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What Works Where?

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What Works Where?

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Honors Research Project

Submitted to

The Honors College

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Abstract

For this project my goal is to examine the management styles of three workplace environments and the relationships those styles create between the employees and their managers. I will endeavor to explore areas that can be improved from the management perspective of the work force so that employees will have more input in their workplace setting. The environments that this project will look into are the office setting, retail setting, and labor setting. Information for this project was collected via questionnaires that I constructed. There were two surveys distributed for this project. One survey was for employees and the others was for the managers. These surveys asked questions about various aspects of the workplace. Among the topics covered were workplace feedback, communication, and company culture. The goal of this project is to be able to provide assistance to managers/supervisors to help improve overall employee relationships. Note: In this report the terms manager and supervisor are synonymous.

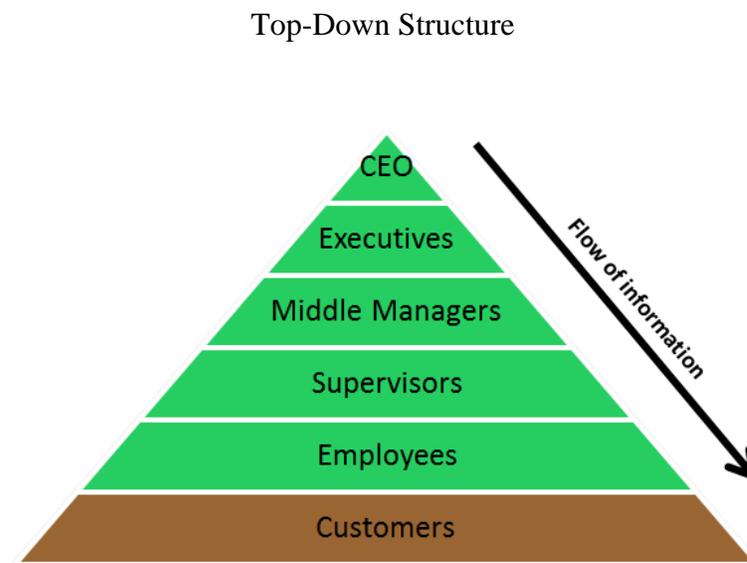
What Works Where

Current workplace environments and conditions are much different than ever before. Work is faster paced, business is conducted on a larger scale, and projects and tasks are more sophisticated. As workers evolve to take on the growing demands of the workplace, the management approach that they desire also evolves. In many cases front-line workers, who carry out the day-to-day activities of jobs have a much better understanding of the position than the supervisor. For example, the difference between a department store worker and the store manager. The store manager's position requires more focus on things such as maintaining inventory, making schedules, meeting productivity quotas, and other tasks that remove them from the roles of those who report to them. Where the store worker interacts with customers, stocks the shelves, and maintains general upkeep of the sales floor. As a result of the difference in duties it can be challenging to know how to engage employees and maintain an efficient and effective relationship. This is an element of management that can easily be overlooked and if employees have poor relationships with their managers it may have negative impacts.

As a manager it is important to understand that no two jobs are alike. Each environment has unique needs and operating styles. This requires that managers be prepared with a variety of management methods to use when on the job. There are many management approaches and positives and negatives associated with each approach. However, the majority of individuals in managerial positions are not familiar with them.

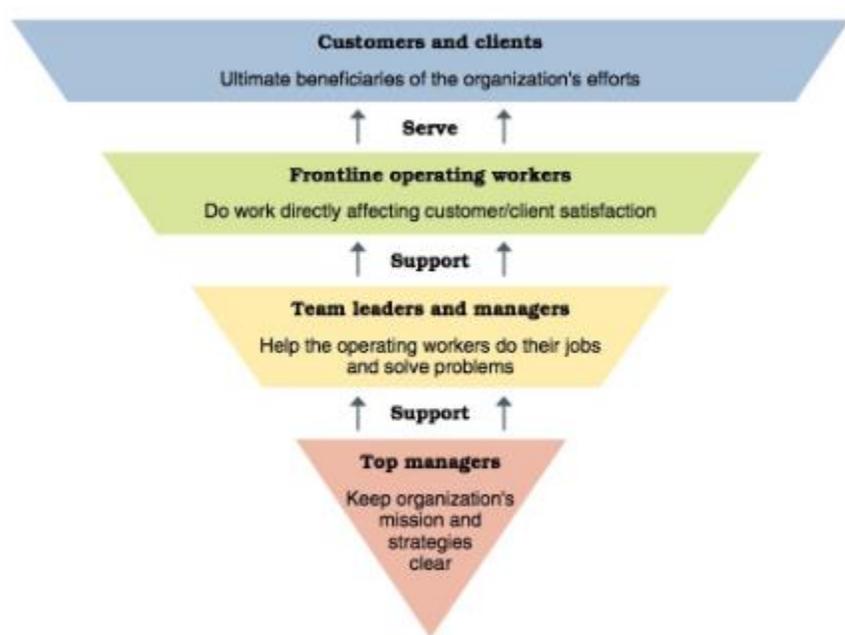
The typical top-down organization structure, where the managers are on top and the front-line workers are near the bottom, is no longer the way that organizations should be structuring themselves. This structure fosters a rigid chain of command with little to no

