



## CREATING HARMONY IN ORGANISATIONS: AN ACTION PLAN

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### **Abstract**

*Crafting a harmonious work environment has been a novel concern in the present day 24x7 work culture. Harmony at work is a vital aspect, shorn of which, there cannot be apposite operational work environment. This research paper focuses on formulating a suitable action plan for creating harmony in a flat organization. The paper discusses the various elements and paths to create a harmony at work with special reference to flat organizations with little or no hierarchy in their organizational structure. The data has been collected from various secondary sources and available literature on the subject. In terms of practical implications, this paper would enable companies at macro, meso and micro levels to motivate their employees to work in harmony and team spirit to enhance the productivity of the company as being brand ambassadors of their company in the factual spirit.*

**Key Words:** flat organization, leadership, harmony, motivation, productivity

### **Introduction**

Creating harmony in an organization is essentially creation of a work atmosphere conducive for employees in an organization. A conducive, harmonious and positive work atmosphere is one which is free of chaos and where employees feel happy and content at work. The word harmony stems from the Greek word “harmonia” which essentially means “to fit together”. In dictionary footings it means coalescing musical notes to form pleasant melodious tunes. A good musician will spin out pleasant music through an appropriate combination of musical notes. Music becomes melodious to the ear when the musician is able to achieve musical harmony.

The finest musicians will produce “noise” when the musical notes are not in sync with each other. In the organizational perspective, participative leadership are the composers of corporate musical notes - which essentially refer to the corporate strategy of the organization. A pleasant, balanced strategic policy aimed at promoting an inclusive

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harmonious workplace sets the tone for harmony within organizations. Therefore, in an organizational set up leaders can achieve successful synchronization of several parts of the organization by promoting unity at work at all levels and doing what is best for the organization as a whole. It therefore, goes beyond doubt that a harmonious, unified, interconnected, integrated, spirited and resilient workplace is critical for any industry or business, irrespective of its size.

The organization can be observed as an open system which subsists in the setting of a bigger business environment. The business environment in general has a profound influence on the performance of the organization, since the performance of the organization is a function of the business environment. The organization maneuvers itself within an external business environment, receives specific inputs from it and transmits these inputs into precise processes and changes them into outputs in the form of services, finished goods, services etc. The output is then used as feedback loop to the organization's overall functioning.

The organization can be diagnosed at three levels. The organization as such can be considered at the highest level, this is the macro level. This macro level encompasses of the plan of the company's strategy, organization structure, organization culture, technology and processes. The next level is the meso level or the group level. This comprises different group elements such as group size, norms, task, goals and group functioning as a whole. The lowest level or the micro level is the individual position or the job. This embraces the job design aspects which provoke desirable task behavior.

The organization can be inspected at its various levels to assess which level has a dearth of harmony. This practice of organizational diagnosis can come about at all levels or it may be restricted to concerns at one precise level. The crucial aspect of effective diagnosis lies in knowing what to look for at each level as well as how the levels affect each other. <sup>1</sup>Right diagnosis is essential since erroneous diagnosis can result in a wrong curative set up which would defeat the very purpose of diagnosis and prescriptive medicine.

<sup>1</sup>D. Coghlan, " Organization Development through Interlevel Dynamics," International Journal of Organizational Analysis 2 (1994); 264-79





