ASSOCIATE SUPPORT & DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

Alen Badal, University of California

ABSTRACT

Innately, supporting and developing a new hire or seasoned associate, regardless of the industry, represent as two mutually exclusive events. In short, support by all stakeholders shall be evident and genuine, before development strategies are executed and achieved by associates. This process also supports professional development & support for those involved in the support and development of associates. Specifically, managers and leaders often require support and development with this process regardless of their experience and/or education levels. The intent of this article is to provide support strategies for leaders and managers, alike, to implement within their respective organization, regardless of the type of business, profit or non-profit, industry, etc. Discussions in this article will revolve around two varied sectors: education (non-profit) and corporation (for-profit).

Keywords: Strategy; Human Resources; Organizational Behavior; Performance Evaluations; Coaching & Support

DISCUSSION

New hires take place continuously within any organization. Regardless of the organization or sector, good associates are hard to find and can be even more difficult to keep. A weakness of those being hired, referenced as associates, is being new to a job/position. Anytime one is new to a position, regardless of new college graduate or change of organization/company, they're considered new to a position. They would not know the processes and procedures as well as those in position for some time (Elliot, 2012). They may not have the experience as more seasoned associates or simply lack the education levels. A weakness also may exist with those in hiring positions as if there lacks a clear picture of who is need with what skills, education and experience, then often a strong candidate is either overlooked and/or not hired.

The focus of this article is on the how-to approach onto collegial support and development strategies. Specifically, components, such as performance evaluation, support needs and the development and support of leaders will be discussed. Viewpoints as to effective strategic approaches will be offered as well, intended to best involve all stakeholders in supporting the professional growth and well-being of associates, new or seasoned.

360-degree performance evaluation

Open-minded organization: all, including leadership give and receive feedback to one another regarding their position/opinion that's fact-based. The person providing the review/feedback is secure of themselves and the focus is to further develop. Sometimes the best strategy for something may come at the least expected time and source. Having shared this, feedback from an interdisciplinary perspective shall sometimes be the most valuable. Unusually, leadership, especially if they're disconnected from the lower/lowest levels within an organization, often have the least productive/valuable feedback (Gallo, 2014). Contrary to this would be leadership that are well-read and practiced, whereby, are interactive and practice what

they share…it's in those cases where feedback becomes valuable due to its source (not from leadership, but from the experiences and practices the leader has continually engaged in) to help an associate.

Objectively, as a stakeholder involved with a performance appraisal process or merely supporting a colleague, it's our duty to be impartial and supportive. The performance appraisal process can be extremely subjective. Given this, truly takes a strong person to set aside their biases, prejudices and preconceived notions and focus on a colleague, objectively. Give credit where credit is due and offer support and guidance with good intentions to strengthen someone to levels higher than ourselves (not be selfish, but secure in one's self). Often, evaluations are not conducted the same, especially when evaluators 'favor' or are connected (friend, etc.) to those being evaluated (Goldman, 2009). Conversely, there may be situations where an employee is underrated due to subjective factors, such as 'personality conflict' or simply envied/jealousy.
In sum, the evaluation process shall be inclusive of all whom have held/or currently hold the position/job description being evaluated. The approach indo the assessment of an individual shall be completely objective and free of any biasedness or jealously at all. Often, actions of individuals are even unnoticed by the person; hence, one may not be aware they're being biased as opposed to providing objective feedback. At the end, the salient factor to keep in mind is to what you would like done unto you.

New hire needs

The needs versus wants of organizations typically range, such as employers are looking (want) someone to hire-on and excel. Often there is misalignment between the needs of new hires and wants of employers. This is normally similar across profit/non-profit sectors, alike. The salient point to consider for any organization bringing on new associates/employees is their needs. If someone is hired with experience they're bringing to the organization from a previous job, they may have varied support needs as compared to someone joining with zero job experience. Same is true for educational background of new hires as well, regardless of having previous job-related experience or not.

