Morale In The Workplace Essay, Research Paper

Morale – OverviewMorale, often used synonymously with job satisfaction, can be simply defined as the general attitude an employee has toward his or her job. Good morale is often a reflection that job satisfaction is high – that there is little difference between the rewards provided and what an employee believes he/she should receive. Conversely, poor or low morale reflects workers’ dissatisfaction with some job related matters. Good morale, or job satisfaction, is considered a key dependent variable in an organization’s human resources effectiveness (Robbins). It ranks high on the list with productivity, absenteeism and turnover as key indicators of how effective an organization is in conducting its business. Job satisfaction has often been linked positively to productivity, although no casual relationship has been concretely established (Robbins). It is also believed to be positively and negatively affected by certain job related factors. Factors That Positively Affect MoraleMental Challenge Mentally challenging work is one factor that purportedly is conducive to job satisfaction. According to Robbins, employees tend to prefer jobs that give them opportunities to use their skill and abilities. Variety is also a key element of mentally challenging work. With too little challenge, an employee will become bored, however, too much challenge creates frustration and feelings of failure. Equitable Rewards Another purported contributor is equitable rewards. Employees tend to prefer compensation and reward structures that are fair and unambiguous. Monetary compensation needs to be viewed as fair based on the demands of the job, the individual’s skill level, and comparable salaries. Money is not always the issue; for some people, trade-offs such as location, stock options or less demanding work are more attractive than the level of their salary. This is key in recognizing that equitable rewards must be seen as fair by the employee. Job Fit But of course, job fit, which is being in the right job in which skills, temperament, strengths and weaknesses find a match with job requirements, cannot be overlooked. For happy employees certainly make for a positive work environment as well as higher levels of productivity. Effects Of Low Morale There are also some factors that are associated with low morale; not as the cause of it, but certainly as a manifestation of it. These are cited by Robbins as absenteeism, turnover, and low productivity. Other factors include poor attitudes and depression.Absenteeism Absenteeism has a consistent negative relationship with job satisfaction. Workers who are unhappy tend to seek every opportunity to stay away from the job. This is made easier by privacy laws which protect employees who use sick days as vacation or “mental health days”. By offering a flimsy excuse to their superiors, employees are able to take advantage of their company and a system put in place for their benefit. Managers’ task to keep absenteeism to a minimum while increasing productivity is therefore not always an easy one. For when negative factors exist in the workplace, absenteeism rises. These negative factors, such as eminent layoffs, dissatisfaction with compensation, personality conflicts or poor job fits, lead to low morale, poor attitudes, low productivity and sometimes depression in the workplace. According to CCH Inc. of Riverwoods, IL, an employment attitude survey company, absenteeism is on the rise. In 1994, small businesses had a 46% increase in absenteeism (from 5.4 missed days to 8 missed days). While there are acceptable applications of absenteeism, CCN, Inc. has found that more and more employees are missing work due to stress or simply because they feel they deserve the time off. Costs associated with absenteeism are estimated to be approximately $1,000 per person/per year (Sinton). When this statistic is applied to large corporations with excess of 50,000 employees, the impact of absenteeism on the bottom line is staggering. Turnover Turnover is also negatively related to morale and job satisfaction. Interestingly enough, turnover has a much higher correlation with low job satisfaction than absenteeism did (Robbins). This means that people would rather quit their job, than stay and simply use up sick leave. According to Robbins, ” an important moderator of the satisfaction-turnover relationship is the employee’s level of performance. Specifically, level of satisfaction is less important in predicting turnover for superior performers.” Superior performers are the ones who are consistently recognized by their organization and often receive rewards such as bonuses, pay increases, praise, official recognition and greater opportunities to excel within the company. Low Productivity Productivity, and the responsibility for achieving it through workers, rests with mangers. Often it is difficult for a manager to recognize the various factors that motivate employees to produce. Many managers feel that they are ineffective at influencing their staff (McClelland). There are two schools of thought about motivation. One believes an employee with an internal locus of control motivates himself/herself. This means that the person sees within himself/herself the ability to control his or her own destiny (Robbins). These are the types of people who will take control of a situation and make the best of it. Employees with an internal locus of control tend to be more productive than those with an external locus of control. For those with an external locus of control, the world uses them as a punching bag. They feel that they have no control over their environment and that management will always be making decision about the direction of their personal work environment. The other school of thought is that the manager is responsible for motivation through the provision of incentives for good performance. Theories of motivation support this supposition. