

**BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN PERCEPTION AND
PRACTICE FOR BETTER PERFORMANCE:
THE REAL CHALLENGE OF HUMAN
RESOURCE MANAGER**

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Abstract:

The challenge that is far more complicated than any other, is managing employee Perceptions without affecting the employee and employer satisfaction in a work place, as the index of satisfaction of both employer and employee determines the level of performance of any organization. Wherever the employees and employer keep very strong differing perceptions in business related aspects, it becomes very difficult to accomplish meaningful objectives. It is not the quality of human resource practices, but the perceptions of the employees regarding these HR practices that actually affect the commitment of the employees towards their work place. The real task of the HR manager is to address the perceptions of employees and to take effective steps to bridge the gap between perception and organizational practice without damaging the perceptions of the employer. An effective HR manager has to practice the art of balancing the perceptions of both the parties in a mutually accepted and trusted manner. This explorative study is indented to highlight the importance of perceptions in business management and to emphasize the need of bridging the gap between perceptions and organizational practice to achieve organizational goals.

Key words. Employee, Employer, Perception, Practice, Trust and, Performance.

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Introduction

Human resource is transforming into Human capital and the effective utilization of this precious capital according to the changing requirements of business has become a challenge of the day for every management. Managing human capital begins with managing human perceptions, as perceptions determine the attitude and behavior of individuals. Extraction of committed behavior from the employees should be the ultimate aim of Human Resources Management and the only way to achieve this objective is to bridge or minimize the gap between perception of employees in job related aspects such as wages, promotions and recognition and the in-house realities on these aspects.

Employees have their own perceptions of fairness of pay, promotion, recognition or opportunity. Unfulfilled dreams may lead to undesirable employee behaviors which will harm the work culture of the organization. As the process of perception is involved in between behaviors and situations of the individuals, it is of very much importance in every aspect of life. It is of great relevance to organizations also, as the situations being perceived by the individuals can bring about particular reactions that result in either improving or weakening of the organizational performance. Inappropriately perceived situations lead to contrary consequences creating misunderstandings while appropriately perceived situations can bring positive chances for enhancing productivity and performance.

By this reason the real task of the HR manager is to fulfill the perceptions that satisfy employees and to take effective steps to bridge the gap between perception and reality without dissatisfying the performance related perceptions of the employer. Since these two perceptions are inversely related the task becomes highly complicated and sensitive seeking high degree of imagination and professionalism for arriving to reach an equilibrium state.

1. Problem statement

Wherever the employees and employer keep strong differing perceptions in business related aspects, it becomes very difficult to accomplish meaningful objectives. As the perceptions of both the parties are inversely related, arriving at an equilibrium position where the perceptions of both parties are optimally got satisfied is highly complicated and it necessitates a well awareness about the importance and impact of perceptions in achieving organizational goals.

2. Objective of the study

Objective of this study is: To highlight the importance of perception, as a determining factor of employee behavior and to present a practice model for bridging the gap between perceptions and practice for improving employee and organizational performance.

3. Methodology

This study is an explorative one and the relevant data and information are collected through extensive interviews with professionals, Trade union leaders, Industrial managers and employees of industrial units. The opinions of all these participants were processed to evolve a practice model for HR managers for effectively bridging the gap between employee's perception and the organizational practice, for better business performance.

4. Literature review

There are quite few articles on the subject how employee perceives his work place and what are the factors influencing his perceptions and how the gap between perception and the real occurrence can be avoided or reduced. Most of the articles are on the topic on how an employee is perceived by others rather than how the employee perceives the work related aspects that may influence the behavioral response of the employees.

Employee perceptions and attitudes have a direct impact on the bottom line. In small business units, unfavorable perceptions about a decision that the manager has made can quickly spread through the organizational grapevine. This situation negatively affects the morale and productivity. Managers of small businesses should actively take steps to change misguided employee beliefs so that workers understand the logic behind the company's actions (Benjamin, 2015)

Everyone of us thinks in different ways and has different views about the world. Every individual lives in his/ her own perceived world which is not the same as the real world. It is important that the people having higher positions in an organization should take all the factors in to consideration in order to apprehend the situations properly, so that an effective decision making process takes place (Fareed, 2015).

In the workplace, perceptions that aren't managed become rumors, then gossip and then backbiting, which lead to destructions (Fortner, 2010). The ability to manage perceptions in the process of handling people and organizational issues make great leaders (O tara, 2011). To achieve desired organizational outcomes, it is important not only to have the right HR practices but also ensure the right employee perceptions about those practices (CAHRS, 2011).