Anyone new to an organization may generally feel overwhelmed. The environment would be new; associates they work around would be new as well as leadership. Even expectations may be different based on where they're coming from (previous company). Not only may the job description be new, the entire environment and associates' working style/characters represent a first. All of these factors shall be accounted for in the in-servicing and support of new associates, regardless of for or non-profit organizations (Lyster & Arthur, 2007).

A first approach shall be to understand the character of the associate. Building professional relationships can be very challenging. Additionally, if professional working relationships are not in place, often the quality or level of actual work produced in jeopardy. Any relationship, even personal ones, cannot be forced. More so, sometimes relationships take time to evolve and require trust to be built as well. A critical factor is a misalignment between associates and/or leadership. Leadership shall be understanding of this and function in leading the organization with their character being flexible akin a rubber band. One of the best leadership qualities is actually the personality and character. One can be the best person and having the best personality/character, but have little to no job skills and they will be respected as a leader, still.

Contrary, they can be the best skilled at the job, serving as a leader, but lack character/personality and not many would be supportive of the leader.

New associates are easily trainable as opposed to seasoned, as they've experienced very little to date and are open to a new career and being successful (Mok, 2023). A limitation is their years of service, even if the experiences have not been the most efficient; it's difficult to replace 'experience' as experience takes only time to develop-right or wrong.

Seasoned associate needs

An existing associate, much alike leadership, requires professional growth and development as well. This associate varies from a new employee joining an organization, in that they've been there for some time and already know the people/organizational culture. The degree of interaction would differ than that of a new entering associate with little to no experience, in than seasoned associates have been there and doing the work for some time.

What may not differ from new associates is character/personality component. Often, new associates have a much different presentation of personality and character, at times more conducive to being open to new ideas (sometimes due to limited knowledge) and working alongside others easily. Although, this is not always the case.

A word of caution is that having been a part of an organization for some time generally means an associate may be aware of the short comings of either the organization as a whole or a department/team or other stakeholders. The situations require leadership to be cognizant of organizational needs when evaluating associates. This process should be similar when evaluating and supporting new associates as well.

One worthy mention is that it's extremely difficult to change behaviors, specifically when work functions have been done ineffective/efficient for quite some time. As the saying goes, "it's difficult to teach an old dog new tricks." When one has worked inefficiently, they may be set in their old ways. Any changes in behavior may not be very well received and/or implemented. Regardless, their years of experience shall be respected and can be built-upon as even if they've done things not the most efficient, they've done it for years that way. In these cases, they possess experiences in what has gone right or wrong (Rosenbaum, 2001).

Support & development of supporters

What illuminates the most is being supported and/or evaluated by someone (leaders, alike) that require support and development, themselves. Specifically, they know as much if not less than those they're attempting to support/evaluate. A key pointer is regardless of who one is supporting and/or evaluating, the associate is able to normally tell (more so, seasoned associates), the level of competence of individuals that are supporting/evaluating them.

What was done and experienced decades ago makes little to no difference today. Times change; products and services change; overall wants and needs change. Given this, leadership and supporters influential in the support and development of associates (new or seasoned) shall continually renew their skill and experience sets in order to be respected; no exceptions! All too often, a manager has been in their position for ten-plus years, for example, as is not really aware of changes associated with a position. In non-profit, such as teaching, all too often Principals have been out of the classroom for years; for Directors, it has even been longer in many cases.

In these cases, given the change of times and the evolving demands of teaching, many simply would experience difficulty in being asked to 'practice what they preach.' For example, A Director having a responsibility to teach a class/subject, daily, for a semester's time, may

experience as much difficulty as a seasoned or even a new teacher they're to be evaluating/supporting. What's noteworthy to mention is when one is being supported/evaluated, s/he is also 'assessing' the degree of support/knowledge of those conducting the support/evaluation. Certainly to be given respect, it shall be earned, whereby a demonstration of knowledge, experience and education is essential for supporters and evaluators, alike.

Leadership/supporters shall be current in best practices and education/experience. Their characteristics resemble respected and admired for their job knowledge and experience and not politics. Quite often these individuals possess years of experience and are admired by everyone. A costly organizational fault is when such individuals are placed due to reasons, such as, but not limited to, being easily controlled by leadership (higher level) or typically are newer and would 'do' anything to please hierarchy as opposed to effectively support those in need of support, effectively.

