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QUESTION

Discuss the social and cultural factors that might affect effective performance of an organisation or a group of employees. We’ll start with the external condition then continue with the group structures. Once the groups have been formed, it happens that some groups perform well whereas some groups do not perform well. This happens because there are several factors both within and outside the groups, what affect its performance.

Some of these factors affect the performance of the group of employees in an organisation.

1. External conditions:

A group is a part of large organisations. They are created by the organisation and as such they do not exist in isolation. A group has to rather work within the framework provided by the organisation. Every group is influenced by a number of external conditions imposed from outside it. These external conditions include: the organization’s strategy, its rules, regulations, its culture, physical work setting, employee selection process etc.

2. Group structures:

A group comprises of a number of individuals and has a well defined structure. Groups have structures that shape the behaviour of its members and make it possible to predict and explain the individual behaviour within the group as well as the performance of the group as a whole.

Some of the structural components are:

(i) Group Size:

A minimum of two persons as required to form a group, as far as the maximum number in concerned, the group should have as many members as can interact meaningfully amongst one another. However, an ideal group size is said to comprise of 5-7 members over a smaller group in terms of idea generation. The evidence indicates that smaller groups are faster at completing tasks than the larger ones. The group size should be determined by taking in consideration factors such as nature of task to be performed, the maturity of the group members etc.

(ii) Group Composition:

A group comprises of a number of individuals with varied qualities and characteristics. In fact most of the group activities require a variety of skill and knowledge. As far as group composition is concerned, a group may be homogeneous or heterogeneous. Homogeneous groups are those which are composed of similar individuals, similar in terms of personality, age, gender, experience, knowledge etc.

Heterogeneous groups on the other hand are the ones which comprise of dissimilar individuals i.e. the individual who differ from one another in one way or the other. In some types of tasks homogeneous groups could be more appropriate while in other types heterogeneous groups could be more appropriate.

(iii) Group Status:

The term status refers to the relative ranking that a person holds in a group. Status is determined in the context of comparison. Therefore, status defines the rank of an individual relative to others in the organisation and the group. Status is in-fact defined in terms of rights, privileges, duties and obligations the individual holds in an organisation.

It is an important factor in understanding human behaviour. When an individual perceives a disparity between his status with that of other group members, it creates a disequilibrium that results in interpersonal conflicts. So, what is important for the group members is to believe that the status hierarchy is equitable and just.

(iv) Group Norms:

Group norms are the “The oughts” or “should be” of behaviour. They are prescriptions for acceptable behaviour determined by the group. “Group Norms are a set of beliefs, feelings, and attitudes commonly shared by group members. These are also referred to as rules or standards of behaviour that apply to group members”.

A very comprehensive definition of group norms is given by The Handbook of Industrial and Organisational Psychology. According to this definition, “All groups have established norms, that is, acceptable standards of behaviour that are shared by the group members. Norms tell members what they ought and ought not to do under certain circumstances. From an individual’s stand point, they tell what is expected of them in certain situations. When agreed to and accepted by the group, norms act as a means of influencing the behavior of group members with a minimum of external controls. Norms differ among groups, communities and societies, but they all have them.”

According to D.C. Feldman:

(In the Academy of management Review), “Group norms are the informal guidelines of behaviour and a code of conduct that provides some order and conformity to group activities and operations. These rules are expected to be followed by all the group members. These norms and rules generally develop gradually and informally as group members learn as to what behaviors are necessary for the group to function effectively”.

From the above definitions, we can observe the following characteristics of group norms:

1. Just as an individual’s characteristics are revealed through his personality, the characteristics of a group are revealed or represented through norms.

2. Norms are the basis of behaviour of members in the group. For example it is an unwritten norm that employees do not criticize their bosses in public. Thus, this norm is related to the behaviour which is considered important by most group members.

3. The norms are the basis for predicting and controlling the behaviour of good members. For example, norms may include behavior in a particular manner both within and outside the group meetings.

4. The norms are applied to all members, though very stringent uniformity is not followed. In certain cases, some deviations may be allowed but not to the extent of jeopardizing group goals. For example, if a code of dress for the meetings or for the work place is there, it is to be followed by all the members.

5. Norms also identify the values and ethics of the group members. They are established on the basis of what is right and decent and expected of professionals.

6. Though formalized norms are written up in organisational manuals setting out rules and procedures for employees to follow, but by far the majority of norms in organisations are informal. For example, you don’t have to tell someone that it is unacceptable to gossip while the meeting is going on.

Types of Norms:

Every group has different established norms depending upon the nature of its members and location. For example, the norms of factory workers will be different from the norms of office workers. Moreover, the group norms may be strong or weak depending upon the status of the group, the importance of behaviour to the group and the relative stability of the group.

Yet there are some common classes of norms which are common to all groups:

1. Performance Norms:

The most common class of norms which is applicable to all the groups is performance norms. Work groups typically provide their members with explicit clues on how hard they should work, how to get the Job done, their level of output, appropriate level of tardiness and so on. Norms regulate the performance and productivity of the individual members.

