

The Weaver's Loom: A Conceptual Framework for Facilitating Transformational Human Resource Management Through the Strategic Integration of Knowledge Management and Continuous Improvement

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Using the metaphor of a weaver's loom, this conceptual paper draws from existing literature to develop an integrative model that synthesizes relevant attributes of transformational leadership, continuous improvement, and knowledge management into an overall framework that supports a more strategic role of human resource management (HRM). The theory espouses that a constant focus on strategic goals, with all processes, policies, practices, procedures, and systems, working congruently with each other, results in a transformational HRM environment. This transformational atmosphere is essential as organizations focus on their strategic goals, while continually scanning their business environments for new opportunities, as well as impediments toward achieving their goals.

This conceptual paper, drawing from the collective experiences of the authors and from existing literature, reveals numerous ways organizations experience change. From one perspective, the following is observed; short-term quick fixes for situations that have been brewing for a long period of time. Another more palatable approach embodies a more long-term, strategic outlook. When managers think strategically, they continually scan the external business environment-competitors, demographics, general economy, legal/regulatory atmosphere, political climate, structural changes in industry, unemployment rates, other external factors, and their organization's internal environment (Ulrich et al., 2009b). This continual examination of the business environment enables strategically minded managers to understand the business and external realities that impact their organizations (Hargis & Bradley, 2011; Mitchell et al., 2013; Ulrich et al., 2009b). This understanding enables managers to incorporate their external/internal observations into their short- and long-term strategies, including ensuring that their internal processes, practices, policies, procedures, rules, metrics, and so forth are in alignment. Barring catastrophic, unanticipated events, these managers, with appropriate internal processes in place, can minimize the need for quick fixes. These top managers can assess their strategic goals in terms of their business environment to make ongoing, needed adjustments in real time as opposed to crisis situations when the viability of the organization is threatened. The purpose of this paper is to outline one approach organizations can consider using to enhance their overall ability to maintain proper alignment with the external environment. This approach utilizes the metaphor of a weaver's loom as a framework for strategically integrating key elements of knowledge management and key elements of continuous improvement into the HRM practices of an organization in an effort to create transformational HRM environment. Knowledge management and continuous improvement were selected as the basic frame for the metaphorical loom because these processes enable managers to acquire, store, and disseminate knowledge within organizations (Ooi, Ten, & Chong, 2009) and have a means to harness internal processes and resources (Gupta, Iyer, & Aronson, 2000), respectively. These capabilities are fundamental elements needed to create and sustain transformational HRM. Granted, there are other processes such as employee engagement/participation programs that may enhance the overall strategic nature of HRM. However, knowledge management and continuous improvement were chosen because of the likelihood that they would provide a more comprehensive foundation to transformational HRM that would subsume other processes.

One major facet of this framework focuses on the strategic integration of key elements of continuous improvement and HRM. When key elements of continuous improvement and HRM share a symbiotic relationship, with each supporting the other, focusing jointly on the strategic goals of the organization, HRM becomes a more transformational process. Since continuous improvement builds on certain elements from total quality management (TQM), considering TQM within the context of this integrated framework may be instructive. For a truly symbiotic relationship to be successful, HRM practices and procedures must be aligned with the core beliefs and needs of TQM (Blackburn & Rosen, 1993, 1996; Jiménez-Jiménez & Martínez-Costa, 2009). Ooi et al. (2009) viewed HRM practices as the soft aspects of TQM and therefore, maintained that it is essential for organizations to establish realistic, no-nonsense criteria for HRM practices in order to ensure that each of them is congruent with the

principles of quality management. In turn, TQM functions and resultant actions must be interwoven with HRM practices and procedures so that the focus remains on all HRM functions, and are supportive of the strategic goals of the organization. When interwoven and tightly focused on the strategic goals of the organization, these two processes will help the organization achieve its goals, including facilitating the changes needed to accomplish those goals.

The second major facet of this framework focuses on the strategic integration of key elements of knowledge management and HRM. The weaver's loom metaphor is built on a framework that establishes knowledge management as a parallel requirement facilitating and strengthening the symbiotic relationship between continuous improvement (based on principles of TQM) and HRM. Indeed, the platform of effective continuous improvement relies on access to knowledge acquisition and dissemination (Algorta & Zeballos, 2011). The integration of these knowledge management and continuous improvement processes into the HRM activities of an organization will provide a strong organizational infrastructure ensuring alignment throughout the organization, but also will significantly affect long-term organizational change. As such, the strategic integration of knowledge management and continuous improvement into traditional HRM practices contribute to HRM becoming more transformational rather than transactional.

