Investigating the Role of Beliefs and Professional Values in HR Management

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Abstract

Human Resource Management (HRM) has been accentuated as a theme for research in various organizations and institutions and sufficient literature has been introduced on this subject since 1980s in the developed world. This aspect did not attract attention in developing / under-developed countries like Pakistan. The resence of literature regarding HRM at the workplace and ideological orientation warrants its application in our organizations and institutions to help resolve managerial issues being confronted by the managers, employees and the employers. HRM ideology is distinguished by the unitarist and pluralist approach at workplace.

Key Words: HRM, Employees, Ideological Orientation, Pluralist, Unitarianist, Values and Beliefs

Introduction

Reiteration of the Employee Relationship (ER) programs in the United States highlights three Human Resource (HR) models which ended up being prominent, specifically; Fombrun, Tichy, and Devanna's (1984) 'Coordinating Model,' Beer et al's. (1984) 'Harvard model,' and Walton's (1985) 'control to Commitment Model' (Farnham 1993). With industrial development / revolution, ER changes surfaced in the world with bias towards larger organisations.

Since 1980s, there has been a critical change in perspective in overseeing ER to the one concentrated on progressively vital and coordinated systems that depend on worker responsibility and shared working environment interests, rather than the customary administrative control and clashes among businesses and representatives (Cully et al. 1999; Kaufman 2008).

Three regular sorts of ER points of view specifically; unitarist, pluralist, and neo-unitary (Farnham 1993) stay under examination at different establishments.

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This paper assesses just two ways to deal with ER for example unitary and pluralist showing their suggestions for overseeing ER in associations which embrace pluralist point of view.

Explication of Workplace Values and Beliefs

In the paper, there are two types of frames which were analysed with relation to ER as; the *unitarist* and *pluralist* (Fox 1996; Farnham 1993); each frame being deliberated upon in succeeding paragraphs.

Unitarist Viewpoint

As indicated by Ross and Bamber (2009), the board is the single wellspring of specialist in the association while restriction pioneers are non-existent. Hierarchical pioneers are depended with the duty to instil dedication and responsibility among representatives (Farnham 1993; Ackers and Payne 1998). It is necessary for the managers to possess and display leadership traits to attain organisational objectives (Farnham 1993). Unitarist viewpoint about the trade union is quite negative considering these entities as non-legal intrusions to management objectives (Farnham 1993). As regards conflict, it is perceived negatively and proves detrimental to the organizational setting (Giles 1989; Farnham 1993). Moreover, according to unitarist viewpoint, management of conflict can be better realized by the management itself instead of trade unions (Ackers & Payne 1998; Dzimbiri 2008).

Strengths of Unitarist Perception

Incorporation of employers' and employees' interests in order to enhance employees' commitment and loyalty is the strength of unitarist perspective (Guest & Peccei 2001). As per unitarist point of view, employees are imperative for the organization's existence and used as a foundation for the management of stakeholders; welfare of organization is linked with the well-being of employees (Ackers & Payne 1998).

The managers have a profound responsibility to attain win-win situation for employees and organizations ensuring alignment of their interests (Giles 1989) for which they are forced to go ahead of their managerial techniques of managing ER and lay emphasis on their leadership capabilities (Ackers & Payne 1998). If the managers are blessed with convincing and dominant leadership traits, employees will not insist for the trade unions in the organization.

Weaknesses of Unitarist Perception

Unitarist theory does not cater for the power inequalities between employers and

employees which breeds various kinds of conflicts (Kessler and Purcell 2003). Conflict is treated too negatively and never seen as an opportunity that reflects discrimination which can be utilized to harmonize the work (Dzimbiri 2008; Kitay & Marchington 1996).

Pluralist Point of View

In contrast with unitarianist stand point; pluralist theory believes that the workplace comprises varied sets of beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviours (Giles 1989). There are varying sources of leadership and attachment in organizations (Farnham 1993); thus conflicts are predestined because of intrinsic rivalries / interests (Dabschec 1989; Dzimbiri 2008). According to pluralist school of thought, conflicts are not always negative; rather can be supportive as well provided these are identified and managed within the establishment's responses well in time (Farnham, 1993). While the role of management is to mediate among competing interests (Farnham 1993); trade unions are legitimate representatives of employees and taken positively as they enable employees utilize their skills and power in decision-making (Leat 2001).

