Human Resource Capacity Building in the developing world and mobilising excess capacity for export

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Introduction

This paper has two sides to it. The first part has to do with building sufficient human resource capacity and the second part of it is to do with the mobilisation of the excess human resource capacity for export. Achieving this two-pronged task is a challenge that requires the expertise and involvement of all key players in the relevant institutions for the desired results.

Building sufficient human resource capacity

The following points are important in building sufficient human resource capacity:

- Institutions / universities should be in the position to admit the right numbers of students to take up relevant courses and a thorough assessment of existing facilities should be carried out to make this feasible and achievable;
- Training courses and programs should be made exciting and relevant to local and international needs. This will equip graduates and personnel in meeting the needs of the country and that of other nations;
- A complete and thorough review of the current courses offered in institutions should be carried out;
- Educational systems should be made challenging and stimulating, to encourage lateral thinking and emphasise the capacity for the human mind to imagine new dimensions and concepts;
- Courses must be geared towards solving practical problems;
- Lecturing opportunities in the tertiary institutions should be packaged more attractively to encourage and attract competent staff and professionals working in industry who will be able to make the subjects more alive to students;
- Development of structured career development plans for staff and graduates to keep learning new things in their various fields.

The second part of the topic under discussion will follow on organically from the achievement of the first part that is, once the structures are in place to develop human resources and build capacity, then expansion on those structures can be used to produce the excess capacity for export.
Mobilising excess capacity for export

The following points will help to achieve the second part dealing with the export of products (skills and capabilities).

- An appreciation of work ethics in other countries in order to be able to work with partners and to export know–how to these countries;
- Understanding the cultures and traditions of target countries is crucial;
- Technical Standards should continuously be under review and brought in line with current thinking and research;
- Work with countries where valuable skills can be acquired particularly in the developed world;
- Exposure for students/graduates in institutions and universities;
- Establishing good links with indigenous people working abroad;
- Strong partnership between local and overseas experts to be encouraged. There can be a two-way arrangement between experts both local and overseas in pursuance of knowledge acquisition and transfer;
- Bringing graduates up to speed with current and latest softwares and tools in industries;
- Presentation of papers at important seminars and conferences;
- Funding from industries to support capacity building initiatives.

Other factors to consider are effective leadership, recognising and rewarding the contributions of employees, offering enriched jobs, training and skills development, the role of technology, partnerships, institutional and governmental policies in this dual goal of building human resources.

Leadership and Change

Organisations are often used to doing things in the same way and in a particular manner and therefore changing the way things are done and work ethics to enhance performance can be a challenge. Change is sometimes seen as an enemy in most organisations, because it is about stepping into the unknown. However, significant organisational change has a powerful impact on the people within the organisation. Change creates a tension between the past and the future, between stability and the unknown (Maginn, 2007). The fear of the unknown is legitimate but in order to build a workforce to first class levels, with the capability to meet global needs, will require things to be done differently from the norm. When the objective of change is seen as to contribute to business development and moving organisations forward, the fear of change can be lessened. Depending on how well the process of change is managed in terms of planning and creativity, the tension can be reduced so that people are encouraged to do things in different ways.

Asking people to change the way they do things for a much better approach in order to achieve organisational goals can create an automatic (negative) emotional reaction. This experience must however not stop businesses from implementing changes that will enhance performance and build a
more capable workforce, skilled in every way to meet challenges of today and the future. Successful organisations have learned that they cannot continue to do things the same way they were done in the past just because the approach was successful (Buhler, 2002).

The need to build human resources is a realisation of the fact that current trends and ways of doing things may not be sufficient and sustainable for the future and hence there must be an aspiration to change things to step up to the next level. This is why good leadership is vital.

Leadership’s appreciation of change plays a major role in organisational development. The rise and fall of organisations depends on leadership, good governance and having the right human resources in terms of their skills, capabilities and abilities and having the capacity level to meet the needs of the organisations’ clients. Leadership that doesn’t appreciate the importance of these factors will hinder progress in the goal to build a world class force, lose out on both internal and external opportunities and invariably will not attract the best brains for their business development and growth.

In order for the developing world to build the capabilities of their people to international standards, the right kind of leadership will therefore be required: leadership that permits people to be all that they can be in building and developing themselves.

