DEALING WITH PEOPLE AT WORK: THE MANAGER’S DILEMMA

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ABSTRACT

Every organisation is composed of people. They are different from one another in their physical, mental and psychological makeup. Their behaviour and performance are influenced by several factors inside and outside the organization. In order to manage people effectively, managers need knowledge and skills in human relations. Healthy human relations can be built by integrative or problem solving approach in which both the parties gain satisfaction of their respective needs in a cooperative manner, and not at the expense of one another. The paper tries firstly to cover problems in human relations. Further, strategies for establishing healthy human relations have been suggested.

Key Words: Adaptive Leadership, Conflicts, Healthy Human Relations, Satisfaction of Needs, Manager’s Dilemma

INTRODUCTION

People differ in values, perceptions, needs, attitudes, temperament, approaches, and in so many other ways. They are the most precious resources of an organization, as it is the level of their willing contribution to the achievement of organisational goals that provides it a real and enduring edge over its competitors. It is accepted employees will to work cooperatively and productively depends on their perception that by doing so they are advancing simultaneously toward their own goals. A manager’s success in directing depends on his ability to create such a healthy human relations climate. He can do so by: (i) providing appropriate leadership; (ii) creating conditions conducive to the development of satisfying interpersonal relationships; (iii) motivating employees by providing them challenging and meaningful work and scope for growth, advancement and achievement, and (iv) establishing a healthy and effective communication system.

Most managers are, however, deficient in the art of human relations. Human relations cover the area of management practice that is concerned with the integration of people into a working situation. It is concerned with motivating people to work together cooperatively and productively. It is disappointing that even the most effective manager-leaders face human relation problems, but the magnitude and complexity of human relations problems is much more in case of managers who treat employees as inanimate objects.

HUMAN RESOURCE PHILOSOPHY

Human Resource philosophy revolves around management’s beliefs and assumptions about people their nature, needs, values, and their approach to work. These beliefs and assumptions, then, determine how people should be treated. There are three approaches for treating people: commodity approach, machine approach, and humanistic approach. In commodity approach, a person is treated like a commodity that can be bought or sold at a price as was the practice in old slavery system. In machine approach, a person is treated as a part of the machine that can be fitted like any other part. Both these approaches treat a person as physiological human being. In humanistic approach, a person is treated as human being having physiological, Psychological and sociological characteristics.

This approach takes into account that human being have four unique endowments-self-awareness, conscience, independent will, and creative imagination. Self-awareness of a person enables him to examine his paradigms, to look at himself, to think about his thoughts and to become aware of the social and psychic programmes. Conscience puts the person in touch with something within him even deeper than his thoughts and something outside him more reliable than his values. Independent will of the person is his capacity to act, the power to transcend his paradigms, and to act on certain principles rather than based on emotions, moods, or circumstances. Creative imagination empowers the person to imagine and create beyond the present reality. Therefore, HR philosophy should take into account all these endowments of human beings. More specifically, HR philosophy should be based on the following beliefs:

1. Human beings are the most important assets in the organisations.
2. Human beings can be developed to a great extent as they have creative energy which is utilised only partially.
3. Human beings feel committed to their work in the organisation if they develop belongingness with it.
4. Human beings are likely to develop a feeling of belongingness if the organisation takes care of them and their need satisfaction.
5. Human beings contribute to the maximum if they get an opportunity to discover their full potential and to use it.
6. It is the responsibility of the organization to create healthy and motivating work climate characterised by openness, enthusiasm, trust, mutualiy, and collaboration.
PROBLEMS IN HUMAN RELATIONS

People are unique in their need patterns and the manager in which they seek fulfilment of their needs. Some generalizations about human needs have been advanced by behavioural scientists like Maslow, Herzberg, Vroom, etc. but people differ from one another in their need patterns. Every worker does not seek socialization on the job, challenge, creativity, recognition, autonomy, etc., and certainly not to be the same extent. People also differ in their need patterns even within themselves from time to time. At one time an individual may be seeking satisfaction of his security need, at another time; he may be hotly pursuing opportunities for advancement. Moreover, people also differ in the way they handle their needs. One may be keen on advancement yet patient, hardworking and persevering, while another with the same degree of keenness for advancement may be impatient, aggressive and politicking.