Employees perceptions may be rooted either on subjective or objective measures. Regardless this, the perception of pay fairness is as important as the reality of it (O tara, 2011, Rasch and Szytko, 2013). An employee's perception of his opportunities for advancement and salary or hours of work, versus that of other workers, can seriously

affect his job satisfaction (*Anaejionu.2015*). It is not the quality of human resource practices, but the perceptions of the employees regarding these HR practices that actually affect the commitment of the employees towards their work place.

5. Perception

Perception differentiates individuals. The world is not the same to every individual, because every one of us thinks differently and has different views about the world. Perception is the ability to see, hear or become aware of something through the senses. It is the way in which something is regarded, understood, or interpreted. It's a psychological process of observation and interpretation. Everybody has his own perceptions on everything he sees, hears or feels in his surroundings. It involves using senses to acquire the information about the surrounding environment or situations and making interpretations accordingly. Perception is the way we all interpret our experiences (*Otara,2011*). What an individual interprets or perceives may be substantially different from reality and that of another.

But perception is a reality that contributes to the mind set of employees and this mind set in turn influences psychologically in his behavioral part such as loyalty and commitment that contributes to the overall performance. In one's day to day life his perceptions react with the reality of each element that interacts with him and it contributes to the formation of his mind set in accordance with the degree of unity in perceptions and the reality. In the process of comparison, many personal, internal and external factors influence the individual's perception, such as social needs of the employees, family requirements, educational qualification, experience, status of other categories of employees, business profit, the share of profit that the management retains, specialization of work, management behavior, level of ethics and fairness followed by the management, working conditions in similar type of organizations in the locality or region, political awareness and relations, bargaining power of trade unions and more.

All these elements react with the organizational practice through the angle of perception to shape the mindset of the employee towards his organization and this mind set again contribute to reshape the perceptions and practices positively or negatively according to the degree of match or mismatch. The reality which matches with the perception only brings satisfaction to individuals. The Figure.2 clearly shows the process of comparison on job related aspects and how it leads to satisfaction or dissatisfaction and performance in accordance with the level of satisfaction. It is to be noted that the perceptions of employees are not limited to their benefits only but to the entire aspects of business activity.

In organizations, perceptions of managers and employees shape the climate and effectiveness of the working environment. In any business context, the employees as well

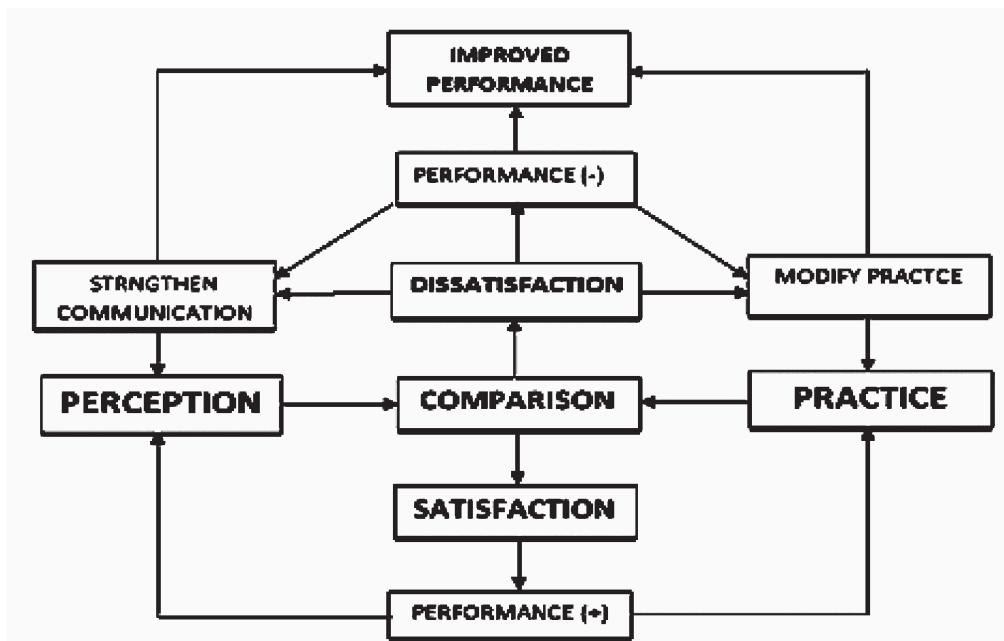
as the employer have their own perceptions regarding every element connected with either the employee or the employer or the organization itself.

6. How to Bridge the gap between perception and practice

The mismatch between perception and practice is the real problem which has to be addressed by the Human Resource Management professionals. There are two possibilities or ways to minimize the gap between perception and organizational practice.

