

## Learning through HRD

The employee relations practices in industrialised countries have undergone marked change in the last 15-20 years. They have progressively become employee-centered. Increasingly, the underlying theme of personnel policies and practices is development. Earlier the emphasis was on control and regulation.

The concept of development includes many things; higher level of maturity, self-confidence, ability to cope better with situations in hand, general awareness, enhanced skills, knowledge, and such things. These are some of the factors that comprise HRD. How should the goals of HRD be achieved? What should the management do to facilitate the process of people development, and why has HRD become necessary for organisations?

Taking the second question first, HRD has become important for several reasons but the two most important one's are the following (Dayal, 1989):

- (a) The market situation has become more competitive, and due to rapid technological obsolescence, the product cycle has become short, and continues to become even shorter every year. These circumstances require constant changes in every aspect of enterprise working, especially at operating levels. Such changes require active collaboration of employees, and their cooperation in re-engineering the jobs and upgradation of skills. Organisations have to develop a whole set of new relationships to effectively deal with the situation. In a number of cases jobs have to be redesigned as well. A large number of documented experiences in organisations and research data are available to suggest that new technology means much more than replacing a machine or a process. It means changes in many aspects of management. Among some of the most discussed programmes are the following (Silvera, 1988):

- Steel Authority of India (SAIL)
- Neyveli Lignite Corporation
- Bharat Electronics Ltd
- Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd (BHEL)
- Hindustan Petrofils
- Larsen & Toubro
- Godrej Boyce
- Life Insurance Corporation of India (LICI)
- ITC Ltd

These are only a few of the many organisations which have taken systematic programmes to cope with the emerging situation (HRD Network, 1989). The need for cooperation at the work level has become a practical necessity and not a choice based on humanistic beliefs.

- (b) The second reason is that the expectations of the people who are joining the work force have been undergoing a change. They do not want facilities or privileges as a favour, but expect these as their entitlement. There is increasing need among younger people for independence, autonomy, and self-expression. They have a much stronger desire for improvement in personal status than did the earlier generations. New needs are enhanced by the propaganda of political parties, the visual media, the TV and the cinema, the emphasis on education and many influences of this nature. These developments have direct influence on the expectations of employees. They are unlikely to be satisfied by carrying out the same routine day in and day out but seek new opportunities. In the emerging situation, if people do not have what they perceive as opportunity, they would, in most cases, blame the management for denying them the scope for advancement. Hence many organisations which are able to look into the future have taken steps to bring about changes in their personnel policy and practices consistent with the emerging expectations of employees.

Keeping the significant changes in the market place and the expectations of employees in mind, HRD initiatives and programmes become necessary in organisations.

Turning now to the first question – what should management do to facilitate growth, we would have to examine how a person grows; how he gains self-confidence and how he acquires a concept of himself (self-concept). Some propositions derived from the research findings in behavioural sciences may be useful (Berelson & Steiner, 1964). A broad generalisation of the learning process may be described as below:

A child learns what is right and wrong from what he observes in his environment or situations that make him happy or unhappy. He acquires practices of people he likes and rejects those practices that belong to people he dislikes. Many of the things that he learns are from feelings and emotions that these experiences evoke in him, and less from a rational process of discussion and discourse. The rational process begins much later, though this is also influenced by the feelings and emotions that individuals have in a given situation. The learning is not independent of the feelings the individual has for the people or the situation. Feelings, therefore, play an important part in learning, and in the process of internalisation of learning. The childhood patterns of learning also hold in adult life at work and elsewhere.

Another important feature of learning is experimentation. Parents often say that the child has to burn his fingers to keep away from fire. By this experience, a child would know more about the fire and what it does or doesn't do, besides keeping away from it. Experimentation and gaining personal experience are important learning media. Doing things oneself and reviewing the experience to know what is done well and what is done poorly is important for personal growth, maturation and selfreliance.

In later life, yet another aspect becomes important. A series of specific instances are grouped together in one's mind and the essence of these experiences are generalised. Often we say that people who do not look you in the eye have something to hide. This generalisation becomes an abstraction. Once this process begins, the abstraction so derived is applied to individual situations. Thus any one who is shy and keeps his head low is labelled as an unreliable person. Abstractions are derived from specific and concrete situations. This is done to interpret a given situation. Hence agreements and disagreements underlie the abstractions that become set. Some times we are conscious of these mental sets but just as often we are not. The learning in many cases would require that the individual understands the reasons for his reactions and judge each situation independently. The mental set shuts out new learning in many cases and prevents individuals from gaining new perspectives and insights.

My purpose here is not to have a comprehensive discussion on learning, but to examine the implications of these on planning HRD systems in an organisation. The conditions that lead to learning may be summarised thus:

- People have to be emotionally involved in the work they do, and in the relationships at work.

