

Forgiveness in Organisation among Managers

(Sikap Memaafkan Para Pengurus dalam Organisasi)

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Abstract

Managers are challenged with the daunting task of employee motivation and enhancing their efficiencies. The concept of forgiveness may help makes the task easier as forgiveness is an important factor in enhancing better working relationship and fosters motivating working environment and leads to higher morale. Therefore deriving from various literatures on philosophy and management this paper intends to conceptually discuss the role of managers in enhancing a sense of and creating a culture of forgiveness in an organization. A review of the literature on philosophy, management and operation was conducted in order to conceptually explore the role of managers in enhancing a sense of and creating a culture of forgiveness in an organization. Managers play a critical role in enhancing a sense of forgiveness in an organization. Their role focuses on creating and preparing a positive environment that are conducive for employees' emotional readiness to forgive any acts or wrongdoings against them at the work place. In doing this, the manager also should be able to forgive as well. Furthermore managers must also develop and create a culture that enhance the sense of forgiveness in an organization by undertaking the various processes that could lead to the act of forgiveness which will bring positive results to the organization. This in turn will assist the organization to meet its goals.

Keywords: *forgiveness, organization, managers*

Abstrak

Pengurus sering berdepan dengan cabaran sukar untuk memotivasikan dan meningkatkan keefisienan pekerja. Konsep kemaafan boleh memudahkan lagi tugas ini kerana ianya merupakan faktor penting dalam meningkatkan hubungan pekerjaan diantara pekerja dan majikan dan menggalakkan persekitaran kerja yang memotivasikan dan boleh meningkatkan semangat

bekerja. Oleh itu daripada pelbagai ulasan karya yang diperolehi daripada bidang falsafah pengurusan, kertas kerja ini bertujuan untuk membincangkan secara konseptual peranan pengurus dalam mewujudkan perasaan kemaafan dan budaya maaf-memaafkan dalam organisasi. Satu sintesis kritikal ke atas ulasan-ulasan karya berkenaan bidang falsafah pengurusan dan operasi telah dijalankan bagi meneroka secara konseptual peranan pengurus dalam mewujudkan perasaan kemaafan serta budaya maaf-memaafkan dalam organisasi. Pengurus memainkan peranan yang kritikal dalam meningkatkan perasaan kemaafan dalam organisasi.. Fokus peranan mereka adalah ke arah mewujudkan dan menyediakan persekitaran positif yang sesuai untuk pekerja supaya mereka mempunyai kesediaan emosi untuk memaafkan apa-apa tindakan atau kesalahan yang dilakukan terhadap mereka di tempat kerja. Dalam hal ini, pengurus juga perlu memaafkan kesalahan-kesalahan yang dilakukan terhadapnya. Pengurus juga mesti membentuk dan mewujudkan budaya yang meningkatkan perasaan kemaafan dalam organisasi yang melalui pelbagai proses yang boleh membawa kepada kewujudan tindakan memaafkan yang boleh membawa hasil positif kepada organisasi. Ini kemudiannya dapat membantu organisasi mencapai matlamatnya.

Kata kunci: Kemaafan, organisasi, pengurus

Introduction

There are some behavioural constructs within an organization that had received little attention (Madsen, Gygi, Hammond and Plowman, 2008). The constructs can be an important influence of performance and productivity of workers or individual employees. One of these behavior constructs is forgiveness (Cameron and Caza, 2002).

As workplace is wrought with human interaction, possible conflict, altercations and personal injuries effected on one another is unavoidable. It is imperative therefore for organisation and managers alike to seek out avenues to repair the grievances and damaged relationship resulting from interpersonal injury from interpersonal relationships at the workplace in order to preserve interpersonal relationships harmony and overcome negative thoughts and emotions. Forgiveness provides such an avenue (Aquino, Tripp and Bies, 2003). The healing aspect of the behavior cannot be denied as the ability to heal a broken relationship can have a profound impact on the functions and the nature of life at the workplace (Aquino et al., 2003). Furthermore it is indicated that good working relationships are essential to organisational effectiveness (Kurzynski, 1998). As an employee spends most of his time at the workplace, the environment and atmosphere there can be a powerful influence in the employee's life experience (Butler and Mullis, 2001). Being able to forgive

and being forgiven for any intentional or unintentional transgression can take a weight of a person's mind leaving him with a better emotional state to focus on work.