1. **Strengthen Communication:** Influence the employee perceptions by communicating the facts and situations faced, transparently, effectively and frequently using all the means of modern communication system;
2. **Modify Practice:** Modify the existing management practice so as to reduce the gap between perception and practice by continuously hearing, addressing and redressing the grievances of employees.

For achieving both of these options, management has to keep a fair level of ethics and justice in the areas of decision making, distribution of wealth, implementing procedures and in interpersonal relations. The success of these two options largely depends on the Trust that the employer created among the employees during the preceding years or the level of Trust that the employees keep, by their own past experience, towards their employer.



Whenever the employees feel dissatisfaction on the organizational practice with respect to their perceptions, and their performance show a less positive approach, the HR Manager should take corrective steps to increase the performance by applying either of the method, which he sees to be fit or by applying both the methods simultaneously. That means HR manager should take steps to either strengthen the communication so as to influence and enable the employees to perceive the situation in the right way or to modify the practice or decision after hearing the apprehensions of the employees, so as to reshape the perceptions of the employees.

The most advisable model is to take action on both ways to influence employee perceptions positively so as to strengthen the employee Trust towards their organization. Figure.1 depicts the path way of remedial action to be taken to improve performance by applying any of these methods. It is to be noted that the level of performance whether positive, less positive or negative will again contribute to re mold the employee perception accordingly.

5. Role of Trust in influencing Perceptions

Trust is the ever winning quality of the management over the employees. An enterprise is a human organization which functions well only when it is based on trust, ethical behavior and the recognition of human dignity(Wehrich,etal 2012). The level of trust that the employees keep on their employers significantly contribute to the formation of the mindset of the employees and their perceptions. Trust factor has an important role in bridging or reducing the gap between perception and reality. The range of ethical principles an organization upholds in each aspect of business management especially with respect to human resource management and the degree of fairness the organization keeps in any decision making process particularly on the aspects which directly or indirectly affects the well being of the employees are the real contributors for the trust factor. Organizational trust has a power to bridge the gap between perception and practice. In a mutually trusted business environment, the employees are committed to their work and the employers keep a caring attitude towards the welfare of their employees.

Traditionally the concept of trust is equated with integrity, loyalty, caring, and keeping promises in the relationship between individuals and between individuals and their organizations. Trust is at the center of communication, collaboration, and the willingness to change. The trusting relationship is the most effective management tool ever invented(McCauley and Kuhnert, 1992). The importance of trust may be more distinguished by its absence. For once trust is violated it is not easy to repair even with pay raise and promotions.

But there is no short cut way to develop trust among the employees but it has to be developed through a long period of time by trust worthy approaches. While effective communication and timely addressing the grievances constitute for the implementation or practice part of human resources management, the level of ethics and fairness constitute for the value part. There is no meaning in keeping the value part high without strengthening the implementation part. Periodical checks should be conducted to know whether the gap between perception and reality is widening or narrowing due to the steps or initiatives taken by the Human Resource Managers.

6. Role of HRM in managing Perception and Practice

An effective HR manager has to practice the art of balancing the Perceptions and interests of both the employer and employees in a mutually accepted and trusted manner by implementing better Practices for getting the desired level of **Performance**. Here the overall quality of HRM both in value and in implementation, act as the central point on which the entire system balances.

Mutual understanding strengthens mutual trust, which is the ideal outcome supposed to be created by human resources management practices by its industrial relation initiatives. In addition to the industrial relation function which is restricted to the interactions with trade unions, the human resource department should have adequate mechanisms to collect the feedback and responses of employees with respect to any decisions taken by the management, which needs the support or co-operation of the employees. It is also necessary for taking pro-active steps to avoid misunderstanding or to apply necessary corrective steps on the issues of dispute or disagreement.

7. Conclusion

Employee perception is an accepted reality in business environments and perception is as important as reality. Any gap between employee perception and organizational practice may affect employee performance adversely to that extent. So in every business organization there should be effective mechanisms and schemes for evaluating and addressing the perceptions of employees and to channelize in the right track by providing adequate information to the employees on each and every business decisions which may affect the employee's interests. In addition the HR manager has the responsibility to modify the practice in such a way to satisfy the perceptions of the employees as much as possible. Unless the HR function, on which the system balances, by keeping some ethical principles, the balance between the two elements may go wrong there by collapsing the system partially or totally.

Implementing programs without evaluating the perceptions of employees in any area of business may not generate desired results whatever advantages the program boast to deliver. That means not only the best practice but the perceptions of employees in each aspect are responsible for better results. Practicing Management by the perceptions of employees as far as possible through developing the trust factor is the best model for implementing managerial decisions.

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