- People should experience that growth is pleasurable to them, and this can happen if individual contribution is invited by the organisation.
- People should have opportunity for experimenting with workable ideas and evaluating this experience. In most organisational change situations initial success encourages more vigorous effort, failure often dampens enthusiasm.
- Experience leads to learning more than listening or discussion. Dialogue and discourse either initiate or enhance the need to learn, but, for most people, internalisation of learning results from experience.
- Learning for most people needs a positive environment and personal involvement in the process of learning.

In basic terms the HRD practices must create conditions which are identified above. In this sense HRD does not consist of a specific programme. Rather it is an approach that permeates through the total organisation. It has to be pervasive. In many successful organisations the responsibility for HRD is assigned to operating managers. For example role clarity, was an initiation programme for HRD in Indian Oil Corporation. While they had a specialist department coordinating the programme, the responsibility was given to operating people and the facilitators were also drawn from operating departments. The ownership of the role clarity exercise was held by the operating and not the functional departments. CMC did not have a formal HRD policy. They geared all their policies and practices towards autonomy and growth coupled with accountability for results. The officers and staff were subject to the same rules and regulations. No distinction was made between one level and another. They tried to create an open and non-threatening environment and found that individuals responded positively to the demands of the work (Sahgal and Jain, 1992).

Many organisations take up organisational development exercise before they launch upon HRD initiatives. The link between the two can be seen from the discussion above. The organisational management has to be quite clear about their own attitudes, beliefs and sentiments and initiate action to legitimise and encourage the urge among employees to grow. In some organisations the HRD initiatives cover mainly the development of personnel policy and practices (Athreya, 1988). Among these, appraisal systems, training, counselling receive closer attention. These are important and would have to be developed. These however, tools and cannot be taken as end results. They support the efforts of the organisation but overall approach towards human development should be specific. At best personnel practices could be anchor points for HRD initiatives. They could initiate and achieve new network of relationships among people, create the urge to do better,

and bring about maturity among individuals concerned. They cannot constitute the total HRD effort in the organisation.

There is no single approach to HRD. Indeed it has to be geared to the problems and the priorities of the organisation. I think a distinction should be made in the policy, or what may more appropriately be called a philosophy of HRD, and the strategy. There has to be a somewhat common perspective in respect to the philosophy. The management has to decide, for example, how they would measure the effectiveness of their HRD. If the organisation is concerned with individual and group development, and the quality of human interaction, the measures of effectiveness would have to be specific and provide data about how changes in these aspects individually and collectively come about. If the emphasis or the outcome is seen to be other than human growth, then the measurements could be the cost of human resources to the organisation, i.e. human resource accounting. The measurement of effectiveness of HRD initiatives is linked to HRD philosophy.

The strategy could vary from one organisation to another. This is indeed the case (Dayal, 1993). Action would be meaningful in areas where the organisation experiences the most stress. These areas could also be chosen on the basis that they would have spread effect throughout the organisation. These are referred to as anchor points for HRD initiatives. For example, Life Insurance Corporation of India had initiated several changes in their styles of working with the objective of providing a greater measure of autonomy and responsibility at all levels of the managerial hierarchy. They called it Work Planning and Review System (WP-R). The second aspect of their HRD initiatives consisted of integrating more closely the appraisal, the career planning, the succession planning, to involve individuals in choosing a stream of work that they enjoyed most. These and other personnel practices were attempted to be linked towards the philosophy of individual growth.

A third measure consisted of redesign of jobs to provide greater scope of autonomy and development to individuals. And the fourth aspect consisted of choosing four anchor points which would help managers to transform an idea into an experience. The anchor points chosen by LIC were the following:

- Supervision—how best superior subordinate relationships of mutual dependence be developed. How best to provide relevant experiences to the subordinate to become concerned about self-development.
- Problem-solving—how best to move away from short-term measures to deal with the immediate to solving what has caused the problem. If the cause of the problem is not analysed, identified and solved, it is likely that the problem would manifest itself in some other form.

- Decision-making—how to obtain, collate and interpret the data to decide on issues rather than rely primarily on hunch. Seeking alternatives and evaluating consequences of these would encourage maturing of both the decision maker and those affected by the decision.
- Counselling—how best to help an individual understand his own problem and solve it. This approach would build capability and confidence of the individual to solve his present and future problems. This approach would also improve relationships between the superior and the subordinate .

LIC's is a comprehensive HRD approach. The specific approaches were developed from an assessment of their own situation. Indian Oil and CMC chose different anchor points, based on their own specific circumstances. The experience of many successful HRD initiatives shows that a number of mutually reinforcing activities are likely to serve the purpose of human development rather than any single activity such as training or appraisal system or a house journal or any such measures (Schein, 1985). People have to experience at work in concrete ways what is stated in the policy. It is when people experience, and derive learning from these experiences, would the policy intention become meaningful to them.

## REFERENCES

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