

Research of Elevating Leadership of Corporation Based on Action Learning

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Abstract—In this paper, we studied how to improve leadership. First, this article defined leadership operating mechanisms based on core capability of corporation, summarized the concept, connotation, method, principle and research theory of Action Learning. Second, this paper formulated the model of the mechanism of systematic operation for the leadership based on core capability of corporation, by using the theory and method of systematic engineering. On this basis, applying the theory of experiential learning cycle and group dynamics, three-cyclic learning model for elevating the leadership of corporation which is based on action learning are constructed. Some superficial new ideas and methods for elevating the leadership of corporation are provided.

Key words—core capability of corporation; leadership; action learning; circulation

I. INTRODUCTION

With the promotion and popularization of information intelligence, the interdisciplinary crossing of technological innovation and the strengthening of complexity, the relevant market competition focus from costs to product performance, quality and the development speed of new products, economic globalization has further intensified, high mobility and openness, permeability and complementary, intensive co-exist with the monopoly, information, knowledge capital is increasing instead of the tangible material resources to become the important factors in economy development, the growth of enterprise value was mainly achieved by increasing knowledge, and because environmental pollution is getting worse, the new scientific concept of development has been firmly established, protect natural resource, reduce environmental pollution has become a cognition and a trend. It's obvious that the survival operating environment of the traditional enterprise has a great changes in concepts, technology, market and so on. Facing with the great changes, we now more need excellent leaders, the companies' survival and development are more than ever dependent on each level of leadership [1]. But it is a high level of corporate leadership that is the key elements and necessary conditions to establish and nurture core capability of corporation, therefore, analysis of how to develop and enhance the core capability based on the leadership have some practical significance. In a variety of leadership development practice, action learning method has been accepted, applied and extended by all kinds of organizations within the world-wide and achieved amazing results, is considered as the secrets weapons to fast enhance leadership capacity, improve performance and promote organizational change. The

reference 2 shows, compared with several other leadership development, action learning is the only practice mode can able to effectively improve the organization's human capital and social capital. The existing research and practice has shown that action learning is almost now become the preferred way of leadership development [3]. This paper focus on the corporation leadership development and cultivation based on action learning, provide reference for corporate training leadership of executives in China.

II. LEADERSHIP OPERATING MECHANISMS BASED ON CORE CAPABILITY OF CORPORATION

The leadership based on core capability of corporation is a dynamic system of four-graded structure, individual qualities and morality located in the center of corporate leadership, belongs to the first grade, is the origin of leadership and has a big impact on all the learning process and activities. Core values and intelligent knowledge are the second gradient, which oriented refinement and integration skills play the most direct role in the formation of leadership. Skills and techniques belonging to the third gradient, is the common ability that the application of structured use of the basics principles to complete specific tasks. Cultural knowledge and professional knowledge are the fourth gradient, which manifested as a public accomplishment and professional qualities, are the resource base of formation of corporation leadership.

In four-graded structure of corporation leadership, due to the different level of every grad shows different ability characteristics and energy, cultural knowledge and professional knowledge are more close to nature reserves, Skills and techniques can be shown in solving specific problems in the process, is also a capabilities to use organizational resources, core values and intelligent knowledge are more tend to directional sorting and control functions. In general circumstances, the ability of the gradient reflects and how much energy is released gradually increase from outside to inside, evaluation and cultivation of its difficulty degree also increase from outside to inside.

Based on the above, apply the theory method of systems engineering and establish the Operating Mechanisms Model of Corporation leadership system based on core capability of corporation shown in figure 1.

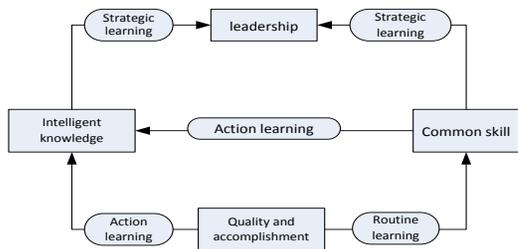


Figure 1. The Operating Mechanisms Model of Corporation leadership system

From the figure-1, in this paper, the leadership system based on the core competence is a hierarchical structure system of layered learning. The interaction between environment and corporations, the interaction of organization and the organization, the organization and individuals the corporation internal, is completed through the cognition and decision-making of the leaders, therefore, on one hand, through the learning of all levels formulates the leadership of leader's individual, on the other hand, the cognition and decision-making of leaders play a decisive role in the depth, breadth and height of study.

