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Co-operative motivation: a useful management tool in developing countries

Summary

Having a motivated employee corps is important. In this article three motivational orientations are examined: co-operative, competitive and individualistic approaches. Literature study reveals strong support for a co-operative motivational orientation. Furthermore, chapter 3 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa makes provision for co-operative government and administration. The role of co-operation in the workplace is thus examined, along with the benefits resulting from having people work together co-operatively. The deleterious effects of competition are also highlighted in order to strengthen the case for co-operation.

Koöperatiewe motivering: 'n nuttige bestuursinstrument in ontwikkelende lande

'n Gemotiveerde werknemerskorps is baie belangrik. In hierdie artikel word drie motiveringsoriëntasies ondersoek: die koöperariewe, mededingende en individualistiese. Literatuurstudies het oortuigende bewys gelewer van die belangrikheid van 'n koöporatiewe motiveringstyl. Hoofstuk 3 van die Grondwet van Suid Afrika maak ook voorsiening vir koöporatiewe regering en administrasie. Derhalwe word die rol van samewerking in die werkplek asook die voordeel van samewerking onder werknemers ondersoek. Die nadelige effek van mededinging op motivering word ook uitgelig om die voordele van koöperatiewe motivering te onderstreep.

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ofstede (1973: 21) found that African cultures are collectivist with an underlying value of co-operation, whereas Western cultures are individualistic with competition as the underlying value. Some authors, such as Christie (1993: 17), have strongly advocated a communal (collectivist) approach to motivation because of its co-operative orientation. Although this article will not make any value judgement as to whether a collectivist or an individualistic culture is to be preferred, the findings and arguments of various researchers in favour of co-operation will be presented. It is argued that creating a co-operative organisational climate in which everyone works with one accord is an effective means of bringing the cultural values of various cultures together. It could make a real contribution to the reduction of inter-group conflict, promote productivity and ultimately bring about development in societies comprising diverse groups, in countries such as South Africa. Furthermore, Chapters 3 and 10 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996) demand co-operation within the spheres of government as well as the public service in order to facilitate efficient, effective and economical service delivery.

Research done by Kohn (1992) has found that people are motivated to be either co-operative or competitive (among other possibilities) and he therefore refers to their motivational orientation as being co-operative or competitive. Kohn (1992) and Tjosvold (1986) strongly advocate a co-operative motivational orientation resulting in co-operative interpersonal interaction and relationships. Asimov (1995: 7) concurs that co-operation is a key ingredient in the make-up of all successful living creatures, and writes that

[...] it seems that self-interest, once thought to be the driving force behind evolution, is not necessarily the norm. Being altruistic and co-operative has enormous advantages, ensuring that the species will survive, even if the individual does not.

Despite this support for co-operation, however, Tjosvold (1986: 10) avers that many managers and researchers have doubts about whether co-operation is vital. One of the reasons for this is that traditional Western value-systems extol the virtues of resilient individualists. Peters (1992: 506), for example, strongly defends competition and writes that it was through "destructive compe-

tition" that the USA became the successful nation it is today. However, such an argument is contested in the present study.

When people think of co-operation, they tend to associate the concept with fuzzy-minded idealism, or to see it as workable in only a few situations. This may result from their confusing the term co-operation with altruism (Kohn 1992: 7). The argument in favour of co-operation is not necessarily that people want mainly to help others; it is based on the principle that by helping others each individual helps him- or herself, and that the organisation and society eventually benefit as well (see Hilliard & Kemp 1999 regarding the interconnectedness of society and people). Kohn (1992: 7) states that co-operation is shrewd and highly pragmatic — that strength comes from unity. More is achieved when people co-operate and work with one accord than when there is fragmentation as a result of certain groups thinking that they can do the job better on their own. Fragmentation places a strain on resources, as they become much more thinly spread.

The aim of this article is, therefore, to put forward the case for cooperation, despite the risk of bias. Readers may judge, on the arguments, whether there is merit in what is proffered.

1. Interpersonal perspective on motivation

Since 1949, social relationships have been described (within the framework adopted in this article) in terms of the perceived goal interdependence of those involved in a relationship. Deutsch (1949: 129) proposed three interpersonal goal orientations, namely cooperative, competitive and individualistic, each of which is described more fully below, in terms of types of relationships. Many years later, Deutsch (1973: 182) referred to interpersonal goal orientations as motivational orientations and conceded that a number of other orientations could also be assumed to exist. The three motivational orientations — still labelled co-operative, competitive and individualistic — are of special interest because they have been the focus of a considerable amount of research, according to Rubin & Brown (1975: 198). Interpersonal motivational orientation may be tegarded as the attitudinal disposition of one person towards another.

