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Managerial communication practices and employees' attitudes and behaviours

A qualitative study

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Abstract

Purpose – This study is a part of two sequential studies (quantitative and qualitative) carried out to study the impact of managerial communication on employees' attitudes and behaviours. The paper aims to discuss this issue.

Design/methodology/approach – Using the critical incident technique, this study explores the effects of managerial communication practices on employees' happiness, job performance, commitment, absenteeism, and turnover intentions. Totally, 101 employees in three manufacturing organisations in eastern India narrated critical incidents related to happiness and superior performance, unhappiness and inferior performance, absenteeism, and the desire to stay or quit. The incidents were further content-analysed.

Findings – Results revealed that collaborative approach, respect and recognition, flexible working arrangements, trust, clear direction, autonomous and challenging tasks are important indicators to make employees happy and drive them towards superior performance. Contrarily, the dominant nature of the superior and more bossism than required, humiliation, biased approach, and lack of flexible working arrangements are detrimental to employees' performance. Collaborative approach, respect/recognition, person-job match, autonomous and challenging tasks, flexible working arrangements, brand image, and location near hometown are the propellers for continuing service in organisations. Contrarily, hierarchical/dominant approach, humiliation, lack of respect and recognition, biased approach – different rules for different people, monotonous and boring assignments, and uncompetitive pay are the propellers for not continuing service in organisations. Humiliation, lack of flexible arrangements, and overwork are the causes for employees' absenteeism.

Research limitations/implications – This study is not without limitations. First, there were some critical incidents with apparent overlapping content areas. To overcome this situation, the authors decided to give preference to the primary theme emerging out of an incident. Second, the observations made in this study were limited to descriptions of what happened in only three organisations. This limits the ability to generalise the results.

Practical implications – Organisations can train supervisors to develop people-centric communication practices, communicate with respect and recognition, implement flexible working arrangements, improve job design, involve employees in important decisions, offer them with autonomous and challenging tasks, so that employees realise their full potential and become happy contributors to their organisations.

Originality/value – The study attempted to capture employees' lived experiences and provided them with narrations of situations that are commonly and uniquely experienced.

Keywords Corporate communications, Employee behaviour, Employee attitudes, Employee relations, Management attitudes, Employees involvement

Paper type Research paper



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Introduction

Relationships have been an integral part of human lives. Effective managerial communication in an organisation helps to connect with employees, build positive relationships and frame attitudes and behaviours of employees in the workplace (Wyatt, 2006).

There is a shift in the way managers communicate with their employees/subordinates. It is believed that in the 1950s the emphasis was on reducing bureaucracy. From the late 1950s to early 1980s the emphasis moved to motivating and involving people for harnessing their unused potential. During the late 1980s and into the early 1990s organisations had begun to consider employees as their greatest asset as they became more and more multinational and decentralised. But now, the asset metaphor is elevated to a new level. Organisations have started recognising their employees as human capital owners and investors (Davenport, 1999).

The word “yoga” in “udyoga” provides a new vision of business in India. It can be considered as the fifth way of self-realisation, the other four being raj yoga, gyan yoga, bhakti yoga, and karma yoga. The managerial meaning of yoga is “yearning for oneness and gaining advancement” (Sharma, 2005). Managers represent organisations and their communication can influence employees’ behaviours down the line (Vuuren *et al.*, 2007).

Although relationships have been one of the pivotal concerns in management research for decades, the significance of relationships between employees and organisations has become even more salient. While the role of emotions has been emphasised in organisational research (Rafaeli and Sutton, 1989), the display of emotions in organisations has become a topic of greater interest to organisational scholars during the past several years. Increased competition has forced organisations to focus greater attention on the way employees are treated at the workplace.

Background

We had previously conducted a quantitative-questionnaire-based study to gauge the impact of managerial communication styles on employees’ attitudes and behaviours. Hypotheses were derived on the basis of extensive literature survey. Studying a cross-section of 400 employees (working under middle managers, line managers, and supervisors) from ten similar manufacturing organisations in eastern India, the study examined the relationship of managerial communication styles and employees’ attitudes and behaviours through the lens of social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and organisation support theory (Eisenberger *et al.*, 1986; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002; Shore and Shore, 1995). Analyses were carried out using SPSS 16.0 and AMOS 16.0. Results revealed that managers/supervisors communicate in passive, aggressive, and assertive styles. Assertive style of communication of superiors can foster maximum supportive work relations. The perceived supervisory support (PSS) can fulfil the communication needs of employees and increase their organisation-based self-esteem (OBSE). While PSS can increase affective commitment (emotional attachment) that can reduce absenteeism, OBSE can enhance job performance (Dasgupta, Suar, and Singh, 2013).

