



Review Article

Managing people more effectively: Challenges and best practices

Avishek Dutta^{1,*}, Sunil Chaudhry²

¹Dept. of Digital Operations, Cognizant Technology Solutions, Kolkata, India

²Dept. of Director Solutions, Bioclinitech Technologies Pvt Ltd, Mumbai, India



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ABSTRACT

People manager is not a designation or position. It is an attitude to keep an eye on the quality of the mindset of the people. Managing people well is extremely important to achieve goals and objectives at workplace. People management skills can be acquired through experience and observation. These skills are positively affected by the attitudes and personalities that the managers develop and apply. This review article presents the essence of people management. While the viewpoints of the human resource management across different levels have been observed, the main skills required for effective people management have also been discussed. The role of social psychology at work is also becoming increasingly important for the people managers especially with the arrivals of the Millennials at workplace and the ongoing new normal where most of the employees worldwide are connected virtually with each other as well as with their leaders. Employees should look up to a people manager as their role model in every aspect at workplace.

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1. Introduction

Intellectual capital, human resource – these are terminologies used to define the value of people in any organisation. Now a days, every organisation is focusing more on these aspects. In modern times, a company's return on investment as well as profitability are based on the quality of people it has.¹ Total Quality People is something that forms the right foundation for every organization. Total Quality People comprises of people with character, integrity, good values, and a positive attitude. People are the best asset of an organization but not always are given the attention that they deserve or need from their line managers.² The attitude of a manager should set an example for all the subordinates.² Superior-Subordinate relationships should be looked upon as power wielder and power recipient relationships.³ All organisations will be more successful if they follow a specific Human Resource plan, comprising of a definite number of people

management policies.⁴ From the 1990s, we are seeing a growing interest in HRM and its effects on organization and employee. People management concept recognizes that line managers play a vital role in shaping employees' perceptions of HRM via implementation of different HR practices and their leadership actions.⁵ In the current times, senior managers in many organisations expect their managers to make the best use of resources available which means delivering faster with fewer people and with lower budgets. This sometimes creates tensions at workplace that needs to be managed in the most appropriate manner. Social psychology plays a key role at work. Organisations are social places where people interact with each other such as colleagues, clients and managers. To get the best out of their people, managers need to find innovative ways of motivating and leading their team members. People's attitude towards their managers and colleagues are subject to social influence. Organisations need motivated and productive people to carry out their responsibilities efficiently and therefore ensure that the organisation maintains profitability.⁶ Hence, people management

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: dutta.avisek@gmail.com (A. Dutta).

became probably one of the most important soft leadership skills.⁷

2. Methodology

The methodology involved reviewing of research articles, review articles, books and other materials from various sources. Different journals, articles and reports were thoroughly searched for understanding the basics of people management. Various challenges associated with people management were also identified in the process.

3. HRM from three viewpoints

There can be variances between the designed HR practices, the way these are executed, and employees’ perceptions of these practices. Intended practices are those formulated by senior management team or HR team. Implemented practices are those that are executed typically by line managers. This theoretical distinction is based on an awareness that not all practices are implemented in the ways intended, and that some will not be executed at all. The implemented practices will then be perceived by employees on an individual basis.⁵

Type of practice	Level of analysis	Rater
Intended	Organization	HR director
Implemented	Team	Line manager
Perceived	Individual	Employee

Fig. 1: HRM from three viewpoints

In modern times, it appears that Human Resources (HR) departments within organizations have deputized more of the day to day management of people job to the managers. This means that managers have increased levels of responsibilities for their team members.⁶ The front-line managers (FLMs) now a days perform a dual role, that of the manager motivating juniors, and the HRM role which do not operate independently. FLMs need well designed HR practices to manage their people in order to motivate them and deal with performance issues. The way FLMs execute these practices is heavily influenced by their leadership traits. The variability of line managers’ people management style is as significant factor explaining the differences in perceived HR practices among employees.⁵

4. People Manager is not an easy role

If one is given the responsibility of managing others’ performance, including evaluation of their performance, then he/she is expected to understand and be able to wear

multiple hats including but not limited to that of a mentor, motivator, consultant, delegator etc.⁸

4.1. Communication and Cooperation:

Communication is a two-way process⁹. Good transparent communication creates an atmosphere of trust among all employees. People managers should share their ideas, decisions, target milestones and future course of planned actions with their people⁷. To develop a win/win relationship, a people manager must check the requirement of his/her people. As a good listener, a people manager should understand the need of his own people before he starts to outline his own ideas. A good people manager should put himself in his people’s shoes. Effective synergy depends on communication. Many people make synergy impossible by reacting in a negative manner. They are not good listeners and instead hear and react insentiently. The irreaktions are sometimes defensive and sometimes may be authoritarian. But one needs to remember that cooperation and communication are the two pillars of a synergistic relationship.⁹

