Strategy and Development Skills

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Abstract

The topic of strategy and development skills in relation to work environment strategies aimed at improving performance is widely researched. The only limitation is that most of these researches do not fit in today’s dynamic environment. In addition, these earlier studies focus on whole-organisation strategies but fail to consider employee-focused strategies. Today’s dynamic environment, where compensation is based on performance rather than time, requires employee-focused strategies that can enable the work to operate at peak performance. This study focuses on application of different strategies skills to improve and develop personal work environment.

Keywords: skills, environment, strategy
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References
1. INTRODUCTION

Working in a dynamic work environment entails dealing with big events that have to be planned and arranged within a very short time, a fact which makes a number of work strategies ineffective in this form of work environment. According to French (2010), duties in the dynamic work environment involve planning and executing detailed programs. Due to this, most work environments have a lot of work to be done within a very short time. The pace of work in this today's work environments demands work strategies that will combine both speed and efficiency for effectiveness of this department, given its importance in any country.

Though a plethora of literature exists on effective work strategies, much of it has been passed by time and cannot be effective in today’s fast-paced environment. In fact, some of the approaches in place today have been causing delays and leading to much frustration. In addition, motivation to work has been destroyed by these strategies and most employees report to work because they have to and not because they are motivated and love their work. There is no internal motivation or worker-based strategies that the worker can use to improve his or her work environment. In this study, I focus on application of different strategies to improve and develop my work environment.

1.1. Background to the Study

Today the work environment and places of work are undergoing dynamic, substantial and even volatile changes driven by changes in technology, economics, demographics and ways of work. In this respect, skills and developments related towards coming up with strategies to improve work environments should evolve to be more supportive, flexible, agile and innovative. According to Saxena (2007), the workplace or work environment is a very important strategic
asset from which a firm can expect a maximum return on investment. Through the effective application of work environment strategies, the design, planning, and management of work environment will increase the effective and efficient use of space to aid workers in the performance of their work and realising the full potential.

Unfortunately, the existing work environment strategies have not aided the workers in their performance of work and realising the full potential of the work environment. The existing strategies have brought issues with employee retention, and a number of employees have been exiting their current work environments in search of better work environments. The current strategy in force focuses on employees doing the portions of work independently without much consultation or interfering with their fellows. In this approach, every worker has to come up with his or her own work plan and manoeuvre it in such a way that it will help him realise his or her organisational goal.

The workers have to achieve their goals irrespective of the method they employ and the way they employ it. As a result, this self-centred strategy has led to cold-feet and reluctance of workers to step in for their fellows in case of emergencies. In addition, an aggressive culture of negative competition has been developed and new employees are viewed as enemies. In this respect, the existing workers secretly plot how to ensure the new worker does not achieve by making his work difficult. They do this by not offering assistance to him making him appear as a failure and unproductive in the work environment.

Apparently, the work environment is fast-paced and events have to be organised within short times, without assistance, new employees find it hard to adopt. Failure to adopt leads to frustration and stress in the work environment, which unfortunately spreads to all workers in the
work environment since all work is inter-connected and inter-related. Consequently, a tense work environment is created where employee cannibalism exists. Apart from issues with the workers, the current strategy fails to address a number of issues that deal with corporate culture and the physical working environment in the work space. A number of workers (I included) have complained that it does not feel good working in tense working environments. In addition, most employees feel they are not personally valued in the work environment. According to Saxena (2007), when an employee does not feel appreciated or engaged, all the money in the world cannot hold him to the work environment.

Existing strategies also fail to address the issues of job support. Most of the employees want to do a good job and have a drive to excel. What prevents them is the feeling that their supervisors are not allowing them to do their best leading to frustrations. Furthermore, there is a clear lack of advancement opportunities in terms of professional and personal growth. Saxena (2007) argues that people often wish and want to be better tomorrow than they are at present. To achieve this, a good work environment should create an opportunity for personal growth. Personal growth forms a very strong drive in the workforce today, particularly with the younger generation who are not motivated with money or title incentives.