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Theory claims that there is a hierarchy of five needs – psychological, safety, social, esteem and self-actualization. As each lower level need is met, the next need on the hierarchy becomes a dominant factor in motivating a person.Need DescriptionPhysiological Includes hunger, thirst, shelter, sex and other bodily needsSafety Includes security and protection from physical and emotional harmSocial Includes affection, belongingness, acceptance and friendshipEsteem Includes internal esteem factors (self respect, autonomy and achievement) and external esteem factors (status, recognition and attention)Self Actualization The drive to become what one is capable of becoming; includes growth, achieving one’s potential and self-fulfillment(Robbins) Other theories such as Theory X and Theory Y, Motivation-Hygiene Theory, ERG Theory, and McClelland’s Hierarchy of Needs are tools managers can use to understand what makes their employees happy and productive. With this knowledge, adjustments to work environment, compensation and other influential factors can be fine-tuned to meet the needs of each employee. This alone will encourage feelings of appreciation, admiration, understanding and affirmation among the employees.Poor Attitudes Attitude can make or break a work relationship. When these evaluative judgements about work related concerns take a negative turn, you can expect morale to decrease as well. Even one person in a group or team with a negative attitude can breed more negativity amongst co-workers. To cite an example, in the summer of 1998, MCI was waiting for governmental approval of its proposed merger with WorldCom. These telecommunications leaders were poised to create a formidable force in the telecommunications industry. Rumors abounded among the employees. The largest concerns were the possibility of layoffs and reduced benefits. In one group, a young lady spent every lunch hour expounding upon all the things that could go wrong once the merger was complete. At times, her doom and gloom outlook would increase the anxiety and fear of her co-workers. Her judgmental attitude caused so much distress that her co-workers were forced to ban discussions of the merger during their lunch breaks. This lady’s negative attitude was precipitated by a poor working relationship with her superior, a feeling of unfair compensation, work-related stress as well as anxieties and stress in her personal life. As her discussions of the upcoming merger reflected a poor attitude, the attitudes of her co-workers began to take the same turn for a short period of time.

Management directs its efforts to improving morale through attitude surveys which ask employees about their job, the organization and it’s processes. This is done confidentially in the hope that employees will feel free to share their true feelings. Management then assess results and targets strategies for improvement. According to Ralph Jacobson, to improve morale and productivity, managers need to keep five questions in mind:+ Is there agreement about what needs to be done?+ Does the employee know how to do the task?+ Does the employee have the resources to do the job?+ Is the employee motivated to accomplish the task?+ Does the employee know how well the job was accomplished? Once a manager recognizes the importance of the answers to these questions, he or she will be able to provide employees with the correct information and tools to accomplish their tasks. Having the necessary tools is a large hurdle to overcome. As an example, upgrading a computer with more memory or a larger hard-drive helps the employee recognize the importance of their work and motivates them to work harder. Because many managers are promoted for their technical skills and less on account of managerial skills, it may not be an idle suggestion that perhaps motivation education be included in their management training programs. Apart from understanding theories of motivation, it could be helpful to sensitize them to personality traits and differences in learning styles and approaches. Myers Briggs and other individual trait tests, when used properly, can provide managers with a wealth of information about their staff.Depression in the Workplace Depression in the workplace is a topic not often discussed because it is often hard for a supervisor to diagnose. Generally, the manifestations of the depression receive the most attention. Numerous illnesses, including anxiety, substance abuse, back pain, diabetes, and headaches, are symptoms of depression and can be costly in of themselves. Because depression spurs so many associated illnesses, absenteeism definitely increases in depressed employees. These and many other problems affect the employee at work and decrease productivity (Greenberg). With nearly 11 million Americans affected by depression each year, only one in three people seek treatment (Greenberg). A system-wide approach to this problem would most likely be the most beneficial to the employees. Rather than taking a heavy-handed, cost-cutting approach to reduce necessary medical care that improves the bottom line, employers need to look into increasing and improving medical care. As Greenberg states in Sloan Management Review, ” investing in a worker’s health has far-reaching implications in the workplace itself. Such investments can improve employees’ work performance, reduce absenteeism, result in fewer