

Specialist Human Resources Limited

Organisational Structure – Strategy – Capability – Culture A Winning Combination – But Needs Greater Thought for Remote & Hybrid Working

Peter Drucker stated that ‘Knowledge Management would have a Major Impact on the Structure of an Organisation’. This is something of an understatement. In fact, the Structure of an Organisation needs to support the Strategy, Capability and Culture (including the Learning Culture) needed to encourage the collaboration, communication, innovation and creativity needed for the growth of both the employee and, through the employee, the organisation.

Structure – So many organisations were ‘forced’ to undertake remote working due to COVID and yet many gave little thought to the fact that they were putting in place a ‘Network’ structure that would have previously been associated more with the outsourcing of services. Many had moved from a structure that had encouraged communication and collaboration to a structure that created individual silos that had been (and in many cases still are) poorly managed. I have previously posted articles that outlined the problems that have been highlighted – such as Millennials and Gen Z feeling that they have not received the development that they perceive necessary for their own career progression which has, in many cases, led to a poor work experience and reduction in employee engagement. In the longer term it could well result in an increase in staff turnover.

Strategy – We are seeing an increase in calls for remote or hybrid working but little is being said about the change in the thought processes required, by both the employer and the employee, if a move to flexible working is to support the agility required for an organisation to compete in the marketplace.

- Having created individual silos it is essential that leaders maintain an awareness of the changes that are taking place in the organisation – in many cases it would appear that there has been an ‘out-of-sight; out-of-mind’ mentality that has crept in over the past two years. The lines of communication also seem to have suffered with 50% of Millennials having highlighted difficulty in contacting their colleagues. This would suggest that there may have been communication up and down the organisation (senior management – team leaders – team members) but a failure to put in place lines of communication across the organisation.

Where a change is made in one area it often presents a need for change in other areas within the organisation. With the lack of communication across the organisation it is likely that the Value Chain will, at the least, become distorted; causing a detrimental effect when attempting to meet the expectations of the Customer.

I am going to talk more about thought processes when covering the subject of Capability.

Capability – When we think about capability it would be easy for those in leadership and management positions to limit this to employee development (I will talk about development in a moment), but there is also a need to think about the ‘tools’ that are required in order to enhance both employee experience and engagement. As I have pointed out in a recent article, we are not yet at a point whereby we have integrated IT Systems that provide an oversight across the organisation and can cut out all unnecessary waste. However, there are ways in which, to an extent, this problem can be overcome. If you would like to know more then please pop over to the Specialist Human Resources Limited page here on LinkedIn where you can view that article (along with many others that outline my findings with regard to remote and hybrid working). The title of that particular article is ‘Here we are – still stuck in the 3rd Industrial Revolution’. It was not written with remote/hybrid working in mind but could be pertinent to the ‘new way of working’. There is also need to look at how new members can be socialised and learn about the organisation. In my research I have already identified the fact that many Gen Z feel that they have not been receiving the coaching/mentoring required in order to be able to undertake their work proficiently. But, what about the thought processes of the Employee?

I have already highlighted that the learning culture in an organisation would normally have a major impact on the structure of the Organisation. The introduction of a network structure will, in the majority of cases, mean that the structure could have a major detrimental impact on the learning culture, if not well managed. A ‘normal’ office environment provides an opportunity for collaboration and communication. In particular it provides for Implicit Learning for employees (the unstructured learning that is picked up in the workplace by listening to and watching what is happening around them). This learning is spontaneous and it often sets the ‘mark’ for how explicit learning should be interpreted in order to add value to both the customer and the organisation. In a remote setting learning still takes place – often through the intervention of customers, suppliers and even through listening to people outside of the organisation that are undertaking similar roles. However, employees need to understand how such learning can have a positive effect on both their colleagues and the organisation itself by sharing this new knowledge and, in particular, have an understanding of what learning is relevant in adding value. In addition, the learning is no longer spontaneous and this could have a negative effect on the agility of an organisation to undertake change if such learning is not shared in a timely manner (another reason for ensuring that the ‘right’ technology is being utilised). There is another area that I would mention; one that could have a positive or negative effect on mental health, engagement and productivity.

Culture – I could write so much on Culture but I have decided to limit this to areas that can be directly linked to mental health, engagement and productivity. Much of this will come down to the actions of the employee as much as those of their leaders.

I am currently reading a book by Lynda Gratton (Redesigning Work). In this book the author has identified how, when we commute from home to the workplace, we cross from one identity (home) to another (work). This is what psychologists call 'boundary work'. We initiate a sequence whereby we are, in a sense, deactivating our feelings about home and replacing them with feelings about work. Where this doesn't happen it can result in 'role spill-over' that can make it harder to concentrate and create stress, both at home and in work. It is pointed out that when it comes to distractions boundaries really matter. I totally agree.

According to research, undertaken by HR Review, 48% of Millennials have found it difficult to communicate with colleagues, whilst working from home, and this has had an impact on their development and productivity. There seems to be a correlation between this and reports of people working into the evening and would suggest that this may be as a result of the failure of employees to distinguish between work and home – possibly due to home related distractions during, what would normally be seen as, the normal working day. This, in turn, is likely to devalue the advantages of not having to commute to the workplace; creating a detrimental effect on their mental health – resulting in 'burn out'. The result for the organisation being a reduction in employee engagement and productivity due to, what would appear to be, longer working hours; coupled with poor communication and collaboration.

When looking at the workspace there is a need to be able to distinguish between 'the feelings of home' and 'the feelings of work'. Where there is a constant 'to-ing' and 'fro-ing' between home and work activities there will also be a detrimental effect on focus and concentration; leading to poor performance and output of value to both the Customer and the Organisation. For this reason, there is a need to locate the workspace where such distractions can be minimised and to regulate access by other people.

Conclusion – Whilst there is much more that can be written on the subject of remote and hybrid working, I have limited this article in an attempt to provide an insight into the need for different thought processes when introducing this 'new' way of working. Although remote and hybrid working is not new it is a new development for many employers and it is hoped that this article will add value in managing the Network Structure that it creates.

