

Can the Division of Labor Be Re-Engineered to Advance Organizational Dynamism?

SAGE Open
April-June 2014: 1–6
© The Author(s) 2014
DOI: 10.1177/2158244014536404
sgo.sagepub.com


Mambo G. Mupepi¹

Abstract

The objective of this article is to illustrate how social constructs can be applied to afford a unique opportunity to effect change in varied environments. Technology can be re-configured to systematically chart practicality in organization. The division of labor is reclaimed to illustrate how explicit knowledge can be engineered in at least three ways: It can imply the utilization of tools to make ends meet; it can imply innovative thinking that promotes the development of techniques and methods based on a template that may augment increased productivity; and in the expanded workforce, authentic knowledge also can be described as highly structured skill-sets acquired from years of practice through continuous learning and improvement, and this resource can be usefully shared to advance productivity.

Keywords

organizational communication, human communication, communication studies, social sciences, economic development, economic science, industrial organization, management, general management, human resources management, human development, economics education, business administration, international business

Introduction

There are many change management methods that can be used to organize work because workplaces can be very dynamic and changing. This article argues that useful change becomes imminent when labor is divided and allowed to learn and develop its skillfulness. I developed the socially constructed competency model (SCCM) as an alternative change management technique (Mupepi, 2010). I maintain that the SCCM works well when the entire organization can come together for the common good. The SCCM makes it possible to engage the people in the business to create the knowledge, skills, and technology necessary to progress the mission. The success of specialists has been attributed to the co-construction of the knowledge and skillsets critical to the growth of the business. Figure 1 illustrates collaboration within the community of practice. It is the basis for creating shared understanding of the prerequisite knowledge and practices the entire Adam Smith enterprise requires to compete and accomplish goals effectively. This model allows the company to competently utilize available resources and to re-configure production to maximize output. Mupepi (2010) maintained that desirable change can be most effectively co-constructed by a selective group of people passionate about the enterprise. Such modification allows the people doing the work to learn what they need to do to make a difference. There is a dimension to the on-going debate about social construction that deserves closer attention. The features of

the SCCM co-construction appear more plausible than what can be sourced externally because the stakeholders are more motivated to participate in the design and grafting of plans that impact their work. The collaboration among other things can be contested to be the key to triumphant companies.

An Overview of a Selected Competences Literature

Phillipson (2012) suggests that Adam Smith's published book, titled *Wealth of Nations* 1776, as a criticism of Britain's commercial policies which misdirected the nation's energies, weakened its international relations and plunged it into rivalries with its European neighbors. Smith contested that Britain could have concentrated on producing capital goods and services in which it had huge comparative advantages. In Phillipson (2012), Smith sees the mistake Britain took in thinking that a nation's wealth lay in the gold and silver hoarded in Lombard Street. This article draws lessons from the division of labor to understand how a specialized workforce can increase the rate of production. The SCCM evolved

¹Grand Valley State University, Grand Rapids, MI, USA

Corresponding Author:

Mambo G. Mupepi, Grand Valley State University, 2715 Arbor Chase Drive, Grand Rapids, MI 49525, USA.
Email: mupepim@gvsu.edu



Figure 1. The socially constructed competency model.
Source. Adapted from Mupepi (2010).

from social construction. The division of labor by Adam Smith created a hypothetical “community of practice” that was focused on the job and in developing the knowledge and skills that were necessary to expand production. The SCCM accepts pragmatism as a worldview and this acceptance arises out of actions, experiences, situations, and consequences, rather than forerunners to strategy. The SCCM can allow the stakeholders to create the knowledge and practices required to progress their mission. Hernandez (2008) proposes that stewardship is the ethic that embodies the responsible planning and management of resources. Successful organizations are also shrewd at controlling costs. The concepts of stewardship can be applied to building sustainable organizations. It is argued that management can impressively design and implement organizations that can win by taking perspectives from all. Hernandez (2008) propounds that stewardship can be linked to triumphant enterprise. The SCCM can be applied as a technology to assess and evaluate what gives life to effective and efficient operations. It makes it possible for the firm to excellently cohere in determining what matters in the business.

