

A STUDY OF BELONGINGNESS AMONG KNOWLEDGE WORKERS - DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS

INTRODUCTION:

Human Resource is one of the most important and dynamic capital in the growth of the organization. In the era of information and knowledge, the two most serious issues that plague industry are Retention and Development of human resource. The motivational theories of yesteryears propounded by Maslow and Vroom have proved to be of limited help in understanding and dealing with knowledge workers of the knowledge era.

Standing on the threshold of the knowledge era and moving towards the era of consciousness we can sense a sea change in the expectations of the people working in the organization. The business context today has changed like never before, and continues to change. The word that constantly echoes in today's business scenario is: 'change'. Paradigms and mindsets are challenged every day, with companies asking questions such as, 'how to increase profitability; how to retain the best people; and how to increase customer satisfaction.' When an extensive survey was conducted using the interview method with global corporate leadership, one consistent message that emerged was that the best-led companies knew and believed in the value of people. Therefore, the challenge of the hour is to create, nurture and optimize human capital. Only those organizations and leaders who have optimally utilized human capital would enjoy a competitive edge. This is further substantiated by the fact that the world's best-led, value-driven organizations derive an increasing proportion of their value from the collective power of their intangible assets, which consists of people, partners, brands, suppliers and intellectual property (Ashby and Miles, 2002).

Business paradigms have constantly evolved over the last century. While the Nineteenth century was the Agrarian Age, the Twentieth century ushered in the Industrial Age where skilled labor formed the predominant work force. Therefore people development efforts were on expertise in handling machinery and production. Subsequently it moved to the Information Age where intellectual capital is the main ingredient of people development, where knowledge, learning, re-engineering, systems and processes are the focus, and 'customer satisfaction' and 'change' are the buzzwords.

The future holds some clear evidences; the Information Age is giving way to the Consciousness Age, where cultural capital will be the predominant feature. Creativity, vision, values and customer collaboration will become important, and emotional intelligence will be an expected competence. While social responsibility will be expected, the buzzwords will be 'transformation' and 'evolution' (Barrett, 2001).

In this new economy, managements have to focus on:

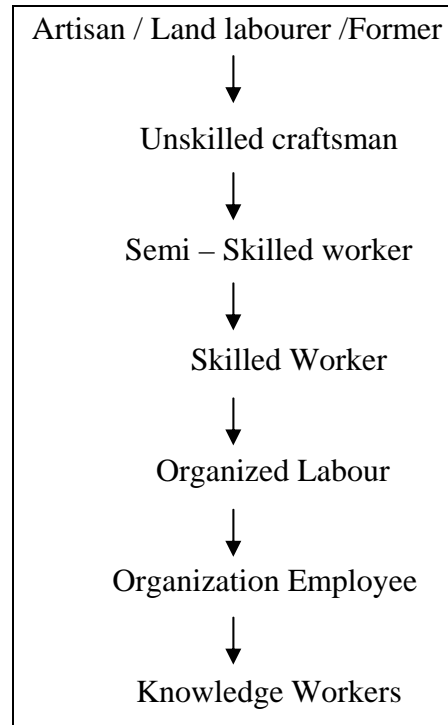
- Personal creativity, where values alignment becomes important
- Personal productivity, where mission alignment is critical
- Knowledge/Experience, where professional development is imperative, and
- Emotional Intelligence, where personal development is the path (Barrett, 2001)

What employees sought in the industrial era and what they seek now are different. The level of consciousness of employees is continually changing and thus their competencies. All this requires a paradigm shift. If organizations have to retain their people and get the best out of them, there is no choice but to understand and develop a culture that would meet their expectations. The primary factor in retaining people is related to their feeling of belongingness. Belongingness has been a powerful bonding thread between the human factor and the individual organization. But what people belonged to and what brought about this belongingness seems to have evolved along with the evolution of industrial organizations. The review of literature indicates that the understanding of 'feeling of belongingness' has been restricted to its manifestations rather than the causative dimensions. That is because it has always been perceived from the affiliative dimension than an internal feeling dimension.