Evaluation instruments

The evaluation process for associations should not be arbitrary or ambiguous. While it's often considered as highly subjective, to demonstrate credibility as an evaluator, the entire process/content written should be as much as possible, objective. The process should serve as the basis of coaching/support provided to associates long before an evaluation is considered. If all the stakeholders conduct their role accordingly, coupled with the associated being supported/mentored, there should be little to no reason why fruitful results would not be achieved.

Each component of the instrument shall be discussed and the best practices to meet/exceed each area shall serve as the basis of support/coaching. The process of supporting and evaluating anyone, regardless of their position and length of employment is to continuously improve/develop as an associate. The salient point for evaluators is to ensure they've coached the associated as to things they will be looking for to fulfil each area on the measurement instrument and at what level as well, for example, Superior Performance, Meeting Job Description, etc.

Organizational culture cultivation

Cultivating organizational culture coupled with synthesizing within remains a monumental challenge for leadership associates (new or seasoned), alike. Toxic traits of stakeholders shall be first attempted to be changed and/or eliminated. If it's of leadership, then powers above shall recognize and treat, accordingly. Treatment shall range from supporting a change of behavior to termination, with the latter preferred. One question remains: should organizational culture formulation follow an organization's stakeholders' current practices and preferences or stem from theoretical best practices?

The identify (organizational culture) of an organization (profit or non-profit) is shaped (effectively or warped) normally from long ago. Change is not always easily embraced, resulting sometimes to leaders/supporters challenging attempts to mold associates' practices in order or yield desired outcomes, minus consideration of practices being theory-backed, in some cases. The reluctance of incorporating theory-backed practices often stems from reluctances or knowledge of effective practices. The practice and theory of management/leadership shall be entrenched/foundational from theoretical literature. This behavior is almost always extinct in the practice of leadership/support, organizationally.

Many organizations may relate to organizational culture practices resembling akin a hybrid of past and current mix of practices of leaders ranging from personal comfort zone to effective

theoretical recommendations. Same applies to seasoned individuals on the receiving end of support; comfort zone from past practices is usually preferred. The challenge remains for stakeholders to continually research for best practices and implement them, accordingly all the while new and seasoned associates remain willing to embrace such theoretical-backed practices.

Employee behavior akin owner system

One key to success for any organization, regardless of industry or size, is when associates (new or seasoned) are devoted and contribute to their job as if they were the owner. Often owners of small or large businesses share countless hours invested, weekly, at work. On the contrary, when similar work hours are logged by employees, especially if not voluntary, the satisfaction levels may vary. It is conventionally an accepted norm among business owners where the more one works the likelihood of more profits and success can be expected immediately or in the future; this tradeoff is generally accepted.

One challenge owners shall focus on is the treatment and support of their employees. After all, a happy employee is probably less likely to adversely function at the workplace; call-out sick and/or genuinely/compassionately work. The lack of these behaviors may negatively affect a business. How can an owner immerse workers as to they taking ownership in the business as if it's their business? One suggestion is careful selection and support of new hires. Treatment of each individual as if they were a family member, a true family member and not a fictitious labeling of 'family.' The difference between treatment is surely detectable and may impose a negative reaction as it may be perceived as a game played just to accomplish tasks. Clearly, if genuine inclusion is not planned, the results are normally not favorable for business owners.

Industry leadership viewpoints

The viewpoints herein represent a selection of recommendations resulting from a variety of leaders in business along with discussions. One effective support method of associates (new or seasoned) is to synthesize (vary as-needed) support offerings and ensure effective modeling is present coupled with the of micromanaging. According to a statement from the late Steve Jobs, published in an Inc. article, "It doesn't make sense to hire smart people and tell them what to do; we hire smart people so they can tell us what to do" New, seasoned hires possess, at the least, a contributor attribute of time (experience) working in the same/similar capacity, where a new hire would lack. Does a 'smart' associate equate to one possessing education, experience, or both?

