



Preventive Stress Management

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

To be able to:

Identify and explain methods for resolving conflict in organized institutions

Explain creative and innovative ways of promoting job environment

Describe the use of external help in reducing stress situations

Explain the basis and process of MBO in modern management

ABSTRACT:- Because inter-group conflict is inherent in the nature of modern organized institutions, management should be capable of resolving this conflict before the dysfunctional consequences affect organizational performance. The ability to prevent minimizes, and to resolve conflicts successfully is an important skill or competency which administrators or managers must develop. The various strategies for preventing, minimizing and resolving intergroup conflicts can be classified into three main categories which will be the focal point of this article.

Keywords:- preventive stress management, avoidance, defusion, confrontation, and MBO techniques

I. INTRODUCTION

Because inter-group conflict is inherent in the nature of modern institutions, management should be capable of resolving this conflict before the dysfunctional consequences affect organizational performance.

PURPOSE OF THIS ARTICLE

In this journal article, it is necessary to carefully examine and evaluate guidelines for implementing preventive stress management techniques and programmes and make sound recommendations on specific actions which may help to reduce stress patterns, and to improve the work environment within the given institutions. It needs to highly appreciated that the ability to prevent minimizes, and to resolve conflicts successfully is an important skill or competency which public administrators and managers must develop. The various strategies for preventing, minimizing and resolving intergroup conflicts can be classified into three main categories: namely, avoidance; defusion, and confrontation.

II. METHODS FOR RESOLVING CONFLICT IN ORGANIZED INSTITUTIONS

Avoidance as a method

The avoidance strategy involves a general disregarded for the causes of the conflict by enabling the conflict to continue only under certain controlled conditions. Three distinct methods prevail under an avoidance philosophy: (a) non-attention, (b) physical separation, and (c) limited interaction.

Non attention

Here the manager totally avoids or ignores the dysfunctional situations. The manager believes that the conflict will resolve itself in time. Because the sources of conflict are not identified by this method, it is likely

that the situation will worsen with time, this technique has a number of false promises in that it takes the view that the situation will resolve itself with time.

Physical separation

It involves moving conflicting groups physically apart from each other. The reliable for this strategy is that if the groups cannot interact, then conflict will diminish.

The disadvantages are that not only have the sources of the conflict not been identified, but if the groups are highly interdependent, physical separation will adversely affect the overall effectiveness of the institution. It is at best only a stopgap measure and may eventually require more organizational resources for continuous surveillance to keep the groups apart. Physical separation is, therefore, a temporary measure of preventing or minimizing conflicts within organizations or groups in industrial organizations.

Limited interaction

Research indicates that it is not an all-inclusive strategy because conflicting parties are permitted to interact on a limited basis. Interactions are permitted generally under only formal situations, such as a meeting at which a strict agenda is followed. The same disadvantages caused by physical separation, that is, sources of conflict still prevail, problems of high interdependency, and future dysfunctional consequences can still result.

Defusion as a method

Diffusion strategy tries to buy time until the conflict between two groups becomes less emotional or less crucial. It involves solving minor points of disagreement, but allows the major points to linger or diminish in importance with time. Two particular techniques are classified as defusion strategies: smoothing and compromise.

Smoothing is a process or technique of playing down the difference between two groups while accentuating their similarities and common interests. Identifying and emphasizing similarities and common interests between conflicting parties can eventually lead to the groups realizing that they are not as far apart, for instance, goal incompatibility, as they initially believed. Although building on a common viewpoint is preferable to an avoidance philosophy, the resources of conflict have not been fully confronted and remain under surface. Sooner or later, the central conflict issues will surface, possibly creating more painful and severe situations then.

Compromise is a give and take process, which results in neither a clear winner nor loser. Compromise can be utilized when the object, goal, or resource in conflict can be divided in some way between the competing groups. In other cases, one group may yield on one point if it can gain something in exchange. Some types of labour management relations and negotiations can be viewed as compromise. For instance, management will agree to a cost of living pay increase if labour will agree to a cost of living pay increase if labour will guarantee that productivity will increase. Compromise is generally effective when the conflicting groups are relatively equal in strengths. However, in situations where one of the groups is significantly stronger or in a better position than the second group, a compromise strategy would probably not work because the stronger group would hold out for a one sided solution in the negotiation process.

