

Manpower

Few years back I was invited by two loss making (sick) companies (with common executive director) to conduct half a day program each, on **Managing Turnaround and Transformation**. Since I had been conducting full PGP effective course in an IIM for several years and also conducted few Management Development Programmes, I tended to consider myself as an expert in the field..

Anyway, I conducted 3 ½ hours module on the topic for executive of each of the two companies, in common training centre, including my favorite topic **Creative Problem Solving**, for turnaround management. I was quite happy and satisfied (as the senior executive/ officers seemed to understand and enjoy the inputs), till the common valedictory session at the end of day came.

The valedictory was to be delivered to the participant by common executive director. As the waiting for his arrival became a little long, one Chief Manager asked “But in the final analysis Sir, Don’t you think that the turnaround in our company can’t be achieved unless the manpower is cut to half?”

I was taken aback by the question. “My eight hours down the drain, I thought”. I however, composed myself and wrote the word manpower on the board with a slash between man and power (man/power) and asked ” which one you want to reduce to half, man or power?”.

The Chief Manager fumbled for a while and then said “Man”.

I then asked “What would you do if the “man” is reduced to half?”

He again fumbled and said “I did not understand your question “. I told him if the man is reduced to half, you will lose his job, then what will you do?

He then said “I did not mean I should be terminated. I meant workers”.

I asked “Did workers recruiters you all of themselves? If you recruited them and then did utilize, who should be sacked?”

They got the point that the management of humane turnaround is possible only if executives collectively assume responsibility of retraining and redeployment of workers to move to a new strategy

The obsession with quick fix of “downsizing” and “exit” has led to Indian companies premature closing down with colossal waste of physical, financial and human resources. More importantly, the episode made me wonder whether the word manpower is understood correctly as asset.

It takes huge effort to create that power (to deliver), but it is wasted by wrong understanding and loose usage of the word manpower, in a mechanistic way, instead of working towards improving utilization of power created. Increasing power in “men” and utilization of it, becomes an organizationwide responsibility of executives and managers at various levels, to be able to increase the delivery capacity of the organization without adding more “men”.

Indeed, if due care is not taken “power” keeps on reducing and organizations with relatively more “manpower” may need more “manpower” (than the ones which work towards increasing power), with attended economic losses.

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