Role of career development culture and senior management support in career development

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Abstract

This article is based on a review of knowledge and theory relating to the influencing factors of career development. The aim of this review was to identify areas that require research attention within the scope of development culture and senior management support as influencing factors of career development. The extant review of literature indicated that career development culture and senior management support has not yet been investigated as variables that are related with career development. None of prior studies have investigated how both of these factors are related with career development. Consequently this paper proposes scales of career development culture and senior management support that can be used in future studies, following a process of validation of scales.

Key words: career development, development culture, senior management support.

Development culture

The extant review of literature reveals that organizational culture has implications on HRM (e.g. Aycan, 2005), and on employee development activities (e.g. Kotter and Heskett, 1992; Simonsen, 1997). More specifically, organizational culture has some implications on career related variables such as career satisfaction and organizational commitment (Joo & Park, 2010), career counselling and planning (Yuen & Kee, 1993), and career self-management (Lips-Wiersma & Hall, 2007). Thus, the aim of this section is to identify some gaps in the relationship between organizational culture and career development. Therefore, the body of knowledge contained in this section is divided to areas such as generic culture, relationship of culture with HRM and career development. Finally, this section identifies development culture as an antecedent of career development together with limitations in prior studies.

Generic culture

Culture has many faces and meanings (Aycan, 2005). According to a most frequently cited conceptualization, 'culture consists in patterned ways of thinking, feeling and reacting, acquired and transmitted mainly by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artefacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values' (Kluckhohn, 1951, p. 86). Thus, the culture is conceptualised and measured through numerous value dimensions (Hofstede, 1980; House et al., 1999; Trompenaars & Hampden, 1997).

Organizational culture and HRM

To explain the role of culture in HRM, 'the model of culture fit' was proposed by Kanungo and his associates (Aycan et al., 1999; Mendonca & Kanungo, 1994). This model assessed culture at two levels: societal and organizational. Organisational culture consists of beliefs, values, and assumptions that are commonly shared by members of an organization, and these values influence the behaviour of organizational members since people rely on these values to guide their decisions and behaviours (Schein, 1985). In other words, the organizational culture consists of managerial beliefs and assumptions about tasks and employees. Managerial assumptions relating to tasks deal with the nature of the task and how it must be best achieved, while managerial assumptions relating to employees deal with the nature and behaviour of employees (Aycan, 2005). Employee related assumptions are also influenced by the characteristics of the socio-cultural context via the mediation of internal work culture (Aycan, 2005). For example, in career management, career behaviour such as initiatives and interventions to shape future careers is less common in high power distance cultures (Claes & Ruiz-Quintanilla, 1998). Similarly, in paternalistic cultures career decisions are influenced significantly by others such as family, friends and superiors (Aycan & Fikret-Pasa, 2003). Consequently, in high power distance and paternalistic cultures, employees seek and accept guidance of their superiors who are perceived to be aware of what is good for employees' professional development (Aycan, 2005).

Development culture and career development

In relation to career development, Kotter and Heskett (1992) propose that the organizational culture has two levels namely, at deeper and less visible level and at the more visible level. According to them, at the deeper and less visible level, culture refers to values shared by the organizational members which constitute the driving force for a development culture. At the more visible level, culture represents behaviour patterns or style of an organization and these behaviours may need to be changed in building a development culture.

Development culture is one in which individuals grow in ways needed by the organization. In a development culture, employees are expected to grow, supported in their efforts to do so, and are rewarded for success as measured by their contributions (Simonsen, 1997, p. 4). There are some main characteristics of a development culture. They are; trust, openness, collaboration, managed conflict, risk taking, systems aligned with messages, and learning organization (Simonsen, 1997). Trust is the most important ingredient in any corporate change process (Laabs, 1996). Openness can be achieved by keeping the organizational structures as open as possible, encouraging participation and role exchange among employees (Gottlieb & Conkling, 1995).Similarly, both formal and informal communication systems must be open in order for employees to develop. Consequently, organizational leaders must define strategic direction of the firm and both suggestions and complaints must be encouraged (Simonsen, 1997). Career development is not about beating out the competition for a promotion, but about successful collaboration/teamwork so that everyone is adding value through the achievement of team goals and organizational success (Simonsen, 1997). In a development culture, conflict is managed rather than avoided and everyone has and uses skills to move from argument to planning for solutions. Consequently, the outcome of conflict situations becomes problem solving rather than ongoing disagreement (Simonsen, 1997). A development culture encourages risk taking. Risk taking is rewarded, not punished and innovation as a result of risk taking is celebrated (Simonsen, 1997). Compensation systems reward employees based on the actual contribution rather than tenure or position; intrinsic rewards such as respect and acknowledgement, and showing employees that their work are valued. If employees are expected to be self directed, then decision making systems allow and support that behaviour (Simonsen, 1997).

A development culture succeeds in a learning organization. In a learning organization, everyone is expected to learn from experience and apply what they learned to improve their own work and contribute to the goals of the company (Simonsen, 1997). There is an important recent debate about the extent of the role of learning in creating and maintaining competitive advantage (Baker & Sinkula, 1999). Consequently, learning is an integral and complex resource of the firm that can create competitive advantage (Hunt & Morgan, 1996). Learning orientation refers to organization-wide activity of creating and using knowledge to enhance competitive advantage (Calantone, Cavusgil, & Zhao, 2002). Learning orientation influences on what kind of information is gathered (Dixon, 1992) and how it is interpreted (Argyris & Schon, 1978), evaluated (Sinkula, Baker, & Noordewier, 1997), and shared (Moorman & Miner, 1998). Based on the literature, learning orientation consists of four factors: commitment to learning, shared vision, open mindedness, and intra organizational knowledge sharing (Hurley & Hult, 1998). Commitment to learning is the degree to which an organization values and promotes learning (Sinkula et al., 1997). If an organization encourages development of knowledge, employees will be motivated to follow learning activities (Calantone et al., 2002). A shared vision in terms of learning refers to an organization-wide focus on learning (Sinkula et al., 1997). That is, an organizational focus is necessary for a positive learning climate, more specifically when new knowledge is implemented (Calantone et al., 2002). Open mindedness refers to the willingness to critically evaluate the organization's operational routine and to accept new ideas (Sinkula et al., 1997). Intra-organizational knowledge sharing comprises collective beliefs/behavioural routines related to the spread of learning among different units within a firm (Moorman & Miner, 1998; Zaltman, Duncan, & Holbek, 1973). That is, an efficient and effective system is necessary for sharing and re-examining information (Moorman & Miner, 1998).

