



Enhancing Relationships by being Change Agents

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Heraclitus, a Greek philosopher, is quoted as saying "change is the only constant in life." In every sphere of life, we evolve. Be it at work or even in our personal lives, there is always some change. We live in a time where the business environment as well as social, economic and demographic environment is constantly evolving.

A focussed effort towards transformation is seen to have more benefits than letting the process flow without intention. Hence, there is an imperative need for change agents. A change agent is a person (internal or external to the organisation) who facilitates, drives, leads, supports and even stimulates change to transform individuals.

In one such intervention, we partnered with a client organisation to create change agents. The organization needed to resolve key matters which directly and indirectly affected the relationship between Team Members and Team Managers.

Background

The Client Company inaugurated one of its plants in 2008. Right from its inception; the company had implemented a set of employee friendly HR policies. However, in the last two years, there were attempts by the Team Members (workmen) to form a union. This happened because of the influence from Unions of other Plants as well as the turbulent IR environment in that Industrial belt. This had vitiated the atmosphere in the plant.

The client company thus wanted Pragati Leadership Institute to train the internal trainers and team members and create a "Train-the-Trainer" module for all the Head of Departments and Section Heads, so that they, in turn, were equipped to train Supervisors / Line Engineers in having meaningful dialogues with Team Members.

Methodology

After discussions with the leadership team and finalisation of a few details, PLI established familiarity with the organization, by collaborating with an internal coordinator from the human resources department, the supervisors and team managers to take the intervention ahead.

Step 1 – Project Plan

This first step involved setting up Project teams in order to plan and implement the project effectively.

The Project Plan



Step 2 - Diagnostic Study

The diagnostic study involved interactions with approximately 85 individuals through

- face-to-face conversations with supervisors and team managers,
- focus group discussions with team members,
- interaction with human resource team to get their perspectives,
- meeting the industrial relations consultant to understand the overall work environment of the region
- studying the existing forums / programmes / practices and any other relevant data that forge dialogue between management and the work force.

A few highlights from the diagnostic study were:

Current Reality

Across the hierarchy, there was a strong perception that the relationship between Team Members and Team Managers was strained. The subjective rating for this, on a scale of 0 to 10 (10 being excellent), across the groups was between 3 and 3.5. Team Managers too acknowledged the weak relationship.

Probable Causes

A few causes for the above reality were also identified:

1. Team Members had developed their skills and competencies over the years in the organisation. Post this their expectations had increased and these expectations were not being addressed by the Team Managers.
2. Team Managers were not aware of changes in policies and thus their communication of the same to the Team Members was inconsistent and disconnected. This caused the Team Members to have less faith in the Team Managers and the seniors.
3. There existed a culture of command and control within the organisation. This led to lack of autonomy and empowerment of Team Members, making them feel powerless.

Report Highlights:

A positive aspect was that the fact of the relationship not thriving was acknowledged by all stakeholders. Thus there was a strong desire for change, provided the right steps were taken promptly.

Pre and Post Programme Assessment Dipstick

Next, a questionnaire was designed and finalised. It was subsequently administered to the employees, both before and after the intervention. The questionnaire aimed to measure the Team Member – Team manager relationship by capturing data. A 6 point rating scale was given to assess various areas such as communication skills, listening abilities, assertiveness, accountability, positive thinking, and trust between employees.

The questionnaire was administered to 200 employees. After the workshops and the hand holding sessions, the dipstick highlighted the following:

87%	showed an improvement in expressing their feelings with ease indicating a very good improvement in the organizational climate conducive to better performance	53%	of Team Members felt at ease expressing their feelings freely
75%	experienced an increase in the level of interest shown by their manager in solving work related problems	50%	experienced an increase in the problem solving inclination of their manager
82%	experienced an improvement in the clarity of instruction given to them, 80% felt listened to and 78% felt an increase in the encouragement given to them to ask questions	63%	experienced better sense of recognition of the good work done by the employees

An increased active participation due to an atmosphere of co-operation and understanding was seen and also a higher level of trust between the employees and their manager was indicated.

Step 3 – Content Creation

A one-day training on 'Leadership for Building Effective Relationships' was conducted for the Team Managers. The aim was to create a buy in and energise them in this intervention. The main objective of the Train the Trainer was so that the Team Managers, could become the change agents and deliver programmes over the coming years.

The broad 2 day design of the workshop was the enabling factor for the improvement in scores. Topic covering areas such as emotional bank account, body language in communication, listening effectiveness, applying assertiveness, ensuring team synergy, etc. were covered during the workshop. Methodologies such as Appreciative Inquiry, experiential learning, case studies, etc. were used to deliver the above topics.

Step 4 - Conducting the Train the Trainer Programme

Once the Training Package was ready, the trainers identified by the client were trained to roll out the programme. The trainers experienced the workshop as conducted by Pragati Leadership and later had practice sessions with video-based feedback given by Pragati Leadership.

Step 5 - Hand Holding of the Trainers

Pragati Leadership hand-held the trainers for 2 workshops and gave them feedback and suggestions. The trained trainers were then expected to cascade the programme down the line. Subsequently a 1-day "Train the Trainer" was conducted as a reinforcement module per quarter for three quarters. This gave an opportunity to provide any guidance / mentoring to the trainers while they were on the job. The dipstick questionnaire was administered again at the end of the intervention to measure the impact.

Step 6 – Project Closure

A Half a Day long final closure of this project was done with the stakeholders of the Client and Pragati Leadership Institute Pvt. Ltd.

Conclusion

Before the programme, team managers felt that it was the responsibility of the human resource function to develop the team members and they would off load interpersonal issues as well as compliance issues to the human resource team. Post the programme realisation dawned that dealing with interpersonal issues would enhance relationships with team members. They realised that if their team members were satisfied they would not feel they were being pushed around and their issues are being taken seriously. Team members would also feel that their team managers care for their development and growth.

This goes to show that the change initiative has not helped only the organisation and team members, but also the team managers. It has impacted the lives of the change agents themselves. This

highlights the authenticity of employees as the change agents and their commitment towards the change they wish to see in the organisation.

Pragati Leadership Institute consultants focussed on enabling team managers and team members to have meaningful and deep relations with each other.