## **Literature Review**

Common literature on business organization indicates that harmony can be studied through three variables: participation, trust and work environment ( Overvold, 1987, Goss 1988, Burton et al 2004, Wright and Bennet 2008, Ho and Chan, 2009, Wang and Juslin, 2009). Good working relations among employees, and between management and labour, are associated with labour efficiency, product quality, client satisfaction, and higher attendance behaviour (Deery et al 1999; Pfeffer 1998; Wagar, 1997). Conversely, adversarial employment relations are associated with higher costs, reduced quality, and lower worker productivity (Pfeffer, 1998). Creating shared value with local communities through stakeholder engagement has been identified as critical to the success and growth of an organization (Porter and Kramer 2011). Corporate citizenship means 'developing mutually beneficial, interactive and trusting relationships between the company and its many stakeholders...through the implementation of the company's strategies and operating practices' (Waddock 2003). Indigenous consensual dispute resolution traditions have the potential to inform or supplement existing conflict management systems within the firm and create conditions more likely to promote sustainable workplace harmony. The organization benefits further since embedding culturally relevant and meaningful practices into the organization draws on the human strengths of the community and creates an expanded basis for competitive advantage (Laszlo and Zhexembayeva 2011). There is considerable literature available on creating sustainable harmony in organizations; however, there is a dearth of research literature on a suitable action plan which can be of practical use for actually implementing harmony at the individual, group and organizational level. This research paper aims to chalk out an applied action plan to develop harmony and positive work culture in organizations.

## **Organisational Level Elements (macro Level)**

An organization is not a closed system by itself. It needs to interact well with its immediate business environment which essentially comprises its business structure. Organizations which have the notion of harmony ingrained in their fabric will be able to interact with the business environment. The concept of harmony pertains to the individual employee, to the groups/teams and to the organization process as a whole.



**The General Business Environment:** The general business environment consists of all external forces and elements that can influence an organization and affect its effectiveness.<sup>2</sup>

**Business Structure** Michael Porter defines an organization's business structure in terms of five forces: supplier power, buyer power, threats of substitutes, threat of new entrants and rivalry among competitors. These forces play an imperative role in defining organizational success.

### **Core Organisational Inputs**

**Organizational Mission and Vision Statement:** This reflects what the organization stands for and what it aims to be over the years. This statement should essentially reflect to its employees and all stakeholders that the “journey is more important than the destination.” This means the organization should reveal a caring value driven culture for all its stakeholders and promise to collectively achieve growth.

### **Organizational strategy**

Strategic policies should be outlined to competently manage the five forces. Strategic alignments must be sensitive to influential suppliers who can escalate prices or force the organization to exhibit more attention to the suppliers' needs than to the organization's needs.

It must shield itself from the threat of new products or services that can supplant the existing market offerings. To manage the threat from competition, strategies must consider prevailing product offerings, product costs and structures judiciously, if the organization is to persist and prosper. A strategic intent should address the above aspects and leverage the five magnitudes of strategy to accomplish its predetermined goals and objectives.

### **Process / Technology**

Technology is related with the way an organization converts inputs into outputs such as products and services. It epitomizes the core conversion practice and includes production methods, work flow and machinery and equipment. Technological

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<sup>2</sup>M Porter, Competitive Strategy ( New York Free Press, 1980)





interdependence involves the way in which the different parts of a technological system are interlinked to each other. High interdependence requires extensive and substantial coordination among people, tasks, and work groups to successfully bring out a novel product.

The manner in which an organization weaves the various parts into one whole unit of work is termed integration. Integration is achieved through a variety of lateral mechanisms, such as departmental liaison, cross departmental task forces etc. This integration is a function of the level of uncertainty in the business environment, the level of distinction in the structure and the expanse of interdependence among various sub-departments.

**Organizational Structure** Snowballing worldwide competition and swift technological and environmental changes are forcing organizations to reorganize themselves to leaner, more flexible designs and do away with the vertical bureaucratic structure. These are exceedingly adaptive and inventive, but they require a high level of managerial capabilities to run successfully. They account for less managers and employees and lead to streamlined work flows and larger span of control.

The organization structure should be framed in accordance with the organizational immediate business environment, the technologies adopted by the organization and the organizational goals at large. Organization structure should be designed to accommodate four factors: the environment, the size, technology and organizational strategy. Organization effectiveness depends on the extent to which its structures are responsive to these contingencies.