Majority of people coming out of universities and colleges often identify training as their primary criterion for selecting their first job or company. Companies that destroyed their training sections, similar to what Dynamic work environment is trying to do, often have to catch up with in order to attract qualified and good employees.

The work environment today is changing fast, and unlike in the past where money or fair compensation were a motivating factor, employees today are seeking for opportunities to learn
and grow, advance their careers, and work on challenging and interesting projects. Employees further want to be appreciated and recognised for their efforts and to feel part of something that enhances value to their community. In this respect, effective work environment strategies should be focused on retaining employees and assisting them to achieve their career objective as they advance their personal and professional lives. In addition, workers need to come up with their own strategies and initiatives to help them improve their work environments, if they need to be relevant to the workplace today.

Today, the work environment is highly competitive and most compensation is based on performance. In this respect, work strategies aimed at fostering self-performance should be developed. Work strategies like employee support strategies, employee growth strategies; employee compensation strategies, Kimball in-office and elsewhere strategies, collective control strategies, office team strategies, and work environment re-design have been proven to work.

1.2. Justification of Study

Workplace strategy is important since the work environment has a significant effect on the behaviour and performance of employees. Effective strategies will increase performance and make workplace environments enjoyable leading to high job satisfaction and increased productivity. The dynamic work environment needs effective work strategies if goals, objectives, and plans are to be realised to perfection within the short time durations specified. Apparently, the existing strategies have failed to address issues of motivation and retention. Thus, employees’ performance is not at optimal levels. The most unfortunate bit is that, a lot has been said and written about the topic of workplace strategies, but not much is known yet. Apparently, most workplace strategy decisions are being made without considering the implications they will
have on employees’ performance. Still, little research exists on the topic of personal work strategies that employees can take advantage of to improve their work environments. This study seeks to look into the shortcomings of earlier strategies and then proposes an array of strategies that will improve performance and address the present needs of today’s employees. This study will further propose additional research on effective workplace strategies to be carried out.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

2.3 Research Objectives

The objective of this study is to come up with effective strategies that I can apply to improve and develop my work environment in the Dynamic work environment. The motivation behind this study comes from the desire and need for strategy and development skills that can improve workplace experience. Much literature exists on this topic, but they fail to address the issues of motivation and the dynamic nature of today’s employees. This study seeks to bridge this gap especially in organisations with similar scenarios and environments like the Dynamic work environment.

2.4 Research Questions

This study shall seek to address the following questions:

i. How effective is the use of workplace strategies in improving workplace performance?
ii. Why have some strategies failed in improving workplace performance?
iii. What are some of the effective employee strategies that can be applied in a workplace environment like Dynamic work environment?
iv. What are some of the barriers to effective implementation of effective work strategies to today’s worker?
3. LITERATURE REVIEW

A lot of research articles have been written on strategy and development skills to improve and develop work environments. Most of these articles have put forward a number of strategies and practices to be enforced by both management and employees to improve workplace performance. Much of what is contained in them ranges from dealing with workplace bullying, stress management, technology-based working, and self-esteem perspective of work environment. Unfortunately, these strategies have not been that effective in improving work environments as they only focused on the employees and failed to focus on the work environment as a whole. The strategies in these articles are also more of tactics used to achieve an objective and thus have been short-lived. In order to come up with an effective work environment strategy, there is a need to understand what the work environment or workplace entails.