In this new economy, which is characterized by escalating speed of change, increasing alienation and a growing search for meaning, it makes good business sense to practice the art of forgiveness. From the harmonic environment that forgiveness brings it is expected that there should be less turnover activities, increases creativity and innovative exchanges, enhances returns and greater flexibility in adapting to changing market conditions. Forgiveness is not an event or a one-time decision. It is not something one decides to do in a flash of understanding or compassion for the other. Though forgiveness rests on one's conscious decision to forgive, one does not wake up and decide that today is the day to forgive and be done with it. Forgiveness also begins with the existence of truthfulness and acknowledging one's responsibility (Madsen et al., 2008)

If we truly want to create a more nurturing and compassionate workplace where people feel a sense a purpose and meaning it is essential to make forgiveness a regular practice. It not only makes sense to treat people with compassion and understanding, it makes business sense- the firms that grow and thrive in the twenty-first century are the ones that create an environment of thriving in the workplace by practicing the principles of compassionate leadership.

Definition Of Forgiveness

Forgiveness can be understood from the aspect of a process by which an offended worker cognitively acknowledges the wrongfulness of an injurious act and deliberately chooses to release negative emotions and inhibit the desire for revenge. Forgiveness may repair damaged work place relationships in the aftermath of a personal offense. Left unattended, damaged work relationships and the resulting resentment and anger, all these can interfere with performance and productivity whenever people must work interdependently (Enright and Coyle 1998, McCullough, Fincham and Tsang, 2003).

Another approach at understanding forgiveness is by identifying the dimensions that exist within a particular behavioural context that defines it as a forgiving act (Sells and Hargrave, 1998). There must exist a personal injury of an emotional nature or one that cause bodily harm. That injury is corresponded by hurt or pain either physical or emotional. The aftermath of such injury is the breaking up or fragmentation of relationships especially the one forged at the workplace. However, once injury is realized, the perpetuation of such injury is

stopped immediately. The party that suffers the pain releases his/her justifiable emotion for being injured or wronged and seeks to stop any retaliation. He/she then proceeds to normalize the broken relationship.

From these dimensions it shows that forgiveness involves the process of giving up blame or stopping any faultfinding action. However it should be noted that forgiveness in the workplace is not a simple issue. It sometimes can be difficult to practice at the workplace. From external aspect, organizational and legal structures often create cultural norms which do not support acts of forgiveness. The common culture is always finding faults or someone to reprimand or “blame” and there is a fear that if we let people “off the hook”, this would be a signal that such behavior is condoned and it would undermine accountability and sets a bad example for other employees. This is not conducive for the nurturing of forgiving culture. From such organizational culture the attitude will be expanded into interpersonal relationships making forgiveness more difficult to practice.

One dimension of forgiveness is that an acknowledgement of injury that has occurred. Most accounts of forgiveness identify two necessary conditions for forgiveness to even occur (Sells and Hargrave, 1998):

- 1) An injury to one person must have occurred
- 2) The injured party is aware of having been injured.

Unlike condoning, excusing or justifying which disregards that an injury or offense has occurred, forgiveness requires that the offense is acknowledged and the wrongdoer held accountable for his or her actions. By acknowledging that a wrongful action has been performed the injured party must engage in the emotional work required to work through the anger and resentment he or she rightfully may feel. Though forgiveness may ultimately be given, the wrongful behavior or offending action may continue to be condemned, but the wrongdoer is released from the effects of the offense (Scobie and Scobie, 1998).

Forgiveness is a process. Philosopher H. J. N. Horsbrugh introduced a somewhat novel concept of forgiveness when he described it as a process. Almost all other philosophers have viewed forgiveness as an event or act of the will. The process, he says, begins with the decision to forgive (volitional aspect), and continues until all negative feelings (emotional aspect) are such as anger, resentment, and hostility are gone. Horsbrugh’s understanding of forgiveness takes into consideration the human capacity for memory and feelings, and acknowledges that resentment may take time to overcome even though the injured party may truly forgive his or her offender.