This paper presents nine key factors that bring in the feeling of belongingness based on a study amongst knowledge workers in south India.

EMERGENCE OF KNOWLEDGE WORKERS

Along with the evolution of industry, management thought, science and technology, the profile of employees has also evolved. While we began with the agrarian age and land labour, we have moved to the information era and the knowledge worker. The following diagram traces the changing profile of the worker.



The impact of technology in all areas, from communication to industries to households has ushered in the era of knowledge. This has made it imperative for every employee to be 'Knowledgeable'.

PROFILE OF A KNOWLEDGE WORKER

A knowledge worker is anyone who works for a living on the tasks of developing, or using, knowledge. For example, a knowledge worker might be someone who works at any of the tasks of planning, acquiring, searching, analyzing, organizing, storing, programming, distributing, marketing, or contributing in some way to the transformation and commercialization of information. A term first used by Peter Drucker in 1959, in his book 'Landmarks of Tomorrow', the knowledge worker includes programmers, systems analysts, technical writers, academic professionals and researchers. The term is also used to include lawyers, teachers, scientists and students.

The expectations from knowledge workers includes –

- A knowledge worker has to be able to constantly challenge the status quo and the company's old assumptions with data and make it work for the company's strategy and future vision. The 21st century knowledge worker's success or failure is defined by its results.
- An effective knowledge worker needs specialized education. When a truly effective knowledge worker can analyze a situation and determine the best way to effectively make all the decisions, the knowledge is truly an asset to the organization. (Drucker, 1996, p.695-697).

- Knowledge work involves creativity and a knowledge worker should be able to use creativity to enhance a process or come up with a better and more efficient way of refining a process. (Taylor, 2003,p.8)
- “The new technology does make possible the output of more goods with the same number of people. But Automation derives its efficiency and productivity mainly from the substitution of highly trained, high-grade human work for poorly trained or semi-skilled human work. It is a qualitative change requiring people to move from work that is labor-intensive to work that is brain-intensive, rather than a quantitative change requiring fewer people” (Drucker, 1993, p.256).
- “...the new jobs (knowledge workers) require a good deal of formal education and the ability to acquire and to apply theoretical and analytical knowledge. They require a different approach to work and a different mind-set. Above all they require a habit of continuous learning” (Drucker, 1995, p.226).

With expectations from knowledge workers increasing, their expectations from management too have changed. With the evolution of consciousness, their expectations have evolved.

UNDERSTANDING FEELING OF BELONGINGNESS

As a feeling element, belongingness is tacit and internal. It emerges at the space of intention, and is individual in nature (Wilbur III Model, 1990). During the nineteenth century, academic psychology which was making acute observations with regard to the thinking process, sensation, perception and memory, kept feelings and emotions largely at bay. The affective realm belonged inside, in the depths of a person. To open it to thought would kill the very object under observation, “We no longer feel as soon as we think” (Hillman, 1970, p.125). But Jung’s various experiments brought ‘feeling’ into focus. Feeling was termed as “Function of relationship”, a psychological process that evaluates. Through the feeling function an individual appreciates a situation, a person, an object, a moment, in terms of values. The pre-requisites identified for feeling were:

- A structure of feeling and memory
- A set of values, to which the event can be related
- The importance individual gives to the factor that creates the event.

Therefore, the feeling function connects the subjective ‘individual’ to the object by imparting value or importance, and the object to the subjective individual by receiving it within the subjective value system. Hence, feeling functions as a relationship.