Contrasting Traditional (Transactional) Human Resource Management with Transformational Human Resource Management

Transactional Human Resource Management

Transactional HRM takes an "accountant's view" of employees, seeing these individuals as assets (Cooke, 2008, p. 4). This form of HRM provides the administrative infrastructure of the organization, focusing on counting heads, processing benefits, overseeing pay, maintaining personnel records, ensuring compliance with government regulations and employee-contract obligations, managing established programs, conducting best-practices benchmarking on a reactive basis, responding to stated needs, and performing other basic HRM functions (Becton & Schraeder, 2009; Cooke, 2008; Gilley & Maycunich, 2000; Meijerink, Bondarouk, & Looise, 2013; Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005; Yusoff & Abdullah, 2008). While repetitive, these functions associated with transactional HRM are a necessity for organizations (Gilley & Maycunich, 2000; Meijerink et al., 2013; Mothersell et al., 2008; Schein, 2010) and are somewhat analogous to the infrastructure of a building with its electrical, plumbing, and other systems (Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005), or the digital elements of a computer with its motherboard, memory chip, and software operating system.

Transformational Human Resource Management

When HRM practices and policies are carefully designed and managed, they comprise "a system that attracts, develops, motivates, and retains employees to ensure the effective functioning and survival of the organization and its members" (Schuler & Jackson, 2007, p. 24). Transformational HRM is more strategic in nature than transactional HRM. Instead of reacting and responding, transformational HRM is more

consultative (Becton & Schraeder, 2009; Lawler & Mohrman, 2003; Pilenzo, 2009; Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005, 2009; Yusoff & Abdullah, 2008). Skill sets in transformational HRM include business and industry knowledge, diagnostic and analytical capabilities, change management, planning, strategic and critical thinking, knowledge collection and dissemination, and cost management (Becton & Schraeder, 2009; Brown, 2004; Lawler & Mohrman, 2003; Mohrman & Lawler, 1997; Pilenzo, 2009; Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005, 2009; Yusoff & Abdullah, 2008). Unlike transactional HRM, transformational HRM necessitates human resource professionals who are schooled in business practices and willing to contribute toward the organization's strategic goals by combining their business knowledge with their human resource technical skills and knowledge (Becton & Schraeder, 2009; Pilenzo, 2009; Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005, 2009). By having this wealth of combined knowledge and skills, these human resource professionals can help forecast business trends as well as anticipate the types of employee knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviors, and attitudes needed to address current and future business challenges (Lawler & Mohrman, 2003; Pilenzo, 2009).

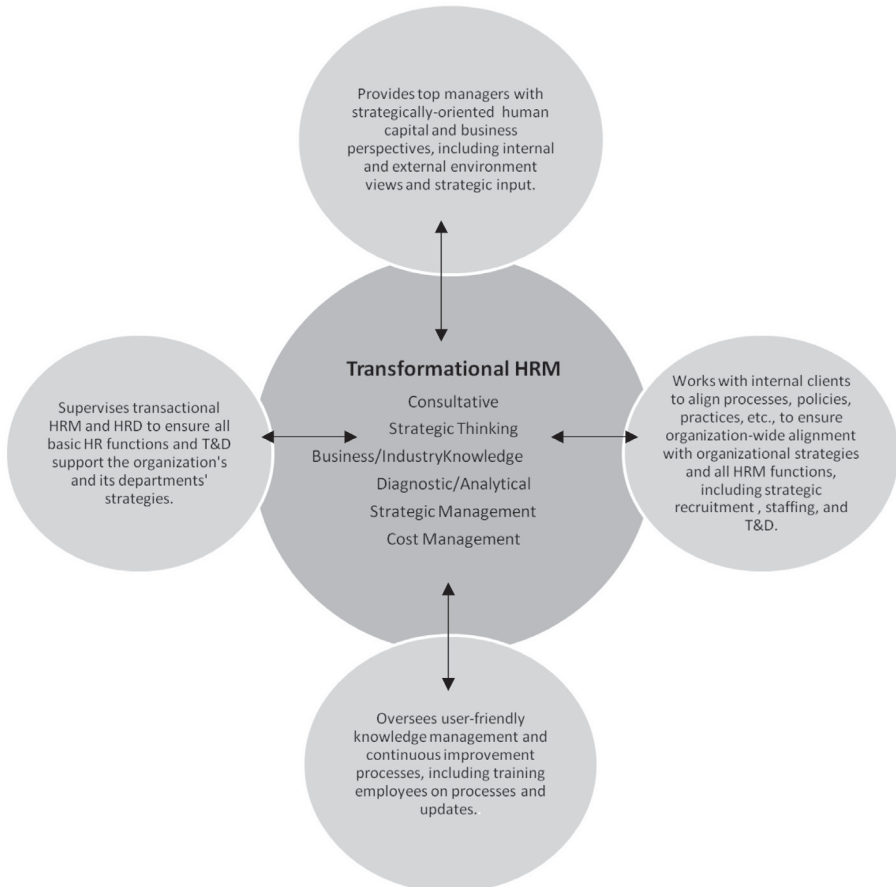
In a practical sense, transactional HRM is more traditional, representing business-as-usual HRM. As such, transactional HRM does not facilitate long-term strategic change, as a consequence of being more reactionary in nature (Becton & Schraeder, 2009; Cooke, 2008; Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005; Yusoff & Abdullah, 2008). Transactional HRM focuses on the day-to-day activities required to process employees into, within, and out of the organization (Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005), while managing the recordkeeping and other routine, but essential, functions of the daily business (Schein, 2010).