Forgiveness is a virtue. Published nearly thirty years ago, philosopher R. S. Downie, was one of the first to discuss forgiveness as a moral good in secular terms. His concept of forgiveness is based on the assumption that forgiveness is a virtue, or more precisely, the readiness to forgive is a virtue. According to Downie (1965) true forgiveness requires one to relinquish all resentment toward the wrongdoer. He suggests that true forgiveness is demonstrated by a change in behavior, characterized by *agape*, towards the wrongdoer with the intention of restoring the relationship to its original status.

The Importance Of Encouraging Forgiveness Within Organisation

Good working relationships are essential to organizational effectiveness yet it is the quality of the interpersonal relationships that often suffers in the aftermath of some wrong doing or conflict. Tense situations that are not managed well or remain unresolved may keep the parties involved in a state of mental anguish and constant battle for power or in the worst case scenario to seek revenge.

Forgiveness gives us an opportunity to use the mistakes, failures, flaws and breakdowns of life as opportunities to awaken greater wisdom, compassion and capability in our co-workers and ourselves. The practice of forgiveness supports the development of organizational cultures where people feel free to take responsible risks, stop withholding their creativity and demonstrate personal ownership and enthusiastic contribution. We can create greater internal harmony and healing by practicing the art of forgiveness by using failures and unwanted situations to develop a culture of compassion and understanding, a place where people feel safe to express fully their natural genius and creativity, a place where they feel appreciated and experience a sense of joy and meaning from their work.

The value of forgiveness is also important for the development of an ethical manager. First, to develop forgiveness as a virtue, and be operated as an ethical standard of behavior, means that the manager recognizes and acknowledges that a wrong was committed. To deny it by overlooking it, rationalizing the wrongdoer actions, or explaining it away leaves no room for forgiveness. Second, the act of forgiving requires that the manager accept the responsibility and challenge in accepting others as human persons with and without their faults and learning to live together without sustained anger and resentment. This means allowing others to make mistakes and holding them accountable, but to not penalize them permanently for their errors.

Forgiveness requires change in one's emotional reaction to the wrongdoer. While change, especially of one's feelings or perceptions is never

easy, in attempting to master the emotional aspects of conflicts and make the personal changes required in order to become a forgiving person, one can create an environment where trust and respect flourishes. In this respect, it is highly likely that the virtue of forgiveness could be extremely efficacious in strategizing employee management.

The Process Of Forgiveness

In the process of forgiveness, there have two type of process which is process of personal forgiveness and process forgiveness of others.

1. Process of personal forgiveness

Forgiveness is the process by which individuals can convert suffering brought on by making a mistake into a growth experience. The process involves recognition that something wrong has been done that has resulted in guilt. Beside, forgiveness is taking the responsibility for the action and letting go of guilt through self-forgiveness (Borysenko, 1990). Below are the steps of forgiveness:

- a) Take responsibility for what was done.
- b) Confess the nature of the wrongs to God or a higher power, one's self and another person.
- c) Assess positive attributes.
- d) Make amends where possible as long as it does no harm to self and others.
- e) Look at God, as a higher power, for help.
- f) Assess what has been learned from the experience.

2. Process Forgiveness of Others

For most managers, forgiveness does not come naturally. Whereas anger that leads to retribution is a spontaneous reaction, understanding and forgiveness are harder; the process that involves seeing an incident from another's point of view usually must be intentional. Empathy also has been found to increase when an apology is offered. Empathy for the offender is related to conciliatory behavior and has been demonstrated by research to be linked to forgiveness. Forgiving does not remove the scars left by being wronged and wounded. However, when an employer forgives, healing occurs and sadness can be replaced by the positive effect of healing. Forgiving begins with the acceptance that no individual is perfect. Below are the steps for forgiveness of others:

- a) Accepts the lack of perfection in others.
- b) Look at the incident from the other's point of view.
- c) Place self in the offender's position and empathize with his or her feelings.
- d) Surrender the right to get even.
- e) Accept an apology when it is offered.
- f) Forgive the individual taking administrative action when this is appropriate but leave the ultimate judgment behavior to outside forces.