In any organisation, the attitudinal disposition of each person towards others working there is vital because it determines how they interact and relate to one another. Tjosvold (1986: 4) states that an organisation is not made up only of people, but also of their interaction(s). All employees must work with others; their relationships determine their effectiveness and the quality of their worklives. For organisations to be productive, employees need to work together to solve problems and ro complete tasks. This means that to work in an organisation and to elicit superior work performance from everyone demands, among other things, interpersonal skills.

The three types of relationship defined in this article are extreme cases in the sense that nobody engages solely in one type to the exclusion of the others, according to Rubin & Brown (1975: 198). However, Axelrod (1984: 3) claims that it is possible for people to become primarily co-operative in their dealings with others.

2. Types of relationships

The idea of co-operative relationships originates from the notion of promotive (or positive) interdependence, according to which Deutsch (1973) postulates that one person's success is dependent on the success of the other party in the interaction. For one party to 'win' the other party also has to 'win' - a 'win-win' relationship is essential. Tjosvold (1986: 19) argues that there is a great deal of mutual (inter-)dependence between people in organisations between managers and employees, between the various departments, and so on. How employees believe themselves to be dependent on one another affects how they work with one another. For example, two employees may decide that their goals are compatible, that they are in the job together (mutually dependent), and that they can both be successful (co-operative goal orientation), or they may conclude that their goals are incompatible (each has a different outlook) and that they may work against each other (competitive goal orientation). Their conclusions about how they depend on each other result in different working relationships, as is illustrated below. Another factor that plays a role in the type of relationships that develop between people is motivational orientation per se.

2.1 Co-operative motivational orientation

Individuals with this motivational orientation have a positive interest in the welfare of others as well as their own wellbeing (Rubin & Brown 1975: 198). The goals of people with this orientation are inter-linked with those of others, in that as one person's goals are achieved, others move towards reaching their own goals. An individual can attain his or her goal(s) if, and only if, the other participants can achieve theirs. Co-operation sets things up so that by helping someone one helps oneself simultaneously. Someone with this motivational orientation seeks an outcome that is beneficial to all those with whom there is a co-operative link (Johnson et al 1981: 47). Tjosvold et al (1983: 1112) write that co-operators want colleagues to work effectively and therefore help each other to succeed.

Tjosvold (1986: 20) states that co-operators establish fair ways of dividing tasks and share both the rewards and the burdens of their joint efforts. They do not avoid conflict (disagreements), but all conflict is resolved co-operatively by joint agreements which benefit all parties. Co-operative conflict ensures that the parties can continue to work together. These interactions result in a supportive climate, high employee morale, and a shared vision. Kohn (1994: 13) is of the opinion that this works better than when people pretend to have some sort of magical harmony where no disagreements are raised, conditions of covert, forced consensus exist and everyone is too afraid to disagree because their attitude(s) and loyalty may be questioned.

2.2 Competitive motivational orientation

Kohn (1990: 9) avers that competition may be defined as "mutually exclusive goal attainment" where one person profits at the expense of another. It is a 'win-lose' relationship. In terms of this orientation, the successful goal attainment of one person makes it less likely that others will attain theirs. Kohn (1994: 13) asserts that "mutually exclusive goal attainment" is a fancy social science expression for "I succeed only if you fail," or, in stronger terms: "I succeed only if I make you fail".

Rubin & Brown (1975: 198) describe a competitive motivational orientation as an interest in doing better than others while doing as well as possible for oneself. Institutions that emphasise competition among personnel place a premium on winning and outdoing others. The result is increased conflict, which is either avoided or results in a series of 'win-lose' battles where members from different 'sides' eventually view each other as enemies. Tjosvold (1986: 21) states that:

Competition, when intense, creates suspicion, even paranoia. Employees may fear that competitors will sabotage their work, think of them as the enemy and want them to suffer.

Tjosvold (1986: 21) points out the following symptoms of competitiveness in organisations that emphasise winning and outdoing others:

- High levels of frustration as people feel that others in the
 organisation interfere, get in their way and do not co-operate.
 This interference and lack of co-operation may be perceived as
 coming from more senior management, peers or subordinates.
- Complaints of a lack of understanding, poor communication and an inability to predict the behaviour of others.
- Inconsistency what is good for one is bad for the other; if one swims the other sinks.
- People attempting to outshine and outperform others, drawing attention to their 'successes' while simultaneously pointing out the 'failures' of others.
- Reasonable employees eventually ask for rules to be drawn up (policies) whereby behaviour (performance) will be measured so that they can legitimately compete, knowing what must be done to demonstrate their superiority.

