Emotional Intelligence and Work Counselling in the Process Intensive Leadership Development Program

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Abstract

The current evolution phase of ICT industry put pressure on developing new competencies to manage and lead knowledge workers in knowledge-intensive organizations. The managers have to acknowledge the importance of developing themselves and their skills as part of improving the organization's intellectual capital. This paper presents an innovative way to develop leadership behaviour with a Process Intensive Leadership Development Program organized in pilot organizations. The ongoing action research will study learning experiences and the development of emotional intelligence skills of the managers as well as the possibilities and limitations of work counselling and the whole Process Intensive Leadership Development Program.

Keywords: knowledge-intensive organization, leadership development, emotional intelligence, work counselling, experiential learning, action research

1. INTRODUCTION

The world in which we live is rapidly shifting from the Industrial Society to the Information Era, when knowledge is used as one of the major factors in production. The economic situation and future prospects of the information and communications technology (ICT) industry have changed dramatically during the last year. It seems that the "Boom Period" is over and the normalisation process has started. The former transitions and the tightening competition present challenges especially to present-day innovative, successful, and multinational knowledge-intensive organizations and their personnel, which try to survive and prosper in an ever-changing and competitive business environment.

These transitions can be described in terms of a new paradigm of management, in which managers are forced to redefine their professions (Ståhle & Grönroos, 2000.) Managers have to acknowledge the importance of developing themselves, their skills, and their perspectives as part of improving the intellectual capital of an organization. They also require skills to maintain and develop the well being of the workers and to make them do their job more

productively. At present, successful leadership can be seen more and more connected to the following theoretically constructed developmental challenges: developing leadership skills, reducing work stress, increasing work satisfaction and continuously learning from experiences.

Developing the area of leadership skills is also more demanding than before. Important challenges connected to successful leadership are, for instance: 1. To lead individually, which means that a successful leader has to understand the differences connected to the personal features, motivational factors, and various values and beliefs of different people. 2. To have the ability and skills to "survive" in a turbulent environment as well as skills to manage with continuous change and various goals. 3. To create and maintain good atmosphere and good relationships between the subordinates. 4. To take care of leaders themselves, which means, for instance stress management.

2. PROCESS INTENSIVE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM (PILDP)

Process Intensive Leadership Development Program (PILDP) is part of a research project called "*Changing Cultures of Knowledge Work and Strategies of Finnish Companies*" organized in the University of Tampere, Finland. In this project changing work cultures of knowledge-intensive workers are being studied in a couple of leading Finnish information industry companies. The project, which is carried out by using action research methods, aims to reveal new courses of action as a result of co-operation between the companies and the researchers. With the help of the found guidelines, the companies are expected to be able to serve their customers better and more effectively than before. In addition, also the personnel are expected to experience their work becoming more meaningful. (See Kasvio & Haapakorpi & Ruohonen, 2000.)

The project started in the year 2001 by making basic interviews, work conferences, and preliminary analyzes in the two participating organizations. After the first phase, the actual developmental processes are now being carried out. An essential part of those developmental processes is called the PILDP. It concentrates on developing leadership and management skills of the managers in the case organizations. The Leadership Program is scheduled for the years 2001-2002. The program as a whole involves two intensively working researchers and at maximum three case organizations. All in all, 12 managers per organization are expected to

participate in this approximately yearlong process. All the case programs will be completed till February in the year 2003. The main objective of the Program is to develop and support leadership and management skills of the managers. In each organization the managers attend voluntarily to the program, which includes interviews, questionnaires, training days, and work counselling process.

2.1. Phases of the Process Intensive Leadership Development Program

First, personal management and leadership skills as well as present state, objectives, and feelings of the participating managers are evaluated by interviewing them. Especially the following themes are examined: emotional intelligence, work stress, work satisfaction, and experiential learning. This part of the process is considered as a starting point for the whole training process. In the interviews, the attending managers are able to make suggestions about the themes of the upcoming process.

Next, managers are evaluated by using management self-assessment questionnaires and the assessment questionnaire named the 360-degree feedback. The latter questionnaire gives information and feedback to the managers from their colleagues, superiors, and subordinates. Various questionnaires are used in order to support the findings gathered by interviews and also in order to go deeper into the theme areas. After the whole Program, managers' ideas will be re-evaluated in two different occasions by using again both interviews and questionnaires.

Third part of the Program are the process intensive training days. The duration of the training days is six within a period of eight months. The main objectives of the programme are to offer theoretical basis to develop the emotional intelligence skills and the learning of the managers from their own and others' experiences and to find their own directions in which to grow as a leader. Training days has a processing nature. This means that the topics under discussion have to be processed through own experiences of the attending managers.

