TOWARD AN UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN BEHAVIOR IN ORGANIZATIONS

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THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE BUSINESS MANAGER

> *Only at the level of the hourly paid worker, at the bottom of the organization chart, do we find people whose job is production. At any step of management above this — from the first level of supervision up to the top — the job is to accomplish production through the intervening medium of the subordinates who are there because the superior is responsible for more production than he can accomplish by himself.*[1]

The business manager's primary responsibility is to manage people. The manager's success depends on his ability to get help from his subordinates in accomplishing the objectives of the business organization. Managers are decision-makers and planners, and they often must concern themselves with the flow of materials, the distribution of products, the maintenance of machines, or the quality of finished goods, *but they do not do the production.* If they did, they would not properly be called managers!

Perhaps another way of stating a manager's responsibility is to say that the manager is responsible for the efficient utilization of *all* of the firm's resources. A manager has failed if he does not take the same analytical attitude toward his human resources as he does toward his physical and technological resources. The final success of any business enterprise depends upon the development of people *and* production. After the manager has finished worrying about his human resources, he can examine his production record. The production record will tell how good a job he has done as a manager of people. If the production record is good, the chances are that the manager has succeeded in creating favorable working conditions; he has succeeded in getting the most out of his subordinates. If it is bad, he probably has failed in his primary responsibility.

Refusal to accept this kind of "responsibility for management" is all too common. It is far easier for a manager to say that his job is production

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[1] *Readings in the Fundamentals of the Behavioral Sciences Applied to Business and Industry*, 1966 ed., prepared by Dolores S. Francisco, Josefina O. Santamaria and Elsa H. Tuason (St. Anthony Book Service).

rather than people. Human relations are usually harder to understand than physical relations. Things are more simple than people. Managers, therefore, tend to "take the easy way out" of their managerial responsibilities. They are prone to say "this business about human relations is very important in industry today. I only wish I had more time to spend on it. But my responsibility is for production. We've got a good man over in Personnel; he looks out for our human relations." It is not hard to understand why a manager would hold this point of view. If our definition of the manager's responsibilities is correct, however, it is a mistaken and dangerous position; and it is often an expensive one. The management of human resources is too vital to be ignored. This is one responsibility that can never be delegated. Managers must be trained to understand and appreciate the dynamics of human behavior, human motivation, and human relationships. They cannot afford to think that understanding organizational behavior is a "luxury." It is a necessity. It is the line manager's primary responsibility.

FULFILLING THIS RESPONSIBILITY

There are managers who seem to be especially able to fulfill their responsibilities for the management of people. Their intuition allows them to bring the best out of each of their subordinates, and they seem to "naturally understand" the significant aspects of human situations. But, for most managers, the job of understanding and managing human behavior in organizations is, at best, a "trial and error" affair. Without a systematic framework, managers can trust nothing but "intuition" or "'experience." Can the development of the human resources of the Philippines be left to intuition and experience? Can we afford to "duck" our responsibilities for people, just because 'labor is cheap?" I think not. We must accept these responsibilities, and, for most business managers, this means accepting the fact that intuition and experience are a poor substitute for systematic insight into the dynamics of human behavior in organizations.

To help gain this insight, a brief systematic framework is presented below. The framework is by no means complete or exhaustive, but it may provide the outlines of a new perspective. The framework consists of four "understandings" every manager should have: (1) an understanding of individuals, (2) an understanding of individuals working in groups, (3) an understanding of the basic jobs to be accomplished in the organization, and (4) an understanding of the manager's own influence.

UNDERSTANDING THE INDIVIDUAL

Many of the human problems in business could be avoided through a more systematic approach to subordinates *as individuals.* What is this man's

background? What province does he come from, and does that mean something? What are his aspirations and goals, and, therefore, what kinds of challenges must I provide for him? These are the kinds of questions that must be asked immediately. Perhaps the most important subject to be understood is employee motivation. It should be made clear that all men are "motivated." That is, all men have certain personal needs and desires that have to be satisfied. Some men may be motivated by money, others by the lure of power or responsibility, others by patriotism or family loyalty, etc. But no man, in the strict use of the term, is "unmotivated." It is up to the manager to discover what makes his subordinates work and what makes them work harder. It is up to the manager to understand the individual and satisfy his needs.

