
The Study of Instruments in Management of Skills as a source of competitive advantage, illustration by the case of the Electro-Industries Company in the wilaya of Tizi-Ouzou

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Abstract:

This contribution aims to highlight the coherent configurations of management instruments and the strategic aims likely to underpin skills management systems. An instrumentalized approach to skills management reveals the contribution that the rational use of the management tools inherent in the skills rationale (skills repositories, skills maps, and skills-based training) can make to the implementation of a sustainable competitive advantage.

From this perspective, a company's performance is not analyzed in terms of its competitive position or the opportunities it can seize (Porterian approach to strategy). However, the path to competitiveness lies in the combination of the company's resources and skills, accumulated over time and space and exploited in several markets (diversification strategy).

The objective of this contribution is to examine the modalities of an unfinished business in terms of management tools and the repercussions on the implementation of strategic skills management as a reliable structure for building a sustainable competitive advantage based on long-term strategic assets.

Key words: skills management, instrumentation, human resources (HR), HR strategy, competence frameworks, competence map, competitive advantage.

Classification JEL: M12, M5, M53.

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Introduction:

Skills management becomes the strategic support that companies use wisely to build, mobilize, develop and capitalize on skills. This process cannot be exhaustive if it is not based on matching management instruments. This study emphasizes the ability of companies to move towards sustainable areas in terms of performance.

The instrumental approach to skills is intended to be a new logic of human resources management, as a proven organizational reality, which combines dynamics of action, modes of governance and objectives allocated to the skills creation process.

The strategic orientation on competitive advantage is being tested, the break with intersectoral models is reshaping the paths of competition, companies are working hard to maintain their skills and allow the latter to develop. In this perspective, competitive advantage is based on the intangible resources that each department of the company creates.

The objective of this article is twofold. On the one hand, we aim to decode the logic of management instruments, as a new skills management variable, and on the other hand, to place the analysis in a post-Porterian reading, where competitive advantage is obtained thanks to the synchronization of skills management instruments by trying to answer the following problem: can skills management instruments contribute to the creation of a lasting and sustainable competitive advantage?

The methodological approach is based on a dual analysis, starting from a literature review, we explored the hidden face of an instrumentalized management of skills by referring to three coherent tools which are training, to better consolidate and capitalize on skills. The benchmarks are used to evaluate. The skill cards are, moreover, strong tools for identifying and locating the required skills.

Secondly.....a field survey was carried out to determine the contribution of these tools in reality, we chose a local company that is a leader in its field of activity and known for its valuable practices in skills management.

I. Theoretical framework on skills management instruments

The study of management instruments is extremely important for the development of businesses. On the one hand, the instruments allow remodeling.... organizational capacities (workforce segmentation, development of benchmarks and implementation of coherent training programs). Furthermore, strategic management remains the priority of this instrumentalized approach, due to its role in determining strategic choices for the sustainability of companies.

1. Skills Management Instruments

The question of competence, as an organizational approach defines the conceptual perimeters

of an instrumentalized logic, the choice of instruments depends on a deep reflection on the links between the dimensions of competence (individual, collective, strategic and organizational competences).

Examining its links leads us to establish a logical choice ranging from an individualistic vision (skills maps) to a strategic vision (employee training) via a shared vision (skills frameworks). The Theoretical vision of the skills management instruments selected Now, we will offer a precise reading of the management tools that are used; namely training in companies, and skills frameworks. However, due to a lack of abundant literature, the study of skills maps will be exclusively empirical.

1.1. Training in the Company

Training is something fundamental in human resources. Thus, in the practices of skills management in companies, the evolution of working conditions is based on an adequacy between the skills of the individual and the requirements of the task to be accomplished, this dual relationship between work and worker is achieved through the implementation of a fair and enriching training program. (DIETRICH, 2006, p. 114)

Training plays an effective role in the development of skills to the extent that it focuses on the nature of the individual to be trained and on the content that should be provided to them, (IGALENS & ROGER , 2006, p. 126) The evolution in content pushes companies to review their training practices and conduct skills, this has given rise to a deliberate approach to skills management through new recommendations issued by the trainers themselves. The current challenges in terms of training are based on debates on the management instruments which make up this practice, training passports or validation of acquired experience, are considered today as the two tools which are the most discussed and the most effective to better manage training plans and contribute to skills development.