4.2. Mentoring:

We always need the help of experienced people while undertaking various projects, or assignments and so every people manager must be in a position to guide his team members properly. However, even though guidance is required from the seniors, freedom coupled with guidance is what every employee needs. Without this system of mentoring, one would not be able to evolve as a better performer. A people manager should mentor his team members in such a manner that the team members would try to associate with his thoughts, ideas, and style of thinking. This helps to develop the mindset required for the job.¹

4.3. Motivation:

Motivation is an extremely important aspect in people management. There are various modern techniques of employee motivation. However, the age-old theory of motivation Sama or consultation, Dana or rewards, Danda or punishment and Bheda or split still is in practice with unlimited applications. In the step of consultation, one can listen to the under performer to understand his/her problem and provide a customised solution. In the step of rewards, wages and salaries become the key motivational factor to make sure that the people stay with you¹. Many managers think by giving people more cash they will get a long-term boost in performance. But while extra salary often provides a short-term motivation, it is often not long before the staff member goes back once again to the phase of under-performance or demotivation. The challenge is to understand what other incentives can be offered and what will create the biggest difference for an

individual.² Sometimes salaries coupled with recognition or some trainings for knowledge growth can do the trick. But even after proper consultation and rewards, if one is not able to come out of his/her sluggish state, it becomes a serious concern and if not corrected with a proper strong action, a sense of complacency can spread throughout the organization. However, if none of these steps work, it can be concluded that the organisation and the employee would not be able to work together any further.¹

4.4. Delegation of work:

While there are many instances where a people manager gets frustrated with his/her subordinates' performance, one cannot overlook the power of delegation. While a subordinate can be blamed to some extent for under performance, a people manager needs to understand the power of delegation. A people manager must evaluate people under different situations and times before delegation of work to an individual¹. Along with delegation, people must also get a sense of ownership. The members of a team will grow in confidence because of this sense of ownership due to proper delegation of work.⁷

4.5. Attrition Management :

The skilled manpower is increasing in our country like never before and the competition for hiring better employees is growing at an extra ordinary pace among different organisations. Moreover, the new generation at workforce are mostly job hoppers. This is leading to high rate of attrition and the challenge of retaining the talented force is increasing with each passing day. This is the scenario in almost every industry at the moment. For people managers, things become very challenging then and so they must take actions proactively. Continuous training of your existing team members and coaching them on how to do multi-tasking will play a key role in these challenging times. Also, it is suggested to always keep a buffer workforce ready which will be play a vital role in managing attrition.¹

5. Role of Social Psychology in People Management

Experimenting with human psychology has become a very important aspect of people management skill in this era¹. One needs to understand that every person will behave in a different way when faced with a particular situation. This is due to the fact that behaviour is shaped from various effects such as family as well as from various beliefs, culture and ideology.⁷ Social psychological research plays a very important role in people management especially in the modern times. Individuals develop attitudes about their work, the organisations they work for and the justice of everyday work life. This affect the behavioral traits of an individual and how they perform. For example, if managers know what influences their team members the most, they

can design their relationships in a way that nurtures positive attitudes. It has been observed that work outcomes can be for ecast appropriately when the deep-rooted concept of social attitudes is extended to job attitudes.⁶

6. Managing the Millennials at workplace

The Millennial generation has been exposed to certain educational, economic, social, and political situations that are totally different from what the previous generations were exposed to. For example, this generation has been moulded by, among other things, over-protective parents, frequent positive feedbacks and significant advances in technology. Many of the common stereotypes associated with Millennials are due to the differences in the values that they have in them. One of the most common stereotypes being disloyalty towards employer since for millennials job hopping is a very common habit.¹⁰ In a survey conducted by Deloitte, nearly 7,700 Millennials from 29 countries during September and October 2015 responded. Two-thirds of Millennials stated a desire to leave their organisation by 2020. Many respondents also felt that their current organisations are over utilising their skills¹¹. Most of the millennials have often been projected as a needy group who wants to maintain their high social status. They have a casual approach and it has been observed that they wish for a less formal work environment, and in many cases, prefer not to come to office only.¹⁰ The Millennials are a new trend and a big challenge. Conventional practices by leaders of organisations and HR managers is not going to work with the Millennials.¹¹ The managers who promote relationships and meeting individual needs will be most successful to attract, motivate, and retain their Millennial employees. This approach to managing involves coaching, mentoring, developing, and providing frequent feedback to employees.¹⁰ One-on-one connects should be a regular thing. Millennials want to have a voice at work, and they want to get recognised for the same, which means managers must be actively engaged in dialogue with them encouraging them to voice out¹². Managers who are able to adapt to this management model will see the so-called negative traits of Millennials transform into valuable assets. Additionally, the manager who is able to develop a strong and honest relationship with his or her Millennial employees will reap the benefit of their commitment.¹⁰ Millennials are more interested in their professional development; and every new way with reducing distance in managing them will make a better future workforce.¹¹

