



**TERMINOLOGY AND OTHER PEOPLE
RELATED THEMES IN BUSINESS**

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Terminology and other related People Management Themes in Business

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Context

Shadowmatch Consultants are workforce optimization specialists consulting for a wide variety of companies. Through their strategic consulting services, they have over the years identified some of the biggest – and most common – challenges faced by these companies when it comes to optimizing their workforce. These include employee energy management, motivation and work-related expectations employees have. Because of this, along with a lack of communication between employer and employee in terms of expectations and agreements, companies are facing the risk of running “a mismatch between employer and employee” that could negatively influence how these companies operate.

Along with this, Shadowmatch have also identified the importance of correct language usage and communication between companies and employees when dealing with these challenges head on. Though when challenges are faced, questions often arise between the various parties involved. The right language usage (like the use of specific words) and communication in these situations are crucial to resolve these challenges as quick as possible, and to avoid similar situations in the future.

Clear, documented and guideline structures given to management teams can often help avoid a mismatch between employer and employee. When implemented correctly, it can also help strengthen communication between companies and employees, workforce performance management, personal development and career progression.

Purpose

The aim of this whitepaper is to deal with the most common confusions experienced by the Shadowmatch team when working with clients on the challenge of managing a work force optimally.

Problem Statement

Communication. The language we use to communicate in is often filled with words that have vague meaning. Words can (in some cases) have more than one definition, have a different meaning when used in certain contexts and have various meanings due to personal interpretation. The relationship between communication and interpretation is thus important. When something that is being communicated is misinterpreted, it could lead to an unnecessary misunderstanding, and when in a workplace environment - a mismatch between employer and employee. Below are a few examples.

Example 1:

A business owner says: “I need a properly qualified programmer”. What does ‘a properly qualified programmer’ mean? Does it refer to a degree? Specific programming language skills? Somebody that’s able to simply do the job?

Example 2:

A manager says: “We have recruited a highly qualified finance administrator for our team but it doesn’t work. Work quality is poor, productivity is poor and the individual is just not the person we want”. How should one interpret this, and do the words used by the manager have similar weight in meaning for everyone hearing this?

Example 3:

The CEO says: “I want a business culture of honesty, dedication, care for people, service to clients and employee development as key business drivers”. Fact is, not all of what the CEO said has to do with culture. Culture is not something you want as a business leader. It is what you have created as a business leader.

About this Publication

The Shadowmatch team has identified a list of terms that can cause confusion in the workplace. In order to help optimize companies’ workforces, these terms have been listed below. For clarity these terms will now be described and where possible, confusion will be addressed by sharing practical examples. The aim is to keep this a short and easy read, with the main takeout being workforce optimization enablement.

1. **Qualifications:** This refers to the knowledge needed by current, and prospective, employees for success in the workplace. Success is measured against a knowledge index which can be defined in two learning paths towards building the necessary knowledge faculties for a job. The first learning path is official training/studies, and the second learning path is through experience.

Official training/studies typically refers to institutionally recognized training and can include things like written exams/tests, proof of learning and a qualification/certificate/diploma as proof that the official training/studies have been achieved.

Learning through experience, the second learning path, should be deemed just as valuable as official training and is mostly practical and job specific. This type of learning is usually automatically paired with pros and cons. The pros seem obvious, in the sense that practical learning (hands-on experience) have already been established in the workplace. The cons are that this form of learning could easily lack theoretical completeness. What's most challenging is that learners of experience have little or no proof of what exactly has been learned. This makes it almost impossible to determine what the theoretical knowledge of the individual is. In some jobs these theoretical knowledge frames can be critical.

When we refer to 'Qualifications', reference is made to theoretical knowledge, relevant to the job that the individual knows in support of doing the job. Let's use a pilot as an example: When asked, "What is the rate the atmospheric pressure decreases with an increase in elevation above mean sea level," any pilot should know the answer. It is theory that could be critical. If someone has a pilot license, the license is proof of the fact that he/she knows this.

2. Skills: This refers to an individual's ability and physical ease of doing a job. Execution capabilities! Skills are almost always about the ability to physically do something effectively, in an efficient and risk-free manner. Skills depend on an individual's multiple abilities working together to execute a task in a smooth and efficient manner. An example will help. The skill of administrative work depends on various sub-skills such as; 1. the ability to logically file documents so that it's easily found when needed, 2. cross referencing documents to ensure that the necessary documents are stacked and filed together for the complete file to be referenced when necessary, and 3. ensuring that all documents are filed when needed and in order. This will prevent the "a missing contract syndrome" so often found in administrative offices.

When we refer to 'skilled people' it's important to have the same frame of reference. It has to do with the fact that skilled people are capable of executing a task in a smooth, efficient and effective manner. Someone might not understand anything about the mechanics of a golf ball but he/she might have the skill of playing a very good game of golf.