opportunity for those at the base of the organization to have a voice. As a result of this, frontline workers feel unsupported, underappreciated, and undervalued. To change the way workers feel about their organization the new structure should be the upside-down pyramid. This structure promotes unity and trust among employees and managers because managers are working along with their employees to provide the service or product to the customers. This method also allows for workers to become more independent and autonomous. This is the result of them being able to think for themselves and exercise their problem solving and critical thinking skills in situation where managers would step in and handle things in the typical organizational structure. With this method managers stick closer to their core functions of leading, planning, organizing, and controlling while they allow the employees to carry out the execution of day-to-day functions.



(Humanbusiness.eu 2017)

Upside-Down Pyramid Structure



(Schermerhorn & Bachrach 15)

Hypothesis: Labor workers desire a delegative management method, office workers desire a participative management method, and retail/service workers desire a coaching method.

The delegative approach can be defined as “leadership style in which a leader transfers decision making power to one or more employees, but remains responsible for their decisions.” The participative approach can be defined as “type of management in which employees at all levels are encouraged to contribute ideas towards identifying and setting organizational-goals, problem solving, and other decisions that may directly affect them.” Lastly, the coaching approach can be defined as a leadership style with a “focus on (1) an individual's needs and accomplishments, (2) close observation, and (3) impartial and non-judgmental feedback on performance” (“Online Business Dictionary - BusinessDictionary.com”).

Labor workers may benefit from delegative management methods primarily because they often know how to fulfill all of the tasks that their position requires them to do. Often, their tasks are repetitive, and they do not need any aid from their managers. They may even know more about tasks of their particular position than their manager does.

Office workers may benefit from a participative management method because it provides more support for the employees while still allowing them to maintain a significant level of independence. Employees in this work setting tackle a number of repeat situations, but they also encounter issues that fall outside of their knowledge base, thus they may require more interaction with their managers.

Lastly, retail/service workers stand to benefit from a coaching method because it shows that the manager are invested in them and support their efforts. Coaching requires managers to be present and supportive while encouraging employees to developing their critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Each work environment has its own unique needs and challenges. “The Hersey-Blanchard situational leadership model suggests that successful leaders... adjust their styles” (Schermerhorn & Bachrach 326). Adjusting one’s style in order to meet the needs of a particular situation or environment is known as situational leadership (“What is Situational Leadership? How Flexibility Leads to Success” 2014). In order to be as effective as possible a, manager must be able to identify the strengths, needs, and weaknesses of their employees, and then adjust their style in order to work with them.

Method

Participants

There were 39 responses to the manager questionnaire and 91 responses to the employee questionnaire. The number of responses to some individual questions varies from the total number of responses. There were no divisions on age, sex, or race. All responses were anonymous to help promote honest answers to questions that may elicit negative feedback. Participants were solicited by distributing links to the surveys via various electronic communication methods. There was no compensation or incentive offered to individuals who completed the surveys, participation was completely voluntary.

Materials

Online surveys were utilized to collect information from both managers and employees. The surveys were constructed by myself and my project sponsor. They consisted of multiple choice, short answer, and extended response questions. A link was used to access surveys on Google Forms.

Procedure

Participants received a short communication explaining who I was and what the project was for. The communication also contained links to both the manager and the employee surveys. An individual started the survey by clicking a link that directed them to the survey on Google Forms. Once on the form they were informed that their responses were anonymous and that they would only be used for this research project. After completion of the survey participants received an automatically generated message that thanked them for participating in the project.

Results

Employees

Question: I receive constructive feedback from my supervisors

28 strongly agreed, 48 agreed, 11 disagreed, and 3 strongly disagreed. These results are indicative that for the majority of employees, constructive feedback is not something that is a major hurdle between them and their supervisors.

Question: Directives from my supervisor are clear and understandable

24 strongly agreed, 47 agreed, 15 disagreed, and 4 strongly disagreed. These results are consistent with the previous question's results in that they indicate communication with management is not much of an issue.

Question: My feedback is taken into consideration by my supervisor/administration.