After examining more than 400 studies, Kohn (1994: 13) comes to the conclusion that competition is not only destructive and counterproductive when it is taken to extremes or when people set about it in the wrong way — it is destructive by its very nature. Thomson (1998: 45) refers to interpersonal competition as a type of peer pressure which has a positive outcome in that it drives people to achieve, but also has a down side in that many people, although

competent, do not have the same talent as other achievers and this, in a conpetitive environment, adversely affects their self-esteem.

2.3 Individualistic motivational orientation

In an individualistic approach there is no link between the goal attainments of the participants. The achievement of one individual's goals has no influence on others achieving or not achieving theirs. People with an individualistic motivational orientation are interested in maximising their own personal outcomes without any reference to those of others, are indifferent to one another's success, and do not help one another (Rubin & Brown 1975: 193). It is not unreasonable to infer from this that the individualistic orientation is also less constructive than the co-operative orientation.

3. Role of co-operation in management

The modern organisation owes its success to the simple yet profound principle of division of labour. Not only is work divided, but certain specialist jobs arise for which people need a specific competence. To capitalise on this division of labour and specialisation requires coordination and co-operation among people and departments within the organisation. Tjosvold (1986: 4) is of the opinion that having people working together co-operatively is not just something 'nice' for an organisation to achieve; it is essential to success. Poor work relations, where the parties work at cross-purposes, create havoc, as has often been witnessed when relations between management and labour turn sour. Poor collaboration usually results in chaos. Slogans such as 'Fight the competition, not each other' illustrate that many organisations recognise the importance of co-operation, even if it has not been conceptualised as such in the minds of the managers concerned.

Observational studies of what managers do and how they spend their time have shown that managers spend up to 70% of their time working with and through others and live in an interpersonal, verbal world (Kotter 1982: 72). The continued viability of any organisation depends on the way in which its managers direct and control its basic resources of people, space, buildings, raw materials, money, plant and

machinery. Of all these, people are the most valuable resource, for the effective use of the other resources depends on the skills and the performance of the individuals in the organisation (Berry 1981: 19). To achieve high levels of staff performance requires managers, *inter alia*, to communicate, delegate, train, instruct, motivate, negotiate, sell ideas, maintain discipline and handle grievances. Managers must therefore be skilled in working with people in order to encourage coordination and collaboration and thus attain organisational goals, targets and objectives (Kemp 1998: 17). This entails personnel working co-operatively. By having employees work together, an organisation can transform resources into products/goods and services. Tjosvold (1986: 8) feels that collaboration is needed to gain workers' commitment, to develop their skills, to solve problems, and to respond to the public, suppliers, clients and markets.

Teamwork is essential for an effective organisation. In an effort to improve productivity, many organisations have shown a keen interest in a style of participatory management which involves project teams, quality control circles, green areas, labour-management problemsolving groups, and other innovations which artest to managers' attempts to create an environment within which co-operative working relationships can develop (Tjosvold 1986: 9). Project teams, for example, require people with a variety of backgrounds, views, expertise, and interests to work together on accomplishing a common task. Co-operative problem-solving, where people exchange ideas on improving work methods, results in more creativity what can be achieved by having people work on their own in order to discover who can come up with the best solution(s). The reason cooperative problem-solving works is because 'none of us is as smart as all of us together'. Group work sparks off creativity because one person's ideas inspires others to think creatively and in this way generate a wealth of ideas, resulting in a far more creative solution.

Tjosvold (1986: 9) points out that co-operative relationships also extend to contacts outside the organisation. Listening to and working with customers can help members of organisations to develop new products, to discover problems relating to quality and to improve marketing approaches. A study by Luthans et al (1985: 265) found that interaction with outsiders was significantly related

to managerial success. In this context, interacting with outsiders includes public relations, contact with customers and suppliers, and meetings with government officials, union officials or consultants.

Co-operation thus has a definite role to play in management, as will be further elucidated below.

4. Benefits of co-operation

Co-operation frightens certain people, particularly in societies with traditional free-market economies where competition is valorised. One of the fears expressed is that co-operation denies or even negates individual interests and rights. However, Tjosvold (1986: 177) argues that co-operation fosters individuality, because the expression of independent ideas, opinions and abilities is encouraged and appreciated. Each person contributes to the group according to his or her individual talents. People are valued and each individual's perspective is respected and understood by others (Tjosvold 1986: 177). People can be themselves where the norm is co-operation, according to Kohn (1994: 14).

