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Re-Imagining Talent Experience in Post Merger & Acquisition

(A case study of Accenture and YSC Consulting Acquisition)

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ABSTRACT:

Merger and Acquisition (M&A) are ways for companies to grow faster than organic business growth and this can be a channel for companies to also strengthen their global market position and increase competitiveness. The aftermath of mergers and acquisitions reveals complex issues due to unsuccessful strategies, resulting in less-than-optimal post-M&A integration. A major challenge encountered in mergers and acquisitions is the process of integration and change management which often involve disparate organizational structures, systems, cultures, and processes among the entities involved. Mergers and acquisitions can trigger concerns among employees regarding ambiguity and changes, prompting some of the employees to explore alternative employment opportunities. Almost every company has felt the impact of the great resignation as a large number of employees are looking for different opportunities almost immediately after a successful acquisition. This study explores the scope of merger and acquisition, the importance of managing talent experience during and after the process, and highlights the importance of leadership in overseeing unifying integration strategies, promoting alignment of cultures, and cultivating an atmosphere of trust and teamwork. Considering the evolving trends in the future of work, this study also stresses the need for companies to focus on talent-focused strategies and flexible leadership tactics in their post-merger and acquisition action plans. The study lastly recommends disruptive and practical approaches for companies looking to improve post-merger integration success to create and maintain a dynamic of real change in the organization.

Keywords: *Mergers & Acquisition; Change Management, Integration, Talent Experience.*

BACKGROUND:

The acquisition process involving Accenture and YSC Consulting is a significant example in the field of mergers and acquisitions. Accenture, a top consulting company, initiated this acquisition process to strengthen its expertise in leadership evaluation and growth by acquiring YSC Consulting, a respected firm in leadership consulting. Nevertheless, despite the positive start and alignment of strategies, the acquisition ended up being partially unfavorable at the first instance. The result of the acquisition process between Accenture and YSC Consulting was marked by a lack of success, mainly due to the high number of YSC staff quitting their roles after the acquisition. Despite the strategic logic for the acquisition and the synergy between the two organizations' products, the integration effort failed in keeping important employees, resulting in a depletion of crucial skills and human competence. This attrition not only weakened the expected synergies and value creation but also questioned the efficiency of the integration strategy and talent experience management post-acquisition. Multiple reasons led to the collapse of the Accenture/YSC Consulting acquisition, with insufficient integration, lack of robust change and culture management, and talent experience being the main factors that led to obstacles like cultural discrepancies, divisional barriers, and communication issues, impeding teamwork and unity between the merged entities. The lack of focus on managing employee experience after the acquisition, such as retention plans and career advancement options for YSC staff, worsened attrition rates and decreased employee morale and engagement. Overall, the acquisition of YSC Consulting by Accenture serves as an eye opener as regards the significance of successful integration and talent experience management in the scope of mergers and acquisitions.

THE SCOPE OF MERGERS AND ACQUISITION:

Mergers and acquisitions are popular corporate restructuring activities that aim to enhance a company's current position and meet its strategic goals. A company's predetermined strategic aims and targets could involve entering new markets to secure a competitive edge, achieve cost efficiency, and integrate cutting-edge technologies (Schuler & Jackson, 2001). The market offers numerous SWOT mechanisms to assess potential new product offerings, alongside opportunity assessment templates that evaluate projects based on business objectives, customer impact, strategic potential, and competitive urgency (Doug, 2017). One of the strategies that companies use to accelerate their growth beyond organic business growth is through mergers and Acquisitions which can help companies enhance their global market position and boost competitiveness (Sui et al, 2016). There are numerous advantages for companies engaging in merger and acquisition activities, such as gaining immediate cash flow, accessing convenient funding, acquiring skilled staff, attaining a customer base rapidly, acquiring a well-established operational and administrative structure, decreasing the likelihood of business failure, expediting entry into new markets, and mitigating business risks (Hariyani & Yusticia, 2011). Either merger or acquisition can be done either domestically or internationally, either by purchasing a minority stake or acquiring full control of management (Malone & Zicheng, 2008). A merger or acquisition is a significant business move that includes substantial investment and comes with risks, particularly due to the volatility of commodity prices in the market. Before an acquisition is completed, the purchaser must conduct due diligence activities. There exist two categories of acquisitions depending on the reasons behind mergers and acquisitions, which are strategic and financial (Hariyani & Yusticia, 2011). A strategic merger or acquisition is typically a lasting investment involving a business that remains connected or integrated with its shareholders. Three common types of Mergers and acquisitions are vertical integration, horizontal integration, and conglomerate takeovers (Aluko & Amidu, 2005).

