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On the Psychological Aspect of Management

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Abstract

People live and act in various groups and are influenced by various formal and informal leaders: parents, teachers, managers, coaches, commanders, and so on. Their personal traits and qualities, their behavior and life style as the dominant parties, have a strong impact on people's mentality and play a significant role in their personal development. Many factors influence on the psychological environment in the workplace, but the strongest one comes from the manager. The way the manager relates to subordinates affects the whole nature of business communication and largely determines the group morals and the psychological atmosphere in the working environment. If the manager does not project a positive image it automatically transmits into the relations between the team members. The working environment becomes stressful, people become less inclined to cooperate with each other, they feel uncomfortable and morally vulnerable. That's why managers should do everything possible to create an optimal psychological atmosphere in their respective production units.

Introduction

Most of the attention in any organization is directed towards achieving financial goals, i.e. towards profitability. This is vital for the organization and well understood. However particularly for this reason people's interests are not often on the priority list in organizations' affairs. If that is the case, sooner or later such an approach will backfire and prevent the organization from functioning successfully in the long run. Hence, directing all possible efforts toward creating a positive psychological environment in the workplace is of a significant importance. To create such an environment without basic knowledge of psychology does not seem possible. To know people's individual characteristics, their ability to work in a group environment as well as their values, goals and desires is just as necessary for managers as to possess the technical knowledge in the chosen field of activity. People are filled with thoughts and ideas and they want to experience satisfaction from their implementation. To achieve the desired objectives and maintain people satisfaction in the work place one must be prepared to think of them in human terms (Voskoboynikov, 2017).

Regardless of the type of organization and the field of activity general managerial functions are similar. In fact, management functions are considered to be universal. Managers plan and

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organize, coordinate and control, make decisions and handle physical, informational and financial resources, create and communicate, motivate and reward, and so on. However, all of this comes down to managing people. A bank manager does not manage safes and accounts, a construction manager does not manage construction equipment and materials, a ship captain does not hold the steering wheel himself but nevertheless gets to the desired destination by managing the ship's crew.

In this brief article, we will consider some important factors of the psychological nature which should be taken into account in managers' work with people.

Individual approach

To take an individual-focused approach in management is perhaps the most crucial role of the manager to see employees as individuals and recognize their abilities and desires helps to bring out their best. Each person has a unique personality; some people are good at one thing, while others are good in something else. Hence, the golden rule in dealing with people is not to try to change people, but rather to build on what they are and compensate for what they are not. To give a person the wrong role is akin to asking him to be what he is not. When one is pressed to be what he is not, he does not feel good and does not perform as effectively. But when placed in their comfort zone, where he feels "in his shoes", everything changes – he feels good, his productivity increases and all the rest that comes with it. Then people around him are amazed about the changes in him. But he has not changed, he simply has become himself. Morris Viteles, who is considered to be one of the fathers of industrial psychology and an enthusiast of taking the human element into the practice of management, wrote: "It is important that a man be kept out of a job for which he is not fitted. It is even more important that he be placed in a job where he can be efficient and happy" (as cited in Wallace, 1996). Such an approach should be a sort of guiding star for managers in their work with people.

The Compatibility Factor

The group is not the arithmetic sum of separate individuals and the result of the group performance is not always the positive sum of the results of individual performances by its members. Just as two dozen clear fragments of glass stacked one on top of another provide a rich blue color or a combination of copper and tin results an alloy, whose hardness resides in neither of them. Similarly, people in a group act and behave in a new capacity, as a component of the system "individual – other individuals". Representatives of various professions and other kinds of activity such as polar explorers, mountain climbers, commanders of aircrafts and ships' crews, coaches of athletic teams, and many others experience in real life that not all people are equally fit for complex teamwork. That is, speaking in the language of psychology, "two plus two is not always four".

