Research Article

9box Grid as A HR Analytical Tool to Nurture A Dynamic Work Culture

Dr. Malathi Selvakkumar*
Principal – Collegiate Education
Aachi Educational and Research Foundation, Chennai India

Abstract: HR Analytics also called as people analytics/ talent analytics/ workforce analytics has come as a one-stop solution to the aid of the HR personnel, and enables them to gain meaningful insights about workforce effectiveness in nurturing a dynamic work culture. HR has now begun to don a kaleidoscopic role to match the growing trend of job seekers constantly on the lookout for potential opportunities while employed. HR thus not only induces employee engagement and loyalty, but contributing in creating a pulsating work culture. The 9 box grid is a popular talent management tool that attempts to correlate employees' growth potential and their performance, and plot the same to categorise them on this basis. This is done in three stages and the employee categories have been explained in detail, based on their characteristics. The types of employees range from bad hires that are least desirable if they do not get aligned to the company's culture and practices; to the star performer who has all the makings of a true leader. If he is mentored effectively, the star employee can soon take over the reins of the organisation in the near future. The employee performance largely depends on the nature of the prevalent culture that is closely monitored using this grid analysis.
Key words: organisation, employee, potential, performance, culture, employee engagement, talent management

Introduction

"Create the kind of workplace and company culture that will attract great talent. If you hire brilliant people, they will make work feel more like play"….Richard Branson

The corporate scenario is punctuated with unprecedented changes at both the macro and micro levels. The current pandemic situation across the globe has further added to the corporate misery; and many of them are forced to re-visit their goals, processes and policies to ensure that the available resources are optimally distributed and used across the functions. There is a paradigm shift in corporate expectations from the HR who are gradually yet firmly faced with a situation to work out their costs effectively and justify them. HR Analytics also called as people analytics/ talent analytics/ workforce analytics has come as a one-stop solution to the aid of the HR personnel, and enables them to gain meaningful insights about workforce effectiveness in nurturing a dynamic work culture.

Definitions

HR Analytics is defined as "the application of statistics, modelling and analysis of employee related factors to improve business outcomes".

It is "the science of gathering, organizing and analysing data related to HR functions like recruitment, talent management, employee engagement, performance and retention to ensure better decision making in all these areas".

HR Analytics is "the systematic identification and quantification of the people drivers of the business outcomes".

In summary of the above definitions, HR Analytics are all the factual data relating to the employee component of an organization, that are used for all the HR functions ranging from "R to R" (recruitment to retirement) with a focus on improved business outcomes through appropriate decision making.

HR tech tools have opened the vistas for recruiters to include data that were earlier considered as insignificant. Its underlying objective is to actually draw inferences from this data and convert it into valuable information to support decision making. With a change in the attitudes of corporates to acknowledge their human resources as human capital, the workforce is now being considered as a potent organizational asset. HR has now begun to don a kaleidoscopic role to match the growing trend of job seekers constantly on the lookout for potential opportunities while employed.

HR Analytics uses quality metrics and helps to chart a proactive corporate recruitment strategy, while helping remove guess work layers and bottlenecks of the selection process. It also helps to remove ineffective sources and locate candidates with desired parameters. Collected workforce data are aligned into practical data models, algorithms and tools, to gain actionable insights drawn from dashboards, visualization and reports. The perception and understanding so got throws clarity on the people performance that can be easily monitored and analysed, besides tracing impeding bottlenecks. Based on this, the HRs are able to draw up a **LAMP (Logic, Analytics, Measure, Process)** agenda to ensure proper decision making by the organization, in addition to predicting the efficiency of the HR activities for better and informed decision making.

Permeation of technology into every field of business activity is now an accepted tandem, and contributes in forging strong employee relations, spirited team work; propagate remarkable

communication in a collaborative work culture to enable employees to carve a niche for themselves in their chosen career. HR today has an array of analytical tools to choose from, in keeping with their organizational background, culture and goals. While employee surveys throw light on the speed breakers that negatively impact the employee skills and competencies, it also enables the HR to comprehend their career objectives. The **chat box** is yet another innovative HR tool that supports and blends both lean processing and machine learning into the corporate culture, while providing real time communication, and adding to the ease of employees. A **collaborative organizational culture** not only motivates employees to hone innovative skills, but also prod professional development too. **Gamification** is a constructive tool that makes work happier and exciting through employee engagement. **Cross training** develops comradeship among employees while propagating organisational loyalty for their better engagement. The **9 box grid** is another ground-breaking analytical tool that is used to find out the correlation between the potential and performance of the employees, and decide if he needs to be retained or an exit plan be made out to him or help place him in an organisation that ideally matches his skill set.

