

## The Manager: A Helmsman or A Herdsman?

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### ABSTRACT

The paper highlights some of the great qualities of good managers by juxtaposing the Demerits of inefficient managers/heads/HOD's in many of our Indian Organizations including Educational Institutions. The focus of the paper is on being a good manager or HOD because it is the very heart of the process of Management, keeping every other part or aspect healthy. It is stressed that managers are not herdsman but helmsmen dealing with not machines but humans like them. The paper concludes with the positive note that effective and excellent leaders/managers/HOD's can also be 'made' through formal training courses conducted by competent persons and with the fond hope that learning the essential managerial skills will bring about a change in the attitude which in turn helps create a convivial environment that contributes to success, quality and productivity.

Keywords: Effective leaders, Essential managerial skills, Change in attitude and Convivial environment.

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Owing to unceasing efforts and vigorous research in every field, old concepts are being superseded by the new ones. The implementation of the new concepts aims at improving production, quality, and more importantly human relations. Management steps in where the above three things are discussed. The nuts and bolts of Management have also undergone a dramatic change, over the years, due to the findings of research in Management. All the changes in the Management Principles are directed towards increased production, enhanced quality of the product that is to be marketed and the motivational impulse that makes the men and the women in an organization work with zeal and zest and more importantly with commitment. It is a well known fact that "Management involves planning, leading, staffing and controlling the activities of various resources within the organization through systematic, coordinated and cooperative human efforts to achieve organizational objectives"[1]. In the words of Koontz and Weihrich, " Management is the process of designing and maintaining an environment in which individuals, working together in groups, efficiently accomplish selected aims"[2]. Of the various aspects of Management, 'leading' or 'managing' is paramount because the success or failure of a project undertaken by an organization depends on the performance of the managers or the various HOD's of departments in the organization. An organization may have numerous modern machines and facilities but all these have to be handled only by humans.

And these humans have to be monitored, directed and properly motivated so that there is no confusion in the smooth flux of the work. It cannot be gainsaid that highly successful organizations such as TATA or TVS , to name a few, have managers or leaders who are not only efficient but more importantly effective. Be it a business organization or an educational organization such as a college, a university, a research institute, a big hospital, a supermarket, a big movie theater, it is the managers that contribute to the success of the organization, though often their contribution remains invisible like that of teachers that make singular contribution to the progress of their nation. It is almost an axiom that no organization can run without managers who keep the organization going smoothly. They perform their duties at the top, middle and bottom levels with different designations and duties and

responsibilities. They “play a vital role towards achieving the organizations’ goals y monitoring and controlling the organizational activities”[3]. Being ‘leaders’, managers direct, influence and motivate the employees towards achieving the organizational objectives. Thus the success or failure of an organization depends on the performance of its managers. This paper, therefore, focuses on the ingredients of an effective manager with special reference to the Indian scenario.

## **2. THE INDIAN SCENARIO**

As far as India is concerned, it is very doubtful if the managers of majority of organizations Follow the modern principles of Management in directing, influencing and motivating the people who happen to work ‘under’ them. In India there are many HOD’s (Heads of Departments), i.e., managers who often like to say ‘so and so worked under me’ unlike a western manager who would say the same thing as ‘ so and so worked with me’. Many of the Indian managers think that they have been born to ‘rule’ over men and that they have directly descended from Heaven. Despite the knowledge that some managers have gained from the Management courses they have done in colleges and universities, they somehow get influenced to develop such an attitude, as soon as they are installed at the helm or get promoted to the management category , as to think that they are superior beings and that the people who work[for them] and report to them or inferior beings. Some Westerners go to the extent of calling it ‘Indian mentality’! Indian managers, umpteen of them though not all, are fond of using words like ‘Do what I say’, ‘listen to me’, ‘I don’t want any explanation’, ‘get lost’, ‘Do you have sense?’ ‘How dare you answer me like that?’ and so on and so forth. Many HOD’s in companies and higher educational institutions get offended when their ‘subordinates’ mention or refer to them by their names! They prefer to be always referred to as or called ‘Sir’ or ‘Boss’ and they link it to Indian Culture!

On the contrary, in the West or even in the MNC’s located in India, managers are called by their names even by the people who are in a lower rank. They are not trained to ‘fear’ their managers. They know that they are all ‘colleagues’ working together for their organization’s common cause or goal. Even ‘a cog in the machine’ is treated with due respect. Calling the managers by their names and many other good practices that are followed in the West and in a few big organizations in India do create a healthy environment in which all people do their allotted work happily and enjoy what they do. This is totally absent in almost all Indian organizations, be it a company or an educational institution. We rarely come across smiling faces among the employees. This may be ascribed to the absence of good human relationship. Indian managers believe that their duty is to command men and get things done by hook or by crook. They attend many training programmes and learn a lot about modern principles of Management and yet think that having attended a training programme has helped them to add a feather to their caps! As soon as they come back to their organizations, they don’t chew the cud and let their attitude change from the bad to the good. Many companies witness strike because of the absence of smooth human relationship between the staff and their managers. There are many managers who do not know how to use the idiom ‘after all’. Mostly they use it in the derogatory sense, for instance, when they say, “You are after all my subordinate”! There are numerous instances where the staff look upon their managers as Circus Ring Masters who crack their whip to

control the animals and make them perform. How many of our managers are capable of smiling and greeting their staff even before the latter greet? How many of our managers reciprocate their staff's expression of respect? Do our managers want to be helmsmen or herdsman? It is up to them to make a choice.