According to Aristotle the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. No disrespect to Aristotle; but, the sum of the parts does not automatically become a "greater whole" just because of the presence of the required parts. This suggests that for the effective execution of tasks in a group environment not only the presence of needed specialists and their technical skills should be taken into account, but also the degree of compatibility between them as well. Depending on the degree of compatibility the result of group performance may either be

equal to the sum of the results of individual performances, or greater or lower than that sum. Examples of the incompatibility can be seen in a working crew, where there is a significant difference in workers' skills, or an athletic team formed of different skill levels athletes. This kind of incompatibility is called *physiological*. In these examples such physical parameters such as height, physical strength, motor skills etc. are described. To note such differences in people is not that difficult and it's unlikely that anyone will instruct people with such differences to perform a task where these differences present a hindrance.

People always experience certain flow of feelings toward others within the group. These feelings are based on the differences of a psychological nature, such as temperament, character, social orientation, habits, amateur interests, religious and ethnic peculiarities and others. They may be positive or negative, or neutral, they can be weak or strong in intensity; they can be mutual or non-mutual and therefore conflicting. These differences are not always obvious and apparent. However, particularly differences of this kind quite often have a decisive impact on compatibility, and in turn, on the successful implementation of the group task. The incompatibility by the described differences is called *psychological*. The presence of psychological incompatibility is a major obstacle for the effective group performance.

Psychological incompatibility has its negative influence not only on group performance, but also on human health. Unfriendly uptight relationships between group members in the working environment call up negative emotions. In mass professions where there are no expressed extreme conditions people can perform productively under the influence of negative emotions for a fairly long time. However, it's important to understand that all of it flows at the expense of the unnecessary stress, so-to-say "until then, until the time". Many can recall the depressing mental state due to the incompatibility with colleagues or bosses at a current or previous job. Working activity on the background of negative emotions for a long period of time may cause pathological developments in the central nervous system, which could lead to various diseases of a neurotic order. People become irritable, experience headaches, insomnia, blood pressure disorders, dysfunction of gastrointestinal tract, and other deviations in health condition. Typical medical approach for the treatment of such conditions does not always give positive results. There are statistical data in different countries on the loss of a huge number of man-hours as a result of the nervous breakdown due to such psychological incompatibility.

Individual Style of Activity

There are two ways of ensuring the effectiveness of human performance. One is by professional selection, the so-called "screening out" of individuals with specific attributes. The other one is through individual training methods directed towards the formation of individual strategies of activity based on features of personality of the individual in the process of adaptation to the objective requirements of activity. The concept of individual style of activity was first introduced by Soviet psychologists Merlin (1986) and Klimov (1969). They were able to establish that different individuals can perform the same work with equal efficiency through the use of their own individual style of performance which is more suitable to their personality features. The individual style of activity is considered a strategy of performance which occurs at the conscious and unconscious levels deriving from the mechanism of self-regulation (Bedny and Voskoboynikov, 1975; Voskoboynikov, 2014).

Any kind of human activity requires a number of qualities from a person in order to perform. Some personality features better relate to the requirements of the activity, others – not as much. People attempt to compensate for individual weaknesses with their personal strength in a given task situation. Through the individual style of activity people adapt to the situations easier and perform in a more efficient way. It suggests that managers should rely on people's strong qualities instead of insisting on fixing the weaker ones. As a result, managers will best benefit from what people are capable of and they will experience satisfaction by their performance.

Communication

The communication process takes place when each party makes an effort to understand what the other party is trying to communicate. In some activities the value of clear communication cannot be overestimated, for example in communication between pilots and air-traffic controllers. If a command or confirmation of the command is not understood correctly by either of them, it may lead to serious and sometimes even tragic consequences. In the ordinary everyday business affairs, clear and proper communication is as important. The following is an example of that. In 2009, after the Financial Crisis of 2005-2007 in the United States, the Government launched a program to help homeowners with their mortgages. Under the program, banks reduced the interest rate to qualified borrowers thereby reducing their monthly mortgage payments accordingly. The homeowners sighed with relief. But unfortunately that was not the end of the story. In some banks, the department which offered mortgage relief to homeowners failed to communicate with the department in charge of implementing foreclosure. As a result, there were cases when the foreclosure departments, seeing that homeowners were making lower than their original monthly mortgage payments, assumed that they defaulted... and seized their properties.