In the current **VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity)** context, thanks to the pandemic outbreak, organisations are forced to seek quick and novel solutions to ensure a smooth adaptation and transition to the changed environment. This adaptation largely depends on employee behaviour, interaction with appropriate technology; flexible and vesting work processes and a culture that supports change and fosters intra-preneurship. With an upper trend in **furloughed** employees (put on temporary leave for at least 3 weeks), organisations are now faced with a category of employees who are going through **Hysteresis** characterised by waning capabilities due to their period away from their work on one hand, and awash with mounting anxiety, boredom and fear of the future looming ahead of them on the other. They are filled with **ANT (Automatic Negative Thoughts)** that have to be consciously worked upon to be curbed by self and the organisation through some initiatives besides counselling. Employee recognition and reward programs based on clearly defined parameters urge employees to consistently outperform and exceed employer expectations. Employers today generate employee excitement through gifts, certificates, souvenirs and movie tickets to create zeal at work. A paradigm shift in the HR roles from activity to value based, with an eye for business creation, has egged employees to saunter out of their comfort zone and focus on redefining their potentials.

HR is now strongly backed by data and has created a pressing need for them to revamp their PMS and embed periodical interactions between employee and manager, efficient employee tracking system, productive feedback and provide ample scope for learning through apt opportunities. HR thus not only induces employee engagement and loyalty, but contributing in creating a pulsating work culture. The 9 box grid is a popular talent management tool that attempts to correlate employees' growth potential and their performance, and plot the same to categorise them on this basis. The growth potential is in terms of their likelihood to perform in the future, and supports performance management and succession planning too. A rain check on the concentration of resources and authority helps in plotting the employees on the basis of their leadership skills and performance parameters. The organisation is able to assess how power is distributed in terms of gender, age, race and sexual orientation, to ultimately develop a harassment free work culture. A good work culture creates plethora opportunities to employees devoid of bias, to ensure their open and honest conversation. Employee performance is not only based on outcomes, but also on how the outcomes were achieved. According to Steve Gruenert and Whitaker, "The culture of an organisation is shaped by the worst behaviour the leader is willing to tolerate".

The 9 box grid is normally done in three stages as discussed below:-

Stage 1- Assessment of Employee Performance

The performance is categorised as low, moderate and high and each have their own comprehension in the corporates. When an employee is found to have **low performance, it** is indicative that there is a poor or nil match with the job requirements, entailing his inability to achieve the individual targets set for him. When an employee records **moderate performance,** it signifies a partial match between the job requirements and the attainment of individual targets. An employee is said to have recorded **high performance** when there is a perfect match between the requirements of the job and the targets laid out for him.

Stage -2 – Assessment of Employee Potential

The table below explains how employee potential is assessed by the HR by using the 9 box grid:-

Employee Potential at Work	Expected Improvement	Reason/ Suggestion
Full (less discouraging)	No	Non-financial motivation/ highest job position
Moderate	Develop current role	Scope for improvement in performance and expertise
High	No	Eligible for promotion

Stage -3 – Matching the Potential with Performance

This is the last stage that leads to plotting the grid and identifying the nature and characteristics of the employee. This helps in bringing about a better understanding of the employee and gauging if he is a misfit in the organisation. If proved a misfit, the HR can give them a counselling and help such employees identify which job will suit them the best, and help place such employees elsewhere. The HR here can decide on what should be done to step up either the performance or the potential of the employee as the case maybe. The following is the categorisation done on the basis of the 9 box grid:-

The X axis measures the performance while the Y axis measures the employee potential. Both the X and Y axes are divided into 3 parts namely low, moderate and high.

Analysis of the Grid in the order of importance to the organization

(1) High Performer with a High Potential is also called as the **Rocking and Consistent Star or Future Leader**- The employee in this position bags the exceptional performance and potential and so in the toe line for succession planning as he has top talent in the workforce. This employee is highly valued by the top management and is given challenging opportunities to handle turnaround projects, start-ups and spin-offs as the case maybe. Non-financial motivators do the magic for this category of employee, who responds favourably to open praise and appreciation, though his limitations are unknown. The top management can groom this employee for higher leadership positions through coaching and mentorship, besides enrolling him for leadership development programs to cultivate his innate leadership skills and competencies. Through this, the said employee will get opportunities to extensive networking and in the long run fall in the succession matrix that is mapped with appropriate key roles in the organisation, and take it forward in the coming days.

