employees' behaviors.

- **Talent retention** is the third step. Retaining employees with compatible values, constructive motivation and most importantly higher learnability is critical for attaining organizational sustainability. However, simply retaining an employee on his or her present competencies would only create inventory of dead woods in the future: a liability no organization can afford.

  Hence, retention strategies should focus on developing succession plans, identifying required development trajectory and offering opportunities such as job rotation at considered intervals, mentoring programs, training and development, etc. It is imperative that employees' development is monitored and evaluated on continuous basis, else the investments are likely to go down the drain. Needless to say, organizations should ensure equal opportunities for all. Otherwise, organizations will risk heightening dissatisfaction across the echelons and emergence of blue-eyed culture.

Talent Management Process

As noted above, nurturing talent requires an inclusive strategy.

- **It begins with translating vision and values into to-do behaviors.**

For example: An organization may proclaim as a "Solutions Company" and promotes values of innovation and reliability. So, practically employees' behaviors should be anchored to solution building, creativity, customer satisfaction, etc.

This follows that personality type and competencies, which critical to promote target behavior and performance should be charted. For example: In the given scenario knowledge, analytical skills, out of box thinking, problem solving, empathy, commitment, work motivation, etc.

- **Promote culture (values and norms) that encourage target behaviors.**

For example: Foster norms like walking an extra mile, value customers, recognition for innovative solutions, etc.

- **Focus on total personality development not just the job skills.**

For example: Make training curriculum inclusive and diverse at the same time to build values, harness motivation, and transfer job knowledge and skills. The process must continue along with the career trajectory of employees.

- **Reinforcement is crucial yet tricky. Compensation is the most considered reinforcement.**

Empirical evidence suggests that it may be a strong variable for employee retention but not really effective in promoting excellence on the job. Having said, multiple and diverse reinforcements are needed to promote performance.

For example: While fair pay is a must but career growth, professional development, self-esteem, recognition, involvement, justice, equity and merit also must be on the reinforcement menu.

- **Last but not the least, management decisions and actions should manifest the essence of corporate vision and values.**

For example, managers should focus on solutions, they should hold hands of the employees, delegate and empower them, and last but not the least promote objectivity, transparency, recognition, etc.

Recommendations

It is observed that organizations envision superior customer experience and higher value for their money but their performance remains within the confines of efficiency and profits. Public utility companies are the glaring example. They keep raising prices of their services only to cover up their internal inefficiencies and sometimes even to compensate for their corruption driven losses while the performance of their employees remains far from quality service. Eventually customer experience and value for their money keeps diminishing. Local corporate entities also face challenges of living by their vision and values, for most of the time employees' performance remains divorced. Consequently, they fail to compete with international brands.

Turning around the prevailing scenario is the urgent need of the local organizations should these resolve to compete and become sustainable in the true sense. The solution lies in managing strategically and transforming generalized (administrative) skills set into targeted business competencies. To do this, organizations need to add strategic perspective and continually build competitive talent inventory that ensures superior customer experience, higher value for their money, and market competitiveness.

Conclusion

Employees' performance is at the center of any organization. It is a complex outcome of employees' potential and organizational factors. Hence, an inclusive strategy for inducting employees with the right personality make-up and learnability, and harnessing organizational factors can increase chances of developing talent necessary to sustain competitiveness. In short, to implement talent management the organization should; -

a. Demonstrate **unwavering resolve** and **commitment** to its Vision and Values.

b. Align **human resources strategy, policies and system** to the Corporate Strategy

c. Identify **core competencies** for the management and executive employees.

d. Integrate **recruitment, onboarding, training, evaluation, reinforcement and retaining processes** to effectiveness.

About the Author: *The writer holds a professional qualification in Banking and Finance. He is a practicing Human Resources and Organizational Development Professional, having more than three decades of hands-on experience in his field. He has authored books and publishes extensively.*