

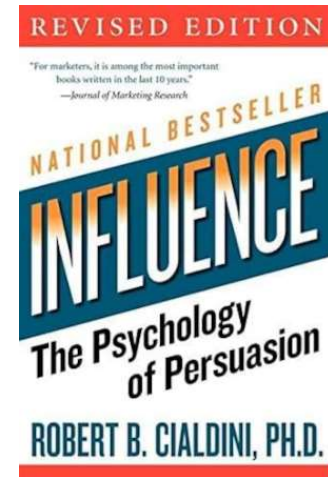
ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR AND HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

prof. Giovanni Masino
University of Ferrara

Lesson 17

The relevance of social influence in HRM:
a few examples

Social influence mechanisms



- SOCIAL VALIDATION
 - NORMATIVE CONFORMITY
 - INFORMATIONAL CONFORMITY
- AUTHORITY
- RECIPROCITY
- LIKING
- UNITY
- CONSISTENCY
- SCARCITY

- How are these processes of social influence relevant for Human Resource Management?
- in other words, how can companies use this knowledge to improve their HRM effectiveness and/or avoid mistakes?

SOCIAL PROOF, CONFORMITY and HRM: a few examples

- Promoting Ethical Behavior and Compliance

- In ethics training at Bechtel, a large engineering firm, new employees are shown real-life stories of colleagues reporting misconduct, emphasizing that "this is how people behave here" (normative conformity) and "this generates significant advantages for the company" (informational conformity)

- Improving Diversity and Inclusion

- Intel publicly committed to increasing representation of underrepresented groups and shared internal data showing where progress was made
 - Employees saw in-group behavior shifting, which nudged further support and participation in inclusion efforts.
 - In team meetings, managers consistently use inclusive language and gently correct exclusionary jokes. Over time, others conform to this inclusive behavior to fit in socially, not just because of a formal policy

- Encouraging Participation in Voluntary HR Programs

- In some corporate wellness programs, participation rates jumped when HR posted a message emphasizing a high participation rate, like: "74% of employees in your department have already completed their health screening"

- Potential dangers and risks

- conformity can be very powerful to spread both positive, useful norms, but also negative, undesirable norms. **Only desirable norms should be made salient!**
 - remember the Wells-Fargo case

SCARCITY and HRM: examples

- in HRM, the scarcity principle can be applied in relation to a number of different aspect, e.g. resources, opportunities, access, talent etc
- **Access to Development Opportunities**
 - A company offers selective access to high-potential leadership programs. Only 10 employees per year are invited based on clear criteria
 - This increases perceived value and motivates high performance. Employees aspire to qualify, and those selected feel proud and engaged
 - the Talent Program example in Zurich
- **Recognition**
 - A peer-nominated "Employee of the Month" award with only one winner
 - Scarcity makes the award prestigious, driving recognition-seeking behaviors like OCB (Organizational Citizenship Behavior)
- Potential dangers and risks
 - need for **transparency and fairness**: use scarcity to drive motivation, not favoritism
 - avoid perceptions of **exclusion** (remember the Award Program in Google)

LIKING and HRM: examples

- Peer-Led Onboarding Programs

- A company assigns new employees to an onboarding "buddy" chosen partly for shared interests (e.g., hobbies, education, values)
 - This may boost early social connection, reducing stress and improving retention

- Effective Leadership

- Google found that one of the top traits of effective leaders was being “a good coach” and “showing interest in team members’ success and well-being”
- plenty of research data on LMX (leader-member exchange): leaders that are more capable at using empathy, active listening, finding common ground, providing feedback, helping etc tend to generate a number of positive outcomes in their group and teams

- Internal Recruitment & Referrals

- Many companies use employee referral programs to find new hires
- Referrals tend to perform better and stay longer in the company, in part because they’re introduced into networks of pre-existing liking and trust

- Potential dangers and risks

- **unjustified bias** for the ones we “like” (especially in hiring and promotions)
- overreliance on **charisma** and “**likeability**” in leadership selection