Organizations can consider re-engineering the organizations' fundamental work process with new information technology to promote strong linkage and harmonization among diverse tasks. This work flow integration is reflected in faster, more reactive work performance, since re-engineering licenses employees to regulate and coordinate work process more effectively

Confronted with fast-track changes in the competitive and dynamic business environments and technologies, organizations have now opted to redesign their structures into more flexible and integrative forms. This has resulted in several organizations embracing a process structure that enables the entire work to be done by teams, with focus on designing subunits around the organizations core work processes.



These process based structures accentuate lateral rather than vertical relationships. The process driven system necessitates innovative skills and knowledge to manage lateral relationships and teams. Also, each process should be manned with the right mix of functional experts. The operational basis for such systems is the establishment of cross –functional teams that could represent the different perspectives at each stage of the business. For such structures to deliver the right results a high level of employee involvement is of paramount importance. Employee involvement can lead to quicker, added receptive decisions, unceasing performance improvements and better employee flexibility, guaranteed commitment and job satisfaction. Employee involvement seeks to increase members' input into decisions that affect organization performance and employee well-being. Employee involvement can be designated in terms of elements that promote involvement - authority, power, information, knowledge, skills and rewards. Since these four elements are interdependent, they must be swapped in desirable combinations to acquire encouraging results.

Employee involvement practices such as contributing to workplace decisions, can substantially improve productivity in more ways than one. It can develop communication and coordination among employees and work groups and departments, help integrate different jobs that contribute to an overall task. It can enhance motivation at work if it is able to gratify the employee's individual needs. Motivation is decoded to improved performance only when people have the indispensable basic skills and knowledge to execute well, supplemented with favorable technology and work situation to allow people to significantly affect productivity. This improves the capabilities of employees, enabling them to perform better. In a nutshell, employee involvement practices enhance employee well-being and satisfaction by ushering in harmonious work environment and job satisfaction at large. However, jobs carried out under very strict supervision and procedures can have a very little motivational or even a negative impact on the employee.

### **Organizational work culture**

Organizational culture consists of the assumptions, norms, and values shared by organization members. It directly influences how organizational members perceive, think and behave at work. Participative leadership as a whole is vital for the establishment and sustainment of a good and harmonious work culture in any organization.





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## Human Resource System Elements

**Performance Management Systems** Performance management systems are an integrated process of defining, assessing and reinforcing employee work behaviors and outcomes.<sup>7</sup> Organizations with a well-designed performance management process in place outclass and outshine those without this element of organization design.

**Work Design** This pertains to creating jobs and work groups that generate high levels of employee fulfillment and productivity. A few approaches of work design are as under:

**The Engineering Approach** It recommends that the most efficient work designs can be determined by visibly specifying the tasks to be performed, the process methods to be used, and the work flow pattern among the individuals. The engineering approach is based on Frederick Taylor, the Father of Scientific Management.<sup>8</sup> This approach focuses on technical components and less on fitting people in the system; this however, results in mediocre performance.

**The Motivational Approach** The motivational approach to work design envisions the efficacy of organizational activities solely on the basis of employee needs and satisfaction and strives to improve employee performance and satisfaction by job enrichment. The motivational approach can lead to satisfied workers but inefficient work process.

A thorough job diagnostic survey can clearly display whether motivation and satisfaction are really problems at hand or the other way round, i.e., whether the job itself is low in motivating aspects. The survey can pinpoint whether the job in question can be restyled and improved. Further, a job design survey measures several parameters like: monetary satisfaction, relationship levels with coworkers etc. These can be effective tools to measure the levels of dissatisfaction with one or more of these variables. Establishment of relevant feedback channels aid employees to ascertain their levels of performance. It is most fruitful in the long run when the employee learns about his/her performance while actually performing on the job.

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<sup>7</sup>A. Moharman, S Moharman and C Worley, "High Technology Performance Management," In managing complexity in High Technology Organizations, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1990, 216-36.