III. THE MODEL AND CHARACTERISTIC OF ACTION LEARNING

A. The Connotation of Action Learning and Learning Equations

The last century 40's, Reg Revans, the British management thinker had proposed the concept of "action learning" and brought it into the area of management development. In 1971, Revans published the book "The development of efficient managers", formally proposed the theory and methods of action learning, he defined action learning as: working as individuals or groups of learners, people committed to solve real problems in the work, while enhanced their skills. When people get together, share their own collection of the fact, stating their analysis of the source of the problems, requesting others to provide the solutions for the problems, trying all kinds of attempts to resolve the problem, and showing the results of the attempts to group, learning is produced [4]. Action learning is built around the real issue without answers, is a process of continuous learning and introspection, it comes with the dual goals: solving the practical problems and developing the ability of individual and group. Therefore, the core of action learning is balancing the action and reflective learning. Another outstanding contributor of action learning is Pedler, who has a complete definition of learning: Action learning is a method of organizing staff development, in which the task is to learn the medium or carrier. The basic belief of action learning is that no action would be no learning, no learning would be no wise action. Action Learning has three main factors: the participants, issues, and sharing group or team, they make progress through mutual support and mutual challenge (querying). Action learning means the win-win results of self-development and organizational development, the action based on issues is necessary to solve the problem, and change the people solving the problems. Marquardt

describes action learning as it is a process, and is also a strong project, which involves a small group of people when solve real problems, concerning what they are learning and how to make overall benefit for each group member and the organization through their learning. Perhaps the greatest value of action learning is that it enhances more effectively ability of responding to changes among individual, team and organization. It is learning that make action learning has strategic rather than technical. When tomorrow's challenges will engulf us, we should avoid using yesterday's solutions project to handle today's problem, we need fresh ideas and new learning "[5]. Action Learning is a comprehensive learning model and includes four kinds of important learning process: (1) learning knowledge: to learn from existing knowledge; (2) Experience: to learn from personal experience; (3) team learning: to learn from the experience of other team members; (4) exploratory solving problem: to learn in process of solving practical problems.

Action learning equations: $L=P+Q$, that means learning is through combining acquiring relative professional knowledge with the ability of solving critical questions. Nowadays, action learning has been given a new definition of leaders, and that famous equation also be added some elements, formulating as a new action learning equation, $AL=P+Q+R+I$: which means that action learning= Programmed Knowledge+ Questioning Insights+ Critical Reflection+ Implementation, therein action learning and programmed knowledge are already "formed" ideas and methods, belong to areas of expertise, which is the basis to carry out the action learning. Questioning insights means that having doubts and exploration on existing knowledge, experience and etc. On the basis of exploring the question, critical reflection has reflections on self mental models to promote behavior change. Implementation refers to after the question, explore, reflect on the formation of new knowledge, applying implementation in the specific context. Action learning is learning in the action and action in the learning, is an effective learning and training methods that combined study with practice into the whole. The essence of action Learning is solving practical problems, summarizing results, and analyzing the process of achieving this effect.

B. The Theoretical Basis of Action Learning

1) *The cycle theory of experiential learning*: The great vitality of action learning comes from it as an open system, constantly absorbing from latest results of areas of education, psychology, systematic, management science, so as to continuously improve their own system. The cycle theory of experiential learning is the basis of action learning, has the greatest impact on action learning, action learning process is just a concrete manifestation of experiential learning cycle and combines the action closely with reflection, the aim is to improve person to acquire learning results from experience. Through the reflection of action, learners can take use of their own experience to formulate a systemic recognition of external word and themselves; through the reflection of study, learners can plan and implement future actions

Kolb first proposed the model of experiential learning

cycle, as shown in figure-2. In this experiential learning cycle, longitudinal experience, observation and reflection, a general principle are all the process of conceptualization; while horizontal observation and reflection, a general principle, examining, represent the practical activities.

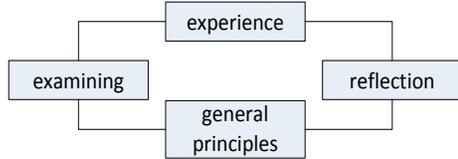


Figure 2. Kolb experiential learning cycle

Based on the conceptual model of Kolb, Pedler who made a further interpretation of experiential learning cycle (as shown in figure 3): Experience is the observation of action and a reflection of experience, producing a new understanding, leading to new action plan, arousing a new action until the issue is again solved. Over time, learning is finished, the learning process is continuously repeated of this cycle process.

