INDIVIDUAL PERCEPTIONS AND ROLE OF LANGUAGE IN CAREER

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INTODUCTION:

Studies of management effectiveness and the consequent development of competency frameworks ate typically conducted from an 'objective' stance. Such studies aim to take a scientific approach using observable, quantitative measures. They are rooted in a factionalist perspective (Burrell & Morgan, 1979) which evaluates management in terms of outputs. The behavior which leads to these desired outputs ate then listed as the competencies necessary for effective performance.

As a counterbalance to this approach, some research has been conducted from a subjective perspective using repertory grid technique. Such work is a deliberate attempt to move away from a positivist approach by examining feelings and attitudes of practitioners about 'effective management' thus describing management behavior in 'lay terms'. The study reported in this paper falls into this category using repertory grid technique based on personal construct theory (Kelly, 1955) in order to elicit an everyday language of competence.

The aims of this paper are:

1. To explore a range if management competency models

2. To report the findings of an exploratory study which examined perceptions of the skills and competencies required.

3. To examine how career role, individual perceptions and language may affect.

The term competence has acquired a number of meanings over the past twenty years. For many practitioners, the debate about the difference between the words competence, competency, and skill is academic and of little concern. Woodruff's (1993) assertion that competency is often used as an umbrella term to cover almost anything that might directly or indirectly affect job performance emphasizes this point. Robtham and Jubb (1996) comment upon the confusion, both within and between organizations, caused by the language of competence. It remains one of the most diffuse terms in organizational and occupational literature.

"An underlying characteristic of an individual which is causally related to

effective or superior performance within a job"

"Competencies deal with the behavior people need to display in order to do the job effectively and not with the job itself"

Frameworks and Models:

Much of the literature dealing with the achievement of management effectiveness offers a definitive model or framework of requires competencies. In reality, management is based on a complex set of actions, thoughts and circumstances. Over-simplification and prescription are the downfall of these frameworks. This is particularly evident when a specific search is made or lists of middle managers skills and competencies.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Stewart et al. observe that an assumption is made about middle management behavior being merely a microcosm of top management practices. They contend that middle managers perform a unique role in organizations.

Burgoyne also voices concern about the prescriptive nature of lists of management competencies and prefers to promote 'meta-competencies' which are not specific skills or outputs but general behavior and mindsets which successful mangers seem to adopt.

Some organizations and educational establishments have been dazzled by the sample brilliance of the Management Charter Initiative (MCI) and its frameworks of competencies. Although the MCI was set up to solve the real deep seated problem of the inadequacies of British managers. When measured against their US or Japanese counter paths, it served to bureaucratize and over-simplicity the issue. In its efforts to be scientific he MCI prescribed one best way of managing at various levels. Thorpe and Holmann find fault with the MCI for not taking into the account the size, culture, purpose, and market position of different organizations. Currie and Derby report low participation rates in MCI based projects due to complexity and bureaucracy in administering the standards.

Personal Construct Theory

It is proposed by Kelly as a theory of personality. However personal construct psychology offers much more than an insight into personality it suggests ways in which individuals may be motivated, they communicate with each other. Kelly attempts to take a holistic view of man and how he interacts with his world, based on the conception that each individual will see the world in a different way.

The basic philosophical stance taken by Kelly and his co-researchers is termed Constructive Alternativism. At the root of constructive alternativism is Kellys view , it represented a fairly radical stance in that he

believed rather than being slaves to the stimuli present in their environment. The basic tenet of constructive is that each person construes the world in a different way and that as individuals. Interpretation of the world by adopting, developing or succumbing to an alternative Kelly terms their personal construct system defined as the channels in which ones mental process run. Constructs are formed with two opposing poles, or as Kelly puts it that they are two way streets along which one may travel to teach conclusions. They make it possible to anticipate the changing tide of events. These are inter related and organized into a hierarchy or super ordinates and subordinate relationships. Thus each person has his own unique personal construct system. As Bannister and Fransella point out , Basic to our making sense of the world and of the world themes and our segmenting of the world in terms of them.

Repertory Grid Technique:

The Repertory Grid Technique test is presented by Kelly as a diagnostic instrument to be used in a clinical setting. The objective of the test is to elicit personal constructs. According to Fransella many of the repertory grids in use today bear little resemblance to those originally proposed.

Repertory grids have been widely used to produce both generic and organization-specific competency lists. One of the concerns in carrying out the study reported below was that given the

potentiality manipulative effects of publishing and using competencies, the use of personal construct theory via repertory grid technique, to define competencies seemed rather out of place. Kelly decision of behavioral principals and his view of individuals making their own decisions about the right way to act do not sit well along side organizations seeking to prescribe behaviors.

SAMPLE

The total number if interviewees in the sample were 25 of whom 8 Administration Managers, 8 were Human Resource Managers and 9 were marketing Managers. All interviews accepted a definition of their roles as middle managers. Ages ranged from 23 to 49 with a mean age across the sample of 35 interviewees worked in one of 14 organizations covering the public and private sectors, service providers and manufacturing. Seven males 18 females were interviewed.

ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEW EVIDENCE

The findings from each group are discussed in turn. Positive constructs ate shown left side and negative to right side.An attempt has been made to classify responses under broad headings has been taken to give a wide range of verbatim reporting also helps to illustrate the broad range of constructs produced by the exercise.

ANALYSIS OF ADMINSTRATION MANAGERS

It covers all constructs in which relationships with others are discussed. It deals with managers attitudes to others. Their general demeanor in dealing with colleagues at a variety of levels and any underlying personality traits which influence behavior.

People Skills

Table 1.1

INTERVIEWER	INTERVIEEW
Trusts subordinates	No
Treats peoples as individuals	Talks down to people
Approachable	Blames
Concerned about personal problems	Treating impersonally
Feedback/credit	No encouragement
Time spending	Less time subordinates

Training and Development of Subordinates

This is strictly classified under the broad heading of people skills, the group of general managers lay so much emphasis on this area that it warrants mention in its own in the table 1.2 given.

Table 1.2

Encourages development	No interest
Coaches Subordinates	Leaves to make own mistakes
Gives opportunities to learn	Views all work as tasks to complete

Communication Skills

This area covers a wide variety of skills. Only two of the administrative managers used the broad term communication skills others preferred to pinpoint more specific skills or traits in this area. All general managers provided at least one construct under this table 1.3

Table 1.3

Communicates standards	They are unclear
Regular meetings	No meetings
Communicates unpopular information	Hides it
Informs subordinates of strategic decisions	No information to them
Listens well	Listens badly

Organizational Skills

These are concerned with dealing with administration and paperwork, planning, ahead, managing time and organizing the workload of others. Seven out of administration managers gave at least one construct in this area.

Table 1.4

Organized	Disorganized
Good planning skills	No planning
Managers time	Does not meet deadlines
Delegates effectively	Delegates in appropriately

Strategic Management

This area covers trails and skills which enable the managers to have a view of the business as a whole and to manage and anticipate change.

Table 1.5

Strategic vision	See only own tasks
Broad knowledge	Limited knowledge
Good overview	Lacks and overview

OTHER CONSTRUCTS

The constructs given by the administrative mangers due to small size of sample and the comparison to be drawn later on with marketing and Human Resource Managers in the given table.

Table 1.6

Managers budgets well	Unable to do
Flexible approach for goal	In flexible
Team attitude	Individualistic
Professional image	Un professional
Creative	Lacks ideas
Democratic leader	Autocratic
Sense of humor	lacks
Forceful determined aggressive	Weak indecisive

MARKETING MANAGERS

This category was given special emphasis by this group. Seven out of the mangers gave at least one construct to this area.

Team Approach

Table 2.1

Family approach	Bossy
Team focus	Individual focus
Gets involved	Not a team player
Leads by example	Will not get stuck in
Team builds by communication	Does not have team spirit
Shares perks	No sharing

SOCIALIZING

Although one or two general and HR provided a construct in this area 4 marketing managers believed that a good manger socialized outside work with subordinates. When socializing with the subordinates the marketing managers are not uncomfortable. when socializes outside work also these are not cooperative.

HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGERS

Conflict handling

As a subsection of people skills this area warrants special mention here four HR managers gave a construct in this area.

Table 3.1

Deals well with conflicts	Does not deal well
Can manage conflict	Cannot
Not afraid to deal with conflicts	Avoids this situations

Technical Knowledge

Table 3.2

Good technical knowledge	poor
Relates theory to practice	It won't relate
Follows procedures	Lack of respect
Professionally qualified	Gut reaction
Practical technical knowledge	No ideas

CONCLUSIONS

There is some evidence to suggest that management competency lists or frameworks preclude the articulation of real persona; observations on the nature of management effectiveness in job terms. However, this is not the case in a discussion

of management ineffectiveness where stock phrases are not so readily available.

The real question is whether students continued use of the language of competency implies that learning transfer has occurred or is students use the language without fully understanding what they mean by it.

It could be argued that ir we asked these mangers to explain what they individually meant when they used certain terms. We would be offered a range if interpretation. So whilst we may all feel comfortable and clever using the same terminology, we may lack a shared meaning competency frameworks purposing to give the right answer deny us an opportunity to explore our own concept of effective management. Pavlica, Holman and Thorpe contend that managers should able to make and create knowledge rather than have it found out for them in order to become practical authors in job situations.

Whilst such a dominant language of management competence persists, it is difficult to promote a transformational dialogue around the concept of management effectiveness. A truly social constructionist approach to exploring our perceptions of what makes a good job holder could lead to the production of generative theory which results in real individual and organizational learning.

Mangers both consciously and unconsciously help to construct an organizations common sense by responding to aspects available to all in the conversational background and by creating a shared way of talking about features of it organizations.

The imposition of a standard aspects without giving opportunities to explain its meaning denies us this opportunity for shared expressions which results in enhanced performance in the workplace.

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