Transformational HRM is truly strategic in scope. Concomitant with the focus on the organization's strategic goals, all transformational HRM decisions are made with the long-term well-being of the organization in mind. Accomplishing this involves human resource professionals trained in the principles of business, as well as human resource technical skills and knowledge (Becton & Schraeder, 2009; Lawler & Mohrman, 2003; Pilenzo, 2009). The critical thinking, planning, analytical, and diagnostic skills of these trained human resource professionals enable them to become "strategy architects" (Ulrich, Brockbank, & Johnson, 2009a, p. 26), who use their skills and position to (a) partner with executives in other departments or business units to initiate strategy discussions, thus facilitating the strategy-creation progression, (b) communicate and clarify the organization's strategy, (c) ensure the successful implementation of the organization's strategy by making sure that all human resource practices and procedures are aligned with the strategy, (d) align the behavior of the organization's leadership with the organization's strategy (Ulrich et al., 2009a), and (e) convey the view of outside customers to human resources' internal clients (Brown, 2004; Ulrich et al., 2009a).

Transformational HRM, which requires human resource professionals to migrate from business-as-usual human resource practices, does not mean that human resource professionals abandon the day-to-day needs of the organization. Instead, under transformational HRM, the human resource professionals must not only focus on the day-to-day, business-as-usual human-resource functions, but must also align these functions with the strategic goals of the business to ensure that both the short and

long-term goals of the organization are met (Hughes & Rog, 2008). This alignment necessitates human resource departments to design and implement internal policies and procedures that are consistent and work in harmony with each other. By doing this, organizations are ensuring that the combined knowledge, skills, and abilities of their employees, or human capital, add to, and are supportive of the organizations' overall strategic goals (Becton & Schraeder, 2009; Hughes & Rog, 2008; Huselid, Jackson, & Schuler, 1997; Jackson & Schuler, 1995). An improved understanding of how transformational HRM can be successful in an organization embodies a greater overall understanding of the symbiotic relationship transformational HRM shares with the strategic integration of knowledge management and continuous improvement (based on principles associated with TQM).

Figure 1: *Transformational HRM*



Integration of Knowledge Management

Knowledge management is a process which allows organizations to find, select, organize, distribute, and relocate the valuable information required for functions such as decision making, ongoing organizational learning, problem solving, and strategic planning (Gupta et al., 2000; Ooi et al., 2009). Technically, knowledge management is defined as the development and use of new knowledge to achieve enhanced value (Batra, 2010). In an organization, knowledge management represents the sharing of knowledge through an ongoing process of development and constant improvement, which increases the innovative capabilities of employees (Batra, 2010). In its simplest form, knowledge management involves three activities: (a) knowledge acquisition, (b) knowledge dissemination, and (c) receptiveness to knowledge within the organization (Ooi et al., 2009).

Some individuals reason that the goal of knowledge management is to transform or convert tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge, enabling it to be codified, stored, transferred, and utilized by others (Algorta & Zeballos, 2011; Gupta et al., 2000). Mooradian (2005) contends that the goal of knowledge management should be to capture explicit knowledge. According to Mooradian (2005), what individuals know in the context of business is explicit knowledge, or “focal knowing” (Polanyi, 1974, p. 109) or “focal awareness” (Polanyi, 1974, p. 55), even though it is unwritten. For instance, workers may know that the written instructions for a procedure are incomplete and, based on their experience, they supplement the written instructions, performing extra steps, to ensure the procedure has a successful outcome. These workers can train others how to supplement the written instructions to gain an equally successful outcome. In the context of business, what these workers know, along with how they supplement the insufficiently written documentation, is explicit knowledge that can be captured by modifying the written instructions (Mooradian, 2005). In this example, the tacit information is not the supplemental information that they can articulate and write down, but rather it is the workers’ awareness and comprehension of the overall goals and the context of the organization. It is also the various procedures the organization utilizes and the workers’ modification of this understanding and the adjustment to the circumstances in such a way that enable them to revise and correct the procedure (Mooradian, 2005).

