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Management Beliefs That Tend to Reduce Associate Motivation and Productivity¹

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Introduction

In this article we will discuss management beliefs that tend to reduce associate motivation and productivity. You will be asked to respond to seven "agree or disagree" statements that give an opinion on the relationship between associates and motivation. The authors' opinions regarding the seven statements are presented for the reader's consideration.

Management Beliefs and Motivation and Productivity

Managers and supervisors often have more influence over the motivation and productivity of their employees than they realize. In today's labor market where jobs are generally plentiful, inappropriate management beliefs and practices can cause employees to practice "compliance motivation". Compliance motivation involves an employee commitment level that results in a productivity level that can best be described as: "I will do just enough to get by (or potentially even less). After all, if I get canned from this job it is relatively easy to find another one that pays just as much." Obviously, in today's exceedingly

competitive marketplace, compliance employee motivation does not bode well for the future profitability of business firms.

The extent to which you and the managers in your organization hold on to some of these beliefs that tend to retard employee productivity, organizational profitability can be determined by the answers to the following seven agree/disagree statements. (Note: For maximum effectiveness, please answer these statements before accessing the answer at the end of this article.)

1. Security and good pay are the factors that associates (employees) most want from their job. Agree, Disagree
2. It is natural for people to resist change. Agree, Disagree
3. Money is generally an effective motivator of people. Agree, Disagree

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4. Lack of job knowledge is the number one cause of unsatisfactory work performance. Agree, Disagree
5. Associates (employees) receive a benefit from inappropriate behavior or they would not act that way. Agree, Disagree
6. The time that supervisors spend with associates (employees) in discussions that involve corrective action and criticism should be balanced with as much praise and recognition time. Agree, Disagree
7. When managing and supervising associates (employees) it is important to treat them equally. Agree, Disagree

After responding to these seven statements, please select the statement with which you most agree (# _____).

Research and experience strongly suggest that six of these statements are "disagree" and only one is an "agree". Please consider your authors' explanation regarding an agree/disagree position for each of the six statements.

Statement #5 is the only "agree". When managers perceive any of the statements to be correct, it is likely that they are utilizing management practices which inhibit associate productivity. It is a fact that most people do things for a particular reason. Even if the behavior does not benefit the organization, it is likely that the associate perceives the activity to benefit him/her. This benefit might even be as rewarding as "getting even" with management for a perceived injustice.

At this point, let's review the reasons for the six "disagree" statements. Security and good pay are important job factors. However, based upon many studies, the research is clear: Most currently employed people do not rank them at the top of their want list. They are most frequently ranked somewhere in the middle of the important job factors. One large sample study across a wide range of occupations, for example, ranked security and good pay fourth and fifth, behind recognition (full appreciation of work done), the feeling of being "in"

on things, and an understanding and appreciation regarding the associates' personal problems.

Most managers believe that resistance to change is a natural phenomenon. Yet, it is a fact that most people want to improve and do things better. Furthermore, it is impossible to improve and do better without changing. Hence, the discovery of an important inconsistency. The fact is, many people do resist change. However, it is an acquired reaction, rather than a natural reaction. Change resistance is most likely the result of how management instigates the change process, and what people resist is not change but "being changed." (A future article will focus on effective management of the change process.)

Research studies have proven that money is not generally an effective motivator of people. If you believe it to be so, you are challenged to remember the last time your people received a raise. More money, but were they motivated to work at higher levels of productivity, and if so, for how long? In reality, research indicates that money is much more likely to be a *demotivator*. This occurs when it is perceived to be inadequate and/or unfair.

Lack of job knowledge or lack of motivation: which source is responsible for most of the unsatisfactory work in your organization? Nearly three-fourths of surveyed managers responded "lack of motivation." The managerial implications are clear: in every poor performance situation, determine the cause. If it is lack of job knowledge, the appropriate action involves effective training, but if it is lack of motivation, additional job training will be a waste of resources.

It may be difficult to believe that the sixth statement is a "disagree". Yet, social science researchers are suggesting that the appropriate positive-negative feedback ratio for managers is 4:1. This 4:1 positive-to-negative feedback ratio has been shown to improve organizational work climate. Furthermore, this ratio is consistent with observations about the first statement. Most workers suggest that their managers do not come close to achieving this level of positive reinforcement.

On a side note, the research also indicates that mixing criticism with praise dilutes the power of praise, since most associates will likely only remember the criticism and forget the praise.

Regarding the last statement, it is recognized that everyone in our organization, and even in a manager's workgroup, are not equal. Therefore, it is inappropriate to even think about training them equally. One of the authors' favorite quotes is that "there is nothing so unequal as the equal treatment of unequals." The managerial focus should therefore be on treating associates equitably and fairly, not equally.

Are you convinced that the statements you originally thought to be "agrees" are "disagrees"? Remember, associate motivation and productivity (organizational performance) are at risk when managers hold these inappropriate beliefs. Look for future issues containing more potential managerial beliefs that can have a negative impact upon associate performance.

Conclusion

We hope you have found this article useful. We invite readers to provide feedback (via email) on which practices were the most prevalent in their organizations. In addition, Drs. Wysocki and Kepner are happy to lead a workshop on how managers and supervisors rethink beliefs that tend to reduce associate motivation and productivity.

Your comments and suggestions are always welcome and you may email directly at wysocki@fred.ifas.ufl.edu or respond via my extension web page at <http://webct.nerdc.ufl.edu:8900/public/WysockiExtension/index.html>.

References

Class discussions and Extension presentations led by Karl Kepner in AEB 4424, "Human Resource Management in Agribusiness."