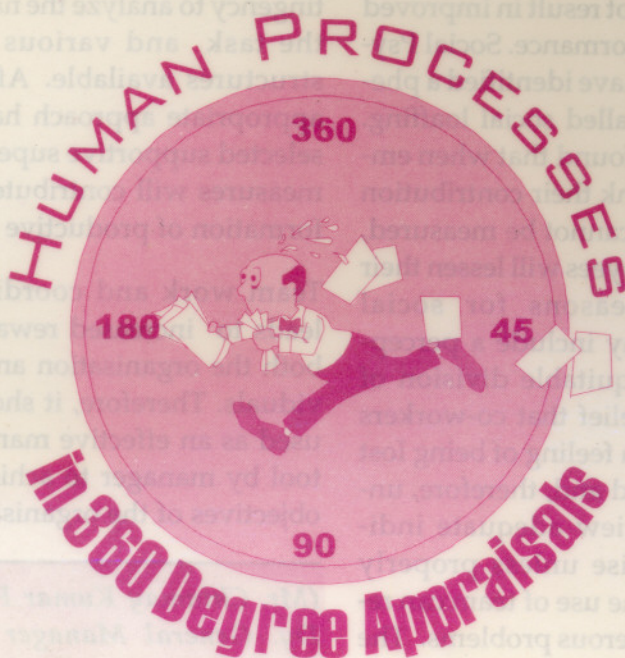


HRD



DR. ANEETA MADHOK

Changing HRD Paradigms

One thing that cannot be denied is that the rules of the game have

changed for most of us. We understand that new performance paradigms are now the order of the day. Common usage of terms like Performance Management,

Competence Based Pay, Accountability of managers, all go to highlight the fact that no longer does the old order work anymore. (If by any chance your

Table I: Changing HRD Paradigms

Hierarchy-based Systems	DIMENSIONS	Networked Systems
Formal, rigid, bureaucratic	WORK CULTURE	Open, flexible, transparent
Power and authority based on position in hierarchy	POWER & AUTHORITY	Power and authority based on personal strengths
Resources to be utilised	EMPLOYEES	Human capital to be invested in
Administrative and functional excellence is a critical skill	LEADERSHIP	Inspirational and motivational skills are critical
Functional departmentalisation	STRUCTURES	Flat, decentralised, networked
Command and control	PROCESSES	Team work and participation
Based on position in hierarchy, seniority and merit.	PAY	Based on demonstrated competence thru objective work measurement
Personality traits plus work objectives assessed	WORK MEASUREMENT	Personality traits, work objectives, plus feedback from customers, subordinates and significant others is assessed

organisation still works on the old system of hierarchy, seniority, take a good look and see how you need to change the ways you work).

Today's organisations are more networked, or at least trying to be. They look upon employees as members of the larger work system and not just a pair of hands or resources to be utilised. Some of the differences in work cultures, performance paradigms, human resources are outlined in the table given on pg 32.

In the analysis, the attempt of all HRD work is to move the organisation away from the old hierarchical paradigm towards the networked paradigm that is more functional and organic in nature. This is the essence of the "learning organisation".

A Caveat

Given the realities of these changing paradigms, the HRD manager needs to relook at the way the various subsystems within the HRD function support and sustain the newer paradigms of performance that are emerging. It is common trap for any HRD manager to make systems superior to the spirit of HRD. This often results in systems that are implemented in a ritualistic manner without any of the passion and spirit that is the most critical ingredient for it to succeed. There is a very live danger of the system becoming omnipotent and any organisation whose culture is wholly created around HRD sub-systems, will

not be in a position to experience the kind of organic growth that is so crucial to its renewal and revival. There have been many Appraisal systems, Organisation Development Interventions, TQM efforts, Career planning systems and many other initiatives of HRD that have failed simply because they have not been able to take the people along with them. Blame for such failures usually falls on 'others' who did not go along with HRD, but HRD managers rarely see the fact that they are also part of the problem, which is compounded by the fact that they often see 'systems' as 'solutions'.

Appraisal Apprehensions

Appraisals are something everybody is apprehensive about. Bosses know that, it is that time of the year when they will have to reluctantly undertake the task of evaluating their subordinates and reviewing their performance, and in many cases, also the job of giving feedback to the subordinates on how they have come along during the review periods. Bosses are concerned about these things because they have an inherent need to be seen as positive and be liked by their subordinates. The subordinates, on the other hand, generally dislike appraisals because they feel that they have to justify their salaries, they will be evaluated and judged by others, they will have to face the review session where they get feedback from their bosses.

Appraisal time is that time of the

year when the HRD manager also goes through many questions about whether the systems that he has designed and implemented really help in meeting the organisational objectives. He also faces the uphill task of implementing the system within the time frames allocated, and at the same time, keeping the general spirit of the work culture alive. This is compounded by the fact that Appraisals are also indicators of performances, and therefore are linked to the rewards systems within the overall compensation framework of HRD. He is often caught between the deadlines of the system implementation and the need and creation of more involvement of all the work force concerned. By and large, it is stressful time for all members of the organisation.

Role of the HRD Manager

Within the overall flux created by these pushes and pulls, it is critical for the HRD manager to work as an anchor of all the processes that take place around appraisal time. There is therefore a real need for the HRD manager to look within and examine for himself the basic foundation of assumptions and premises that govern his initiatives. If there is an internal dissonance in the convictions with which this system is introduced, chances are that the anchoring processes of this new initiative will be weak and inconsistent. This will then result in the new initiative being subject to the vagaries of the context and the forces of decay will

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reign supreme even as the new steps are first taken. Thus internal questions about the convictions with which the system is introduced in the organisations, need to be deeply embedded in the culture of the organisation as a prerequisite to such initiatives. It is the role of the HRD Manager to lay the basic foundations of this trust and openness in the working culture of the organisation.

