Human Resource strategies at Super- Pharm to lead the process of deepening the understanding of the Organizational identification of managers in the organization

By: Shelly Roymesher (H.R organizational Psychologist) human resource manager at Super-Pharm

Shoshi Stat (H.R social psychologist) organizational consultant, Gaya organizational development

Abstract:

In the last few years, Super-Pharm has been going through a very meaningful and challenging growth and learning process in the Israeli and global market. As a company who conveys the importance of their family values and sets for themselves goals to upkeep their commitment and personal relationship with their employees, as well as their growing and learning process, Human Resources decided to create a fascinating cross organizational process whose purpose is to deepen the organizational identification and the connection of the managers and employees in the Super-Pharm branch.

The decision to lead this specific cross organizational process coincides with Super-Pharms perception that has been driving them for years, which states that activities that boost the morale of employees and managers are an integral part of their organizations culture, traditions and perception of values of their entire branch. The basic assumption underlying this perception is that investing in these channels is most important and has the ability to strengthen the values of the organization.

In order to do so, while celebrating 30 years since the founding of Super-Pharm, there were over 5000 exciting workshops for all employees, from the highest manager to the average employee, who were led and guided by the executives of the branch. The workshops consisted of identity dilemmas and their connection to the organization, employees expressed their wishes for the way they would like to see Super-Pharm and where they want to see themselves in the organization in the future. The employees deepened their familiarity with important characteristics of the organization such as: promotion channels, the learning and coaching activities they offer, the welfare and community activities.

In this article we will survey the model that was developed for this process, and the challenges and questions we dealt with throughout the process.

Organizational background and the goals of Human Resource in this process

As a company that is going through a growth and learning process and as part of their goals to preserve and amplify the commitment and personal relationship of employees to the branch, we decided to put an emphasis on a cross organizational, strategic process that will lead to deepening the way employees and managers relate and identify with the organization. The decision to begin this process was merged with Super Pharms 30th anniversary and it was decided to organize workshops for all 5000 employees, led by managers of the different branches.

A few main targets were defined for this process:

1. Marking the 30th birthday of Super-Pharm and form an emotional bond between employees and this event.

2. Creating a framework that will allow personal and emotional dialogue with the identity dilemma and the relationship of employees and managers with the organization.

3. Giving the opportunity for employees to express their hopes and fantasies for the way they want the branch to look in the future.

4. An attempt to strengthen the feeling of involvement between employees and managers with the organization.

The goals above were defined also in light of the known world view in the literature. In general, over the last decade there has been an increasing interest on organizational identification, and it is well-known that there is a significant relationship between the level of organizational identification to different variables of organizational effectiveness, including employee's attitudes and behaviors - such as employee's level of performance, organizational civilian behavior and lower turnover rates.

For example, identification with a social group provides a wide range of individual human needs, such as the need for security and the need for belonging. It was also found that organizational identification may help in promoting a sense of meaning, self-empowerment and a sense of belonging to the workplace. According to Pratt, 1998, identification with the organization may also provide the holistic need of the individual, because the organization provides the individual's life with meaning, and helps him to find logic and purpose in his life.

The unique model we developed for this processes:

The process took place in all areas and levels of the organization and reached each and every employee. The working model was based on the managers being the ones to lead the workshops. The basic assumption of the model was that whoever is in charge of developing organizational identification is the professional manager and the job requirement of human resources is to formulate the strategy which best fits the processes and give the manager the skills and tools that are required.

In order to do so, the managers themselves participated in the workshop, where they were given a chance to deal with the issue of identification and their personal relationship with the Super-Pharm branch. They were also given tools to assist them in dealing with the guidance task. In practice, these workshops were used as a framework of "Train the trainer", where they experienced and learnt the workshop model which they later on conducted for the employees. In regards to this it is important to mention that the workshop process the mangers went through has more value than acquiring tools to conduct the workshop. In fact we are dealing with a parallel process, which made it possible for high level managers to have a dialogue regarding the difficulty of organizational identification. This process was marked as the core process that was inseparable to the goals of this project.

At the end of the qualification process, the managers began to conduct the workshop for their employees. The workshops were conducted in houses that were specially designed, with specific furniture that was planned in advance for the process. These houses were an essential part of the process and the employee's experience. Aside from being warm and welcoming, the houses were branded as "Super-Pharm" homes and supplied a personal as well as organizational experience all at once and provided an unconventional answer for the goals of strengthening relationships and the feeling of belonging.

The workshops given to the employees and managers was developed in a multi-step process, streamlining managers in the organization and mapping out the central needs of organizational identification as well as adjusting the most effective workshop tools for this process.

Finally, the workshop that was developed included a few important components:

1. **experiential component**- a few components were combined:

- conducting the workshop in branded and specially designed "Super-Pharm houses"

- Using video footage about Super-Pharm (ways to advance on the web, history and main events in the organization, the organizations contribution to society)

- Celebrating the organizations 30th birthday

2. **Emotional component** – a significant part of the workshop dealt with examining the personal connection of the employees and managers towards Super Pharm. Special workshop tools were used and enabled a deep and emotional discussion on all aspects of this topic.

