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NEED OF HOUR: ACTION TANKS NOT THINK TANKS

NAGURVALI SHAIK
ALUMNI
K L UNIVERSITY
GUNTUR

PUJITHA VALLBHANENI
ALUMNI
KONERU LAKSHMAIAH UNIVERSITY
GUNTUR

VINOD ADAPALA
ALUMNI
K L UNIVERSITY
GUNTUR

ABSTRACT

In today's global village, organizations are facing stiff competition. Each organization is trying to create competitive edge over its competitor. To do so, top management formulates various strategies. It is said that the greatest strategy wins the war of competition. Analogous to this situation, world also has grown enormously in information sharing with the advent of Internet; where every information starting from making of a pin to making of automobile is available to each and every corner of the world. Every individual has grown in their Intellectual Quotient, making them knowledge workers. The future of an organization is forecasted by many intellectual brains in a better way – "think tanks". Think tanks are those who are open to new ideas, new concepts and appreciate change and always experimenting. But who is going to take these strategies a step forward? Undoubtedly answer would be "action tanks". Action tanks are those who get things done efficiently and effectively. This conceptual paper includes arguments favouring action tanks, arguments favouring think tanks, situations that made use of these terms, followed by concluding that India being a developing country in need of action tanks who can directly 'execute' the given task and contribute to the success of organization rather than 'thinking' alone.

KEYWORDS

Action Tanks, Think Tanks, Strategy, knowledge workers.

1. PREAMBLE

The world is now experiencing Information Age, in which the individuals are able to transfer information freely and have instant access to information without any difficulty. The challenge for present era is to harness the vast reservoir of knowledge and information available. On the other side, competition among firms is increasing with swift phase where it is noticed that the speed of a computer processor doubles by every 18 months and Nokia says their product life cycle changes for every 6 months. Use of human capital is a strategy that firms identify as the best and competitive advantage factor. Organizations started believing that human assets are significant in winning competition. Human resources create and implement strategies. Management thinking recognized the importance of strategic formulation, hence envisages vision, mission, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, long term objectives and strategy selection. Firms not fail in formulating strategies but in implementation of strategies. It is very difficult to implement the predetermined plan with precision. Contemporary management thinking identifies importance of strategy implementation. Now, it is said that strategic implementation is crucial for organizational success. Thus firms are in search of people who are action oriented. Organizations can possess and maintain such people through recruitment function and performance appraisal respectively.

This paper conceptual in nature provides a framework of skills and attributes test for differentiating action tanks and think tanks during selection process, so that organizations can easily differentiate applicants and hire action tanks. It endeavours to suggest a reward system that maintains action oriented people in the organization. It also includes, arguments favouring both action tanks and think tanks with examples and concludes that action oriented individuals are need of the hour.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAME WORK**2.1 THINK TANKS**

There are two meanings identified for the term "Think Tank". First, think tanks as organizations and second think tanks in organizations.

THINK TANKS AS ORGANIZATIONS

The term think tanks originated during 19th century. Think tank represents an organization that sponsors research on specific problems, encourages discovery of solutions and facilitates interaction among scientists and intellectuals in pursuit of these goals. Today there are many organizations involved in acquiring and disseminating knowledge. These organizations specialize in collecting knowledge about management practices, storing it and then transferring the information to those who need such information about enhancing performance.

THINK TANKS IN ORGANIZATIONS

Think tanks in organizations are the individuals who create strategies for the organization. The critical thinker, better problem-solver and better decision-maker, who thinks critically, accurately, knowledgeable, and fairly while evaluating the reasons for a belief or for taking some action.

Thinking is core competency for leaders and managers and one of the best ways to set an organization apart from the competition. They are characterised by the ability to perceive the world in new ways, to find hidden patterns, to make connections between seemingly unrelated phenomena, and to generate solutions. Generating fresh solutions to problems, and the ability to create new products, processes or services for a changing market, are part of the intellectual capital that give a company its competitive edge. Having new insights is a crucial part of the innovation equation.

Thinking can help organizations manage the innovation process and overcome some of the barriers that prevent leaders from being effective innovators. Art and design processes help people develop fresh thinking through aesthetic ways of knowing, imagination, intuition, re-framing and exploring different perspectives.

2.2 ACTION TANKS

There are two meanings identified for the term "Action Tank". First, action tanks as organizations and second action tanks in organizations.

ACTION TANKS AS ORGANIZATIONS

Action tank represents an organization that puts ideas into action; implement them successfully to make certain output. Many organizations fall under the category of action tanks. Specifically, sub units of giant manufacturing firm acts as action organizations, whose duty is to manufacture goods according to requirements, policies of major unit.

