

In Praise of Employeeeship

Employeeeship is as important as leadership for the success of an organisation, says **Kaushik Mitra**

A significant part of management writing has been focused on Leadership and its attributes. Not much has been said about “Non-Leaders” or in other words the vast majority of *employees* in an organisation who do not play a leadership role. The success or otherwise of an organisation is as much dependent on the quality of its leadership as it is on the quality of its “Employeeeship”. This article turns the focus on the employees in non-leadership roles; the forces affecting employees in an organisation and what it takes to deliver high quality ‘employeeeship’.

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The concept of ‘Employeeeship’

The term employee has varying connotations depending on the type of the organisation. In family-run sole-proprietorship organisations, the family members are the employees of the firm. They typically earn a nominal salary and more importantly a share in the profits of the business. There is a direct correlation between the well-being of the business and that of its owner-employees. In a large corporation, on the other hand, employees are generally individuals with varying levels of skills and professional knowledge hired for a salary with no direct linkage with the well-being of



the organisation.

Wikipedia defines 'Employeeeeship' as "...a process where the traditional thinking in regards to leadership and subordination in hierarchy is abandoned. The traditional model is replaced by a mindset of partnership, a relationship where both managers and employees take ownership over their work situation." Thus, looked at this way, 'Employeeeeship', in simple terms, is just being an employee.

So what does it take to be a good employee? To understand this, let us look at the forces acting upon employees in organisations today.

Forces acting upon Employees in Organisations

There are several stimuli which impact employees in organisations. Let's focus on three key forces:

- 1) Career Prospects:** Generally speaking most employees are driven by the ambition to get ahead and stay ahead. The desire to actualise one's potential in the form of career advancement is a key driving force for them.
- 2) Organisation Culture:** Almost all organisations have some form of culture, which reflects its shared beliefs, values, and behaviours of the workforce and has a significant effect on the success of a business. For example Apple's corporate culture is built on innovation, but critics report that executives push their employees hard and expect nothing less than the best from them. Similarly, the US multinational corporations, such as GE and PepsiCo, have a strong performance oriented and values driven culture. Indian companies tend to have an entrepreneurial culture. The Tata's have built a culture around strong ethics, social welfare and employee relationship. Whatever the culture, it has a strong bearing on how employees work and behave in organisations.
- 3) Manager Quality:** This is arguably the most telling force acting on employees in organisations. Particularly in India we suffer from a culture of "Boss watching", that is, following in the close footsteps

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of the manager. Most managers in Indian organisations today are surrounded by "yes men or women" who link career progress to pleasing the boss. By the same logic, most employees when they quit their jobs, more often than not, do so because they fall out of line with their managers. Either way, the quality of managers or leaders has a strong influence on employees.

The Boss versus the Shareholder

A relevant question particularly in the Indian context is, should employees be driven by what the boss or manager thinks is right or what is right for the organisation from an owner or shareholder point of view? The answer is logical. Employees should do what is right for the organisation and that is evident in most sole proprietorship organisations. As the distance between ownership and management widens, as it happens in large corporations quite often, the convergence of interests also weakens, and employees, more often than not, go along with the boss. This is a serious challenge particularly in an Indian context. Good 'Employeeeeship' is all about keeping the best interest of the shareholders in mind rather than being a nodding dog to the manager or the boss.

Ten Tenets of good Employeeeeship

So what does it take to be an effective employee? The answer lies in

putting on your owner/ shareholder hat on and thinking what kind of individuals you would like to have in your organisation. Here is a list of ten things owners would want from their employees:

- 1) Bringing your whole self to work:** This happens when employees enjoy their work and the work environment rather than going through a forced ritual out of the need for livelihood. This is a pre-requisite for employee motivation and performance and both - organisations and employees - must strive to create a culture that makes work enjoyable so that employees bring their whole self to the work place.
- 2) Having a "shareholder mindset" vs. "the boss is always right" approach:** This is a difficult one for employees but a critical element of good 'Employeeeeship'. The question employees need to ask of themselves is "who do they work for and who pays their salaries"? It's certainly not the boss. Employees work for the Organisation and represent the shareholders and to them lies their responsibility.
- 3) Drive for Results and Ambition:** The performance of an organisation is integrally linked to the performance of its employees. Most organisations have some form of Performance Management process by which employee performance is measured and salary increments and promotions are directly linked to performance. A high performing organisation typically has high performing employees with strong ambition and drive for results. This is an integral component of good 'Employeeeeship'.
- 4) Adaptability:** Operating in today's dynamic external environment requires employees to be nimble and adaptable. It starts with adapting to the culture of the organisation when an employee joins. Employees are expected to perform a variety of roles in the course of their career, some of which entail multiple reporting. All this needs adaptability. No doubt therefore that adaptability is an essential element of good 'Employeeeeship'



and a win-win for both employees and organisations.

- 5) **Positive Attitude and Openness to Learning:** As the saying goes "Attitude is everything". A positive attitude is a pre-requisite for job satisfaction and involvement leading to a commitment to the organisation. Employees with positive attitude and a willingness to learn are able to keep up with the times and overcome obstacles to drive results. They also have a better chance of getting ahead in their careers. Surely, it is an important ingredient of effective Employee-ship.
- 6) **Change Agents versus 'Status Quoist':** Change always brings with it some positive consequences for both employees and the organisation. Employees who challenge the status quo rather than being happy with the existing state of affairs more often than not create value for the organisation and

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- demonstrate good 'Employee-ship'.
- 7) **Inclusive behaviour and being a Team Player:** Organisational effectiveness depends as much on the individual prowess of employees as it does on the synergies created by effective team-working. An inclusive culture is one that fosters a

sense of respect for each other and winning together. Good 'Employee-ship' is also about being a good team player, being respectful of others and working together in harmony.

- 8) **The 100th degree Principle:** We all know that water at 99 degrees is still in the liquid form and all it takes is that extra degree of heat to make steam. Making that extra stretch is what separates good employees from exceptional ones. In a way this is a manifestation of positive attitude to work and always pays back handsomely in an employee's career. The 100th degree principle is an essential element of good 'Employee-ship'.
- 9) **Networking:** In today's super connected world employees need to be highly networked both within the organisation and also externally to stay abreast of relevant developments in the field of expertise or the domain of knowledge. This is a win-win for both employees and organisations and an important facet of exemplary 'Employee-ship'.
- 10) **Values and Ethics:** This is really the salt and pepper of good 'Employee-ship'. It is the most endearing part of an organisation's culture and probably the strongest glue for its employees.

In Summary:

A high performing organisation is a result of not only effective leadership but also effective 'Employee-ship'. The two forces combine to create a winning culture where employees and leaders strive towards common goals and efforts are aligned.

In tandem with all the focus on leadership development, organisations must also focus on creating an effective 'Employee-ship' culture which harnesses the collective potential of all its employees. Organisations which are able to do this will create sustainable competitive advantage in the long run and create shareholder value. ■



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