Human Relations Approach of Management: An Assessment of Organizational Leadership in Dealing with Informal Work Groups.

By

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Abstract:

This work seeks to analyze the role played by informal work groups in the attainment of organizational goals and how organizational leaders should treat these groups. Many organizational leaders see informal work groups as threats instead of potential benefits, but this notion should be countered because these groups aim at not only benefiting their members but very often, also the organization. Organizational leaders are encouraged to support and be a part of informal work groups because by doing so they will help to direct the objectives of such groups not to become hostile to the goals of the organization. "The Linking-Pin-Concept" of Rensis Likert will be used as an analytical tool to show how organizational leaders (managers) can effectively support informal work groups to become productive instruments of the organization. In the course of this study, Maslow's hierarchy of needs has been addressed in relation to group members' satisfaction and the attainment of organizational goals. This study also looks at those factors that led to the creation of informal work groups and traits that are common to such groups so as to enable managers to better understand factors that influence the creation of such groups thereby enabling them to channel the necessary resources required to cope with these groups.

Keywords: Organization, Informal work groups, Organizational goals, Leadership, Management, Linking-Pin-Concept.

Overview:

Organizational goals can be effectively attained if organizational leadership accommodates and supports informal work groups within the organization. This would enable members of informal work groups to become loyal to organizational objectives.

Quote: Every company has two organizational structures: the formal one is written on the charts; the other is the everyday relationship of the men and women in the organization (Harold S. Geneen).

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INTRODUCTION

An organization comes into existence when it can bring people together who can communicate with each other and are willing to contribute actions for the attainment of set goals or common purpose (Barnard 1938). It can therefore be said that an organization's three main elements are: communication, willingness to serve, and common purpose. Given that humans are social beings, it is of paramount importance that humans must communicate, cooperate and interact with each other both in formal and informal settings for them to thrive (Asci, Cemberci, Civelek & Gunel 2015). This makes communication one of the most important aspects in organizational management (Likert 1961). Through the interactions that take place in the organization, informal work groups are created by employees for their "common interests". Organizational leaders are always suspicious of informal work groups that develop in organizations because of the potential power these groups have that can lower productivity in what is known as the formal organization (Grover 1993; Barnard 1938).

It is the duty of the management to harness the important elements found in organizational settings so that organizational members can easily identify themselves with these important elements. For this to be done, management must be willing to work closely with not only formal groups within organizations. However, they must also get engaged in the activities of informal groups within the organizations because if these groups are not closely looked upon, they would become harmful, or even hostile to the organizations instead of adding to productivity (Grover 1993).

Organizations are made up of groups of individual workers and these individual workers form informal social groups. These social groups are transformed into informal work groups and form the informal organization. Barnard (1938) held that formal organizations actually are made up of informal groups and these groups evolve to become informal organizations. Informal work groups are always found in organizations and most of the time these groups possess a common purpose irrespective of the organization's stated purpose in which they find themselves (Barnard 1938). The creation of informal work groups may be for a friendly or hostile purpose depending upon the accidental or incidental purposes of the group. But they may also arise from some personal desire or gregarious instincts that ought not to be discounted (Barnard 1938). The existence of formal organization creates an avenue where informal organizations can be created because people within the formal organization interact and through these interactions, they create a bond whose goal is not directly defined by the formal organization (Barnard 1938).

For any organization to function effectively, it has to create strategies that will ensure that informal work groups do not work against organizational norms or do not become hostile to the organization. In this light, managers are therefore encouraged to become part of these informal work groups in their organizations so as to better understand the problems these groups face and also how organizational goals can be attained from the perspective of the members of these groups (Likert 1961; Grover, 1993; Barnard 1938). Managers have a great opportunity to ensure that the willingness to serve the formal organization is built among informal group members by building a group cohesion that aligns with the goal of the organization while also ensuring that the personal integrity of group members is respected (Barnard 1938).

This work focuses on the human relations aspects in organizational settings drawing inspiration from the works of Chester Barnard (1938), Herbert Simon (1997), Grover Sterling

(1993), and Rensis Likert (1961) to provide guidelines needed for the management to deal with informal work groups in organizations. In an effort to address certain aspects of the behavioral approach to management, this work focuses on workers' wellbeing as opposed to organizational efficiency with the consideration that once workers are satisfied, organizational goals would be attained. It is aimed at providing reasons why informal work groups exist within organizations and how managers can influence these groups to become more productive towards the goals of organizations. The exploration also provides a distinction between formal and informal work groups and looks at factors and conceptions that are common to informal work groups. In an effort to demonstrate how management can help make informal work groups align with organizational goals, Rensis Likert's "Linking-Pin-Concept" is used as an analytical tool to provide such guide. This approach enables us to see how the needs of informal work group members and organizational goals are simultaneously being attained through the help of managers that create links between these groups and the organizations.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Group

Groups are two or more people who perceive themselves as people of the same social category (Forsyth 2006)**.** Groups can also be seen as any number of people who interact with one another, are psychologically aware of one another, and perceive themselves to share something in common through their interactions with each other (Schein 1965). Groups share a feeling of loyalty, comradeship, and a common sense of values among their members.