At the time of collection of filled-in questionnaires, some employees agreed to share their experiences about their supervisory communication, recognition, behaviours, and attitudes and those were jotted down in field dairy. The important narrations relevant to the context were reported. The revelations by employees were interesting and synonymous with McGregor’s (1960) Theory Y.

Relationships and social bonding play a vital role in Indian culture (Dash *et al.*, 2007). Employees tend to be in supportive relationship with superiors who create

trustworthy environment through open, honest, and need-based communication. They cultivate *sneh-shradha* relationship with their superiors (Sinha, 2002). While passive managers can be indecisive, poor mentors, and uninspiring, assertive managers consider the rights and needs of everybody (Arredondo, 2003). They have the ability to support and connect with employees both rationally and emotionally, which helps them to properly manage their employees. Accordingly, assertive managers have extended more support to employees compared to passive managers. Conversely, aggressive managers due to their rude and self-centred behaviour could not maintain positive relationships with their employees.

Supportive communications of supervisors build positive relationships thus increasing PSS and increase employees' communication satisfaction because their needs are met (Madlock, 2008). Also, PSS helps in the development of employees' OBSE by enhancing employees' scope for decision making and developing a sense of job autonomy. The OBSE of employees in organisations reflects the perceived value they have of themselves as organisation members (Pierce *et al.*, 1989).

Organisational commitment (OC) is the desire of employees to remain in the organisation. OC has three dimensions: affective, continuance, and normative (Allen and Meyer, 1990). Affective commitment is the employee's positive emotional attachment to the organisation. Continuance commitment is the state in which the employee commits to continue his/her job in the organisation because s/he perceives high costs of losing organisational membership, including economic (such as pension accruals) and social costs (friendship ties with co-workers). Indian culture values emotions, family ties, and long-term relationships. Employees develop emotional attachment with their organisations when they are satisfied with the communication of supervisors. This emotional attachment encourages them to attend their work regularly. On the other hand, just fulfilling the intrinsic needs of employees may not be sufficient to increase their performance. Also, an employee might stay in an organisation in spite of dissatisfaction with his/her manager's communication, if s/he does not have any other employment alternative(s). Employees who are bound by economic exchange may or may not be regular in their work.

As in the "Pygmalion effect" (Livingston, 1988), employees give their best when expectations of supervisors are high. When employees are trusted and offered challenging work, their enhanced self-esteem trigger higher job performance as well as better job elsewhere (Goris *et al.*, 2000; Villegas and Cerveny 2004).

Employees have reported very low rate of absenteeism in the quantitative study. Employees might not have taken leave without permission due to the severe consequences they might have to face including pay cut, losing jobs, etc.

Previous studies have suggested that OC can influence absenteeism (Savery *et al.*, 1998). But issues like OC and absenteeism of employees along with the impact of communication were not explored fully within the structured frame of the quantitative study. However, the experiences shared by employees laid the foundation to comprehend effects of managerial communication practices through a qualitative study.

Qualitative research has not been emphasised much by the industrial/organisational psychologists in the study of employees' behaviours (Ehigie and Ehigie, 2005). Adopting a qualitative approach can reveal the fine-grained realities that are likely to escape in a quantitative study (Ehigie and Ehigie, 2005; Patton, 2002). Recently, the critical incident technique (CIT) has been instrumental as a research technique to explore organisational problems. Rather than the pre-conceptualised notion and specific hypotheses, efforts

were made to explore the effects of managerial communication using a similar technique like Herzberg's critical incident.