<sup>8</sup>F Taylor, The Principles of Scientific Management (New York: Harper & Row, 1911)



## **The Socio-technical Systems Approach**

This approach is a cohesive approach, and is grounded on two fundamental variables: the social-plus-technical system, and that this system is open in relation to its environment.<sup>9</sup> This approach has two components, viz. the social and the psychological aspects which result in job satisfaction and commitment. The challenge lies in combining the two variables harmoniously and inclusively so as to produce high levels of human satisfaction.

**Self-Managed Work Teams** This form of work design consists of members performing interrelated tasks and they as a team are characteristically responsible for a complete product or service. The team performance and its member satisfaction are directly proportional to the team functioning, how well the members work in harmony with each other, communicate, synchronize tasks with each other, resolve clashes and problems, and the degree to which they make and also implement task relevant decisions. The team functioning is in turn influenced by team work design, team interventions and existing parallel organization support systems.

**Team work design** This is direct result of the team's goals that define the chief drives of the team and serves as the guiding path for task achievement. Team work design structures should meticulously be aligned to the corporate strategy and organizational objectives so as to contribute to the organization's success. This can reinforce and accentuate group members' commitment to team goals. Three task design elements are necessary for creating self-managed teams: task differentiation, boundary control and task control.<sup>10</sup> Task differentiation refers to the level of task autonomy and differentiation that distinguishes teams. This differentiation outlines the team boundaries and team responsibilities. Boundary control includes a well-defined work area, group accountability for decisions, and members sufficiently trained to perform tasks on self-dependent basis. This necessitates thoughtful cross training of team members to take on a assortment of tasks. This makes members highly flexible and adaptable to change. Task control: The degree to which team members can control their behavior to accomplish tasks.

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<sup>9</sup>T Cummings and Srivastava, Management of work; A socio- Technical Systems Approach( San Diego: University Associates, 1977 <sup>10</sup>Cummings, "Self Regulating Work Groups.





## **Managing work force diversity**

**Age:** To address age diversity work design, wellness programmes, career planning and development, and reward systems must be adapted to suit different age groups. For instance, for older employees work design should focus more on intellectual aspects rather than on a physically exhaustive job.

**Gender:** Work designs, reward systems and career developments can be used to address issues arising out of gender. Ex: provision of work from home, flexi time options etc. should be given to working mothers as such so that they can maintain harmony at work and home.

**Disability:** Organizations who hire people with disability should ensure that they have a climate where accommodation requests can be made without fear. It also means there is a need for more comprehensive healthcare, new physical work place layouts, new attitude of working people with special needs.

**Cultural diversity:** Conduct workplace programmes that would enable employees to develop a sense of mutual respect and tolerance towards different values, beliefs, and cultures.

## **THE ACTION PLAN**

### **At the Macro Level (Organizational Level)**

#### **1. Identify which elements in the organization have a dearth of harmony.**

This can be assessed by preparing a questionnaire survey across the organization which can have the following checklist of questions pertaining to the organizational strategy and business goals, products and services, company interaction, shared values and ethics, leadership styles, diversity management, key challenges of the organization, staff requirements, performance expectations, to mention a few.

#### **2. Demonstrate that organizational support system exists in the true sense in the organization and is not an eyewash by the top management / owners of the company. This should be done without sacrificing the organizational interests.**

- Connect with employees and communicate the significance of a harmonious workplace during formal and informal assemblies with all employees.



- Create awareness about the existing work culture. This is important, since people continue to behave in particular ways due to lack of awareness about their behavior and its dysfunctional effects. Creating awareness about their existing work behavior and exposure to desirable work culture can facilitate change.
- New recruits in the organization should be made aware of the existing organizational culture so that they get used to good practices from day one. This process makes them aware of what is expected of them in terms of behavior by the organization and vice versa. This facilitates in defining expectations of both the parties and makes them aware of the fundamental psychological contract.
- Internally market the company's values and to the employees through a series of tailored and well-crafted communiqués so that it would help them to comprehend the justification behind the business motives, and how they can contribute to the organizations success. Do not ask employees to simply go through the organizational manual and hope that they would be able to read between the lines.
- Leaders should walk the talk. They should be role models for their subordinates and they should actively participate in implementing workplace harmony and actually live up to the organizational values and beliefs in the right spirit.
- Leaders should implant the belief that no single unit is important in a process system and ensure that the success was on account of team effort. This would promote team spirit and unity within the organization and facilitate better understanding and coordination among work groups.

