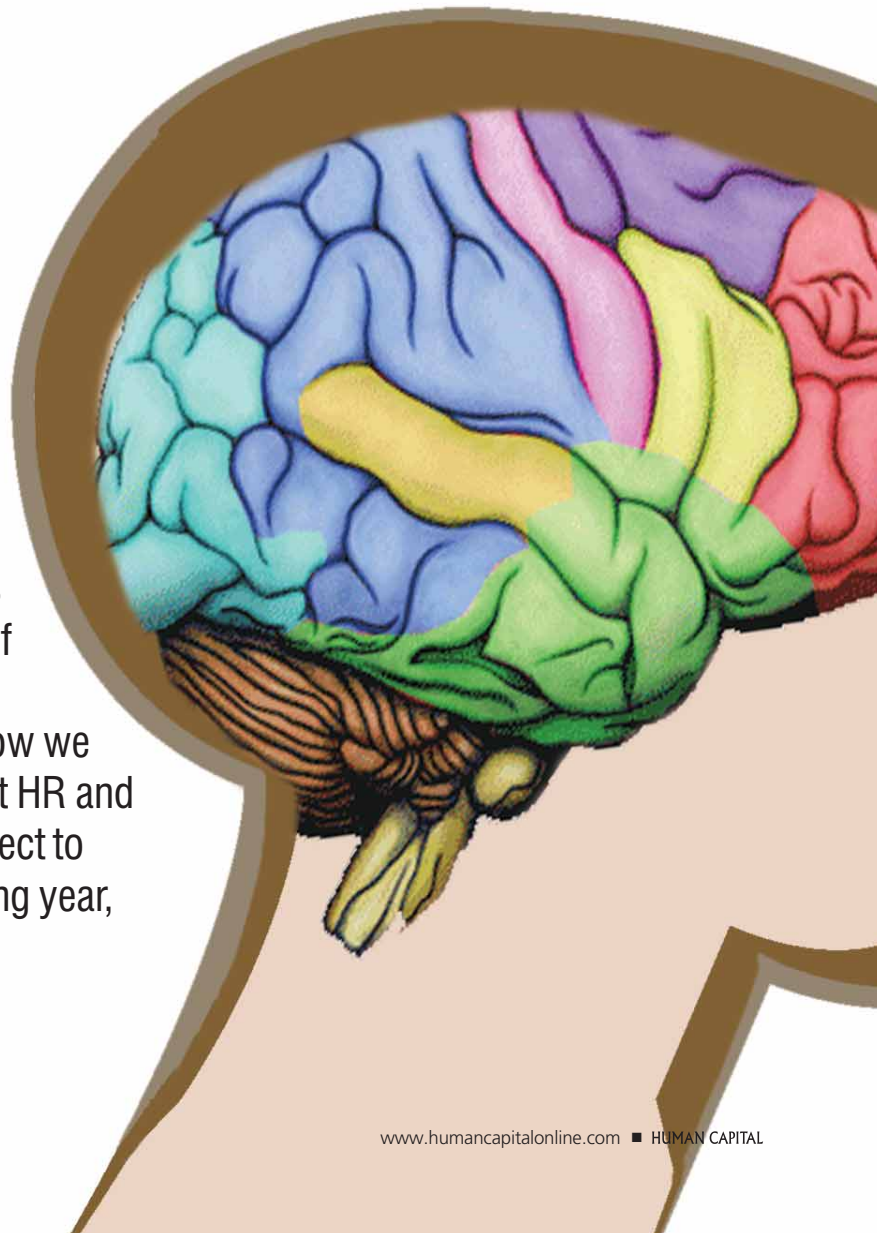


strategic learning

the real imperative
of our times

■ BY DR SUJAYA BANERJEE

To survive in the environment of uncertainty, it is imperative for organizations to reinvent, adapt, and prepare themselves to manage the difficult truths of the market place. Strategic learning is a vital element of how we think about the future and what HR and learning professionals can expect to see on their plates in the coming year, given the macro trends.



