

VIBGYOR: A Regenerative Framework for Organisations to Thrive in an Evolving World

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Abstract

Work is not working anymore. Taylorism still prevails even though the scope of work has moved from physical work to knowledge work. We need a paradigm shift to make work, work. To address this need, “VIBGYOR” framework is proposed based on available studies and experiments conducted. The VIBGYOR framework, comprises of seven dimensions that includes competence, circles, cadence, catalyst, conversations, context and clarity, to create employee experience where work becomes play. Based on the outcomes observed from experiments done at five product based startups for more than ten quarters, it is believed that this alternate approach will help to get work done better. The observations includes an alignment to a larger purpose, increased employee engagement, accountability and a steady rise in predictability of team outcomes.

Keywords: Regenerative, Thrive, Evolving, Culture, Work, Play, Employee experience.

Introduction

Frederick Winslow Taylor, introduced the concept of systemising work, more than a century back through his book, “The Principles of Scientific Management” (Taylor, 1919). While this did improve the efficiency and outcome of people at work then, today unfortunately, many organisations are stuck with old and irrelevant management principles even when work has shifted from physical work to knowledge work (Dignan, 2019; Hamel & Zanini, 2020; Laloux, 2014). Taylor (1919) differentiates people as a ‘thinker’ and ‘doer’ through his concept of Task idea, which has since then continued for more than a century, even though it was ineffective. With automation of physical work, most of today's work aligns to knowledge work, where everyone is a ‘thinker’ and everyone is a ‘doer’. However, the unfortunate truth is that Taylorism continues to prevail today in the form of bureaucracy even in many progressive organisations leading to inefficient use of human capital (Dignan, 2019; Hamel & Zanini, 2020; Laloux, 2014). Now that work is not working, we need alternatives in this evolving world to capitalise on the hidden potential of people (Hamel & Zanini, 2020; Laloux, 2014). Many organisations are looking for readymade how-to-templates rather than creating an approach that best suits them. Sanford (2017) believes that our attachment to older way of working and habitual patterns of thoughts are the biggest barrier that most of us face. Paradigms provide us context; they determine our perspectives and shape the choices we make and the actions we take. We need to change our perspectives and move out of our comfort zone to design the new way of work.

Literature Survey

There has been many studies related to building great organisations. Research says that when an organisation exists to serve a larger cause than profits and there is alignment among all stakeholders, the organisation thrives (Birkinshaw, 2014; Ulrich & Ulrich, 2010). Denning (2018) talks about three core characteristics of an agile organisation: (a) The law of the small team (b) The law of the customer (c) The law of the network. A well-designed communication strategy is key for ensuring alignment at all levels, and will serve as a connecting bridge between the desired outcomes and actual results (Wollmann et al., 2020). Bungay (2012) emphasises the importance of creating an operating rhythm within the organisation. Sanford (2017) observes that members need to comprehend the circumstances constituting the background of an event, challenge, idea or statement to make decisions. Any change initiative

needs an owner (Crawford & Nahmias, 2010) and a sponsor (Mento et al., 2002). Based on the literature reviewed, we identified seven dimensions that are critical for an organisation to thrive.

Competence

Meaningful work contribution requires a growth mindset (Dweck, 2012) and the ability to learn, unlearn, update and react to the changing environment. Self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982) is positively associated with work related performance and nature of work performance can be explained through underlying mechanisms of task strategies, task focus, ability conception and skill acquisition (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). The quality of having sufficient attitude, knowledge, skill, and, intention and ability to upgrade regularly, sets one apart from the other. Hence, early identification of factors contributing to change and mapping the competencies required to respond to change, will be key to thriving in an evolving world.

Clarity

Unearthing clarity amidst today's chaos, gives a sense of direction (Birkinshaw, 2014; Wollmann et al., 2020) as well as meaning for both organisation and its employees. A well-designed communication strategy is key for ensuring clarity at all levels, and will serve as a connecting bridge between the desired outcomes and actual results (Wollmann et al., 2020).