Mergers and acquisitions are a strategic choice in corporate restructuring activities that offer companies increased profitability, market dominance, and competitiveness to compete in the global market, which is increasingly borderless.

Nonetheless, Mergers and acquisitions can cause significant disturbances to the current networks of relationships that make up operational units in a company. As organizations navigate through various work options, achieving alignment of purpose and mission becomes progressively more difficult (Ravin, 2019). Therefore, decision-making structures become fragmented; work teams are either reorganized, eliminated, or reshaped (Simonet & Tett, 2012). Without the effective implementation of change and talent experience management strategies to handle disruptions, systems, and human stakeholders such as the workforce during the various phases of mergers and acquisition, employee motivation dwindles, loyalty decreases, and performance and profitability suffer in the long run (Hatch 2010).

DEFINITIONS OF MERGERS AND ACQUISITIONS:

There are various definitions of mergers and acquisitions. A merger happens when a company or multiple companies combine with another company, causing the original company to no longer exist. An acquisition involves transferring ownership of shares in a company to another company, where the buyer purchases the shares or assets of the company. A merger is defined as combining two or more companies, regardless of their size, into a single company. Investors who choose to do so have a higher probability of maintaining the acquired company's branding (Scott, 2012). After a merger, the acquired companies will no longer function autonomously (Depamphilis, 2018). An acquisition on the other hand also involves purchasing either the assets or shares of a company, which could encompass all or only a portion of the shares, or a specific business division. A slightly varied explanation is that a merger is the coming together of two or more companies where each retains an equal number of shares and a defined role within the new entity (Snow, 2011). An acquisition is when one company purchases another company, a business division, or the assets of another company.

Mergers and acquisitions are components of the corporate restructuring process, involving either forward or backward integration (Depamphilis, 2018). If a company primarily deals with providing raw materials, operates in the field, and also aims to manage the distribution channels and end products, it is engaging in forward integration. If the company's primary focus is on sales or marketing, and it focuses on developing the final product and trying to control the resources in the earlier stages of production, then it is engaging in backward integration. Mergers and acquisitions are a strategy for growing companies with strong financial resources and the ability to take on debt. Through this process, companies benefit from obtaining the most up-to-date knowledge, systems, and technology. Additionally, they gain access to a skilled management team and natural resources, allowing them to participate in business restructuring, ultimately leading to a competitive advantage for the company performing the

mergers and acquisitions process (Akram & Shadid, 2016). If a firm conducts mergers and acquisitions, especially with companies that are financially stronger than others, it will likely establish a new, quicker, and larger economic, social, and cultural landscape compared to its rivals, ultimately offering significant benefits to investors involved in merger and acquisition deals (Fatih & Cagle, 2015). In the beginning, merger and acquisition transactions primarily targeted assets with low value or assets facing challenges, leading to opportunities for improvement and increased profits once acquired by investors. However, over the decades, the scope has become essential for businesses to consolidate and access markets and products in other regions (Downey, 2008).