Fourth part of the Program is the intensive work counselling process. The main objectives of this process are to integrate the theory from the other part of the Leadership Program into the everyday working practice of the managers and to support them in their experiential and interactive learning process. This part of the Program, which is interlocked to the training days, lasts eight months, two hours, in two times a month. Because of the nature of work

counselling, it will be organised only to six managers in each organization. Work counselling as a process of experiential learning will enable the counsellees to analyze, evaluate, and develop their work, working skills, and working behaviour as well as share their experiential or tacit knowledge. At its best, it may also enable the counsellees to attain a profound control of their essential values, knowledge, and know-how.

The main theoretical focus of the ongoing research is to use the concepts of emotional intelligence and experiential learning as background theories of PILDP. These theoretical concepts build the ground for the process intensive training days and the intensive work counselling processes, where the attending managers are expected to learn emotional intelligence skills as well as to learn from their own and others' experiences.

3. EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

The concept and the idea of emotional intelligence became well known around the year 1995 by D. Goleman's book "*Emotional Intelligence*". P. Salovey and J. D. Mayer had used the term already in the beginning of the 1990's in their book "*Emotional Intelligence: Imagination, Cognition and Personality*". However, the real pioneer of emotional intelligence is said to be a psychologist Reuven Bar-On who studied in the 1980's the differences of men and women in different cultures. Quite close to the concept of emotional intelligence becomes also the theory of H. Gardner's (1983) of seven different kinds of intelligence. Gardner says that the concept of intelligence includes traditional mathematic and verbal intelligence but also social ability and the knowledge of person's own inner world.

An additional root for the concept of emotional intelligence can be found from A. Damasio's book "*Descartes' Error*". There the author tries to point out that it is possible to explain the most important role of emotions in most of the reasonable decision making by arguments of brain physiology. The area of emotions has a significant role in evaluating reasonable alternatives and in learning by experience.

The concept of emotional intelligence can be seen as a collection of theories from several researchers. A critic could think that Goleman's concept of emotional intelligence could be called as "popular science". Goleman's concept of emotional intelligence is not sufficient

enough to describe the success in work life because it is too narrow. But it is an interesting way to look at intelligence and especially the elements of successful superior work. It can be said, that emotional intelligence is not the only thing leading to success. However, there is no need to question its value as an important element in successful superior work. For instance, a good leader has to be able to understand that people are different and appreciate different kinds of things, and they are mostly motivated by their values.

Emotional intelligence can be defined as follows: First, the ability to recognise different feelings and emotions in yourself as well as in other people. Second, the ability to motivate yourself and the ability to effectively manage your own states of emotions. Third, to effectively manage states of emotions between other people. When defined briefly, emotional intelligence is a purposeful thinking and behaving in different situations.

The concept of emotional intelligence can be divided in five areas:

1. Self-understanding, which means the ability to notice perceptions of yourself. It means also the abilities to recognise your emotions in real time. This is the base for successful decision making. The real knowledge of your emotions gives a reliable feeling of what kind of consequences follow from different choices. How do your emotions impact your performance, what do you think and so on. These skills determine how you manage with yourself.

2. Managing emotions, which means mostly self-discipline. Can you manage your desires and your anxious emotions. It includes also the skills to manage the emotions of anger, fear, and depression. This ability or skill helps a person to avoid emotional over reaction as well as primitive reaction. It can be said that if a person is in a non-controlled emotional situation he/she is not in a best state to make important decisions. Managing emotions is also important in the situations in which you are filled with worries, troubles, irritability and so on. If a superior can not manage his/her own emotions, it is not very probable that he/she is good in understanding the complicated emotional net of the subordinates. These skills direct your emotions, desires, and resources.

3. Motivating oneself, which includes three different areas: The first area is initiative and optimism, which mean the ability to catch different things with optimistic emotions. This is important in situations where we meet difficulties. The second one is entitled

engagement, which means the adaptation and acceptance of organization's goals. The third area is ambition, which means the desire to develop yourself. Finally, the motivation area means how to find the power to make the motivation possible. These skills are the emotional properties, which make it easier to achieve goals.

4. Empathy, which means understanding other people and to feel compassion to their feelings and emotions. It also means that you should understand the needs of other people and the ability to see different people as strength. The superiors with low level of empathy are not good to perceive weak signals coming from their subordinates. Empathic superiors are discreet, which means that they have the skill to avoid hurting the emotions of other people. These skills determine how we manage with other people.

5. Social skills, which include the following areas: handling human relationships, understanding the importance of nets, communication skills, starting changes, conflict management, effectiveness, and ability to change. The superiors with a high level of social skills have the ability to use these skills in leading, persuading, negotiating, and in teamwork. Superiors should understand the short period motivators and also the long period motivators of different people. In communication skills this means that the most important thing in communication is not always the real message but the impact and reaction it makes. These skills are important in making desired reactions in people.

