DECISION MAKING FOR SMALL AND MEDIUM SIZE ENTERPRISES WITH A FOCUS ON SUCCESSFUL WORKPLACE COLLABORATION

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Abstract

Research purpose. It is rational to say that individual decision making is less time consuming and easier than group decision making. Decisions can be accomplished in such a manner as long the individual is an expert, well-informed on the topic, and is unbiased. However, due to globalization and technological advancement people are enforced to perform challenging tasks in collaboration with other individuals. Nowadays one of the factors which contribute the most to business success is whether or not employees are able to collaborate in team settings. By utilizing team settings businesses gain fasters operations and more effective results. Additionally, collaboration positively impacts individuals' responsibility, which furthermore empowers their motivation, especially in a digital workplace setup. Thus the purpose of this research is to determine and evaluate the most important values which impact collaboration in small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

Methodology. The study was carried out in a non-experimental way with a focus to collect data for descriptive research. A two-phase structured self-administrative survey was distributed online (n=117). 7 points Likert scale was applied to sum survey responses over the set of individual values.

Value / Practical implications. As a conclusion is offered a set of recommendations for managers concerning the improvement of collaboration in the workplace based on discovered individuals' values, like introducing Kanban boards to track and trace the efficiency of individual effort, increasing autonomy in the workplace, etc.

Keywords: Collaborative Work, Performance management, Interorganizational relationships, Team Performance

Introduction

With the continuous transformation, technological advancement, and ongoing globalization individuals are required to collaborate with other individuals in terms to complete daily operations successfully. The topic which arises more frequently in the organizational literature is the importance of collaboration in the organization.

Collaboration at the workplace is a widely discussed topic, however, it is at the same time a very often misjudged business issue. Although enterprises acknowledge the importance of collaboration and try to practice within their organization, it does not necessarily mean that it applied in a way to optimize the results. The common way for enterprises to incorporate collaboration in daily operations is to divide the work tasks amongst group members. Collaborating in such a way leads to that each individual is focused on the assigned task rather than working towards mutual results and greater ideas. This approach can consequence that individuals remain within their comfort zone, not knowing their peer expertise and not knowing that colleague input could resolve the problem easier. Additionally, we often can hear that it is significantly important to value teamwork, however, if there are no rewards and incentives presented, successful results cannot be guaranteed.

Over the years researches has been made which proved the benefits of collaboration at the workplace (Sarkar et al., 2001, Zaheer & Bell, 2005). Study conducted by Carr et al. (2014) found evidence that even the mere awareness of teamwork for common goal can positively impact individual's performance.

Transitioning from the old type of organization to a team setup can be a huge adjustment for leaders' end employees. Also organizations and managers until recently have been more contented with the one person to define the operations and distributing tasks. It is crucial to take into account that teamwork significantly improves overall results, task delivery realization, and individuals' mental state than working individually. We all know the old proverb "There is no "I" in team" and it is a very accurate illustration when we are discussing workplace collaboration. Successful leaders in enterprises, just like leading hockey team coaches, understand the significance of keeping teams in balance and delegating individuals to positions where they can give the most impact.

By learning each individual's strengths, weaknesses, and values, leaders can develop an exact plan for each employee and utilizing more efficiently their abilities. In the meantime, leaders need to highlight the value of teamwork, mutual support, and team interconnection. Efficacious collaboration at the workplace balances each individuals' abilities and skills with the needs of the whole organization, consequentially resulting in a victorious setup for the entire enterprise.

The main purpose of this paper is to identify the values which individuals appraise for successful collaboration at the workplace. By mapping out these individuals' values it gives leaders an overview of areas where attention could be improved. By incorporating these knowledge leaders can create successful strategies to utilize individuals' abilities and gain highest benefit from team collaboration.

Literature review

Operating in a team setup is not a new concern of the organization. Since the early 20th century, the dynamic of enterprises has changed tremendously what has caused the need for new ways of collaboration. The technological advancement, information superhighway, cyberspaces, and online communities have changed the way how teams are building their relationships at the workplace. The old-world setup, where all information is conserved within companies' own premises has changed to a new one, a much more open concept. The knowledge is shared all over the globe through different channels and the success of enterprises is based on collaborative team setup (Tapscott 2001, Wirtz et al. 2010).

Workplace collaboration is viewed as individuals who are working together towards the accomplishment of a mutual goal. The main understanding is that individuals in the team must have a shared awareness, allowing them to interact, foresee each other's needs and actions, and allow coordination of the process much easier. In the past two decades, we can perceive the collaboration at the workplace has begun to surface as an individual emphasis of scientific and empirical research. Discovering individual perceptions at the workplace has become a very important topic for organizational researchers. Mainly in academia we can see that collaboration is defined as "the situation of two or more people working together to create or achieve the same thing" (Cambridge dictionary), a common understanding of collaboration is "working together". Often in scientific literature terms such as collaboration, cooperation and coordination are used interchanged, however, these terms have offered different concepts in the. There have been attempts to stereotype "collaboration", however in academia has not a unified view of the concept (Alter & Hage, 1993; Reilly, 2001). Consequently, how enterprises can be expected to engage in "collaboration at the workplace" when the core concept is not well defined?