The Development Of Forgiveness At The Workplace

Managers often are selected because of their performance for excellence and attention to detail. They have high expectations for themselves and their department. Mistakes, wrong doings and behavior that inhibit productivity are contradictory to the manager's high expectations. When an error is made by an individual who fails to appreciate the harm this causes to the effective running of the department, managers can be hard pressed to forgive. Also, forgiveness may be difficult because it appears that the error has caused irreparable damage. However, there are various behavioural elements that managers could adopt in order to develop forgiveness within them and among the subordinates.

- 1. The need for personal forgiveness must be recognized.
- 2. Forgiveness is facilitated when events are put into perspective.
- 3. Forgiveness remembers the past with truth.
- 4. Forgiveness remembers with new respect for self.
- 5. Forgiveness is for person, not institutions.
- 6. Forgiveness is given for what was done.
- 7. Forgiveness is needed for incidents that cannot be forgotten.
- 8. Forgiveness is for persons who wrong them when they wound them.

1. The need for personal forgiveness must be recognize

As managers move away from "you-messages" to "I-messages," they will begin to understand their own role in the latest problem they face. For example, statements like, "If I had just handled that differently." "If I had been more perceptive." or "If I had preplanned that new initiative more carefully." will bring fresh and healthy insights to the current crisis.

2. Forgiveness is facilitated when events are put into perspective

The art of forgiveness usually involves putting a bad incident into perspective. The good aspects of a relationship or performance should be given priority. A manager who is able to forgive will focus on the

good that has gone before and might come after. Forgiving does not edit bad things out of the memory anymore than it makes bad things qualitatively good. However, forgiving can help the manager to focus on the positive things that will follow. "We've gotten that mistake out of the way; we'll all be glad we won't have to go through that again." This places the focus on the value of what has been learned and how that learning will enable avoidance of similar errors in the future.

3. Forgiveness remembers the past with truth

The managerial art of forgiveness gives the manager new courage to recall accurately an incident in which wrong was done and to accept personal responsibility for the situation. Thus, forgiveness enables an individual to see the true picture and enter into the forgiveness process.' All too frequently, when a supervisor looks at an event carefully, it becomes clear that certain managerial actions might have eliminated the problematic situation. Thus, a manager should be slow to anger and quick to take personal inventory.

4. Forgiveness remembers with new respect for self

Managers who feel victimized by the negligence or wrong doings of their staff may allow the offense to cause them to lose respect for that worker. The way to restore self-respect is to forgive. Nothing restores self-respect more than breaking the grip of a painful memory and looking with hope to the future. "We really messed up with that one. Let's be glad nothing worse happened. Now let's plan so that it doesn't happen again", this saying can allow both manager and employee to move on with hope.

5. Forgiveness is for persons, not institutions.

A manager may feel wronged by a corporation, a government or some other faceless organization. However, institutions cannot be forgiven. Forgiving is for persons. To experience authentic reconciliation, the manager needs to forgive the specific CEO or supervisor who was involved in the problem.

6. Forgiveness is given for what was done, not for who the person is.

Most people are too complex to be forgiven for who they are. At most, the manager can forgive a specific wrong doing. Where forgiveness is concerned, it is better to narrow things down to the specific and to deal with one incident at a time.

7. Forgiveness is needed for incidents that cannot be forgotten.

There are many incidents in a day that merely annoy the manager. These should be overlooked as trivialities. However, when the offense

is significant and atoned for, forgiveness is obligatory. It may not be possible for the manager to forget the wrong doing especially if it had become habitual or the consequences were still being felt. But forgiveness wedded to a strategy for restitution offers the supervisor a better option than debilitating anger.

8. Forgiveness is for persons who wrong them when they wound them.

There are pains and wrongful pains. Forgiveness is for persons who wrong the individual personally when pain is inflicted. Sometimes the difference between pain and wrong doing is not clearly apparent. However, being wronged usually involves the breaking of a trust and making it difficult for the offended party to trust again.

The following table (adapted and summarized) provides the possible impact when forgiveness is not forthcoming.