Kemp and Baker (2010) define the work environment as a place that one works either in an office building, from a car, at a construction site or at home. Each work environment has its own unique, physical, psychological, and cultural composition. According to Davis and Ventre (2010), most organisations view the primary facilities performance objective as the provision of an effective and efficient work environment for the operations of the firm. The provision of this work environment often includes the allocation of adequate work space, the arrangement of this space, connecting it to other spaces, its furnishing, and operation of its mechanical and electrical systems to make it more comfortable. All the physical components of the work environment must be adequately tuned to facilitate the operations of the workers.
Davis and Ventre (2010) further argue that the work environment has an effect on the comfort, productivity and employee. Due to this, an effective work strategy that will maximise on employees’ ability should be thought of and implemented. According to Curtis (2007), a workplace strategy is the dynamic alignment of a firm’s work patterns with the work environment in order to achieve peak performance and reduce costs. Gardner and Johnson (2011) view workplace strategies as systematic approaches for improving efficiency and effectiveness of how work space is utilised by changing the way work space is configured. One clear thing from these two definitions is the aspect of the workplace enabling peak performance and reduction of costs through improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the way a work environment is used.

In normal instances, work environments strategies development often coordinates information from all fundamental domains of a firm. That is, IT, Human Resource, and Finance among others. Typically, each of these departments often has its own strategy and the success of the whole organisations strategy depends on these different strategies and to what extent they have been aligned with the overall business strategy. Some of the work strategies that have been studied include working environment, employee relationship, employee support strategies, employee growth strategies, employee compensation strategies, Kimball in-office and elsewhere strategies, collective control strategies, office team strategies, and work environment re-design.

### 3.1. Working Environment Strategies

This strategy is among the many strategies recommended by Rumelt (2011) that proposes creating and maintaining a workplace that attracts, nourishes and retains people. This strategy covers a number of issues, from development of a corporate mission, value system, and culture
to the creation of a safer working environment together with clear, consistent, and logical operating procedures and policies. These strategies address three fundamental aspects of the work environment: the values and ethics foundation on which the organisation rests; the policies which interpret these values and translate them into daily actions; and the physical work environment in which the people work.

According to Rumelt (2011), the overall goal of these strategies is to make the company a place where people want and are motivated to come to work. From Curtis’s (2007) viewpoint, these strategies include clarification of work mission for the whole organisation and for each worker, creation of a value statement, communication of positive feelings between the workers, staying focused on the objective of work, being fair and honest to fellow workers, cultivating a feeling of family in the work environment; promoting integrity; upholding workplace safety, reducing the number of meetings, and making work more enjoyable.

According to Curtis (2007), these working environment strategies relate in one way or another to the corporate culture in force in the organisation. Most workers desire a culture of shared information and openness where they can know where the company is going and what it will look like in the days to come. In addition, workers also insist on knowing how their specific jobs fit into the big scheme of things in the company and what they can do to help the firm to achieve its set goals and objectives.

3.2. Employee Relationship Strategies

Employee relationship strategies deal with how the management treats its people and how the employees treat each other. According to Rumelt (2011), organisations where employees perceive each other as enemies and potential competitors to their positions will not succeed in
creating a proper working environment for efficient and effective performance. What every company needs is a good working relationship between all people in the firm at all levels. The strategies in this category start from giving the management plenty of relationship training and getting information from the workers as to why they are working for the company.

According to Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger and Vohs (2006), giving management plenty of relationship training makes them know that their subordinates in the company are working for them and not for the company per se. This brings in a sense of responsibility and removes the aspect of viewing juniors as potential competitors and thus rivals. In addition, when the management and supervisors possess this knowledge, sensitivity to work and training effectively with people on an individual level would be easy, and the required workplace bonding would be achieved.

According to Baumister et al. (2006), employee relationship strategies include use of behavioural styles tools of assessment like DISC or Myers-Briggs to help people better understand themselves and others for effective communication; assisting the employees set life goals and become focused on where they want to go and help them realise how their goals match up with the overall company’s goals and that they can achieve this goal by being part of the company; and involving the workers family through an open house event, birthday celebrations, holding major milestone celebrations, and holding social activities among others. Wrench (2013) also proposes other employee relationship strategies that comprise of building mentoring relationships with and among the workers to increase their emotional ties to the firm, being firm and fair through avoiding second-guessing employees, encouraging humour in the work environment, focusing on building individual self-esteem, and giving recognition deliberately and strategically.
According to Wrench (2013), the ultimate goal of employee relationship strategies is to help create a sense of family in the organisation. In most instances, people in families have disagreements and conflicts but they often learn how to work them out. The family sticks together through the good and bad times and supporting each other’s growth.