PROS AND CONS OF MERGERS AND ACQUISITIONS:

Typically, mergers and acquisitions are motivated by different factors such as the fact that the company may lack the necessary resources to expand, particularly in regulated markets, and cannot venture into new markets itself. The company believes it has reached a turning point in its business growth and must pursue business development through mergers and acquisitions. There is also the absence of capital access or the presence of a fresh rivalry. There are numerous explanations for organizations acquiring other organizations. For instance, entering and expanding into a specific market area, enhancing existing products by combining complementary product portfolios; and integrating into new possible growth or cost-effective technologies and market segments vertically or horizontally. Multiple scholars have determined that mergers and acquisitions should result in enhanced performance for the merged companies, leading to a competitive edge for the firms (Sinclair & Keller, 2017). The partnership between the merged entities is expected to encourage engagement to enhance their competitive standing and lead to successful outcomes. For instance, to enhance its current products, Facebook concentrated on locating a preexisting partner in the same market through combining complementary product portfolios, such as WhatsApp. Analysts at Facebook spent

over six months studying the potential of WhatsApp, examining its direction and compatibility, before finalizing the purchase in 2014. The merger was entirely effective based on the initial objectives of the agreement (Galpin & Herndon, 2014). In general, the results of operational mergers and acquisitions have been somewhat lacking in success. Recent studies show that typically more than 60% of mergers and acquisitions do not achieve the desired results for diverse reasons (Krug, Wright, & Kroll, 2014).

However, acquiring managers and consultants often face the challenge of navigating the transformation and merging of organizational dynamics and cultures when bringing together two distinct entities. It is also argued that the level of success in mergers and acquisitions will depend on preparedness, thorough planning, integration processes, decision-making, problem-solving strategies undertaken by leaders, and meticulous execution (Blake & Mouton, 1984). Not meeting this requirement will not only harm anticipated competitive benefits but also cause morale distress for the employees and managers of both companies. Even though mergers and acquisitions have the potential to generate significant benefits across various aspects of business, they may become challenging to execute smoothly and can begin to pose a burden for the companies. In certain situations, desired synergies are not attained, and the merger will not meet its goals. Since mergers and acquisitions are typically intricate and lengthy processes, issues may arise in various ways and at different phases. Evaluating the success of mergers and acquisitions can be challenging, as the benefits sought from them may not be realized until several years after the merger. Due to its complex and multidimensional nature, mergers and acquisitions often lead to unexpected changes at the micro and macro levels of the new entity. These changes can either be favorable or unfavorable among employees. It is typical for certain goals to be met and values to be generated, while still causing negative impacts on other aspects due to consolidation and integration (Fiorentino & Garzella, 2015). Merger and acquisition

processes can also be quite costly, and it may take a significant amount of time for synergies to be created to offset these expenses.

IMPLICATION OF MERGERS AND ACQUISITIONS ON TALENT EXPERIENCE:

Human capital is crucial as it offers the basis for strategic rejuvenation and creativity in many organizations. In mergers and acquisitions, human resources serve as the key factor in generating profits and establishing a competitive edge (Barbaroux, 2011). Mergers and acquisitions happen to improve the capacity of human capital, which is essential for driving profit, market, and product expansion. Some organizations that have gone through mergers and acquisitions tend to have higher levels of human capital, successful integration of change, and improved overall performance hence, regarding change management in mergers and acquisitions, most successful companies structured their workforce in a methodical way that did not interrupt the business model or operational functions. As previously stated, organizational change can elicit both favorable and unfavorable reactions among employees. The success rate of integration in mergers is determined by how well the human capital is managed by change management leaders (Kotter, 2002). Blending corporate cultures and human capital policies requires careful assessment and potential updates. Neglecting it can have consequences in the form of a boomerang effect. Most venture capitalists and acquisition managers pay little attention to the management of talent experience during mergers and, hence suffer the consequences of such neglect. Some of the effects revolve around downsizing, outsourcing, and remuneration disharmony.

However, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding regarding the involvement of the corporate human resources function in multinational corporations when it comes to global talent management (Farndale, & Sparrow, 2010). Three factors play a role in the decision-making process relating to talent experience: the cultural and institutional gap between the potential talent pool member's location and the decision-makers, the similarity between the individual and the decision-makers, and the individual's position within the network (Makela, Bjorkman, & Ehrnrooth, 2010). The main driver of mergers and acquisitions is shifting toward

talent acquisition, surpassing traditional factors like market power, channel control, risk reduction, and cost savings in different types of mergers and acquisitions. No matter the location of cross-border transactions of mergers and acquisitions, global talent management is now a key concern during the integration process (Schuler & Jackson, 2001). Talent management should prioritize building a talent pool of top-performing individuals with high potential to fill critical roles that can impact an organization's competitive advantage. Employees may go through a turbulent phase after a merger or acquisition, resulting in them quitting due to uncertainty, ultimately diminishing the value of the merged company (Schuler, 2004). Previous research has indicated that the prolonged lack of stability in executive teams could be a significant factor leading to the failure of mergers (Hambrick & Cannella, 1993). Cultural conflicts in post-merger integration frequently led to higher levels of instability among the top management team. Regarding the effect on interpersonal or social traits, Mergers and acquisitions usually cause employees to feel unsure and anxious, as they worry about their job stability, alterations in their job duties, and possible disturbances to their workplace as employees could feel more stressed and less satisfied with their job when going through organizational changes, potentially affecting their talent experience negatively (Marks & Mirvis, 2011). As regards cultural integration, ensuring the successful merging of company cultures is crucial for creating a favorable employee experience after a merger or acquisition. There is a significance in matching the values, norms, and behaviors of both organizations to encourage teamwork, trust, and involvement from staff members. Neglecting cultural differences and failing to incorporate diverse viewpoints can result in disagreement, opposition to change, and eventually, the loss of valuable employees. Implementing a robust system for collecting metrics on new culture or culture performance post-merger enables proactive identification of potential challenges. Fostering open dialogues between innovation teams, business unit leaders, and the executive suite facilitates effective change and culture

management (Scott, 2021). Mergers and acquisitions can bring about obstacles as well as possibilities for growing talent and advancing in one's career. Although the merged organization might present fresh chances for development and education, workers could encounter obstacles like shifts in hierarchy or rivalry for scarce resources (Cascio, 2018). Organizations should focus on talent management strategies that promote career growth, offer clear progression opportunities, and acknowledge and incentivize employees for their efforts.

THE ROLES OF LEADERSHIP IN MERGERS AND ACQUISITIONS:

Adaptive leadership is a critical managerial skill that leads to short- and long-term success during mergers and acquisitions. Through this mindset, leaders can manage decision-making skills and uncertainty to achieve a better strategic outcome. Leadership focuses on crucial roles and has a significant impact on the performance and economic outcomes of the post-acquisition. In the pursuit of any sustainable competitive advantage, organizations must carefully identify their unique capabilities, set strategies to manage these capabilities effectively, and lastly, an active involvement of the senior leadership team is essential to ensure harnessing these organizational capabilities for enduring competitive edge (Scott, 2024). Having strong leadership is crucial for promoting team engagement, dedication, and cooperation, leading to better results in tasks and projects. Leadership plays a vital role in establishing a workplace culture that emphasizes the significance of collaboration among different departments, building trust, reducing stress, boosting morale, improving relationships, and cultivating a sense of responsibility. Effective leadership has a beneficial effect on the mergers and acquisitions process. Business leaders can leverage their leadership skills and techniques to effectively carry out post-acquisition processes to enhance anticipated results. There are diverse roles of leadership in mergers and acquisitions.

Firstly, communication is the foremost important role of leaders during the process of mergers and acquisitions. The possible reasons for failure and success in mergers and acquisitions are aligned with the presence or absence of effective communication (Friedman, 2016). Effective communication along with strong leadership can enhance employee motivation and aid in the success of integration initiatives. During the merger and acquisition process, leaders at all operational, technical, and functional levels of the company must communicate excessively with other leadership teams and their employees to ensure transparency and minimize uncertainty. Effective communication enhances the credibility of the entire leadership team,

guarantees employees have a clear sense of direction and establishes important checkpoints for all. Employees are driven when they have a clear understanding of how their tasks contribute to the company's overall success strategy. Hence, micro and macro-scale communication needs to happen often and must be effective to ensure a successful process of merger or acquisition.