Work Group

A work group is a group of three or more persons who work together interdependently on an agreed-upon activity or goal. (Forsyth 2006).

Formal Work Group

Formal work groups are officially prescribed relationships between employees and a plan of effort directed towards the attainment of specific objectives in an organization (Barnard 1938). They have defined structures and established goals set by the organization. They are basically two types: command and task groups. Command work groups are always shown, on an organizational chart for example, where junior personnel has to convey information to senior personnel concerning how they are handling duties. On the other hand, a task work group has to do with personnel collaborating to accomplish a task given to them by the organization, e.g. engineers working on a particular project.

Informal Work Group

An informal work group is a relationship between employees in an organization that is not officially defined by the organization. Such groups can be seen when formal groups start overlapping themselves in an organization. Here groups of employees form cliques to protect their general interest (to satisfy their individual needs and emotions) such interest is not determined by the organization but rather by group members, thus making the relationships organic and less organized (Asci, Cemberci, Civelek & Gunel 2015). Informal work groups can be seen as an aggregation of the personal contacts, interactions, and the associated groupings of people with no formal structure and without any specific conscious joint purpose (Barnard 1938; Fry 1998). All organizations have such groups (Likert 1961; Barnard 1938).

Organizational Goals

Organizational goals are the objectives, values, means, or ends that an organization stands to achieve and uplift. These goals are mostly found in the mission or vision statement of organizations, but the business plan gives more details of organizational goals. Organizational

goals are generally defined as inspirational levels of measurable organizational outcomes (Kotlar et. al. 2018).

Leadership

A leader is seen as that individual in a group who directs and coordinates task-relevant group activities, or who, in the absence of a designated leader, automatically performs these functions in the group (Fielder 1964, p. 153; Farris 1973). Leadership is defined as an interaction between persons in which one person presents information that influences the others to behave in accordance with what this person postulates with the hope that they are being directed towards the right path (Farris 1973). Leadership can also be seen as the behavior or art of an individual when directing shared goals (Farris 1973).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

As a conceptual tool for the usefulness of informal work groups, the Linking-Pin concept depicts an ideal of attaining organizational goals through work groups with the help of leaders. The linking-pin-concept offers useful guidelines to take advantage of informal work groups' power to encourage (or discourage) the attainment of organizational goal.
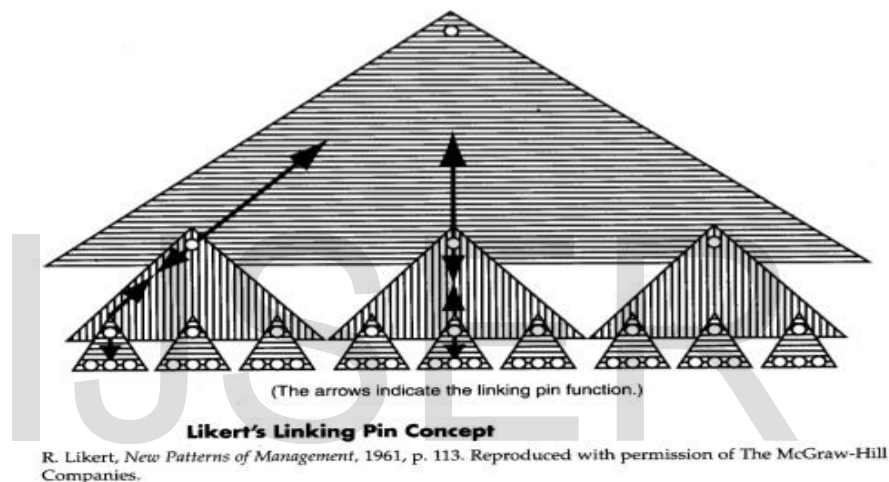
The Linking-Pin Concept

The Linking-Pin Concept holds that managers must understand that they are members of two teams: the team that represents the organizational context and the team that they manage directly (the boss and the subordinates). It is of great importance that managers interact closely with peers for the smooth execution of projects to be attained. Managers are therefore seen as the linking pin for both teams; that is the organization and the subordinates. Therefore, the manager is seen as a linking pin that ultimately connects all work (and workers) with organizational strategy.