3.3. Employee Support Strategies

Paludi (2012) views employee support strategies as those that entail giving people the equipment and tools to get their jobs done. In most instances, when people feel that they have what they need to carry out within the organisation, their job satisfaction increases tremendously. These strategies stem from three elementary principles. They are as follows: people need to be availed with adequate resources to get their jobs done; people want to excel in whatever they do; people need mental and moral support from fellow employees and the management (Paludi, 2012).

Employee support strategies, in most instances, start with a change in attitudes; both in the management and employees and in believing that all the employees want to excel rather than perform at minimum levels. Employee support strategies comprise of providing people with productive work to carry out, providing them with challenges, removing all possible barriers and obstacles to implementing their work, and adjusting the job to fit their abilities, strengths and talents. It also entails keeping promises made to them, establishing effective communication systems, clearly defining their job responsibilities and accountabilities, inspiring people to take initiative, recognising and encouraging as well as rewarding innovation and creativity, avoiding micro-management, reducing any reporting requirements, and where possible, offering job flexibility.
3.4. Kimball’s In-Office and Elsewhere Strategies

Springer (2010) asserts that most organisation seldom consider developing or changing their work environment strategies despite benefits of reduced space, reduced facilities cost, and improved performance of employees. He suggests work environment strategies that focus on space efficiency and lowering facilities costs and increasing communication and collaboration. Space inefficiencies are among the major causes of mismatch between the functional features of workplaces and changes in the ways work is carried out. When the workspace functionality is aligned to better support work modes and work behaviours, greater space efficiency can be achieved. This efficiency is in terms of utilising less space for the same number of people or even more people in the same workspace.

Kimball’s work environment strategies are focused at achieving workspace efficiency as a work environment strategy. Some of the strategies utilised in Kimball’s model include reduction of individual footprint; moving of employees out of private offices into cubicle or open plan workspaces; forming flexible work schedules that reduce the total number of workspaces required to aid the work force; and employing telework, distributed work, or telecommuting (Davis & Ventre, 2010).

According to Kemp and Baker (2010), Kimball’s strategies are also focused on increasing collaboration and communication. Unfortunately, increasing collaboration and communication appears hard to realise as most workplace strategies aim at cutting costs but are cold on ways to increase communication and collaboration. Increasing worker density by getting rid of private offices and lowering partitions do not necessarily lead to more communication and collaboration. According to Wrench (2013), effective communication and collaboration can only
be achieved through increased opportunities for face-to-face interactions. In this respect strategies that help increase communication and collaboration include creation of more informal flexible group and interaction spaces; clustering of workspaces; lowering partitions; creation of functional zones to support different forms of behaviour and work; and taking advantage of web-enabled virtual group spaces (Davis & Ventre, 2010).

3.5. Employee Compensation Strategies

Rumelt (2011) argues that effective employee compensation that will improve the work environment should stem from one basic principle. That is, money alone will not bring satisfaction to most employees. In the past, most firms paid their workers for their time, but today, more and more organisations are paying for performance in almost all positions (Paludi, 2012). Every work strategy should incorporate this trend if there is a need to achieve work satisfaction and improved performance. Paying for performance plans comes in a variety of forms, but they all involve two fundamental activities; checking performance against expectations and defining the job. It is thus necessary for firms to give workers bonuses whenever they exceed expectations. This helps to lay the organisation’s plan well ahead of time enabling employees to understand the expectations of the organisation and what they need to do to get a bonus.

Apparently, employee compensation strategies constitute only one piece of the greater organisational work strategies. The other pieces are relationship, environmental, growth and support strategies, which need to fit into one interlocking whole in order for people to be paid enough. According to Paludi (2012), the employees in today’s market have a greater control and
believe firms are lucky having them as their employees. Organisations that fail to believe this and treat them accordingly, often lose them to other better employers.