In Herzberg's (1959, 1968) study, 200 accountants and engineers in Pittsburgh area of the USA were asked to narrate incidents when they felt exceptionally good or bad about their present and/or past job. Analysis of reported critical incidents revealed that when employees reported or talked about good feelings or satisfaction, they mentioned the factors intrinsic to the job – achievement, recognition, responsibility, challenging job, and growth or advancement. When employees talked about bad feelings or dissatisfaction, the analysis of narrated incidents revealed the factors external to the job – company policy and administration, working conditions, salary, personal life, status, status, security, relationship with supervisors, peers, and subordinates. Analysis of critical incidents gave rise to the two-factor theory of motivation because the motivation/satisfaction as well as dissatisfaction reside in two distinct category of job factors. Using similar critical incidents in happiness and unhappiness in communication with supervisors, this study intends to explore the effects of managerial communication practices.

Method

Sample

The sample consisted of 150 employees (working under middle managers, line managers, and supervisors) in three organisations, one at Haldia of West Bengal, one at Tatanagar of Jharkhand, and one at Renukut of Uttar Pradesh (in eastern India). Totally, 50 employees in each of the three organisations were randomly selected and individually approached with the permission of higher authorities and explained about the purpose of the study. The organisations were large private firms having similar range of employees (2,000-2,500) with more or less similar structural hierarchy producing electricity, steel, and aluminium, respectively.

Complete anonymity of responses was assured. Out of 150 employees, 101 completed testimonials were returned. The response rate was 67.33 per cent. Of the 101 employees, 90.1 per cent were males and only 9.9 per cent were females. The sample contained the lower representation of females since there were very few female employees compared to male employees. The age of employees varied from as low as 20 to as high as 60. More than half of employees were from urban background, about one-fifth were from rural background, and about one-fourth were from semi-urban background (see Table I).

Measure

CIT was used to capture employees' experiences at the workplace. The technique focused on respondents' accounts of events that had actually happened (incidents) in communication with superiors rather than on generalisations or opinions. Four open-ended questions were designed to elicit the narration of incidents for: first, increasing happiness in communication and superior performance; second, unhappiness in communication and underperformance; third, absenteeism; and fourth, inspiring commitment towards organisations or turnover. Employees were requested to recall situations at the workplace in which they had good and/or bad experiences. The prompts to mention the critical incidents were. First, mention one incident when the communication of your immediate supervisor made you happy, inspired, and consequently you were able to perform well. Second, mention one situation when the communication of your immediate supervisor made you unhappy, uninspired, and

	Frequency	%	Managerial communication practices
<i>Gender</i>			
Female	10	9.90	291
Male	91	90.10	
<i>Background</i>			
Urban	55	54.46	
Semi-urban	26	25.74	
Rural	20	19.80	
	Minimum	Maximum	
Age	20	60	
Total family members	1	12	
Total work experience	0.4	41	
Total salary per month	2,500	60,000	
Number of promotions	0	6	Table I. Sample profile
Years studied in formal education institutions	9	24	

consequently you failed to perform well. Third, narrate one situation created by your immediate supervisor due to which you wanted to take leave or had taken leave to escape the work environment. Fourth, narrate one incident why you want to/do not want to continue with your organisation.

The employees identified issues related to communication that were responsible for their attitudes and behaviours. We did not analyse the data with preconceived categories based on earlier research (a priori approach), but the categories emerged from the views of employees (a posteriori approach).

Each incident was read through several times to obtain the central theme in it. Incidents were deemed to be critical when the purpose and the outcome of the incident were reasonably clear and relevant. The incidents were scrutinised by a panel of three experts in social sciences, and then categorised on the basis of inductive judgements. The categories which evolved finally included the incidents.

As a part of the process of verification, one respondent from each organisation was invited to check whether the words were properly interpreted and summarised. Two doctoral scholars in communication acted as coders. They assessed the contents and put the themes into different categories. In the first round, each coder was given 30 critical incidents. The classification of the two coders in 27 critical incidents matched exactly, suggesting the inter-rater consistency of 90 per cent. In the second round, half of the remaining critical incidents was analysed and put into different categories by one coder and the rest by another coder.

Results

From the survey content categories emerged against the critical incidents. Employees identified the following aspects of managerial communication that contributed to their happiness and enhanced performance: collaborative approach, respect/recognition, flexible working arrangements, trust, clear direction, involvement, and autonomous and challenging tasks (see Table II).

