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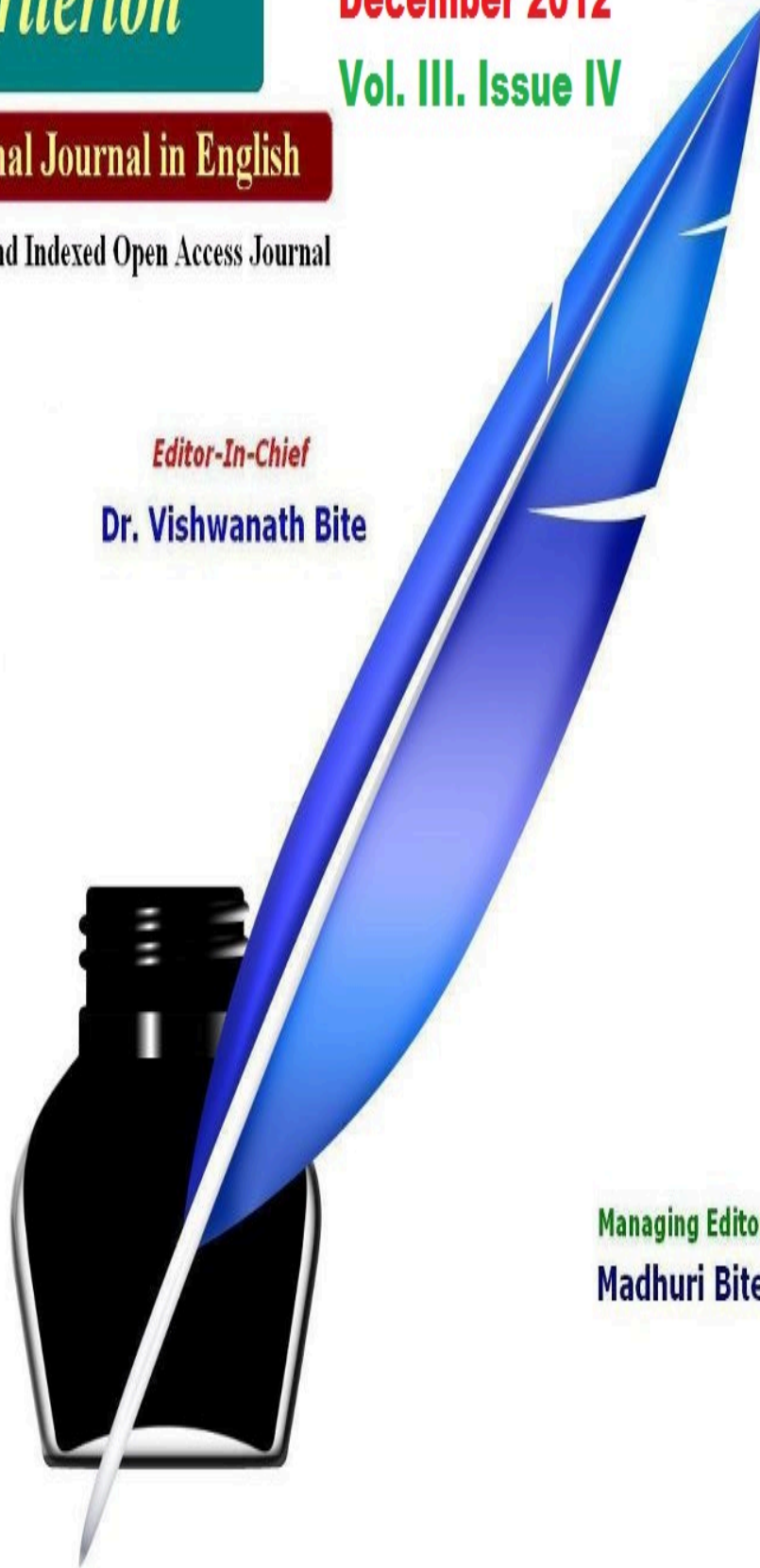
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Human Fallibility, Communication and Error Management

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Human fallibility - with the very definition of man, I stand up with my emotional bill of rights to proclaim -

I have the right to make mistakes
This is how I feel
This is what I am.

The knowledge of one's own fallibility cannot keep one from making mistakes. The paper is all about fallibility, a human factor in organisation life and error avoidant strategies.

Building an institution is a passion and success comes only with committed efforts of everyone who are involved in such a noble task. There cannot be a more satisfying effort than taking part in such a venture. The paper carries with itself a memory with lessons moral:

‘Life is lived forwards, but understood backwards’

Central to an understanding of the crisis situation is an understanding of the communication barriers in organisational settings; of who is the communicator, who is the communicatee, how and when it gets communicated; and how decisions are made, both concerning what actions to take and who are the people in administration. But mistakes are never made in gathering and transmitting information, they just happen. Every system at some point is subject to fail and every individual subject to fall. Failure condition in most of the institutes occur when the system requires the modification of concepts and demands the establishment of new concepts.