1.2. Training and Skills Development

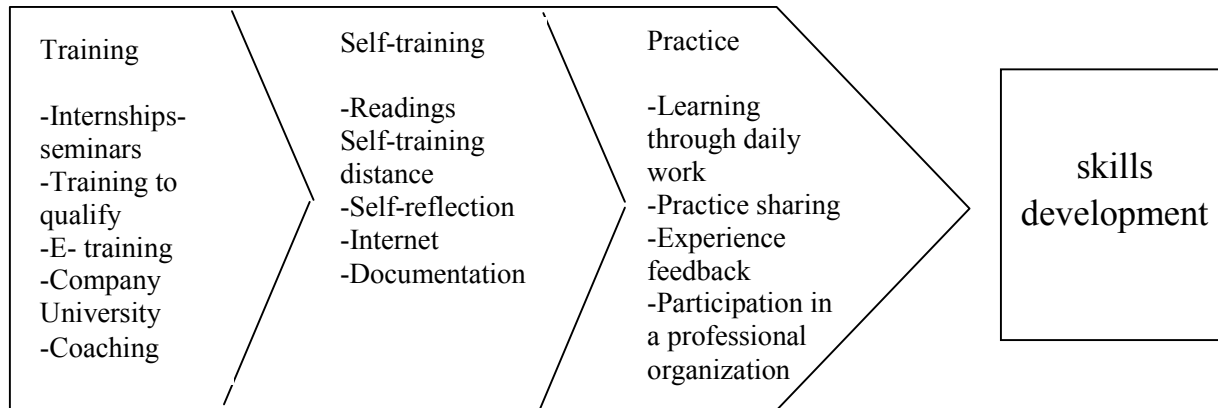
Training is considered an important practice in companies, the double link between training and skills is very intimate.

The first link relates to the creation of skills following training actions, while the second refers to the improvement of training plans using obtained skills (MEIGNANT, 2000, p. 17).

Training is not the main source of learning, but it is a very important basis for investment in skills development, which involves not only training, but also other methods linked to professional practices, as summarized in the following diagram:

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Figure.01: The skills development process



Source : SIMONET JEAN, From training to skills management, territorial, 2008 , P 52.

Skills development is fueled by a comprehensive training approach, such as theoretical aspects, empirical information, feedback, etc.

The knowledge obtained through the training process is subsequently applied to the company; the latter must engage in a process of consolidating skills by adapting them and using them in attractive professions. Employees base the skill advantage on the appropriation of training tools; this amounts to personalizing the roles of the training plans by offering the right content to the right person.

1.3. Professional and skills benchmarks

Skills frameworks seem to be the most discussed skills management instruments over the last twenty years. Their abilities to evaluate and identify skills needs make them strategic tools in the management box of managers.

Competency benchmarks are indispensable in skills management systems. Indeed, they become essential as soon as any skills management, whatever its supposed form and scale (Gilbert, Pigeyre, & Aubre, 2002, p. 89).

Work situations are now becoming learning, HR managers and their colleagues are responsible for writing and implementing a skills framework to manage the activities of employees and list their skills.

1.4. Obstacles to the development of the skills framework.

The skills framework is a methodical description of skills that are necessary to carry out an activity. It makes it possible to give each of the company’s skills a precise coding by explaining the nature of the skills that each job would need. The difficulties in developing benchmarks are

demonstrated by the increasing complexity in defining skills, as well as the vagueness that makes up the scope of skills; two situations can emerge from this analysis (DEJOUX, 2008) .

2. Links skills and competitive advantages, exploration of strategic determinants.

The links between business strategy and competence can be explained, if we indeed admit that strategy makes it possible to identify the paths and conditions of performance for the company, the question of the usefulness of portfolio of skills management for strategic thinking in turn raises three corollary analysis approaches.

2.1. The skills required

This model is basic in its configuration, the starting point is the implementation of a group strategy or competitive strategies, once these two strategies are formulated, the human resources function is asked to identify the skills required for these two strategic choices. In this context, the human resources department defines its own strategic plan (strategic human resources management) allowing it to ensure that the required skills are available at the right time when implementing the company's strategy. (LE BOULAIRE & RETOUR, 2006, p. 16)

2.2. Held Skills

This model starts from an obvious analysis of the heterogeneities of the resources held by competing companies, as consequences of intersectoral differences. According to this approach, diversity suggests that the identification (Quélin, 2000, p. 55) and the allocation of specific resources allow companies to build and establish their unique character and ensure sustainable development. The principles of analysis of the theory of resources and skills (LE BOULAIRE & RETOUR, 2006, p. 17) is based on a methodical process which starts from identification to the creation of rare resources through protection and exploitation, also called key skills, otherwise, the "core skills", to describe collective learning within companies, particularly in the coordination of expertise in production and integration of different technologies.

