
Creating Engaged Workplaces through Employee Ownership - A Study on Manas Agro Industries and Infrastructure Ltd.

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Abstract

The research work was undertaken with the objective to understand the working Systems at Unit II of Manas Agro Industries and Infrastructure Ltd. situated at Village Kolari in Central India. The objective behind research was to understand ownership of employees at Unit II towards organization. Sense of belongingness towards their work and organization was gauged through interviews. The research involved the conduction of Job Analysis of the various positions at the plant and to understand the deployment of manpower at each level. Further, the paper focuses on the working environment and culture leading towards current state of employee ownership. Based on concerns of employees suggestive measures are recommended. The paper focuses on how the organization can improve the engagement of employees at the workplace by improving the psychological ownership in its employees. Psychological ownership can be defined as a deep seated connection that the employee feels towards their work and they look at their work as something which belongs to them. Psychological ownership is the psychologically experienced phenomenon in which an employee develops possessive feelings for the target.

Keywords

Employee Engagement, Psychological Ownership, Job Analysis

Introduction

In the VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity) times of today an organizations ability to flourish and grow depends a lot on the employees of the organization. In order to derive the most benefits from the employees the organization needs to ensure that the employees are contributing to their hundred percent potential. This potential can be derived by ensuring that the employees are engaged at the workplace. One of the means of improving engagement levels of employees is to instil Employee Ownership in them.

Employee Ownership

Employee ownership can be defined as the attitude that the employees showcase with regarding the acceptance of responsibility for something and their involvement in developing it. It can also be look on as how psychologically tied the employee is to the organization. This sense of ownership is not only intellectual but also affective that is simply by calling an entity — whether an object, another person, or a job — “mine” suggests that we have an emotional connection to it. Employees often express a desire for greater psychological ownership of their work, believing this will improve their job satisfaction and happiness. A sense of ownership in the employees would inspire employees to work proactively in the organization which would in turn improve their productivity. Increased employee productivity would improve organizational performance.

Another aspect of employee ownership is a sense of belongingness. Sense of belonging in employees can be defined as the extent to which employees feel that they are a part of something important and greater than themselves. The need to belong is the need to give attention to and receive attention from others. Without belonging, one cannot identify themselves as clearly, thus having difficulties communicating with and relating to their surroundings. Psychologists Roy Baumeister and Mark Leary argue that belongingness is such an essential incentive for human beings that they feel severe consequences of not belonging.

The need to belong is particularly apparent in the workplace. Employees want to fit in at work and have a need to be accepted by their peers as well as their superiors. They seek the approval of their leaders, bosses, and other employees in order to be accepted. A high sense of belonging in employees encourages them to be co-operative and helpful in their workplace. This improves the productivity of employees. A reduced sense of belonging in employees not only reduces their productivity but also may encourage them to leave the organization.

Factors Affecting Employee Ownership

There are two types of factors that affect employee ownership: organizational and individual. Organizational factors include organizational dependability, effectiveness of organizational processes, organizational climate, etc. Organizational identity also plays an important part in helping the employees feel a greater sense of responsibility in the organization. Communication goes a long way in affecting how the employees perceive the organization and hence will play an important part in the way the employees perceive the organization in terms of dependability. Further, effectiveness of the process and an understanding of the organizations climate is also brought about by communication. Individual factors include demographic factors such as age and marital status. Another individual factor is Job Security.

How the organization can impart this sense of Employee ownership and belongingness will depend on the culture of the organization and the functioning of the organization. In order to understand these factors it is important to understand the company profile.

About Manas Agro Industries and Infrastructure Ltd.

Manas Agro Industries and Infrastructure Ltd. (MAIIL) is promoted and established by experienced group of professionals having rich experience in various industries. MAIIL is a diversified group with interest in Sugar, Power, Distillery & LPG. MAIIL has a strategic partnership with ESSAR petroleum for supply of Ethanol blended petrol at affordable rates. The unit of the organization that was studied was earlier a part of another sister concern of MAIIL and was merged with MAIIL two years prior to the study. This has also affected how connected the employees feel to MAIIL.

Materials and Methods

The research was carried out in two phases. The first phase consisted of the conduction of Job Analysis for each position at the Unit. The second phase consisted of a structured interview that focused on the understanding of the working culture and environment at the Unit.

The purpose of the job analysis was to understand the various tasks involved in the running of the plant and how the work was allocated within the structure of the organization. This helped the researchers understand the way that the Jobs were designed at the organization. The Job Analysis was done by first observing the operations of the plant and then conducting structured interviews with the employees. The sample interviewed for the conduction of Job Analysis was 35. Post the interviews detailed Job Descriptions of the various positions were created.