3.6. Employee Growth Strategies

According to Cooper (2007), employee growth strategies focus on professional and personal growth of workers. Good workers want to develop new skills and knowledge in order to improve their value in the larger employment marketplace and enhance their self-esteem. These strategies require the worker and management to explore different needs of the worker and the best way in which they can be met. Employee support strategies towards improving the work environment comprise of establishing a learning culture within the firm; creating individual learning plans for workers; encouraging the workers to join trade and professional associations; investing in career planning; operating a corporate mentoring programme; provision of incentives for learning; and taking advantage of online learning (Cooper, 2007).

Despite the availability and continual use of these strategies, they do not focus on the individual employee or worker and how he can improve his own work environment. Most of these strategies are whole-organisation based or employer-focused. In addition, they appear like tactics and laid down rules that should be followed in order for efficiency and peak performance to be realised. One can argue that if these strategies were that effective, there would be no need to develop more strategies. This reasoning can be true, but it is negated by the dynamic nature of today’s work environment. Today’s work environment has unique needs and challenges which these earlier literature may not solve effectively. For this purpose more research should be conducted to address the needs of today’s worker, more so, on the topic of worker-based strategies for improving the work environment.
4. METHODOLOGY

To improve on the effectiveness of the outcome, this study shall narrow down its scope to the Protocol Division work environment where I work; but the scope will be on effective strategic thinking skills that can be applied in any work environment. The approach that this study will use is a qualitative approach where a survey will be carried out, interview questions used, and earlier literature will be relied on to realise the objectives of the study.

Respondents from Protocol Division work environment will be involved since they occupy the same work environment as the researcher. That is, they experience the same challenges, benefits, shortcomings and thus would provide the best and needed results. Ethical considerations shall be observed in three major ways. First of all, permission will be sought from the Protocol Division work environment management and ethical research department. Secondly, free consent will be obtained from the participants, after thoroughly informing them of the purpose of the study. Thirdly, names of participants will not be disclosed in line with privacy requirements.

5. CONCLUSION AND PERSONAL STATEMENT

In conclusion, a lot of literature exists on the topic of skills and development in relation to developing effective work strategies to apply in work environments. Apparently, work environments are different, thus no single strategy can fit all work situations. A dynamic work environment entails dealing with big events that have to be planned and arranged within a very short time. This duty necessitates an effective work strategy which focuses on speed, efficiency, workers’ motivation, and workers’ growth. Today’s work environment is dynamic and volatile due to changes from the economy, technology, and demographics. In addition today’s workers
need much than monetary compensation. The workers today have a strong desire to develop their career in addition to feeling part of the organisation and a party to positive development of the organisation towards its realisation of its objectives.

Much of the existing strategies fail to satisfy these new needs of employees since they are whole-organisation based or employer-focused. Furthermore these strategies are more of tactics to be followed in order for efficiency and peak performance to be realised. The topic of the employee or worker-based strategies; that is strategies the worker can employ to improve his or her work environment is not sufficiently researched. For productivity and improved performance to be realised in today’s work environment, the shift should focus on employee-based strategies to improve work environments.

I hold a bachelor degree in Computer Engineering and a Master in International Business and currently work in Protocol Division. This is now my third year with this organisation. Within three years, I have experienced various strategies employed by this organisation, which apparently have not worked for me and many other employees as well. Redundancies have been experienced and in a number of instances, targets have not been met. The main purpose for choosing this topic was motivated by the desire to improve my knowledge in setting strategies for my work initiative, help different events go smoothly, plan these events in detail, improve my work, and avoid mistakes.

My interest and hobbies include reading new literature and making new friends. I endeavour to become a friend to any new person within this division and because of this I want to be aware of what most of the employees are going through in relation to strategy and
development skills. I have also achieved two awards from the school I attended as the most innovative student.
References


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