(2) Moderate Performer with a High Potential is considered as a growth employee and a valuable contributor and is also called as a **future star.** Commonly referred to as a high performer or **HIPO,** he shows a great potential to move up the career rungs calling for responsibility. Being an average performer, he needs sufficient time to mature in his current role. Challenging assignments tend to incite him subject to the condition that there is role clarity and clear cut job expectations. Also called as a **High Flier**, this employee is most sought after by his peers and organisation. He has a strong streak of accepting challenges and hence the organisation runs the risk of losing him, lest he accepts a plum offer. His synergy and achievement levels can be matched at one go when offered a lynchpin position (one that offers critical and irreplaceable sources, without which the organisational goals are difficult to attain). In short, he is one person who needs to be watched with catchy bait!

(3) High Performer with a Moderate Potential exceeds all expectations and is normally a top performer in a ready form. Considered as a high impact strong contributor, this employee responds positively to both challenges and rewards at workplace. In certain organisations, this employee is treated as a **star in the rise** that can do exceedingly well if coached well by professionals or peers with the clear intention to remove his performance barriers. He is bound to improve his performance if subjected to a blend of on the job and off the job training techniques. He can be dared to stretch his potentials while giving him the space and time to adapt to added responsibilities similar to the **jumping frog syndrome.**

(4) High Performer with a Low Potential – is considered as a solid performer with high professional ethics and trusted instincts. He does wonders when handed out assignments that match his skill set and is a keen and dedicated learner. With a low score on development, he could be filled with a feeling of stagnation, lacking growth space. He is so conditioned to doing routine and mundane work to the point of becoming a specialist by imbibing expertise over the years, and left feeling choked. This type of employee should be handled with kid gloves by encouraging him to mentor the new joiner that also doubles as his retention technique. Commonly referred as a **work horse** or **stuck employee** or **old timer**, he does not pay much heed to his career progression. The organisation should offer him flexi-work options, telecommuting or cross functional assignments, as he has a good work orientation and will never question authority. This type of an employee has least job hopper instincts and lacks personal career growth. **The Peter Principle** that upholds the fact that "every employee tends to rise to his level of incompetence" is applicable to him beyond doubt.

(5)   Low Performer with a High Potential – commonly called as **dysfunctional genius**, has no previous job experience although brimming with an eagerness to learn new things. Most of the time, he is like a management trainee from a reputed institution, but lacks work exposure and his potential can be harnessed in accordance to the organisational policies. Given time to adapt to the organisational culture, this type of employee tends to perform better when he is evaluated on a timely basis throwing light on the scope for improvement**.** The manager should be open about the organisational expectations from him and also convey the fact that if he is a misfit, he runs the risk of continuing his services. This maybe resorted if he fails to improve in his current role or on re-assignment. When his supervisor uses constructive feedback and coaching to motivate him, he stands a strong chance of becoming a rough diamond that needs to be put through the arduous process of polishing to get the best out of him.

(6) Moderate Performer with a Moderate Potential – A person in this category is considered as a **core or key player.** As their category suggests, this employee shows great potential to move ahead in responsible positions in the organisation. The best of him is got through job rotation so that he gets familiar with all the processes in the organisation. Another reason this is suggested is because this employee is a spirited team player and has unique characteristics of flexibility and adaptability. Reflection meetings as held in Japan called as **hanseikai** will enable him to brainstorm his performance as an individual and as a team player with the team, and use the learning outcome and experience to avoid similar mistakes in the forthcoming project/assignment. The performance quotient can be improved by leaps and bounds when he is kept excited, engaged and satisfied. This is possible when additional responsibilities are added to his existing job portfolio, and he is given reasonable time to adapt. Productive criticism together with a training program aimed at up-skilling or re-skilling will yield positive outcomes faster.

