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Employee-Organization-Relationship: Towards a Conceptualized Ideal Model

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Abstract:

Organizational management is defined as “the process of organizing, planning, leading, and controlling within an entity with the overall aim of achieving its objectives”. What it implies is that for a business to maximize efficacy and achieve set organizational goals and objectives, it is imperative to make decision on going concern basis and also endeavour to resolve issues both current and outstanding in a manner that will inure to the overall benefit of the organization. Undoubtedly, this onerous burden is anchored on people within the organization. An attempt is therefore made in this paper to examine the employee-organization-relationship within the context of an idealized human resource conceptual framework, which, if properly harnessed can become a vital resource, providing the foundation and roadmap for crafting, maintaining, and maximizing organizational excellence. As such the common position adopted in this paper is that a well-crafted human resource framework can serve as solid foundation and a roadmap to establishing, maintaining, and above all, enhancing the potential of each and every employee of the organization to achieving organizational objectives in a relaxed and most dignified organizational environment. For effective discussion, the paper is structured into four sections, including organization as a system, organizational culture, theoretical underpinnings, and desired human resource framework.

1. Organization as a System

Meadows and Wright (2008) defined a system as an “organized collection of parts or subsystems that are integrated to accomplish an overall goal”. By implication, systems are said to be very pervasive, establishing presence everywhere, including the physical, biological, geographic, and social space. Examples of these abound. For instance, automobiles have an inherent systems and subsystems that make it to function effectively; the human nervous system, and perhaps also, the whole system which drives customer relationship management in organizations. Against this backdrop, Katz and Khan (1978) advocated for organizations to be modelled into systems or social systems fashioned with tools that make them very much alive, organic, dynamic, complex and complicated, but at the same time highly integrated so that they can function as a coherent whole. In this light, it is imperative to note that von Bertalanffy (1956, 1968) first introduced the system perspective by proposing that all systems, including the physical, biological, and social are endowed with certain predictable traits or behaviours that include open/closed exchange, interdependence, homeostasis, and nonsummativity of its parts. The underpinning assumption here is that the organization functions as a system in which every part plays significant role to attain the desired goal. It therefore implies that the malfunctioning or change of one part potentially affects (positively or negatively) the whole organization via the network of relationship established across the various parts.

Overall, the organization as a productive unit functions as a system at different, but highly interrelated levels. Essentially, therefore, employees constitute a significant part of the whole organizational system. The employee-organizational relationship is thus highlighted and amplified which should be symbiotically developed for mutual benefits.

2. Organizational Culture

Undoubtedly, culture has taken center stage of organizational development, greatly influencing how employees think and behave in relation to organizational objectives. It implies that in any organizational set up, culture appears to be more informal as it relates to beliefs, values, and norms of individual employees in the organization. It also shapes how the perceptions and worldview of employees of the organization dovetail into shared meanings to attain organizational objectives. It also implies further that culture is more manifested by symbols, rituals, and ceremonies. It is thus instructive to note that organizational structure may not demonstrate such cultural underpinnings because of its formal design. Bush (2003) essentially highlights this as follows:

“Beliefs, values, and ideology are at the heart of organizations. Individuals hold certain ideas and value preferences which influence how they behave and how they view the behavior of other members. These norms become shared traditions which are communicated within the group and are reinforced by symbols and rituals” (p. 156).

From the foregoing, Schein (1997), a Professor Emeritus of the Sloan School of Management of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) defined organizational culture as “a pattern of shared basic assumptions that were learnt by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid, and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems”. Desson and Cloutheir (2010) thus summarized the essential features of organizational culture as follows:

- i. Shared understanding of the organizational mission,
- ii. Values that guide decision-making and activity at all levels in the organization,
- iii. The focus and management style of senior officers;
- iv. How employees think of their relationship with management, one another, partner organization, and clients (p.2).

From the foregoing, it is thus imperative to note that organizational culture largely affects leadership and management of organizations. Implicitly, it determines, shapes, and gives direction to organizations. Essentially, it establishes the organizational contours within the economic and social space. This is highlighted by Morgan (1997) and O’Neil (1994). O’Neil (1994), for example, observes that organizational culture enables organizations to clearly “articulate values in order to provide form and meaning for activities of organizational members in the absence of visible and certain organizational structures and relationships. In this sense, analysis and influence of organizational culture become essential management tools in the pursuit of increased organizational growth and effectiveness” (p. 116).

In effect, culture may be seen as an abstraction. Nonetheless, its powerful influence on the organization relative to the thinking and behavior of constituents is certainly not in doubt (Desson & Cloutheir, 2010). Essentially, therefore, organizational culture impacts significantly on employee behavior on the job. The hypothesis then is that a more favorable culture has the greatest potential to extract the best out of the employee for enhanced productivity.