UNITY and HRM: examples

- Onboarding as Identity-Building

- an HR department designs onboarding not just to communicate policies, but to create in new hires a **shared identity**
 - New employees are told, “Welcome to the Company X family”; they hear stories of founding struggles, company legends, and shared values; they meet “culture mentors” who help socialize them into the company’s norms.
 - The goal is to transform the organization from a workplace into a source of identity, which strengthens affective commitment

- Cross-Functional Rituals and Symbols

- Zappos is famous for using company-wide rituals (like “Zappos Culture Book,” peer-recognition systems, and costumed events) to reinforce a sense of fun, inclusive unity across departments
 - by creating **shared symbols and language** across different roles, Zappos minimizes siloed thinking and fosters a strong shared identity.
 - outcomes: higher collaboration and lower turnover due to emotional attachment

- Potential dangers and risks

- beware of the potential **contradiction with individual incentives**
- failing to recognize **the relevance “subcultures” and “sub-identities”** within organizations (based on local culture, profession, tasks and functions etc)
- superficial / artificial unity-building initiatives

RECIPROCITY and HRM: examples

- Investing in Employee Development

- employees in companies that offers generous training, certifications, development initiatives show more loyalty (lower turnover) and more discretionary effort and performance
 - the benefit in performance is not just about better skills, but also more effort because of a sense of “reciprocity” activated by the investment in them made by the company
 - Salesforce and SAP invest heavily in reskilling and internal mobility programs, which are linked to strong internal talent retention

- Flexibility and Work-Life Balance

- when leaders allows remote work for caregiving or family reasons, a number of positive behavioral consequences can be observed:
 - Employees voluntarily adjust schedules, work extra during critical times, or remain more loyal.
 - Studies on Perceived Organizational Support (POS) show strong links between feeling supported and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB)

- Potential dangers and risks

- Reciprocity must be ... reciprocal! if the organization fails to reciprocate and employee's efforts, disengagement follows
- Perceived coercion: if reciprocity feels obligatory, not voluntary, it may generate cynicism of compliance without engagement
 - e.g. Employees are pressured to donate to a company-sponsored cause, participate in wellness programs, or mentor without recognition or compensation

FINAL REMARKS: HRM as MANAGING RELATIONSHIPS

- HRM is mostly about managing relationships between
 - employees
 - leaders and employees
 - the company and the employees
- so, HR managers need to have a good understanding of the principles that govern social relationships. A few key notions are absolutely essential:
 1. the idea that **CONFORMITY to SOCIAL NORMS** is a very influential in defining our behaviors in almost all situations
 2. it is particularly useful to be able to understand the difference between **NORMATIVE** and **INFORMATIONAL** conformity
 3. the idea that **RECIPROCITY** is a crucial social norm: it's the foundation of **COLLABORATION**, which is essential for any effective organization
 4. the idea that we are very sensitive to **AUTHORITY**, which is at the same time essential for coordination but it also has several potential dangers
 5. the idea that there are **several general principles** that, in some situations, can help us significantly in building better relationships (unity, consistency, liking: all these are to some extent related to **IDENTITY**)
 6. the idea that **EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP** is mostly about managing relationships, especially in small groups and in complex tasks, as we will see in the final part of our course

a short speech by Simon Sinek that summarizes many things

- <https://youtu.be/UZTyvbmW92M?si=P9isv1BRGLYFwxHS>
- this is a short speech on leadership, by Simon Sinek
- we haven't talked about leadership directly, but we will shortly
- however, we have talked about it indirectly
 - every single topic we covered (decision making, motivation, social influence) is CLOSELY RELATED to leadership
- BEFORE WE WATCH THINK ABOUT ALL THE (DIRECT OR INDIRECT CONNECTIONS) WITH SEVERAL THINGS WE HAVE TALKED ABOUT SO FAR
- THE GENERAL RELEVANCE OF SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS
- THE RELEVANCE OF CONSISTENCY, OF HOW THE LITTLE THINGS ACCUMULATE OVER TIME
- A SENSE OF UNITY, SHARED IDENTITY, COMMON VALUES
- A SENSE OF RECIPROCITY AND COLLABORATION
- LIKING EACH OTHER