Confrontation as a conflict – reduction technique

This final conflict resolution strategy differs from avoidance and defusion in that the sources of conflict are identified and examined, which emphasizes the attainment of the common objectives of the conflicting groups. Three management techniques are categorized as confrontation methods: mutual personnel exchange; emphasis on a super ordinate goal, and problem-solving or confrontation meetings.

Mutual personnel exchange involves increasing the communication and understanding between groups by exchanging personnel for a time. The assumption underlying this strategy is that the exchanged personnel can learn about other groups and communicate their impressions to their original group. For example, a common practice among manufacturing firms is to have shipping supervisors and sales representatives exchange roles. During the short exchange period, it is hoped that each group gains an appreciation for the other's job. This conflict reduction method is limited because it is only a temporary solution mechanism. In addition, on their return to their permanent groups, the exchanged personnel may be treated as outsiders, which may result in their knowledge and opinions not being fully utilized.

Super ordinate goals are common, more important goals on which the conflicting parties can focus their attention. Such goals are unattainable by one group alone and generally supersede all other goals of each other. A common super ordinate goal could be the survival of the organization. Petty differences are considered unimportant when the survival of the overall organization is in question.

Problem solving involves bringing together conflicting groups in order to conduct a formal confrontation meeting. The objective of this technique is to have the groups present their views to each other and work through the differences in attitudes and perceptions. Issues of who is right or wrong are not entertained, only the identification of problems and possible solutions is allowed. This technique is most effective when a thorough analysis of the problem and identification of points of mutual interest can be established and alternatives can be suggested. A problem-solving method, however, requires great time and commitment and usually is ineffective when the source of conflict originates from value-laden issues. It appears from research studies that problem-solving technique is one of the best conflicts – resolution techniques in modern institutions.

Creative and innovative ways to promote job environment

The truly creative and innovative institution is found only infrequently. The reasons are many but generally focus on the type of people that are employed and the nature of the organization's structure, procedures and systems. If a manager is seriously interested in establishing a creative and innovative environment in his unit, there are factors which help to promote be used as a good beginning. These factors which help to promote conducive job environment, are singled out as follows:

Permit open communication and interaction among employees

The successful idea and innovation highly depends on the free flow of information and data. By allowing employees to communicate and interact more freely; the chance that an idea can generated is enhanced. The can facilitate this by holding frequent meetings, seminars, courses and workshops, physically moving the employees closer together , or evaluating the communication between employees not as a waste of valuable time and effort ,but as a necessary, constructive management activity.

Encourage new ideas

Manager should welcome new ideas and techniques. Rather than hastily evaluating an idea as “it won't work, now go to work” or enforcing strict rules, the manager should encourage experimentation and informal brainstorming sessions. Giving a new idea a fair hearing may prove to be a most profitable activity. In effect it creates free, congenial and motivating atmosphere between and among employees.

Provide clear organization goals and guidelines

Creativity and innovation can be stimulated when employees have at least a minimum idea of purpose, objective and direction. The manager, however, should be careful not to set a too strict time schedule. This may hinder rather than encourage creativity, innovation, motivation and confidence in the employees.

Tolerate failures

It is known that every idea will not reach the final stages of the innovation process. In fact , only about one out of 50 new ideas ever gets past the proposal stage .If new ideas are rejected ,the persons should feel that they continue their activities, and not be worrying about whether this rejection will affect their career growth or security in the organization.

Constantly reinforce

Creative and innovative employees are motivated not only by intrinsic means [the feeling of accomplishment], but also by extrinsic means. If it is nothing more than a pat on the back or simple thanks for your effort; the manager will see many benefits. Of course, bonuses, significant pay increases, or advancement are important to creative individuals, but the basic recognition that they are doing well can be strong motivator to continue their activities. In effect, the more motivated person is the one who can develop into a better, more productive, responsible, employee.

Consider the use of external help

Many a time, the creative and innovative process can be stimulated by bringing in or using people outside the confines of the organization. This may simply take the form of talking over an idea with a neighbour, friend or colleague in another company. A short conversation with another person may prove to be a significant cerebral massage technique. On a more formal basis, many organizations have been turning to other organizations specializing in creative, innovative and imaginative thinking.

All these simple ordinary factors are significant challenges to managers and administrators of our time. They have profound positive effects to organizations if they are properly implemented. They, therefore, help to prevent the development of stress situations in individuals, groups, or organizations.

