

Importance of sound interpersonal relations in the workplace

The Financial Year 2018/19 was closed with an employee relations article in which it was indicated, based on available research, that employees are the most important key resources in an organisation. This position was based on fact that employees can put other organisational resources into good use; and that they are yet the most easily overlooked of all resources. According to eResources Scheduler Specialist (2013), the motivation of the employees is essential in improving productivity and results. As such, the previous article needs to be taken a step further in order to cover, to a certain extent, the importance of interpersonal relationship in the workplace.

Workplaces have various prescripts which regulate employer/employee relationship and interpersonal relationships among employees. Those prescripts are aimed at ensuring, among other things; the prevalence of discipline and harmonious relations among all stake holders within the work environment. For instance in the Public Service, Regulation 14 of the Public Service Regulations, 2016 provides for among other things; the optimal development of employees and the promotion of sound labour and interpersonal relations. The previous article, touched upon the importance of developing employee; whereas this article places emphasis on interpersonal relations/relationship/s at the workplace.

Interpersonal relations refers to an association between individuals working together in the same organisation for a common goal being to achieve the objectives/strategic objectives of their department/organisation. Sound interpersonal relations should be interactive in nature involving all who play a crucial role within the organisation, from management to employees. Interpersonal relations play an important part in the functioning of an organisation, which is why they need to be cultivated, developed and maintained without losing professionalism in the process. Employees in the workplace share a certain relationship/s, happiness and sorrows with each other or one another. They need to communicate and talk to each other or one another, discuss ideas and socialise or interact with each other or one another at appropriate times. Developing interpersonal skills, particularly at work, is very important. Generally, a person who possesses deep interpersonal skills and is able to use it both individually and in groups, normally comes across as professional with enviable personal life/qualities. According to Thompson (2017), the following are the four important intrapersonal skills which all employees should develop:

Self-awareness which she refers to as an essential soft skill that act as a foundation to emotional intelligence. It enables one to know one's strengths, opportunities for growth, triggers, values, drivers, and everything in between. She further says it enables one to know when to utilise assets to their advantage, when to exercise caution, and to develop areas that they need most. Lack of self-awareness could harm not only the individual but also the organisation as a whole. Understanding oneself is critical in interpersonal skills; self-reflection and feedback are crucial and best in developing self-awareness.

Empathy is very important. Thompson (2017) refers to empathy as the ability to understand other's feelings. Empathy enables employees to build better relationships and helps them address the needs of those around them since they will better recognise the impact they have on others. Managers/supervisors who lead with empathy can foster an environment in which they increase the odds of motivating their employees, and can be more effective when managing conflict, influencing, and coaching.

Managing emotions is key to success. Life can be very stressful at work; and even outside work. The work environment is characterised by ambitious goals, disagreements with colleagues, large workloads, all of which can create pressure for employees. At home,

relationship challenges, financial strains, and work-life balance issues can also create stress on employees which can adversely influence/affect their work performance specifically and the workplace generally. It would assist a great deal if employees were to learn and/or be assisted to learn how to manage these stresses, and any consequent negative emotional displays. Thompson (2017) claims that while self-awareness enables employees to recognise when they are irritable, anxious, or feeling threatened; their ability to regulate these emotions helps them maintain their composure, and prevent any behaviours they might later regret.

Listening skills are vital. Thompson (2017) asserts that listening; now more than ever, can be a challenge due to an era in which we currently live where constant digital distractions make it more difficult to stay present with those around us. She further expresses concern over our general cultural climate which seems to be one in which people are more concerned with expressing their viewpoints than trying to be receptive to listening to, and understanding different perspectives. She then postulates that these factors can contribute to a workplace in which employees lack the patience and motivation to truly listen to one another.

Mastering good communication skills is another important interpersonal skill which is perhaps the most important aspect (of interpersonal skills). To convey your message effectively and to do so without creating any conflict in the best manner possible, ensures that the message is understood (<https://www.educba.com/how-to-develop-interpersonal-skills-at-work/>). They further indicate that **verbal** and **nonverbal communication skills** are basically the two types of interpersonal communication skills that need to be mastered as well. Like Thompson above, they also embrace the concept of listening properly as the very basic aspect of communicating effectively.

Verbal communication is any form of communication encompassing the use of words, be it spoken or written. Verbal communication is a powerful tool which includes the conversation held generally with co-workers, clients, supervisors and managers at any given moment which could even happen at lunch, and in meetings. Therefore, effective verbal communication requires learning the art of conveying your message properly because conveying what you mean in the best possible manner enhances your professional as well as personal life.

Nonverbal communication, also a very powerful tool, as research shows that about 60% of daily communicating occurs verbally. It includes among other things eye contact, the sound of voice and tone, dressing sense, body language, and posture. The sound of your voice and the tone in which you are speaking tells a lot about your mode. Therefore, the combination of verbal and nonverbal communication is the most powerful tool.

In conclusion, a person who possesses good interpersonal skills is normally a smart communicator. Such skills are not only beneficial to employees themselves, but to their employer as well. Therefore, interpersonal skills are real skills that we need in order to maximise our effectiveness in the roles that we play (Thompson, 2017). Communicating properly can help avoid or address conflict and increases your productivity. In the Public Service concept, additionally; more emphasis is placed on efficiency and effectiveness, as well as improved service delivery. To that end, we must always add inclusiveness to our work life whereby we cooperate willingly with other people for the benefit not only for ourselves but our Department. Always remember, it takes a collective to achieve the goals and strategic objectives of an organisation. We therefore need to develop and enhance our interpersonal skills; however, not at the expense of our technical skills.

*(An opinion from the labour desk
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