In healthy organisations people disagree with each other, atgue and raise objections in constructive ways, thereby exposing each other to new ideas and reaching more informed agreements. Kohn (1994: 13) calls this co-operative conflict and regards it as productive when people disagree for the purpose of educating or revealing new insights. However, co-operative conflict can only work when the parties involved have a genuinely co-operative motivational orientation and trust each other, knowing that the disagreements are being raised in order to come to a better decision than would otherwise have been possible. Disagreements that are motivated by competition and raised in order to show the other person up are destructive.

Axelrod (1984: 8) and Kohn (1994: 14) also argue and, indeed, have demonstrated that co-operation results in individual and organisational success, while competition is destructive. Kohn (1994: 3) points out that the most common argument proffered in favour of competition equates it with success, while success is equated with victory and beating (outsmarting) someone else.

However, it is possible to prove one's competence by setting goals and achieving them without competing with anyone. Kohn (1994: 47) reports on research conducted with the aim of discovering whether people perform better when in competition or in cooperation with others. It was found that co-operation always produced superior results. Whittemore (1924: 245) writes that although people worked faster at mechanical tasks when competing, the quality of their work was pooter. In another study it was found that when two groups were compared, the one operating competitively and the other co-operatively, significantly more complex products were made in the co-operative condition than in the competitive condition (Pepitone 1980: 234).

Johnson et al (1981) published a review of the findings of 122 research studies undertaken between 1924 and 1980 in order to establish whether people perform better in competition or in cooperation with one another, and they found that 65 studies demonstrated that co-operation promotes higher achievement than competition; eight studies showed the reverse, and 42 found no difference. These researchers found, furthermore, that co-operation promotes greater productivity than competition or individualisation and that this finding held for different age groups and subject-matters as well as for tasks involving learning concepts, problem-solving, categorisation, retention and memory, or motor performance.

Tjosvold et al (1983: 1119) found that leaders who were perceived to be co-operative had subordinates who felt satisfied with their supervision, believed their leader contributed to their job performance and commitment, and were satisfied with their jobs. These cortelations were not only statistically significant, but at higher level than those generally obtained in leadership research. These results held for the various age groups, educational levels, and gender groups involved in the sample.

Nierenberg (1984: 39) suggests that negotiators should think of negotiation as a co-operative enterprise: "If both parties enter the situation on a co-operative basis, there is a strong likelihood that they will be persuaded to strive for goals that can be shared equally". Rubin & Brown (1975: 201), reporting on research findings of negotiators' motivational orientation, found that negotiators with a

co-operative motivational orientation have a greater chance of effecting successful bargaining than negotiators with an individualistic or a competitive motivational orientation. They conclude that a co-operative motivational orientation appears to be a significant determinant in effective bargaining. A co-operative motivational orientation is more significant to effective bargaining than levels of power (Rubin & Brown 1975: 202).

The benefits of co-operation do not only apply to management and business. Asimov (1995: 7) reports that co-operation is a notable concept for all living organisms, for it is practically omnipresent with interesting examples being discovered and examined every day. All multi-cellular creatures exist thanks to the co-operation of their component cells. Asimov (1995: 7) provides the following examples of co-operation in the living world:

- Sperm cells are ordinarily thought of as independent and competing, but it has been found that a normal sperm (trying to be first to impregnate the egg) is aided in its purpose by other, usually deformed sperm in the same batch. When the normal sperm is on its way to successful impregnation, the deformed sperm clump together to form a plug that prevents other sperm from entering the reproductive tract.
- Primitive human beings tamed the wolf and turned it into a helpful dog that considers the human being its pack leader. This was possible because both the human being and the dog (wolf) are capable of hunting and living co-operatively. Like human beings, wolf pups are not genetically programmed to become part of a social group, but they soon learn how to socialise. A pup raised by human beings considers them to be his 'pack' and obeys the pack leader to their mutual advantage.
- Chimpanzees and gorillas also live co-operatively. Forest chimpanzees hunt in large co-operative groups, rather as early hominids are thought to have behaved. Forest chimpanzees are more inclined to share meat than other chimpanzees, and it is probable that early hominid survival depended on similar altruism. Jane Goodall's book In the shadow of man (1971), in which she recorded her work with chimpanzees, shows that individuals survive longer when they form close, long-term bonds with others.

The above findings (along with others) provide evidence of the benefits of a co-operative motivational orientation. However, to reap the benefits of this motivational orientation requires an understanding of the interpersonal processes that promote co-operation, working in groups and better interpersonal relationships.