2.3. The Dual Process ...

According to the proponents of this vision, the links between strategy and skills are in reality explained by a double process of alignment and investment. The first process refers to aligning human resources with the HR needs resulting from the strategy, here the HR strategy is reactive because it arises from the variation of the strategy into required skills (top down). The second process emphasizes the capacities available to companies to invest in current resources to guarantee future strategies, (Barraud, Guillemin, & Kittel, 2004, p. 100) The HR strategy in this case is proactive, relying on the skills that are held. Therefore, the real strategy consists of short-term decisions aimed at aligning resources with the major strategic orientations, and of long-term decisions concerning investment in the HR capabilities of the organization.

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II. The implementation of an approach based on skills management instruments as a strategic determinant for the development of a competitive advantage

The empirical study concerns a case of a company in the electronics sector specializing in the manufacturing and marketing of electric motors and transformers, the analysis focuses on a field approach based on a set of semi-structured interviews that we conducted with the various executives of this company, from the beginning of September until mid-December of the year 2023.

1. Methodological Aspects of Information Collection

Empirical exploration requires an epistemological positioning, which we construct through the observation of the phenomena set out in the problem which is formulated in the general introduction.

2. The Epistemological Contribution of the Field Investigation

In our study, with regard to the formulation of our problem, a constructivist epistemological position seems more appropriate. Indeed, our problem focuses on the validation of a vision of instrumental skills management, as a new organizational paradigm for the development of a competitive advantage as well as the analysis of the transition from traditional management towards a new dynamic logic centered on skills.

3. The qualitative study and the unique case in field research

Our research is based on a qualitative approach, centered on a single case study. The collection of information was based on semi-structured interviews carried out with company managers. This survey aims to put into practice the instrumental approach to skills management, competitive advantages are transformed and skills become the key success factor to their definition. At the HR department, we defined the contours of our empirical study by confronting the experience of employees and managers who ensure the implementation of organizational performance management tools.

III. Interpretation and Discussion of the Survey Results

1. Implementation of Instrumental Skills Management

The process of implementing a reading grid for skills management instruments inevitably involves the adoption of a series of tools whose objective is to chart a trajectory for skills development with a view to building a competitive advantage.

2. Identifying skill cards

To ensure effective skills management within the Electro Industrie (E.I) company, it is imperative to create skills maps. These will be used to define the responsibilities of each employee and determine the required skills.

3. The data collection.

To create skills maps, it is essential to conduct interviews to understand the missions and activities of each employee. The person in charge of this task begins by discussing individually with managers to identify positions within the company. Skills cards are the common thread between the position and the worker, they serve as an impact to better identify suitable profiles. and implement them, this approach aims to create distinctive skills, which are the sources of a solid competitive advantage.

4. Writing Skills Cards

The skills maps are a document which determines the profiles of the skills to be acquired, as well as the organizational position that it must occupy. The skills map must first of all be strategic, because the responsibility for its implementation falls on the decision of the human resources director, in the Electro-Industrie company, the HR department is responsible for setting up a structure which ensures that the necessary skills are identified through a series of interviews with different employees in the different units and departments of the company. The skills cards created are then validated and defined as support structures for future recruitment and integration campaigns for new employees. Skills maps are thus considered strategic objectives in order to stand out from competitors. Employability and versatility are two relational skills that emerge from a clear definition of skills cards.

5. Skills Frameworks

Here, we have an effective tool for assessing skills at work, a tool that will highlight the matrix of required skills corresponding to the professional requirements of each profession:

6. Skills Frameworks and Skills Matrices

The skills matrix is a skills management tool which is inspired by the recommendations of skills frameworks. The objective is to better identify the skills by the structure which is dispatched for this purpose. Building a sustainable and defensible competitive advantage is conditioned by a thoughtful and sovereign skills matrix.

The Electro-Industries company is implementing a structural approach to identify the required skills to the execution of work situations, these are obtained thanks to the involvement of all stakeholders of the companies, within the HR department of the company Electro-Industries. A strategic determination is expressed through the consolidation of acquired knowledge and skills, and this involves the creation of organizational memories whose role is to convert the different skills and succeed in linking individual, collective, organizational and strategic skills.