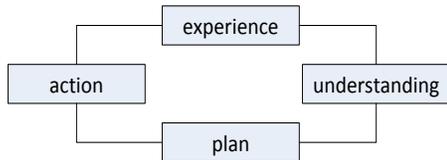


Figure 3. Pedler experiential learning cycle

Mezirow took critical reflection as the core of the learning process, thought that the learners acquired experience on the basis of the original experience must go through ten steps: (1) Facing the condition of be in a nice hobble (2) self-test; (3)be all adrift ; (4) doubt on past experience; (5) generate the intent to new exploration; (6) plan the new action; (7) implementation of action plans; (8)acquire the knowledge of solution project ; (9) experience the new role; (10) social role adjustment. On basis of the above, Mezirow proposed experiential learning cycle shown in figure-4.

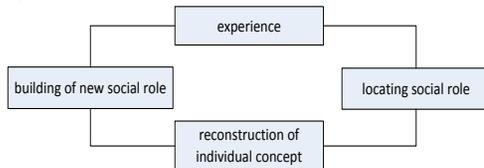


Figure 4. Mezirow experiential learning cycle

2) *The theory of group dynamics:* Action learning takes learning model of project team, whether it is to solve the problem, or to acquire new knowledge, all can't leave mutual cooperation and depth of questioning and reflection among team members, group dynamics theory has provided a psychological basis for action learning team interaction [6]:

As a holistic existence, human is in the form of groups, individuals can't be divorced from groups , only in groups can human demonstrate the essential nature of a social

nature.

The group members have different levels of intelligence, knowledge structure, ways of thinking and cognitive style, in the effect of field of group dynamics, "group dynamics" that produced by the interaction within the group members, far greater than the sum of the individual.

In order to complete a common task, the cohesion formed in group members is the source of power of the "group dynamics", to establish and maintain cohesion is the critical factor that whether the learning group team can succeed.

Group cohesion is not only unconditional echo between members of group, but the team members take the role of "driven, supervisors, analysts' to stimulate action, bring questions, challenges, dialogue and other activities, form a deep understanding and system thinking.

Individual behavior is not only restricted by its own internal factors, but also by the effect of group environment, it is the interaction between groups and members that form the dynamics of group behavior.

In the group, on one hand, each individual bear varying degrees of roles of self-improvement practice, innovation and leadership, as well as roles of liaison to support others, auxiliary and so on, these roles provide individual power energy; on the other hand, groups bear roles of the challengers of individual thought, urged action, cooperation, maintainer, etc. which gather together groups of power energy.

Action Learning is a comprehensive learning model and includes four kinds of important learning process: (1) learning knowledge: to learn from existing knowledge; (2) Experience: to learn from personal experience; (3) team learning: to learn from the experience of other team members; (4) exploratory solving problem: to learn in process of solving practical problems.

In a word, experiential learning cycle and group dynamics have composed the basic theory of support action learning; in addition, (1) build a learning concept in the knowledge building process and the effect of external environment on building knowledge of the learner; (2) Human-centered humanistic learning theory and process-oriented learning principles; (3) knowledge management theory, from creation, sharing, transformation of the knowledge all provide a theoretical support for action learning .

The“3-circulation”action learning model of leadership cultivation

On the basis of research to explore in the theoretical approach of action learning, through reference [4-10] and with the author's work and experience accumulation in senior management over the years in corporations, this paper has proposed the“3-circulation”action learning model of leadership cultivation as shown in figure-5. In the model, the first circulation is Leadership structured knowledge learning circle; the second is leading behavior ability and wisdom learning circle; the third is Strategic study circle.

