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Learning Unlearning and Relearning in the Work—Life Balance Scenario of Organizations in Health Care Industry

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Abstract:
The current paper focuses on an approach which includes applying the pattern recognition based methods of learning to the work life balance scenario in the domain of organizations predominantly in the medical services industry. The concepts of learning, relearning and unlearning are being introduced initially and later on an algorithm which can be used by both the medical organizations as well as the doctors working there in order to achieve work life balance is being proposed.

1. Introduction

In this age of learning when machines, algorithms and the minds behind them are involved in learning new concepts and applying them to solve the ever increasing problems, the organizations which employ them also have to take the necessary steps in ensuring that they observe, learn, unlearn and relearn as necessary. The concept of learning is known to all since the time humans learnt to read and write. Ancient humans learnt in order to survive modern man learns in order to improve the quality of life of the current generation as well as of the generations to follow.

Organizations are considered to be a microcosm of the world. Thus, In the modern organizational context, it is essential that both the organizations as well as their employees learn to modify their work environment to the volatile market scenario. Organizations may shift from a state they are biased more in favour of their own welfare vis-à-vis the welfare of the employees who work for them. Thus in one manner organizations may also be considered to be shifting from one state where their interests are at stake to another state where the interests of their employees are at stake. In the former case, organizations risk losing a significant part of their revenue while in the latter they risk losing the goodwill and trust of their employees. Now the relationship between the organization and the employee is mutual where an enhancement in one can either enhance or degrade the other. This is indicative of its non-deterministic nature. This however brings us to the forefront of another brilliant question, how to understand this non-determinism and then attribute it specifically to factors which influence the entities concerned. The main entities here include the organization and the employee. Nothing much can be said of the organization except the fact that the behaviour that it exhibits depends to a large extent of the collective behaviour of its employees who may in turn be influenced by various factors beyond their control. Although understanding those factors and representing them is an arduous text, it is relatively easy to simplify and broadly categorise these individualistic factors under the categories of personal life and professional life which correspond to the role play which the employee plays at that particular instant of time. Thus, an understanding of the personal life and professional life of the employee is a significant indicator of the extent to which work life balance exists in its organization.

Although most studies focus on trying to understand the concept of work life balance from the perspective of the employee and hence we find studies trying to relate the personal life or the professional life of the employee it is really rare to find a study where the question of work—life balance is analyzed from the organizational view point. The present study is a small but significant step in this direction and it provides an algorithmic approach to identifying possible work – life balances from the organizational viewpoint.

1.1. The Intricacies of Learning

Employees learn by working in order to ensure that their job performance matches up with that expected by the organization. Organizations learn by ensuring that their work environment is competent enough to match the challenges imposed by the market.

This process of learning is not sufficient, what is essential is a cautious approach to observe any mismatches between the observed and expected performance and then modifying the existing approach. This modification may require unlearning i.e., relinquishing the

currently adopted approach and starting on a new method. However, unlearning which is generally considered synonymous with backtracking will have to be understood in the right perspective. An appropriate interpretation of unlearning includes the ability to discontinue all previously applied methods or mechanisms or patterns of thought which might result in continuing to work in conformity with the past. This proceeds with the assumption that the future might not confirm with the past or that the future trends as predicted may be different. Therefore, an appropriate alternative is to start with an approach which proceeds to solve the problem in a unique manner. This is because problems although they seem to be variants of situations which have been already encountered are different; and each problem has its own background patterns of context, scenarios of incidence, possible variants and mitigating conditions. Thus each problem will have to be looked at a new perspective without basing on the current decisions on the uncertain predictions. Thus by eliminating the dependence of the process of problem solving on the previous history the algorithms search for novel and previously untried methods; this in itself is rewarding because it enhances the corpus of problem solving mechanisms available. However, one major caveat is sticking to the principle of non-conformity while overlooking any significant indicators of possible facilitating conditions.