Certain types of tacit knowledge may be difficult to articulate (Chilton & Bloodgood, 2008; Ipe, 2003; Mooradian, 2005; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). For example, some knowledge deals with auditory and visual experiences. Others may involve sensory awareness and brain signals on a subconscious level. Mooradian (2005) maintained that this type of tacit knowledge can be virtually impossible to articulate in order to capture and transfer it into explicit knowledge.

Considering this complexity, Mooradian (2005) and Chilton and Bloodgood (2008) recommended that organizations use a knowledge-management methodology that acknowledged and respected the structural dependence shared by explicit and tacit knowledge. Research has often suggested a two-phase knowledge process when undertaking a knowledge-management initiative (Mooradian, 2005). Phase one would require the organization to inventory all existing explicit knowledge such as practices, policies, procedures, white papers, instructions, training, and so forth. Once the

organization gathers all obtainable explicit knowledge, it classifies the knowledge, codes it, and stores it. This is usually done with the aid of computer-based systems (Mooradian, 2005; Smith, 2001). Phase two assumes that tacit knowledge can be pursued independently of explicit knowledge. Based on this assumption, phase two requires the organization to attempt to identify the tacit knowledge of its knowledge workers. In other words, to find out what is in their minds. When relevant tacit knowledge is identified, the organization should attempt to convert the knowledge into explicit knowledge.

Instead of this two-phase knowledge process, Mooradian (2005) advocated focusing on identifying and capturing the explicit knowledge that was both obtainable and valuable to the organization. Once the inventory is compiled, the organization should conduct an analysis of each item to determine the kinds of tacit knowledge that was involved in creating the explicit knowledge. By analyzing the relevant explicit knowledge inventory in terms of what tacit information went into the creation of the different items, the organization would develop a set of the underlying forms of tacit knowledge that supports the organization's explicit knowledge. After the organization develops its inventory of underlying tacit knowledge and understood its structure, it begins the process of classifying, storing, and so forth (Mooradian, 2005). However, Chilton and Bloodgood (2008) advocated that prior to translating the tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge, organizations should determine the competitive benefits of certain tacit knowledge. If there was specific tacit knowledge that, if leaked to competitors, could negatively impact the organizations, they should elect not to codify that strategic tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge (Chilton & Bloodgood, 2008).

Whether an organization elects to use a two-phase knowledge process or to focus on analyzing the tacit knowledge components of obtainable explicit knowledge (Mooradian, 2005), the organization must understand the need for undertaking a knowledge-management initiative. Knowledge management not only can help an organization stay on track in attaining its strategic goals and strengthening its infrastructure, but it also can provide a means for managing valuable intellectual capital, which represents "the collective knowledge and knowing capability of organization members" (Pil & Leana, 2009, p. 1103).

Knowledge Sharing

One way that organizations capture tacit knowledge on an ongoing basis is through "knowledge sharing," depicted as "the act of making knowledge available to others within the organization" (Ipe, 2003, p. 341). Knowledge sharing supports the view that technology is secondary to the human element, because humans are the source of tacit knowledge (Gupta et al., 2000). Many knowledge-management researchers recognize that when people leave organizations, they take their tacit knowledge with them (Smith, 2001). This potential loss of tacit knowledge makes it critical for organizations to tap into the tacit knowledge of employees, converting it to explicit knowledge that can be shared by the organization instead of being lost, if or when individuals leave the organization (Gupta et al., 2000; Ipe, 2003; Ooi et al., 2009; Smith, 2001).

Knowledge sharing is critical to the organization because it furnishes a connection between the individual employee and the organization by transferring knowledge from the individual level to that of the organizational level (Chilton & Bloodgood, 2008; Ipe, 2003). This transfer of individual knowledge to the organization enables the knowledge to be converted into explicit knowledge or knowledge that can be used by others in the organization (Chilton & Bloodgood, 2008; Ipe, 2003). Because the knowledge is tacit, it means that individuals must be willing to share their personal experience and expertise in order for it to be changed into a form that can be accessed, understood, as well as used by others (Ipe, 2003).