On the other hand, employees identified the following aspects of managerial communication that were responsible for their unhappiness and low performance: hierarchical/dominant approach of the supervisors, humiliation, biased approach, lack of flexible working arrangements, and selfish approach.

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Table II.
Positive and negative
aspects of managerial
communication

	Descriptive <i>n</i> (%)
<i>1. Communication of supervisor that made employees happy and performance oriented</i>	
(a) Collaborative approach	55 (54.46)
(b) Respect/recognition	54 (53.47)
(c) Flexible working arrangements	52 (51.49)
(d) Trust	51 (50.50)
(e) Clear direction	50 (49.50)
(f) Involvement	46 (45.54)
(g) Autonomy/challenging tasks	45 (44.55)
<i>2. Communication of supervisor that made employees unhappy and decreased their performance</i>	
(a) Hierarchical/dominating approach	46 (45.54)
(b) Humiliation	45 (44.55)
(c) Biased approach – different rules for different people	42 (41.58)
(d) Lack of flexible working arrangements	41 (40.59)
(e) Selfish approach	39 (38.61)

In order of perceived importance to employees, the reasons to stay in organisations were: collaborative approach, respect/recognition, person-job match, involvement, autonomous and challenging tasks, flexible working arrangements, brand image, and location near hometown.

The reasons for employees' intention to quit organisations were: hierarchical/dominant approach, humiliation, lack of respect/recognition, biased approach/different rules for different people, monotonous/boring assignments, and uncompetitive pay (see Table III).

Employees also pointed out the following reasons for taking leave to avoid the workplace: humiliation, lack of flexible working arrangements, and overwork (only when allotted forcefully).

Table III.
Causes of employees'
desire to stay/leave
and absenteeism

	Descriptive <i>n</i> (%)
<i>Causes identified by employees as major contributors to employees' desire to stay with organisations</i>	
(a) Collaborative approach	55 (54.46)
(b) Respect/recognition	54 (53.47)
(c) Person-job match	52 (51.49)
(d) Involvement	46 (45.54)
(e) Autonomous/challenging tasks	45 (44.55)
(f) Flexible working arrangements	43 (42.57)
(g) Brand image	36 (35.64)
(h) Location near home town	33 (32.67)
<i>Causes identified by employees as major contributors to employees' desire to leave organisations</i>	
(a) Hierarchical approach	45 (44.55)
(b) Humiliation	44 (43.56)
(c) Lack of respect/recognition	44 (43.56)
(d) Biased approach	42 (41.58)
(e) Monotonous/boring assignments	41 (40.59)
(f) Uncompetitive pay	34 (33.66)
<i>Causes identified by employees for being absent to escape workplace situations</i>	
(a) Humiliation	50 (49.50)
(b) Lack of flexible working arrangements	47 (46.53)
(c) Overwork	44 (43.56)

Discussion

Studying the critical incidents of 101 employees, the findings reveal that collaborative approach, respect/recognition, flexible working arrangements, trust, clear direction, involvement, autonomous, and challenging tasks are important indicators to make employees happy and drive them towards superior performance. Contrarily, the dominant nature of the superior and more bossism than required, humiliation, biased approach, lack of flexible working arrangements, and selfish attitude of supervisors are detrimental to employees' performance. Collaborative approach, respect/recognition, person-job match, involvement, autonomous and challenging tasks, flexible working arrangements, brand image, and location near hometown are the propellers for continuing service in organisations. Contrarily, hierarchical/dominant approach, humiliation, lack of respect/recognition, biased approach, monotonous and boring assignments, and uncompetitive pay are the propellers for not continuing service in organisations. Humiliation, lack of flexible working arrangements, and overwork are the causes for employees' absenteeism.

Collaborative approach

Collaborative effort is the combined/coordinated effort of supervisors and subordinates in order to resolve issues. Employees reported to be happy when they worked in collaboration:

Our supervisor encourages us to work in collaboration. Once we were very upset when not getting proper solution to the sudden breakdown of our plant. Our manager had a meeting with us, discussed the problem and collaboratively we solved the problem.

Employees appreciate democratic setup and love to share difficulties. They believe that "none of us is as good as all of us". The collaborative environment fosters a "we" spirit, contributes to synergy, and builds alliance relationships. The interdependence of employees makes an integrated organisation.