People are different from one another not only in their needs and modes of responses to them, but also in attitudes. Attitudes are predispositions in terms of which people respond to situations. People widely differ in attitudes ranging from highly rational to highly non-rational, highly objective to highly subjective, highly passive to highly aggressive, and so forth. They also differ in their likes, dislikes, beliefs, values, etc. The problem is further complicated by the fact that attitudes are not characterized by permanence. Instead, they are changing and, at times, in an unpredictable manner.

Yet another factor that complicates human relations is that people differ in their perception of work, supervisor, rewards, situations, etc. Since perception is the process through which we organize our experiences, it affects our behaviour towards work, people and situations. Many problems arise due to differing perception of situation. While the supervisor may perceive the works as lazy and indolent, the worker may perceive him as a slave driver. These perceptual differences are at the basis of many problems that managers face from day to day.

Though people differ widely in their needs, response to need fulfilment, attitudes and perceptions, management often try to handle them through standardized work methods and operations, and uniform policies, rules and procedures. These standardizations and uniformities are an indispensable element of organized effort, asc cooperative effort for the achievement of common goals will be impossible without it. Besides, in many cases, manager fined it convenient to treat people in a uniform and standardized manner. It is not an easy task for a manager to vary his strategy and policy in relation to every one of large number of people with whom he interacts every day during the course of performance of his duties. Moreover, if he were to treat people differently according to their unique needs, he might be accused by others of bias, discrimination, prejudice, and favouritism. This is the manager’s dilemma in dealing with people at work.

Role conflict and role ambiguity both canes dysfunctional behaviour and result in decline in need fulfilment and job satisfaction with adverse consequences to healthy human relation at work (Keller, 1975). Another problem of human relations arises from status incongruity. Status incongruities create human relations problems at work. Whyte (1949) found in a restaurant study that when relatively low status waitresses passed their customer orders to high status counterman, it caused much wrangling and bickering. The problems was slowed by proceeding a spindle for order slips or a high warning compartment which reduced much content between waitresses and countermen. Maier (1957) reports a similar situation of status conflict in a public utility.

Sexton (1968) found that there is position association between satisfaction and job structure. The grater the extent to which the job is structured in terms of activities, methods repetitiveness and reutilization, the greater is the satisfaction of needs for achievement, affiliation autonomy and recognition. It may, however, be concluded from this discussion that organisational demands for conformity and reutilization of work do frustrate the needs of a mature person for growth, autonomy and challenge. This frustration, particularly true in the case of blue collar employees, lays at the root of many human relations problems.

CONFLICT LIES BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL AND ORGANIZATION

Chris Argyris argues that there is a basis conflict between the needs of a mature person and organizational demands. He contends that as an individual grows from infancy to adulthood, he develops the following continuum:

1. From a state of passivity to a state of increasing activity
2. From a state of dependence on others for need gratification to a state of relative independence, and acknowledgement of healthy dependencies
3. From a state of responding to environment is only a few ways to responding in several alternative ways
4. From a state of having shallow, short-time and erratic interests to deeper, long-time and challenging interests
5. From a short time perspective to a long-time perspective of his work, environment, life goals, etc.
6. From a state of sub ordinary to a state of search for equality in interpersonal relationships
7. From a sense of unawareness of ‘self’ to a sense of identity as a unique individual.

Thus, an employee seeks a work environment which permits him to act like a mature person. That is to say, the wants; scope to utilize and develop his abilities: to be creative and innovative; to develop deeper interest in his work; and a
long-time perspective about his job and situation work which is challenging: autonomy and independence in work performance; predictable management policies, behaviour and responses; and to be treated as a unique person with needs, abilities and a sense of responsibility.