Circles

Circle is a structure that helps realise the three core characteristics of an agile organisation (Denning, 2018) and may consist of about 5-9 members. Each member may belong to one or more circles, and holds a specific role in each circle they are part of. Designed for an hierarchy of competence instead of a hierarchy of authority, members in a circle interact directly without intermediaries. Every circle has an elected chief, who acts as information radiators.

Cadence

Cadence enhances predictability of results, and certainty across circles, with clear and measurable outcomes. The ceremonies agreed upon by the members are conducted in a rhythmic fashion, to bring in predictability.

Catalyst

The catalyst is the single accountable person for the transformation initiative. Being the torchbearer, the catalyst acts as an agent that enables or speeds significant change. The role of the catalyst includes identifying the drivers of change, enabling change through communicating the need, and driving change initiative to achieve business results through the members in the organisation.

Conversations

Conversations are result based interactions scheduled among and within the members of circles. Hastings and Meyer (2020) observes that a clear and concise communication among all its stakeholders at regular cadence is critical to ensure that the organisation achieves its desired outcomes. The conversations ensures clarity and create opportunities for regular learning and information sharing (Drawbaugh et al., 2019).

Context

The context (both internal and external) is critical and requires a thorough understanding to lead and manage in a world of change and disruption, to drive business results (Gothelf & Seiden, 2017). To help people better connect and respond to change, it may be necessary to put in place certain context enablers that will help explain the evolving environment.

Changing Paradigms

In most of the traditional organisations, bureaucracy has not helped, instead created silos, overheads and added to the overall complexity of the organisation (Hamel & Zanini, 2020). Laloux (2014) states that the need of the hour is to redesign the organisation to be free of pathologies including but not restricted to politics, bureaucracy, stress, burnout, resentment to

name a few. Dignan (2019) speaks about Evolutionary organisations that use purpose, transparency and reputation to create a culture of freedom and accountability. A more humanistic approach as advocated by the unsung mother of modern management, Mary Parker Follett will bring in a win-win outcome for all parties involved. Evolutionary organisations are people positive, where there is an environment of trust among the employees and employers.

Repositioning Today's Organisation

In their study, Sathianathan and Anish (2021) shares results of experiments conducted to explore the current gaps and identify alternatives to achieve organisational excellence. These experiments have given new insights to leverage the full capabilities of the workforce involved in an organisation. Based on these understanding of current deficiencies and possibilities, we are proposing an enhanced framework to help organisations thrive in this evolving and volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) world. The enhanced framework named as the VIBGYOR framework is the outcome of experiments and iterations conducted over a duration of ten quarters in multiple organisations. We use the metaphor of rainbow to describe the organisation. For any organisation, to thrive in these uncertain times, it is important to have competence as well as clarity, which forms the base of the framework. The other five dimensions are built on competence and clarity.

