



| HUMAN RESOURCES |

HCM Professionals' New Agenda and Challenges

Challenge # 2: Changing Personal and Cultural Values of Workforce

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The ever changing personal and cultural values of workforce working under the same roof inevitably lead to emergence of new values and culture. A set of cultural values of one society may stand in conflict with the values of another society. A clear distinction marks the personal and cultural values and work ethics of the western countries as against the values nurtured by the East. Some people are workaholic; some are lazy; some societies value punctuality, honesty, diligence and frugality as their core values; others do not at all bother such values in their social and personal life. This juxtaposition of human behavior is heavily influenced by the culture in which they are brought up. Broadly speaking culture is composed of man created elements of life - customs, beliefs, habits, codes, ethics and laws. Global economy and global village concepts make the workforce culture more complex and thus challenging for HCM professionals.

Human behavior depends largely on his/her socio-cultural norms and practices. Social customs, beliefs, values, and language are all part of what shapes a person's identity and reality. According to this approach, what a person thinks or acts is based on his or her socio-cultural background. However, the global village concept, education, training and the free flow of information create a vital impact in shaping the minds of an individual. This is largely because exposure to other culture shapes his mind, thought process and activities. He learns how to adjust and be adaptable to a value that is acceptable universally. Human Capital is diverse in education, language, social value systems, individual requirements and priorities. This is where managing diversity becomes a challenge for HCM professionals.

2.1 Managing Diversity: Diversity describes a range of differences in people - ethnicity, nationality, gender, function, ability, language, religion, lifestyle, culture, etc. - binding them all together to achieve the objectives working under the same roof. Diversity management therefore, is an aggregate effect of proper recruitment, reward, performance appraisals, employee development, pay and compensation management of these diverse people so that they develop behaviors which lead to competitive advantage and team work. When diversity is managed well, it can enhance creativity, increase commitment and job satisfaction. Diversity is a specialized term describing a workplace that includes:

- people from various backgrounds and cultures and/or
- involved in diverse businesses.

Managing Diversity through 'Teamwork' is essential for competing in today's global scenario, where individual perfection is desirable as much as a high level of collective performance. In Research, Scientific and knowledge based enterprises, teams are the norm rather than the exception. An important feature of these teams is that they have a significant degree of empowerment and decision-making authority. There are many different kinds of teams in an organization: top management teams, focused task forces, self-directed teams, engineering teams, product/service development and/or launch teams, quality improvement and assurance teams, and so on and so forth.

2.2 Comparisons of Cultures: The importance of culture in managing human capital in an organization can best be exemplified by contrasting one country with another. Let's take the example of two highly developed and industrialized countries - Japan and USA. In Japan, a worker would normally expect advice and guidance from the employer to a great extent. But in US it would be presented with the workers' emphasis upon freedom and equality. American cultural values of individuality often lead to severe competition among employees and organizations, while Japanese practices are a cooperative method of workers - workers work in the same organization years together for a long time; even their children and pro-children would be employed in future. Non-performance is not the only cause for dismissal in Japan. In USA it is the "survival of the fittest".

2.3 Sub-Cultures within an organization: Sub-cultures do exist in each business organization. This depends largely upon trade, occupation, type of profession, etc. Engineers and scientists, for example bring and nurture certain beliefs, values and culture that can stand in conflict with the entire value systems of that organization. Researchers would want freedom of action with no time-bound activities. Very simple system of swiping attendance cards or punching system is a matter that they resent while other professionals would accept this as a normal duty while entering the organization without which pay and attendance will be in question by HR department. There exists a sort of clash in values and culture. It is therefore the task of HCM professionals to study the characteristics, standards and values of the subcultures so that a clash free ambiance can be created within the organization.

2.4 Treatment of time: Perhaps the most cited example of varying international cultural values is the treatment of time. Western civilizations attach much importance to time. This can be seen by the widespread availability and use of accurate clocks hung atop tall building towers. The precision of transportation departure and arrival time-schedules and the pressing necessity of individuals to meet scheduled appointments in scheduled times are yet other examples of the value of time. In some countries such as Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and few African and East Asian countries, time does not have the same high value. This does not mean that these people do not value efficiency. Often, their attitude toward time is a result of poorer transportation and communication facilities available to them. Being 5 minutes late for an appointment in some society will call for an apology, while 30-40 minutes late for an appointment is not an unusual happening in some society and demands no apology.

2.5 Binding personal values and culture: As there are changing mixes of individual values and culture so are there needs of professional ways of handling these individuals so that they bind together with the same value and culture of the organization they work for. The HCM professional's role is very critical in this respect as he/she strives to make fusion of these varied elements into one value system, one culture of the organization. He starts with: -

2.5.1 Coaching: The goal of a coach is to bring out the possibilities in a player as a member a team. It inspires, energizes and facilitates learning and development of the player. The foremost point of learning is the organizational vision which describes purpose, strategic direction, inspiration and alignment to the central theme of business.

2.5.2 Building a Team Culture: The following actions may be prescribed for building a

team which most HCM Managers are aware of; however, some of these are mentioned below for refreshing our mind. These we may term 10 commandments for our purpose here:

- Provide an inspiring vision
- Define shared values and culture
- Set stretch goals and objectives
- Develop team leaders
- Synergize complimentary skills
- Uphold and celebrate diversity
- Encourage team activities
- Empower teams
- Provide coaching
- Reward collective achievements

Please note that reward systems are the mechanisms that make many things happen. However, reward systems are much more than just bonus plans and stock options. While they often include both of these incentives, they can also include awards and other recognition, promotions, reassignment, non-monetary bonuses (e.g., vacations, LFA), or a simple 'Thank You'. "The journey is the reward," says Steve Jobs.

2.6 Conclusion: Human relation is basically based on a sound management practice that is concerned with integration of people into a work situation - motivating employees to work together cooperatively bearing the same values and culture. Human behavior largely depends upon need-stimulated tensions which are commonly known as physiological, social and egoistic. When needs are frustrated, employee behavior tends to be aggressive, regressive, obsessed or submissive. Organization psychologists propagate a highly optimistic view of human beings who have enormous capacity for growth, development and achievement. Some psychologists maintain that this capacity for growth rests on foundation of social, cultural, or genetically transmitted behavioral patterns. Humans are malleable, adaptable, accommodating and therefore behaviour can be engineered but cannot be fully understood and rightly predicted unless you have knowledge of various cultures. The customs, traditions, codes, values and laws that make up a culture restrict the freedom of managers to a certain degree. But within an organization, a culture and value system should be developed that will facilitate effective cooperation to create a super team. The HCM professionals' challenge, therefore, is to create such an environment.

(Next issue: Challenge # 3 Changing Expectations of Workforce)

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