Secondly, ensuring a positive talent experience during integration is important, and leaders can employ diverse strategies to achieve this goal efficiently. By validating the overall value needed for the portfolio and assessing existing projects based on alignment with strategic priorities, leaders can align talent initiatives with organizational goals, fostering employee satisfaction and loyalty. Reallocating resources to support integration efforts and addressing talent gaps also enhances talent development and growth opportunities, ultimately fostering a conducive environment for employees during the merger and acquisition integration process.

The third role of leadership is to establish and promote the culture. During the period of the merger and acquisition integration process, the leader must establish a culture that welcomes uncertainty and promotes positivity. Communication, transparency, positive intent, and understanding of impact are necessary. The culture and structure need to be consistent and in harmony with the company's original implementation strategy. Creating a culture that promotes flexibility is crucial. The growth mindset needs to be embraced by all employees, from top executives down to the lowest rank, as adaptability is essential for success in challenging situations. Some of the ways leaders can enhance their organization's culture are by finding the deficiencies in culture, individuals, and the organization's framework necessary for fostering flexibility; For leaders, being open to change as an individual is the quickest route to success in technology, procedures, and interpersonal relationships; and motivating employees to accept change. When dealing with resistance to change, leaders must present an attractive vision of change along with a vision of what will remain consistent.

One of the important roles of Leaders is to anchor decision-making and problem-solving processes for mergers and acquisitions because their strategic decisions can greatly influence the result of the process, especially the integration phase. Successful leaders in mergers and acquisitions show a blend of analytical abilities and intuition, enabling them to evaluate intricate scenarios and make prompt, well-informed choices (Marks, Mirvis, & Hackett, 2018). Leaders can call for a comprehensive SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis to assess the internal capabilities and external factors influencing the problem or decision, helping to prioritize actions, mitigate risks, and make decisions. Presenting data and analysis results visually through charts, graphs, and dashboards facilitates understanding, communication, and decision-making between the leaders and relevant stakeholders (Gilbert, 2010). Another valuable framework is the decision matrix, where different alternatives are evaluated against key criteria. Assigning weights to these criteria and scoring each option helps leaders identify the optimal choice with the greatest overall benefit. Other notable frameworks for decision-making undertaken by leaders during the post-integration phase are majority rule, minority rule, or consensus rule. The decision-making and problem-solving processes are tailored to the organization's structure, ensuring that decision authority, information flow, and accountability align with the established hierarchy and reporting lines. Leadership styles also impact the approach to decision-making and problem-solving, with leaders fostering environments that encourage participation, collaboration, and innovation (Zollo & Meier, 2008). Leaders must manage cultural differences and internal operations within the organization to ensure that decisions align with the primary goals of the merger or acquisition (Napier, 2011).

In managing the integration phase, leaders undertake a certain framework for problem-solving and decision-making that delineates two distinct approaches: the Hierarchical approach and the Formal and Informal approach. The Hierarchical approach entails maneuvering decisions

through the structured layers of the organizational hierarchy, facilitating the effective resolution of strategic, tactical, and operational issues within the established framework. In contrast, the Formal and Informal approach covers a more adaptive and collaborative methodology. This approach integrates both formal processes and informal collaboration to manage creativity and responsiveness in decision-making, essential for navigating the intricate challenges inherent in integration.

Additionally, Authority plays a crucial role in leadership during mergers and acquisitions, enabling leaders to lead strategic efforts and promote organizational alignment. Leaders who have a well-defined vision and use assertive communication are more effective in gaining authority and getting stakeholders on board with merger and acquisition goals. There is also a significance in proficiently assigning authority in integration efforts, enabling leaders to utilize the skills of functional teams while still retaining control. Leaders can promote accountability and ownership among employees by using their authority effectively, which in turn can speed up the integration process (Appelbaum et al., 2000).

