

QUALITIES OF INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTORS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE ORGANIZATIONS

-ICs The unsung heroes of companies

POOJA KULKARNI

Saanvi PG College for Women, Almasguda, Hyderabad.

Telangana, 500058.

E-mail: poojakulkarni03@gmail.com

ABSTRACT:

Companies these days are getting flatter and flatter. This has resulted in tremendous decrease in the availability of management positions giving birth to the breed called individual contributors. These individual contributors are the experts in the organization who are not willing to, or are never given opportunity to take up the responsibility of a team. They provide technical expertise to the firm through their in-depth experience and profound skills. This paper tries to highlight the various ways through which these individual contributors with their special characteristics contribute towards the development of the organization. The irony is that their efforts are neither recognized nor rewarded. This paper also focuses on the ways through which the individual contributors work towards the effectiveness of the organization.

Keywords: Individual contributors, opportunity, responsibility, technical expertise, recognized, effective leaders.

INTRODUCTION:

There are some people without a managerial title who generate a good deal of influence and make great contributions, regardless of their title or role. They meet the ultimate criteria for true leaders. These people are the highly professional individual contributors.

The availability of management positions is decreasing now a day because of flatter organizations, and as a result, numerous professionals are electing to make careers through individual contributor roles that allow more influence and accountability, without cumbersome titles or management duties.

An individual contributor is a person who performs his duties and fulfills his responsibilities individually. He/she is not a part of any team but performs the activities of the process as any other individual does. It means than he is not ambitious to become a part of management. Thus their career path doesn't go through the path of becoming a manager. Their career advancement is on technical basis because of the knowledge and the interests they possess.

In many cases they have deliberately chosen not to pursue a managerial career, preferring technical work or wanting to avoid the duties associated with being a manager, including budgets, reports, endless meetings and the never-ending people issues. They have no one reporting to them, yet they make a big contribution and have a strong influence on the success of their firms.

These individual contributors possess exemplary skills and qualities which sometimes lack in so called good managers of the organization. The irony of the organizations is that such talented employees are never given recognition for their efforts and their sacrifice is always underrated. Though they contribute equally and perform better the rewards are always away from them.

OBJECTIVES:

1. To understand the role of individual contributors in organizations.
2. To highlight the qualities and competencies possessed by the individual contributors.
3. To examine the contributions of the individual contributors towards the organization.

METHODOLOGY:

This paper is conceptual in nature. Secondary sources available on the title have been consulted for the development of the concept.

ROLE OF INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTORS:

In general the role of individual contributors is of the technical aspects. These days many managers are shifting their role from management to individual contributors. The reasons are many. Firstly individual contributors are these days paid more than the managers. Secondly, managers realize that the real value add is on technical side. Thirdly, the belief that “professionals can manage themselves” may give threat to management jobs. And the final reason, the fear that their technical skills may go rusty if they focus more on management rather than the technical knowledge.

With the expanded roles of individual contributors in many companies, it is becoming more and more vital to hire effective individuals who can handle larger roles and be more self-directed.

All the people who work as individual contributors have the capability to play different roles in an organization depending on the situation. Few of such roles can be identified as:

1. For **new startups** where the requirement of workers is more than managers, these individual contributors can serve not only as workers but also can provide ideas to survive and expand the business because of their technical expertise.
2. When a **new industry** establishes, the individual contributors which their adaptive skills and ability and willingness for learning, can adjust and improve the industry.
3. Because of the knowledge they possess they can be **good testers** of the process.
4. Individual contributors also perform the **documentation tasks**.

5. Another role of a contributor is ***status reporting***. A clear, actionable status report is created by the individual contributor which is of great help to the manager.
6. They articulate themselves as the ***specialists*** in an organization. They see the world from their own perspective and love to have authority to independently plan and complete the work itself.

QUALITIES OF INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTORS:

In general, the basic competencies or qualities that must be present in any good employee are the qualities of the individual contributor too. Some of such competencies are tabulated below

INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTOR JOB ROLE COMPETENCIES

COMPETENCY	DESCRIPTION
Customer Focus	Builds customer confidence, is committed to increasing customer satisfaction, sets achievable customer expectations, assumes responsibility for solving customer problems, ensures commitments to customers are met, solicits opinions and ideas from customers, responds to both internal and external customers with equal priority
Ethics	Is accountable for actions, deals with others in a straightforward and honest manner, maintains confidentiality, conveys good news and bad
Results	Targets and achieves results, sets challenging and productive goals, prioritizes tasks, overcomes obstacles, accepts accountability
Teamwork	Meets all team deadlines and responsibilities, listens to others and values opinions, helps team leader to meet goals, welcomes newcomers and promotes a team atmosphere
Vision	Communicates the values of the organization to others, supports values in daily actions and decisions, incorporates the entire organization when planning
Communication	Communicates effectively both verbally and in writing, creates accurate and punctual reports, delivers presentations, shares information and ideas with others, exhibits good listening skills

Enthusiasm	Shows energy, acts on opportunities, instills urgency in others, positive momentum, stays the course, generates new ideas, practices self-development
Job Knowledge	Understands duties and responsibilities, has and maintains necessary job knowledge and technical skills, is in command of critical issues, works to acquire and develop new skills
Quality Productivity	Manages workload and is attentive to detail and accuracy, is committed to excellence, looks for improvements continuously, owns/acts on quality problems, prioritizes tasks, develops effective work procedures, manages time well, handles information flow, meets deadlines

Apart from these competencies the other most crucial and effective competencies of individual contributors include:

1. Ability to Effectively Plan & Organize Their Work:

Effective individual contributors are competent at managing their time and the time of others. In addition, they effectively handle multiple demands and competing deadlines. They excel at identifying goals, developing plans, estimating time frames and monitoring their progress without much oversight by management.