Table 1

Impact of lack of forgiveness on different levels of system

Individual	Dyad	Team	Organization
Alienation	Separation	Internal Competition	Controlling Behaviour
Self-Doubt	Conflict	Lack Of Common Direction	Secrecy
Righteousness	Blame	Fault Finding	Mistrust
Preoccupation	Avoidance	Jealousy	High Turnover
Anger/ Withdrawal	Mistrust	Negative Politics	Protective Behaviour
Lack Of Creativity/ Information	Controlling	Gossip	Back Stabbing
Poor Health	Punishing	Manipulation	Over-Work
Unhappiness	Frustration	Stress	Out Of Balance
Guilt	Anger	Frustration	Confusion
Fear	Tension	Denial	Political Posturing
Depression	Judgmental	Score Keeping	Non-Coordinated Workforce
Suffering	Disharmony	Distance	Low Allegiance
Low Self-Esteem	Agitation Disappointment Defensiveness Inauthentic Behaviour		

Context gives meaning. If we look at four primary levels of system in an organizational as contexts we can see how the lack of forgiveness at each contextual level produces different meanings and different outcomes. At each of these levels there is a loss of energy, which is being used for covering up, playing safe and avoiding potentially painful situations. This energy could be used to learn, grow, connect and be more productive. Table 1 show the predictable outcomes of a context where forgiveness is missing. If these symptoms are present at these different levels of system it is a good indication that forgiveness is missing.

As we can see from Table 1, the cost of not forgiving has an enormous impact at each level of system. If individuals feel that they are not forgiven, or they cannot forgive themselves, there is a risk of increasing separation, which leads to “doing their own thing” and creating safety by becoming more and more invisible or more adversarial. It is predictable that they will withhold their discretionary effort, creativity and authenticity becoming increasingly more alienated, self-absorbed and preoccupied with doubt and self-criticism. Since the most common need of most people in an organization is to belong, this alienation will continue to grow until that person leaves the organization or becomes an ineffective member of the organization just waiting for retirement.

Dyads mean two person systems where forgiveness is missing are breeding grounds for upset and conflict. When one person feels justified in holding on to anger, blame and resentment the other feels a need to protect themselves. Both parties feel victimized by the other, bringing about protective behavior that leads to justification, faultfinding, avoidance and malicious gossip. The individuals involved will often go to others in the organization to gain agreement on why they are feeling justified in avoiding the other person and the conflict can soon create tension or bring about punishing behavior in other relationships, increasing the complexity of the initial issue. By gossiping about another person to someone else, that person is now involved in the conflict.

When a team is blamed for a mistake, or is hurt in some way either intentionally or inadvertently and there is no forgiveness present the team members begin to feel like it is “us against them”. Conversations between team members revolve around what is wrong with the other teams or “corporate” and it becomes difficult to unravel the situation because there is no longer a responsible person or person directly involved. You cannot forgive phantom entities like “them”, “accounting”, “sales”, “HR”, or “corporate”. This team separation leads to score keeping, negative politics, internal competition and kingdom building within an organization.

At the system level of organization we are dealing with cultural issues from within the organization and community perceptions from outside. A

culture that does not promote forgiveness will be engaged in negative and destructive politics. People will be afraid to speak out and will hide their true feeling, secrecy will be the common operating mode, employee trust will be low and turnover will be high. In a climate of secrecy people assume the worst, which leads to internal competition, gossip and misinformation. Typically in this type of organization it takes a great deal of effort to produce even the smallest results and burnout is common.

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Effect Of Forgiveness On Individuals And Organizations

Forgiveness in search of reward is not true forgiveness. Forgiving occurs for its own sake, not to obtain external recognition or acknowledgement. Forgiveness also may lead to personal and social benefits. Forgiving responses have been found to buffer ill-health by decreasing all static loads and by promoting physiological and psychological healing. Stressful interpersonal relationships are associated with alterations in the endocrine systems, the pituitary glands and the adrenal hormones, that forgiveness serves a buffering function in minimizing the harmful effects of these kind of stress. They found that the quality of social relationships was predicted by two dispositional attributes that are trait anger and forgiveness. Forgiveness with long term benefits to social adjustment, physical health and mental health. Emotional and social stability are positively correlated with dispositional forgiveness, as a greater life satisfaction, self-esteem and more complete recovery from disease. Forgiveness is negatively correlated with detrimental personality factors such as neuroticism, worry, anxiety, depression and hostility. Developing the virtue of forgiveness has been shown to have benefits to physical, mental, emotional and social health in individuals.