Simple successes of 360 Degree Feedback

First of all, 360 Degree Feedback is the one mirror image consisting of realistic perceptions of those persons who matter the most. The average manager spends most of his time with people who are subordinate to him, and only a fraction of the time with his bosses. Ultimately, the reality is not hidden from team members, subordinates as well as outsiders whose opinions are the most relevant. The 360 degree feedback is one way of promoting the spirit of internal customer service which is so critical to building learning organisations. When an individual receives the honest perceptions of those he relates to, he is more in a position to confront his mistakes and chart meaningful courses for change and growth. This in turn would build more internal linkages within the organisation and contribute to the overall fostering of learning and growing.

With the increasing openness, there will be less entrenchment

of the powerful elements in the network, resulting in quicker responses to changes in the environment and economy. This is certainly a competitive edge that no one can deny advantages of.

One of the changing values in our society is the need for hierarchy and its effects. The hierarchical barriers are fast getting eroded. People are now treated as equals in a structure that is getting flatter and flatter, with communications systems that support diminishing differentials of status. Building organisations that are truly networked and vibrant needs support structures of the kind of 360 degree feedback mechanisms.

Discovery of scope for improvement is the only way for developing the capability of the organisation. Let's face it, in order to improve, there are two things we can do. The first is to look at our strengths and enhance them, and the other is to look at our shortcomings and overcome them. In the first case, the scope for dramatic and noticeable growth is limited, whereas, if we look at our shortcomings, 360 Degree feedback is one way of making quantum jumps in performance and excellence.

Some Pitfalls To Watch For

1. The "pecking order" which determine the relative social standing of the individual members comprising the group. In the context of organisations, there was a legitimate

hierarchy which supported the pecking order, and gave authority and legal sanction to exercising of influence over others in the process of accomplishing tasks of the organisation. With the advent of the networked organisational paradigm, the legitimate use of power and authority of position has weakened. Thus, the manager whose subordinates have the authority to undertake his appraisal, would feel an erosion of his influencing power in the organisation. This makes it imperative for the organisation to be prepared for the kind of openness that it would ensure that the organisation does not get politicised in the absence of legitimate hierarchical boundaries of power and authority.

2. Another simple pitfall is to mistake the fact that subordinates have an accurate perception of the boss. In many cases, the subordinates do not really know the boss as well as the system presupposes. This is so because, the nature of the working relationship calls for drawing of appropriate and balanced boundaries between boss and subordinates. Thus the subordinate gets a small keyhole view of the boss, often with his own prejudices against authority figures, which may not be complete. It would be

easy to fall into the trap of believing that the feedback is all that there is to it. Just like the five blind men and the elephant.

3. Ultimately, the purpose of management is "getting things done". This definition automatically results in a bifurcation of people into those that get things done and those that do things, thus naturally resulting in some form of hierarchy, however rudimentary. It also gives rise to drawing of appropriate boundaries of behaviour that would determine the optimum level of openness in organisations especially between these two classes. The ideal degree of openness is different for different organisations and is dependent upon many factors. The design of 360 Degree appraisals should take into consideration the appropriate levels of openness that would work for the organisation. The pitfall here could be that this delicate balance may not be achieved, and a "free for all" might result, thereby

affecting the achievement orientation of the group.

Preparing The Ground

It is imperative that the ground be prepared for introduction of such initiatives on the part of the HRD department. Such a preparation would include inculcating a culture of openness, receptivity to the ideas and to feedback in general, a direct linkage with business missions and corporate values, visible support of the top management which is ready to "walk the talk" and live by example.

The HRD manager also needs to work with himself and his role in the organisation's growth efforts. He needs to believe in the system, and advocate it at all levels in the organisation, he has to play a supporting role to line managers, he even has to play God at times. He must not politicise the situation, while retaining his political agility, and most of all, he must never get caught in the crossfire between boss and subordinate, but must retain his outsidership.

Line managers need to change their mindsets, be proactive and not defensive, and most of all

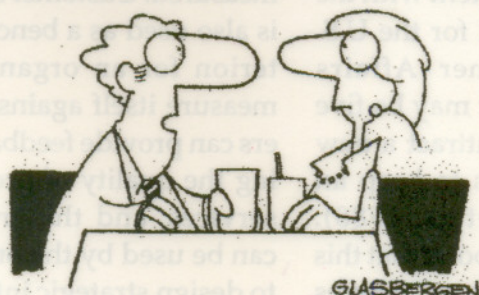
they must become receptive to feedback.

If these conditions are not met, it is probably better not to introduce such a system, and to live without it rather than to begin in an unprepared manner.

The Final Word

360 Degree appraisal systems have been very successfully implemented in several Indian organisations, like Aptech Limited, Blue Dart, Citibank, Godrej GE Appliances, and many others. The issues presented in this article are the result of the author's discussion with HRD managers and line managers from such organisations, as well as with HRD managers who believe that this kind of a system will not work well in their cultures. In a nutshell, 360 Degree initiatives need to be implemented with care and caution, and it must be remembered that such systems are not a universal cure-all for organisational diseases arising out of bureaucracy, hierarchy, authority and the "pecking order".

(Dr. Aneeta Madhok is a faculty - HR & OD, Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies, Mumbai).



"At my office we're not just coworkers, we're like family. A very dysfunctional family"

Courtesy : Glasbergen