



# Knowledge Workplace

By Anuradha Rangan

**K**nowledge workers are the intellectual capital of an organization. Is managing them as simple as conducting a symphony?

Bill Joy, co-founder of Sun Microsystems said, "High technology obeys the iron law of revolution. The more you change, the more you have to change. You have to be willing to accept the fact that in this game, rules keep changing".

The nature of work today is primarily oriented towards knowledge, innovation, learning and teamwork. It is a project-based, multi-skilled, customer-focused and collaborative effort. Work life is always governed by rules, roles, relationships and results. As Charles Handy remarks, our assumptions about how the world works, taxes collected, families supported, lives planned and corporations organized, will change radically. To make meaning of this transition, human resource personnel will have to integrate the dynamics of rapid changes, knowledge explosion, speed of innovation and high voltage intellectual capital. Managing physical workforce and managing cerebral workforce require two opposite sets of competencies. Are we adequately equipped to face the human resource issues of the virtual organization?

Many enterprises are in the midst of fundamental change in organization design and management practices. Sheer external competitive forces compel the owner and the employees to respond through frequent internal adaptations. In such situations, it is very critical that someone inside the organization is safeguarding the basic work conditions. Pioneering and traditional companies are both experimenting with new strategies, structures, cultures and system approaches, to accommodate the fast pace of technological change and also to reap the benefit of the emerging knowledge economy. But who is keeping a check on the overall health and happiness of the individual? Are we assuming that since everything is going to get wired and networked, people will achieve excellence even in de-emotional and de-personal work settings? The information technology sector is creating organizations that are completely occupied by cerebral workers. It was predicted much before 2000, that 80% of jobs in any organization will be cerebral rather than

manual; business foundations will be anchored in knowledge-based industries that employ educated, young and mobile professionals with high expectations.

Today it is accepted that scientific knowledge is not the sum of all knowledge. We are unable to tap the entire source of human knowledge of particular times and circumstances. It is because of this inherent skill to use the fleeting moment with known information and data, that each individual is able to remain distinct from each other. Society as a whole is able to generate a variety of form and function. What are the future challenges that will put human resource personnel on center stage and enable everyone to maximize the return of hard work and synergy?

Corporate success in the new economy comes from being able to identify the right talent and competence, skillfully codify, document and transfer knowledge and thereby be ahead of competition. Managing the heart, head, soul and spirit of an ambitious community demands a high order of human resource strategies and practices. While a traditional personnel department was regarded as policing in its orientation, there are chances that an ambitious HR person in a networked virtual work setting may become a cyber-based KGB outfit. Codifying rules, allocating roles and responsibilities and enabling healthy relationships between people require a combination of rational and emotional processes. Due to severe competition, the chances of similar organizations sharing widespread scientific data on the most realistic human resource practices may also get restricted.

We have always responded to certain trends or fads such as quality circle, managing by results, vision and empowerment. In the same fashion, are we tackling human resource issues with talent and assessment centers, competency mapping, leadership academy and 360-degree feedback? Strategic human resource personnel come across considerable opportunities and challenges while formulating an agenda for knowledge work places.

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Prof. Ms. Anuradha Rangan is Associate Professor at T. A. Pai Management Institute Manipal and can be contacted at [anuradha@mail.tapmi.org](mailto:anuradha@mail.tapmi.org)