In scientific literature is possible to identify more than dozen definitions of collaboration. Even with these definitions, the differentiation between collaboration and cooperation is not clearly defined. Douma et al. (2000) deliberate collaborative efforts from the viewpoint of strategic alliances and emphasize that due to ongoing technological advancement and access to new technological innovations, alliances have become an important element for success in many industries. Additionally, research shows that the traditional approach of cost-driven motivation has shifted to knowledge sharing, where individuals' main objective was learning from each other. To promote successful collaborative partnership between alliances and strategic shareholders must be incorporated in the overall organizational strategy of the enterprise from the very beginning such as defined goals and objective setting (Stiles, 1995). Lake et al. (2017) describe collaboration as a combined action of a group, where the paradox of collaboration is founded on individual skills of the group who share the responsibility.

One of the essential elements that promote successful collaboration at the workplace is learning and interpersonal skills help a lot in team learning. Edmondson (2012) concludes that collaboration amongst peers is a vital activity with many benefits. In the same paper, conclusions were drawn that collaboration is a way of working which amalgamate peers to create new ideas, concepts, answer questions and solve problems. But as we know collaboration is a learning process and usually it doesn't come naturally in the majority of enterprises. It is important to recognize collaboration's importance since it is essential for innovation, problem-solving, general improvement in any enterprise which wants to stay competitive in the current marketplace.

Setting goals is a key requisite for successful collaboration at the workplace. Without a proper, mutual goal team cannot collaborate. Mackall (2004) highlights the importance of goal and objective setting for everyday operations at the workplace. Furthermore, elaborating on the need for setting mutual goals and objectives once an individual becomes a member of a team. These selected goals and objectives, later on, will determine the success of collaboration efforts. Once individuals are collaborating to achieve mutual goals, it is crucial that each individual acknowledge each other's abilities and skillset and work upon a common goal. West (2012) in his book highlighted the importance of diversification for each enterprise, implying that the 'one-size-fits-all' recommendation might not be the winning solution.

When we talk about successful collaboration it is important to understand individual values in the context of the workplace, as it gives a fundamental understanding of attitudes and motivations of employees, remarkably providing comprehension of the way how individuals perceive their workplace. The business world cannot survive with the olden day motto 'the key of success is to make a profit' as individuals expect to be treated fairly and ethically at the workplace. Ros et al. (1999) conducted extensive research with a focus on discovering employee values associated with individual attitude, behaviour, and social interactions and positions at the workplace. Similar studies that found links between individual value influence on collaboration, behaviour at the workplace and in a group setup has been conducted (Brief, 1998; Munson & Posner, 1980). Group values are considered as collective values that impact individuals' efforts in a team setup, correspondingly enterprise-level analysis emphasizes emotional values that influence the emotional commitment of employees in the workplace. They highlighted the importance of studying individuals' personal values as it gives an insight and allows the development of a pattern that can be applied in the workplace to predict individuals' behaviour on important social problems.

With different views from several authors on collaboration at the workplace, we can conclude following that group must have eager individuals with the wide skillset to complete extensive tasks in a more efficient and rapid way. This paper aims to investigate how cognitive value perceptions and attitude of individuals are linked

to behavioural intent in the context of collaboration at the workplace and how such relations can be organized giving a clear insight for decision-makers.

Methods

The dominating approach which has been applied in this research paper to gather actual insight of individuals' values is a quantitative research. In order to get an enriched understanding of individuals' values at the workplace surveying was applied. A questionnaire survey was selected as a key method in order to achieve better results, furthermore it is considered as most cost efficient approach to involve larger masses of respondents (McQueen and Knussen, 2002). The data was gathered from a sample selected in 2021 in a period from 12th of January till 14th of February. The study was carried out in a non-experimental way with a focus to collect data for descriptive research. A two-phase structured self-administrative survey was distributed online. In the first phase, respondents were asked to evaluate 11 pre-selected values from a personal perspective, furthermore, in the second phase, the same was asked but from an enterprise perspective. To evaluate respondents' engagement a psychometric scale was involved due to the applied questionnaire. Particularly, a 7-point Likert scale was applied to sum survey responses over the set of individual values. A Likert item is an approach to statements that the respondent is asked to evaluate by providing qualitative evaluation on subjects of the research, focusing on the agreement and disagreement on each dimension. The survey tool lead authors to a useable sample of 117 respondents from 19 countries. All respondents were randomly selected and cover a wide range of industries and occupations. The sample contained the following ratio – 59% female and 41% male respondents, all survey participants were in the age of consent.

The sole purpose of this investigation is to discover employees' values and enterprise values, which could be translated to actions that would be focused on long term success.