Considerable insight into the motives and values of Filipinos is reflected in recent studies of Philippine values compiled by Frank Lynch, S.J.[2] These readings may help the manager organize his thoughts. There can be little doubt that the cultural norms of "smooth interpersonal relations," reciprocity, traditionalism, etc,, dramatically affect the patterns of worker motivation. It is beyond the scope of this paper to speculate on the relative influences of the values, but they must be appreciated. Managers cannot ignore them. They may or may not "agree" with them, but they are there. Their importance does not diminish simply because we have chosen to forget them.

UNDERSTANDING INDIVIDUALS WORKING IN GROUPS

More often than not, individuals are asked to work with other workers in an organized manner. *Groups of workers* become the focus of management intervention. Understanding the dynamics of the work group becomes important. This is a complex topic, and we have to be brief, but several questions should be asked and emphasized.

First, who hold positions of power and influence in the work group? By isolating the powerful people, the manager my be able to gain "leverage" with the group members. He may be able to impress the informal group leaders and thereby "manage" the entire group. On the other hand, if the group leader is ignored, a manager's efforts may lead to disastrous results . Defining the positions of power in the work group assumes that the manager can define the group itself, and this is is not always an easy task. The second and third questions may help us to spot the existence of different work groups.

Are there any "unwritten rules" that seem to govern the behavior of certain workers? Looking for and identifying group "norms" is an enlightening process. The manager may suddenly realize that production is

[2] *Four Readings in Philippine Values,* Frank Lynch, S. J., ed., Ateneo, 1964.

being pegged because of a trivial or minor misunderstanding. He may see that the group consists of workers who have a common goal, and the group's efforts to achieve this goal can be harnessed to serve the company (as well as the individuals involved). For example, a group of clerks in a local textile mill were charged with the responsibility of collecting production data for the quarterly budgets. These data never seemed to be ready on time. Closer examination of the tardiness revealed that the clerks were purposely delaying the gathering of the data because of the way they were treated by other members of the accounting department. It was an "unwritten rule" that for every "insult" a clerk received from an accountant, the production data would be delayed one day. The clerks wanted to be known as "production inspectors," and when the accountants were instructed to refer to them only as "production inspectors," the delays ceased and the quality of the reports increased dramatically.

A final question that should be asked is, what are the functions of the group for each of its members? Why have the workers formed a group? What does each person hope to gain by becoming a member of the group? What needs are satisfied by joining the group? These questions are intimately related to those we just asked, but they force the manager to face the fact that work groups are not necessarily "bad." They need not be destructive forces, for the energies of the entire group can be put to work in accomplishing the objectives of the organization, as in the example cited above.

UNDERSTANDING THE TASKS OF THE ORGANIZATION

It is often easy to forget one of the most important kinds of "understandings" a manager can have: understanding what each job requires of the man that is to do the job. What kinds of challenges are offered in the job? How much freedom does the job allow for the subordinate to choose how he will do it? What skills are required? Is teamwork required? If so, what kind of teamwork? Careful analysis of the tasks of the organization might reveal to the manager that some positions are being "over-staffed" and others "under-staffed." It might also reveal the fallacies and weaknesses of some companies' hiring and promotion policies. A good example might be the position of sales manager. Too often, the best salesmen are promoted to the position of sales manager. Selling and sales management are two very different tasks. Each requires its own special skills. A good salesman will probably be aggressive, personable, enthusiastic, and ambitious. A good sales manager might have to be diplomatic, patient, understanding, even willing to compromise. It is unrealistic to expect a company's top salesman to turn into a top sales manager. The jobs are often quite different.

Careful examination of the demands of each job in the organization should guide the manager in his hiring policies. In this way, he can successfully "match" the needs and talents of his subordinates with the tasks that must be accomplished. He can satisfy the objectives of the company by satisfying the needs of the workforce he employs!