3. **Cognitive component**- a significant part of the workshop dealt with acquiring knowledge about the organization in exciting ways: a sophisticated trivia questionnaire, the enlightening videos and a variety of workshop techniques.

<u>The challenges we faced along the way:</u>

Leading a process of this kind is filled with significant challenges:

1.The object of identification- most of Super-Pharms employees work in their different branches, therefore, the question was raised- who is the important object of identification? Is it the branch? The first home the employee belongs to? Or is it the organization? The extended family to which all employees and managers belong to? In addition to this question another balancing question was asked, how do we create identification that balances the small organizational unit the employee belongs to and the large organizational unit the employee belongs to? The answers we found for these questions were not unanimous, but we chose a flexible guideline that encouraged the managers to allow different levels of discussion on this topic. This decision was based on the understanding that organizational identification can be created from a number of different circles and that strengthening each circle contributes to the strengthening of identification with the organization as a whole.

2. Identification as a deeper issue- in the thinking and performing process of the project, we understood that we cannot deal with the question of identification without dealing with its meaning in depth. We based this on the understanding that in line with feelings of identification with the organization, it is important to acknowledge that in every organization there are other feelings involved, such as: disidentification, ambivalent identification or neutral identification. The expanded model of organizational identification (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004) takes into account different levels of identification and dis-identification and explores different ways which people may define themselves according to their connection to the organization, as presented above. In relation to this, their main argument, which we based our workshop upon, is that although it may be very difficult to acknowledge the existence of different emotions and allowing them to be expressed, it is extremely important for the organization that these emotions be expressed and can lead to the deepening of the connection between the individual with the organization.

In order to do this we asked ourselves what process will legitimize feeling and expressing these emotions and how can we allow an authentic experience of testing the relationship of the employees with the organization throughout the process. After much thought, we came to the conclusion that the workshop must allow room for all the different feelings that may arise among employees and managers, even at the cost of expressing emotions that rarely arise with the "fantasy" to which "we all identify". In order to do so we used workshop methods which allow the expression of different voices. In practice, we found that allowing this opportunity led to authentic and meaningful discussions during the workshops.

3. The challenge of realistic expectations- building identification and belonging of employees to the organization is a complex process composed of many different factors and may take a long time. Nonetheless we chose this for ourselves, as a challenge, to deal with this issue with hopes to see the positive changes among the employees. Is this an achievable challenge? In what form is it derived from the concept of our role as human resources in the organization? In what way does it coincide with other projects and activities we are working on? In what way does it fit with the vision and values of the organization? For all these issues we found solutions, but since we are dealing with a complicated topic we made sure to remember that we must be modest with our expectations and understand that our project is only one component (if also important) of many other process taking place in the organization. It is interesting to note that this issue of "expecting to make a difference" came up more than once in the process of creating the workshops and during the workshops for the managers, and the discussion about it played an inseparable role in the process and was a learning experience of the in depth attitude the managers have towards this process.

In reality? Findings from the field:

As part of the expectation to estimate the success of the process on influencing the positions of the managers and employees of the organization, we decided to accompany the process with a research survey to test the influence of the project on the identification and connection of employees with the organization. In order to do so, a survey was conducted before and after the project in 18 branches of Super-Pharm with questions dealing with the level of organizational identification (some questions were based on Mael & Tetrick, 1992).

A few important findings from the survey:

1. The general satisfaction from the project was very high. In regards to this a few aspects were measured, among them:

- Assessment of the contribution of the activities to the strengthening of the connection with the organization.
- Interest and enjoyment of activities
- Willingness to conduct additional activities hosted by the members next year.

2. In all the identification dimensions surveyed you were able to vote for a positive change, when in 5 dimensions a clear positive change was found indicating a rise in the level of organizational identification:

- satisfaction with the work at Super-Pharm
- Confidence that members of the team are describing the organization in a positive light when speaking to people outside of the organization
- Perceiving criticism against the company as personal insult
- Proud to be a part of the branch
- perceiving that members of the team in the branch do their job as best they can

3. As mentioned, in all the other identification dimensions a positive theme has been found, for example:

- Showing interest in what others think of the branch

- perceiving the success of the branch as personal success

- personal embarrassment when the branch is criticized in the media

- Self characterization of the characteristics defining Super-Pharm

- perception that Super-Pharm does it all it can to make their employees happy

These finding contribute to our understanding of the importance of cross organizational processes. In regards to this it is important to emphasize the finding by which brought to light the desire for the managers to continue to lead additional activities in the future. This finding is consistent with the strategic perception which we led- that says- the central agent for change in the organization is the manager- and he has the power to shape and strengthen the connection and identification of the employees towards the organization.

References:

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