ACTION TANKS IN ORGANIZATIONS

Action tanks in organizations represent individuals who implement ideas and achieve the given task. They are go-getters, achievement oriented, adaptable and believe in results, who promptly acts based on situation to achieve the given task. Action tanks are those who get things done efficiently and effectively. More precisely, who gets the results are action tanks.

3. DESCRIPTION OF THINK TANKS AND ACTION TANKS

In the present context, as part of human resources function, think tanks and action tanks are considered as individuals working in organizations.

3.1 THINK TANKS

Think tanks are those who are open to new ideas, new concepts and appreciate change and always experimenting. They are creative types, always experimenting. Their strength lies in willingness to experiment and change and try new things, new processes, invent new products or services. But they may not understand the processes and issues required to bring these new concepts to market.

Think tanks examine the underlying assumptions and radically question or doubt the validity of arguments, assertions and even facts of concept. The ability to think requires reflection, induction, deduction, analysis, challenging assumptions and evaluation of information to guide decision making.

3.1.1 QUALITIES OF A THINK TANK

Subject expertise and creativity are two major qualities proposed to be found in think tanks.

Subject Expertise – domain expert, technical know-how

They are experts in particular area of concern. They are people with special knowledge or skills in a particular area of endeavour.

Creativity – clever, imaginative, artistry

It is the ability to produce something new through imaginative skill, generation of new ideas, alternatives or possibilities that may be useful in solving problems. Individuals view things in new ways or from a different perspective and they are able to generate alternatives or new alternatives. Sometimes, they generate unique alternatives.

3.1.2 ARGUMENTS FAVOURING THINK TANKS

Argument 1: Strategy is a reaction to environmental changes.

As the external environment (political, economic, social, technological and legislation) changes, strategists form new strategies for the organization. Strategists are generally top management who are aware of company environment and analyze present position to suggest a new strategy; to build on company's strengths and to overcome company's weaknesses. Strategists are think tanks. Thus think tanks enable organization to face competition.

Argument 2: Strategy sets direction for organizations.

The business strategy of a company provides the big picture that shows how all the individual activities are coordinated to achieve a desired end result. It is through the strategy process that the overall direction of the business is set. This is based on the opportunities and threats in the outside world and the internal strengths and weaknesses of the business. Hence, think tanks set direction for organizations. A well thought-out strategy keeps you focused and on-target.

Argument 3: Strategies provide management with a means to motivate employees towards organizational performance.

In organizations, think tanks are responsible for creation of policies, procedures and reward systems. Reward system acts as management control system that motivates all employees in the organization to act in favor of organization. An effective management control system designed by think tanks ensures goal congruence thereby increasing organizational performance.

3.2 ACTION TANKS

Action tanks are those who get things done efficiently and effectively. They are field based. The work done by an action tank affects the Think Tanks in a series. It shows a progressive effect. Every individual's work can be calculated and study the impact of think tanks. To get action tanks is a difficult task as the words of an individual are always questionable. The only option left for the organisations is trust them based upon certain competencies and skills. To do a competency mapping it takes time and money for an organisation. Regardless of the efforts still the action tanks are rarely found. Recruitment, pre-selection process, pre-orientation, written test, operation/technical round, HR round with a good number of procedures are conducted only to guarantee that the selected individual can perform the work to his/her 100% contribution and efforts. Pareto's principle - the 80-20 rule is still being the truth where 80% of the employees contribute to 20% of profits and 20% of the employees contribute to 80% of profits. Are the designs, policies, strategies', are proving weak? When an action tank is selected the organisation is considered to be the luckiest.

3.2.1 QUALITIES OF ACTION TANKS

Go-getter and extroversion are two major qualities proposed to be found in think tanks.

GO-GETTERS - EAGER BEAVER, SELF-STARTER, NUMERO UNO, AND LEADER OF THE PACK

A "go-getter" is someone who really tries hard to fulfil their dreams or performs above and beyond the expected amount. They utilise all the resources required to achieve the goal and possess Just-do-it attitude. They go above and beyond the call of duty and are concerned with external reality than inner feelings.

EXTROVERTS – GREGARIOUS, OUTGOING

Extroverts are the individuals concerned more with practical realities than with inner thoughts and feelings. If the task is not achievable they choose another path to achieve it. They are more pragmatic.

3.2.2 ARGUMENTS FAVOURING ACTION TANKS

Argument 1: Highly performing employees drive organizational performance.

The contemporary management concept believes in "Management by Results". High performing employees produce results on which organization's future is highly dependent. Only, implementation enables, ensures organization to move forward in its business operations.

Argument 2: Thinking just to be thinking is counterproductive.

Boastful ideas may demand organizations to change their policies, organogram or culture there by misleading to counterproductive. By virtue huge organizations require to spend its time, money and effort investment in making structural changes and sometimes impracticable. It is difficult for manufacturing, complex administrative set ups, long channels of distribution to quickly implement changes.