There is one further aspect of task understanding that should be emphasized, and this is the structure of the organization itself. The company's organization chart is essentially a description of the various tasks that must be done if the company is to realize its objectives. The organization chart delineates the "sub-tasks" of the company and shows what work groups are responsible for accomplishing these"sub-tasks." In drawing up the organization chart, attention must be given to both the nature of the *tasks* and the nature of the *individuals* and groups who will work at these tasks. The size, shape, or form of an organization chart should depend on the relationship between these variables. It should not depend on a manager's conception of a "neat" or "well-balanced" organization. The most effective organizations often have organization charts that are "confusing" or that look quite "messy." For example, let us assume that the job of collecting production data for the operating budget is deemed especially important to the organization. The accounting department which compiles the budget has been charged with the responsibility of collecting the production data, but the production workers resent "being spied on" by the accountants and, therefore, withhold production information. The job is not being done efficiently. One day the production manager announces that the accountants will no longer be collecting production information; the production workers themselves will record the necessary data. Although this makes the organization chart look "lopsided" (for production workers are doing "accountant's work"), it works out well. The task of compiling the operating budget is done efficiently.

In this example, the tasks as originally defined conflicted with some of the production worker's feelings about their work group and their relationship with the accountants. A minor reorganization was called for, based on a reassessment of the tasks' demands and the individuals and groups involved. It may now take two or three minutes longer for the president of this company to explain to an outsider how his company is organized, but the work is being done more efficiently.

UNDERSTANDING THE MANAGER'S INFLUENCE

The final, and perhaps the most important, "understanding" a manager should have is an understanding of his own influence as a manager. Much of this understanding depends upon introspection. As a manager, what are your personal goals and ambitions? What are your own values and

needs? What are your strengths and weaknesses when it comes to fulfilling your responsibilities as a manager? By answering these questions, a manager can appreciate his own motivations and the forces behind his "style" of management.

The significance of one's style of management cannot be over-emphasized. No matter how knowledgeable of the problems of human behavior in organizations one becomes, this knowledge is worthless unless it can be translated into constructive action. The business manager must not just *understand people,* he must also *relate to them.* He must give them instructions, supervise their activities, evaluate their performance, etc. It is in the carrying out of these everyday duties that the effective managers will rise to the top. The effective manager has cultivated a managerial style which is consistent with his own needs and beliefs and, at the same time, is consistent with his analysis of the needs of his organization.

A manager can appreciate his own influence only if he views himself as a manager of an "atmosphere" or "climate." Like the director of a play, he must set the "tone" for the entire performance. He can do this by the way he phrases questions, pats people on the back, smiles, etc. *All* of his behavior helps to create the "tone" of the working climate. If the organization climate is enthusiastic, subordinates may respond more readily to new ideas and challenges and responsibilities. If the climate is "stuffy" or "depressing," the same subordinates will probably be more conservative, take less risks, and shirk responsibilities.

Since it is the manager's style that helps to create the organization's working atmosphere or climate, we should pay particular attention to the effects of the *informal* interactions between the manager and his subordinates: the small words of praise, the looks of disappointment, the nervous way an order is given, or the amount of time that is spent going over "paper work" each day. All of these informal behaviors go into creating the total organizational climate, and they are too often overlooked. They are, perhaps, the most powerful aspect of a manager's influence. It should be obvious that, to alter these aspects of a manager's style, the manager must first understand his own motives. Sensitivity and managerial effectiveness, therefore, depend upon an understanding of individuals, groups of individuals, tasks, *and* the manager's own influence.

IN SEARCH OF PRINCIPLES

It is inevitable that students of business management will search for "principles" of human behavior in organizations. They will look for these "principles" in the hope that, once discovered, they can be applied over and over again in solving the human problems of administration. The

students will search in vain — for there are no lasting "principles." Every human situation is different, and managers must develop their abilities to analyze and respond to the facts of each specific situation. The only "principles" that are worth remembering are some of the "principles" of analysis: 1) examine the individuals involved (their needs, motives, values); 2) examine the groups involved (the dynamics that make them exist and make them powerful); 3) examine the tasks involved (the demands they place on individuals and groups); 4) examine the nature of the manager's influence (his personal motives, his "style" and the effects of his "style"). In many cases, even these "principles" of analysis will fail, for they are too brief to encompass the variety of human experience in organizations. But they do provide us with a start, a framework. Within this framework, we can build our understanding of human behavior in organizations by blending the knowledge gained from books and professors with the knowledge gained from our own experiences in human situations. The first step is to accept responsibility for the management of people, as well as production; the more difficult step is to fulfill this responsibility. Only in this way will the manager in the Philippine economy be able to harness the human resources of the country.