Management by objectives

One of the most popular and frequently used techniques to create effective, healthy and constructive team management is management by objectives (MBO). In its most basic form, MBO may be defined as: - A process whereby the superior and subordinate managers of an organization jointly identify common goals; define each individual's major areas of responsibilities in terms of the results expected of them; and use these measures as guidelines for operating the unit and assessing the contribution of each its members in the achievement of goals.

In essence, MBO is an applied managerial technique that not only emphasizes the importance of mutual understanding between superiors and subordinates, but is also concerned with initiating and stimulating job performance through a productive as opposed of a creative style of managing.
The basis and process of MBO in modern management

MBO has evolved in many institutions because it addresses certain important factors inherent in a person's job:-

Employees perform better when it is clear to them not only what is expected of them, but also how their individual efforts contribute to the overall performance of the organization of which they are members.

Employees want to have some say in the particular results that are expected of them.

While performing, employees have a need to know how well they are doing.

Employees want to be rewarded, for instance, money, recognition, opportunities for growth and advancement, and a sense of achievement, in line with their levels of performance.

These foundational elements have been translated into operational terms, and an operational MBO process usually involves at least eight steps as illustrated in the following operational framework:

Step 1: diagnosis

The first step concerns the preliminary activities that are directed towards an understanding of the important employee needs, jobs, technology, and issues in the institution.

Step 2: diagnosis

Involved in this MBO step are issues related to the overall aims and strategies of the organisation, receiving management commitment to the MBO process, and training and development in learning how to use technique.

Step 3: defining the employee's job

Possibly one of the most difficult steps, the employee is required to describe his particular job, its content, duties, requirements, and responsibilities. The important aspect of this step is that before individual goals can be set, he must know precisely what work is being done and how it is to be done.

Step 4: goal setting

The employee initiates the superior-subordinate interaction by developing a set of goals for the upcoming period, setting priorities, target dates, and methods of work measurement.

Step 5: superior review

The employee's superior reviews the initial goals, offers suggestions for improvement, and so on.

Step 6: joint agreement

Steps 4 and 5 are repeated until both the employee and the manager agree on the established set of goals for the period.

Step 7: interim review

During the period of evaluation, the employee and manager get together to review the progress toward goal accomplishment. These meetings can be scheduled for once, twice, or more during the year. The focus of these interim reviews is not only to see what progress has been made, but also to adjust the goals should new information or changing environmental events become crucial.

Step 8: final review

At the end of the goal setting period, the employee and manager formally get together to review the results. Emphasis is placed on analysis, discussion, feedback, and input to the next MBO cycle. At the end of

this step, the cycle is repeated for the next period. This is when experiences, discoveries, new ideas insights and interactions are significant.

The MBO process is closely related to the major functions of management. That is, planning function deals with Steps 1 and 2; organizing concerns Step 3 through 6; leading relates to Step 6 through 8; and controlling concerns Steps 7 and 8. Managerial changes relate to the recycling of the whole process. This direct relationship to managerial functions has resulted in the fact that institutions sometimes use MBO for different purposes.

Some organizations use to clarify the employee's job (planning and organizing);
Others use it to motivate employees (leading);

While still other organizations apply MBO as a performance control mechanism to check performance and to adapt to new conditions (control and change).

Nowhere is this difference in application more pronounced than in how institutions use the results of the MBO process (Step 8). Some organizations tie the MBO process results directly into the merit review process. In this way, the employee sees a direct monetary impact of MBO on his salary. Other organizations use MBO to improve job related performance, with little or no tie into the merit review process. Finally, still other organizations use MBO to identify managers for training, development and future advancement. There is no best practical application of MBO. The organization generally identifies its own needs and then adapts the MBO process to them.

MBO applications in practical work situations

Due to its popularity, MBO is subject of many organizational applications and studies. Among the most notable studies include those conducted at General electric, Wells Fargo, Purex, Weyerhaeuser, and Black and Decker. These research studies reveal the following:

Setting clear and specific goals has a greater positive effect on performance improvement than does the 'do the best you can' approach.

Employee goals that are perceived to be conflict but achievable tend to lead to better performance than do easy goals, so long as the goals are accepted by the individual.

Superior-subordinate participative goal-setting has been shown to improve performance more than superior-assigned goal setting.