Strengths of the Pluralist Perspective

In contrast to the unitarist, the pluralist hypothesis accentuates that proficient Industrial Relations (IR) mediations can prompt the auspicious goals of contentions (Dzimbiri 2008). It justifies an advising way to deal with be embraced by the administration while reacting to clashes. Struggle isn't neglected yet overseen successfully through partners' inclusion (Hunter 1998). Strife would then be able to be utilized to appreciate causal pressures, so that these can be recognized and handled legitimately (Kessler & Purcell 2003; Bacon & Blyton 2007). The pluralist school of thought makes utilization of refereeing systems to connect with gatherings that are in strife, so goals can be expanded and executed (Kessler & Purcell 2003).

The representative relationship approaches make pluralism valuable for assorted hierarchical and national societies (Gennard & Judge 2002). For instance, worker's guilds can be compelling partners to acquire line the individual and authoritative interests contradicting with their counter parts, the unitarist school of thought to deal with representative relations (Badigannavar & Kelly 2005). The pluralist school of thought furthermore makes it appropriate for generally speaking Industrial Relation frameworks, since it doesn't slight the job of worker's organizations in overseeing representative boss clashes (Badigannavar & Kelly 2005).

Limitation of the Pluralist Perspective

The pluralist theory is inclined to bother standards and methodologies, disregarding the strategies that add to the objectives of disputes. For example, laws can be made that approve certain standards for settling workplace conflicts; these standards can't change in accordance with rising unmistakable workplace conditions (Gennard & Judge 2002).

Method and Analysis

Qualitative methodology was adopted for data collection; based on face-to-face interviews. The interview questions have been principally framed to assess three themes: *Employer authority*, ideological orientation and *workplace conflict,* and role of *trade union*. Respondents (Top Managers, Middle and Lower Level Managers) were requested to give their candid opinion about the questions asked. Due to prevailing uncertainties / job insecurities in various organizations, mostly the senior executives declined but with insistence, few eventually consented to participate on ethical commitment for not disclosing their identity. Due to time constraints, very small sample has been taken. With the objectives in mind, and small sample size, with focus on qualitative data, some very significant themes emerged.

Three personnel from two national organizations at Islamabad and Rawalpindi were interviewed; while remaining relevant to the research themes.

First Interviewee

Station:-Islamabad   Date: -   26 May 2014
Employment Status: - Senior Executive   Age: - 52 Years
Gender: Male

1. Word about your educational background and work experience; how long have you been working here in this position?

"I am an Electrical Engineer and working in WAPDA for last 27 Years; and more than two years on this post."

2. Would you like to briefly describe the organization of your establishment?

"IESCO is headed by a Managing Director with Superintendent Engineer, XEN and down to Sub Divisional Level Managers (SDO) of grade 17 with staff and workers of grade 16 and below."

3. What are the employer's rights in the organization and how do you implement these rights?

"An organization has to have right man for the right job having sufficient authority to execute his assigned tasks and responsibilities without interference from external forces like political interference. Though the policies are quite comprehensive the problem lies with implementation. We have a Board of Directors as well but astonishingly, there are directors who are not actually the stake holders. We at the top management level are facing another dilemma of critical deficiency in SDOs where the vacancies are lying vacant either due to promotion or transfer under political influence; which is being aggravated due to ban on recruitment by the Government."

4. Do you think that employees are being afforded their rights in your organization?

"Sure, they are heard and afforded equal chance to raise their voice, which is taken positive."

5. Do you feel that employees' rights are not usurped by the employers in your organization?

"Employer is not seizing employees' rights in our organization."

6. What is your understanding of the ideological orientation respecting HRM in the organization; is it unitarist or pluralist in approach?