On the other hand, a typical worker, particularly if he is engaged in automated operations is: (i) provided with minimal control over his work environment so far as activities, work methods, pace of work, etc., are concerned: (ii) expected to perform reutilized operations in the prescribed manner; (iii) required to use his surface abilities, mainly his motor skills: (iv) allowed to have a short-time perspective as he has to perform the same operation repeatedly and mechanically: and (v) placed in the position of dependence on the organization for "psychological failure" for the employees. As an adult, he seeks to mature future on the job but he is required to perform under conditions which require him to behave like an immature person. This leads to a basic conflict between the needs of a mature person, and organizational demands requiring behaving like an immature person, stifling his needs for growth, development, challenge and autonomy. The employee working under such conditions of "psychological failure" responds with apathy and alienation, and sometimes even by aggressive feeling toward management.

Dublin stress that work is not of central life interest to most people and they can seek satisfaction of the job and in the community and home, they do not deny the existence of conflict between the individual and organization. This conflict results in frustration and causes human relations problems.

1. Individual difference in needs and patterns of responses to need fulfilment, attitudes and perceptions create human relations problems.

2. Role and status incongruities and conflicts are another source of human relations problems.

3. Interpersonal conflicts based on personality differences serve some useful purpose as they force re-examination of data and approaches, and resultant modifications may benefit the organization as a whole. But persistent conflicts cause damage to it.

4. Informal groups serve many useful functions by providing opportunities for fulfilment of security, social and esteem needs of their members, but at the same time create a number of human relations problems. They put pressure on deviants and isolates if they produce more than group norms of production, do not easily accept new employees in the groups and resist transfer of group members. Inter group conflicts also create problems.

Differences in the means for goal attainment may also cause conflict. A manager and his subordinates may run into conflict about work priorities, or determination of activities that will lead to goal accomplishment. Competition for allocation of funds or other resources may also cause conflict. Competition for status and status symbols is yet another source of conflict.

Conflicts cannot be eliminated in any organization as they are the natural consequence of interacting among people with differing personalities. It is also not necessary to eliminate all conflicts as they are not always dysfunctional. In fact, conflict can "Contribute in a positive fashion to organizational creativity and productivity. Conflict and disagreement force re-examination of basic ideas and philosophies, often resulting in modifications that benefit the organization as a whole." But all conflicts are not healthy and can do untold damage to the organization. An internecine conflict between a production manager and purchase manager may seriously hamper production. A continuing conflict between a supervisor and his subordinates may adversely affect the performance of both. Conflicts can lead to improvement in organization performance, or at least save it from debilitating and destructive consequences if they are resolved constructively and in good time.

STRATEGIES FOR ESTABLISHING HEALTHY HUMAN RELATIONS

Success of an organization in achieving its goals significantly depends on the willingness and zeal with which its employees contribute their abilities, efforts and energies in the performances of their assigned tasks, and fulfillment of their responsibilities. This requires a healthy human relations climate in the organization, and it is the responsibility of management to build it. We suggest the following managerial strategies for building a healthy human relations climate at work:

- **Integrating the Individual and the Group with the Organization**

  Successful achievement of organizational goals significantly depends on the ability of management to integrate the individual needs and group goals with its own objectives. It should be recognized that neither management nor employees as individuals as well as group members can achieve their respective goals by frustrating one another's goals. If employee needs are not satisfied they will not be motivated to contribute their optimum for the achievement of organizational goals. And, if organizational not achieved, it will put limitation on its resources to gratify individual needs. It is only by pursuing mutually congruous goals that the organization as well employees can maximize the achievement of their respective goals.

- **Involving individuals and Groups in Decision Making**

  Supportive climate and relationships based on mutual trust and confidence can be effectively established by involving workers and their groups in decision making process. The manager should not only permit but seek their ideas and suggestions in all kinds of problem situations which affect them. He may consult them frequently or participate with them in joint decision making, depending on the problem and
the situation. This not only helps in improving the quality or decision but also leads to the satisfaction of their needs. They feel treated as responsible people with abilities and competence.