### **3. MANAGERS ARE HELMSMEN**

Managers/HOD's should bear in mind that they are not herdsman but helmsmen dealing with Humans like them. They should also remember that cracking the whip (i.e., using their power) does not always help. It is good for many of our Indian managers to remember that their staff or team members do not work 'under' them but work 'for' them and 'with' them. Sitting most of the time in their cabins and issuing commands frequently over the intercom cannot help them achieve the desired results and cannot help them get the best out of their staff.

#### ***3.1. Respect Others***

First and foremost, managers and HOD's should respect the people who work for them. That means they should not be rude or severe even to their car drivers or the servants who are at their beck and call and do little jobs such as serving coffee, opening the windows, etc. If our managers can greet their staff with a smiling face and reciprocate their greeting and respect, then they can win their hearts and get their wholehearted cooperation without asking for it. Modern management emphasizes that the managers should try to understand the needs and feelings of those who work for them. This calls for personal interaction and effective communication.

#### ***3.2. Personal Interaction and Effective Communication***

Friendly interaction and frequent face to face communication is paramount. The managers should see that their staff's basic needs such as working conditions, salary ,etc., are fulfilled, for, "failures with the basic needs nearly always explain dissatisfaction among staff"[4]. Many managers do not communicate with their staff except when they send official circulars instructing their staff to do this and that, nor do they 'listen' to their staff when they express what is in their mind. In other words, they do not encourage open discussions. Experts in Management opine that managers should "make an effort to understand people's attitude by careful listening and questioning and by giving them the opportunity to express themselves"[5]. Robert Heller, the Management expert further avers that "all managers are ultimately personal officers. From time to time, they may have to deal with difficult personal matters that their staff bring to them"[6]. The managers should be aware that they should handle such problems as a friend and not as a boss. However, there is a word of caution. While dealing with a troubled employee, the manager concerned must be 'supportive without getting too involved'.

#### ***3.3. Team Work***

Believing in team work is another great quality of a good manager. Discussing with the team frequently not only boosts the confidence of the staff but helps the managers get wonderful ideas and results. Sometimes wonderful, brilliant ideas come even from the staff of the lowest rank, such as the driver! Good managers trust their staff and communicate with them frequently besides encouraging free flow of communication among the staff. It is doubtful

whether this healthy practice is followed in many Indian organizations, especially small organizations. In educational institutions meetings are held but the staff are not free to express their opinions. Often they are advised or expected to be passive listeners. People who speak frankly on the matters mentioned in the agenda are often mistaken for warring elements and are even laughed at! Most of the Indian Heads want to be listened to but do not want to listen to others. They do not let others talk, that is to say, they do not listen. They prefer to be herdsmen. This will undermine the growth of the organization.

### ***3.4. Strictness and severity***

Another good quality of a good manager is that he or she praises the staff in public and admonishes in private. Many Indian managers think that they command greater respect when they shout at erring staff in the presence of other staff. They do not understand that this practice will have a negative impact on the performance of the staff. The managers or leaders or heads should know the distinction between being strict and being severe. They should never make efforts to 'enforce' cooperation but should direct their energies towards 'enlisting' the cooperation of their staff. In fine, a good manager has a heart larger than his head. She or he should never forget that their staff are not machines but humans like them. Mere use of rod (power) cannot help; it is only a soft word that does not lacerate the feelings of the staff that really works and brings success and good name to the manager. Managers should try to set a good example rather than become an example. They should believe in good qualities such as sporting a smile, uttering soft words, using euphemisms while pointing out defects in work, listening to the staff or letting them speak frankly, empathizing with them and understanding their feelings and problems, lending them a helping hand in times of need and involving every member of the staff in the organizational activities and appreciating the staff for their nice work. We see a few bank managers often coming out of their cabins and helping their staff, especially when there is rush. They are examples of good managers/leaders.

### ***3.5. Delegation of work***

Lastly, many Indian Heads fail miserably in delegating work. It is only inefficient Leaders or inefficient managers or HOD's who fail to involve the entire staff when an occasion demands the contribution of every member of the staff. What bad managers do normally is that they allot the entire work or a massive chunk to one or two sincere workers who never shirk work and do their work conscientiously, and let the rest be free, fearing that the work will get spoiled. This is totally wrong. Efficient managers or Heads will see that every member of the staff in their departments gets some work or the other and contributes to the success of the programme organized for an important occasion or of a project and at the same time they should see that no member is overworked. In the words of Robert Heller, a leading authority on Managerial skills, "Effective delegation Is an essential managerial skill....Delegation is the manager's key to efficiency, and benefits all"[7]. BY delegating, managers boost their staff morale, build confidence and reduce stress. Above all, managers should trust their staff and be loyal to them; then only their staff will trust them and be loyal to them.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

This paper focused on a major aspect, namely leadership of the process of Management and presented a few important facts concerning the performance of the managers/leaders/ HOD's with special reference to the Indian scenario. It was stated in the paper that many Managers in many Indian organizations think that they are just rulers appointed by their Organizations to exact work from their staff by cracking their whip (power) and to show good results. It was pointed out that many of our managers behave like Ring Masters in circus or like herdsmen and, more is the pity, not like helmsmen who rule over their men not by the power of their position but by the power of persuasion and personal example. It is only good training, preferably by the Western Managers, that can change the attitude of many of our managers from bad to good, make them learn and acquire the ingredients of successful managers and help them grow and contribute to the growth of the people that work for them and to the well-being of the organizations they work for.

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