The aim of any error analysis is to provide a psychological explanation (Abbot, 1980: 124). Errors are a result of a chain of causes in which the precipitating psychological facts – misjudgments, momentary inattention, forgetfulness, and preoccupation – are often the last and least manageable links in the chain. In searching for the reasons why the institutions or organisations fail to establish credibility and to go deeper into understanding the reason for failures, the paper poses some questions:

What are the common causes of the mistake?
What are the extents of damage due to the mistakes?
What is the lasting impact of the mistake?
Is the mistake intentional or unintentional?
Any erroneous assumptions made?
Is there any external influence?
Are there any multiple small mistakes that lead to a larger one? Can it be corrected? How?
What can I learn from the present mistake?

Are there any unaddressed patterns of behavior that lead to the failure of the systems?

Learn to ask some simple questions when a mistake is made to simplify the outcome instead of worrying about the mistake or dwelling on it after it is done.

Role of Communication on Learning from Errors

The overriding issue for members of almost every organisation is the inability to communicate. This limits the flow of information in organisations. Communication problems can cover the gamut: lack of communication down the hierarchy, little communicating across sections, poor feedback or acknowledgement within teams, and leaders' messages being misunderstood or distorted. Poor communication sabotages every positive aspect of the organization.

No matter how compelling a vision, how enlightened a policy, how clear a strategic plan - it will not focus behavior in a positive direction if it is not communicated or understood by every stakeholder! In organisations, even harmless communications slip-ups can backfire. Too often leaders over- react and loosen the tongue. During a strike in one of the universities in Odisha, the outraged statement,

‘Don’t bring your rented parents’

created a havoc. The utterance is pragmatically unacceptable. We are responsible for what we speak. This is a covert error, superficially well formed but which do not mean what the learner intended to mean until it becomes clearer that “rented parents” refer to the ‘hired parent show practice by some students’. Clearly it was a mistake, unintentional. A plausible interpretation could have been obtained by referring to the context in which the utterance was produced or by translating the idea literally into the student language. This directs all of us to think before, prevent blunders that can have negative consequences.

Ambiguity in job definitions, ambiguity in dialogues, hasty decisions, and untimely declarations aggravate the situation in the organisations. Many managers neglect to take the time necessary to seek out long-term solutions to the problems of their organizations in the zeal to fix problems quickly. It is necessary to remember that speed is vital and haste is fatal.

Listening to Be Heard

The biggest mistake is simply not having official channels in place for emotional expression:

‘You are a headache’
‘Don’t bring problems to my table’

Most disgruntled students or employees post to blogs and twitter because they feel like they are not being heard by the organisation. They get frustrated with the disinterested endeavour of the authority and they think to themselves,

“I’ll show them, I’ll post a negative review on Orkut/Twitter/Blog.”

And they do it!

If organisations would simply look at how they're listening to their people, and how they escalate and resolve everyday problem, many of the reputation problems you see would never make it to the web. The paper makes learning possible by moving the focus away from the blame assignment – blaming the management, the employees and the staff towards understanding to provide a forum for the unheard voices, the feel that there is an outlet where everyone can be heard.

Disclosure

The basis of any relationship is communication. Without communication – be it written or spoken – there is no connection and hence no relationship. Communication involves a back-and-forth exchange, a give - and - take. You are trying to understand the system, the employees are trying to understand the management and the management is trying to understand the employees, i.e., you are trying to understand the other person and the other person is trying to understand you, and you have each to get a message across. The mindset is always subject to revision with a strategic disclosure. One learns with time - 'The sooner you realize that the world - your world included — will change whether you like it or not, the better'.

Trust

Any change must be communicated with rationale behind the change made clear. Failure to walk the talk, and subjecting employees to random, haphazard change destroys the trust. Further, trust is broken by the failure to demonstrate the quality or behavioural expectation. The organisations can demonstrate trust in the employees by welcoming their feelings. An emotionally intelligent person recognizes there's an emotional component even to the factual level of communication and that trust and comfort must be nurtured along. Every effort should be made to resolve situations by cooperating with the people, who are the co-respondents in the situation. The organisations can also provide the option – to choose between the Old / the New that will affect the career or change mindset. Constant talks, one-on-one with boss, presentations, discussions, news postings, written policies, frequent interaction, and open door policy will help in generating a stimulus response and the managers can establish credibility. This suggests deliberateness in implementation of communication strategies. To learn that people listen to you only when they trust you empower the management with a sense of control over the situation.

Any time the challenges of adapting to change are to deal with uncertainty- uncertainty with the ambiguity of language. Often the issue originates out of partial understanding, non-understanding, misunderstanding, disinterested endeavour, hearing what one wants to hear, preconceived notion and attitudinal disposition. This lead to error spirals and of state of unreadiness for unguarded interaction.

Overreliance on Automated System

Complacency and overreliance on automated system is another cause of the failure in the system. The analysis suggest that employees do not automatically share information or knowledge about errors. Thomas Edison once said that it takes 10,000 mistakes to find an answer. Continued silence over slips, lapses, mistakes lead to severe negative consequences. An intolerant view

towards errors, for example, more easily elicits a reprimand than praise upon reporting. Managers should take away that errors with insignificant negative consequences is a valid standard than the degree of negative consequences. Organisations should be stimulated to prevent themselves from twice bitten.