Hierarchical/dominant approach

Rigidity in thought and action of managers reduced the efficiency and creativity of employees:

My manager is overdominant. Last week, I was given a task. But he was monitoring my work every now and then. He wanted explanation over small things like a school teacher. This irritated me a lot. I cannot work like this [...] I will have to look for other job.

Employees get frustrated to have someone breathing down their necks every minute. Indian employees exhibit a preference for reduction in the power distance if possible and value work if it is part of a positive personalised relationship (Kumar and Sankaran, 2007). It is wasteful if managers do not allow employees to use their skills and knowledge to their full potential. An employee explained:

I felt very depressed when my manager imposed decisions on me. He insisted that the steam flow transmitter of the plant should be calibrated. I was sure that calibration was not required. But my manager would not listen. I wished I could withdraw myself from the work but had no other option than to continue. I couldn't concentrate.

Employees felt unhappy and tried to escape from the workplace when supervisors pushed them to overwork:

We have been working for 10-12 hours a day in our organisation. But when my supervisor forcibly gave me an additional task of looking after the safety department, I felt extra burdened. I went on leave to avoid the situation.

When pushed to overwork, disenfranchised employees do not like to attend to their work. Performance declines and the downward spiral continue. Contrarily, employees reported to be happy and experienced a deep “camaraderie” when managers listened to them with empathy:

My supervisor periodically asks for our suggestions. Once when I told him that daily monitoring of current in a motor would prevent sudden breakdown, he listened to my views very carefully and took necessary steps. This made me feel important and I felt more enthusiastic to perform better.

Respect/recognition

Respect and recognition to employees give them the motivational push they need to stay loyal and committed to organisational goals. The following incident described by an employee clearly illustrates this:

Two weeks ago, I was able to complete a task one day before the schedule. I received a grand appreciation from my manager in front of all members of my office. The incident has made me more confident to handle any task.

Another employee illustrated his contentment and intention to stay as follows:

I had worked day and night to complete the task allotted by my supervisor. And the good news is that my dedication was recognised by my supervisor. He recommended my name for promotion. I wish to stay here for long.

Employees want to see a clear and measurable return of their effort. Although a part of that return may be monetary, surprisingly a large part has to do with the respect/recognition that they earn in the workplace.

Humiliation

Abuse in the workplace has come increasingly into limelight. Employees sometimes revert back with negative attitudes and behaviours:

Yes, I had taken leave just to escape the work environment created by my supervisor. The multimeter which is used to detect problem was malfunctioning. My supervisor was horrible. He shouted at me very badly although it was not my fault.

Another employee said:

The history card of instruments was not updated. My supervisor scolded me in front of everyone. I understand that I had committed a mistake, but to err is human. That does not mean that you start shouting at an employee in front of his colleagues. I was not able to concentrate on my work. I even went on leave for a few days.

A manager who threatens employees, uses scare tactics, makes unfounded accusations, screams, and abuses is a workplace bully. Employees feel defeated and humiliated. Their emotions are hurt, following which they are unable to perform well. An employee indicated:

My supervisor bashes me unnecessarily in front of my peers. The situation has become such that he has become a nightmare for me. I do not feel like going to the workplace anymore. I wish God could change my supervisor or I'll have to change my job!

It is a fact that “employees leave the boss but not the organisation”. More often, employees develop withdrawal intentions because of the way supervisors treat them.

Flexible working arrangements

To balance increased pressures of work and family life, some supervisors allow flexible working practices. This leads to increased motivation and productivity. Flexible arrangements include part time or reduced hours, additional career breaks, assistance with child care and eldercare, extensions to statutory maternity leave, paternity leave, emergency leave working, job sharing, compressed work weeks, voluntary reduced time, and flexible work schedules. Employees felt very happy and supported when they had flexible working arrangements:

Recently my brother met an accident. I asked my manager to grant me leave for a few days, as this was an emergency. My manager didn't hesitate to grant me leave although the deadlines for commissioning the plant were very tight.

Another employee explained:

Our supervisor is very efficient and knows how to manage our workload. Sometimes, if you are really tired with workload and have to work till late at night, you can get up late the following day and arrive at the factory late.

