What Do Meta-Enablers Add To Your Insight into the Workforce?

Otto Laske, PhD
Personnel Development Consultation
Oelaske@earthlink.net

Abstract
The article introduces novel HR measures called "meta-enablers" whose assessment strengthens the strategic partnership of HR in organizations. The distinction between HR enablers and meta-enablers is explained, and situations in which assessment of the latter is vital are described. This is followed by a demonstration of how to assess and report meta-enablers, using the Corporate Development Readiness and Effectiveness Measure (CDREM™), a methodology for making visible covert organizational processes (both positive and negative).

Introduction

Meta-enablers are determinants of the covert processes that determine how human capacities are exercised in the organizational functioning of individuals and groups. One can best think of meta-enablers as the ingredients of a prism (set of lenses), through which employees view themselves and the organization *out of awareness*. In the corporate trend to include a broader set of measures both in the internal and external reporting of companies, HR meta-enablers are a powerful novelty. These are human and corporate capacities that lie "beyond" (Greek: "meta") workplace behavior and performance, and therefore are typically hidden from view, and intangible. However, well-tested new technology is making it possible to make meta-enablers visible, and thus manageable. In this article, I briefly describe HR meta-enablers from the perspective of the HR Director. I show what it means to measure and report them, focusing on stratetic alignment of employees as an example. (See the partial list of applications below.) My purpose is to show that including HR meta-enablers in readiness reports directed to senior management and communication to the market place enriches strengthens the strategic relevance of HR for the company as a whole.

What are Meta-Enablers?

Meta-enablers are intangible HR assets that are a source of future benefits (financial or other) given a business strategy that employs them. Executives who reflect on what drives the execution of strategy in their company over the long term intuitively understand them. However, a language for naming, and a conceptual framework for measuring, meta-enablers have long been missing. Meta-enablers differ from other measures typically reported by HR in two regards: first, they cannot be derived from opinion surveys, anecdotal observation, or actuarial data; second, the target population they refer to is typically not the entire workforce, but a carefully constructed

representative sample of company, or company division, employees. Based on qualitative research, meta-enablers can be measured with accuracy, using validated interview and questionnaire methods, whether to supplement, refine, or replace opinion polls.

Example Situations Calling for Probing HR Meta-Enablers

The utility of meta-enablers assessed by CDREM™ is broad: they can be used for purposes of measurement, communication, strategizing HR policy, and long-term human-resource planning. A partial list of applications follows:

- An auditing partnership experiences a dramatic increase in liability suits. CDREM™ is used to find root causes of misalignment between partners and clients that result in such suits. HR proceeds by defining and tracking a comprehensive "liability suit risk" index for a representative sample of partners. Resulting cost savings are targeted for use in further partner development.
- An e-business professional services firm providing internet-banking solutions experiences difficulty in achieving effectiveness of learning and knowledge-sharing in its virtual teams. CDREM™ is used to assess human capital indexes such as cultural alignment, personal goal alignment with strategy, and team collaboration. Insight into the developmental-behavioral anatomy of crucial teams is used to re-assess and re-structure existing virtual teams, and contributes to meeting deadlines previously missed to great financial loss.
- A consulting firm chooses to select candidates for advanced e-learning from its own staff, rather than hire outside consultants. HR cannot provide the information necessary to make an effective selection. CDREM™ is used to define an "e-learning competency index" for a representative sample of promising employees. The index focuses on candidates' capacity for systems thinking, and their task focus, conduct, and interpersonal perspective.
- A company adopting the balanced scorecard wants to provide an HR Readiness Report that details readiness to execute strategy in five performance domains: competence, leadership, strategic alignment of employees, cultural awareness, and team synergy. CDREM™ is used to define an index in each of these domains, and track indexes over the long term. In this way, HR can document its contribution to company strategy, and become a more strategic partner.
- A large pharmaceutical firm wants to upgrade its executive coaching program based on knowledge of the developmental and behavioral preconditions of coaching effectiveness in its team of executives. CDREM™ is used to define a "coaching need" and "potential coaching effectiveness" index, to guide the coaching program. An additional purpose is to track the effectiveness of the corporate coaching program over the long term.

How Does CDREM™ Conceptualize Meta-Enablers?

In the framework of focused strategy, such as the balanced scorecard, we think of HR core *measurements* as those of employee satisfaction, retention, and productivity, and of HR *enablers* as comprising staff competencies, leadership, cultural alignment, employee strategic alignment, and the strategic integration of teams. These concepts ultimately refer to human beings that have certain capacities and limitations.