Stephen Covey describes the changing world as turbulent permanent white water. The analogy is based on rowing in the earlier days, where the coxswain (in charge of the boat) would get team members to adjust and follow new instructions as the situation or the environment changed. In comparison is the analogy of a turbulent world where the challenges of leading through rough terrains with unforeseen sharp turns can jeopardize an organization's chances for survival. And the noise of the turbulence is so great that no one can gain from each other's experience for changing the course!

In this environment of uncertainty, leaders committed to strategic learning can get their organizations to reinvent, adjust and adapt proactively for the purpose of being ahead of the sharp turns and challenges of a turbulent environment.

Today's competitive scenario presents unique challenges to organizations placing great premium on speed, choice and innovation. These new challenges demand a new kind of leadership, which is not short-term in its orientation.

There is a great need for adaptive leadership- that is adept at sensing the need and continuously modifies to adjust in the macro environment

Change is uncomfortable, disruptive and always resisted.

The feat of continuously changing is even harder to achieve. Yet, building an organization that has the ability to constantly question status-quo is the only way of ensuring a sustainable organization of future.

Organizations need to be competent and make sense of the changing environment to focus on the right things

The leaders need to align and mobilize the entire outfit to invest energies in areas of strategic focus

The need to develop the ability of

ideating with speed and do these things continuously should be addressed, in a cyclical manner to become competent strategic learning organization.

While it is common to see T&D departments re-label themselves as learning and development functions, many organizations may miss the opportunity of understanding and exploiting the true value of strategic learning. This kind of learning is based on creating and executing breakthrough strategies. Unlike traditional approaches that produce one-time change, strategic learning creates a cycle of continuous adaptation and renewal for organizations.

How does strategic learning happen?

a) Strategic learning is preceded by a systematic exercise of diagnostic learning that generates insights into customer, competitors, organization's realities, industry dynamics and the macro environment.

b) Strategic learning enables organizations to focus through vision and making strategic choices: Vision is a word-picture of what the organization aspires to achieve in the future, and when organizations define a vision statement, it must be an extension of an organization's strategic choices. It should stretch and inspire transformational behavior within people. Strategy is finally about making choices and strategic learning ensures that choices are based on insights rather than guesswork.

c) Strategic learning involves aligning the organization for success: Organizations can fall into the trap by managing things in isolation. When any one element of the business is changed through isolated initiatives such as Six Sigma, MBO, re-engineering and restructuring, the organization runs into the peril of not getting value from these initiatives if not strategically aligned to other systems and processes.

Several organizations have attempted to reorganize their way to success before becoming serial



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TALENT MANAGEMENT

reorganizers and causing more confusion and frustration in the bargain. For a strategy to be successful, key elements of the business system must reinforce each other in support of the strategy. Success comes not from isolated action but from orchestrating the actions to align meaningfully.

d) Strategic learning involves meaningful execution: This step allows the organization to learn through examining its own actions and re-scanning the environment to modify the tentative plan of action as may be required.

An organization is not a machine - strategy will finally succeed and enable learning through people, who are focused, skilled and motivated. An organization that makes efforts to communicate its strategic choices with clarity and simplicity has greater chance of succeeding.

Sometimes it is about capabilities in which case, hiring, training, rotating employees for different exposures can help build capabilities for strategy execution. Motivation is an important factor for ensuring successful execution. The evidence clearly shows that high engagement organizations usually outperform those with low engagement levels.

Leadership of change is the core factor here. It involves creating a burning platform for change and communicating constantly to maximize participation and generate short-term wins leading to long-term victory eventually.

Organization culture is equally important as any organization's values and behaviors must directly support its strategy - and work in support of all key elements in the business system enabling success.

When culture resists strategy, culture wins!

Strategic learning rests on the belief that the ability to learn and adapt is the only sustainable advantage in today's turbulent world. Through strategic learning, an organization can help develop intellectual capital of its people by providing them vital

tools for success in a competitive environment (includes training and development).