Contrarily, employees felt disappointed at the lack of flexible working arrangements:

Once I had applied for leave to attend my brother's marriage. My manager cancelled my leave. At that point of time, there was no emergency in the plant. But still I had to cancel my tickets. I felt very depressed and was unable to concentrate on my job. As soon as I get a good job, I will leave.

Another employee complained:

Once I had taken leave to go to Kolkata for my daughter's treatment and even booked the tickets. But I had to cancel the leave because my supervisor forced me to do so. I felt very unhappy and completely drained out.

Another employee reported:

My supervisor cares much more about how long you have worked than about how much you have accomplished. Is it fair that spending a much longer time doing the same amount of work can be taken as being more hardworking? It is better to be with your family and child after completion of your task. But I have no choice than to waste time unnecessarily at the workplace.

Many employees felt trapped and greatly stressed out when working conditions were not flexible. The effect is subtle, yet cumulatively it becomes powerful. It creates stress, disturbs worklife balance, and sometimes leads to absenteeism and turnover.

Trust

Trust is formed when immediate supervisors transfer their care to employees and deal in their day-to-day transactions with utmost transparency and fairness. Employees feel empowered, confident, willing to take risks, and embrace change. They become more responsible and there is a high degree of accountability and ownership. One employee commented:

In my present organisation my supervisor trusts me much. He would go on leave only if I am not on leave. This makes me feel that I am an important and essential part of my organisation. I would really like to continue here.

Biased approach

Some managers apply different rules for different people. Employees felt unhappy when they experienced biased approach of their superiors:

Despite having several positive feedbacks, I was given the most general rating at the time of annual appraisal. My manager told me that whatever I had done was expected. I had not exceeded or excelled. I felt very bad and down and this hampered my performance as well.

An employee expressed his discontentment thus:

I think my manager is inclined more towards his personal relationships with employees than the skill set of employees. How bad technically an employee is, if he/she is in his good books, he/she will get everything in his/her plate. Let it be salary hikes or better opportunities. I have never been dishonest in my work and so I strongly believe in getting recognition for what I have done. This ray is missing here.

Another employee narrated:

Its very hard to believe but I myself faced racism in my project. My manager was very much biased toward people of his own caste and speaking his mother tongue. Its very tough to work in such workplace situations. I am not able to concentrate on my work.

Another employee explained:

My supervisor has a predefined circle of trust. The people inside that would get every benefit whereas people outsider it will have to wait for long. Recently, one of my colleagues got a promotion, although he does not deserve it.

Selfish approach

Some managers lack work ethics. They are often incompetent and incapable of formulating their own ideas and resort to stealing the ideas of employees in order to hide their own deficiencies. Such thieving supervisors also blame employees when organisational goals are not met. If there is success to be claimed, they take all the credit and refuse to acknowledge the contribution of employees. Employees felt undervalued, demeaned, and cheated when their managers were selfish and unfair and took the credit themselves:

My manager is very selfish. On substantial occasions to surmise it is, as always, heads he wins tails I lose. A few months back, DCS (Distributed Control System) was not responding and the total control system failed. There was no communication between FCS (Field Control System) and HIS (Human Interface Station). It was me who found out that the underground V-net cable (connecting between FCS and HIS) was cut by rat. The cable was replaced and the problem was rectified. But my effort was not recognised. The higher authorities could only know that the problem was solved by my manager. Perhaps that was the unhappiest day of my life in the organisation.

Another employee complained:

There was a problem in PLC (programmable logic controller). I detected that the problem was in the input card of PLC. The problem was solved immediately with the replacement of the card. Yet, my supervisor took the credit for himself in front of the management. He did not even mention my name there. The incident gave me many sleepless nights.

Clear direction

Efficient supervisors set clear expectations from employees, including what is to be done, when it is to be done, and where it goes after they complete their responsibilities.

While this can be accomplished by creating a comprehensive employee manual, a “personal touch” by interacting with employees in group and in one-on-one setting enhances employees’ positive attitudes and behaviours. Employees felt happy and connected to the core purpose of the organisation when their superiors gave them clear directions:

Recently, when we had a sudden breakdown in our plant, our manager had a meeting with us. He clearly explained the roles to each one of us. This helped us to perform well and properly handle the situations. I find it very interesting to work under his supervision.