"At top level understanding is in conflict with ground situation. Top level assumes that managers and workers are joining their forces to achieve organizational goals without resistance while on ground, there is labor union which resists on one pretext or the other like timings, working environment, financial aspects and incentives etc. These union has the power to influence the decision making; thus, to me it is pluralist in nature."

7. Conflicts at workplace is a common phenomenon, in your opinion what are the sources of conflict in your organization?

"Over worked employees, long absentees from workplace by the favored ones and exploitation by the labor union are major sources / causes of the conflict in our institution."

8. Does the organization/ management look after the interest of workers or these are being taken care of by the labor union?

"Organization/ management is always sympathetic and taking good care of the employees; however, as a culture, labor union portrays that they are forcing the management to look after the employees."

9. Do you consider that interests of management and workers are aligned?

"Certainly, our goal is common-betterment of the organization."

10. What is your opinion about the legitimacy of labor union in Pakistani context?

"These are covered under the Act and legitimate entities in all respects."

11. Do you consider union as a liability as they introduce distrust in work environment, or these are the assets as they protect workers interest?

"To me these are the nurseries for development of leadership and senior managers from within the organizations. These are not liabilities; actually, they require direction and guidance to remain relevant to the overall objectives of the institution where ever they are serving."

12. In your opinion, do the workers and management in your organization work as a team or sometimes as a team and sometimes in conflict?

"Mostly they work as a team but on few occasions, on instigation of the union leaders they go astray."

13. Do you think that management leaves no stone unturned to get the best for their workers?

"This is essential ingredient of our management to get the best for our employees, so that they reciprocate in terms of better displayed performance."

14. Conflict management is a managerial skill; how is it being practiced in your organization?

"To me a manager has the leadership skills and he has to control the uncertainties / ambiguities. He has to be on site to resolve the conflict. In the establishment my effort is to have conducive workplace environment, which avoids the emergence of conflicts; if at all it occurs then defuse and resolve."

15. Poor communication and the trouble makers in any organization are the major causes of the conflict in workplace-your comments?

"I agree with the perception; it is rather a reality. Once the management is maintaining a communication gap with the workforce, it affords opportunity to the exploiters which results into the conflict at workplace."

16. Clash of interest or difference of objectives of various groups results into major conflict in any workplace, do you agree with that?

"I agree with the impression."

17. Workers have affiliations with their leaders and the labour unions which results into their better performance for the organization, do you agree or otherwise?

"I partially agree. Commitment of the employees matters in better performance of the organization. At one point in time, almost 52% employees are with any of the union while remaining in opposition, so if the connotation is taken true then half of the workforce is not contributing positively; which is not the case."

18. Is there anything else you would like to share or add about the ideological orientation in the workplace?

"No thanks, but please remember that identity is not disclosed as agreed."

Second Interviewee

Station:-Islamabad   Date: -   26 May 2014
Employment Status: - Union Leader   Age: - 40 Years
Gender: Male

1. Word about your educational background and work experience; how long have you been working here in this position?

"I am matriculate and working in WAPDA for last 20 Years and more than three years as Union Leader."

2. Would you like to briefly describe the organization of your establishment?

"There is one MD Sahb in IESCO who has SE, XEN and variety of SDOs, lower staff and workers."

3. What are the employer's right in the organization and how do they implement these rights?

"They have rights for themselves and not for the workers, we have to get our rights by force, and we know that with experience."

4. Do you think that employees are being afforded their rights in your organization?

"No, no one gives rights to anybody willingly; rather rights are to be snatched."

5. Do you feel that employees' rights are not usurped by the employers in your organization?

"It is because of us that employees are getting their rights."

6. What is your understanding of the ideological orientation respecting HRM in the organization; is it unitarist or pluralist in approach?

"Firstly, it is too difficult for me to understand the question; however, now with your explanation of the terminologies, my answer would be the 'Pluralist Perspective'."

7. Conflicts at workplace is a common phenomenon, in your opinion what are the sources of conflict in your organization?

"Whenever the employer violates employees' rights, there has to be demand of union to give due rights to the workers; once no one listens to the demand then there has to be a conflict."

8. Does the organization/ management look after the interest of workers or these are being taken care of by the labor union?