4. WORK COUNSELLING

The meaning of the term "work counselling" arouses different images, expectations, and confusion. The term is also hard to distinguish from its various neighbouring concepts, for example consultation, therapy, and mentoring. There does not even exist any single coherent or clearly defined definition of work counselling. The definition depends on the theoretical orientation of the researcher (Paunonen, 1989). In this paper work counselling is defined as a regular and learning-oriented process of interaction, where an employee evaluates his work, analyses the dilemmas raising up from it, and plans the possible operations required in the future. It is also guidance and support given usually a consultant specialized in human relations.

Work counselling can be described to be an ancient practice, whose basis derives from the relationship between a master and his apprentice. (Niskanen, 1988.) The beginning of the historical development of work counselling can be traced back to the turn of the 20th century in Germany and the United States of America. At that time, the fields of social services, the church, education, and psychiatry used work counselling as a method to support and develop their employees. (Wacklin, 1993.) Not until recently, a growing interest towards work counselling as a method of developing leadership and management behaviour has aroused also in the private sector organizations. However, especially in the context of knowledge-intensive organizations this topic appears to be lacking in research. As seems to be leadership in general (Juuti, 2000).

In practice, work counselling can be organized to an individual, a group, and even to a whole work community. Work counselling is based on materials or narratives, which can be in written form or sometimes simply oral discussions. The function of these narratives is to illustrate the relationship of the counsellee to his certain work situations. (Kuusniemi, 1984.) It is also important, that before starting the work counselling process the attitude of the supervisors, the work community, and the work counselling group itself are favourable towards the process, and the counsellees are motivated to participate. (Niskanen, 1988.)

The objectives of work counselling can be examined from the level of an individual employee to the level of a whole organization. At individual level, the main objective is to help the employee to learn something new and useful in relation to work. At the level of work counselling groups, the other main objective is to learn from the interactive relationships between group members. At the level of organization, work counselling is usually seen as a method of developing human resources. Despite of the many possible goals of work counselling, all the levels also have a common aim, which is to make their output better than before. (Moilanen, 1994, Huhtala, 1993). In the ongoing research, the objective is to help counsellees to successfully accomplish their primary work function as well as to pursue several important objectives, including improvement of work motivation and work satisfaction, prevention of stress and burnout, and strengthening their professional skills.

Work counselling can be studied and practised with, for instance, psychodynamic, cognitive, organizational, and learning approaches. In this ongoing research the theory of experiential learning is put the main focus on.

It is common to apply experiential learning as a background theory for work counselling. Work counselling as a process of learning emphasises the concrete learning of various experiences and behaviour of counsellees. Experiential learning theory by Kolb examines learning as a continuous process whereby knowledge is continuously derived from and tested by the learner's experiences. The general nature of experiential learning theory leads to its process description called the experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 1984). The starting point for the experiential process of learning in work counselling, which takes place both throughout the whole process and in every separate session, is the concrete experience of a counsellee. Sharing that experience or tacit knowledge (From tacit knowledge see Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995) is connected to the following phase named reflective observation, in which the counsellee ponders his experience and other counsellees try to help the counsellee by confronting and asking questions about the experience. External opinions, generalisations, and attitudes often affect to the counsellee and help him to handle his experience and abstractly conceptualise it. Reflective observation and abstract conceptualization can be considered as the phases of active working in the work counselling sessions. This means discussing, debating, thinking, reflecting, and gradually understanding subjective experiences. Finally, this understanding is actively applied to the future working situations of the counsellee. (Paunonen, 1989.)

Experiential learning in work counselling can be seen as a change in the behaviour of a counsellee, which influences his future actions. In practice, learning happens by examining successful and unsuccessful experiences of a counsellee. By making attempts and mistakes, a counsellee learns a personal way to function in various working situations. Learning does not happen only in work counselling sessions, but also outside of them, while actually working, at home, and in spare time. Therefore, the continuous nature of the work counselling process and the regularly occurring sessions maintain the process of learning. (Paunonen, 1989.)

5. CONCLUSIONS

The main idea of the ongoing study is to test the PILDP as a method of developing leadership behaviour in a context of knowledge-intensive organizations. A special feature of the program is its processing nature. Especially, the combination of process intensive training days and the intensive work counselling process form an innovative feature of the program. Hence, the

main focus of the study is connected to the following questions: What are the learning experiences of the attending managers? How does this kind of Program suit to developing leadership behaviour and emotional intelligence skills of the attending managers? Can this kind of Program lead to fairly permanent changes in behaviour of managers? The expected outcomes of the Program are, for instance: improved time management, communication, and goal setting skills, positive changes in self confidence, learning from experiences, increased work satisfaction, and reduced stress levels.

Because the first PILDP is not finished yet, only few perceptions based on the superior interviews can be made. The first observations have been encouraging. The participants have been enthusiastic and very motivated. Because of the voluntary participation there has been a basic motivation existing before starting the program. Managers have also been eager to share their opinions, experiences, support, and knowledge.

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