Understanding is subjective; it can occur in the receiver's mind. The fact that the communicator transmitted the message and the receivers heard it does not mean as yet that communication has taken place. Even when the receiver understood the instruction or information the way it is intended to be understood by the communicator, it does not yet constitute a completed communication process. Communication is not only the receipt and understanding of information; it is also an acceptance and action that result from it. It can be illustrated, though in a humorous mode, by an episode from the popular in the United States sitcom *Seinfeld*. Jerry Seinfeld and his friend Elaine called a car rental company to reserve a car. When they arrived to pick up the car, they were told that they don't have a car available for them. Jerry began complaining about the service to which the receptionist said with irritation, "We know how to take a reservation". Jerry immediately retorted, "The main thing about reservations is not how to take the reservation, the main thing about reservation is how to ho-o-o-ld the reservation".

One of the most common blunders of communication in management is when the manager assumes that everything is going well because he did not hear anything to the contrary. Such an assumption is a clear evidence of the manager's rare and inefficient communication with subordinates. If subordinates are not getting regular check-ins of their work, they won't know if everything is going in the right direction. If the manager, on the other hand, is not getting regular feedback from subordinates, it will be difficult for her to track the progress of the work. Maintaining regular and accurate communication with all the people involved in the

ongoing projects is essential for ensuring the smooth flow of the work progress. That in turn allows anticipating possible missteps and making the necessary corrections in advance. In order to maintain such a business environment managers must provide appropriate and timely information to subordinates, so they will know what they should do, when they should do it, and what is expected from them in general in the framework of the work requirements. In other words, to make sure that what is known as “getting through to people” takes place.

Make them feel important

The late American philosopher John Dewey wrote, “The deepest urge of human nature is the desire to be important” (as cited in Schul, 1975). It seems that these words were written for managers. When someone makes a person feel important and special, most likely, the person experienced the warmest feelings towards that someone. It is natural to try your very best after that. To take time outside the office to greet people and making a "small talk" in a friendly and genuine manner will let them know that they are important and valued. People thrive in the atmosphere of acceptance and recognition, and sometimes open some gifts and talents in themselves, the presence of which was not even suspected.

Two things motivate people stronger than anything else – achievements and acknowledgment of achievements by their superiors. People desire recognition, they want to experience their own importance. They want to have their ideas considered and want to feel a real sense of accomplishment. The important factor in delivering recognition is to deliver it in a timely fashion, not wait for some official event to mark the employee’s contribution to the team success. To make all possible efforts to note people’s merits when they expect it is called positive reinforcement, which tends to increase the probability that the act will occur again. Announcing at a meeting that the employee has done something special or presenting a handwritten note from the higher superior, or any other way of acknowledgment, plays an important role in encouraging employees to continue to perform at their best. Even if the success was achieved mainly because of the manager's own actions, to congratulate people on that achievement plays an important role as well. After all, it is they who have carried out the instructions they received from the manager.

Conclusion

In everyday life each and every one of us uses psychology in dealing with people, even though we are not always consciously aware of that application. We respond to the behavior of others, we try to predict their reactions and build our relationships on that basis. We are guided by our experience, intuition, conventional wisdom etc. Some do it successfully, others suffer from their blunders. But if a person in a position to manage other people’s activity makes blunders, they suffer from it too. The more people that are under his or her command, the higher the cost of the person's psychological illiteracy to the organization or business and to society as a whole.

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Fred Voskoboynikov worked as an industrial psychologist in a civil engineering firm and taught ergonomics at Civil Engineering University in Odessa, Ukraine. He developed a course on psychological methods of management and gave related lectures and seminars to managers of industrial firms and organizations of Odessa and the Odessa region. He is an honorary professor of psychology at the Baltic Academy of Education (St.-Petersburg, Russia) and a regular contributor to the Academy's periodic journal. Since immigrating to the United States he worked as a manager of construction projects in the San Francisco Bay Area. He combined his work with writing on the subjects matter of psychology of management, the psychology of individual differences and on some theoretical issues. His writings were published by Taylor and Francis Group in the proceedings of International Conferences on Applied Human Factors and Ergonomics and in the collections of articles.

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