‘Belonging’ as an element that affects an individual in an organization was identified in the motivational theories (Maslow, 1943). It has been viewed as an affiliative element that makes people

want to identify, affiliate, relate to others from the perspective of bonding. It has also been studied under various processes as socialization, commitment, and hygiene factor of motivation, job satisfaction, mentoring and identification. The route taken significantly indicates that the study of Belongingness has been based on its manifestation. (Merzberg, 1959, 1966; Steers & Porter, 1979; Adams, 1965; Robbins, 1996; Parsons, 1943; Danziger, 1971; Rousseau, 1998; Sherif & Sherif, 1969; Brewer and Gardens, 1996; Fogel & Lyra, 1997; Coleman, 1990; Senge, 1990; Sheldon, 1971; Mowday, Steers and Porter, 1979). Several studies on commitment to organization and factors that bring in commitment have been researched (Dressler, 1999; Brief and Motowidlo, 1986; Organ, 1988; Meyer and Aden, 1997).

But, with the changing paradigm of organizations and the profile of the employees, the need to focus on the factors that bring in belongingness has become imperative. Belongingness cannot be seen from its manifestation perspective, but has to be understood from the causative perspective.

A knowledge worker, as an individual is just not a need fulfilling entity but a living, dynamic, evolving human being. While the need fulfilling activities are a part of the human being, it is directed towards the ultimate process of evolution. The dualism in the Western approach has not permitted the holistic perspective of the evolving individual to be taken into account. In its attempt to understand the Self, the Western approaches have addressed the dualism of the ego level and the existential level through psychology. Therefore a 'stimulus-response' theory is operative. The Eastern approach on the other hand has been working on understanding the mind, bypassing ego-centricity and aiming at the concept of transcending the Self. (Wilber, 1977, 1993).

The quest, therefore, for a human being is the evolution of his own consciousness. This journey is continuous and eternal (Yogananda, 1998) Most of the need fulfilling activities do not seem to motivate after their purpose is over if they are not in the line of evolution of one's consciousness.

Thus 'feeling of belongingness' is much more than an affiliate need. It is internal, tacit and grounded to what the individual human being is seeking for himself. The gratification of what the individual seeks leaves behind a sense of deep internal satisfaction leaving a pathway for further evolution. This is felt at the feeling level as 'Belongingness' resulting in a bonding that also evolves continuously. This makes belongingness not a destination, but a continuous evolving process.

The key characteristics of the feeling of belongingness are:

- It is manifested as a feeling element.
- It is subjective and specific to individuals, through a generality can be derived at the form level.
- It is dynamic and changes as the individual evolves.
- Since it is integral to an individual, the factors only stimulate and manifest the feeling.

The factors should be present to constantly stir and evolve along with the individual evolution to bring in belongingness.

Based on the above characteristics, the meaning of belongingness in an organizational context can be defined as a “state of being born out of a relationship, in which one experiences value for oneself, being cared for with a space for continuous evolution leading to the need to fulfill the expectations of the relationship and beyond”.

RESEARCH STUDY TO IDENTIFY FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE BELONGINGNESS:

Questionnaire survey method was used to study the measures of Belongingness. The aims of the study were:

- To identify the dimensions that measures the feeling of Belongingness.
- To develop a tool that would measure organizational Belongingness.
- To identify the predictors of the feeling of Belongingness.

The Universe of the study was Bangalore City, southern India. The study was confined to the executives of electrical-electronics and information technology organizations.

Measurements Used:

Two instruments were used.

1. Belongingness Inventory – an instrument developed for the purpose of the study.
2. HRD Climate Survey – by T.V. Rao & Abraham.

To understand the meaning of feeling of Belongingness, a set of questions were used as a part of organizational culture study in an IT Organization. Open-ended questions were used on a cross-section of employees of the organization. Based on consultation with experts in the field and protocol sessions in several IT organizations, a set of items or statements reflecting the various dimensions of the feeling of Belongingness was prepared. Pre-test was conducted to find out the reliability of the instrument. Discriminant analysis was performed to sort out the items or statements which were irrelevant. The content, validity was done using ‘Gate Keepers’ and ‘Users’.