3. Theoretical Underpinnings

Abraham Maslow’s (1954) hierarchy of relative prepotency provides suitable academic space for the situation of this paper. Maslow, the existentialist psychologist built a basic theory of human needs and wants around a pyramid which demonstrates human needs in successive levels beginning from the very fundamental or survival level to the most self-fulfilled level at the apex to the pyramid. The following figure illustrates Maslow’s Hierarchy of Relative Prepotency proposition:

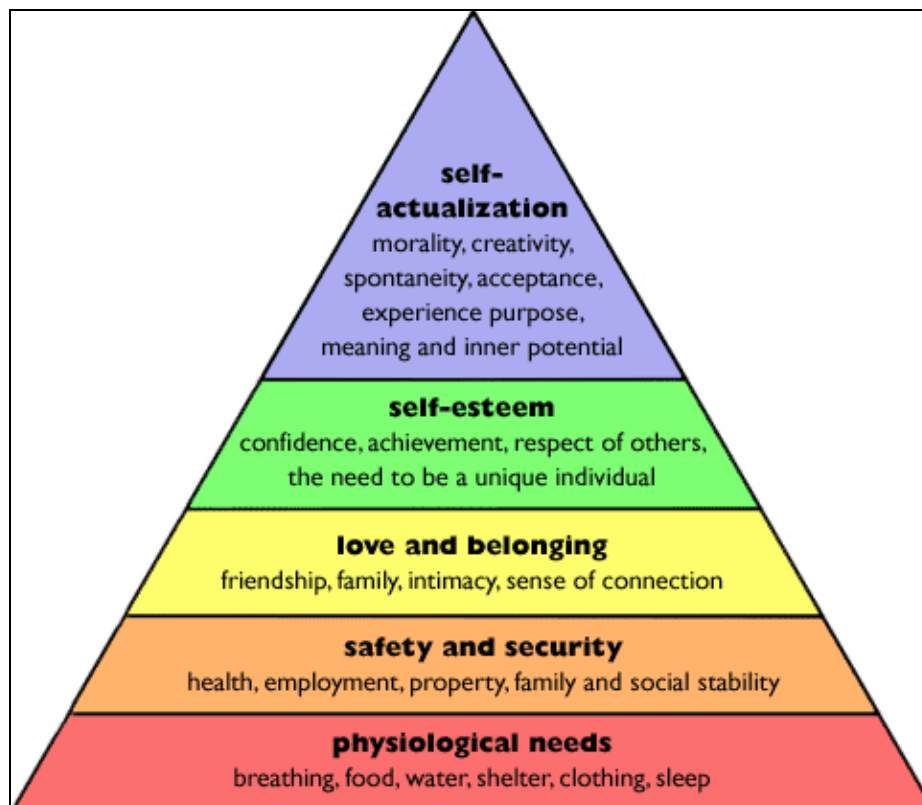


Figure 1

Source: Adopted from the Texas Hunger Project

As observed by the theory, human needs begin at the basic level. It is imperative to note that from the basic level moving upward, it is seen that the gap (needs) become narrower at each successive level till the very top. Be that as it may, it is argued that Maslow theory suffers from validation issues (Alderfer, 1972; Latham & Pinder, 2005; Shuttle, 1973; Schneider & Alderfer, 1973; Wahba & Bridwell, 1976). Intercultural validation of the theory has also been significantly brochured (Ajila, 1979; Rao & Kulkarni, 1998). Notwithstanding its shortcomings, it must be noted that it largely shapes contemporary leadership and management thinking. Come to think of it, the checklist of human needs has never been fully exhausted. It is argued that once there is felt need by the employee, it becomes a peremptory psychological void which is exceedingly inimical to the full potential productive capacity of the employee. How does the void get filled in the process? This is filled only by satisfying the need. The basic thrust of the theory is that employees like any other human beings have certain basic needs and wants. These needs and wants can impede the deployment of the potential productive capacity of the employee. It only therefore makes logical reasoning and economic sense that these needs are identified and satiated through motivation.

Another theory which is useful and can therefore be applied here is McGregory’s theory Y, which simply posits that “the essential task of management is to arrange conditions so that people can achieve their own goals best by directing efforts towards organizational rewards” (McGregory, 1960, p. 61). Theory Y implies that employees are self-directed with the full capacity to initiate tasks on their own. They are intuitively oriented and thus only need direction and alignment of organizational requirements with self-interests. Another theory which is related here is Argyris (1957, 1964) theory of personality and organization. This theory argues that management practice largely conflicts with human personality. According to Argyris (1957, 1964), just as plants make tremendous efforts to maximize their full biological potential, human beings, and for that matter, employees are shaped by “self-actualization trends”. That the plights of the employee at the work environment is best illustrated by Charlie Chaplin’s 1936 film, Modern Times, depicting a scene in which “Chaplin’s character works furiously on an assembly line, trying to tighten bolts on every piece that slides past.” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 124).

4. Desired Human Resource Model

Employees constitute an integral part of the organizational system. Therefore “the success or failure of the organization depends on employee performance (Waheed, 2011, p. 224).