accidents, and free colleagues to concentrate on their own responsibilities rather than covering for an ill coworker.” Steps To Alleviate Low Morale And Achieve Higher MoraleEffective CommunicationThere are two basic types of communication: listening and sharing. In an organizational environment, both are necessary to keep morale on the upswing. Empathic communication, a phrase coined by Stephen R. Covey in his Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, is listening with the intent to understand. This involves registering what is being said and reflecting upon the information as well as focusing on the true communication of one person to another. By receiving the information and asking questions, the other person is able to share more emotion as well as information. This type of listening provides affirmation to the person sharing. When a manager truly listens to an employee, the employee feels important, appreciated and understood. These emotions go a long way towards increasing the employees’ attitude towards their manager and work environment (Covey). One of the scariest things an employee can experience is being left in the dark, especially during transitional times. Whether the changes are additional staff hirings, new management, benefits changes, changes in the chain of command or new parking procedures, employees have a need to know this information in advance. Explaining changes after the fact, or not at all, makes the employee feel powerless. If known in advance, the employee has an opportunity to voice his/her opinion, even if that opinion will have no weight on the decision. Proactive communication is essential in keeping morale high. Confidentiality is important, but in most cases, there is information that can be shared. Large corporations have made use of technology to keep their employees informed through intranet sites. This communications avenue provides information to the greatest audience possible in a consistent forum. Mass emails are also an effective way of getting information to employees. When large changes are forthcoming, top-down briefings may be called for. In this way, the message remains consistent while allowing each manager to deliver the information to their employees in a more personal atmosphere.Recognition/Award ProgramsWhether it’s a simple “pat on the back”, bonus check, plaque or all expense paid vacation, rewards at work will motivate employees. Recognition programs are a formal way to publicly reward employees for exemplary work. A recognition program should be developed so that it is geared towards individual as well as group achievements (Robbins). Often, tiers of rewards are established so larger accomplishments can receive larger rewards. Once the program is developed, management should focus on effectively communicating the applications of the program including the requirements that must be met as well as the award structure. Not all employees will be motivated by monetary rewards. Casual-dress days, time off in compensation for overtime, and lunch “on the boss” are all examples of informal recognition. The key is to find what motivates each employee, then apply that to his or her work environment.Employee InvolvementBroadly covering many aspects of individual and group management, employee involvement is also known as workplace democracy, participate management, empowerment and employee ownership (Robbins). This is often achieved by delegating authority as well as responsibility to employees. Task groups are another way to gain insight into the needs of employees while involving them in the decision making process. Employees need to feel that they have impact on decisions that are made for their benefit. When management changes policies that affect the day-to-day functions of employees, the staff might feel that their needs were not taken into consideration. Conclusion U.S. managers have often looked to the Japanese for ways to increase productivity. Many have walked away with slogans touting teamwork and quality, however, the problems are never resolved and productivity is not able to meet the benchmarks created by the Japanese. As Hall states, ” . Maybe all we really need to borrow from the Japanese is their philosophy that ‘a problem holds the seed of its own solution’.” By empowering and educating managers, the entire staff will reap the benefits of a more interactive, enjoyable work environment. A good manager works with his/her employees to make them feel responsible. He also recognizes their efforts and rewards them appropriately. By fostering a team spirit and pride in achievements, the employees will respond positively and their performance will improve (McClelland). Often, the seed is management. Bibliography Covey, Stephen R., Simon & Schuster, The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, 1989. Greenberg, Paul E.; Finkelstein, Stan N.; Berndt, Ernst R., Economic Consequences Of Illness In The Workplace.., Vol. 36, Sloan Management Review, 06-25-1995, pp26(13). Hall, Jay, Americans Know How To Be Productive If Managers Will Let Them.., Vol. 22, Organizational Dynamics, 01-01-1994, pp 33(14). Jacobson, Ralph, 5 Questions Leaders Need To Answer About Employees, Minneapolis Star Tribune, 09-09-1996, pp 03D. McClelland, David C – McBer and Co.; David H. Burnham – Boston Univ.; – Harvard Univ., Power Is The Great Motivator., Harvard Business Review, 01-01-1995, pp 126. Robbins, Stephen P., Prentice-Hall, Inc., Organizational Behavior, 1998. Sinton, Peter; San Francisco Chronicle, Rise In Number Of Workers Playing Hooky Jolts Small Firms Absenteeism Rate Up 46% In Small Companies; Stress Often Gets Blame., Denver Rocky Mountain News, 10-11-1998, pp2J.