5. Disadvantages of competition

Not only has co-operation been found to be advantageous, but competition has also been found to have deleterious effects. Kohn (1992: 199) is opposed to competition for the following reasons:

- For many, it creates anxiety of a kind and intensity that interferes with and could impede performance.
- Whether they win or lose, people typically attribute the results of a competitive encounter to luck or inherited ability, with the result that they may not accept responsibility for the outcomes of their actions.
- Competition results in a situation where some groups perform better than others, thereby leading to superior attitudes; this may further divide the workforce.

Kohn (1994: 13) believes that competition is always destructive and states that the ideal amount of competition is none. He goes even further and views competition as equal to aggression because of the hostility it can evoke.

Nierenberg (1984: 38) provides examples of the failures of competitive negotiations where one party wins to the detriment of the other. A classic example occurred in the newspaper business in New York City where the printers' union achieved remarkable contracts for the printers. Not only did the printers obtain a substantial wage increase, but the newspapers were forbidden to institute certain money-saving practices. The printers won in the short-term, but the newspapers were forced into an economic straightjacket. Three major newspapers merged and, finally, after another long strike, went bankrupt leaving thousands of employees without work. There were more losers than winners as a result of the union's competitive approach. Nierenberg (1984: 41) warns that settlements reached in highly competitive negotiations, where one

side seems to achieve complete victory and the loser to suffer a humiliating defeat, will rarely remain 'settled'. Unless the terms arrived at have some advantages to the 'losing party', it will soon seek a way of changing the settlement. In other words, a one-sided (unilateral) agreement contains the seed of its own destruction.

Kohn (1994: 13) differentiates between co-operative conflict, which is constructive, and competitive conflict, which is destructive. Competitive conflict arises when people raise objections or precipitate controversy in order to show how clever they are and how stupid (or bad) someone else is. The effect of competitive conflict is the complete breakdown of relationships. Kemp (1992: 39) alludes to a "combative relationship" developing under such circumstances.

Kohn (1992: 9) questions how people can perform at their best when they have to outperform others. On the surface it may appear that competition will motivate each person to perform at peak levels. but he argues that many people are not motivated by competition at all — they decide early on not to compete, as a result of (negative) past experience and because so much subjectivity, inconsistency, unfairness and other factors over which the individual has no control are usually involved in determining the winner (the best performance). Many managers glibly speak of a system of determining workers' wage increases according to merit, where a fixed sum of money is divided up and each receives a share according to the merit of his or her contribution. It is argued that this will motivate the workers, but Kohn's (1992: 9) finding was that it seldom has any impact at all on performance (productivity) because most people doubt whether genuine fairness will prevail in merit assessment, so they do not put the necessary effort into their work.

Although Peters (1992: 506) tries to argue that scientific and economic progress are products of destructive competition, an argument which contradicts what is presented here, these comments must be seen in context. He contrasts competition with collusion whereby monopolies are formed between competitors, and where inefficiency results in the absence of competition. He also suggests that, in the 1970's, the American motor industry was complacent (inadequately competitive) and that it was as a result of this the Japanese were able to move in and take over. However, neither

collusion nor complacency can actually be equated with co-operation. Peters's (1992) argument is not an attack on co-operation, but on poor business practices, principles and management. Peters (1992) also argues that destructive competition leads to the creation of new technology and the demise of outdated technology, using this as proof of the virtue of destructive competition. What he is actually claiming is that any competition promotes innovation and that innovation results in the demise of outdated technology.

When people pool ideas (work together/co-operate) it sparks off creativity and innovation. Innovation has seldom been destructive; it usually results in improvement, even though old technology is jettisoned. Innovation is, therefore, to be welcomed. Whether destructive competition accounts for innovation is debatable; at this stage, in Peters' (1992) opinion, it is not an empirically tested fact.

Kohn (1992: 7) suggests that the fact that most people consistently fail to consider alternatives to competition is testimony to the effectiveness of their socialisation. People have been trained not only to compete, but also to believe in competition. However, Kohn (1992: 8) concludes by stating that the case for competition does not stand up to scrutiny; this paper presents a related argument.

6. Conclusion

There is strong evidence that co-operative motivational orientation plays a significant role, not only in the success of organisations, but also in that of society. Asimov (1995: 7) reminds us that human beings are social animals par excellence and suggests that it is impossible to look at the huge buildings in any city without admitting that such edifices could only have been built with co-operation, regardless of the nasty human behaviour that might be taking place in the streets below. Thus, the Egyptian pyramids may be seen as bearing lasting testimony to co-operative human effort.

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