Co-Constructing the Task

Collaboration can be priceless; it is the collection of healthy, high-performance teams working together for the greater good. Technology such as geographic information systems and other telecommunications tools have created a global environment, which has changed the shape of national, ethnic, and cultural boundaries and has made it possible for

corporations to hire people physically located at any place to do work for a company that could be situated in the United States or in any place. Another example associated with globalization is that of the manufacturing industry. Factories that are geographically located in countries where there are comparative operational advantages, such as Swaziland or Lesotho, could be contracted to manufacture apparel for international companies such as Wal-Mart retail stores. It could be argued that networking and collaboration among shareholders and national governments can be instrumental in creating sustainable jobs. Co-construction technology has made it possible for networking to be available to all stakeholders. Proponents of social construction such as Mupepi, Yim, Mupepi, and Mupepi (2011) argue that the collective approach to creating knowledge that can be utilized to advance organizational goals is behind most successful organizations.

Voyages of Discovery

Leading firms such as Microsoft have been at the forefront of research and development in many areas, including communications technologies, to advance work and to support biomedical researchers in quests to find cures for diseases such as cancer among others. Weins (2013) asserts that the Microsoft Corporation collaborates with industry leaders to find solutions to some of the world’s toughest problems. The company recently sponsored a voyage of discovery where it gathered some of the world’s top scientists in a bid to find solutions to some of the world’s problems. Weins argues that these collaboration efforts may produce the information that can be used by the company to design the software and hardware necessary to accomplish these goals.

Coming Together to Grow the Business

Lyotard (1984) argues that cybernetics has come to dominate society and economics since World War II, but since then technology has made companies more efficient and effective. The SCCM can make it possible for a firm to effectively cohere and create useful practices and for stakeholders to design new tools and equipment. This technology can allow a firm to think outside the box and come up with better ways to do business. Lyotard’s work is characterized by a persistent opposition to universal knowledge. Mupepi et al. (2011) suggest that the collaborative forums of a knowledge community can create what can be described as authentic knowledge. The entire organization can easily accept the work systems and practices developed by their knowledge community, a group of people within the business who meet regularly to create, diffuse, and distribute the knowledge required in effective organization. Knowledge teams, production committees, or knowledge communities can describe the worker and type of skills critical to organizational success. Mupepi and Mupepi (2013) consider explicit knowledge as necessary in

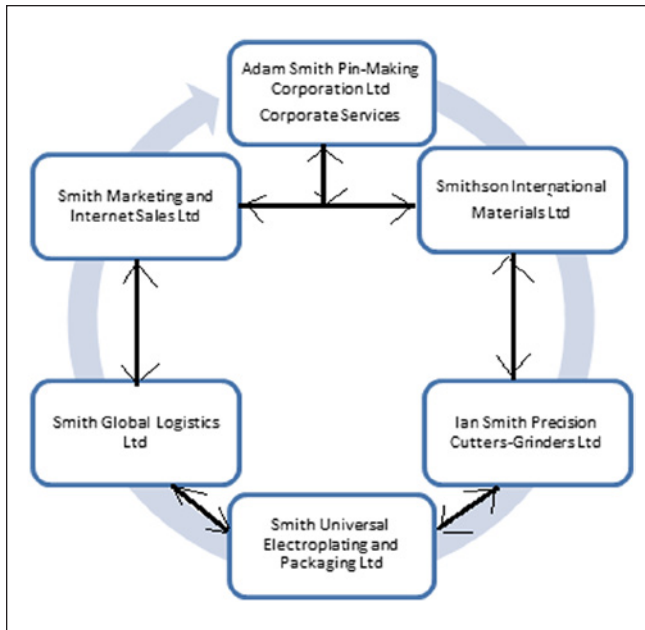


Figure 2. The hypothetical Adam Smith group of companies.
Source. Adapted from Mupepi (2010).

successful companies and as a strategy that can make it more competent in competition. Knowledge can be described as explicit or tacit. Explicit knowledge is self-conscious in that the knower is aware of the relevant state of knowledge. For example, the individual worker might know how to produce pins (see Figure 2) because he or she was trained to do so and can possess the step-by-step manufacturing procedures or the knowledge of how to produce pins that are valued by customers. In tacit knowing, the knowledge is implicit and hidden from self-consciousness. Knowledge can also be defined as a collection of discrete but related facts and information about a particular domain; it is acquired through education and training or accumulated through specific experiences. Much of the knowledge found in organizations is tacit, derived from experience. In Mupepi (2010), it is contested reflections that allow people in organization to articulate the business in relation to practice, skills, and the behavior required in effective organization. Experiences can be shared to create the knowledge required to progress organizational goals.