The use of frequent performance feedback in the process results in higher performance levels of individuals that when feedback is not used.

There is growing evidence that unless successful goal achievement is reinforced, the performance levels of individuals will begin to decline.

Important criticisms

However, these and other related studies show a number of important criticisms in the use of MBO. The most prominent complaints include:

The programme is used as a whip by management to get employees to do what management wants them to do not what the employee feels is best.

The programme significantly increases paperwork in the organization.

The programme not only fails to reach the lower managerial levels, but staff position are frequently excluded, creating a problem of the 'haves and have notes.'

There is an over-emphasis on achieving quantitative results, and this ignores some of the important results which can be assessed in qualitative terms.

Rewards for good job performance, or the efforts either the level of subsequent performance, or the efforts put in by employees in the MBO programme.

In essence, these negative feelings and research findings are viewed as indicators that despite some initial performance improvements, the MBO programmes may have produced some important side effects that have developed into serious problems.

Factors to success with MBO as a technique for management practitioners

MBO has been known and used by managers for more than decades. A the following list can be looked upon at least as a start to determining some key factors to success with MBO.

Top management support; commitment, and involvement are mandatory. Without it; MBO will probably slowly decline in usage and effectiveness.

MBO should be integrated into the normal, daily activities of the manager. Managers should accept it as part of the management system, not just something they pull out of their desks once a year.

MBO should emphasize goals that when achieved can benefit the whole organization and the manager. In other words, personnel development goals should be included in an MBO programme.

Organizational resources, that is, time and people; should be devoted to the important diagnostic and training activities flow smoother.

Recognition of differences in units, departments, and functions in an organization is essential. Forcing a standardized programme on units that involve different processes, methods and constraints may meet with resistance and possible failure. Slight modifications to an MBO programme at the unit level can prove to be quite valuable and useful.

Over-emphasis on quantitative goals can undermine success. Qualitative goals can be equally useful. Great emphasis should be placed on evaluation.

Overnight results should not generate too much paperwork. An effective MBO programme can be conducted without the massive use of forms, memos, reports and the like.

Finally, a practically flexible and adaptable MBO system should be a goal in itself. As the system is used, new and different factors are discovered and evaluated.

On current research studies show that MBO can result in improved job performance, not in doing so; it requires careful diagnosis, training, implementation, and enforcement. These results clearly indicate that although MBO appears to be simpler on paper, it is a complex process and difficult programme to make work at any level in any organization.

Approved job performance

We have paid our attention on improving job performance. The selected techniques, that is, the creative and innovative process, MBO conflict, and stress analysis, have been chosen not only because of their popularity and number of reported successes, but also because they represent two views of management namely, (a) planning for improved job performance, and (b) removing or preventing the stressors to effective job performance in organization.

There are a number of managerial skills and roles that are related to these jobs performance techniques. With creativity and innovation, human and conceptual skills are most silent. Human skills concern the manner in which the manager establishes the climate for creative and innovative work activities to occur. The success of the innovative proposal stage is influenced to a great extent by the manager's conceptual skills, that is, the degree to which the need and technology can be carefully synthesized. Managerial roles are closely involved with creativity and innovation. The manager's liaison interpersonal role and all the informational roles are significant because of their emphasis on communication and information flow, which are so crucial to the innovation process. The manner in which the manager performs his entrepreneurial and resources allocator roles helps to move the creative and innovative process towards a successful conclusion in an organization.

All the four managerial skills are involved in MOB.

Technical skills relate to how the manager follows the MOB processual steps;

Human skills concern the important interactions between the manager and employees;

Conceptual skills come to the forefront when the manager links the job performance plans of the employees to the total organization; and the diagnostic skills relate not only to analyzing the particular jobs, but also to the interim review stage when internal and external changes force a revision of an employee's goals and plan. From a managerial role perspective, the manager's interpersonal leader role and all the informational roles also are important to the MBO process.

Human and diagnostic skills are the most important managerial skills in the conflict – resolution situations in institutions. That is, diagnostic skills relate to the process of identifying the sources of conflicts and stress, while skills become silent in the interpersonal activities in the resolution process. Successful conflict-resolution is also related to the performance of the manager in a leader role in the disturbance handler; resource allocator, negotiator and decisional roles in formal organization

Finally, in carefully identifying the sources stress, the manager's conceptual and diagnostic skills come into action. Managers should also recognize whether their performance in the leader and resources allocator roles is contributing excessive stress among and between employees. In reducing and preventing stress in organizations, managers should emphasize their human and diagnostic skills and informational roles.

