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Spruce up your people skills; get the best outcomes from others

Often, to an employee, his immediate boss and the local work environs constitute the organisation for better or for worse. It is not the top management's decisions or organisational policies but the day-to-day

HR HIGHS

interactions with his manager and co-workers that impact his productivity and engagement levels. Evidently, there is a crucial link between the frontline manager's rapport with his team and its performance. But unfortunately not many

managers succeed at establishing the right equation with their team. This is because frontline managers are mainly technical experts and usually fall short of people management skills that are so vital to build and maintain productive work relationships. In that case, what is the impact of this skill gap on the organisation?

Quite obviously, the repercussions tend to be serious. Ms. Shikha Gupta, GM - Human Resources, Schneider Electric India, says, "The most obvious

and most prevalent impact is attrition, we have often heard 'employees do not leave organisations, they leave managers' and there is enough data to prove that. With attrition comes not only the cost of rehiring and integration time but also the competency loss which is ever so critical in knowledge organisations. An insecure and ineffective manager also has a more disengaged team leading to lesser willingness to go the extra mile. Usually, one notices poor managers surrounding themselves with sycophants, who are

generally, not the most competent employees. So, you have the cascading effect by which poor management spills over to the entire team and at times even to other teams, thus multiplying its negative impact." Rajesh Padmanabhan, HR Head, Capgemini India, adds, "The repercussions of having poor people management skills are widespread and damaging. Managers acting as the bottle neck, block the flow of ideas and communication in the chain of command. They

practice poor delegation and micro-management to the point of undermining the self-confidence of team members. They also display inability to push the right team members based on their true potential through the ranks of the organisation. The morale of the staff would be low if they don't feel valued. It saps their motivation to go the extra mile for the organisation."

Prabir Jha, Senior Vice President (Human Resources), Tata Motors elaborates, "At the minimum, it is under-performance and at worst it could be the collapse of the entire business. Being overly soft or being overly harsh and indifferent have equally disastrous consequences. People lose to work with fair and inspiring managers, more so in an era of choice. If not fully enthused, they will hold back their discretionary effort which will impact quality, productivity and engagement. This hurts the immediate performance of

the team which does not play at the optimal level. Worse, team dynamics are adversely impacted. People start looking out and many may leave. This derails the team further, adding to erosion of skills and experience and the entire business implication of fresh hiring and onboarding which directly hurts the business."

Speaking on why the skill gap exists, Jha says, "It is important to see this issue in perspective. In the initial days, one is actually doing a single performer's job. Many supervisors assume, erroneously, that a person who has delivered in an individual role will by default be a good line manager. Also, at times, the demand-supply imbalance of skills and the fear of attrition forces organisations to move people up. Hence, people get put into people leadership roles, often by accident and the hope that they will deliver. This transition from being responsible only for oneself to being responsible for

others is fairly significant. Many line managers do not quite appreciate this strategic difference in the two roles. All of us need to recognise that being good soldiers does not necessarily make us good generals!" he sums up.

Today, realising their folly, most organisations are paying greater attention to people skills while promoting their employees. Rajesh Padmanabhan recounts, "Leadership and functional capabilities are imperative for growth of the organisation. People management skills are one of the most important parameters considered for promoting a candidate to managerial positions. A manager who is a good people leader can foster belief and motivation among his/her team members. The manager could then channelise his/her efforts to drive organisational change and help teams to outperform themselves."

Gopinath Govindan, Director - Human Resources, CLP India, says,

"Promotions are a function of availability of role, performance of the employee in the current role and the potential of the employee to handle the higher role. Both the track record of goal achievement and behavioural competencies are given equal importance while deciding on promotions at CLP India." Further he adds, "People management skills assume greater significance at higher levels, as people at senior positions are not only expected to deliver business performance but also foster an environment for teamwork and development in the organisation. A certain level of technical competence can be taken for granted at these levels. For promotions to the senior most level, people management skills are a critical imperative." Let us see how people management skills of the managers can actually be enhanced in the next part of this article.

N. PURNIMA SRIRISHNA
lap@cnkonline.com