The Principles of the Division of Labor

In Buchan (2006), the assertion is made that Adam Smith's principles of the division of labor have been employed all over the world to build effective organizations. During Smith's days, a pin production could have been a one-person operation that did everything from taking orders to delivering the finished product. Smith suggests that dividing the pin production into defined operations, such as materials purchasing unit, guillotine wire cutters, pin-sharpeners, polishing and packaging, and so forth, would increase productivity. Dividing

the operations into manageable chunks allowed the workforce to create the knowledge and tools that enhanced the skillfulness required for specialization to happen (see Figure 2). This division of labor also enabled production to increase and the law of variable proportion to occur. This law is concerned with the effect of changes in the proportion of the factors of production used to produce pins, or anything for that matter. As the proportion of one specialist increases relative to all other inputs at some point there will be decreasing marginal returns from that input. Adding more specialists, holding all other inputs constant, will at some point cause the resulting increases in production to decrease or the marginal product of pins will fall, all things being equal. This production philosophy is applied in many successful organizations the world over.

Perfecting the Act: Advancing the Skillfulness

It has been proven by Adam Smith in his book *The Wealth of Nations* first published in 1774, that the division of labor will make it possible to increase productivity and make it possible for the specialist labor to earn increased wages (Figure 2). In this process, the company also gained economically. It is a win-win situation where the new specialist is able to practice his or her acts in return for more wages. Smith propounded that a nation is able to create more wealth by producing those goods and services in which it had comparative advantage. Smith's example of the pin factory in which the workforce was specialized allowed workers to develop the special skills necessary for the production of pins.

Enhancing Innovation

Among the inputs held constant is the level of technology used to produce pins. Smith contested that as each unit continued to learn and improve performance it also developed the necessary tools to advance production. Hamel and Prahalad (1990) suggest that a clear and shared understanding of how an industry such as pin manufacturing could be different in the future, and would define the core competences, new pin products, tools and technology and alliances necessary to ensure the effectiveness of the newly created specialists. Hamel and Prahalad (1990) propound that net income can be divided by the capital employed to determine the rate of return in a new business, such as the expanded Adam Smith Corporation (see Figure 2). The quantitative approach can be applied to boost productivity. In Mupepi (2010), Adam Smith envisioned increased ratio of output as each worker perfected his or her skills. Change management methods such as the SCCM can be deployed to determine the skillfulness required to avoid wasted time and efforts. Mupepi asserts that collaboration through the forums of knowledge communities can make it possible for the entire Adam Smith Corporation to determine what needs to be

changed making it possible to distinguish between efficiency and effectiveness. It is essential to make this differentiation because successful corporations are both efficient and effective. By drawing from the Adam Smith pin enterprise, the article illustrates how co-construction can be one of the best methods used to perfect the acts of different specialists. More wealth can be created by controlling operational costs.

Feelings and Moods

Moods establish the inner barometer of the mind and have a definite place in the SCCM structure. Andre (2012) suggests that emotional intelligence (EI) affects work output, including safety and quality. EI is composed of personal assertiveness, moods, and perceptions that enable people to succeed in life, including self-awareness, empathy, self-confidence, and self-control. Andre argues that EI influences the way customers are served. Customers who are often treated well tend to repeat their custom by returning for more. Those who are dissatisfied with their experiences tend to go elsewhere, especially in economic environments where there is competition, all things being the same. Proponents of EI such as Goleman (2006) and Gardner and Moran (2006) posited numerable types of intelligence. Goleman (1995) defined EI as the ability to identify, assess, and control the emotions of oneself, of others, and of groups. It can be divided into ability EI and trait EI. Ability EI is usually measured using maximum performance tests and has stronger relationships with traditional intelligence, whereas trait EI is usually measured using self-report questionnaires and has stronger relationships with personality. EI allows managers to view the emotions as useful sources of information that help one to make sense of and navigate the social environment of the organization. Gardner and Moran's notion of interpersonal intelligence was the ability to understand other people, what motivates them and how they work. Gardner asserts that there is also intrapersonal intelligence, which is the capacity to understand oneself and form a truthful position in relation to the world. Goleman (2006) asserts that two positions about EI have emerged. The first is whether EI is a skill developed and honed with practice or a personality characteristic. The second question pertains to how to measure EI. Goleman defines two methods in measuring EI. The first method has been referred to as the mixed approach and addresses EI as a personality characteristic. The second method is called the ability approach and measures EI like any other cognitive talent. In later research, Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (2008) define EI as the ability to carry out accurate reasoning about emotions and the ability to use emotions and emotional knowledge to enhance organizational perspectives.