This framework emphasizes that managers must align themselves with peers or co-workers/subordinates first in order to create good work strategy that will be beneficial to the organization (Likert 1961).

Fig. 1:

Likert's Linking Pin Concept

(The arrows indicate the linking pin function.)

Likert's Linking Pin Concept

R. Likert, *New Patterns of Management*, 1961, p. 113. Reproduced with permission of The McGraw-Hill Companies.

This linking pin strategy has been described by Likert (1961) as the role management play when interacting with work groups. He suggests that as an individual interacts with the organization, these interactions should contribute to maintaining the sense of personal worth and importance. According to Likert (1961, p. 104-105) and Likert (1967), "management will make full use of the potential capacities of its human resources only when each person in an organization is a member of one or more effectively functioning work groups that have a high degree of loyalty, effective skills of interactions and high-performance goals". Likert encourages that management should deliberately endeavor to build effective work groups that have high-performance goals. Management should have overlapping membership in these work groups and

link them to the organization in general because an organization functions best when its

personnel function as members of highly effective goal-oriented work groups. Likert (1961) also

asserts that in any organization, managers are seen as linking-pins between all the other work

groups. The arrows pointing upward in figure 1 above indicate how managers link different

groups to the organization. That Likert intended to include informal work groups is unlikely.

This work provides an opportunity to expand the linking-pin model further such that informal

work groups within organizations can be addressed using Likert's framework. Likert advocated

that the managers should attempt to gain acceptance as the head of work groups and in that role

practice a participation-listen communication approach as they engage with employees and

involve the work groups in work planning (Likert, 1961).

As noted by Barnard (1938) & Fry (1998), organizations have three basic duties which

are: inducing a willingness to cooperate on the part of organizational participants; establishing

and defining organizational purpose; and, communication (decision making).

These basic duties of the organization are the things expected of organizational leaders to instill

in functional work groups. It is possible to extend these functions to informal work groups if

managers accept their existence and their usefulness. Informal work group, then, could be

helpful in fulfilling formal organizational goals if allowed.   The duty of the manager here is to

inculcate in organization members the organization culture (Simon 1997) and importantly,

though not always considered, extend that effort within informal work groups.

Likert (1961) held that the linking-pin-concept entails that managers have to exert

influence not only on the subordinates but also on their superiors (both downward and upward

influence) in the course of their interaction with different groups. To Liker (1961)t, this approach

helps to address the problems posed by these groups and goes further to make group members to

become more committed towards organizational goals because managers convey their worries to the hierarchy as a connecting tool thereby helping to ensure that their problems are adequately solved.