Integrating Knowledge Sharing into HRM Practices

The complexity of knowledge sharing demands more than traditional-business-as-usual human resource practices (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005). HRM professionals must be strategic in working with top management, line managers, and other employees cross-functionally to consider the use of practices that will enhance the probability and success of knowledge sharing. For example, work design can be used to enhance knowledge flow by encouraging social networks through creating interdependencies among jobs, which result in a subsequent need for increased interactions and more information flow (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005). There are a number of work designs that leverage this type of social network and knowledge sharing. Instead of structured jobs with highly defined tasks, work can be designed as a series of assignments, requiring employees to interact and work closely with other employees in different groups on each assignment or project in the series. This, in turn, fosters cross-functional linkages that could involve multiple-geographical locations and business units (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005; Ghobadi & D'Ambra, 2012). Work could also be designed around teams, requiring employees to not only work closely with each other, but also encouraging them to share knowledge. Designing work around the team concept intensifies the need for collaboration and coordination, facilitating knowledge sharing (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005; Ghobadi & D'Ambra, 2012). Cross-functional teams can enhance the willingness to share knowledge with individuals in other business units or work groups (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005; Ghobadi & D'Ambra, 2012).

Knowledge sharing by individuals is essential to the development, distribution, as well as management of knowledge throughout all levels of an organization (Ipe, 2003). Organizations cannot create knowledge without individuals. If individuals do not share their personal knowledge with other individuals and groups, their hoarded knowledge will most likely have limited influence on the effectiveness of the organization (Ipe, 2003; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).

Just as organizations cannot create knowledge without individuals, effective HRM and efforts directed toward continuous improvement cannot reach their full potential without the strategic integration of knowledge management.

Integration of Continuous Improvement

The foundation of continuous improvement parallels the core of TQM premised on fundamental belief that organizations can obtain a competitive advantage in the marketplace by concentrating on their customers' needs, striving for continuous

improvement in both product and service quality, assisting employees in their efforts to develop to their fullest potential, and developing and implementing relevant metrics to gauge and track improvements (Blackburn & Rosen, 1995; Jiménez-Jiménez & Martínez-Costa, 2009). This foundation for continuous improvement based on the fundamental core of TQM makes it an obvious process for organizations to use in trying to achieve their strategic goals. In addition to the fundamental core of TQM, it should be noted that TQM is a process, or means, for harnessing internal processes and resources (Gupta et al., 2000). As such, continuous improvement efforts, based on TQM principles, can assist in binding HRM and knowledge management together. However, to be successful, continuous improvement (embodied in TQM) necessitates a culture that is collaborative in its efforts, with cross-functional work, managers and coworkers who coach and enable, and, at the forefront, an emphasis on quality and customer satisfaction (Algorta & Zeballos, 2011; Blackburn & Rosen, 1993; Jiménez-Jiménez & Martínez-Costa, 2009). For many organizations, this represents a paradigm shift from a culture focused on individualism, differentiation with little or no cross-functional work, leadership that is autocratic in nature, and strong emphasis on profits and productivity (Blackburn & Rosen, 1993). To achieve this paradigm shift toward a culture of consultation, decentralization, and focus on the strategic goals of the organization (Soltani et al., 2004), human resource departments, as well as other departments, must align their HRM practices with the core belief and needs of continuous improvement/TQM (Blackburn & Rosen, 1993, 1996; Jiménez-Jiménez & Martínez-Costa, 2009).

The strategically integrated relationship between continuous improvement and HRM becomes critical as HRM focuses on achieving the strategic goals of the organization. By incorporating continuous improvement principles into HRM, human resource professionals will be focused on doing the right things for strategic reasons. In a sense, knowledge management represents that “what” and continuous improvement provides the “how” to transformational HRM initiatives within the organization. The combined processes, when coupled with knowledge management, enable human resource departments to work with top leadership, as well as cross-departmentally, toward strategically strengthening the organization, even when this strengthening involves a needed paradigm shift as mentioned above. The combined processes enable strategic results through consultation, decentralization, and developmental procedures (Soltani et al., 2004).

In a somewhat reciprocal manner, strategically integrated knowledge management ensures that the tacit and the explicit knowledge created through transformational HRM and continuous improvement efforts are collected, stored, and made accessible for use throughout the organization. This support by knowledge management of the symbiotic relationship between HRM and continuous improvement not only improves functional alignment as it relates to strategic-goal achievement, but elevates the effectiveness of HRM to become transformational in scope. As the integration of knowledge management and continuous improvement into HRM become interwoven, each supporting and enhancing the other, they not only enable organizations to stay focused on their strategic goals, but also create an environment conducive for organizational change. As previously noted, this atmosphere is essential as organizations continually

scan their business environment, including examining external stakeholders such as customers and investors to better understand the relationship between these stakeholders and organizational strategy (Hargis & Bradley, 2011; Ulrich et al., 2009b). This focus enables organizations to adapt to current needs in real time and to project future needs.

