

ROLE OF LABOUR IN PRODUCTIVITY IMPROVEMENT AND WORKERS' WELFARE

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Abstract

The principles of leadership development and trade unionism are universal. However, where necessary, particular strategies may be formulated within the contexts of certain circumstances. Nevertheless, such strategies should not radically depart from the principles in order to facilitate effective leadership and trade unionism. Both management and labour have responsibilities for the enhancement of productivity and workers' welfare. The following issues, among others, are considered in the paper: Nature of labour; obligations or responsibilities of management concerning productivity improvement; obligations or duties of labour (or workers) regarding increased productivity; the role of labour in workers' welfare.

Introduction

The principles of leadership development and trade unionism are universal. However, where necessary, particular strategies may be formulated within the context of certain circumstances. Nevertheless, such strategies should not radically depart from the principle in order to facilitate effective leadership and trade unionism.

The following issues, among others, are considered in this essay: Nature of labour, obligations or responsibilities of management concerning productivity; improvement; obligations or duties of labour (or workers regarding increased productivity; the role of labour in workers' welfare.

Labour can be defined as "man 's purposeful activity to adapt objects of nature to satisfying people's needs" (Ryndina & Chernikov, 1985:7) The term "labour" is also used to refer to a group or groups of workers. The union of such group or groups is called labour union. A labour union is an organization of workers formed for the purpose of advancing its members' interests in respect to wages, benefits, and working conditions" (Mish, 1989:658). Forces of production or productive forces comprise people (that is, workers) with their production experience and skills, and means of production are means or instruments of labour (such as stones, axes, hoes, bows, arrows, modern tools and complex machines and objects of labour (which include earth or land and its bowels, and other raw materials). The workers (or people) are the main productive force as they make and improve the means of production (Ryndina & Chernikov, 1985; 8 &7), The foregoing remarks are from the socialist perspective.

From the capitalist point of view, the entrepreneur (or proprietor), capital, land and labour can be regarded as forces of production. The adoption of this conception in the process of capitalist production has facilitated the exploitation of workers, who are the main producers. The system of rewards in capitalist production underlines this exploitation. The proprietor of the business takes profit, interest is paid on capital, rent is set aside for land while workers collect wages or salaries. The exploitation is quite enormous and indeed questionable when the entrepreneur collects rewards three — fold (as opposed to the one - fold reward received by the worker) as the proprietor, the owner of the capital, and land.

This has negative implication for productivity improvement. Inadequate remuneration for workers is partly responsible for low level of productivity. A poorly paid worker - especially, one whose morale is low - may not be highly productive. This is not likely to be so in a socialist system of production where means of production are socially or collectively owned and products of labour are appropriated or distributed equitably.

Requirements Of A Responsible And Effective Labour Or Trade Union

A responsible and effective labour or trade union should display the following attributes, among others:

(a) Presence of good, selfless, accountable, and credible leadership.

- (b) Ability or capacity to function as an independent, voluntary, democratic and accountable body.
- (c) Ability to organise and mobilise workers to demand for, obtain, protect, and promote their rights and entitlements.
- (d) Ability to promote the welfare of its members through the establishment of commercial ventures, groups insurance policies, multipurpose co-operative ventures, etc.
- (e) Ability to sustain its members consequent upon stoppage of salaries and allowance by the management during industrial action (s).

Obligations Or Responsibilities Of Management Concerning Productivity Improvement

Obligations or responsibilities of the management concerning productivity improvement include the following: Creation of enabling environment of adequate number of suitable and or skilled workers; judicious allocation of duties or assignments to workers; (for instance, putting round pegs in round holes); provision or required and sufficient machinery or equipment and other tools; regular payment of staff wages or salaries, allowances and other entitlements; additional motivation of workers through award of incentives (such as regular promotion, increase in salaries and allowances, bonuses, merit awards, long service awards etc); respect for and promotion of fundamental rights and freedoms of workers, regular training of workers; regular maintenance or overhauling of equipments, tools etc; regular transfer of certain categories of workers from certain duty posts to others: and sincerity of purpose.

Obligations Or Duties Of Labour (Or Workers) Regarding Increased Productivity

In order to enhance productivity, the workers have the following obligations, among others, to fulfil commitment to the realization of corporate objectives, punctuality at work, hard work or diligence, prompt and faithful discharge of responsibilities.

A labour or trade union can also facilitate productivity improvement by among other things, educating workers on the need for punctuality at work, diligence, discipline, industrial peace and harmony; drawing the attention of the management to lapses in the execution of policies and offering concrete suggestions for improvement; promoting industrial peace and harmony through consultation, dialogue and negotiation with the management, promoting cordial relationship between labour and management.

The Role Of Labour In Workers' Welfare

The most important concern of any labour or trade union ought to be and is the welfare - or what is also regarded as the well - being - of its members. The welfare needs of workers include basic necessities of life such as food, clothing, shelter; peaceful and enabling environment; good equipment (or machinery) and other tools to work with; adequate remuneration and incentives,

A responsive and responsible management is usually interested in the welfare of its workers. Such management tries to meet the welfare needs of the workers even before the latter demand for them or soonest after the demands are made. However, this has not always been the case in every establishment.

Several factors may be responsible. The management may be interested in promoting the workers' welfare but may not give it the priority it deserves. This is likely going to be the case if the workers have no union (or if they do, it is ineffective) to press the button. Moreover, it may be due to low financial capacity of the establishment or competing demands. Besides, the management might have struck a deal with the workers' representatives - a case of sell - out.

If a management does not seem to be interested in - or it is dragging its feet in - meeting the welfare needs of workers, a responsible union is expected to rise up to the occasion reasonably. After due consultations with the majority of, if not all, its members, the

leadership of labour union may take any or a combination of the following options as situations demand: (a) enter into consultation, dialogue, and negotiation with the management; (b) establish group insurance policy or policies, co-operative societies, commercial ventures, and other social security schemes as the case may be; (c) embark, after giving due notice to management, on work to rule and, or, other forms of individual action as a last resort.

The step or steps taken should be informed by the need to promote workers' welfare within the context of enduring industrial peace, and attainment of corporate objectives. The need for industrial peace cannot be over-stressed, as it is crucial to the development and progress of any establishment, community,

nation, etc.

Summary and Conclusion

Management and labour should be partners in progress as they are like two sides of a coin each of, which is indispensable especially with respect to the attainment of corporate or organizational goals. Both management and labour have responsibilities for the enhancement of productivity and workers' welfare. This paper has highlighted these obligations paying more attention to those of the workers. Management and labour have several benefits to obtain from increased productivity and workers' welfare.

In order to derive maximum gains, they should recognize the need for and indeed promote industrial peace.

References

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