

Organizational Excellence through Diversity

Attaining results is the function of collaborative efforts of multiple subsystems and individuals within a bigger system referred to as organization. Different schools of thoughts exist as to how the subsystems and individuals should be organized to attain the organizational results. Some types of organization designs are more conducive, and some are not so conducive. Put it differently, we have basis to contemplate that diversity is critical for innovation, synergy, and performance excellence.

Organizations are like a typical wardrobe – you organize it over a weekend, and you would need to do it again on the next weekend. Organizations lose rationality in their systems and processes over time, hence the need to keep revisiting the systems and processes is inevitable. Bryan Joiner in his book titled, “Fourth Generation Management” had pointed out that often newer organizations outperform their older counterparts. Rationality is often compromised due to a host of reasons. For example, changes in the permeable environment reshape the opportunities and challenges facing the organizations. Moreover, organizations’ traditional strengths also become irrelevant over time and often weaknesses go unattended causing serious issues. Likewise, people competencies if not augmented with time turn into weaknesses. So on and so forth. Being said, rituals eclipse organizational rationality and the competitiveness is oftentimes compromised. It is evident that many times newcomers outperform the existing ones.

1) Conventional Organizations

In a typical conventional organization, top-down approach is followed. Employees’ positions are identified based on employees’ locus on the hierarchy. However, roles are largely eclipsed. Individuals are identified as seniors vs. subordinates. In most of the situations, work

responsibility is identified with the most senior person, while others are considered to assist the boss by performing preparatory or sometimes

as referred to “donkey” work. In such scenarios, boss keeps the authority and delegates the responsibility. In this system all the work is done by the subordinates while the credit of doing the work goes to the boss. The irony of this system is that regardless of how critical, complex, or sensitive a task may be, it is assigned to the most junior employee. Seniors are only there to get things done. In short, the senior distributes his entire task list amongst his subordinates. The consequence is that subordinates may be or may not be fit to perform the tasks, especially ones which are critical, complex, and sensitive yet given to them. In this situation, subordinates are forced to do tasks in a stereotype manner, as they would lack the clarity and empowerment needed to perform with diligence. A few proactive subordinates when assigned high level task, also proclaim authority from their seniors. Not having the required level of clarity and empowerment, inevitably they tend to exercise authority for their personal gratification. On the other hand, the inputs of senior incumbents are minimized, rendering them practically redundant. Managers often can be heard saying, “I have done too much when I was a subordinate, now it is time for me to sit back.” Author Kenneth Davis in his book titled, One Minute Manager described these people as, “Some managers wear sunglasses and sleep in their offices until someone makes a mistake, then they wake-up to reprimand.” At the end, the much-needed innovation, synergy and performance excellence are compromised beyond the affordability. Consequently, organizational performance gets restricted to actions, but no intrinsic results are attained.



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Examples of conventional organization design abound in our world of work. Like, typical public sector organizations. Bureaucracy model of organizations is totally based on this concept. Once I met a Principal of a professional academy in a govt. organization. The gentleman had recently been transferred from operations to head training function. I asked him as to how does he see his current job different from the earlier one. He naively said, "There is no difference, I was working at Basic Pay Scale 18 and this position is of the same rank" – once a boss always a boss. In short, his role perception was simply to administrate, which requires him to exercise authority over the employees. Here, the sole competence for him is his authority – authority to hire and fire and authority to control employees. The manager is unable to see his role beyond this, hence does not consider need for management skills per se.

2) Pseudo Teamwork Organizations

Theoretically speaking, teamwork usually brings in diverse skillset and roles whereby complex tasks are completed in a befitting manner. However, on ground this does not happen. An example of such organizations is the "Pseudo Teamwork Organization." Such organizations are by default organized along the administrative hierarchies with all the gratifications of ranks and statuses, yet under the disguise of teamwork everyone tries to show his or her involvement in others' tasks sometimes even by ignoring to do their assigned jobs – typically a "Photo Session" syndrome. Put it differently, the manager, supervisor and subordinates all do same tasks. For example, in a typical pseudo sales team, the sales agents would be making sales. The sales supervisor will report his performance by summing up the sales of individual sales agents. Then the sales manager would report his performance by summing up sales performance of all the sales supervisors. Whereas, in reality only the sales agents make the sales, while others simply leverage their performance. However, exceptions to this exist. Similarly, in an office environment the most junior would write a document, which would then go to next senior person for some changes and then would go to the senior most for making final changes. It can be clearly seen that the junior most does the creative work, while others leverage their input, by making some changes, sometimes necessary and at times only to justify their input. Thus, the cost of doing a task is multiplied by the number of employees. Isn't this an expensive proposition besides diluting the ownership and excitement of the real doer?