The Weaver's Loom: A Conceptual Framework

As mentioned previously, the metaphor of a weaver's loom provides a useful framework for discussing the relationship between HRM and an organization's strategic goals in a manner similar to fabric that is being woven. Just as weavers secure their vertical fibers on a loom, organizations must firmly anchor their strategic goals to a framework of transformational of HRM (Becton & Schraeder, 2009; Brown, 2004; Lawler & Mohrman, 2003; Mohrman & Lawler, 1997; Pilenzo, 2009; Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005, 2009; Yusoff & Abdullah, 2008), reflecting the integration of knowledge management (Batra, 2010; Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005; Gupta et al., 2000; Ipe, 2003; Mooradian, 2005; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1999; Ooi et al., 2009; Pil & Lenna, 2009; Polanyi, 1974) and continuous improvement (Algorta & Zeballos, 2011; Blackburn & Rosen, 1993, 1995; Gupta et al., 2000; Jiménez-Jiménez & Martínez-Costa, 2009). By doing so, organizations, as weavers with their looms, create a stable framework to ensure that their basic human resource-management elements—staffing, training and development, performance appraisal, and compensation (Kaeomanee, 2009)—as well as other human resource management policies, practices, and procedures can be seamlessly intertwined with the organization's strategic goals. (However, for the purpose of this paper, the human-resource-management functions will be limited to the basic elements.) Without a solid framework of HRM practices bolstered by the strategic integration of knowledge management (Chilton & Bloodgood, 2008; Ipe, 2003) and continuous improvement (Blackburn & Rosen, 1993, 1996; Jiménez-Jiménez & Martínez-Costa, 2009), an organization's strategic goals may become unstable, creating disconnects in the HRM process as seen in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: *Transactional/Business-As-Usual Human Resource Management*



The horizontal “fibers” represent the basic elements of human resource management.

Their thickness and strength depend on the focus being applied to the individual elements.

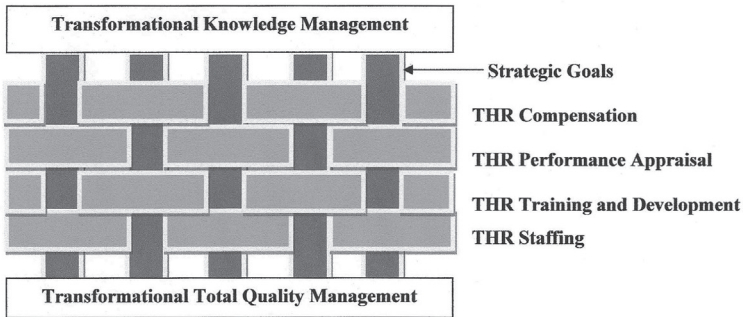
The vertical “fibers” represent the strategic goals of the organization.

Figure 2 illustrates business-as-usual human resource management. The human resource department and the organization have not put processes in place to anchor the organization's strategic goals in their vertical position, as a weaver's loom would provide a frame to hold the vertical fibers in their perpendicular position. Business-as-usual, or transactional HRM, is reactive or responsive in nature (Becton & Schraeder, 2009; Cooke, 2008; Gilley & Maycunich, 2000; Meijerink et al., 2013; Mothersell et al., 2008; Schein, 2010; Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005; Yusoff & Abdullah, 2008). Therefore, at any given time, the focus on the various human resource management elements will vary. If these elements were fibers being woven on a loom, the result would be loosely woven fabric, with no straight of grain (or in terms of an organization, no direct line of sight on the strategic goals [Aquila & Lees, 2013]).

In the case of transactional HRM (Becton & Schraeder, 2009; Cooke, 2008; Gilley & Maycunich, 2000; Meijerink et al., 2013; Mothersell et al., 2008; Schein, 2010; Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005; Yusoff & Abdullah, 2008), emphasis is placed on the different human resource elements in order to be responsive to immediate needs of the organization. This is likely to have a negative-long-term impact on the organization's ability to achieve its strategic goals. For example, short-sighted hiring decisions can result in an incongruent person-organization fit throughout the organization (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005). This results in individuals who are not as supportive of the organization's strategic goals or willing to do what is necessary to ensure the organization's long-term viability (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005). Their lack of support may stem from their not having the necessary knowledge, skills, abilities, and other competencies. If an organization is overlooking the training and development needs of its employees or is providing the wrong type of training and development (e.g., programs that do not support the organization's strategic goals), this weakens the fabric of the organization (Brown, 2010; Hargis & Bradley, 2011; Pineda, 2010). If performance appraisals do not provide documented objective reviews with constructive development, as well as performance improvement plans, then the organization's strategic goals will be in jeopardy because employees are not given an opportunity to grow, learn, and improve (Brauns, 2013; Sripirabaa & Krishnaveni, 2009). Also, if performance evaluations are emphasizing the wrong things, the organization's strategic goals are not being supported, because employees will do those things on which they are measured (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005; Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005). The same can be said for compensation. People will do those things for which they are compensated (Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005). For example, if the compensation system is stressing individual performance when teamwork is essential to the organization's strategic goals, then employees will focus more on their individual efforts, rather than on teamwork. As demonstrated in these examples, when HRM is transactional, focusing first on one basic element and then on another, but not binding them together as one transformational human resource management process through the integration of knowledge management and continuous improvement, it results in a weak organizational fiber. In other words, when an organization practices only transactional HRM, it not only weakens its infrastructure by reducing its prospects for attaining its strategic goals, but it also inhibits the ability to make smooth transitional changes when needed.