After the Job Analysis was done an in-depth discussion was done with the HR team at Manas Agro Industries and Infrastructure Ltd. Various aspects of the observations made during the Job Analysis phase were discussed. On the basis of these discussions as well as the observations made during the Job Analysis a structured questionnaire was designed. This questionnaire was again administered to a Sample of 35 employees at Unit II. The questionnaire aimed at understanding the employees so as to give recommendations to the organization to improve the levels of ownership felt by the employees.

Results and Discussion

After the conduction of the each phase of interviews certain observations were noted by the researchers. These observations are mentioned below.

Observations Made During Phase I

After the conduction of the first phase the following observations were made:

1. General lack of enthusiasm and lackadaisical approach: During the interview, it was observed that the employees were rather resigned to their role in the organization and showcased a general lack of enthusiasm. This has resulted in an externalization of responsibility with regard to the improvement that can be made in the organization. It was observed that the employees did not take initiative to enrich their Job Profile and would rather wait till they were officially assigned duties.
2. Lack of sense of ownership: There was a general lack of ownership in the employees. As stated earlier the employees tend to look towards to organization to work on the improvement of the productivity and Job Enrichment of the employees and did not take any initiative by themselves. While they were willing to take up additional work they needed the organizations to allocate the work to them.
3. Overqualified personnel: Employees in the Boiler department and Admin department are overqualified as compared to the work that they are doing at the organization and hence feel a certain level of discontent because of this.

4. Mismatch between qualifications and job assignments: Further, there is a mismatch between the qualifications and job assignments of employees in the admin department.
5. The employees are open to take additional responsibilities which includes their willingness to join committees that have been established in the plant such as Canteen Committee and Safety Committee. However, it was observed that there is a lack of awareness regarding the committees within the workplace as many employees who were interviewed were not aware of the existence of these committees

The observations made during this first phase of the study indicated that the employees were unable to relate to the work that they were doing. As the organization is one of the only source of income in the area they were continuing to work there even though the work was not in line with their education or qualification. This has resulted in the externalization of responsibility. Another aspect that has led to this is the demography that the employees belong to most employees are settled in the region with their families and are unwilling to change the status quo. While they don't mind taking additional work, they are content with doing what work has been allotted to them.

Based on the observations of the first phase the researchers had a discussion with the HR Department function of the organisation. These observations triggered the phase 2 of the study as a deeper understanding was required to understand the challenges with regard to ownership at the organization.

Observations Made During Phase 2

Lack of Ownership

1. The employees are not connected with the organization as they are not aware of the scale of the organization's operations.
2. They are not aware of the possibilities of growth in the organization. As they have not seen any growth in the past in their career path they appear to be complacent about the opportunities available with the organization.
3. As the plant is semi-automated there is unstructured time available that can be leveraged to improve engagement levels.
4. The employees are not aware of the overall standing of Manas as a brand. And the unit lacks employer branding.
5. As a majority the employees have been working in the organization for over 6 to 7 years they are still thinking on the basis of the old organizational set-up.
6. They lack enthusiasm in terms of giving ideas and innovation as in the past their ideas were neither given any importance nor were they communicated so as to why their ideas may not be implemented in the organization. This has led them to believe that there is no point in giving suggestions.
7. The overall climate in terms of interpersonal relationships is strong and has been built over the years. However, this feeling of camaraderie has led to the employees looking at newer employees as outsiders and there is a lower level of trust in newer employees.
8. There is a palpable tension between the Operations and Administration of the plant. This needs to be looked into as it may lead to issues in the future.

On the basis of the interviews there are three major areas that are hindering the ownership levels of the employees. The first is the availability of idle time. The second is that the employees are still thinking from the pre-merger cultural set-up. The third is the overall understanding of the organizations brand and internal communication.

Recommendation

Based on the observations made during the study recommendations were given addressing each of the three identified areas.

The first identified problem was that of idle time. The recommendation given for this was the introduction of Pet Projects. Pet projects are defined as small short term projects/ portfolios/ assignments whose ownership is taken completely by the employees. The organization can create a list of such assignments that focus on Infrastructural development or Safety measures or increasing productivity and efficiency or employee engagement activities. The organization can also think of sourcing these ideas from the employees themselves for added sense of belongingness. This will address the issue of idle time thereby increasing manpower utilization.

The second identified problem was that of employees still thinking from the pre-merger cultural mindset. For this issue the recommendations that were given was conduction of skip level meetings, inter-unit visits, inter-unit competitions. Initiatives like these will help the employees connect with employees from the other units as well as the Head Office and help them understand the new cultural set-up better.

The third identified problem that of absence of employer branding. For this the recommendations that were given were Employer Branding Initiatives, Brand Sensitizations drives, publication of Corporate Magazine. These initiatives will help in propagating the brand of Manas in the minds of the employees.

Conclusion and Recommendations

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