3. Workplace Behaviour Patterns: Keep in mind that all behaviour follow patterns. This is a complicated, extremely important and in a way very simple reality. These patterns cross influence each other as a contextual reaction of the individual to the environment, and then defines a profile of behaviour. If the behavioural patterns of an individual are not in harmony with the behavioural patterns necessary for the job, bilateral damage is inevitable. The individual will suffer as a result of this mismatch and the job too will suffer equally. This is the most critical aspect of workplace success and failure. In most instances bilateral damage accounts for poor performance, negative spirit amongst employees and an unpleasant workplace atmosphere (vibe).

If a group of people working together do not approve each other's behaviours, do not work along similar patterns of activities and do not share similar ways of getting the job done, the result could be a team who compromises success. If companies don't get this right, they have largely failed in their efforts to put together a successful workforce.

4. Job Titles: Ask, 'What is the name of the job'? Many companies and individuals cannot get this right. This is a name! It is not a sentence or a series of bullet points on a slide. It is a single label to name a job or position. Examples: Call Centre Agent. Teacher. Head Master. Head of sales. Engineer. Artist. Programmer. Office Manager. Finance Manager. Project Manager.

When job titles are exaggerated, it can become an environment of 'prestige titles' and lead to workforce problems. In such cases an employees' ambition is misplaced, they tend to have a job title in mind as their next goal and overall job focus shifts away from the business' success to *their* business position. Job titles are (and should be) simple name tags that identifies the work people do.

5. Job Description: This is a sentence. Maybe two sentences, maximum three. It describes the job. It answers the question: "Tell me, what do you actually do?" The following answers are great examples: 1. "I sell second hand cars in Johannesburg", 2. "I lecture Physics to engineering students at the University", 3. "I do research as part of a team commissioned to design the optimal water purification system", 3. "I treat ill people", 4. "I teach people to play tennis".

Job descriptions should not be an extensive list of tasks related to the job. Here's one example: Generate invoices. Send out invoices. Report on invoices outstanding. Compare bank statements to invoices paid. Follow-up on outstanding invoices. Ensure all services and products delivered to clients are being invoiced. Ensure invoice credibility to clients to prevent pseudo invoicing to prevent fraud. Wrong! The job description should be: Responsible for the entire invoicing function of the business.

6. Standard Operating Procedures: This is a step by step description of how the job is done (Idiots manual). If somebody steps into a new role without any prior experience of the work at hand, this 'step by step description' should easily enable the new recruit to do the job without external help. If this is not the case, it can be taken as a sign that there are problems within the business. These could include: 1. processes being too complicated, 2. systems used are poorly designed, 3. poor succession planning, and/or 4. individuals recruited not competent of doing the job at hand. It could also be related to training for the job that is not adequate (see 2. Skills). Be careful: In some jobs this is governed by legislation. Safety officers, pilots, some medical procedures, aircraft maintenance and some legal procedures are all examples where legislation requires Standard Operating Procedures compliance.

7. KPAs (Key Performance Areas): Three key concepts important to understanding this HR function: 1. quality of work, 2. quantity of work delivered, and 3. work priority. Coupled with these three concepts are three functions each should deliver on: 1. minimum acceptable levels of work, 2. satisfactory levels of work, and 3. exceptional work delivered. In simple terms, KPA's can be plotted on a matrix of quantity, quality and priority against expectable and minimum, satisfactory and outstanding performance.

KPA's are the foundation of performance management. If this is not documented by the company and signed by the employee, performance management becomes impossible especially in countries with strict labour legislation. When KPAs are signed, it becomes a performance contract to which employees should adhere to. An agreement between employer and employee that describes the work expectation and deliverables for which the employee is paid.

8. Code of Conduct: This refers to the way companies expect people to behave at work and includes things like adherence to governance, dress code and how to treat visitors. It could also be described as 'office manners'. A code of conduct is sometimes most respected at institutions like medical practices, police stations, counselling practices, etc. Some companies have their code of conduct described, documented and sometimes distributed amongst employees. These companies are mostly very well organised, disciplined and they expect all their employees to uphold specific standards of behaviour. In some instances, the way people address each other is defined and adherence is compulsory.

A code of conduct can become part of company culture if it defines values and principles. If not, it is purely structured as 'office manners'. Sometimes companies get mixed up between culture, code of conduct, code of ethical practice and company culture adherence. A code of conduct stipulates an organization's expectations and guiding practices for appropriate workplace behaviour.

9. Culture: This is the shared values, principles and the vibe (energy and 'spontaneous-ness') as it is collectively practiced by the majority of employees. This is usually shaped and created by the 10% most influential people present in the business. There is no such thing as a Documented Company Culture Pin-up. This is in most instances a company culture dream as provided by senior management. Culture is the shared behavioural patterns displayed by the top most influential business leaders and followed or resisted by the collective of the workforce.

