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Shallow Management In Large Organizations

From a relatively smaller size of 300 employees, an organization grew to over 1200 employees spread over 50 locations across the country - many of them in the interiors of rural India. The employee attrition for a particular quarter in this organization was seemingly high. In the analysis that followed, in addition to establishing causes for attrition, many other interesting facts emerged as well. Probably the most important among them was "no attrition among the members of the management who reported to the CEO". These leaders constituted the decision makers for the organization.

A further analysis of how this team developed a deeper engagement led to the emergence of a number of process issues. This team met the CEO on a regular basis, and, a lot of ideas were exchanged between them through a continuous consultative process. Very often, they worked in the market together. The field leaders had the CEO's ear whenever they wanted. If they had any personal or professional issues, they could discuss them with the CEO, and, often the issues were either resolved or reasons for non-resolution were ascertained. They could tell stories, share jokes and have casual talk with the CEO. They dined together and lived together in the hotels at the locations to which they travelled. For them, their organization was nothing but their supervisor. And, they had quality access to their supervisor at a high

frequency. A high clarity shared vision existed about the strategies that could realize this vision. They truly felt that they were a part of the organization and behaved as if they were the 'organization'.

Since each one of them had some working experience in other organizations prior to this, working in this organization was to them a completely different experience. They experienced an unparalleled freedom of expression and action. Besides, they

did not have to do anything that was against their values, or anything that they would feel ashamed of doing. They were not required to appease the seniors in the organization in any manner - other than of course, by way of their performance and

adherence to organizational values. Thus, this team of 60 odd senior employees managed to build an enormous ownership among them.

Why was a similar feeling not being created among the employees reporting to those senior leaders and other employees in their teams?

An analysis of exit interviews threw up some interesting aspects. Many members who left the organization after working for a few years, did not identify themselves with the organizational vision. They were unable to establish relationship between their work and the vision. When they raised issues about the same, they did not get satisfactory answers. Some failed to understand that they were being developed for

future roles, and would contribute to the realization of the organizational vision, and this was a necessary period of transition. Some employees received offers from other organizations with a substantial increase in the compensation. Since they were not firmly engaged with the organization in any manner, they had no problem in considering this offer - even if it was for a period of three years and an uncertain future thereafter.

Some had joined organizations that were neither suitable for utilizing their competence nor suiting their own values. However, they were either unaware, or their very approach was casual. Some of the senior leaders were confident that after experiencing the new organization for a few months, they would want to return to their current organization.

The message at the end from them all was loud and clear. The senior leadership and a few critical employees reporting to the senior leadership had not created a strong bond, or a relationship that built confidence and a firmer engagement of all members in the team. Part of the problem was that the senior leadership spent too much time in managing their relationship with their supervisors. As a result, they failed to spend adequate time with the employees in their team. Assuming each leader had about 30 to 50 members in the team, it was required from the leader to have a concrete plan for regular, high quality and frequent interaction with most of these members. The current analysis showed that the leaders did not travel adequately to the field to spend meaningful time with teams of people, in listening to and communicating with these members.

It was also discovered that many members did not have very demanding roles. The expectations from them either did not excite them, or failed to keep them sufficiently engaged. It was even felt by a few that their work did not provide sufficient scope to utilize their abilities. As a result, they tended to settle down at a low and lethargic pace. Such employees had enough time to indulge in unproductive activities including negative group dynamics. Some even engaged in actions that were blatantly against the culture of the organization, and even managed to distract those employees who were focussed on contributing to vision of

the organization. This invariably resulted in the leaders requiring spending time in managing them. A large percentage of employees thus became energy sappers than energy contributors.

The vastness of an organization is a reason often cited for weak people management. However, it is not valid, since large organizations also have a large number of leaders who have manageable size of span of control. The crux of the issue is that organizations do not spend adequate time and effort in selecting the right leaders, developing them to a professional level, and empowering them to manage their teams, which are motivated and deeply engaged with the organization's agenda. An important role of such leaders is also to invest sufficiently in developing their team members to be competent to deliver the expected outcomes. However, they must recognize that team members would not realize their potential, unless a very strong bond exists between them and the organization.

The only way organizations can build depth in people management is through the development of larger number of leaders, critical employees, who are completely aligned with the organizational vision, understand the manifestation, and implications of the vision are deeply seeped into the organizational culture and above all, are great democratic influencers with the other team members. Issues like vision and culture are built much more strongly through their own practice and demonstration.

The journey begins at the time of selection of employees and continues through powerful induction progress, personal interactions, examples and folklore that is created about what works and does not work in the organization etc. Unless leadership influence travels deep in the organization and across levels, the chasm between what the leaders advocate and what is understood in the rank and file would continue. This often leads to a loose bond between the employees and the organization that is not desirable for the engagement, excitement, productivity and general morale of the organization. **HC**

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