2. Strong Interpersonal Communication:

Individual contributors who are competent at making relationships work, listen effectively and develop rapport with others. They are able to articulate their thoughts and ideas clearly, present information in a straightforward and logical way, and they ensure that they are understood. They are also very good at sharing information with others in order to improve overall work progress.

3. Effective at Collaboration:

Individual contributors who effectively collaborate are able to maintain cooperative work relationships with others. They complete their own tasks for group projects in a timely and responsible manner and directly contribute to reaching the group goal.

4. Able to Deliver Consistent Results:

Individual contributors who are effective in delivering results assume personal responsibility for achieving outcomes and work effectively with little direction. In short, they are dependable and responsible.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTORS TO THE ORGANIZATION:

Though individual competitors possess numerous skills, qualities and capabilities, many times their efforts are underrated by the top management.

Some of the reasons for individual contributor's job to be unattractive are:

- You may not be taken as seriously in the workplace as a manager.
- You cannot *delegate* anything you don't want to do, to an underling. On the other hand, your manager may delegate mundane tasks to you, leaving you less time to work on your area of expertise.
- Your manager can dictate areas of development in which may not be interested. Perhaps your manager wants you to handle all oral presentations for your group and you have no interest in public speaking. You basically have no control over what your manager wants for you, even if your manager is guiding you to develop public speaking skills for selfish reasons.
- Stuck in the office. Managers typically have more access to travel in the workplace, whether it is to training classes, seminars, symposiums, or to sister offices. As an individual contributor you may not have as many opportunities of getting out of the office as a manager may have.

But there are many areas where in the individual contributors job looks attractive. They are:

- You can focus more on the job at hand without the distractions that could come with a manager's position.
- You are responsible only for yourself and your own actions.
- You can much more easily become an "expert" in a particular area at your workplace
- Depending on your job, it is much more probable that you are able to telecommute since you don't have to manage people who are at the office.

Irrespective of the attractive and unattractive aspects of the individual contributors, they strive hard to work for their organization with their persistence and efficiency.

Being an effective Individual Contributor is learnable. The key to finding and developing the right people is understanding your company's core competencies ahead of time, as well as the competencies that are needed in order to be effective within your organization.

This effectiveness can be increased by taking the time to actively strive to enhance the competencies of the individual contributors leading to the most desired outcomes and the most qualified individual contributors.

Individual contributors define the success of any organization. Often, the investment in individual contributors is the lowest in all organizations. This must change because the organizations these days are wider and flatter. More and more companies have adopted a "flat" organizational structure as a way to reduce costs and become more nimble. With management

positions few and far between, numerous professionals are electing to make careers through individual contributor roles.

The major contributions of individual contributors to the organization include:

Coordinators: Many individual contributors act as coordinators, working through others. The challenge for professionals like product managers or marketing managers is that they have no direct authority over the people they need to influence.

Expertise: One way to successfully persuade others is through expertise. Developing expertise can take many forms. For example, individual contributors may become product experts. This requires experiencing the product through the eyes of the customer, acting as a customer advocate, and translating customer insights into actionable business requirements. When a team member conveys product expertise, his or her requests carry more weight with others.

Another form of expertise is market knowledge. Having in-depth knowledge of competitors, as well as partners, can be very valuable to an organization. Employees with market expertise are the “go-to” people when product decisions must be made that will affect the company’s competitiveness.

Process experts: Individual contributors may also be process experts who know how to navigate the organization. By staying on top of projects and understanding how much detail teams need for an idea to gain action, the process expert can successfully shepherd projects through the various organizational channels.

Authority: A combination of product expertise, as well as internal organizational knowledge, gives individual contributors authority within the team and leadership within the company.

Demonstrate Values: The values that individual contributors exhibit are another good way to develop credibility.

Articulate a Vision:

One clear way that individual contributors can differentiate themselves is by taking their project and articulating a vision for it. This means creating a picture of the ideal project outcomes that others support. However, a vision alone is not enough. True leaders back up their vision with a realistic roadmap for accomplishing that vision.

CONCLUSION:

Individual contributor is an expert, a specialist in an organization who works independently to achieve the personal and organizational goals. Individual contributors play the role of a technical skill provider whose work area ranges from documentation to critical problem solving. Though managerial fame, power and communications are not available to these individual contributors, they silently, with their self interest, expertise, vision and values move



forward and help the organizations to reach its goals. Thus individual contributors are unsung heroes of the organizations, whose contributions are hardly recognized and rewarded but the outcomes are always enjoyed.

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