Finally, a set of 54 items or statements were selected. The coefficients of reliability of the instrument are:

<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>Tests Used</i>	<i>Reliability Index</i>
1	Correlation between forms	0.9589
2	Equal-length Spearman – brown	0.9790
3	Unequal-length Spearman - brown	0.9790
4	Guttman Split-half	0.9719
5	Alpha – part 1	0.9310
6	Alpha – part 2	0.9409

The predictive validity was established by measuring the coefficient of relationship between the scores on measurement instrument on the feeling of Belongingness and the behavior scores of the same subjects in the real interaction. The coefficient ($r = 0.878$) provided the evidence of the predictive validity. Concurrent validity was measured by comparing the scores on the feeling of belongingness and the scores generated by the instrument ‘HRD Climate Survey’, which consists of almost common dimensions. The results of association between the two instruments ($r = 0.573$) are shown in the following table:

	<i>Belongingness Inventory</i>	<i>HRD Climate Survey</i>
Belongingness Inventory	1.00	0.573**
HRD Climate Survey	0.573**	1.00

$N = 333$, ** correlation is significant at the 0.01 level, (2 – tailed). A score of $r = 0.573$ reflected high degree of concurrent validity.

The Belongingness Inventory measures nine dimensions on a five point rating scale –

1. Clarity on organizational vision
2. Professionalism in functioning
3. Rewards
4. Alignment of individual and organizational values
5. Sense of ownership
6. Exploration and development of potential
7. Material comforts
8. Emotional satisfaction
9. Value for contribution

The resulting scores are classified at four levels – ‘Dormant’, ‘Low’, ‘Moderate’ and ‘High’ extent of Belongingness.

The HRD Climate Instrument consists of 38 questions on a five point rating scale measuring 12 dimensions related to HRD and commitment towards HRD.

Sampling

Of the 67 electronics engineering and 110 software and telecommunication organizations fourteen organizations were selected, using the inclusion-exclusion criterion. Four organizations opted for the study. The entire population was stratified based on the departments. Within each stratum the senior, middle and junior management categories were grouped based on the designation parameter relevant to the hierarchical structure of the organization. Departmental specifications were also taken into account.

A systematic random sample of 40% of the total population was selected after discussions with the concerned HR executives as the ideal number that would be feasible for the organizations to provide for the research study, in the time available. To maintain confidentiality as well as blindness in sample selection the serial numbers and the employee code numbers were used to generate the random number. Of the 40%, 5% of the total population (47 respondents) were unable to complete the questionnaire for various reasons. Therefore, the effective coverage was 333, i.e. 35% of the total population.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Profile of the Knowledge workers

The profile of the respondents indicated that the majority of the knowledge workers are young and professionally qualified. Not more than half of them are married with independent nuclear family of their own. The sample indicated a predominantly male but with a good representation of the female gender. This feature is true to the knowledge workers. There is an increasing population. Women coming to work due to the requirements being “knowledge” and “skills that use knowledge”. The majority of them have fair or technology and attitudinal training. The results revealed a variance in the personal, career and family profile of the knowledge workers.

HRD Climate Survey

The results from HRD Climate Survey revealed that to a large extent organizations where knowledge workers work enjoy a ‘good’ HRD Climate. The strengths of the HRD Climate emerges from the organization’s belief that the human factor is a critical factor and need commitment to development, team spirit, helpfulness and providing training on skills and knowledge. There is present a psychological climate conducive for development. There is a shift from ‘Performance-Oriented Welfare’ climate ‘developmental’ climate being positive towards problem solving, providing opportunities for learning, experimentation, innovation and change. Each of the organizations have taken their own route and formulated its own orientation on building systems and processes. In a traditional organization the focus on organizational climate itself was viewed as something over and above what needs to be offered to an employee. It was considered a motivator and an achievement of the organization to create a climate with 50% satisfaction. But in today’s knowledge industry the minimum expectation seems to be at the level ‘good’. This has shifted to being a basic maintenance factor that knowledge workers expect to be provided with, for their existence in the organization. When "good" becomes the minimum expected, the scales need to be enhanced. (Sampath, Kalpana, 2005)

Feeling of Belongingness

The nine dimensions measured by the Belongingness Inventory are critical factors that are influenced by the HRD Climate in the organization. The key finding of the research indicate that when they are

placed in a hierarchy, the organizations focus on professionalism, material comforts, rewards and value for contribution much more than on clarity of vision, Development of potential, Ownership, Alignment of values and emotional satisfaction.