Another deterring effect of pseudo teamwork is that employees usually encroach each other's roles thus moving away from their actual given responsibilities, which becomes a major deterrent and give boost to intra

organizational politics. For example, it is seen that functional staff and executives for no reason intervene in policy formulation sometimes even does it independently. Likewise, managers and senior managers naïve of their actual roles engage themselves in functional tasks.

3) Diverse Organizations

A more rational approach calls for designing the roles along the value chain. Meaning, each employee should have a recognizable input [KPI] and should have more control on the overall task. Doing so, it will enhance employees' ownership and excitement. To do this, it entails optimally empowering the employees and making the jobs independent. Doing so, the efficiency will go up, cost of doing the job will come down and last but not the least, accountability can be more precisely fixed.

Diverse Organization is the one that works on the premise of right person for the right job. Employees can still be placed at various positions on the hierarchy but not to reflect on their status or ranks. Instead, it should reflect their independent roles. Roles can be differentiated based on required competency and empowerment. This follows that managers should identify tasks along the value chain and group them into functional, executive, and strategic tasks. Each employee should be independently made responsible for the completion of a specified task. For example, the senior manager should focus on planning and strategy, the managers should focus on making operational decisions and trouble shooting and the functional level employees should execute routine tasks. All should do their respective tasks within the given parameters.

Doing so organizations can attain the standard of "right person at the right job" in letter and spirit and can ensure that everyone adds a unique value to the whole. We have evidence that in this scenario, the diversity of roles and inputs from so many persons leads to innovation and synergy which in turn cause performance excellence.

Examples of these type of organization may not abound but such organizations do exist in our world of work. Former Country Head of IBM, Pakistan had this habit of asking his IT managers not to work as software developer no matter how exciting it may look to them: He use to tell them that you are a manager and has something more critical to do. Once, I personally happened to conduct Goals Setting exercise for a division of a corporate entity. When I had finished helping the officers setting their goals, the head of the department categorically asked me what his goal should be. Should it be a cumulative performance of all officers, in that case he has no task but just to wait and see how the subordinates would perform.

Table One

Group	Role	Key Responsibility Areas
Senior Managers	Strategic	✓ Set business directions. ✓ Define policies & rules. ✓ Define outcomes. ✓ Mobilize resources. ✓ Integrate across diverse groups within the organization. ✓ Link with outside organizations
Managers	Executive	✓ Formulate operational plans and budgets. ✓ Make operational decisions. ✓ Shoot problems and initiate corrective actions. ✓ Coordinate within and across different functional departments. ✓ Manage employees' performance. ✓ Develop and facilitate employees. ✓ Link between strategic and administrative tiers
Associates (Front end Employees)	Functional	✓ Perform or execute tasks as per standards and operational plan

He got excited when I advised him to consider his goals as to how he could make his subordinates be successful in doing their jobs rather than proclaiming their performance as his. In fact, his entire work paradigm had changed. This elaborates how roles need to be defined along the value chain so that a natural and mutually enriching interdependence amongst employees is established for higher organizational performance.

4) Recommendations

It is time to design diverse organizations for unleashing optimal performance. A diverse organization consist of three fundamental roles and competencies namely, Strategic; executive; and functional. Each role has its unique key responsibility areas and so are the corresponding competencies (See Table One). It is pertinent to make a point here that the roles should be complimentary to each other on the value-chain, however, must not be overlapping across employees.

5) Conclusion

All organizations have the potentials to innovate, synergize and achieve performance excellence, but how they prepare for it and approach it makes the difference. The discussion can be summarized in a few statements as cited below.

- ✓ Organizations can only sustain when they continually improve their performance bars all the time. "We raise our performance bar every day," says Lackson Group.
- ✓ Organizations must be quick and innovative in responding to their environment and addressing their challenges. This means, how fast an organization adopts to new ways of doing the business?
- ✓ Everyone should bring in diverse competencies and focus on his respective role thus synergizing the whole. It is very much likely that a functional competence will not help an employee to perform equally well in a manager's role, for each role is different hence the requirement for competencies at each level. Having said this, significance of retooling cannot be over emphasized for career planning and advancement.
- ✓ Hierarchies need to be flexible enough to allow cross functional teamwork and matrix relationships.

About the Author: The writer holds a professional qualification in Banking and Finance. He is a practicing Human Resources and Organizational Development Professional, having more than three decades of hands-on experience in his field. He has authored books and publishes extensively.