Workplace Culture

The paper measures to diagnose organizational factors that create error producing factors with the individual, the team, the task and the workplace. A 'just' culture is important in the organization life. People should feel that they are able to voice their opinions without fear of reprisal. The most alarming and surprising thing is the frosty silence of the staff and employees during crisis situations clearly expressing the pent up frustration. Employers may be taking the necessary steps to streamline operations to remain viable, many employees may feel neglected in the process. The result is a disengaged and disgruntled workforce. Major operational decisions, particularly negative ones, must be accompanied by compassionate communication that helps employees get through tough times. So it makes sense ideologically, to make considerate communication part of the error management plan for dealing with tough times.

Communication Loop

It is a serious concern that managers, employees are - ARE NOT – in loop. People feel they are in dark. The internal state is surely a mismatch between the employee choice and organisation demand. The widening gap between the sections or units in the functional areas of the organisations, located at different locations limit the capability. Some error avoidant strategies can be adopted like hiring of skilled communicators to promote the organization objectives and make communication decisions. And human resources can form staff council. Linguistic artifacts such as value statements can be put in writing and all desirable behaviours reinforced. The torrent of rumors and speculation surrounding elude with the realisation:

It doesn't matter how long we may have been stuck in a sense of our limitations. If we go into a darkened room and turn on the light, it doesn't matter if the room has been dark for a day, a week, or ten thousand years -- we turn on the light and it is illuminated (Sharon Salzberg).

The mistakes made are truly powerful in teaching a new way to approach the problem. When you focus on the improvements and lessons learned from a mistake you reinforce the ability to make mistakes part of the process and something that is accepted as long as it improves things.

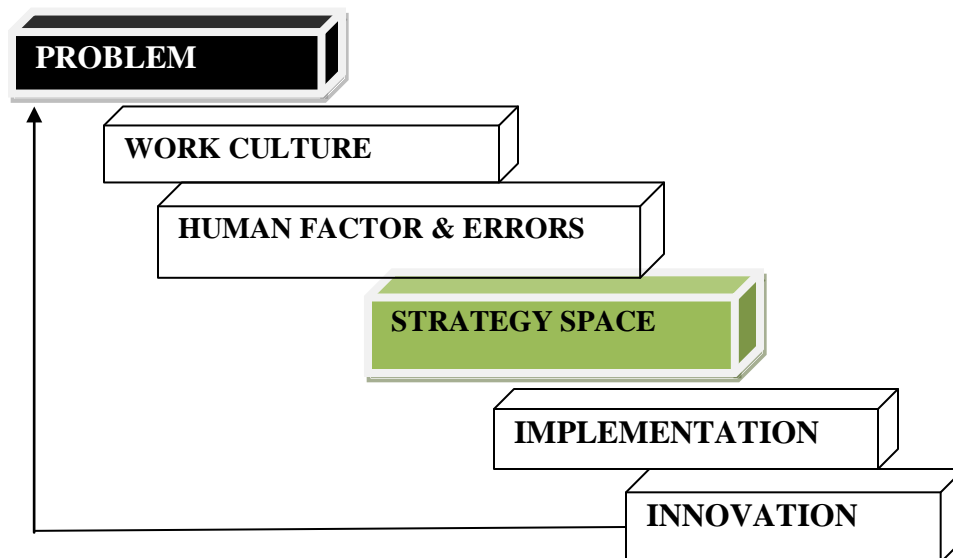
A communication training and error management workshop should be incorporated into a change initiative, such as department or organization redesign, culture change, and new system implementation. Research shows that conversations and clarification in a constructive way follow a mistake. Furthermore, future prevention in the form of discussions, specification of new working procedures and establishment of new control mechanism is caused by mistakes. The subjects also have common understandings of a human factor in errors.

The first fallibility in the nature of man is to walk the three judged myths and truisms giving an unconscious dent at the very innovation itself. Few open up their mind and hearts and become judgmental to them. Moving on we encounter comparison in an illusive stand of competition.

The realisation cajoles to overcome fallibility when the need for it becomes formidable- in the realm of education awareness of fallibility smoothens the study teeling away the intellectual informative – fallible is a cosmic corruption that manifests in us without our wanting to have it so. So, it cannot be rubbed off but can be morphed by a sheer force of commitment and unflinching awareness.

¹‘Without that human element of commitment to task, commitment to each other, preparedness wouldn’t have done anything. The best plan never would have opened up’. (A World Trade Centre Firm Manager)

The new strategy introduces a dynamic adaptive cycle and strategy typology to renovate the system. This can be seen as a fundamental process in the error management strategy:



Thus, from a crisis situation emerges a centre of innovation - a capacity to create real change and transformative experiential learning.

¹ Daniel Beunza and David Stark, The organization of responsiveness: innovation and recovery in the trading rooms of lower Manhattan, Socio- Economic Review(2003)1, 149.