Leaders also spearhead the introduction and use of digital transformation, Artificial Intelligence, technology, and data analysis to navigate change and culture management while preserving talent and preventing layoffs. Platforms such as Glint and Culture Amp offer real-time feedback and sentiment analysis, facilitating prompt responses to employee concerns. AI-driven talent management systems like Workday and SAP SuccessFactors streamline human resources processes and identify skill gaps for smoother integration. The focus of leaders should never just be technology but also talent, operating strategy, problem-solving, data, and scale and adoption (McKinsey, 2024). Data analytics tools such as Tableau and Power BI provide insights into performance, guiding talent retention strategies. Digital communication platforms like Microsoft Teams and Slack foster cross-functional collaboration, bridging

cultural gaps. Technology and data analytics tools are also leveraged to optimize resource utilization, enhance decision-making capabilities, and support strategic choices that align with organizational goals and objectives. A point to note is that Innovation is paramount hence investing in forward-thinking strategies like robotics and AI (Cathie, 2022) not only drives organizational growth but also enhances employee engagement by providing opportunities to work with cutting-edge technologies.

Furthermore, leaders are essential for guiding organizational change in mergers and acquisitions, as they are responsible for motivating and rallying employees to adapt to new work practices. Effective leaders of change in mergers and acquisitions demonstrate a blend of vision, charisma, and determination, allowing them to conquer opposition and deal with ambiguity efficiently (Kotter, 1995). Leaders can generate a feeling of necessity and dedication among employees by expressing a convincing future vision and explaining the reason for the change. Additionally, leaders who engage employees in the change process and offer assistance and resources for skill enhancement are better positioned to maintain momentum and accomplish lasting success (Beer & Nohria, 2000). Leaders can also inspire commitment and promote a shared sense of purpose by conveying an engaging vision for the future and ensuring organizational goals match individual aspirations (Kotter & Cohen, 2002). Leaders need to focus on transparency and clear communication during the process of change, by offering consistent updates and seeking input to address issues and establish trust as successful change leaders utilize their networks and influence to address resistance and promote acceptance at every level of the organization.

LEADERSHIP AND CHANGE MANAGEMENT IN MERGERS AND ACQUISITIONS:

Navigating change in cross-cultural acquisitions is the most challenging task faced by managers and organizational leaders (Michela & Burke, 2009). In organizational acquisitions and change management, there are no guarantees, and certainty is not guaranteed (Elrod II and Tippet, 2010). The challenge managers encounter when starting change management in mergers and acquisitions lies in engaging employees. Cultural change management in merging organizations happens when employees realize that the performance and loyalty they were accustomed to have shifted suddenly. Generally, this is seen as a challenge to the company's values, culture, and organizational norms. Consequently, integrations result in employees feeling defensive due to heightened levels of mistrust within the organization, and even experiencing culture shock (Kazík, 2012). Socialization has a major impact on the organizational cultures at various levels. Factors like loyalty, information security, secrecy, accessibility, and accountability within the organizational culture are strongly associated with successful change transitions during mergers and acquisitions (Andrews et al, 2008). Other factors within organizational culture that impact change management in mergers and acquisitions comprise organizational leadership, robust decision-making, problem-solving strategies, organizational politics, and organizational learning.

To analyze the impacts of change management in mergers and acquisitions, leaders need to recognize that their leadership approach is closely linked to organizational change processes. Resistance towards change or the implementation of new technology could be due to the leadership approach being used. Skilled leaders recognize this element of organizational culture and adapt their approach when necessary to make transitions smoother and more appealing. Successful cultural change can also be credited to charismatic interventions by leaders who inspire others to support a successful transition. To lead the staff toward change,

leaders need to cultivate trust and belief in them (Weber, 1996). Similarly, leadership in mergers and acquisitions should focus on inspiring individuals to embrace the desired changes. Leaders in mergers and acquisitions can affect the mindset of organizational members by implementing a series of strategic actions that are within the organization's capability to manage the change.

THE FUTURE OF WORK:

The future of work is closely tied to talent experience, especially in the scope of mergers and acquisitions, as organizations adapt to the changing landscape of employment and organizational transitions. Before the phase of mergers and acquisitions, talent experience is impacted by elements like job stability, chances for career growth, and company culture. Employees view their current work environment as having a big effect on their readiness to participate in the process (Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007). Hence, companies have to focus on talent management strategies that promote a positive employee experience, such as open communication, career growth chances, and acknowledgment initiatives (Schein, 2004).