Figure 3 takes an entirely different approach to human resource management. Instead of illustrating transactional human resource management, Figure 3 shows the even and satin-like organizational fabric that occurs with transformational human resource management.

Figure 3: *Strategically Aligned Transformational Human Resource Management (THR)*



In Figure 3, the strategic integration processes of continuous improvement and knowledge management act as the frames of the loom, anchoring the strategic goals. Because the fibers are anchored to the loom's frame, they will maintain their upright, evenly spaced position. The interweaving of the basic-transformational-human-resource-management elements—staffing, training and development, performance appraisal, and compensation (Kaeomane, 2009)—cannot pull the strategic goals askew.

The horizontal fibers represent the basic elements of transformational human resource management. Because the elements are integrated, they work in tandem with each other and are bound together by knowledge management and continuous improvement (Algorta & Zeballos, 2011; Barta, 2010; Becton & Schraeder, 2009; Blackburn & Rosen, 1993; Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005; Chilton & Bloodgood, 2008; Gupta et al., 2000; Huselid et al., 1997; Ipe, 2003; Jackson & Schuler, 1995; Jiménez-Jiménez & Martínez-Costa, 2009; Ooi et al., 2009; Pil & Leana, 2009). As such, every human resource decision, procedure, practice, and other initiative is made in support of the strategic goals (Ulrich et al., 2009a). This requires HRM to be part of the organization's strategy team. It also requires HRM to partner with all cross-functional managers to ensure that all departments and their practices, policies, procedures, rules, metrics, and so forth are in alignment with those of human resources, with each supporting the strategic goals of the organization (Algorta & Zeballos, 2011; Blackburn & Rosen, 1993; Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005; Hargis & Bradley, 2011; Jiménez-Jiménez & Martínez-Costa, 2009; Ulrich & Brockbank, 2009; Ulrich et al., 2009a).

Practical Implications

To develop, implement, and nurture an environment in which transformational HRM, knowledge management, and continuous improvement work in symbiosis to enhance organizational infrastructure requires total commitment of everyone in the organization. The commitment has to begin through the dedicated and consistent

actions of the organization's top managers. This commitment cannot be only verbal; it must be demonstrated through every action and every decision that is made by top managers (Verma, 2009). Only this type of commitment and reinforcement can be successfully cascaded through the ranks and be viewed as believable and not just as the program of the month. In other words, if leaders fail to enact what they espouse, they will lose credibility among their followers (Boyd, 2011; Mosley & Patrick, 2011)

A transformational HRM environment has an expensive start-up cost, which, if properly designed and implemented, will result in efficiencies and savings in the long term. The phrase *long term* is one of the primary keys for attaining a successful transformational environment. Every decision is based not on filling today's needs, but rather on *fulfilling* the organization's long-term strategic goals. As part of this, organizations must seek internal alignment to ensure a viable infrastructure is in place to support the transformational environment (Barbaroux, 2011).

On a more precautionary note, adopting the transformational HRM reflected in Figure 3 requires organizations to commit to seeking alignment throughout the organization. It is a strategic model that is not intended to be reactive. It is a long-term commitment (Algorta & Zeballos, 2011) in which organizations will be successful in achieving short and long-term strategic goals and affect sustainable change if they create, implement, and nurture a transformational human resource management environment. This cannot be done by picking and choosing only those elements that have appeal or appear to be easy to achieve.

The model will also cause organizations to look at HRM differently. To be transformational HRM, the process requires cross-functional participation (Hargis & Bradley, 2011; Ulrich & Brockbank, 2009; Ulrich et al., 2009a). It is not just a function of human resources (Oakland & Oakland, 1998).