If the CEO of a company shouts and screams at employees, employees will experience this as accepted behaviour and will most likely do the same to their peers or clients. If the leadership team lies to clients when deadlines were not met, employees will most likely lie to their managers when their deadlines are not met. If the CEO earns a salary 300 times the salary of a junior employee in the business, and that junior financially struggles to live a decent life, the CEO cannot say: 'We care for our people'. The truth is then the opposite.

10. Code of Ethical Practice: This is the framework of honesty, transparency and fairness as lived by all in a company, and the way in which they hold each other accountable. In a healthy environment, if the CEO has been dishonest and is caught red handed by (say) the security guard, the security guard should feel that he/she can expose such behaviour without consequences of fear or favour. Again, some businesses are very sensitive and requires the code of ethical practice to be documented, discussed and signed on the date of employment.

Accountants, legal offices, medical centres and many more companies run very sensitive businesses where strict adherence to a code of ethical practice is important. In most instances, an awareness amongst employees is sufficient, but sometimes it must be elevated to become a condition of employment.

A good example is a receptionist working at a medical centre who tells people (without respect for privacy) about the medical conditions of patients. This should constitute as immediate dismissal.

11. Company Culture Adherence: This refers to an outline of the principles employees uphold as a business, the way they do it and the pride in which they are doing it. Without repeating the above, company culture is a values and principles based atmosphere of collective behavioural patterns in a business. Adherence to this is a function of recruitment. Employees must be of similar ethical fibre as that of the business leaders. If this is not the case, culture disruption takes place, subcultures develop and the business ends up with an 'us-and-them' culture. Normally split along the lines of seniority. This is dangerous and it could destroy a business, especially medium sized companies (between 50 and 500 employees).

12. Innovation, Learning and Development: What is in place to support innovation, learning and development amongst all employees in a company? Every employee must be on a development path. Every development path must be applicable to the job done by the employee and it must be known to all. At least one major learning and development progression per employee per year must be accomplished. Unfortunately, this has become company talk with very little company action in most cases. Research indicate that less than 5% of businesses can answer "Yes" to the following question: "Is every employee on a managed, dedicated job relevant personal development programme?" What business leaders tend to underestimate is the tangible, financial benefit this gives the business. It reduces resignations, attracts competent people, improves business efficiencies and above every other benefit, it creates a learning and development culture with an explicit message that the people working for the company is an important asset to the business.

13. Talent Management: Make a mental note of the following intense statements: Talented people cannot hide! It is impossible! They cannot be 'unseen' in a business. You don't have to develop them, they are already developed. They don't need the job where they are employed, they can walk out and find a better job next door. They must be used, supported, admired and empowered to deliver extreme results as a function of their extreme abilities. They are sometimes very stubborn people. Self-minded. Better in what they do best than the rest. Easily frustrated. Extremely valuable as well as extremely destructive. They show low levels of loyalty and fear. They know they are good in what they do and they are often very willing to display their talents.

A short but fascinating case study will demonstrate this. A well-known corporate business employed John. John has an extreme talent to understand investments, calculate risk, predict trends and analyse historic data with derived intelligent conclusions that are mind blowing to say the least. On top of this, John is highly qualified with qualifications from leading global universities. His employer realised his value and decided to appoint him to a more senior position. He refused the new position because he didn't like the idea. The HR director told him that this new position is such a compliment and it could be frowned upon if he turns a cold shoulder to this compliment. This is what John said: "I told you I'm not interested. I like my current job. You will pay me what I tell you to pay me and I will be reasonable because I know my value. If this is not OK, let me know. I have five jobs offered to me that I can take whenever I want to". Sounds arrogant? Yes. People with extreme talent are often like this. They tell you, you don't tell them.

There is a current mind-set that talented people are those individuals we can develop to become very competent in what they do. We have to find them, identify them and then develop them. This is a mind-set from a fairy-tale world. This is a display of a very poor understanding of what talent means. Talented people have superior capabilities. You don't teach them, they teach you. They have pre-coded knowledge. It has been given to them. They excel above the vast majority of ordinary people. They have an extreme work efficiency ability. They do a job ten times quicker and better than normal clever competent people. These people are extremely valuable. Think of people like Albert Einstein, Beethoven, Mozart, Rafael Nadal, Ernie Els, Elon Musk, Dr Christiaan Barnard, Wernher von Braun and many more. The challenge is that some of them never deliver to their potential because the system doesn't allow them to.

So, if somebody says: "Please help me identify talent in my business?" Consider saying: "You don't have talented people. If you had talented people you would have known it. What I can do is to help you find the smartest people in your business so that we can develop their optimal potential". With this in mind, it is sometimes difficult to understand what somebody with the Job Title of Talent Manager does. If you have to manage and motivate

anybody, or develop that individual, or help discover the capabilities of such individual, be sure of the fact that you are not working with a talented person. We must be aware of the fact that talent is a superior capability.

To conclude, when terms that can cause confusion in the workplace are not identified and defined by companies, it can lead to a mismatch between employer and employee. By clearly defining, structuring and communicating your business terminology, you will contribute to an optimized workforce.

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