Involvement

Employees want to learn and grow. They want their opinions based on their expertise to matter and to be taken seriously. They feel happier if their ideas and opinions are implemented into a process. When supervisors encourage employee participation and expect novel ideas, the organisations are more likely to be benefitted (Rooney *et al.*, 2009). Here is one such incident:

My boss does not take decisions independently. Whatever may be the situation, he always discusses with me/us and due to this I never feel that his decision is imposed on me, even if the workload is sometimes high. Once when the steam temperature was showing erratic reading, my manager consulted me and we detected that the problem was in the junction box. The wires were found loose and were rectified. I enjoy working here and wish to stay here for long.

Autonomous and challenging tasks

Employees reported to be happier, performance oriented, and more attached to organisations when they had some decision-making power and consequently felt a greater sense of control over their jobs:

My supervisor encourages me a lot. After my DCS training, I was given the power to take decisions independently. I felt very enthusiastic. I got a chance to further learn and test my abilities. I could successfully perform the task.

Another employee elaborated:

My supervisor provides me the power and freedom to try new methods to solve the problems. Recently, I tried condition based monitoring to prevent breakdown and I could handle the situation successfully. This is the reason why I like to stay here.

On the contrary, lack of power and freedom prompted employees to look for other jobs:

The role that has been allotted to me has little importance in my project. I feel neglected and demoralised to work here. I want to have a somewhat challenging role. If I am given a job with better opportunities and freedom, I would like to leave.

These expressions show that employees want to be challenged by their work, especially those which stretch their abilities and create a learning atmosphere. Many employees felt monotonous and frustrated doing the same type of jobs daily:

My job is very monotonous. I get bored of updating history card and documentation job day after day. Perhaps it would have been interesting if I were offered some other interesting task by my manager. I really need a change.

Job rotation policies expose employees to new responsibilities and functions. By cross-functional training, some job monotony can be reduced, so that employees have a

variety of tasks to perform. An employee became enthusiastic when given a chance for distributed control system training:

We feel bored and monotonous by performing the same type of work daily. When I was selected for DCS training which was a relatively new thing for me, it inspired me a lot as I was given the opportunity to learn and explore a new domain.

Participation in multiple roles can actually expand, rather than diminish resources and lead to increase in well-being. Success or satisfaction in one role may buffer the stress or dissatisfaction that is evolved from another role. Finally, other positive outcomes such as increased income, social support, and self-efficacy may also develop as a result of managing multiple roles.

Person-job match

While challenging tasks appealed to most of employees, it is worth noting that employees lost interest if they were not matched to their jobs in terms of their abilities, interests, and personalities:

My supervisor is a tough nut to crack. He thinks that since he is my boss he has every right to force me to do anything. He forcibly allotted me a task which did not match my abilities and interests. In the end I had to leave the city by taking a voluntary relocation to another place.

Another employee expressed:

My experience is in mechanical department. But a few months back my manager transferred me to safety department, saying that I was not good enough in mechanical department. I took leave to escape the humiliation and started looking for a new job.

When employees are put in jobs where the demands of the job do not match their abilities, where stimulation offered by the job does not match their particular interests, and where the demands of the position does not match their skill, knowledge, and attitudes as well as personalities, employee absenteeism and turnover intentions increase, and performance decreases as well.

Brand image

Employees felt secured to work for an organisation, which is a responsible corporate citizen and a trusted brand in the market:

The organisation that I am working in is one of the big players in the steel market. So, it's a pleasure for me being a part of this organisation. I feel proud to work for this organisation. I want to be here for long.

Another employee said:

My present organisation is striving to be one of the best of its own kind. It really feels great to be a part of such a reputed organisation. I would like to work here for the rest of my life.

Location near home town

Only a few employees considered the location of their workplace to be important. Having strong emotional attachment with their family, friends, and relatives, they feel comfortable and contented with their jobs if the location of their workplace is near their hometown. One employee indicated:

My organisation is in my home town, Haldia. That's a big advantage for me as I can work while staying with my parents. I have a special attachment with this place, and so, I would like to continue with this organisation.

Another employee said:

The reason why I prefer to stay with my present organisation is that it is quite near my home town Kolkata. It takes only 3-4 hours to reach my hometown. I can visit my family and relatives almost every weekend.