Trends for 2012

Growth is at the top of the agendas for CEOs this year, and the focus will be emerging markets, mergers and acquisitions and innovation. All these top agendas present a wide range of people-related challenges for strategic HR and learning professionals who will need to focus on:

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will need to focus on:

- Managing talent with growth in mind will require developing a plan for acquiring, developing and retaining the right talent
- Grooming business leaders and managers who can drive growth and innovation globally will be significant
- Coaching and counseling top management teams on leadership, personal development, communication and organization influence
- Building and developing HR/learning capabilities that are aligned to company's growth strategies

Organizations are becoming global corporations and the home country is one of the many markets they operate in. As organizations move towards globally integrated operating models there will be people issues

related to change and talent management. The imperatives:

- Designing new organizational structure and governance models, new decision frameworks, new approaches to roles and responsibilities, rationalizing and consolidating businesses or functions
- Managing global talent and developing strategies to provide new skills and talent, creating a leadership pipeline that can quickly get redeployed to capitalize on global opportunities

● Managing a diverse and complex workforce and leading change

Developing next generation leaders to drive future growth: There is a unanimous need being felt for a stronger, deeper leadership pipeline across organizations. Cultivating the right mix of personal attributes skills and experience through the right leadership exposures is necessary for grooming future leaders. The agenda:

- Aligning leadership strategy with business strategies and models to ensure the right capabilities are being developed
- Getting top leadership to own the development of future leaders and provide visibility and support to develop them
- Aligning talent programs such as selection and assessment, development, planning, performance and rewards and succession management and accelerate the leadership development process

People are risky business: HR/learning professionals have a key role in managing enterprise wide risk including people-related risks. As a result:

- People-related risks will be important including the support organizations will expect from HR to manage these risks effectively
- HR organizations must embed formal risk management and benchmarking into their organizations, processes and strategies to present a more informed view on people related risks
- Creating a risk mindset for everyday HR activities - HR and risk management should work together

to create a single set of processes that are practical and risk intelligent


Workforce analytics can provide useful insights to manage the macro environment: Advanced analytics is helping organizations retain top talent, mitigate churn by identifying employees who are potential exit risks through robust vulnerability analysis programs. Advanced analytics also enable organizations to beef up their leadership pipelines and develop employees most likely to grow into leadership positions. What will take centre stage:

- Workforce planning and analytics to enable improvements in identifying critical workforce segments based on current and future needs of the organization
- Measuring recruitment effectiveness
- Workforce performance - analyzing and managing top performers to ensure they are being used effectively
- Diversity effectiveness - identifying diversity issues and measuring the effectiveness of diversity programs
- Talent potential and progression - assessing the effectiveness of development programs by mapping them against actual career progression
- Conducting exhaustive vulnerability analysis before putting into place individualized retention strategies

Deployment of social media @work: Social media and the use of mobile devices are raising the bar on HR service delivery and there are already several organizations using mobile devices with employee self-service options to offer HR services and using social media to promote learning and create communities of practice.

Cloud computing is changing the way every business operates and HR/ learning has a significant role to play in enabling organizations to adapt to new service levels and infrastructure needs. Change management will be effective in the new cloud environment and make cloud services part of the organization's DNA while helping users to adjust to technology changes and enhancement

Effective sales force management: Companies in frantic pursuit of growth are rapidly shifting their sales focus to emerging markets which are seen as the engines for future revenue and profits. There will be emphasis on adapting to the new challenges and complexities of talent strategies, organization design, learning, and compensation and change management in these markets. While the megatrends indicate the likely strategic agendas, each organization will obviously have their own unique challenges which require a different set of interventions for human capital management. Organizations must not remain focused on creating short-term value for now but invest in continuous processes of adaption and renewal for success in the future.

In the final analysis, the sum total of self-initiated changes within the organization must exceed the change in the macro environment. Getting organizations to focus on reflection, alignment and execution in a cyclical process of becoming future ready is the role of strategic learning. If surviving in the future is an imperative then so is strategic learning. 



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