### **3. Appoint a committee which is backed by both the authority and accountability to implement the concept of harmony at work across all levels.**

Authority without accountability and accountability without authority have no potential. The committee members should include employees from all divisions so that employee needs are better addressed. The committee should cultivate, implement and regularly assess the initiatives to promote harmony across the organization.

### **4. Identify and Strengthen employee proficiencies without hurting their self-respect and self-esteem.**

The Human Resource system can play a significant role in developing a sound harmonious work culture:





- Recruit people who share the same values and ethics as that of the organization. This would enable the new recruits to quickly get into the fabric of the organization thereby plummeting the possibility of negativity and mismatch.
- Provide a good orientation programme so that the new employee does not feel out of place at work and understands the values and norms of behavior that is expected by the organization.
- Training employees to work in self-managed teams and cross functional teams, and equipping them with the necessary assistance to get along in harmony with people coming from diverse cultures.
- Ascertain the issues the organization is plagued with and arrange training programmes to address the issues of prime concern first.
- Performance management systems should be designed so as to accommodate quantifiable and accessible criteria for performance evaluation. The system should be rational and unprejudiced.
- Members representing a variety of functions need to be involved in the design process so that the essential strategic and organizational issues are addressed.
- A clear picture of the existing performance management system needs to be assessed for its strengths and weaknesses. This is essential for designing the new performance management system
- The ultimate purpose of an appraisal system is to help the organization achieve better performance. Thus managers, staff and employees can have more specific views on how the appraisal process can be used.
- Design the performance appraisal system: this should include choices about who performs the appraisal, who is involved in determining performance, how performance is measured and how often the feedback is given.
- Criteria for designing an effective appraisal system includes timeliness, accuracy, acceptance, focus on control points and economic feasibility.
- Individuals and work groups need to get performance information prior to review. The information needs to be accurate so as to determine whether the performance is above or below the targets. Further information needs to be understood well if it is to have problem solving value. Performance feedback must be accepted and owned by people who use it.



- Appraisal systems should focus on critical points.
  - Implement the new appraisal system by administering a small pilot test to correct any flaws in the design before it is implemented systemwide.
  - Evaluate and monitor the system via user interface, i.e. human resource team, managers, and employee viewpoints for essential inputs.
- 5. Build an atmosphere of bonding, and togetherness to improve good relations, and sound understanding between individuals and teams.**
- Create green work spaces. Ensure that the workplace is spacious enough, well lit, and clean and is surrounded by natural greenery. Green has a soothing effect on the mind and can significantly boost employee moods.
  - Work place design should be in sync with the nature of work. If the work demands more integration and coordination across various teams, workplace structure should be designed as such.
  - Creating an open work environment reduces confusion at work.
  - Offices can have a few areas designed to facilitate employees to have informal interactions such as canteens, play areas, etc. where employees socialize and forge bonds. Such interventions can foster a family culture in the organization and can be useful in employee retention and reducing employee turnover considerably.
  - Organize team building workshops and ice breaking activities where employees get to understand each other.
  - Mentoring employees at work - both for new recruits and low performers. This will help the new employees to address the teething issues at work.
  - Establish cross functional employee networks which would act as parallel support systems to employees.
  - Spot and reward employees who significantly promote harmony at workplace.
  - Address employee grievances via the formal and informal routes.
  - Celebrate diversity in the true spirit by observing cultural festivals for various religious populations in the organization, so that employees from different cultures learn to appreciate each other's culture. This enhances mutual respect towards each other.