According to Scobie and Scobie (1998), negative aspects such as anger, hostility and resentment can cause stress and tension in interpersonal relationships at the workplace. Stress and tension can affect ones physical and mental health (Lamb, 2005). In order to reduce this debilitating emotion, forgiveness is one aspect that can be considered. Forgiveness is expected to reduce negative feelings and promote interpersonal peace and harmony which is a positive mental state, which can then be focused into work related productivity (Anderson, 2007). Stone (2002) explained that when employees and managers have an in-depth understanding of the value of forgiveness, it actually provides opportunities to use the mistakes, failures, flaws and breakdowns of life and change it positive aspects in terms of greater wisdom, compassion and capability within the workers themselves and each other.

Majority of organizations report a sense of injustice, personal and organizational injury, and irreparable damage as a result of cutbacks. Almost

all post-downsizing organizations develop negative internal attributes such as deteriorating morale, communication, trust, innovation, participative decision making and flexibility. At the same time, they experience increases in conflict, rigidity, scapegoat leaders, secretiveness, politicking, fear and short term focus. Because of these internal dysfunctions, organizational performance in areas such as employee turnover, quality and productivity almost always suffer as well. The six organizational virtues included dispositional forgiveness, restoration forgiveness, hope, compassion, respect and integrity. Forgiveness appears to buffer negative effects and fosters the capability to move forward, to put aside feeling of injustice and harm, and to view the organization positively. Although not intended to produce instrumental organizational performance, organizational virtues appear and nevertheless it to be positive predictors of desired outcomes.

Previous researches found links between forgiveness and productivity after downsizing, higher morale and satisfaction, trust and caring in a relationship (Cameron and Caza, 2002; McCullough et al., 2003). This is because forgiveness can lessen resentment on positive initiatives taken by organisation such as downsizing, layoffs and restructuring. Furthermore it lessens the negative emotional effect resulting from unjust treatment. The minimization of negative emotional feelings avoid distraction of workers on their current level of job performance (Butler and Mullis, 2001)

Who Managers Need To Forgive

“Wrong can stick like a nettle in the memory, but through forgiveness the nettle can be removed.” The ability to forgive is important for success in management. Forgiveness can be a motivational transformation that inclines managers to inhibit relationship. Forgiving for the manager can be described as a human resources management strategy and an art. Forgiveness must begin personally with the managers. So, managers must be able to practice personal forgiveness. Most managers hold themselves up as role models to employees and strive for perfection.

Forgiveness cannot occur when personal failure is denied. When managers do not deal with their own failures, the unresolved consequences of those failures are likely not only to diminish their productivity but also to destroy their own sense of well-being.

First, the acceptance of personal failures is essential if authentic forgiveness that can leads to more widespread healing is to occur. A manager who is able to practice personal forgiveness may easily forgive employees when they have made mistakes. On the other hand those managers that have

high personal standards and believe themselves to rarely make mistakes may not be that forgivable. Instead they may find that the mistakes of employees as a provocation to debilitating anger. The most difficult act to forgive are actions of staff members who have sabotaged the manager's effectiveness by relaying disparaging remarks about the manager's competency. This may deplete the physical and mental energies of all involved and hinders mutual respect that might have thrived in the work environment. A manager who practices forgiveness can resolve destructive, alienating relationships and work to create an environment of goodwill throughout the organization. In short successful managers not only learn to confess their humanity but also to forgive their fellow staff members as well.