Argument 3: "Knowledge is not enough; we must apply. Willing is not enough we must do." Goethe.

Only thinking is not enough implementation justifies thinking process. Ideas are of no use until they are promptly implemented. The proof of their value is their implementation. (Theodore Levitt, 2002). Every idea may not be feasible to all organizations. One idea may suit to particular organization and the same might be useless for others. Many people who are creative think that having ideas makes their job complete and do not hold responsibility to implement upon those ideas. Knowledge is has no power until it is applied.

Argument 4: Myth: Articulation is accomplishment

People think having idea as most imperative in global scenario. But knowledge not applied at right time is merely useless. Every year, companies spend billions of dollars on training programs and management consultants, searching for ways to improve. But it's mostly all talk and no action. According to Jeffrey Pfeffer and Robert I. Sutton, authors of *The Knowing-Doing Gap*, ideas are important, but they're only valuable after they've been implemented. One average idea that's been put into action is more valuable than a dozen brilliant ideas.

Argument 5: Transitioning ideas to action

To get a creative idea is one thing, but to get it transitioned into implementation ensures organizational success. Many organizations with abundant ideas fail to transmit them into execution.

Argument 6: High performers are scarce and significant

The fact that you can put a dozen inexperienced people into a room and conduct a brainstorming session that produces exciting new ideas shows how little relative importance ideas themselves actually have. Almost anybody with the intelligence of the average businessman can produce them, given a halfway decent environment and stimulus. The scarce people are those who have the know-how, energy, daring, and staying power to implement ideas. (Theodore Levitt, 2002)

Argument 7: Implementation of ideas lead to achievement of business goals but not just ideas.

Whatever the goals of a business may be, it must make money. To do that, it must get things done. But having ideas is seldom equivalent to getting things done in the business or organizational sense. (Theodore Levitt, 2002)

4. COMPARISON OF THINK TANKS AND ACTION TANKS

Thinkers vs. doers

Think tanks are thinkers. They are someone who explores and considers all possibilities. His thinking is not bound by rules or doctrines, and he tries his best not to use emotions to justify his ideas. Plus, he realizes that concepts such as right and wrong have a transitory nature. Action tanks are doers and they are the people who get things done.

Abstract vs. Pragmatism

Think tanks are abstract. It's being in existence in thought or as an idea but not as concrete existence. Action tanks are pragmatic. They consider situations in very practical way and respond immediately to those situations. It signifies the insistence on usefulness or practical consequences as a test of truth.

Knowledge based vs. Field based

Think tanks are knowledge based. They collect, analyze information to take wise decisions. Action tanks are field based. They receive experience from practical exposure and use them in achieving present goal.

5. A FRAMEWORK FOR IDENTIFYING THINK TANKS AND ACTION TANKS

An organization can recruit action oriented people by inclusion of frame work during skill and attribute test of selection. Table 1 shows a framework of skills and attributes test for identification of think tanks and action tanks during selection process.

TABLE 1: FRAMEWORK OF SKILLS AND ATTRIBUTES TEST FOR IDENTIFYING THINK TANKS AND ACTION TANKS DURING SELECTION PROCESS

Category	Criteria of evaluation
Organization Skills	X1: Innovative
	X2: Decision Quality
	X3: Logical in thinking
	X4: Action oriented
	X5: Drive for results
	X6: Motivating others
	X7: Team work
Personality Attributes	X8: Extroversion
	X9: Machiavellianism
	X10: Openness to Experience
	X11: Risk taking
	X12: Self-monitoring
	X13: Type A and Type B personality

According to the framework, an applicant can be measured for organization skills and personality attributes. These two criteria consists thirteen attributes as shown in figure1. Employer has to rate applicant for these attributes on a scale of 1 to 5. Scores are interpreted on individual attribute basis as portrayed under.

ORGANIZATION SKILLS

These skills identify applicant's capability during performance of a job. These skills include seven attributes to be calculated to determine whether the job applicant is an action tank or think tank. Attributes that determine organization skills of an applicant envisage innovative, decision quality, logical in thinking, action oriented, drive for results, motivating others and team work.

X1: Innovative –

Innovation is the creation of unique ideas. For business operations innovation is catalyst to growth. In the organizational context, innovation may be linked to positive changes in efficiency, productivity and quality. It is said that need is mother of innovation. The measure of innovation at the organization level relates to individuals, team-level assessments and organization level. During recruitment process applicant's individual level of innovation should be rated.

X2: Decision Quality –

Decision is a choice between two or more alternatives. Quality of decisions mostly depends on available information and prompt analysis. Think tanks presumably can make high decision quality. Quality of decision is dependent on optimum utilization of available resources.