Results and discussion

The paradigm of evaluating enterprises based only on revenue has shifted, and now even more than ever the focus is set on other valuables - employees. The traditional approach has a narrow scope due to the fact it measures only past events. In order to make the right decisions for more efficient collaboration at the workplace, the authors preselected 11 values which were presented to respondents for selection. The preselected values cover multidimensional perspectives which allow drawing wider conclusions which are motivational factors for individuals'.

Firstly, enterprises need to revise the current team dynamics and shift them to unique ones that inspire and promote group collaboration at the workplace. The

survey respondents shared opinion on values which matters the most at the workplace to successfully collaborate. Van Wart (1998) argues that individuals develop values based on their past interactions with other individuals and through these experiences they are able to form new personal values. The authors argue that the role of personal values determines a much larger impact than just reflection of individuals' feelings. Additionally, the conclusion can be drawn that individuals make decisions based on their personal values, which certainly impact collaboration efforts.

Findings revealed which are individual personal values at the workplace, which were later compared to enterprise values based on respondent suppositions. The results found that there are values that can be linked to individual and enterprise, which gives an insight into how employees think, feel and act. By discovering the following values, we can distinguish areas where the additional focus should be implied. In the following figure is disclosed which are two values which were the highest selected values for both value groups – employee and enterprise.

Respondents from different cultural backgrounds and occupations, representing different industries of various sizes selected "making money" and "efficiency" as their most important values at the workplace. Additionally, these values were selected as the ones with the highest importance also for enterprises based on respondent suppositions. Authors can argue that monetary values play a big part in our lives and has a motivational power, and gives a supplementary feeling of security (Furnham, 1996). Various studies show that attitude towards money influence individuals' financial behaviour such as spending and saving habits (Nga & Yeoh, 2015). Conclusions can be drawn that money is not only exchange instrument but also can be discerned as a representation of validity, authority, and value.

The second mutually highest selected value is "efficiency". It can be explained that efficiency generally is linked with skilfulness in terms to avoid squandered results, time, and effort. Respondents evaluate their time and they know that by working efficiently they are able to use less time, effort, and resources to complete their job. However, the efficiency of each individual is different and it variates depending on where the time and efforts are spent and how much of it is being used to obtain a common goal. We can link that these values are interconnected for both parties and in the end, it adds up to functionality and money. Furthermore, it is important to comprehend that process can be efficient only if it is effective and vice versa.

Besides generating income and being efficient respondents selected as their personal values at the workplace "autonomy" and "mastery of skills".

Research results illustrated that there are large discrepancies between employee and enterprise values when we touched the autonomy dimension. The results can be translated as employees appraise autonomy as it serves a certain level of freedom and feeling of having control over your daily tasks. This is one of the key values that can grant employee satisfaction at the workplace. Lin et al. (2013) conducted a similar study amongst health care professionals that concluded similar results. The largest

gap on values what employees value and presume that enterprises don't was the autonomy dimension. In general, the evaluation of autonomy as employee value was rather high = 5,18 in comparison to enterprise value =3,69. We can clearly conclude a discrepancy of =1,49 gives clear comprehension of autonomy's importance in employees every day at the workplace.

For employees, this was the highest set priority after "money-making" and "efficiency".
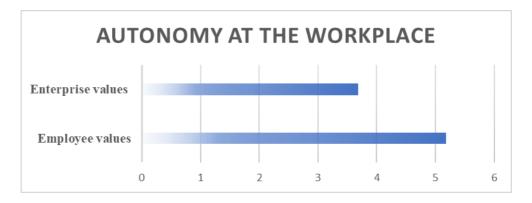

Figure 1. Comparison of enterprise values and employee values

Bradley et al. (2003) study shows that giving employees autonomy makes them more collaborative, content, and willing to stay in the company. From this conclusion can be drawn that individuals might leave jobs they are passionate about due to bad relations with management but might remain in the company in positions where they are not fulfilled but have a high degree of autonomy

Conclusion

According to the study, we can understand there are several factors that influence team collaboration at the workplace, and there are ways how managers can improve it.

1. By being direct and giving a clear indication of responsibilities enterprises can gain the maximum efficiency that employees evaluate highly. Monetary rewards are an excellent way to motivate individuals to be more efficient, in addition, we can conclude it based on that employee's values "money-making".

2. Managers can introduce in daily operations Kanban boards to track and trace the efficiency of each individual efforts. This approach gives additional accountability and transparency to the workplace by clearly displaying who is working on what and how long it will take to reach the goal. Additionally, by

applying this method, employees gain the confidence of ownership over their assigned tasks, which furthermore motivates them to collaborate to increase the efficiency of their work.

3. Increase autonomy at the workplace - is one of the values which motivates employees the most. Giving employees accept to gain gradually more autonomy will motivate them to collaborate in the teams and improve general efficiency. However, managers' tasks are to evaluate is individuals have the right resources and skillset to wield autonomy properly.

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