Workers who are performing below the lower acceptable level are generally informally reprimanded and encouraged to produce more. On the other hand, an ambitious worker who produces more and performs above the upper acceptable limit set by group are also ostracized for encouraging the management to raise its expectations.

2. Appearance Norms:

The second types of norms are appearance norms. These include things like appropriate dress, loyalty to the work group or organisation etc. Some organisations have formal dress codes. However even in their absence norms frequently dictate the kind of clothing that should be worn to work.

Other appearance norms might involve loyalty or confidentiality on the part of members. Workers are not expected to report about fellow workers to supervisors. Similarly, confidentiality is a powerful group norm so that no matter how much tension may be between workers and management, the workers will not divulge company secrets to competing organisations.

3. Arrangement Norms:

These norms come from informal work groups and primarily regulate social interactions within the group. With whom group members eat lunch, friendship on and off the job, social games and the like are influenced by these norms.

4. Allocation of Resources Norms:

These norms can originate in the group or in the organisation and cover things like pay, assignment of difficult job and allocations of new tools and equipment.

5. Behaviour Norms:

These are rules and guidelines defining the day to day behaviour of people at work. This behaviour pattern may include punctuality as a habit, completing any given assignments within the required time framework, not losing temper, showing respect for other member’s opinions and so on. Certain professionalism is expected from all members and this professionalism is predictable form of behaviour.

How do Norms Develop?

Norms usually develop gradually and informally as members learn what behaviours are necessary for the group to function.

Most norms develop in one of the following four ways:

1. Explicit Statements Made by a Group Member:

Explicit statements made by the supervisors or a powerful member may become norms. Norm develops this way to prevent any threats to the status quo. For example, the supervisor may explicitly say that tea breaks are to be kept to ten minutes and this will become a norm.

2. Critical Events in the Group’s History:

Critical events in the group’s history set important precedents. For example, a person who was standing too close to a machine was injured in a work group. It became an established norm in that group that no person other than the operator gets within five feet of any machine.

3. Primacy:

Primacy is another way of forming group norms. Primacy refers to the first behaviour pattern that emerges in a group. This behaviour pattern sets group expectations. For example, if the first group meeting is marked by very formal interaction between supervisors and subordinates then the group expects future meetings to be conducted in the same way.

4. Past Experiences:

Many norms develop because members bring their past experiences from other groups in other organisations. This can explain why work groups typically prefer to add new members who are similar to current ones in background experience.

Fatigue and Resilience

Dr. Bryan Vila stated that human beings are built to work during the day and sleep at night. Fatigue associated with sleep loss, work hours, and circadian factors affect the ability to form sound judgments, deal with complex and stressful situations, and assess fatigue-related impairments. Fatigue narrows an individual’s perceptions, increases anxiety and fearfulness,

reduces his or her perspective and understanding, and degrades cognitive ability. Fatigue also increases irritability, hostility, and the tendency to shift blame. Vila contends that fatigue reduces resilience. There is a persistent struggle for law enforcement managers to balance

the demands for services with the resources available. Often the managers’ ability to push back when the demands exceed the capacity of the available resources is limited. As a result, managers are then forced to increase work load on the staff, which leads to increased job stress. Although everybody likes being able to do their job, nobody likes being tasked with the impossible. Vila presented a model from the new edition of *Principles and Practices*

*of Sleep Medicine* that characterizes the impacts of fatigue for first responders, the military, and police. This model includes the standard medical model for thinking about resilience. There are three central factors within the model (1) how much sleep you get, (2) what is the circadian phase, and (3) what is the domestic life like (Kryger et al., 2005). Those factors together affect the ability to cope with challenges.

Day-to-day fatigue reduces the ability to handle change. Short-term sleep loss affects performance, leading to on-duty events that most frequently

kill or seriously harm law enforcement officers such as traffic crashes and confrontations.

Chronic Fatigue

Career-long fatigue or chronic fatigue elevates the risk of cardiovascular, gastrointestinal, and metabolic diseases, such as diabetes. Chronic fatigue increases the risk of chronic insomnia, sleep apnea, and psychological disorders such as depression, suicide, and family dysfunction. There are many causes of chronic fatigue such as sleep disruption due to shift work, schedule changes, overtime, and extra shifts. Additionally, during their hours off of work many officers moonlight or choose family, personal, and recreational activities over sleep. They may have personal obligations such as watching their children, and/or choose to use their time off for leisure activities like fishing. Addressing these issues requires a cooperative effort between labor and management. Both managers and employees bear responsibility for part of the solution, but if either side does not address its piece, the solutions will fail. To increase everyone’s understanding of the importance of this issue, it is necessary to educate both groups. Although one size does not fit all, the process can translate across many environments. Fatigue fuels a vicious cycle for the organization as well as the individual. Because fatigue decreases attentiveness, impairs physical and cognitive functioning, and worsens mood, it increases absenteeism, which results in the need for other staff to pick up the load, which then cycles back to increased fatigue. These affects organisational and group performance.