CDREM™ is a human-capital appraisal methdology. It adopts the perspective that workforce effectiveness is largely based on covert—out of awareness—processes that make up a "prism" through which employees see both themselves and their host organization. CDREM™ conceptualizes this prism as composed of "human assets and liabilities out of awareness," referred to as meta-enablers. Specifically, it views members of the workforce from two related perspectives, a *developmental* and *behavioral* one. The first perspective targets hidden resources begging for future use, the second, present strengths and liabilities. Both of these meta-

dimensions are assessed in a sample representative of a chosen target population, on the level of individuals.

Being focused on what is held out of awareness in organizations, CDREM™ sees developmental meta-enablers as *the deepest HR intangible*, referred to as "level of mental growth." Table 1 below sheds light on why this makes sense:

Table 1. Levels of adult mental growth and their impact on workplace behavior

Level of Mental Growth	Workforce Capacities	% of Adult Attaining Level*
Self-aware ("level 5")	Individual can decenter from self and own value system; motivate and develop others, negotiate own at-riskness	8-10%
Self-authoring ("level 4")	Individual is identified with own value system, unable to disengage from it, but respects that of others	**20-30%
Other-dependent ("level 3")	Individual puts consensus and shared context over own value system and principled action, identifying with 'authority' (inner or outer)	**50-60%
Instrumental ("level 2")	Individual bases actions and decisions on the gratification of own needs and interests; cannot stand in others' shoes, does not respect conventions at odds with own interests	10%

* Kegan (1994), Cook-Greuter (1999), Laske (2000). Between each of the four levels, there exist 4 transitional levels, altogether 15. Each of the self-awareness levels is associated with variable degrees of complexity awareness--inner and outer complexity as perceived by individuals.
** The relative percentages at levels 4 and 3 depend on corporate and societal culture.

Table 1 tells us that in their journey across the lifespan between ages 20 and 100, adults typically are (and end up) at starkly differing levels of mental growth that can be empirically assessed. These levels have been shown to co-determine individuals' awareness of inner and outer complexity (capacity for systems thinking), as well as their behavioral profile. Teams composed of members at different mental-growth levels are characterized by their own predictable dynamics. For example, a "downwardly divided 4-team" with a majority of members at level 4 and a minority at level 3 typically struggles to decide between consensual and principled action.

CDREM™ also takes into account the behavioral profile of members of the workforce, both with regard to themselves and their relationship to the organization. Table 2 shows the behavioral domains (columns) and aspects (rows) assessed.

Table 2. Domains and Aspects of Workforce Behavior

Behavioral Aspects	Domain I Aspects of Personal Workplace Behavior	Domain II Degree of Attunement to Organizational Culture	Domain III Way of Experiencing the Organization On a Daily Basis
Conduct	Self confidence, risk taking, flexibility regarding change, need to control and direct, need for visibility, need to berate others	Energy sinks deriving from accommodation to organizational imperatives that do not support self-conduct needs	The organization's conduct as seen by employees, e.g., its need to control and direct, and its risk taking
Task Focus	Autonomy and creativity of action, drive to achieve, motivation to overcome obstacles, follow-through, quality of planning, need to explain and self-protect	Energy sinks deriving from accommodatiion to organizational imperatives hindering subjective task focus	The organization's ability to achieve, overcome obstacles, follow through, quality of planning, and its need to self-protect, as seen by employees
Interpersonal Perspective	Capacity for affiliation, understanding others' motives, relationship to power, dependency on others, bias toward others	Energy sinks deriving from accommodation to organizational imperatives conflicting with subjective interpersonal perspective	The organization's capacity to understand employees, be helpful to them, affiliate with them; its strength of bias, as seen by employees

*Strategic alignment is measured in all three domains, in terms of attaining a managerial norm that varies from domain to domain, and from aspect to aspect. Gaps between Domains I and II show up as degree of organizational attunement, while gaps between Domains II and III show up as frustration index.

For all of these nine aspects, managerial norms exist against which findings of members of a representative sample can be compared. A variable number of developmental and behavioral aspects is selected by HR from the domains and aspects shown above, so as to define *indexes* (sets of criteria) to be tracked over the long term. The example below regards an index of alignment with company strategy. Figures in red highlight prominent risks and potentials.