- Organize counseling sessions for employees to address their personal and professional problems.
- Encourage employee participation at all relevant times.

## **6. Rewards and Recognition**

Frame clear cut rewards and recognition policies and ensure that it is a transparent process. Recognize individuals and team who are instrumental in creating a harmonious work place.

### **At the Meso Level (group Level):**

1. Establish clear team goals which are in sync with the organizational goals. Further, goals should be relatively clear to all the group members so that everyone knows what issues they need to solve.
2. Group design needs be compatible with the larger organization design. When this does not materialize it results in unsettled conflict with the organization. Such groups may lead to emergence of counterproductive behavior and norms that runs against the organization.
3. When the work process results in symbiotic tasks, coordination should be promoted by goal clarity, task structure, group composition, and team functioning.
4. In a rapidly changing technological environment groups need to be well informed in terms of information processing and decision making. Members should have the necessary freedom and information to decide on the various aspects of performing the job and to set goals for the team.
5. Teams should be trained to handle diversity related issues, and cross functional teams should be established so as to bring in the desired level of flexibility to adapt to changes.
6. Team functioning is the essence of groups. It's important for group members to relate to each other positively, because the quality of associations can shake task performance to a significant level.
7. Establishment of parallel structures: To resolve ill defined, yet complex problems and build adaptability. Here, members may join intermittent off-site meetings to reconnoiter means to improve quality in their work area. Parallel structures facilitate problem solving and change by providing time and resources for members to think,



talk and act in completely new ways. For this we need to implement the following:

- Delineate the purpose and opportunity of the parallel structure.
- Form a managing committee comprising leads of various process teams who would actually create the linkage mechanisms between the parallel structure and the formal process organization.
- Establish problem solving group activities. This helps to set the tone for problem solving.
- The committee can create a vision statement that hones the structure's purpose and promotes ownership of it.
- Communicate the purpose, procedures and rewards for participating; this can promote involvement of employees and might offer inputs to new improved paths of working in harmony.
- Create mediums for employee problem solving.
- Group norms that promote openness, inspiration and integration need to be established.

#### **At the micro level (individual level)**

1. Identify the personal characteristics of the individual and assess the level of fit between the personal characteristics and the job design.
2. Ensure sufficient role clarity, the absence of which leads to role conflict at work. Employee engagement in the right direction leads to employee job satisfaction and therefore it pays to keep the employee meaningfully engaged.
3. Ensure sufficient feedback so that the individual gets to know where his/her lacuna is.
4. Slow and weak performers must be associated with mentors or employee networks within the organization so as to raise their performance standards and give them an opportunity to grow and be a valuable asset to the team.
5. Organizations should have an open door policy where employees can voice their concerns and adequately solve their problems at the right time.
6. Organizations should frame appropriate work life balance strategies so that employees can be efficient at work, while managing their personal life equally well. This is quintessential for maintenance of internal harmony of the individual. This has





a tremendous impact on employee productivity.

7. Stress buster workshops and employee wellness activities that enable employees to handle high pressure jobs better.
8. Organize workshops that foster harmonious relationships amongst employees, since good healthy relationships are the essence of contentment and success.
9. Employees should be trained on the necessary life skills such as yoga, meditation etc. to exhibit desirable behavior at work so as to generate positive energy within and spread the same within the organization and build strong relationships – a prerequisite for harmony at work.

## Conclusion

Organizations must opt for an integrated and planned effort to integrate a harmonious work culture and motivate employees from within and empower them to be ambassadors for promoting harmony in the organization. The responsibility to build harmonious organizations lies not only with the top management, but rather it is the responsibility of each member in the organization to contribute to the cause of harmony. The efforts should be integrated in the fabric of the organization from all levels and across all functions. This would definitely be an economical option for organizations to retain competent and indispensable human resources.

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