30 strongly agreed, 43 agreed, 13 disagreed and 4 strongly disagreed. The responses to this question line up well with the previous questions that inspected communication lines in the workplace. They show that about 20% of employees do not feel their opinions and suggestions are not being heard or taken into account.

Question: Please provide three words that best describe your company culture

Of the 88 responses 14 responses were negative. They contained descriptors such as punitive, stressful, unsettled, harsh, and dismissive. The remaining responses indicated that employees were satisfied with their companies' culture.

Question: Please indicate some challenges you have faced in the advancement of your career

Of 85 responses there were 28 responses that indicated management hindered their advance. The responses were explained by phrases such as lack of support, inadequate training, unfair promotion practices, and glass ceiling limitations. (This list is intended to provide examples of responses that show causation, by no means is it comprehensive.)

Question: What are some things that management can do to improve your work experience?

Of the 86 responses there were 25 of them that stated communication needed to be improved in some way. Another 10 responses expressed that there was a need for more general support from those in management. There were 9 responses that said there was nothing management could do to improve the experience.

Question: Do you believe that you are able to operate at your full potential in your position?

Of the 89 individuals who responded 27 stated that they did not feel that they were able to operate at their full potential. The remaining participants indicated that they were able to operate at their full capacity.

Question: What other resources and/or support (if any) would help you to overcome job-related obstacles?

Of the 81 responses there were 23 that either indicated a need for more training, more support, or both. There were 8 responses that expressed a need for clarity/improvement of a policy or communication. Lastly, there were 12 responses that expressed an inadequacy in funds, necessary tools/resources for the job, or number of people for the positions. The remaining responses did not fit into a singular category.

Question: Do you feel employee satisfaction is a priority for this organization?

Of the 88 responses there were 27 that stated they did not feel that their company made employee satisfaction a priority. There were 61 responses that stated that they did feel their organization made employee satisfaction a priority.

Managers/Supervisors

Question: How would you describe your approach to management? What factors lead you to this description? Number of Responses: 38

14 responses stated that they use some combination of approaches. 14 responses stated that they utilize a coaching approach. 10 responses stated that they utilize a delegative approach.

Question: What results have you seen that show your management approach is effective?

Number of responses: 38

Managers responded to this with a variety of responses. The majority of them can be summed up into trust, employee growth, improved production, and improved company culture.

Question: What are some behaviors that you see from your employees that show they are responding positively to your management approach and they do not simply comply because of your authority? Number of responses: 39

Answers to this question showed that the manager felt their employees started to become more comfortable with them. They asked more questions, brought forth more creative ideas, and expressed their appreciation. Other responses stated that there were improved team dynamics, more initiative being taken, and improvement in the quality of work.

Question: What are some steps you take to foster an environment where employees have an opportunity to grow and develop? Number of responses: 39

The feedback that this question prompted made it apparent that one major thing in developing an employee is being invested in them. This is done by taking time to get to know them, listening to them, and encouraging them to push themselves. Another point that stuck out was making sure employees have opportunities to partake in training or mentoring.

Question: How do your employees know that their feedback will be heard and not discarded? Number of responses: 39

Managers stated that one step they take is discussing the feedback with the individual to let them know it was received. Another task that they do is follow up with employees to update them on the process. Last, managers said that they either make the employee aware of the implementation of their feedback or provide an explanation as to why changes were unable to be made.

Discussion

Labor

The employee data shows that a concern for a significant amount of individuals is that they desire more training. The second challenge that labor employees face is lack of resources. Their responses showed that they need the right tools and personnel to improve their work experience.

When employees responded to questions about whether they felt they were able to operate at their full potential, the majority of the participants said yes. Those who responded in

the opposition often attributed it to factors unrelated to anything management could change e.g., unreliable transportation. These results support my hypothesis that labor workers desire a delegative management approach. The support for the hypothesis comes from workers identifying few personal issues such as appreciation and acknowledgement and identifying more task-oriented issues such as lacking tools and resources as stated above.

The data from labor managers shows that they tend to take a delegative approach and only intervene when they are asked. This aligns well with what the employee results stated. Managers in this field seem to have an understanding that workers are in a position where they only need interaction from management to receive directives and to request more supplies or resources. The responses to the survey are evidence that most managers in this field are aware of the most effective management approach to use, but they need to work on their execution of the approach.

One reason that delegation may work well in the labor field is due to flat structures of the organizations. A flat structure is an organizational layout with a wide span of control and few hierarchical levels (Schermerhorn & Bachrach 257). Due to the wide span of control, managers would be overwhelmed if employees came to them every time something was wrong or there was a decision that had to be made. Thus, delegation makes sense in this environment and structure. If there is a need for employees to report to manager in a flat structure the delegation method would allow them to utilize teams and give one individual the responsibility of reporting the necessary information.

