

INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP^{1*}

The concept of interpersonal relationship is central to most people's lives. Most of the problems which adversely affect effective functioning of organisations are human or people problems. Lack of trust, deceit, self-centredness, non cooperation, unhappy atmosphere and the like have their beginning in the distortion of interpersonal relations. Here an attempt has been made to briefly describe the phenomenon of interpersonal relationship and its dynamics.

We are interacting on one to one basis all the time with some one or the other. Some of the interaction is a one time affair, like purchasing an air ticket; most of it is on a continuing basis with family and friends, peers and colleagues, superior and subordinates in the work place. This piece of writing is primarily concerned with understanding the later type of relationship, since this affect us the most.

Two basic components which combine to make interpersonal relations possible are, perception of self concept and perception of others perception. Understanding of the very relationship phenomenon is also required to make the relationship stronger and longer lasting. All the three components are explained below.

(a) Self Concept : This is the generalised view one adopts of oneself. Self awareness changes positively or negatively as a result of novel experiences in life which forces us to retrospection, which keeps reinforcing the self concept. The self concept has three main components viz. Social, material and spiritual. Of these, the most important is the social self which is shaped in the following manner.

- (i) Reflected Appraisal of others : The meanings one attaches to the behaviour of others towards him build up the social self.
- (ii) Comparison of self with other : A person's level of aspiration is affected by his past performance in comparison with that of his referent others. In workplace colleagues in equal rank are considered as referent others.
- (iii) Playing Social Roles : It refers to the ability of a person to handle the social roles that determines his standing in the social milieu of which he is a component. It demands considerable perseverance of the part of an individual person to convince the society that he is actually playing the role ascribed to him.

Person perception, the other vital component of interpersonal relationship refers to the filters we normally apply or tend to apply to our behaviour while relating to others. Any error

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or distortion in our perceptions of others tend to colour our judgement about them which in turn affects the way we behave with and towards them.

It therefore may be stated that the ability to perceive people in the totality of context including recognition of their emotion, feelings, and attitude is developed by us only through social interactions. An interpersonal relationship becomes more authentic when understanding of each other becomes deeper, and more insightful when it is based on varied perception.

In an organisation we are dealing with three types of persons. They include – superiors, peers and subordinates. There are some general principles to make all types of relationship meaningful. However, some special skills are required while dealing with superiors and subordinates. Before highlighting the general principles we must have to know the core conditions that qualify relationships in the interpersonal domain. These conditions are

- (i) Relationships involve reciprocal exchange between active and interdependent relationship partners.;
- (ii) Relationships are purposive involving at their Core the provision of meanings to the persons who engage in them;
- (iii) Relationships are multiplex phenomena. They range across several dimensions and take many forms, providing a range of possible benefits for their participants; and
- (iv) Relationships are process phenomena. They evolve and change over a series of interactions in response to fluctuations in the Contextual environment.

For relationship to truly exist, interdependence between partners must collectively affect, define and redefine the relationship. The elements of behaviour which contribute to good relationship are discussed below.

- (i) Congruence being and seeming ; we very often practice something that differs from what we preach and thus project a false or deceptive image of ourselves. This is nothing but hypocrisy. Consistent behaviour of this type can cause erosion and ultimately destroy relationships. Personal example at every step reassures others about the congruence between your intentions and utterings and invariably leads to the development of deeper relationships.
- (ii) Empathy : It is the ability of a person to experience a situation from the angle of another i.e. stepping into his/her shoes. It amounts to becoming aware of another person's feelings, needs, pains and pangs without being told about them.

- (iii) Positive Regard : There is a need to have a positive, accepting attitude towards other people. This requires acceptance of people the way they are without any condition attached.

The model of social interaction known as 'JOHARI WINDOW' (propounded by the behavioural Scientists Joseph Luft and Harry Inghan) facilitates understanding of the quality of interpersonal relationship. The model states that we as individuals consciously know some of our strengths and weaknesses, but not aware of some others. Similarly, others become aware of our positive qualities as well as shortcomings through the type of contracts and relationships we develop with them. The knowledge about ourselves has two dimensions;

- (i) It can be limited by us by exposing ourselves less in relation to others or by putting up a façade as it were.
- (ii) We can find out what others think of us by encouraging and seeking feedback from them.

The information available in various cells of the model may pertain to feelings, emotions, assumptions, prejudices or competence. All these aspects are very relevant to inter-personal relationships. Improving or maintaining relationship calls for increased exposure of self to others and feedback from others.

When it comes to interpersonal relationship in an organisation the organisational climate and work environment play a very important role in influencing the interpersonal relationship. A trusting nurturing relationship helps resolve conflicts quickly dissipates stress and encourages every member of the organisation to give his best leading to organisational and personal growth. On the other-hand coercive style, selfish mentality, miscommunication etc. can spoil the interpersonal relationship leading to a dysfunctional behaviour. For a positive result the following points are to be taken into consideration.

- (1) Relationship with Subordinate : It is the responsibility of the superior to ensure that the subordinates have comfortable work-life, growth, commitment towards the job and meaningful interaction in the organisation. For this the Superior officer or executive has to
 - give credit liberally whenever and wherever it is due.
 - Demand good quality of work.
 - Provide guidance.
 - Encourage participation of all in decision making.
 - Invite criticism and judgement.

- Avoid assigning vague responsibilities and task that are not meaningful to the organisation.
- Support your staff in appropriate and constructive expression.
- Avoid holding a grudge.
- Be a role model for them.

(2) Relationship with Superiors: It is important on the part of an organisation to ensure that a subordinate gets along well with the Superior in order to work in a tension free atmosphere. At the same time it is a known fact that every individual, be the boss or subordinate has some strengths and weaknesses and likes and dislikes . Within the limitations of these likes and dislikes, effort should be made to build a good functional relationship. The following are some positive measures that can help a subordinate build healthy working relationship with his Superiors.

- Avoid hiding problems from the boss. A timely informed boss may guide and resolve the problem before it is out of control
- Do not give Surprise.
- Do not waste the boss's time. Approach him with sufficient homework in advance.
- Know his special and peculiar characteristics and modify yourself to work within these.
- Avoid provoking his anger unnecessarily.
- Support him where you can.
- Start improving yourself, not the boss.

Interpersonal relationship is a dynamic and complex phenomenon. In relationship, people exchange behaviours intended to influence each other and prove hospitable to their needs. One can improve interpersonal relationship by openness, trust and mutual respect and understanding by openness, trust and mutual respect and understanding. But one's success or failure will be highly dependent on his or her ability and competence at handling people and initiating an effective relationship.