Furthermore, it is worth stressing that lifelong learning is a requirement if the capabilities of human resources from the developing world are to be relevant to the times and stand up to international scrutiny. Sometimes life-long learning may mean challenging and questioning the traditional ways of thinking about work organisation, leadership, employment practices, education and training and this must be encouraged. Leaders should not be quick to defend the status quo when views contrary to theirs are advanced by subordinates but rather encouraged free thinking and reward innovation.

Consequently, for organisational practices to be fit for export, business systems will need to be adaptable to the changes in the global market, which means personnel will need the required training and preparation to rise up to the challenges beyond their shores. In short, without adaptability the developing world cannot compete on the international scene and will be out of touch with what is happening abroad.

Leadership must be able to communicate clearly and effectively the vision of their organisations, and demonstrate how this ties in with any needed change. This enables teams to build into the change process and commit to the full realisation of the anticipated results. It is worth emphasising that the onus rests on leadership to ensure clarity in the midst of change.

The challenge of building human resource capacity fit for international markets would require commitment from developing countries and to do things differently from the norm and there will be difficulties, but as said by the celebrated British Prime Minister Sir Winston Churchill; “A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity and an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty”. It will call for being optimistic that their efforts and commitments to human resource capacity building and to mobilise excess capacity for export will succeed.

Recognition, Rewards and Enriched Jobs

An important ingredient to building sufficient human resource capacity is the ability to positively
reinforce achievements. Showing genuine appreciation for what teams have achieved, acknowledging progress and valuing team efforts is a morale booster and important in encouraging people to extend themselves for the good of the organisation they work for.

Recognising the contributions of employees and giving credit where credit is due particularly by supervisors and colleagues whose opinion they value is a tool in getting the most out of them. Recognition is one of the single most frequently mentioned factors causing satisfaction and dissatisfaction especially among workers (Locke (1973, 1976). Most employees will be demoralised if criticised or not given credit for their achievements. Demoralised staffs are difficult to motivate and to build up not to mentioned the implications for capacity building and development. In pursuing capacity building aspirations, it is worth noting that recognition of employees’ contributions are important for a number of reasons:

(i) it provides feedback concerning one’s competence and offers the opportunity to correct past mistakes and to set future goals for performance (Locke 1976);

(ii) it provides self-esteem or positive self concept and;

(iii) it ensures that individuals receive justice for work well done (Locke, 1976).

Additionally, rewarding teams for specific achievement enhances their commitment. Effective reward systems have a role in getting the best out of people and it is the responsibility of every business to find reward systems pertinent to their staff. Leaders who demonstrate this kind of confidence in their staff will build them up and in turn build up their organisations. Making employees’ salary and benefits package commensurate with the demands of the job and their qualifications will motivate them and will be much easier for them to extend themselves for the benefits of others and the organisation they serve. Much as having effective reward systems in place is essential combining this with the appropriate and well targeted job responsibilities is even better. Cranny et al (1992) state that when workers are satisfied with their jobs it has a positive effect on their quality of life, health (both mental and physical), become more stable and leading potentially to greater performance and productivity. Enriched jobs are jobs that offer:

(i) Skills variety – different job activities involving different skills and talents;

(ii) Task identity – the completion of a whole identifiable piece of work;

(iii) Task significance – The positive impact that the work has on the lives of others;

(iv) Autonomy – Independence and discretion in making decisions and;

(v) Feedback – Information on job performance.

When employees are involved in jobs which at their very core offer these five realities then a motivated workforce will be built satisfied with what they do. A dissatisfied workforce are more likely to exhibit negative realities such as higher turnover, higher absenteeism, lower co-operative spirit, more grievances, strikes, stealing, sabotage, poor mental attitude to work leading to higher jobs stress and poor performance. Clearly, enriched jobs have a significant role in human resource capacity building and this must be priority and at the core in work allocation. This is an advice that cannot be taken lightly
if the developing world is to compete at the international level.

Training and Technology

Training is a crucial component in pursuance of this objective and universities must be brought on board in developing training programmes. Giving this a high priority and involving all key stakeholders such as the government, businesses and other relevant institutions will add the needed weight to the realisation of this aspiration. The successful implementation of effective training programmes, relevant to industry and in line with international trends with the needed rigour and vigour will offer the opportunities that the developing world seek to achieve. Capacity building should also be based on innovation and creativity promoted by networked information technologies.

