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Human Factors in Management

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Summary

Nothing is more certain in today's uncertain world than change -- rapid, constant, ever increasing change. Indeed, change is perhaps the most fundamental characteristics of modern life, and this moment in time might rightly be called The Age of Change. (After all, anxiety, the characteristic most often associated with modern times, is largely a result of man's inability to adjust to change.)

The political, cultural, and socio-economic changes that characterize this Age of Change are in turn producing major changes in the industrial work force. Today's worker is a man or woman who refuses to be squeezed into the neat little compartments of yesterday's "practical" manager. Consequently, the job of management is becoming significantly more difficult; and the new breed of managers, even now, requires more sophisticated skills, especially in interpersonal competence.

In this paper, I will briefly examine the nature of the changes that are tossing us hither and yon, the effects of these changes on the industrial work force, and the changes required of today's managers in order to lead these varied workers.

The Age of Change

The changes that have buffeted our society in the last quarter century have been so great and have been accelerating at such a rate the mind boggles and can scarcely comprehend them. Viewing these changes is like trying to count telephone poles through the window of a speeding train or watching an old movie projected at an accelerated speed. The results -- a blur, a montage:

1. The Bomb, the cold wars and the limited wars that seem to prove the world will never be "safe for democracy."
2. Literally fantastic technological changes and the Age of the Computer -- accompanied by the amazing compression of the time between scientific theory, invention, and mass distribution.
3. The knowledge explosion, with the attendant problems in education and information retrieval.
4. An increasingly affluent society; but also, ironically, a widening gap between the haves and the have-nots.
5. The Negro Revolution that has brought to the surface conscience-shaking issues the American people had hoped were long dead.
6. The population explosion, which will restrict individual freedom, the only question being to what extent.

7. The growing interdependence of each member of society, with the resulting need for freedoms and the loss of some individual freedoms.

8. Urban decay, the white flight to the suburbs, and the growth of megalopolises.

9. The New Morality, which makes sex instead of the family its central theme.

10. The growth of the mass media, especially television, which have helped to bring about the Negro Revolution, the New Morality, etc.

These are only a few of the changes that have led Marshall McLuhan to speak of "Total Change."¹ He says:

We are being forced to reconsider and re-evaluate practically every thought, every action, and every institution formerly taken for granted. Everything is changing -- you, your family, your neighborhood, your education, your job, your government, your relation to "the others" and they're changing dramatically.²

Even more apocalyptic in his view of our changing world was Dr. Franklin D. Murphy, Chancellor of the University of California at Los Angeles, in a recent Saturday Review editorial:

Essential to survival and progress for the remainder of the twentieth century is acceptance of the fact that we live in the midst of revolution -- a period of unprecedented and rapid change without end in sight... We are involved in a struggle -- a war, if you will -- and the stakes are cosmic. Revolutionary, unprecedented problems cry out for unprecedented answers.

The Changing Work Force

The industrial work force in the United States is indeed changing. As a result of the revolution in society, it is far more heterogeneous than ever before. Workers vary widely in:

1. Level of education--from drop-outs to post-Ph.D.'s.
2. Religious and moral values--although still prevalent, the traditional middle-class values have begun to break down.
3. Acceptance of authority--the range is from the total acceptance of authority, no matter how unreasonable, (the divine right of the boss) to the rejection of virtually all authority (as exemplified by the extreme Hippies).

4. Need satisfaction level⁴--varies from the lowest (physiological) to the highest (self-actualizing) level.

5. Self concept--the range is from self-as-object to self-as-fully-functioning person.

6. Concept of work--the Calvinist work ethic has also begun to disintegrate.

These changes in beliefs, attitudes, goals, and needs are most obvious in the new generation or, as Robert J. Weston has so aptly dubbed it, the Critical Generation.⁵ This fact is especially important when we realize that within a matter of months fifty percent of all Americans will be under twenty-five years of age!⁶

The bright, young college graduate has always needed to question the traditions, values, teaching, and advice of his parents and others of their generation. Since the times today are obviously out of joint and since the older generations must be to blame, the representatives of the Critical Generation are far more likely to question--and sometimes to reject--the traditional way of doing things.⁷

Some of these hypercritical young people will be difficult for business to swallow. In many cases, the most creative and the most intelligent will have the most difficulty in fitting into the corporate mold. For one thing, they may not look or act the part of the typical young businessman. However, far more important is the fact that business, as it is presently structured, may not be able to satisfy their needs. According to McLuhan:⁸

The young today reject goals.
They want roles-- R-O-L-E-S.
That is, total involvement. They do not want fragmented, specialized goals or jobs.

Unfortunately, in modern business the majority of jobs are purposely fragmented and specialized. As Frederick Herzberg has pointed out in study after study, we have in our attempts to gain efficiency unwittingly removed most of the motivators that might make a job worth doing well.⁹

From what has been said, it is obvious that the changing work force has made the role of management much tougher than ever before. To meet the challenge, today's manager needs help.