The inability for these managers to interact in these groups and exert sufficient influence upward to the hierarchy to handle ongoing problems constructively gives rise to unfavorable outcomes to the organization (Likert 1961). On the other hand, if the manager succeeds in exerting influence, it positively affects morale and motivation as well as performance and productivity.
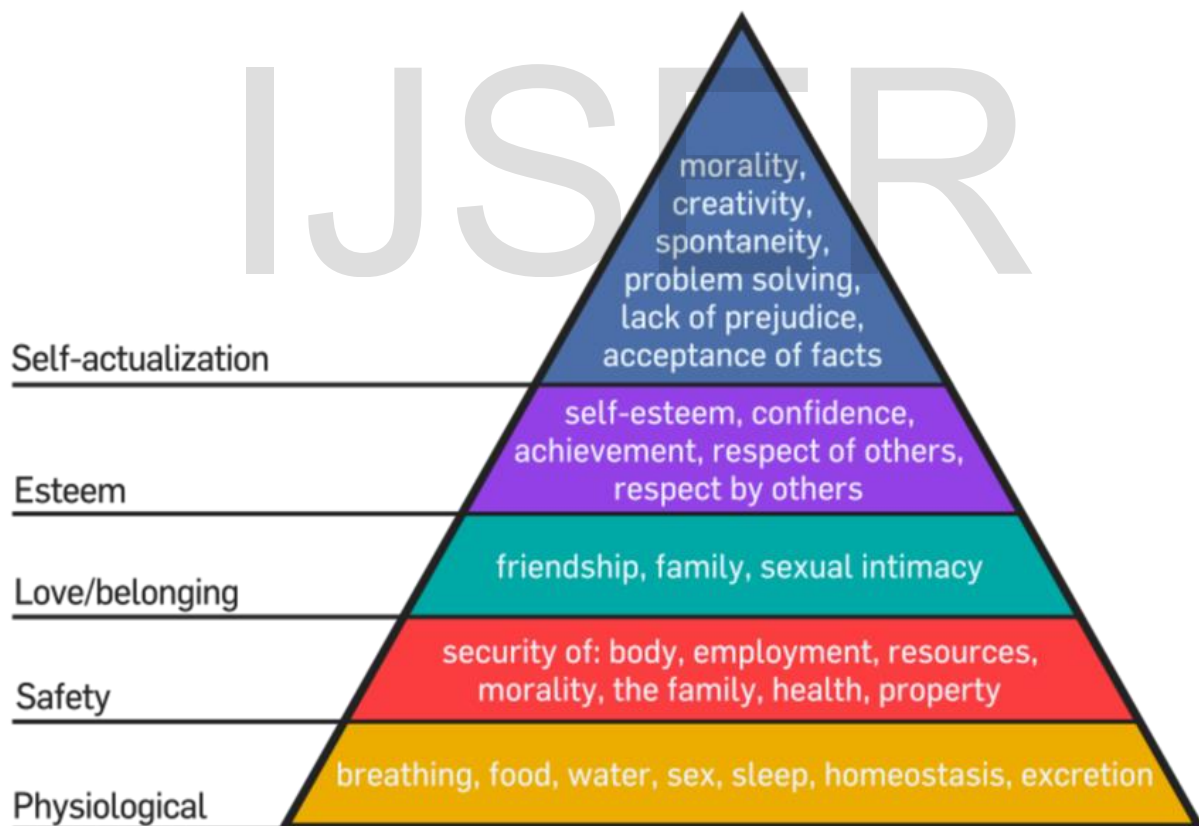
WHY DO INFORMAL WORK GROUPS EXIST IN ORGANIZATIONS

In any organization, the formation of informal work groups is as a result of mutual interest, friendship and the need to fulfill social needs by workers (Barnard 1938). Before these three aspects come into play, the workers will initially see that coming together to work and interact under one umbrella organization allows them to fulfill mutual interests for themselves and the organization (Asci et.al 2015; Grover 1993; Barnard 1938). However, a perceived (or real) imbalance between the social needs (primary needs) of individuals and the requirements of organizations (secondary needs) bring about the existence of informal work groups (Grover 1993). The lack of integration of these needs is one of the main reasons that cause the formation of informal work groups in organizations.

Humans as social beings have interactive instincts that always make them cooperate whenever they meet in an organizational setting. The reason for this can be related to the formation of informal work groups in organization in both conscious and unconscious manners (Waldstrom 2001). They see the need to come together because their mutual interests will be well secured as a group than if they stay as individuals. Grover (1993) points out that Maslow's need theory suggests

that generally speaking, 2% of workers focus on the attainment of self-actualization needs, 30% are focused on esteem (self-esteem), 43% on social needs (love/belonging needs), 15% on safety needs and 10% on physiological needs. The quest for the fulfillment of these needs by organizational members influence the formation of informal work groups within organizations. Employees always look towards the attainment of these needs in carrying out their duties in organizations. The plurality of workers focusing on social needs as indicated by Maslow (1954); Foleide (2013) and Grover (1993) make it clear that social factors are a powerful counter-weight to mere organizational requirements.

Fig. 1:

Source: Maslow (1954); Foleide (2013).

When organizational members feel they are not attaining these social needs as expected within the organization, they will create a mechanism to overcome such problems. The creation of informal work groups is one approach they use in addressing these worries (Waldstrom 2001). Members of informal work groups are optimistic that by creating and becoming part of these groups, these groups will help them do the following:

➢ attain their self-esteem;

➢ attain their social realities which formal organization can't provide;

➢ provides them defense mechanism with reduction of risk;

➢ provides an avenue to learn about the formal organization things that the formal structures of the organization do not allow them know; and,

➢ they see informal work groups as platforms to influence the formal organization to address their problems (Waldstrom 2001).

The physical work condition, the type of technology employed, the pattern of management and the leadership style also accounts for reasons why informal groups exist (Grover 1993). Maslow (1954) provides a good understanding on why organization members strive to ensure their interests are attained in the course of interacting in the organization. Bolman & Deal (2017); Likert (1967); Likert (1961); Maslow (1954); Simon (1997); Barnard (1938); and, Morgan (1998) call on managers to make necessary efforts in ensuring that they set a balance on both organizational and individual organizational member's interests so as to avoid hostility that may arise if this balance is not realized.