Until now career researchers have paid less attention relating to the influence of development culture on career development in organizations. However, prior studies provide some evidence about the impact of development (learning) culture on some career related outcomes such as career satisfaction and organizational commitment (Joo & Park, 2010).Similarly, Japanese overseas subsidiaries reflected greater influences of parent company culture on their career counselling and planning activities (Yuen & Kee, 1993). This is the case for career-self management as well. That is, in line with this argument (Lips-Wiersma & Hall, 2007) revealed that individual employees take responsibility to consider whether culture is matched with their career directions. Thus, HR has to make sure that those individual career aspirations are linked to desired organizational culture. Conversely, when employees don't feel that they fit with the culture of their organization, it may also be perceived as a barrier to their career advancement (Briggs, Jaramillo, & Weeks, 2011). Overall, a positive relationship can be expected between development culture and career development.

Senior management support
Generally, it is well accepted that there is an involvement of HR at corporate level (Huselid., 1995; Schuler & Jackson, 1987). Particularly, senior management support is an essential element of every comprehensive and integrated career development systems. In relation to career, it's well recognised that career development is a tool for strategic control and development (Evans, 1987). Consequently, career planning and management have a huge impact on whether organizations can attain corporate goals and individuals can meet their personal aspirations. Therefore, to successfully manage careers, a strategy is required aimed at having a comprehensive framework for attracting, developing, and retaining employees in accordance with business objectives (Mayo, 1991; Walters, 1992). Consequently, active support from senior management is vital to a comprehensive and sustainable career development process (Simonsen, 1997). In support of this argument, a survey conducted in Canadian context revealed that career development

programs need considerable co-ordination within a company, particularly from the support and direction of senior management (Portis, 1978). For example, senior management can pilot the career development process, participate in career discussions, and set their own development goals (Simonsen, 1997). Furthermore, senior management needs to pay greatest attention to career planning activities such as periodic progress reviews of managers and identification of strengths, weaknesses and training needs (Portis, 1978). Simonsen (1997) proposed six dimensions of top management support for career development: provide leadership for development culture change, provide role models to get their people to change, participate in training to discuss differences on the assessment as part of career discussion and set their own development goal, communicate the urgency for everyone to be involved in the career development process, communication from top management promoting the program purposes, need for changes, expressing high level expectations, and continued encouragement for participation.

To date, prior studies have not empirically tested how top management support in career development impacts on career development practices. Kraimer, Seibert, et al. (2011) suggest that top management support may have an impact on career development and employee career opportunities and therefore future studies should focus on how top management support is related to the career development.

The following tables (Tables-1 and 2) represent some measures and scales of career development culture and senior management support developed based on the measures and scales proposed by Simonsen (1997). They were modified since Simonsen (1997) has proposed those scales of development culture and senior management support in terms of employee development. Therefore, future career studies may use scales of career development culture and senior management support proposed in this article following a process of validation.

Table 1- Scale of development culture

Measures	Questionnaire items
Extent of use of organizational systems that support career development	Our organization values managers those who support to develop careers of their employees.
	We have systems (job posting, position descriptions, and so on) and open communication so employees can gain information about career opportunities in the organization
	Managers and employees' responsibilities for career development are clearly identified and stated
	Our organization provides access to career assessment and planning tools/materials for employees
	Our organization provides career development for managers and employees
Extent of managers, contributions to the career development of employees	Our managers are skilled and comfortable coaching employees
	Our managers/supervisors know how to help marginal employees
	Our managers work with employees to enrich their current jobs
	Our managers use performance appraisals as a career development activity
	Our managers help employees to explore career goals
	Managers know how to reward and keep top performers motivated even when promotions are not possible
	Our managers give employees frequent, candid, feedback on performance

Extent of employees needs and awareness of responsibility for their own career development	Our employees seek feedback about their performance from their supervisors
	Employees here initiate new work procedures, activities and responsibilities
	Employees have written career development plans
	Our new supervisors are trained in supporting the career development of subordinates
	Employees like to work, and develop their careers as demonstrated by high morale
	Our professional/technical employees can develop their own careers without moving to managerial positions

Table-2 Scale of senior management support

Measures	Questionnaire items
Career leadership	Provide leadership for career development culture change
Encouragement and participation	Provide role models to get their people to change in terms of career development
	Continued encouragement for participation in career development
	Participate in training to discuss differences on the assessment as part of career discussion
Top management communication	Communicate the importance for everyone to be involved in the career development process
	Communication from top management promoting the career development program purposes, need for changes, expressing high level expectations

About the author

Richard Wickramaratne is a Senior Lecturer of the Department of Management Studies at the University of Peradeniya in Sri Lanka. His main role as a lecturer involves teaching and research supervision at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. He has published a number of research articles in refereed journals and proceedings of international research conferences. Currently, he is reading for his PhD in HRM at Murdoch University in Western Australia.

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