The field notes also indicate that in these organizations systems are continuously developed, compensation is higher for knowledge workers than employees of other sectors, variety of rewards and recognition of their contribution. While these are dimensions that are important, the core dimensions that enable growth and worker and the organization are given lesser focus.

The clarity of vision seems to be more taken for granted dimension. Attractive vision statements are formulated but not much of clarity is being provided to integrate and relate to the vision on daily decisions within the organization. This lack of effort to provide the clarity can come in the way of bonding since individual knowledge workers would search to identify with the organization from their varied personal vision. Mobility results when the knowledge workers realize their personal vision does not match with the organization vision. Further, the organization is pulled in different directions due to non-clarity in business decisions. There is also a lack of identification and apathy in steering the organization in the direction of vision. This results in knowledge workers working on short term goals which may or may not result in long term progress and evolution of the organization.

The activities steered towards development of potential of the knowledge workers are still knowledge and skill based. They are not 'transformational' and 'evolving' with a keen focus on self development processes. While the organizations are moving towards err of consciousness, there is lack of realization that development should transform the individuals and prepare them to evolve. Therefore, training is still seen as development of competence, but not as to how the developed competence is really used. "It is important to know what I am capable of. It is even more important to know what I am using my capabilities for" (Sampath, 2003)

While financial ownership would mean stock options, the dynamic nature of economic growth has not helped the organizations much in creating a sense of belonging. Brand building activity has remained at customer level. The inner urge of the knowledge worker is feel a process of evolution as a person within himself/herself. This is not addressed by the organizations to bond the individuals to themselves and thereby to others around them.

Alignment of personal and organizational values has not been the focus of the HR initiatives. By formulating organizational values, alignment of personal values of knowledge workers has been taken for granted. But unless individual values are not clarified at belief, alignments to organizational values are a far fetched ambition (Sampath, 1999). Clarifying and aligning process is not an one time activity but a continuous process. It has to be a transformational process.

Emotional satisfaction as a dimension has been largely mistaken as space for expression and liberal rules towards non-interference in personal lives of the knowledge workers. The knowledge workers level of stress increases due to stringent, competitive and performance based culture. The ester years of values of security, comradeships are no longer nurtured in a dynamic organization. Though forms are changed, the essence still needs to be understood. The pomp and show of colourful and typed activities of picnics, outings, and annual day events become mere situational satisfactions since they lack the depth of bonding. They are also not activities evolved from the employees but mere events managed by the professional event managers giving no scope to the knowledge workers to contribute their efforts without the threat of competition. Even the events are designed 'to prove' or to 'compete' with less value addition to the soul of the knowledge worker. Studies have proved the process of group meditation brings higher level of emotional evolution and comradeship (www.vyasa.org)

The above are a brief account of the myriad possibilities to aid in the natural evolution of the knowledge worker in an organization context. The possibilities of evolution would bond the knowledge workers to the space and thereby enable them to give their best to the organization.

CONCLUSION AND HR IMPLICATIONS:

The research findings of this study have put forth significant steps that HR needs to take in stimulating feeling of belongingness amongst the knowledge workers. There should be paradigm shift in understanding and building organization climate. It needs to be more towards being more sensitive & converge the energy of the human capital in the organization (Sampath, Kalpana 2005).

There is needed a revamp of the orientation of HR on the dimensions that actually are expected to satisfy and motivate knowledge workers. They have to move from the glorified and modified practices of the Industrial Era to evolve newer understanding of the expectations of the era of knowledge. Further, work on building the human capital to face the era of consciousness. This calls for dynamic, evolving HR systems and process built along the dimensions discussed in this paper.

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