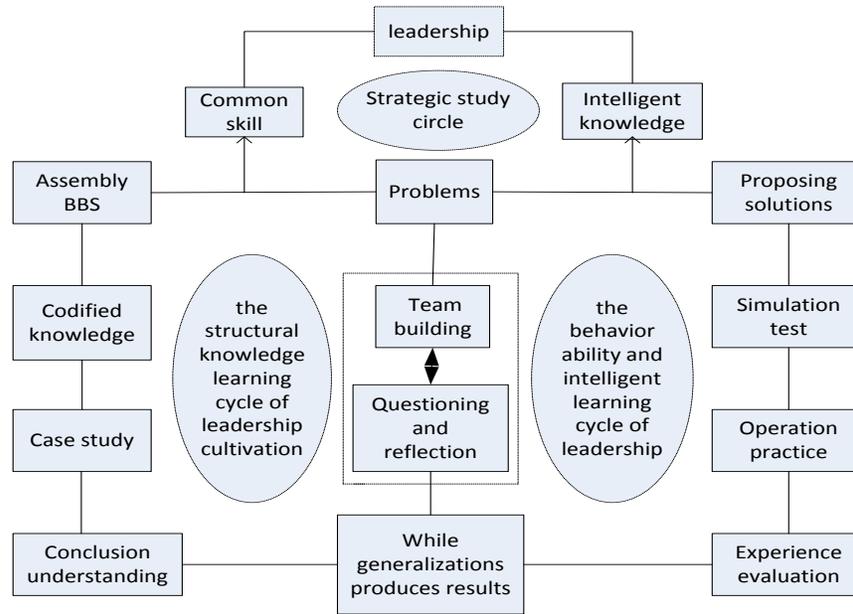


Figure 5. The “3-circulation” action learning model of leadership cultivation

The most prominent feature of “3-circulation” action learning of leadership cultivation is practicality and team learning, the model operation is not only according to the reality to choose questions, but also conduct team building and propose effective solution projects. Action learning is not a salon, prate, all the participants in action learning have to be based on experience of the results, having deep reflection and questioning between each other in the process of analyzing and solving problems, and then find effective ways and put into practice action.

The “3-circulation” action learning model of leadership cultivation is an endless and circulatory process. The operating mechanisms are as follows: (1) the structural knowledge learning cycle of leadership cultivation: finding problems (looking for gap, gap is the problem) ----accumulation of codified knowledge---- understanding and summarizing ---- abstract conceptualization principles ----doubts and reflection of team ----finding new problems (establishing benchmarking, the problem is the objective); (2) the behavior ability and intelligent learning cycle of leadership cultivation: finding the problem----proposing solutions(according to the status and understanding of the problem , make action plan)----action and practice(executing and implementing under certain situations)----producing results---- doubts and introspections of team(careful observation, experience the action results, make a deep introspection and re-form the understanding of the status)----looking for new problems;(3) Strategic study circle of leadership cultivation: raise strategic objectives and questions----doubts and reflection----take measures and learn----test, calibration and feedback. Strategic learning is the emphasis on insights learning, should maintain keen state and give full intuition and inspiration to unconventional thinking, is actively explore unknown areas, propose some creative and insightful questions and comments, is the path

to the future and learning of unknown. Strategic learning is a consistent learning approach that the leaders purposeful in integrated enterprise resource to respond to or even create, altering dynamical changes of external operation environment to gain competitive advantages. In the circulation of strategic learning, on one hand, through the establishment of strategic learning “guiding the organization to formulate sustainable development core values and healthy, excellent mental model”, making the leaders’ intelligent learning with strategic, foresee-ability, dynamic and global, enhancing the continuous influence of non-official (non-right), transferring the individual’s intelligent learning into leadership; on the other hand, leadership will guide the general ability to find new problems, thus encouraging access to the first and second levels of action learning cycle. This repeated interaction to achieve a virtuous cycle of action learning. In a word, find problems — action — re-find problems— rethinking— re-action, constantly re-focus, breaking up the whole problems into parts, splitting big problems into smaller ones, easier issues first, strengthen key points, step by step, constantly promote the deepen cognition, the solving of problems and improvement of leadership.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

In the “3-circulation” action learning of leadership cultivation, leaders should take the initiative to absorb structural knowledge, insight on practical problems and creatively solve, this study greatly enhanced the leaders’ ability to handle problems independently, provide conditions for the play of leaders’ creativity. In the implementation of action learning method, every member is active to participate in every link and give full play of personal potential, plus team learning and the use and play of “group dynamics”,

throughout the whole process and every link of 3-circulation, so the “reflection” will be gradually deep because of the mutual support and stimulations between educational team members. What’s more, in the proper time of 3-circulation process of action learning, we should guide learners from “reflection” to “correction and concluding”, as a result, the leaders have new perspectives and mental models. Leadership trainers through professional knowledge learning acquire abundant leadership structural knowledge, improve the ability of finding problems and analyzing by the research of practical problems, and finally obtain leading experience through solving problems.

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