"Organization/ management look after our interests to avoid conflict, because we are not going to spare them."

9. Do you consider that interests of management and workers are aligned?

"We are loyal to the organization, we feed our children from the same institution; it is binding on us to remain devoted to the organization."

10. What is your opinion about the legitimacy of labor union in Pakistani context?

"This is our democratic right."

11. Do you consider union as a liability as they introduce distrust in work environment, or these are the assets as they protect workers interest?

"We are asset to the organization, as we ensure that interests of employee are looked after; which eventually lead to his devotion to the institution."

12. In your opinion, do the workers and management in your organization work as a team or sometimes as a team and sometimes in conflict?

"We are a team and do not cause conflict in the workplace unless management usurps workers' rights / privileges."

13. Do you think that management leaves no stone unturned to get the best for their workers?

"They are supposed to but forced to give their best."

14. Conflict management is a managerial skill; how is it being practiced in your organization?

"Our management is efficient and resolves the conflict by meeting our just demands."

15. Poor communication and the trouble makers in any organization are the major causes of the conflict in workplace-your views?

"I partially agree with the perception; poor communication at the hands of management creates situation which may lead to conflict."

16. Clash of interest or difference of objectives of various groups results into major conflict in any workplace, do you agree with that?

"I agree with the impression."

17. Workers have affiliations with their leaders and the labor unions which results into their better performance for the organization, do you agree or otherwise?

"I agree; they give their best for the better performance of the organization."

18. Is there anything else you would like to share or add about the ideological orientation in the workplace?

"No thanks."

Third Interviewee

Station:-Rawalpindi   Date: -   26 May 2014
Employment Status: - Senior Executive   Age: - 51 Years

Gender: Male
  1. Word about your educational background and work experience; how long have you been working here in this position?
"I am Mechanical Engineer and working in Pakistan Railways for last 25 Years; and more than three years on this post."

  2. Would you like to briefly describe the organization of your establishment?
"Railway is organized in Divisions; Peshawar, Rawalpindi, Lahore, Multan, Sukkur, Karachi and Quetta Division."

  3. What are the employer's rights in the organization and how do you implement these rights?
"We have elaborate policies which are revised on need basis for efficient working of the organization. Rights and privileges are well known to everybody at every tier. We have no Board of Directors but Railway Board which earlier abolished is being revived with the expectation of better strategy formulation and guidelines for implementation. Regarding implementation of employers' rights, I would say that it requires the workers commitment toward their occupation / profession / job which at few cadres is missing unfortunately."

  4. Do you think that employees are being afforded their rights in your organization?
"Surely, their rights are well protected."

  5. Do you feel that employees' rights are not usurped by the employers in your organization?
"Certainly, employer is not grabbing employees' rights in our institution."

  6. What is your understanding of the ideological orientation respecting HRM in the organization; is it unitarist or pluralist in approach?
"It is pluralist approach being followed in the organization."

  7. Conflicts at workplace is a common phenomenon, in your opinion what are the sources of conflict in your organization?
"It is always because of two main factors: violation of policies by the management and exploitation by the pressure groups."

  8. Does the organization/ management look after the interest of workers or these are being taken care of by the labour union?
"Our management is always considerate and takes good care of the employees."

  9. Do you consider that interests of management and workers are aligned?
      "Optimistically, interests of both are aligned."
  10.   What is your opinion about the legitimacy of labour union in Pakistani context?
"These are legal entities."

11.   Do you consider union as a liability as they introduce distrust in work environment, or these are the assets as they protect workers interest?

"No, these are the entities which provide forum to workers to register their reservations/ personal problems and protects their interests in the organization. It leads to their loyalty / personal association with the organization resulting to its overall improvement. In Railways, there is another union comprising 'Station Masters' who are educated people and quite participative in nature and shares valuable inputs owing to their situational experience and management of crisis at various levels. It is necessary for the management to follow the policies. If policies are being followed sparingly, these labour unions can contribute positively."

12.   In your opinion, do the workers and management in your organization work as a team or sometimes as a team and sometimes in conflict?