Table 3. Meta-Enabler Profile of a Representative Sample Regarding Strategic Alignment

IndexTracked	*Developmental and Behavioral Aspects Defining the Index	CDREM™ Measurement Result (Example) Below Standard [-]	 Above Standard [+]
Strategic Alignment HR Objective: Create an organization where personal goals and incentives are aligned with strategy; and that encourages personal contribution	*1. Level of mental growth*	**0.31**	0.10
	2. Developmental potential over risk	0.10	0.21
	3. Complexity awareness index	**0.29**	0.09
	4. Conduct (e.g., self confidence, flexibility regarding change, etc.)	0.11	**0.29**
	5. Task focus (e.g. autonomy of action and decision making, resourcefulness under stress, etc.)	0.18	**0.46**
	6. Interpersonal perspective (e.g., capacity for affiliation, undertanding other's motives, etc.)	**0.36**	0.07

Summary			
Developmental ratio		***0.29***	*0.10*
Behavioral ratio		*0.18*	***0.29***
TOTAL ALIGNMENT RATIO	(median, not mean)	**0.23**	**0.20**

*The standard chosen for the six alignment aspects is not shown. In the table, it has been set to '1,' as a basis of comparison for values in the two outer right columns.

The information in Table 3 provides the HR Director with detailed insight into the developmental and behavioral meta-enabler profile that undergirds strategic alignment in the representative sample. Not only does this information strengthen the human capital readiness report; it also guides the formulation of future HR programs and policy. Indirectly, it also strengthens the strategic function of HR. Space permits only a few concluding comments on Table 3.

As shown in the two outer right columns, the ratio of those missing and exceeding the chosen company standard varies from aspect to aspect. The total median ratio of those missing the alignment standard to those exceeding it is [-]0.23 to [+]0.20, thus fairly even. This confirms the aptness of the company standard chosen for follow-up assessments. Since more employees miss the maturity-level standard (-0.29) than behavioral standards (-0.18), and more exceed the behavioral (+0.29) than the developmental standard set (+0.10), the *behavioral* (short-term) picture for this sample looks brighter than the *developmental* (long-term) one. This finding should provoke HR attention to succession planning and hiring efforts by which the maturity level of the workforce can be raised. In detail, the highest "missing the standard ratio" is found in interpersonal perspective, developmental level, and complexity awareness (which indicates systems thinking capacity), and is thus predominantly developmental. The highest "exceeding the standard ratio" is found in task focus followed by employee-conduct. While behaviors can be changed relatively easily by way of appropriate coaching and training, mental-growth levels are determined by hiring and succession planning decisions, as well as corporate culture, and are thus not easily revoked. Clearly, being able to make available such in-depth information regarding the workforce strengthens the position of the HR Director as a strategic partner, and heightens his or her effectiveness as a guardian of strategic alignment.

This increase in HR effectiveness is aided by costing information that can be attached to CDREM™ findings. Concretely, in the case above, the overall *developmental* risk-potential ratio is negative (-0.19), while the overall *behavioral* risk-potential ratio is positive (+0.11), facts that are obscured by the near-evenness of the overall ratio (-0.03). These findings entail that while the behavioral readiness of employees in the sample is a company asset, the developmental make-up of the sample is presently a liability. Rather than pointing to training needs, the overall developmental risk-potential ratios point to a need for job re-assignment, re-structuring of employee-client relationships, coaching, and leadership mentoring, and to unwise hiring

decisions. The overall ratio can be "costed" to the extent that the company is able to formulate (or at least hypothesize) specific cause-effect links that relate individual and overall risk-potential ratios (see Table 3) to outcomes in the internal business process or customer relations domains, if not in financials (ROI). While as costly as a developmental liability of –0.1, a behavioral liability of the same magnitude is typically easier and less expensive to correct, for instance, through training. Negative developmental ratios point to liabilities in the anatomy of the workforce, and therefore require more analysis and soul searching. They are typically twice as costly to change than negative behavioral ratios, depending on the HR system in place.

While negative developmental and behavioral risk-potential ratios point to liabilities, positive ratios point to unused resources (and the need to develop them). An overall risk-potential index of +0.21 in the developmental domain, for instance, indicates a considerable human capital resource that is presently being wasted. The resource resides in the developmental maturity and systems thinking capacity of employees whose assignment to tasks is not optimal. Conversely, a positive behavioral risk potential ratio of the same magnitude points to competences whose exercise presently encounters obstacles, structural or procedural, and these obstacles will have to be located to remedy the waste of resources that presently occurs.

As these examples show, a human-capital appraisal methodology such as CDREM™ is highly relevant to optimizing the resources of a company's workforce.

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About the Author:

Otto Laske, PhD PsyD is Founder and Principal of Laske and Associates LLC, Medford, MA., He is a human-resources measurement specialist working with a proprietary methodology, CDREM™. Dr. Laske helps HR clients in mid-size and large companies in establishing and tracking learning-and-growth metrics, carrying out long-term strategic performance management. He advises on computerized learning-and-growth measurement systems, and on making HR a more strategic partner of executive management. Laske is multi-lingual and works internationally and nationally. He can be reached at otto@interdevelopmentals.org , or (781) 391-2361.