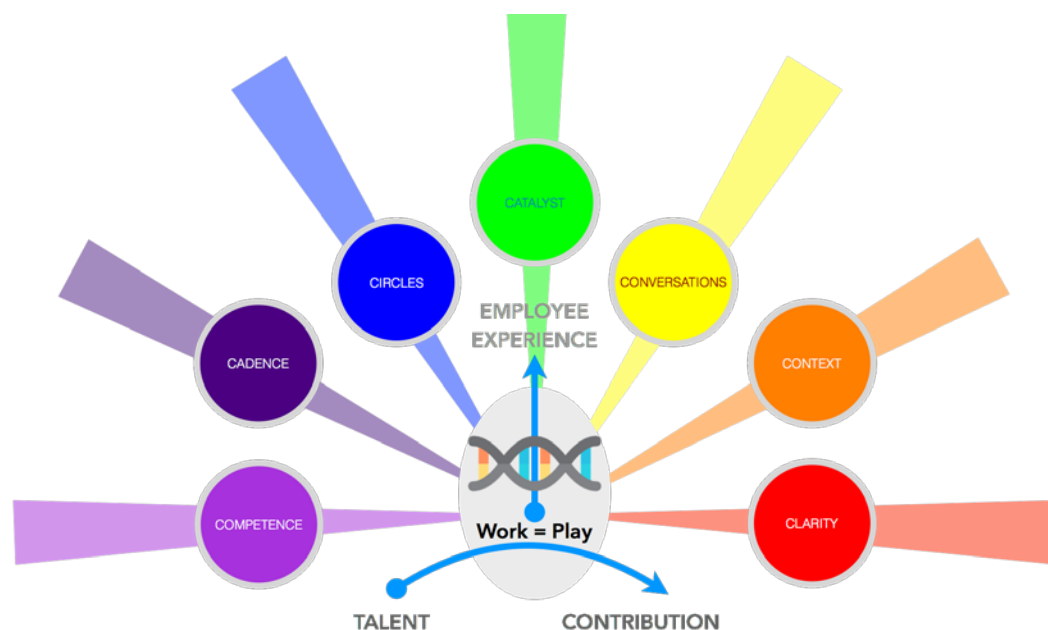


Figure 1. VIBGYOR framework

Talent and Contribution

Netflix believes that a company with dense talent is a company everyone wants to work for and high performers thrive in environments where the overall talent density is high (Hastings & Meyer, 2020). Collins (2001) emphasises the importance of having the right people, the ones who are intrinsically motivated to deliver their best for the team and organisation. Having the right talent helps the organisation achieve the desired outcomes through the contributions of their members.

Work and Play

Csikszentmihalyi (2009) introduced the concept of flow, and described it as a state where people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience is so enjoyable that people will continue to do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it. Pink (2018) observes that for intrinsically motivated members, work does not feel like work. When work

becomes play, the members enjoy and flourish within the organisation because for them work is its own reward (Roth, 2016; Sathianathan & Rajan, 2017).

Employee Experience

For any organisation, an engaged workforce are the source of its competitive advantage (Macey et al., 2011). When various factors required to make the members and team deliver are taken care of, their experience within the organisation peaks (Hastings & Meyer, 2020; Bock, 2017). An organisation that focuses on employee experience gets the best results out of their employees (Pink, 2018; Roth, 2016).

Culture

Every organisation has its own culture, whether we like it or not. For any organism, its DNA is fundamental to it and provides its distinctiveness, similarly, culture is the signature of an organisation. An organisation where the members have mutual respect and feel psychologically safe (Edmondson, 2019) provides a conducive environment for the members to thrive (Hastings & Meyer, 2020). Over a period of time, the culture evolves and becomes inseparable to the organisation which gives it a unique flavour (Wollmann et al., 2020).

Method

Based on the studies and experiments, a framework was iteratively derived to identify the necessary ingredients to reposition today's organisation. The study were done across five organisations. The organisations for study were shortlisted based on the readiness as perceived by the leadership team, availability of sponsor and catalyst. Table 1 provides details of the organisations included in this study.

Table 1. Summary of five organisations considered

| Details | Org1 | Org2 | Org3 | Org4 | Org5 |
|-------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|-----------|
| Start date | Mar, 2019 | Mar, 2020 | Jul, 2020 | Sep, 2020 | Nov, 2020 |
| End date | Mar, 2021 | Ongoing | Ongoing | Ongoing | Ongoing |
| Duration | 25 months | 17 months | 13 months | 11 months | 9 months |
| Employees | 100+ | 50+ | 40+ | 20+ | 30+ |
| Founder(s) | 3 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Operational | >10 years | 5-10 years | <5 years | 5-10 years | <5 years |

The agile way of working (Agile WoW) was introduced through bootcamps where the members discussed and clarified the understandings from readings shared prior to the session, moderated by an agile coach. Post the bootcamp, the members formed circles, and agreed on their way of working as well as the ceremonies they will align with. Retrospective was the only ceremony mandated to ensure that the circle members reflects on opportunities for improvement. The circles also identified their 'definition of done' to align on expectation of their work outcomes. As part of the Agile WoW, the circles and its members agreed on the necessary conversations and the cadence that will happen among them, which included a monthly heartbeat conversation to assess the progress of commitments at the organisation level and individual level. The purpose and values of an organisation helps employees align. Among the five organisations, we adopted one of the following approaches (a) leadership team co-created the purpose and values and communicated with the entire organisation, (b) leadership team co-created the purpose and values and later aligned with core members of the organisation, (c) leadership team co-created the purpose and values and later aligned with all members of the organisation. Involving core