Wanted--Changes in Management

What, exactly, do these changes in society and changes in the work force mean to the professional manager:

1. In the first place, these changes mean that at any given moment a manager may have reporting to him people with widely differing skills, education, needs, goals, etc. Although this has always been true to some extent, I feel certain the differences were formerly not as great as they are today or as they will be in the future.

2. Recognizing that each one in his varied work force is a unique human being, the manager will need to make an even greater effort to treat all his employees as individuals. In IBM, we call this principle "respect for the individual," and Mr. Thomas J. Watson, Jr., Chairman of the Board, has identified it as the most important of our three Corporate beliefs.¹⁰

Although this principle may seem obvious, it is nevertheless extremely difficult for the individual manager to apply. It is much easier to treat everyone alike than it is to make the judgment that, because the situation is different, treatment should be different. Managers often brag that they treat all their employees alike (or the same). I always hope they mean that they treat each employee fairly.

The problem is that since people differ, their reactions to supervision is different. For example, an employee who has been accustomed to authoritarian treatment by his parents and by management early in his career, might very well be unable to produce at all, if placed with a manager who insists on using the democratic or participative approach. Some employees are not achievement motivated. Some are afraid of a promotion. The examples of perceptions differing from the "norm" are endless.

A slogan of the general semanticists emphasizes the importance of respecting each person's individuality:

The more you discriminate between people, the less you discriminate against any individual.

Those of us in Personnel have to battle constantly between the desire to be consistent in applying personnel policies and the need to recognize the unique features in each individual case.

3. A corollary to item 2 is that the effective manager will not be able to limit himself to one style of leadership, but will consciously vary it to fit the need; i.e., he will alter it according to the time, the place, the situation, his own needs, and the employee(s) involved.

This is an important point because some management theoreticians seem to insist that one particular set of principles (e.g., participative management) can be applied with all employees and in all management situations. It is interesting that Edgar H. Schein in his Introduction to Douglas McGregor's The Professional Manager¹¹ described McGregor's discouragement by the degree to which Theory Y had become as monolithic a set of principles as those of Theory X. Schein adds:

He wanted Theory Y to be a realistic view, in which one examined one's assumptions, tested them against reality, and then chose a managerial strategy that made sense in terms of one's diagnosis of reality.

With the variety of people he will be supervising, the manager of tomorrow will need to recognize and be able to apply a variety of leadership styles.

4. In order to respond effectively to individual differences in his varied work force, the manager will need to make every effort to sharpen his interpersonal competence.

He will need to better understand himself, for only then will he be able to understand others.

He will need to develop a certain humility by becoming aware of how his world is of his own making. Or as Combs and Saygg have said:¹⁴

Our own perceptions always have so strong a feeling of reality that it is easy to jump to the conclusion that they must be real to others as well. If others do not see as we do, we may even regard them as stupid, stubborn, or perverse. It is hard to set one's own experience aside, yet it is difficult to see how effective human relationships can be built without a clear recognition of the personal character of perceptions. The first step toward the solution of our human problems seems to require a willingness to grant that how it seems to me may be different. I, too, could be wrong! Humility, it would seem, is more than a nice idea. It is an essential to effective communication!

He will need to have an understanding of the important contributions by management theoreticians such as, Douglas McGregor,¹⁵ Rensis Likert,¹⁶ Chris Argyris,¹⁷ Warren Bennis and Saul Cellerman,¹⁸ and by Third Force psychologists such as, Carl Rogers,¹⁹ Arthur Combs and Donald Saygg.²¹

He will need to practice relating to others -- his superiors, his peers and his subordinates-- in a more open manner and without fear of reprisal.

The best way I know to achieve this sort of practice is through an organization development session such as those described in the National Association of Manufacturers' pamphlet "What's Wrong With Work."^{21 22}

Less threatening than pure sensitivity labs, Organization Development sessions deal with subverbal emotions and tensions and concentrate on improving interpersonal communications.

5. Finally, if the manager finds, as McLuhan has said, that young people don't want fragmented, specialized jobs, he will need to re-examine the work in his area. Perhaps some jobs could be combined or restructured. His best guide to this effort would be the books of Frederick Herzberg.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to:

1. Outline the chief political, cultural, and socio-economic changes that characterize the Age of Change.

2. Describe the effects of these changes on the industrial work force.

3. Suggest a few ways the manager might change in order to manage a more varied work force.

It is obvious because of the controversy over the theories of Likert, Bennis and others of the participative school, that much more research is needed. In this area, as in many others, I am afraid that Marshall McLuhan²³ is correct:

Our 'Age of Anxiety' is, in great part, the result of trying to do today's job with yesterday's tools-- with yesterday's concepts.

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