Besides, the manager must also be able to forgive supervisors or those with authority for decisions or actions that the manager finds unacceptable. Every employee forced to choose between supporting their manager or employer will not function to their fullest potential and will flounder in confusion marked by dispiritedness. For the manager, failure to forgive self, employees or administration will lead to lack of productivity and often to aggressive and passive-aggressive behavior. Failure to forgive also can result in feelings of blame, bitterness and guilt. A manager who feels guilty about personal actions or fails to forgive others will be ineffective and interpersonal relationship with staff will deteriorate (Lamb, 2005). Furthermore, guilt can lead to feelings of depression and personal unhappiness.

Creating A Culture Of Forgiveness

The real work of forgiveness begins on the individual level of awareness. Contrary to our constant search for happiness from people and situations outside ourselves, nothing and no one outside ourselves will ever bring us true happiness. Thinking that the right job, the right employees, the right partner, the right amount of money or stuff will bring us the joy and satisfaction we seek is a delusion that keeps us from discovering real happiness which can only come from fully embracing this precious moment.

When we forgive, we free ourselves from the fear and anger that we have imposed on our minds by holding on to the past. The people who we feel have betrayed us or let us down become mirrors for our own growth and development. By having compassion for ourselves we can more deeply understand the needs, desires, fears and motivations of others. This can bring great peace of mind, reduce stress and lead to greater satisfaction, joy and fulfillment from our work.

Interpersonal relationships will thrive if we let go of having to be right about what the other person has done wrong and take the first steps towards

creating more nurturing relationships. Saying “I’m sorry” is not a sign of weakness. It takes great courage and strength of character to take responsibility for creating healing in a relationship even when the fault appears to belong to the other party. This is not about fault or blame. It is about using the discontent, anger and letdowns in a relationship to learn, grow, set appropriate boundaries, negotiate clear working agreements and resolve unfulfilled expectations and miscommunications.

When we demonstrate forgiveness at the level of team, people feel safe to express themselves fully, leading to greater creativity, innovation and risk taking. People will work harder and have crucial “courageous conversations” because they feel recognized and appreciated. They are willing to play full out because they feel safe to voice their concerns as well as their dreams and aspirations. Forgiveness leads to an empowered and fully functioning work team.

Organizations that develop a culture of forgiveness will breed authentic, courageous and open conversations based on their values and vision as well as the current commitments and strategic objectives. This develops trusts and will build pride in the organization. Customer satisfaction will soar because people will bring the quality of joy and satisfaction to their work and customers. People will find greater meaning and value in the work they are doing. In a forgiving organization people will want to stay and will work towards the success of the company and their fellow employees. Employee retention ceases to be an issue. A true sense of community will arise within the organization.

Process Of Creating A Forgiving Culture In An Organisation (Interventions)

Numerous processes of creating a forgiving culture in an organization or also termed as interventions are discussed in the psychological literature. This section presented some of these studies and notes their application to potential workplace or organizational interventions. However before a process is instigated it is important to note that forgiveness interventions must acknowledge the implications and complexities of gender, culture, religion, class, and personal histories (Orr et al., 2005). Various researchers and authors such as Aquino, Tripp, & Bies, (2006), extend a “call for action” for managerial efforts to “reengineer” their organizations “to include a procedurally just climate” that creates appropriate settings for forgiveness. Some of the suggestions made by literatures (Madsen et. al. 2006) include the following six categories:

1. Third-party interventions:

According to Struthers et al. (2005), there are situations where workers can be “encouraged to forgive such conflicts following third-party interventions developed to facilitate forgiveness” and that “by helping workers overcome the potentially debilitating reactions that can arise from conflict with their coworkers,” forgiveness interventions can help repair damaged workplace relationships and assist in building more healthy workplaces.

2. Social interest interventions:

Butler and Mullis (2001) is of the opinion that social interest increases forgiveness. Therefore organizational development interventions may encourage the development of social interest, and subsequently would also inculcate a forgiving culture. As a result interventions such as intergroup team-building, third-party peacemaking, and survey feedback processes, which focus on social interest development in organizations, may “also promote forgiveness as a problem-solving strategy for workplace conflict”.