members and other members helped to have a better buy-in from other stakeholders. The Objectives and Key Results (OKRs) were introduced after the Agile WoW and purpose and values alignment. The organisation level OKRs were finalised by the leadership team, based on historical data and communicated to the members and each circle derived their OKRs to work towards during the quarter. At the end of the quarter, the circles reflected on the progress made with respect to the OKRs and further actions to improve the results. Table 2 summarises the sequence of approaches followed to implement various experiments.

Table 2. Summary of approaches

| Dimension | Org1 | Org2 | Org3 | Org4 | Org5 |
|-----------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Step 1 | Agile WoW | Agile WoW | Align purpose | Align purpose | Agile WoW |
| Step 2 | Align purpose | Align purpose | Agile WoW | Agile WoW | Align purpose |
| Step 3 | OKR | OKR | OKR | | OKR |

Discussion

Table 3 provides the summary of approaches and interventions against each of the seven dimensions.

Table 3. Summary of approaches and interventions

| S.no | Dimensions | Approaches, interventions |
|------|---------------|--|
| 1 | Competence | Onboarding the right talent, developing competence through continuous learning, measuring contributions and taking corrective actions wherever required. |
| 2 | Circles | Dynamic teaming for desired results , clear accountabilities., circle chief as enabler. |
| 3 | Cadence | Daily, weekly, fortnightly, monthly and quarterly cadence of various ceremonies. |
| 4 | Catalyst | Single accountable person for the initiative, from C suite or a nominated representative who reports directly to either the CEO or the board and to be supported by other teams |
| 5 | Conversations | One-to-one conversations, circle and organisational level conversations at various cadence, including heartbeat conversations, huddles, learning circles, demos and retrospectives, OKR alignment and reviews. |
| 6 | Context | Internal and external factors impacting the organisation. |
| 7 | Clarity | Purpose and values to bring in alignment, OKRs to drive results |

The data collected during the course of intervention at these organisations were analysed and the results showed (a) increase in predictability of teams outcomes, (b) increase in individual and team accountability resulting in improved performance/ outcomes, (c) increase in employee

engagement, and (d) alignment to organisation's purpose, values and goals. The Agile WoW enabled the circles to focus on sprint deliverables and the cadence of ceremonies (Donnelly, 2016; Baumeister, 2017) brought in better predictability of team outcomes. When the overall predictability increased, it also resulted in improving the quality of deliverables as well as the outcomes expected. The dynamic teaming (Helfand, 2019) approach provided a platform for the circle members to collaborate better improving the engagement among them. The clarity (Wollmann et al., 2020) of organisational purpose and values along with the OKR (Doerr, 2018) brought in better alignment to organisational goals.

Conclusion

The VIBGYOR framework enables the Catalyst to wear the hat of a facilitator (Sathianathan & Aravind, 2021) to bring in alignment to a larger purpose, increased employee engagement, accountability and a steady rise in predictability of team outcomes. Based on the results observed, following recommendations are being made. Initiating the teams with Agile WoW, followed by purpose orientation and OKR has been found to be better than other approaches mentioned in Table 2. We believe that the organisations embracing an agile mindset and best practices are ready and better prepared to be exposed to higher level thinking required for organisation purpose and values. We recommend practitioners to adopt an approach to involve all the members if possible or at least the key members in the organisation to co-create the purpose and values that defines the organisation. This helps prepare the mindset to embrace and assimilate the importance of purpose and values in context of the organisation. The VIBGYOR framework provides a reliable structure for organisations to flourish in the upcoming days of a VUCA world and organisations may find this approach to be indispensable in their journey to reinvent itself (Prahalad & Hamel, 2017; Sathianathan & Ramasamy, 2021). The observations also implies that the success of the transformation journey using the VIBGYOR framework is tightly coupled to the catalyst role.

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