

Short notes on workplace complexity.

Work simplicity is the ability to make choices that create value or lead to success. The information economy ramps up the speed and number of choices required and the interconnections between them. Business success depends on how these choices are made.

Work complexity results from not providing the raw materials or infrastructure needed to make these choices;

- Relevant data
- Meaningful information
- Easy access to knowledge
- Ways to navigate and develop understanding

These could all be considered as part of work system design

In addressing the issue of work complexity most senior executives believe it derives from outside the organisation, "out there".

But employees take the changes in the external environment as a given and believe work complexity results from;

- Lack of integration of human, technology and capital in the management of change
- Unclear goals and objectives
- Poor communication
- Ineffective knowledge management

And because only a small percentage of employees are innate "symbolic analysts" or true knowledge workers, failure to address these issues for the majority of workers (some 60% to 80%) results in their work being considered too complex to make the appropriate choices needed to deliver value.

The impact of workplace complexity is considered to be equivalent to an 11% to 22% cost /head count reduction or a gain of 1 to 2 hours per day per employee in a typical 9 hour day.

(Source: Changing how we Work. The Search for a Simpler Way. The Jensen Group 1999. Study included 2500 individuals in 460 corporations, 16 of Fortune's 25 most admired companies and 32 of S&P's top 75 performers)

New Accountabilities

Business controls all things on the balance sheet; products, services, structures, capital, people costs, resources, work processes, but the workforce controls the final decisions of what to do and when to do it. Work practices deliver the outputs.

Push back occurs in change programs because the workforce demand to exercise choice (ie to self organise, develop emergent order) is opposed to the business need for control. Too often simplifying work equates to a mix of co-option and coercion to maximise productivity gains. The new accountabilities mean change must address the real issues of Power, Trust and Control, against trying to ensure minimal interference in so called management prerogatives. In a global world \these are disappearing as fast as worker security.

Wealth Creators Change the Rules

In the management of change simplifying work and empowering workers will result in the kind of work that enables choice and leads to success in the value creation/delivery process. Integrating what people need in order to be able to make these choices is the new contract for the knowledge economy.

If every two to three years the amount of data, information (and knowledge) the workforce must organise, transform into new knowledge and communicate doubles then the design of work and the workplace needs to be revisited at least this often.

However to address these issues simply by focussing on reversing the practices of the industrial era (eg restructuring, downsizing, removing silos, teaming, getting close to the customer etc) is to miss the basic need of people in modern organisations. For example, very few organisations pay any attention to restructuring the data and information needed for employees to "get things done" when they restructure their organisations.

People need better wayfinding/pathfinding to help them make choices in an increasingly volatile, chaotic and connected world. This includes the navigation of relationships, information and physical space.

Communication needs to shift from the plan, strategy program and roll-out to ideas, stories, discovery, using language to shape meaning and maps which help link personal and corporate purpose. We understand the built environment can be a powerful communicator of shared meanings.

Sources of Work Complexity

- *Failure to integrate change*

Integration has the highest ability to change employee behaviour (Source: The Jensen Group) Ninety percent of respondents cited the following factors as important

- employee empowerment
- risk taking and innovation
- process improvement
- quality and leadership

Integration is seen as critical to the ability of being able to control one's own destiny.

However the leadership's view of integration was focussed on

- restructuring
- the strategic plan/process
- project management processes

that is, what to do and who reports to whom (= making the right decisions)

Conversely the workforce view is on having access to the resources needed to "get things done" (=how to decide what to do)

- *Unclear goals and objectives*

The ability to create aligned goals is directly related to the belief that the strategic plan controls the actions of employees. Too many goals and objectives contributes to work complexity and about 85% of the "resistance to change" is resistance to poorly organised decision making.

(Source: The Jensen Group)

Goal clarity means addressing who is accountable for the choices made.

- *How we communicate*

This is about the search for meaning and for information that is "useful"
Leadership communication should inspire, enable, and strengthen with the purpose of raising the conviction and confidence of others. Everything else is management.

- *Knowledge management*

More and more, work *is* decision making. Hence knowledge management is about linking people to the data, information and other knowledge that is useful in their work practices in order to "get things done". How does the physical workplace help to link these resources and help get things done more effectively?

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