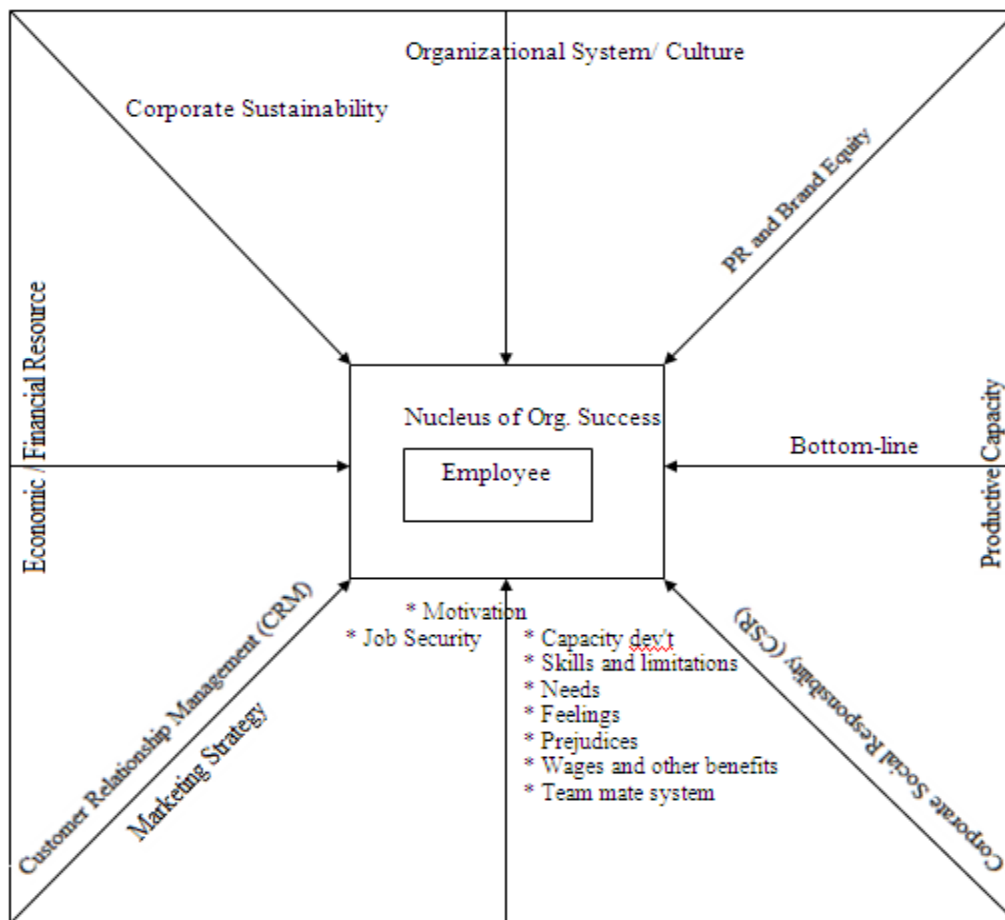


Figure 2: Human Resource Approach
 Author’s Conceptual Framework of Idealized Human Resource Model
 * Fair treatment * Avenue for appeal

Given this indispensable role that employees play in any concerted effort towards organizational development, it is imperative to develop and anchor a desired human resource model on Bolman and Deal (2013) human resource frame and also drawing a little lesson from the symbolic frame. The human resource frame builds organizations from the perspective of an architecture of individual employees and their managers working together as an extended family laced by varying “needs, feelings, prejudices, skills, and limitations”. In this perspective, the basic challenge is aligning organizational requirements with individual interests in such a manner as will enable employees to perform specific assigned tasks, while still maintaining their “comfort zone”. Equally, the symbolic frame draws on symbols, culture, and rituals as against stringent bureaucratic bottlenecks to drive home organizational objectives. The choice of this desired model is premised on the fact that people (employees) want to be acknowledged and appreciated for their effort at productivity. They want to be rewarded proportionate to productive effort. They want to see organizational justice dispensed fairly and equitably devoid of organizational political undertones and schematic maneuverings. Equipped with this knowledge, it is important to endeavor to satisfy basic needs of employees just to reassure them of the sense of security and trust, but also at the same time, equip them with the spirit of belongingness in the whole organizational architecture. Also, to put the organization on sound healthy psychological footing, it is important that employees are provided with substantial wages and other benefits commensurate with their productive effort. It is important also to ensure that their capacities are fully built with the needed repertoire of skills and resources to enable them perform their assigned tasks without any structural bottlenecks. Additionally, measures be stepped up to fully, but profitably deploy symbols and rituals within the confines of the organization to create the needed psychological bond of relationship with employees so that there is that positive affection and affinity for mutual benefit. In effect, I want to build Nucor’s kind of human resource model where employees feel that they are cared for and recognized as the nucleus of the productive machinery of the organization. It should be possible under the frame that in a highly productive environment, each and every employee still retains the right to pursue his full measure of happiness without any let or hindrance. That, even when we pursue the bottom line as the basic survival necessity (Carroll & Buchholtz, 2006), employees would still matter in the scheme of things as they become the engine house of the pursuit of the bottom line.

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