During the mergers and acquisitions phase, employees may experience uncertainty, anxiety, and potential changes to their roles and responsibilities. There is also an emphasis on the difficulties of maintaining employee morale and productivity during integration processes (Buono et al, 2001). Organizations need to actively deal with employee issues and offer support systems to reduce resistance to change and sustain levels of engagement (Appelbaum et al., 2000). Leaders have a crucial function in leading employees during the transition phase, offering an understanding of the strategic reasoning behind the merger and acquisitions deal and expressing a common vision for what lies ahead (Kotter, 1996).

In the post-merger or acquisition phase, the quality of talent experience is impacted by how well integration is executed and the organization's capacity to foster a cohesive and welcoming work environment. Achieving successful integration involves an emphasis on cultural alignment, communication, and employee engagement (Marks & Mirvis, 2011). It is recommended that organizations invest in programs that support collaboration among different operational and functional levels, acknowledge and rejoice in diversity, and nurture a feeling of belonging among their staff (Schuler et al., 2002). Furthermore, organizations need to offer

continuous assistance and resources for employee growth and advancement so that employees are encouraged to participate in the success of the company post-mergers and acquisitions.

THE FUTURE OF WORK POST COVID 19:

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about significant changes in the world of work across multiple dimensions, including sustainability, the environment, technology, mergers, and acquisitions (M&A), and talent experience.

The pandemic has led organizations to re-evaluate their environmental footprint and sustainability strategies. As remote work becomes more common, companies have noticed decreases in carbon emissions caused by commuting and office-related tasks (Gensler, 2020). The crisis has highlighted the link between human and planetary well-being, resulting in a greater focus on sustainability efforts that tackle environmental issues and encourage corporate social responsibility (McKinsey, 2021). Organizations are placing more importance on efforts that align with sustainable development objectives and minimize their impact on the environment, such as adopting energy-saving practices and implementing strategies to lower waste.

The pandemic has also sped up the use of digital technologies and automation in the workplace. Companies have put money into technologies like AI, robotics, and data analytics to help with working from home, improve how efficiently they operate, and promote innovation. Furthermore, the COVID-19 crisis has emphasized the significance of cybersecurity and data privacy as companies shift to remote work setups, resulting in a rise in spending on secure remote access options and employee training initiatives.

Regarding mergers and acquisitions, many companies are considering strategic goals and investment choices due to economic instability caused by the pandemic, leading to a notable effect on mergers and acquisition operations. While certain mergers and acquisitions have been

delayed or called off, others have continued due to reasons like industry merging and strategic matching. Furthermore, companies involved have needed to modify their integration plans to support remote work and handle employee worries about job stability, changes in responsibilities, and corporate culture (Marks & Mirvis, 2011).

In re-aligning talent experience post-COVID-19, companies have had to revise their talent management tactics, such as hiring, welcoming new employees, and evaluating performance, to adjust to remote work settings and maintain employee involvement and loyalty (Cascio, 2020). The talent experience in mergers and acquisitions and work, in general, has been greatly affected by the changes caused by COVID-19.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

In the context of talent experience during mergers and acquisitions, leaders must prioritize cultural alignment and integration to avoid layoffs resulting from poor organizational cohesion. One innovative solution to address this challenge is the development of a new product specifically designed to facilitate cultural integration and alignment post-merger and acquisition. For example, a comprehensive cultural assessment tool could be created to evaluate the cultural compatibility between merging entities and identify potential areas of divergence or alignment. This tool could leverage advanced algorithms and data analytics to provide actionable insights and recommendations for fostering a more cohesive and inclusive organizational culture, ultimately reducing the risk of layoffs due to cultural conflicts.

As a recommendation, leaders can introduce a new way of working or a new process to make work more efficient, thereby enhancing the talent experience and minimizing the likelihood of layoffs post-merger and acquisition. For instance, implementing a flexible work arrangement policy that allows employees to choose their preferred work location and hours can promote work-life balance and employee satisfaction, contributing to a positive organizational culture and reducing turnover rates.