The model will also create a paradigm shift in the way some organizations manage knowledge. Historically, most organizations have placed the learning and the knowledge functions in different departments, and these two groups have neither aligned their activities, nor aimed toward the same objectives (Davenport, Prusak, & Strong, 2008). For knowledge management to become strategically integrated into HRM, organizations must look toward continuous improvement to ensure that the traditional technology group and the traditional training and development group (i.e., information technology and human resource) are focused on the same strategic goals of the organization. This includes making sure that employees receive ongoing training and development on the various platforms, such as corporate intranets, database-software programs, and web portals (Davenport et al., 2008). Training programs such as workshops, and practices such as mentoring and on-the-job training, which are often conducted by human resources, will encourage employees to put their knowledge to use (Davenport et al., 2008). In other words, maintaining databases is not the answer to the effective integration of knowledge management into HRM. Employees must have user-friendly technology platforms that they know how to access and utilize and that they are encouraged to use (Algorta & Zeballos, 2011; Casimir, Lee, & Loon, 2012; Gupta et al., 2000). Employers must be committed to providing user-friendly technology platforms and the time and encouragement needed for training and transfer into the work environment (Algorta & Zeballos, 2011; Casimir et al., 2012).

The weaver's loom metaphor associated with Figure 3 is not a quick fix, nor is it an easy undertaking. It is a long-term investment in time and resources that will result in long-term, sustainable transformation (Andries & Wastyn, 2012; Pulakanam, 2012). High up-front expenses for such things as identifying knowledge, skills, abilities, competencies, behaviors, attitudes, and traits needed for short and long-term strategic success and the development and use of screening and testing tools for these attributes will be offset by the increased probability of hiring the right people the first time and not incurring the unnecessary expenses associated with inappropriate hires and turnovers (Da Silva, Hutcheson, & Wahl, 2010; Karsan, 2007). The integration of continuous improvement will ensure the organization is focused on the strategic goals of the organization, as well as the alignment of the "hard aspects" (Soltani et al., 2004, p. 392) of TQM, such as systems, techniques, and tools. The integration of knowledge management will provide the organization with the ability to acquire, store, and disseminate knowledge (Ooi et al., 2009), thus ensuring no loss of organizational memory (Casimir et al., 2012; Gupta et al., 2000; Ipe, 2003; Ooi et al., 2009). With today's proliferation of computers and software, there is no excuse for organizations, regardless of size, to refuse to maintain and use employee knowledge, skills, and abilities inventories; track strategic-goal progress; fail to align policies, practices, procedures, systems, and so forth. In other words, all organizations have access to the tools needed to create a transformational human resource management environment through the strategic integration of knowledge management and continuous improvement. However, the question is whether their top managers and other leaders within the organization have the courage and conviction to pursue such a transformational environment. In order for all elements within an organization to become aligned, it means that some groups will have to change how they do things and get out of their comfort zone.

Conclusion

Unlike St. Vincent Millay (1956, p. 697), who marveled over the "meteoric shower of facts" that "lie unquestioned, uncombined" because "there exists no loom to weave it into fabric", organizations today have no excuse because a loom does exist that has the capability to weave a smooth and strong organizational fabric from the organization's strategic goals, processes, policies, practices, procedures, systems, functions, etc. With two foundational processes—knowledge management and continuous improvement—anchoring the organizations' strategic goals in place, this loom enables organizations to create an environment in which all transformational human resource management practices, policies, procedures, functions, and related systems are integrated and work in harmony with all other organizational practices, policies, procedures, functions, and systems. To ensure organizational viability, these elements must be congruent and collectively work in synch (Bennett, Lehman, & Forst, 1999; Bunch, 2007; Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005; Kepes, Delery, & Gupta, 2009; Derouen & Kleiner, 1994; Ooi et al., 2009; Rago, 1996; Soltani et al., 2004). For many organizations, this type of congruency will probably mean a paradigm shift in which organizational policies, practices, metrics, and workloads may have to be reevaluated or redesigned to ensure compatibility.

Organizations that are willing to commit the time and resources (Andries & Wastyn, 2012; Pulakanam, 2012) to implement the practices reflected in Figure 3 will move toward a transformational environment. This environment, in turn, can affect and sustain long-term change, avoiding the systemic problems of reactive-human-capital decisions that lead to downsizing and large numbers of turnovers. A transformational environment is one in which continual learning, constant evaluation, and gradual evolution occurs (Algorta & Zeballos, 2001). This type of environment is much more apt to avoid the upheavals and angst caused by reactive management. In other words, transformational HRM, bolstered by strategically integrated knowledge management, and continuous improvement, acting in concert, enable an organization to weave an organizational fabric that is tightly woven, smooth, and strong.

As noted earlier, this is a conceptual paper and the model depicted in Figure 3 has not been tested. However, there is not only potential value-added for organizations willing to implement this conceptual model, but there is also equal value in studying these assertions empirically.

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