"Most of the time they are a team but on a few occasions, employees go off track on instigation of their leaders for petty personal gains."

13.   Do you think that management leaves no stone unturned to get the best for their workers?

"We are duty bound to get the best for the workers so that they give their 100 % to the organization."

14.   Conflict management is a managerial skill; how is it being practiced in your organization?

"We as a manager have to face so many challenging situations, which are to be controlled before escalation. If managers are strictly following the laid down policies, there will no conflict."

15.   Poor communication and the trouble makers in any organization are the major causes of the conflict in workplace-your comments?

"I agree with the observation; it is rather true"

16.   Clash of interest or difference of objectives of various groups results into major conflict in any workplace, do you agree with that?

"I agree with the impression."

17.   Workers have affiliations with their leaders and the labour unions which results into their better performance for the organization, do you agree or otherwise?

"It is debatable, 100% strength is not on the side of labor union at one time; generally speaking, more than 40% would not be part of presently functional union; thus the performance of certain segment may be improved because of better affiliation but may be infected by the presence of pressure groups in some sectors."

18.   Is there anything else you would like to share or add about the ideological orientation in the workplace?

"Please remember the commitment respecting confidentiality of identification."

Discussion

The model comprised three themes: - *Employer authority and Employees' rights*, ideological orientation and *workplace conflict,* and role of *labour union*. Themes were discussed with senior executives and middle / lower managers from WAPDA and Pakistan Railway. Each one of them gave his personal opinion while remaining relevant to the management rules and regulations being implemented in their respective organization; response appended in subsequent paragraphs.

Employer Authority and Employees' Rights

Like employees, employers also have well defined rights / privileges which are to be put into effect in the workplace to ensure intended quality of the work environment; if an employer is well versed with his rights, he can apply them effectively to evade legal issues while ensuring efficient work atmosphere.

As a guideline, employers should not ask their workers about their approach towards unions or any union activities they may be interested in. Employers should not promise benefits to their employees with a malicious intent to weaken a union drive.

While responding to questions related to employer authority and its impact on employment relations, senior executives from WAPDA who is working in this post for more than two years stated,

"For accomplishment of assigned tasks / objectives, there has to be right man for the right job alongside autonomy / delegation of authority with responsibility without interference from outside organization elements / political system. Policies are quite clear on every aspect, but the problem is with implementation. Employer / top manager's authority is challenged once he has to work under the influence of external factors limiting his performance. There is a board of Directors in our organization which has the members who are actually not the true stake holders; how can their input in decision making be beneficial to the organization? One more issue being faced by the managers is deficiency of lower level managers, e.g. 1 x SDO is authorised on 8000 consumers; there is almost 50% deficiency in this cadre which is attributed to ban on recruitment and promotion / retirement in parallel."

During discourse with senior executive (serving in this organization for last 25 years) from Railway, he responded to the concept of employer authority stating,

"Elaborate rules and policies exist since pre-partition and being reviewed with passage of time on need basis for overall betterment of the organization. Organizational objectives are translated down to the lower level managers which are then achieved with the cooperation of employees. There is no Board of Directors in Pakistan Railways, however, Railway Board which was abolished earlier is being revitalized; its restoration would help focussed formulation of strategies and policies for betterment of the organization. Personal commitment at

various managerial levels is another ingredient which is deficient at various tiers and gets subdued with the passage of time when frequently confronted with intangible forces like political interference barricading their decision making."

