

2-11-03  
Human Resource  
News

# The human factor - I

**H**uman Resource Development is another magic turn of phrase that we have acquired from the lexicon of management sciences. Its debut with the corporate world in the eighties has now spread into the arteries of development business run by NGOs, public sector agencies and donors. HR has thus become another siren in the din of development slogans.

For the past fifty years the term development has been synonymous with physical resources in Pakistan — so many industries, so many roads, so many dams, so many canals and so forth. Human resources were taken for granted as a natural outcome of population growth and perfunctory education system. Much of the infrastructure in the public and the private sector did not produce the planned benefits since the quality of manpower required to run it was not up to the mark. Being intangible, qualitative aspect of manpower remained invisible to the national vision. Notwithstanding the fact that HR development is a much broader area than mere formal education, Pakistan has remained a member of a unique club of countries that spent more than 6 percent of GDP on defence and less than 2 percent on education — other members being Libya, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan and Burma. The newfound zeal for HR development, therefore, couldn't have come sooner.

Apart from the gamut of institutional HR development instruments used globally, I would like to share some problem areas that I have encountered as a management person in my diverse fields of work. I am a great believer in Lee Iacocca who puts 'building a team' on top of a manager's agenda, and this I have

found a cardinal weakness in our indigenous management style, public sector and private sector. A good team invariably is understood as a group of passive and compliant subordinates who will obey blindly and never question the boss. The boss will ensure that terror never leaves their hearts because without it all humans are primarily wicked — they would either be dishonest or shirk responsibility. This myth is so deep rooted that it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. A soft boss invites chicanery from juniors and a zeal for work and initiative in subordinates is almost always mistaken for a rebellious streak. I see a streak of theological conditioning in this fallacy.

In reality a good team is a combination of diverse skills working together harmoniously in utter good faith that every one desires the same results. Interdependence and complementation of abilities occurs naturally like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle fitting together. This professional ideal of a good team is not easy to develop since it requires more than what HR development instruments can impart formally. There are three components to a good team: a suitable organisational structure, professional capabilities of the team members and the right outlook towards work in all the team (professionalism). Any good manual of HR practices will explain the first two components in a structured and fairly precise manner. It is the third component, equally critical, that remains elusive in most organisations. In this two-part column, we shall visit those social and cultural influences that contribute to the third element of a good team, a hard core, result oriented professional attitude to work.



## Iqbal Mustafa

The writer is a former member of the Central Board, State Bank of Pakistan and CEO of SMEDA  
Mustafa@hujra.com

### Inside View

We have a 'power oriented' social ethos. Power is the key to social dynamics. This is a legacy of the medieval Agrarian Society where power determined the welfare of individuals, institutions and nations. Industrial revolution brought about a paradigm shift in social dynamics. Productivity replaced power as the key to all social motivation. Productivity generated wealth and power was purchased to protect that wealth. Power became subservient to wealth, whereas previously wealth was subservient to power, since there was little trade or industry to generate wealth. Wealth was primarily a product of grabbing natural resources.

The power orientation reeks through organisations from the top to the bottom in Pakistan. The subliminal understanding is that the nearer one is to the apex of the power pyramid the more buttered one's bread gets. There is no premium on productivity, only on appeasement and goodwill of the power source. The need for appeasement, subservience and sycophancy is shared mutually between the superiors and the juniors — one desires it and the others are pleased to oblige. This environment does not encourage productive initiative and hence Human Resources remain devoid of it. Even in corporate environment where performance parameters are quantified, people's intrinsic power

instincts do not rest in peace and keep orchestrating organisational relationships.

Fear of losing power and suspicions about basic human goodness breeds a strange management strategy — divide and rule. It begins with a feudal mindset that pervades

through the whole society; even the indigenous corporate entrepreneurs act on feudal impulses. Building a homogenous team is thought as bad strategy because it can gang up against the owners. Therefore, keep employees divided into groups or camps, hoping that in struggle for power they will keep an eye on each other and squeal when anything foul is detected. It's a free internal espionage device. Moreover, it provides warranty against any one (or group) becoming indispensable and taking advantage of that position. While this medieval scheme provides psychological security, it diverts productive energies to internal intrigues and the organisation becomes a self-cancelling entity.

**N**ext, a strong family system poses an impregnable challenge to loyalty towards the organisation and even the State. Loyalties are prioritised to family, clan, ethnicity, organisation and last to the State. If there is a conflict between the interest of the organisation and the family, the latter wins instinctively. The bane of 'Safarish' eating away the fabric of society is based on this moral superiority of duty to the family at a cost to the organisation or the State. Placement of individuals in organisations and departments on the force of strong 'recommendations' annihilates idealism in the youth and professional ethics in the experienced

elders. Family obligations are so pervasive that one is expected to respect not only one's own but honour those of others too. Every new government resolves to recruit on merit but we all know how authentic that proclamation is.

It is not only in employment but in every sphere of life that family takes top priority. In managing businesses, corporations, banks, ministries and even welfare organisations, people compromise organisational interests to family obligations. Depriving your kith and kin is essentially a greater sin than damaging institutions. The moral ethos of society remains mute like a docile conscience in these matters. As for the eternal damnation, that seems too far away compared to the immediate holocaust of the family wrath. Professional ethics cannot survive in such a barren moral landscape.

Lest it be misunderstood, I am not against the strong binding of family ties. With all its merits no one would like to see the back of the family system. However, in the absence of a social security system family remains the bedrock of survival for most people in the lower income brackets. In the upper brackets, it is a source of secure consolidation of wealth, especially through medieval means. A happy ideal would be to have social security system in place where people's loyalties are equally divided between the family and the State or the employer, as many developed societies have.

In the next part of this column, we shall visit two other critical areas that mould professional character. One is the education system and the other is the social impact of early childhood in the cradle and the influence of the hand that rocks it.