- **Communicating Effectively**
  Many of the human relations problems are orated by inadequate or distorted communication. The need “to know” about one’s situation, status, prospects, company policies, contemplated changes, etc, one of the most basic needs of employees. Lack of communication causes fear, confusion, misunderstandings and distrust. Management should aim at opening the channels of communicating, particularly upward communication. This will enable it to know and understand employee problems, reactions, fears, aspirations, needs and hopes. Informal channels of communication, called the grapevine, can complement as well as supplement formal communication if fed with adequate and timely information.

- **Adaptive Leadership**
  Since people are different, complex and variable, and situations are also in a continuous process of change, no single style of leadership-democratic or autocratic, employee centered or process of change, no single style of leadership democratic or autocratic, employee centered or production centered- can be equally successful in all situations and with all people. In order to be able to provide effective leadership, a manager should be able to understand the people and situations accurately and adapt his leadership strategy accordingly. Skinner and Sasser found on the basis of analysis of the leadership style of some highly successful and some less successful manager that successful manager have many styles. They are regularly inconsistent. The high accomplishments get into fine details in one situation, yet stay away at the strategic level in another. They delegate a lot one time, or a little the next time. They are close and supportive one day and remote and demanding another day. It is apparent that healthy human relations can be established by managers who carefully analyze and understand the people with whom they are dealing and situations in which they are operating. Then they adapt their leadership style to situation and people.

- **Conditioning Behavior**
  One of the effective ways of building healthy human relations at work is through conditioning the behavior of people. The theory propounded by B.F. Skinner states that “Operant conditioning shapes behavior just as a sculptor shapes a lump of clay.” According to him, an individual's behavior is not determined by his internal states like beliefs, value and feelings, etc., but by the forces in his environment. Behavioral objectives can be deliberately determined and appropriate responses engineered through a conditioning process. This operant conditioning process consists of positive and negative reinforcers associated with a given behavior. The basic approach is to reinforce the desirable behavior by reward, and punish or ignore undesirable behavior. This will lead to the repetition of reinforced behavior, while unrewarded behavior will tend to disappear. Undesirable behavior, however, should be generally ignored as punishment may invoke negative reaction or lead to actions of rebellion.

- **Resolving Conflicts**
  Conflict resolution refers to activities aimed at reducing or ending interpersonal and intercrops conflicts. Methods aimed at resolving conflicts may involve; (i)0 the victory of one side and the defeat of the other-win-loss methods; (ii) splitting the differences or compromising lose methods; or (iii) the use of problem solving win-win methods.

In the win-lose methods, the gain of one partly results from the loss of another party. For example, out of the two groups contending for a given office space, one gets it and the other does not. It may result into the creation of feelings of losing in the second group, and it may react by engaging in non-productive behavior.

The lose-lose methods are typically compromise methods. Both the parties settle down for something which partially satisfies their respective needs. Both the groups agree to share the available office space.

The win-win methods are based on the integrative or problem solving approach. It involves both the parties in joint identification of needs of both the parties, an exhaustive search for alternative solutions which will satisfy their respective needs, and selection of the best methods. In an example of conflict for office space, both the parties examine their need for it, generate and evaluate alternative solutions and decide that one may have the use of the space, and the other meets its needs by recognizing its desks and filling cabinets and also by shifting one of the typists to the typing pool.

**CONCLUSION**

Every organization is replete with human relations problems because people are different, complex and variable. Work is not central life interest for a very large number of people. Beside, in many cases, managers find it convenient to treat people in a uniform and standardized manner. It is not an easy task for a manager to vary his strategy and policy in relations to everyone of the large number of people with whom he interacts every day during the course of performance of his duties. Moreover, if he were to treat people differently according to their unique needs, he might be accused by others of bias, discrimination, prejudice and favoritism. This is the manager's dilemma in dealing with people at work. Healthy human relations can be built by integrative or problem solving approach in which both the parties gain satisfaction of their respective needs in a cooperative manner, and not at the expense of one another.

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