This method can briefly be summarized in the form of a LEARN—UNLEARN—RELEARN ALGORITHM as

1.1.1. Algorithm Learn—Unlearn—Relearn

- INPUT: An entity which is generally an individual or an organization which wants to solve the problem at hand.
- STEP 1. Observe patterns – identify and recognize possible useful patterns
- STEP 2. understand the impact of the inputs on the output being obtained – incorporate this information into the problem solving method or algorithm being used
- STEP 3. Identify any anomalous conditions and then use them as exceptions to the algorithm.
- STEP 4. Iterate, i.e., use these set of steps again and again until acceptable level of performance is achieved.
- STEP 5. Once this is done over a considerable period of time and a final set of rules has been obtained, these rules are incorporated into the algorithms being used.
- STEP 6. Then the performance of these algorithms is measured for optimality. Once the possibility of finding optimal solutions is reached these methods are benchmarked and published for review among other entities in the same domain and continue to step 8. Otherwise, move to step 7.
- STEP 7. Modify any existing strategies by truly delineating from previously used/observed/assumed patterns and start from the current scenario as the starting point. (Unlearning what was previously learnt). Continue to step 1.
- STEP 8. These reviews are then used to improve the algorithm considerably.
- OUTPUT: The output of this algorithm is the solution to the problem in the form of a sequence of measures when taken result in achieving performance measures. This might include the possibility of obtaining work life balance of employee or attainment of equilibrium state for the organization.

1.2. Application of This Method by the Employee for His/Her Own Improvement

In the domain of a hospital where the managements of hospital are very much concerned with improving the quality of service being provided to the patients, the main source of income to the doctor is in the form of salary which the doctors receive for providing service to the patients. Now the doctors too will have to ensure that their knowledge and skill match up with the growing demands of people being affected by pollutants and drug resistant strains of bacteria and viruses. For this purpose it is essential that the doctors evaluate their current performance with the expected performance and then apply the learn unlearn and relearn algorithm to improve their performance to the organizational satisfaction.

1.3. Application of This Method by the Organization for All Round Development

An interesting scenario occurs when organizations find the need to improve themselves in order to meet expectations of the management; in other words organizations find the need to learn. Organizations find the need to learn when their strategies work, when they do not work and when the modifications that are made by them provide results and if they backfire what remedial measures work and what do not. Thus this provides an appropriate application of the learn unlearn and relearn algorithm. What is interesting however, is the unlearning phase since learning and relearning are done based on observing, measuring against benchmarks and then continuing to use either the same or a modified method (relearn). The unlearn phase is different in the sense that delineates from the previously existing strategies and then embarking into new and previously unchartered territory of problem solving. Thus by combining learning, relearning and unlearning it becomes possible for organizations to address their ever growing demands for improved and cost effective service.

One important point to note is the relationship that this learn—unlearn—relearn method has on the work life balance. As we have already discussed at the level of an individual doctor the organizations may be concerned about trying to improve productivity by improving the work life balance of their doctors. For this purpose, the organizations will have to systematically and periodically gain information from the doctors regarding their personal and professional lives while at the same time deriving information from the data which is already available with them. On the other hand, the organizations may also focus on attaining an equilibrium state, i.e., that state where the management policies being applied are balanced while keeping in view the organizational profitability and doctor welfare. Thus this algorithm may be used by organizations as well as the doctors who work for them for achieving work—life balance.

2. Conclusions and Future Work

The necessity of both organizations as well as doctors to identify the causative factors of work life imbalances as well as generic approach towards reducing them based on the LEARN—UNLEARN—RELEARN algorithm is being suggested. In the current form the paper provides only a theoretical framework based on which the actual implementations may be done. Creating implementations which reflect the real life situations faced in hospitals by organizations and by doctors will have to be done. By doing so, the effectiveness of the algorithm to identify imbalances and then to rectify them can significantly be improved.

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