Ideological Orientation and Workplace Conflicts

The quintessence of unitary hypothesis is that 'each work association is a coordinated and amicable entire existing for a typical reason' (Farnham & Pilmott 1986, p.4). The unitary belief system holds that administration practices real expert over representatives, that chiefs' and workers' interests are consistent, and that any contention between them is an abnormality; if struggle emerges, it is credited to outside sources, (for example, an instigator). The pluralist belief system, then again, sees the association as including diverse sectional gatherings with both 'normal and contending interests' (Horwitz 1991, pp.4–5). Consequently, there definitely exists the potential for strife among the board and specialists, and struggle isn't viewed as fundamentally unfortunate. This aspect was deliberated with senior executives more vigorously. Executive Officer from WAPDA stated, "At the top level, it is unitarist in nature assuming that all tiers join hands for accomplishment of organizational goals. While actually it is not; on ground there are labour unions which have different mindset with their specified agenda – exploitation for personal interests / individual gains. They have their say and at the implementation stage of policies, they influence the decisions of managers. Thus, to me it is pluralist perspective of HRM being followed in WAPDA. Regarding conflicts, in most of the cases, this crop up due to personal interests of the employees and exploitation by the union. On occurrence, mangers have to then tackle the issues on the basis of merit."

When asked about the ideological orientation and workplace belief and values in Pakistan Railways, the executive officer explained: -

"Pluralist approach is being followed in the organization. Regarding conflicts, my experience of dealing with these issues vindicates that violation of standing operating procedures by the managers at every tier and exploitation by the pressure groups within the organization is the main cause of conflicts in the organization. However, these are taken positive in the sense that discriminations are highlighted by such occurrences and same can be rectified before escalation. For the cases in litigation, legal division of the organization handles / pleads as per the jurisdiction of the court."

Role of Labour Unions

Unions are groups of workers that have organized in order to speak as one voice to their employers. As an organization, a union can negotiate for such issues as hours, wages and work conditions.

Unitarism considers labour unions as invaders of a private realm, wilfully disrupting the "natural pursuit of common purpose" and "rational managerial authority" (Fox, 1966). To establish the understanding on this concept, theme was framed and executives from WAPDA and Pakistan Railways alongside a senior representative of labour union were interviewed. Executive from WAPDA states,

"Labour unions are basically the nurseries which should be guided to play their intended role; which unfortunately on behest of some pressure groups are busy in derailing the management from performance track. While I am strong supporter of the labour unions in any organizations, in the present mode these should be kept out of the managers / organizational realm."

Senior representative of the labour union was also requested to share his personal views / experience on the this critical issue; in response he advocated'

"The importance of labour union is justified due to the untiring efforts in looking after personnel/ workers interests while ensuring delivery of justice to the lower staff and poor employees in the organizations. If a common man is unable to get his deserved and justified rights/ privileges with the presence of labour union, how will he be treated in the absence of a forum where he can record his voice?"

While discussing this essential ingredient of the research, executive from Pakistan Railways was of the point of view:

"Unions are the mode to enable employees to share their point of view concerning an issue conflicting with their personal interests. This is the only forum which presents personal problems of the employees and protects their interests in the organization which ensues to their loyalty / personal attachment with the organization leading to its overall amelioration. In Railways, there is another union comprising Station Masters who are educated people and quite participative in nature and shares valuable inputs owing to their situational experience and management of crisis at various levels. If the management is strictly following the policies formulated for the achievement of organizational objectives, these labour unions can contribute positively, instead of impeding, towards accomplishment of intended goals."

Conclusions

The management follows different frame of references when dealing with employee relations. This paper focused only on two perspectives, the unitarist and the pluralist frame of reference. Both these perspectives have their own merits and demerits which are articulated to get them aligned with the organizational objectives and employees' relations. Unitarist school of thought assumes that there is only one source of leadership, thus inclined towards the individualist employee relationship while the pluralist school of thought believes that there are competing interests and resulting conflict can be properly managed efficiently by effective

labour unions; therefore falls into the collectivistic relationship system. While labour unions are seen negatively by unitarist school of thought, this approach considers that the conflicts should be avoided and managed through alignment of the individual and organizational interests.

There is an ambiguity at various levels of leadership and management; higher pedestal is of the opinion that managers and employees are at one page while perceiving employees with contrast to the organizational interests – hinting at unitarist view point. But in reality, there are labour unions which are usually in conflict with managerial perspective; considering themselves as the solitary guardian of the employees' interests. There is an unpronounced mix of unitarist and pluralist stand points which is not a healthy sign for the organization". Due to scarcity of time and resources, the study has been confined to two public sector organizations; it needs to be expanded to other public as well as private sectors.

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