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6.1. Competitive Advantage and Acquired Competence

Based on our interviews, we established a list of skills acquired by employees. Hierarchical position is decisive and informational asymmetries are vectors that slow down the development of certain professions. The establishment of a skills barometer was necessary to assess the skills acquired and to confirm that the advantage held is sustainable and therefore non-transferable.

Additionally, the business can potentially scale up later. After meeting each of the employees, the real skills matrix is finally archived, it is possible to establish the required skills matrix. This strategic perspective is in line with the recommendations of the top-down strategy that we mentioned above; the company builds its HR strategy by taking into account the skills already available.

6.2. Competitive Advantage and Required Skills

The required skills represent the cornerstone of the study on skills management instruments, the Electro-Industrie company has a control service which ensures the codification of skills after having verified its nature and dimension, a scale is put into practice whose objective is to succeed in connections between different skill levels.

Each skill area is then composed of several skills. Concerning the scale of competence, it must be relevant in order to precisely define the competence. It is best to start small and expand over the years. This is part of the strategic orientations of horizontal investment which recommends that the company invest in the areas it masters best to build its competitive advantage. This strategy brings together two advantages for the Electro-Industrie company, the first is purely functional, which raises awareness of future issues in terms of acquiring new skills, the second is purely practical because the company is required to invest more in development paths to maintain its competitive advantage. After having established these two matrices, it is now possible to compare them.

6.3. The Dual Skills and Training Process, for a lasting Competitive Advantage.

The two matrices, one representing actual skills and the other representing required skills, are then merged into one. This merger then makes it possible to compare them and analyze skill gaps, thus highlighting the differences and, therefore, the training needs. The matrix must be a practical tool, it makes it possible to clearly identify skills needs, which facilitates their development in a judicious manner.

6.4. Procedures for Identifying Training Actions

The drafting of administrative and organizational procedures is the guarantee of successful investment in the management of skills, the Electro-Industries company formalizes its training using a set of documents that

the HR department draws up in collaboration with the general management and the attached establishments in the training of the employees of this company.

First, the most obvious procedure for proving the initial training of employees is to ask the future employee to provide proof of their training and experience. They will provide proof of their training by providing a copy of their diplomas and proof of their experience by providing a copy of their work certificates.

Secondly, the training completed is formalized in structured files proving the ability of the Electro-Industrie company to capitalize on its training actions and use them in building competitive advantages.

Thirdly, a document is put into practice to measure the skill, thus creating its impact in the future professions of the company.

Conclusion:

This article aims to highlight a new dynamic of employment and skills development; this dynamic is based on a set of innovative and operational practices. The approach to skills management instruments is now established as a reference model in human resources management. At the end of this research, we focused on three tools which remain the most mentioned in the literature in human resources management and business strategy. These tools have the particularity of acting differently on the management of people at work by offering them the opportunities to develop their skills.

Skills cards replace traditional job descriptions and this creates a dematerialization of work content. The skills frameworks seem to become, over the years, the most discussed tools for the evaluation of acquired knowledge. They provide a sort of assurance to leaders through their ability to sort, to select and list the different skills, according to their interest and uses for companies. These benchmarks give us the possibility of identifying which skills for which professions, and consequently, determining the distinctive skills, in terms of which, sustainable competitive advantages are built.

Professional training remains the most important HR subsystem in skills development, thanks to its ability to implement adapted programs to allow different employees to have access to the skills that are necessary for their professional development. Skills-based training acts directly on employees' prior knowledge and, through thoughtful actions, has a broad ability to adapt this knowledge to new work requirements. Professional training brings together a set of practices aimed at enriching skills and giving managers flexibility in management as well as a broad and strategic vision of the skills available to the company.

In the case of the Electro-Industrie company, we have determined the need for the company to move towards a new, more flexible and adapted management mode in order to create an advantage, which is mainly obtained thanks to the specific resources at its disposal. This new orientation pushes this company to invest more in dynamic professions, such as new technologies, rare resources and in the validation of professional skills. These professions guarantee favorable competitive positioning

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and sustainable performance. The electro-industry company asserts itself as an example to follow in the use of management instruments allowing flexible and efficient management, despite the legal constraint which is inherent to the expression of skills in the public sector.

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