X3: Logical in Thinking –

Logical thinking is a learned mental process. The American Philosophical Association (APA) defined critical thinking as purposeful, self-regulatory judgment that uses cognitive tools such as interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, and explanation of the evidential, conceptual, methodological, criteriological, or contextual considerations on which judgment is based.

X4: Action oriented –

An action-oriented person by nature will take on big goals and go after them full force. I they don't like to take too much time to plan and prepare. They believe in the "ready-fire-aim" approach to life. They are alright with making mistakes and fixing them after the fact.

X5: Drive for results –

They are energetic people who demonstrate a vigorous drive for results have a positive effect on their team members. Their compassion doesn't impede their business acumen. Nor does their business acumen impede their compassion. Since a champion is self-aware, they know their natural tendencies and where they need to compensate for their lack of skills.

X6: Motivating others -

It is the ability of an individual to persuade others in the required direction to get things done. Action oriented people are expected to motivate others in the pertinent direction so that actual aim of action oriented people is achieved.

X7: Teamwork -

Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision. It is the ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organizational objectives. Each individual have different responsibilities in a team resulting in synergetic effect.

SCORE INTERPRETATION OF ORGANIZATION SKILL VARIABLES

Applicants those who score high on X1, X2 and X3 variables can be interpreted as think tanks. Because these three attributes reflect qualities of a think tank. Applicants those score high on X4, X5, X6 and X7 variables can be interpreted as action tanks as these variables reflect qualities of an action tank.

PERSONALITY ATTRIBUTES*X8: Extroverts -*

Extroverts are the individuals concerned more with practical realities than with inner thoughts and feelings. If the task is not achievable they choose another path to achieve it. They are more pragmatic.

X9: Machiavellianism-

It is the ability of an individual to be successful in political and social engagements. Machiavellianism reaps benefits by manipulation and feel no empathy when their actions harm others.

X10: Openness to Experience -

Openness to Experience is characterized by an eagerness to try new things and ideas, and a broad-minded, non-judgmental approach to life. Open people are self-aware and have a high tolerance for ambiguity. Routines bore them and they like to challenge authority. A sub-trait of Adventurousness leads them to embrace risks and seek constant change.

X11: Risk taking -

Risk taking refers to the tendency to engage in behaviours that have the potential to be harmful or dangerous, yet at the same time provide the opportunity for some kind of outcome that can be perceived as positive.

X12: Self-Monitoring -

It is the ability of an individual to adjust his or her behaviour with external and situational factors. Self-monitoring theory deals with the phenomena of expressive controls. People who closely monitor themselves are categorized as self monitors.

X13: Type A and Type B personality

Type A personality

They always move rapidly, feel impatient with the rate at which most events take place; strive to think or do two or more things at once; are obsessed with numbers, measuring their success in terms of how many or how much of everything they acquire.

Type B personality

They never suffer from a sense of time urgency with its accompanying impatience; feel no need to display or discuss either their achievements or accomplishments; play for fun and relaxation, rather than to exhibit their superiority at any cost.

SCORE INTERPRETATION OF PERSONALITY ATTRIBUTES

Applicants who score high on all i.e. X8, X9, X10, X11, X12 and X13 variables of personality attributes can be interpreted as action tanks and on the other extreme those who score low are interpreted as think tanks.

An overall score of an applicant represents whether he/she is a think tank or action tank. On any of these variables ranging from X1 to X13 if an applicant scores average, such a variable is discarded from the total score.

6. PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL AND REWARD SYSTEM:

The competencies of an action tank are analysed at the time of selection. Organisations also follow the path of reflecting the competencies in terms of designing a performance appraisal and evaluating them. One of the best Performance appraisal methods is Performance Based Pay. In this method the output required from the employee are calculated and also the costs incurred from recruitment to training. The rewards are paid based upon the production done. Exceeding the expectations would receive a high pay. Ultimately performance matters in an organisation. If the performance is weak there is a chance that either the strategy opted is wrong or competencies selected are wrong. Think tanks provide a globally used system to analyse the employees' performance. Most of the performance appraisal methods' have the following competencies: skills (required for the job), Qualification, Training and Development, Workshops, Research, Innovation, Accuracy – Turn Around Time, Leadership, Networking, Inter-departmental Relations, Discipline, Proactive, Behaviour/Attitude, Production and Quality.

7. CONCLUSION

Think tanks provide organizations with ideas, strategies that possibly allow them to win the war of competition. Action tanks implement these ideas to ensure organizational success. Action tanks are of highest significant to organizations as they drive organizational performance and effectiveness. Organizations can attract and maintain such action tanks with proper selection process and reward system.

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