3. Writing and journaling:

Writing and journaling may be effective activities to aid in conflict management, conflict resolution, and interpersonal communication interventions within the workplace. Professional counseling available through an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) may already be utilizing such methods ultimately as performance improving techniques. Landry et. al. (2005) reseerach study the influence of writing and journaling about an interpersonal offense on a person's motivation to forgive. In their study with undergraduate students, they found that those who wrote about their conflict reported significant improvements in the manner they reflected on and experienced the interpersonal conflict. Participants who verbalized their thoughts and feelings also reported cognitive changes, improved understanding of the conflict, and improved coping skills. Landry and her associates cited research that found the benefits of writing tended to persist and even grow stronger over time. They also found that while the female gender benefit from writing, the males had benefited even more.

4. Educational programs:

Rodden (1997) discussed various dimensions of forgiveness. His framework is of steps to be taken towards character education. Interestingly, character education is often an important component of workplace ethics training and development interventions. He recommends that steps toward forgiveness must be addressed in such educational programs. Hui and Ho (2004) found that forgiveness was a “viable classroom guidance program” that demonstrated student improvements in forgiveness, self-esteem, and hope. They did warn, however, that short programs (e.g., three or four weeks) are not enough time to demonstrate significant changes. They noted that group forgiveness interventions were effective in helping some participants forgive specific individuals but not others in general. Denton and Martin (1998) argued

that “education about forgiveness is essential in emphasizing the power of individual choice, the personalized aspects of its process, and its real benefits” (p. 289). Education can empower employees by providing knowledge of what is happening as well as promoting awareness of the possible biases and assumptions they may have which may hinder the forgiveness process.

5. Forgiveness programs:

Hubler (2005) reported on his use of a Family Forgiveness Ritual ©, which he found to be effective with problems incurred in family-owned businesses. The operation of this intervention used individual counseling and the inclusion of a member of the clergy selected by the family. It must be noted that while this type of intervention may be useful for a small, close-knit group such as a family, it may not be as helpful in a larger organization. This is an issue that needed consideration. A time may arise when an individual should be referred to a therapist for help with anger management, which might lead to forgiveness therapy. Some type of group forgiveness therapy may be appropriate for situations such as a major downsizing or a hostile takeover. It would appear that training of leaders in modeling forgiveness as well as general training in conflict resolution might be more effective.

6. Empathy-building and communication interventions:

McCullough et al. (2003) research resulted in that individuals tended to have more forbearance if the transgression was not severe, if they had empathy with the transgressor, and if they did not have strong attribution of responsibility towards the transgressor. While the severity of the transgression may be beyond the control of management, it would appear that building strong empathy among employees would be helpful in encouraging forbearance and forgiveness. Communication might also mitigate the impact of responsibility attribution, although it appears to be important not to make excuses for genuine transgressions. Bottom et al. (2002) noted that “accepting blame may create better prospects for future cooperation in short interactions. By admitting a mistake, a person acknowledges their fallibility and may even generate increased attraction” (p. 510).

Not all of the interventions presented in this paper can be offered directly by managers in an HRD or human resources department. However, if leaders, managers, and HRD/HR professionals are educated and aware of the counseling options, they can provide employees with appropriate suggestions and recommendations for further assistance. For example, many companies offer employee assistance programs that provide professional counseling for various emotional issues and stressful situations. The use of EAPs by organizations has increased in past years as more businesses are finding that physically and mentally healthier employees are more productive. These interventions have shown to lead to improved workplace performance at all levels (Madsen et. al. 2008).

Conclusion

The act of forgiveness often has been minimized or ignored by organizational practitioners. This is unfortunate as researches have indicated the positive impact of forgiveness in issues within an organization. The power of forgiveness affects individual and organisational outcomes. The ability to forgive creates healthy relationships among workforce that takes away resentment and other negative debilitating emotion that interferes and distract workers away from job performance and work execution. Forgiveness brings positive results in organizations. It results in better work relationships, motivating work environment and higher morale. Managers can implement six processes that can intervene or assist in creating a forgiving culture in their organization. The processes are third-party interventions, social interest interventions, writing and journaling, educational programs, forgiveness programs, empathy-building and communication interventions.

From the understanding of the positive implication of forgiveness in an organization, managers should take steps in developing and create the culture of forgiveness in the workplace through the undertaking of the various process discussed in this paper.

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