(7) Moderate Performer with a Low Potential – This type of an employee is known as an **solid professional or an effective specialist.** Some organisations prefer to call him as an average performer or **up or out grinder.** Though he is an average performer, his firing decision can be postponed, if the organisation finds that the time and money invested in training him is not a wasted expenditure as they had expected. If the manager finds a ray of hope in retaining this employee, he should be appraised of his uncertain position in the organisation, and draw out a personal development plan that provides scope for improving his potential and performance. This is necessary as the employee is convinced that he has

reached his career potential. To transition as a HIPO, he should be given time to bring about the desired changes, failing which the organisation should not hesitate to fire him.

(8) Low Performer with a Moderate Potential – is in a predicament as he shows potential for one level of growth only. To survive in the organisation, he has to show substantial change to overcome his gross underperformance. In corporate parlance tis employee is called as **up or out dilemma** or considered as an **inconsistent player**, owing to the mismatch between his potential and performance outcome. This could be due to a faulty on-boarding process or incompatible individual and organisational expectations; or not placed on a job that matches his competencies and skills. Peer coaching together with a well-planned mentoring program are the feasible OD interventions that can be implemented for this employee. The mentor can throw light on the employee's personal bottlenecks and draw up an evaluation due on a monthly basis, and review it periodically. This can become a reality if the Japanese style of **Senpai-Kohai** relationship is nurtured in the corporate culture. Suggested and expected behavioural changes should be re-in forced by the mentor. Despite all these efforts if no visible changes are noted, then his exit plan may be executed.

(9) Low Performer with a Low Potential- This type of an employee is called as an **under performer** who faces a talent risk, and his employment is questionable, making him a **bad hire.** In certain corporates, this employee is referred to as an **ice berg or useless work** that is better fired without any hesitation. When his manager gives him time for adaptation, he poses a potent threat to the organisation as an iceberg, not justifying but rather wasting the resources allocated to him. If retained, his poor work quality will create a **ripple effect** and spread the wrong word in the organisation. A lot of time will be wasted in "cleaning the mess" created by him, rather than his positive contribution to organisational development. If the organisation has a bevy of bad hires, it reflects on a defective selection process and talent acquisition policies that need to be re-visited and revamped immediately. In Japanese management, this category of employees are called as **madogiwazoku or "window seat"** people who are considered redundant and uncooperative. They are not allowed to attend any meetings or partake in any task, and have the freedom to leave when they realise their misfit. Modern corporates refer to them as **party goers and drifters/loggers** as they lack organisational loyalty and keep moving in and out of jobs. This class of employees lack both discipline and team orientation. If put on an Assistance Program for counselling that backfires, the company runs a risk of an epidemic spread of disengagement stemming from them, which rings a death knell for the organisation. It

would do well for both the company and the employees if they are immediately exited from the system.

To sum up, the above exhaustive segregation of the employees on the basis of both their potential which is a combination of inherent and acquired capabilities together with their performance makes valuable information that is used by HR for decision making. When this is converted in terms of figures, it is called as data and lends a fabulous flavour to the organisational culture that is reflected through proper policies and procedures.

Conclusion

The role of employees in the development of the organisation clearly depends on the culture it prides. A dynamic work culture revolves around tolerance, inclusiveness, engagement, accountability and mutual respect. Employee engagement not only acts as a retention strategy, but also helps identify the "flight risk" among employees that spells a positive work culture that supports not only a pulse dipstick, but loyalty among the employees. On the organisational front, HR may be trained and designated to double as the ambassadors besides a data champion, to enable quick data driven decision making in terms of attracting, managing and retaining employees while improving the ROI. Such data that may be analysed include employee surveys, telemetric analysis, attendance records, multi-rater reviews, sales promotion history, personality and temperament data and employee data bases to name a few. The two mantras – **HEAR – halt, empathy, anticipate and review** and **FASTER - forget, active, state, teach, enter, review** when embedded in the corporate culture is bound to lead to success. Ownership of work, collaboration, and flexibility are the keywords that do the magic for the Gen Y who are eyeing an organisation priding a culture that improves their levels of energy, wellness, and business performance. In conclusion, we may recall the words of **Richard Branson "Create the kind of workplace and company culture that will attract great talent. If you have brilliant people, they will make work feel more like play"….**

References

1) hr.technologist.com/articles

2) http://ilonkajankovich.com/blog/

3) www.analyticsinhr.com

4) www.forbes.com

5) https://medium.com/nauta-capital/the-rise-of-the-niche-hr-tech-ccab1ad550bc