Office

The office results from the employee perspective displayed that they face a few different challenges when it comes to their success. Responses to the question about the challenges they have faced in their career advancement show that employees tend to find themselves in positions or careers that do not have many opportunities to advance. Those that do have these opportunities often face educational barriers or feel that they are overlooked for promotions.

When employees were asked what management could do to improve the work experience the responses conveyed that many employees desire more communication. This was a bit of a surprise considering the first three questions of the survey all asked about communication and none of the questions had a disagree percentage of more than 25%. Nonetheless, the feedback from the employees expressed that they want to be able to bring issues to the attention of the management and have them taken care of. Many of the responses indicated that management needs to make a better effort to listen and follow up with action.

The manager information from the office environment indicated that the prominent approach was delegative. 15 of the 28 office responses stated that they utilized the delegative approach or some combination of approaches that included it. This may be where employee feelings of insufficient support stem from. Delegation has a way of minimizing interaction between managers and employees. In order for employees to be heard, and be able to communicate, they need interaction. This supports my hypothesis that office workers desire a participative management method. Using the participative approach in an office setting provides the necessary interaction to allow employees the opportunity to give their input to managers while allowing managers enough distance to refrain from micromanage.

Along with utilizing a participative management style, managers might also want to put into place some sort of work teams. Teams would allow workers to draw support from one another as well as potentially increase efficiency. An additional benefit of this would be a reduced workload on management staff. This would come as a result of individuals not having to come to them with questions or concerns as often because they were able to ask their group for assistance.

Retail/Service

Feedback from the employees in the retail/service environment showed that their primary concerns are poor scheduling, lack of respect from higher ranking individuals, and insufficient communication from their managers. Another less prominent concern was that workers felt they were not being given the compensation they deserved. All of these challenges, with exception of the compensation, could be addressed and potentially handled by management, yet they still persist. These concerns are directly affecting the productivity levels that individuals are able to achieve. The “no” responses to the question of, “Do you believe that you are able to operate at your full potential in your position?” attributed the inability to reach full potential to the previously stated factors. An aspect to keep in mind is that out of 17 respondents 3 felt that their feedback was not taken into consideration. This indicates that management is hearing the complaints, but they are not following up with any action. The results do not support my hypothesis that retail/service workers desire a coaching method. My conclusion is these employees do not need close observation or intensive guidance, therefore they would best benefit from a participative approach.

The mechanistic design of some retail/service organizations could be contributing to the challenges that the employees are facing. “A mechanistic design is centralized, with many rules and procedures, a clear-cut division of labor, narrow spans of control, and formal coordination” (Schermerhorn & Bachrach 256). The tall chain of command and centralization can make an organization rigid and slow to implement change due to all of the processes and paperwork.

The data gathered from the management survey shows that the approach of most managers in the retail/service environment is coaching. Responses convey that when utilizing the coaching approach managers believe they provide the necessary amount of support while also being able to encourage the employee to think and make decisions for themselves. Many stated that they want to empower employees so that they will be able to increase their level of autonomy. This seems like a very reasonable and achievable goal if implemented correctly. In fairness to the managers they did report that they are able to see that their approaches are effective via productivity, employees receiving promotions, and employees taking on more responsibility. This shows that their approaches are not failing, just that there are opportunities for improvement. In order to bridge the gap between the understanding that the managers have and the way the employees feel there needs to be more two-way communication so that employees can express their needs and opinions.

Improving the opportunities for employees to express their thoughts and give their input is a step in the right direction. Along with this I would say that management also needs to make more of an effort to improve company morale and employee motivation. One way to do this may be offering incentives such as providing lunch or a gift card for good customer satisfaction reviews. Another option is offering a bonus for meeting quotas or reaching goals consistently. These ideas take advantage of the reward-driven approach which, “is the process in which

motivation is generated by reward anticipation and selective approach behaviors toward reward” (Kim). This approach provides a boost for employees because they feel appreciated and they know their work does not go unnoticed. It can also be applied to teams or different shifts. There could be an incentive put in place for the team/shift that has the best statistics each month. A result of this may be more cohesion between employees and improved attitudes towards work.

General

After reviewing the answers to both of the surveys it became abundantly apparent that communication is one of the foundational aspects of an effective and efficient manager. Employees across all fields had an underlying theme of desiring more transparent and meaningful communication. They want those with higher ranks in their organization to be honest and direct in relaying information. Along with receiving better communication they would like more opportunities to give their input and be heard. From my research I would infer that in order for situations to improve there needs to be much more open and honest dialogue between management and the employees.

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