7. The New Normal

The new normal post Covid-19 pandemic has restricted most of us to work from home and connect with each other virtually. Distance between colleagues may range from being located at different cities to being located at different

countries. Virtual teams are more inclined to conflicts as the traditional method of socialising is completely missing. As a result, people struggle with weak interpersonal bonds and poor information sharing. Leadership becomes a critical factor for ensuring virtual teams' efficacy. Skills required for successful management of virtual teams are much more complex than those skills required for leading the team physically. Hence, the role of the e-leader is more challenging as it requires immense knowledge and understanding of team dynamics, irrespective of the differences between virtual and traditional work environments. Most importantly, in virtual environment it is extremely difficult to develop and maintain trust, which is important to manage effectively¹³. It is very difficult for a team leader to have a direct control over his team member's activity due to different geographical location. Therefore, leaders need to consider the power of delegation by shifting managerial functions down the hierarchy to the other team members. But the acceptance of these managerial functions depends on the level of motivation of the team members, which is not at all easy to achieve in a virtual environment. The virtual leaders are not in a position to physically observe the members and should be creative to set the expectations virtually. There are three important roles for a virtual team leader as a connection between team's members to understand the overall environment, as a direction setter to ensure all actions are in line with team's overall goals and objectives and thirdly as an operational coordinator for the identification of right resources and development of strategies to solve the problems.¹⁴ The e-leaders are the major link of the team, facilitating communications, creating processes, and taking up responsibility for task completion. Technology has become highly critical and the e-leaders should be able to manage the same appropriately¹⁵.

8. Global Leaders and their People Management Skills

Most of the global leaders have excellent people management skills since they do understand the importance of the asset known as human resource. Jeff Weiner, CEO of LinkedIn Group stresses on compassionate management. He stresses on the fact of stepping into your employee's shoes to understand their problems instead of just expecting irrational sacrifice and resilience. According to Richard Branson, CEO of Virgin Group, being caring is extremely important, as it brings out the best in people. Arianna Huffington, former CEO of the Huffington Post, believes in taking great care of employee's well-being to keep them productive. Arianna had a system in place to ensure complete work-life balance and that does not allow employees to check their work emails when on vacation to prevent any kind of burnout. In an email sent by Elon Musk, CEO of Tesla Group, to all his employees, he emphasized on reducing the time for communicating the message to the

relevant person by keeping the communication open. The email became viral in no time. He had set an expectation that everyone should be allowed to approach anyone in the company without needing approval from their concerned manager. Sundar Pichai, CEO of Google, strongly believes in helping others grow and succeed. He emphasizes on that fact that it is important to trust people and help them prosper. If they are successful in achieving what they aimed to, it is not only their win, but also a win for the organisation. This becomes clear now that all the global leaders have one thing in common when it comes to people management and that is, they stress on letting others grow.¹⁶

9. Discussion and Conclusion

Managing people and leading teams can be extremely challenging, especially in industries where the pressure to get things done can be immense. The whole team works together leading to a great performance even under pressure if the people manager gets it right. But if the manager gets it wrong then it can add unnecessary pressure to everyone in the team. People management is viewed as line managers' execution of HR practices along with their leadership traits in supporting the employees they monitor.⁵ It is how organisations manage their employees that is vital to organisational success. People management impacts individual, group as well as overall organisational performance.¹⁷ The approach of helping team members is increasing its importance in today's world especially amongst the Millennials and this virtual work environment. Employees not only have to deliver their own work but also have to work together as a team to create an environment that nurtures both individual and team performance. Managers need to influence their team members to implement similar positive attitudes and associated behaviours. Managers need to make sure that the team members realise the benefits of doing so. People managers need to be the driving force behind any team. They are responsible for the performance both at individual and team level. They need to motivate and encourage team members to excel. Managers need to wear multiple hats so that they can deal with different people in a variety of situations such as conflicts, complaints or short-term high-pressure situations. Adopting this approach, it is highly likely that managers will discover what the true mindsets of people are and how they can be influenced. It is then possible for the managers to design improvement plans for their team members⁶. Many factors influence the effectiveness of people management activity. The manager should be a role model for his team members in professionalism, knowledge, leadership, decision-making ability, communication, personality and character.¹⁸ This would help him to manage his team better as well as to earn respect from his team members. The minds of the people manager should always be open to continuous learning. No

problem or challenging scenario should stop the same. In the modern times, a good people manager must challenge himself and seek innovative ways every time to manage his team more effectively.

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Author biography

Avisek Dutta, Service Delivery Manager

Sunil Chaudhry, Honorary Medical Director

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