Hints for administrators/managers in the modern institutions

The theoretical material on motivation, leadership, and group behaviour patterns can be integrated into applied framework directed at improving job performance. Understanding this framework is important because a manager in order to reach high performance levels must be able to motivate and lead individuals in groups, in institutions, and organizations.

Two of the most important factors in facilitating the creative and innovative process in organizations are improving information flow and creating a climate for innovation. A lack of information flow coupled with coercive work environment will date the development of new ideas, new products, and new services and this could lead to stress in the organization.

A key factor for managers to understand is that creative and innovation and functions more of the immediate environment than functions of the size of the organization. The organization can provide the required resources for creativity and innovation to occur. However, one-to-one relationships are the real heart of the process.

In its most basic form, management by objectives is really a simplified expression of the total management process. It involves planning, organizing, leading, and controlling as well as change.

The manager can use MBO to use achieve a number of purposeful objectives.

Managers need to recognize that that conflict is a common occurrence in most organizations, and the managers should develop the proper skill to diagnose the source conflict and stress, and also to develop the ability to prevent, reduce and minimize conflicts and stress in organizations.

Once the sources of conflicts and stress have been identified, appropriate skills should be developed to prevent, reduce, and minimize their occurrences in organizations.

III. CONCLUSION

We conclude our discussions on this important management aspect referring to what A. Warrington, T. Lupton and C. Gribbin, [Organizational behavior and Performance, London, Mac Millan, 1977, pp.25 and 35]. Warning, Lupton and Gribben, state that the voluntary element in joining an organization and the acceptance of rewards of service, partly explain why people confirm to the norms and rule of particular organizations it can be called a process of self selection. There is a need to recognize that members of an organization are individually motivated human beings whose behaviour is not perceived by them to be structurally determined; some of them will see themselves as those who determine.

In effect the motivation of employees is not on external act; on the contrary, it is something aimed at meeting the inner needs of people in the organization, and in this respect it is subjective. As P. Pigors and C.A Meyers [Personnel Administration, 8th edition, Tokyo: Mc Graw- Hill: Kogakusha, 1977, p. 99, and 98 – 111] state, people cannot exist without the minimum, satisfaction of physiological needs, the need arises from the animal nature of mankind, but because mankind is more than animal, it has social, psychological and spiritual needs which must be met. They go on to say:

At levels higher than mere physical existence every human being needs opportunities to belong; to give and receive affection and loyalty, to use and develop latent powers, and to spend spiritual energies in the service of some cause that transcends personal goals [p. 99].

Development is more objective, and it flows out of and extends beyond motivation, in that by development, the leadership of the organization seeks to take the latent talents that exist and provide the means

whereby they can be drawn out and not only the individual enriched but some benefit brought to the organization as well.

Logically then, it may be asked what practical acts can be carried to motivate employees, and to enable them to develop their talents. The following list could assist senior municipal administrators:

The organization should have a shared objective: a written statement known as a mission statement which can be described as a desired future position, that is, the target aimed at or the vision of the organization.

The inculcation of a team spirit [or esprit dicorps].

Allowing employees responsibility and authority so that they may achieve

Rewarding excellence, to be done in public, if it is to be effective.

Encouraging employees to make suggestions about improving work procedures, organizational improvements and the like, and visibly recognizing good ideas.

The organization should be so designed that each employee is certain of what is expected of him.

The team of employees should be told that, firstly, they have specially selected and secondly, that they have the authority to produce a solution.

Performance appraisal it must be clear that it is the performance itself and not the person that it is being evaluated.

The development of an employee calls for a measure of skill: it involves each leader studying the employee under him, and selecting those with promise. The following are some of the means by which employees can be developed:

Allowing employees to attend lessons to enable them to obtain improved qualifications; establishing training programmes;

identifying employees who show promise, that they can be promoted to senior positions and giving them special opportunities, for example, in project work, to demonstrate whether they possess excellence: hardworking, punctuality, smartness, team leadership, quantity and quality production, loyalty, obedience, good record keeping, ability to listen and follow instructions, timeous reporting, advance preparation of his work.

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