EI in the SCCM

Chakraborty and Amity (2009) build upon Goleman (1995, 2006) and assert that cybernetics can be applied to provide

mathematical models for emotional dynamics to study the artificial control of emotion using music and videos and also to ascertain the interactions between emotion and logic from the perspectives of reasoning. In addition, Chakraborty and Amity group the emotions applying electroencephalogram signals to illustrate the scope of applicability of EI in several engineering systems such as human-machine interfaces, psychotherapy, and user assistance systems, and among many others. The SCCM provides the framework to create logical practices and artifacts that can be appreciated by all stakeholders something that affects the quality of the job. Mupepi, Tenkasi, Sorensen, and Mupepi (2013) contest that the platform of a knowledge community is critical in understanding EI. Emotions affect quality and productivity. Thus, understanding EI is critical in successful businesses.

Teams and Teamwork

Work teams are interdependent collections of individuals who share defined responsibilities for specific outcomes for their organization. Teams can be very useful at collaboration networking and best at forming what can be called a knowledge creation forum. Mupepi (in press) suggests that teams can have the capacity for collective responsibility. Through the group norms, theory members of a team can create their own rules and regulations to control the actions of each member. The group norms can be associated with work output or standard of performance. Mupepi asserts that teams can collaborate in a larger social system context and most of the times exist to achieve a shared goal. Teams can be empowered to design and implement their own tools and to re-configure technology to make their jobs an antecedent to productivity.

Learning From Experience

In his field theory, Lewin (1951) argued that collaboration could be the key to usefully define the environment in which the business operates. Lewin argued that the totality of co-existing facts could be drawn from experiential learning. In much later research, Mupepi and Mupepi (2013) propound that the collective experience of the firm can be critical in the identification of what gives life to the business. The past can be deconstructed to analyze past performance. Mupepi and Mupepi assert that useful lessons can be drawn from what was done well. At the same time, past mistakes can also be reviewed with a view of developing plans to avoid them in the future.

Applying the SCCM to Re-Invent the Business

Lewin (1951) suggested that behavior could be determined by the organization in totality to its environment. In his field theory, collaboration can be the key to usefully define the environment in which the business operates. Lewin argued

that the totality of co-existing facts could be drawn from experiential learning. In much later research, Mupepi and Mupepi (2013) propound that the collective experience of the firm can be critical in the identification of what gives life to the business. The past can be deconstructed to analyze past performance. Mupepi and Mupepi assert that useful lessons can be drawn from what was done well. At the same time, past mistakes can also be reviewed with a view of developing plans to avoid them in the future. The SCCM allows the useful organizational design to happen. It permits the organization to put into context continuous learning and improvement to progress production and organizational effectiveness. It makes it possible to design a business that is interdependent with the environment in which it operates. There is a need then to evaluate output and create the knowledge to close skills deficiencies and to re-tool where necessary (see Figure 2). Mupepi (2009) suggests that allotting labor makes it possible for the would-be specialist to pursue the things he or she is most passionate about. It also opens up opportunities to grade jobs and for organizational practitioners to study the competences associated with the divided labor. The division of labor had ripple effects leading to innovation and the inventions of equipment such as “electroplating or guillotine pin-sharpeners.” In Smith’s time, it gave the pin makers the chance to learn on the job, and go on learning and improving, and it led to increased productivity and for companies during that period to expand markets.

Conclusion

The debate about effective organizational change methods continues unabated. The SCCM is an alternative strategy which can be applied to measure and assess the distribution of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and technology. It can be contested that the SCCM can be applied to understand the division of labor, especially in developing the skill-sets necessary in making the difference. The Adam Smith division of labor is an effective paradigm to useful organization and continues to influence efficacies in positive firms the world over. EI is inherent in all organization. Attitudes are part of EI, and these can be assessed and evaluated to measure the positivity or negativity and distribution of what could be sources of dynamism or lethargy to allow the development and implementation of appropriate strategy. The SCCM can be applied to measure and assess the distribution of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and technology. Organizational dynamism requires close cohesion among stakeholders. The competences that are drawn using the SCCM support the understanding of obstacles that inhibit people from realizing their development goals.