The requirement of a college degree is non-controllable in certain fields/jobs, such as education; however, control over equivalency of experience for education can be made in some fields. Even with college degrees/education, unknown source notes a similar statement, such as one has read a lot, but has learned little. This is true with many college degree holders at various levels, even up Ph.D. holders. Personally, I've met my doctoral degree holders or actually know very little about the methodology of conducting scholarly research. Interestingly, according to a former CEO of IBM, Ginny Rometty, "access and aptitude are not connected". The article continues noting that a focus shall be on 'skills rather than credentials.' Ultimately, perhaps most notable leaders may agree that what's one needed skill is the ability to critically think and apply theory to practice. With so many of problems being not one dimensional, a true skill remains as having the ability to think interdisciplinary. Problems are really not one dimensional and

requiring thinking outside the box and considering numerous concepts, which sometimes represent various disciplines in order to derive at a possible solution. College education really does provide the theoretical exposure to various disciplines. Experienced/skills obtained from work may be limited unless the experience contained various departments, for example.

Who would ever have imagined saying what you don't know actually is the best response that triggers prospective employers to sense 'humility' by responding with 'I don't know,' according to Apple. One key organizational requisite is the ability to work in teams to accomplish organizational goals. Perhaps being humble and low key are among top traits of effective team members; they know how to agree to disagree all the while listening to reasoning and views/virtues of actions at hand. Too often it's easy to become disinterested, as after all, many may believe they/their plans are right and others' are wrong/ineffective. In such cases, discussions loop back to the main purpose of this article, which is to incorporate effective support of associates by supporters/leaders. Organizations may have such associates (new or seasoned) that require support in areas, such as working in teams and being open minded. Additionally, those charged with supporting/leading may also require such professional development as often new hires may know the same if not just as much as supporters/leaders, in one or more areas.

Rethinking performance evaluations may be overdue. The process is sometimes not without bias, according to an article in Fortune entitled, 'annual performance reviews are outdated and they're probably hurting your company.' Anything done without a concise purpose may be meaningless; doing an evaluation just because it's the end of the year to do one doesn't offer much purpose. Consistent in-context feedback and development may be leaps and bounds more effective to strengthen areas of deficiency, in an informal manner, than any performance evaluation system. Unfortunately, as the Fortune article notes, evaluations (formal) are sometimes utilized for pay raises and bonuses, but if they're biased, they can be counter effective. "One in four employees believe their performance reviews were negatively affected by their supervisor's personal biases, according to a recent survey of more than 1,000 full-time workers from Syndio, a technology company that helps employers including Walmart and Salesforce analyze race- and gender-based pay gaps".

Clearly, communication from leadership shall be clear and effective. Overtly communicating or not enough genuine communication can be harmful. Communication shall be foundational with trust, which is especially the case when stemming from leadership to associates. A unique example is communication from the CEO of Nvidia, where he 'writes hundreds of emails,' daily to his staff. Certainly the communications may be perceived as being excessive and according to one employee, … "the way the CEO communicates is like sticking your finger in the electric socket,". Communication shall be limited in-writing and personal/in-person, more often. The emotions via written rhetoric as opposed to in-person are very difficult to read, especially during the trust-building phase within an organization. Also, the value of communication can certainly be compromised when it's done in excessive as well. Conscientious leaders may be the preferred type as opposed to antagonistic. Typically, satisfaction and probably trust levels are at probably better positioned with conscientious leaders as opposed to antagonistic leadership.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

In sum, the process of evaluating associates, new or seasoned, shall be as objective as possible. The intent is to support the development of not only new hires but seasoned as well. The process is not absent regarding the support and development of leadership as well. The entire process of evaluation is intended to support associates, which in turn support the development of the organization's behavior. All of which is intended to support the end-individual, which is normally a customer/consumer. If the behavior of any organization is such, which demonstrates all associates/stakeholders functioning as if they're owners, would really constitute a win-win organization. The purpose of this article was to share practical support strategies aimed at strengthen the organizational culture of for and non-profit organizations, with a focus on supporting stakeholders. A selection of industry practical viewpoints is shared to provide a basis for discussions, which are taking place at various organizations.

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