In addition to product and process innovations, leaders can explore new organizational structures that promote collaboration, transparency, and alignment across merging entities. For example, adopting a matrix organizational structure that combines functional, operational, and technical teams can facilitate cross-functional collaboration and knowledge sharing, fostering a sense of unity and common purpose among employees. By promoting interdisciplinary teamwork, leaders can build a more cohesive and resilient organization that is better equipped to navigate the challenges of post-merger and acquisition integration without resorting to layoffs.

Moreover, leaders can leverage new systems or technologies to support cultural alignment and integration efforts post-merger and acquisition. For instance, implementing a digital employee engagement platform that enables real-time feedback and communication can foster a sense of belonging and inclusion among employees, facilitating the integration process and reducing the risk of layoffs due to cultural misalignment.

However, reinventing the talent experience in the post-merger and acquisition environment necessitates a strategic methodology that focuses on integration, communication, and employee welfare. Companies need to understand the significance of incorporating different cultures to enhance the employee experience after a merger or acquisition. Aligning cultures has a notable effect on employee engagement and retention throughout the integration process. Organizations can improve employee satisfaction and productivity by actively evaluating cultural disparities and encouraging collaboration across cultures, leading to a unified and welcoming work atmosphere.

Businesses need to create effective communication methods like town hall meetings, employee forums, and digital platforms to ensure employees are kept up to date on integration plans, milestones, and how they may affect their roles. It is important for leaders to actively seek input from their employees and address any issues promptly and openly, showcasing a dedication to employee wellness and involvement.

Considering the above recommendations, to improve talent experience, especially during acquisitions, Accenture should consider implementing various strategic initiatives. The company's first step should be to prioritize cultural integration through the creation of a specialized onboarding program for newly acquired employees. Companies that dedicate resources to cultural integration efforts see increased employee engagement and retention rates after mergers and acquisitions. Accenture can reduce integration-related stress among employees by offering cultural assimilation training and promoting cross-functional

collaboration, thus fostering a sense of belonging. Also, Accenture should utilize technology to make talent management processes more efficient and improve employee involvement. Utilizing digital platforms is crucial for talent recruitment, performance evaluation, and employee training. Accenture can offer employees personalized learning resources, performance feedback, and career development opportunities through the utilization of an integrated talent management system. Accenture has the potential to employ technology such as artificial intelligence and data analysis to pinpoint promising talent and assist in planning for future leadership roles, thus guaranteeing smooth transitions and stability.

In addition, Accenture needs to focus on communication and transparency during the acquisition process to reduce uncertainty and create a sense of trust among employees. Good communication is crucial in lessening employee anxiety and resistance to change in mergers and acquisitions.

In summary, this study advocates for a disruptive approach to talent management during mergers and acquisition post-integration activities considering the background of the acquisition involved between YSC and Accenture, considering both micro and macro levels of the organization. By addressing potential reactions from all points of the business and providing strategies for effective leadership, this study aims to maximize the value-creation potential of mergers and acquisition transactions. At the micro level, implementing modular teams at the departmental level can facilitate smoother integration and minimize disruptions to daily operations, while at the macro level, establishing cross-functional task forces comprising representatives from both merging entities ensures alignment with overarching strategic goals. Leaders must communicate the benefits of the modular structure in promoting agility and adaptability, while also addressing concerns about potential changes to reporting lines and job roles. Additionally, introducing AI-powered talent assessment tools at the micro level can

streamline talent data management and enable data-driven decision-making organization-wide. Proactive communication and comprehensive training are essential to managing reactions to these technological changes, emphasizing the benefits of increased efficiency and accuracy in talent management processes. Leaders must address concerns about job security and cultural integration by highlighting opportunities for career growth and cross-cultural collaboration. By embracing a disruptive approach to talent management during mergers and acquisitions, organizations can optimize the talent experience, proactively manage potential reactions, and lay the foundation for sustainable growth and success in the post-COVID-19 era of work.

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