Increasingly, more organisations are striving to be High Performance Organisations. Such progressive organisations place a great deal of value on their human resources and provide opportunities for their employees to achieve their full potential (Buhler, 2002). When organisations operate in this manner with greater emphasis on the development of their human resources, they benefit with superior performance and sustainable competitive advantage.

In order for businesses in the developing world to stay at the cutting edge of their field of work and make worthwhile contributions, they must remain relevant and develop structures that help them achieve this. Organisations must be aware that ongoing development and learning is equally important for the organisation as its individuals. An organisation which has an understanding of this, focus their training and development needs on quality management at a corporate level and employees throughout the company.

To achieve this aspiration of international recognition and for skills to be valued, there is the need for the developing world to market what they have but importantly also calls for them to ensure that sound techniques are applied and place emphasis on key scientific research and findings in their practice and be willing to submit their work readily to for peer review and scrutiny to ensure that procedures and standards adopted are defensible. This will earn the credibility needed in competing at the international level and provide the human resource export opportunities.

Partnerships

As mentioned earlier, it is important to establish stakeholder partnerships and co-management structures involving businesses with policy makers, external funding bodies as may be applicable. Often limited technical and capital resources and gaps in training in most developing countries means that scientific and technological assistance from other countries is required and developing countries must be willing to seek assistance in the areas which can benefit them. Partnership, which involves local and external experts coming together to share knowledge is essential in capacity building. Teaming up with other consultants (local and external) to bid for jobs and work on jobs together would lead to knowledge transfer and skills acquisition which is crucial in development and progress.

Furthermore, human capacity building is important not only for the developing world but also the developed and it is important to emphasise this fact to both sides of the partnerships that are formed. It is important for the developing world to work with each other, including foreign partners, to reach a deeper understanding of the role of human resources in the economic and social development of their
countries. It is important to mention that in successful partnerships it’s crucial for the parties involved to respect the values of each other. Promoting human resource capacity building through a comprehensive, widespread and flexible partnership and networks, including governments, businesses and educational institutions should be targeted toward mutual benefit and common prosperity.

Policies

For the developing world to build human resource capacity fit for export, clear strategies capable of responding to the rapid changes currently taking place with regards to employment and training and development on the global level will be needed. This will require setting objectives, policies, principles and priorities whilst formulating and carrying out effective policy measures. Institutions in collaboration with governments must adopt policies that foster ingenuity and entrepreneurship with greater emphasis on research and development. In pursuing this there should be equal opportunities for women who are often marginalized in capacity development and building.

In addition, the role of information technology in accessing information and bringing the world closer is indispensable. In this regard, governments should have a responsibility of enacting regulations and measures that enhance access to information technology, making it available to all seekers of knowledge. Access to information will increase opportunities for knowledge expansion and contribute immensely in capacity building.

Capacity building is a major pillar in nation building and therefore this must be at the forefront of government policies and there must be practical, demonstrable and measurable indicators to show commitment to this all important element. Governments should be encouraged to integrate human resource capacity building with the economic and social strategies and policies and they should not control capacity development but rather work with businesses and experts in the field to identify opportunities to their benefit.

Concluding thoughts

To realise the aspiration to build sufficient human resource capacity and to mobilise excess capacity for export; the developing world must value the role and application of good management principles in business development and be willing to embrace changes which will add to the services they offer.

Stakeholders must be willing to allocate financial resources towards the development of the human capacity and this must be seen as an investment and not an expense. At the economic level, individuals, firms and governments should be encouraged to allocate a larger share of resources to developing human resources. A cooperative approach with partners would enable better identification of human capacity needs and provide a transparent environment to tailor policies and agreements to specific needs.

Government must develop policies to provide incentives for the business sector to participate in the development of human capacity and ensure that there is access to e-commerce and information technology and are affordable.

Capacity building should be a high policy priority and a key pillar in development and much as there is the need for the developing world to learn from other developed worlds it is important that they don’t
forget the relevance of their cultural practices in developing their model whilst embracing the often tried and tested strategies and mechanisms of the developed world. Again human resource capacity building is a worthy aspiration that can be achieved with understanding, co-operation and a purpose of vision from all concerned.

References