Uncompetitive pay

Employees need adequate and reasonable salary to satisfy their physiological and security needs like food, clothing, healthcare, and also for other needs like relations with family and friends. A sound pay policy is, therefore, critical to retention of employees. One employee said:

I cannot fulfill my needs with this salary structure. If I get a job which would offer me a better salary than what I am getting here, I will leave this organisation.

Another employee indicated:

The salary structure of my organisation is not very impressive. I have two school going children. My parents are also dependent on me. I am willing to work day and night for this organisation, provided I receive a salary hike. But if my salary is not increased, I will leave.

Pay vs personal growth and dreams

An interesting finding here is that, high employee turnover cannot be simply smothered by salary increase and other costly extrinsic incentives. Employees' happiness may be dependent on how an employee sees his or her work (Wrzesniewski *et al.*, 1997). Employees exchange not only impersonal resources such as money with their organisations/supervisors, but also socio-emotional resources such as approval, respect, recognition, and support (Eisenberger *et al.*, 2001). They deeply care for emotional comfort and self-fulfillment. They have goals to achieve which surpass financial gains. Involvement, autonomous, and challenging tasks make them feel that they are important and responsible part of their organisations. One employee narrated:

One of the reasons why I want to continue with my current organisation is that, here I am enjoying the autonomy and thus meeting my career goals. I have defined a milestone for my life and I think with my present work and rewards it is on track.

Another employee narrated:

I am not satisfied with my job. The money I am being paid is the best in the market but I do not have opportunities for my career growth. I want to change my job not because of any monetary reason but because of the monotonous and boring assignments.

Still another employee revealed:

I had joined this organisation for its relatively better pay, but now I feel that from the career perspective, it was the wrong choice. I have tried my best to deliver to the organisation but my supervisor has never recognised my efforts.

Conclusion

The study attempted to capture employees' lived experiences and provided them with narrations of situations that are commonly and uniquely experienced. The findings are in accordance with McGregor's (1960) Theory Y. The major theme that has emerged is that employees like to work and stay in organisations where the communication between supervisors and employees transpires the intrinsic worth of employees,

provides respect, and instills recognition beyond the financial rewards. Perhaps these needs of employees are least satisfied/met in the workplace and consequently those have prominently surfaced in the contents of the incidents. Though the qualitative study did not specify the variables outlined in the quantitative study, the broad themes of both the studies reinforce each other.

Employees consider emotional comfort as one of the major elements of motivation and love to be managed by people-centric leadership – one that has the human factor at the centre of things (Bardwick, 2007). Putting employee happiness first has a direct, positive effect on individual productivity, and by extension, organisation profitability (Pfeffer, 1998; Gavin and Mason, 2004). Organisations can only develop competitive advantage by creating value in a way that is rare and difficult for competitors to imitate (Becker and Gerhart, 1996). A people-centred strategy is an important source of competitive advantage because, unlike technology, cost, or new product development, it is difficult to imitate (Pfeffer, 1998). Great leaders through effective communication create “connection cultures” that meet the emotional needs in the people they lead. Managers, who are able to connect with subordinates on a human level, minimise the difference between superior-subordinate relationships and create a comfortable environment in which subordinates can develop and use their abilities. This is leadership Darwinism – survival of the happiest.

Limitations and future study

This study is not without limitations. First, there were some critical incidents with apparent overlapping content areas. To overcome this situation, we decided to give preference to the primary theme emerging out of an incident. Second, the observations made in this study were limited to descriptions of what happened in only three organisations. This limits the ability to generalise the results.

Because every investigation raises issues for further investigation, there is no dearth of scope for future research. First, research can be replicated in a sample of employees from diverse organisations. Second, a comparative study can be made on the communication of male and female managers and their influence on employees’ attitudes and behaviours.

Implications

The culture in collectivist countries like India emphasises on interpersonal relations and social bonding as compared to structural bonding (Dash *et al.*, 2007). Indian managers at workplace need to narrow the power distance, treat employees more humanely, and improve the social bonding at workplace to bring out employees’ talents and increase their performance. Organisations can train supervisors to develop people-centric communication practices, communicate with respect/recognition, implement flexible working arrangements, improve job design, involve employees in important decisions, offer them with autonomous and challenging tasks, so that employees can realise their full potential and become happy contributors to their organisations.

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