In conclusion, proficiency models, particularly those concerned with organizational capabilities, are relatively ineffective when developed outside the organization, while only those developed by the stakeholders tend to produce authentic knowledge through the collaboration of knowledge communities.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article.

References

- Andre, C. (2012). *Feelings and moods*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- Buchan, James (2006). *The authentic Adam Smith*. First American Edition. New York: Atlas Books
- Chakraborty, A., & Amit, K. (2009). Emotional intelligence: A cybernetics approach. In K. Janusz (Series Ed.), *Studies in Computational Intelligence, Vol. 234*. ISBN: 978-3-540-68606-4 (Print) 978-3-540-68609-5 (Online)
- Gardner, H., & Moran, S. (2006). The science of multiple intelligences theory: A Response to Lynn Waterhouse. *Educational Psychologist, 41*, (227-232)
- Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional intelligence*. London, England: Harvard Business Press
- Goleman, D. (2006). *Working with emotional intelligence* (10th anniversary hardcover ed.) New York, NY: Bantam Books.
- Hernandez, M. (2008). Promoting stewardship behavior in organizations: A leadership model. *Journal of Business Ethics, 80*, 121-128.
- Lewin, K. (1951). *Field theory in social science: Selected theoretical papers* (D. Cartwright, Ed.), New York, NY: Harper & Row.
- Lyotard, J.-F. (1984). *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Mayer, J. D., Salovey, P., & Caruso, D. R. (2008). Emotional intelligence: New ability or eclectic traits? *American Psychologist, 63*, 503-517.
- Mupepi, M. G. (2009). The nature of a schematic description of a socially constructed organizational competency model (CCM). *International Journal of Collaborative Enterprise, 1*(2), 224-240.
- Mupepi, M. G. (2010). Appreciating social structures: A strategy for advancing the efficiency and effectiveness loci in organization. *International Journal of Education Economics and Development, 1*(4), 306-319.
- Mupepi, M. G. (2014). *Can human and technical resources be in sync to advance resourceful inclusive enterprise*. In Fawzy Soliman (Ed) *Learning Models for Innovation in Organizations*. Hershey, PA; IGI Global ISBN13: 9781466648845 Pp. 173-191
- Mupepi, M. G., & Mupepi, S. C. (2013). Appreciating rapid technology integration in creating value in enterprises. In T. Torres-Coronas & M. A. Vidal-Blasco (Eds.), *Value creation through social enterprise*. Hershey, PA: IGI Global.Pp44-66
- Mupepi, M. G., Tenkasi, R. V., Sorensen, P. F., Jr., & Mupepi, S. C. (2013). Creating high impact organizations. In J. Vogelsang PhD (Editor), Maya Townsend(Editor), Matt Minahan(Editor), David Jamieson(Editor), Judy Vogel(Editor), Annie Viets(Editor), Cathy Royal(Editor), Lynne Valek(Editor) *Handbook for strategic human resources*. New York, NY: American Management Association.Pp624-631

- Mupepi, M. G., Yim, J. Y., Mupepi, S. C., & Mupepi, K. B. (2011). Can a knowledge community situated in an African village create and advance human rights practices beyond love thy neighbor principle? *International Journal of Knowledge and Learning*, 7, 233-252.
- Prahalad, C.K.; Hamel, Gary (1990). "Core Competence of the Corporation". Harvard Business Review May 1990
- Phillipson, N. (2012). *Adam Smith: An enlightened life*. New Haven, CT Yale University Press.
- Weins, Steve (Guest Editor) (2013). Collaboration and Social Alchemy on the High Seas. Accessed 05/10/14 http://blogs.technet.com/b/microsoft_blog/archive/2013/02/26/collaboration-and-social-alchemy-on-the-high-seas.aspx

Author Biography

Dr. Mambo G. Mupepi is associated with Grand Valley State University and Saint Joseph College where he is a Professor in African and Organizational Studies. Dr. Mupepi earned his PhD in Organizational Change from Benedictine University, Master's degree in Technology and Education from Eastern Michigan University and undergraduate education in Business Administration from the University of Wales, Newport. He is President of Grand Change Inc and Program Director of the Zimbabwe Diaspora Network in North America. Mambo can be reached by email mupepim@gvsu.edu