OTHER FACTORS THAT ACCOUNT FOR THE EXISTENCE OF INFORMAL WORK GROUPS IN ORGANIZATIONS

Physical Work Condition

Physical work conditions can encourage the formation of informal groups. If people work in close proximity with each other, they are usually forced to interact with each other more often (Grover, 1993). Such physical settings that facilitate social interaction increase the likelihood that an informal group will exist. It also encourages new employees coming to the organization to join such groups. This is because as they constantly interact with each other, they develop a spirit of friendship and mutual interest. This will cause them to unite informally and strive to protect their goals in that organization so as to enable them to fulfil their social needs (Grover, 1993).

Technology

Technology as an aspect of informal work group formation is related to the physical work condition mentioned above. Technology in this sense refers to how the overall work flows through the organization. The type of technology an organization uses in a particular work system determines employees' interactions and prescribes their activities. If the technology of an organization is organized in such a way that in the absence of one or few persons the organization will not operate well, then such technology can easily cause the formation of strong informal work groups (Grover 1993). This is because the group will always see the need to work closely so as to ensure their efficiency can be maintained despite the technology at play. Such informal group helps to make group members be very committed to their job.

Specialized Operations

A functional, technocratic system of work (e.g. engineering, marketing, and accounting) within an organization encourages informal groups as employees already share certain interests and skills. The formation of informal group occurs to protect their mutual interest with respect to the work and skillsets (Grover 1993; Harry 1980). In such organization, one can find many

informal work groups with the aim of protecting the interest of their various specializations (Grover 1993; Harry 1980).

Leadership Style:

The formation of informal work groups can be influenced by the style of leadership that is implemented by managers in organizations. An example is that an autocratic leader and a participatory leader would probably cause entirely different informal work behaviors (Vroom & Yetton 1973; Vroom & Jago 1988). Autocratic leaders will likely be more hostile (or firm) with their workers. Such an approach makes workers come together to protect their social and emotional interests collectively through the formation of informal groups. A participatory leader who interacts well with the workers, is not seen as hostile to personal or social needs and therefore workers see less reasons to create informal work groups; even if such groups are created they will not be aggressive or hostile to the organization (Grover, 1993).

These elements suggest that the formation of informal work groups in organizations comes as a result of individuals seeing a need to galvanize themselves together to create, if not present, or enhance because of mutual individual interests an atmosphere where they can enjoy net-positive stimuli from the organization.

Employees who are conscious of the fact that they are in an environment where the social aspects of workers appreciate a management approach that advocates for the attainment of both professional, practical, and social needs. Employees want to maximize the attainment of their needs as they work towards the attainment of the goal of organizations. Whenever employees are not treated as they expect, they try to come together and create a forum (informal work group)

where their worries can be adequately addressed. It is important that managers understand factors that are common in all informal work groups so as to have an awareness of both the reasons why these groups exist and the factors that relate to them because such knowledge will give managers a better understanding when relating with these groups.

WHAT ARE THE COMMON FACTORS TO ALL INFORMAL WORK GROUPS

The following factors are common to all informal work groups.

Group Norms

This is an agreement among the members of the group on how members behave. All informal work groups have norms that serve as principles or laws within the group. Such laws normally relate to their work place and they set certain performance levels that may be either above, below or at the same level as those set by the management. Levying fines when a member goes against the norms is part of such norms, playing a joke on new employees and even asking a "new member tax" or visible investment from a new member can also be a part of such norms. These sets of principles or norms help to guide members' as they interact with the organization and the group (Grover 1993).

Group Cohesiveness

This refers to the degree of attraction that each member has for the group, or the "stick togetherness" of the group. A high degree of cohesion exists in all informal groups whose goals are well defined and they work hard to attain their objectives. Cohesiveness is important in the sense that the more cohesive groups are, the more likely members will pursue group goals and not their individual goals. For cohesiveness to be effective in any informal work group, the size of such group must be limited to about 15 to 20 members. This is because group cohesiveness

decreases as the size of the group increase. If such group becomes larger than 20 members, subgroups begin to form and this may cause division in the main group (Grover 1993).

Success and status of informal work groups play an important part in all informal work groups' cohesiveness in the sense that groups that are successful in achieving their goals are more cohesive and also, groups with higher status or prestige are also more cohesive. All the workers in highly cohesive informal work groups whose goals are compatible with the organization's productivity do produce above average but if their goals are not compatible, they produce below average.

In all informal work groups, when group members become physically isolated from other groups, there is an increase in a group's cohesiveness. Individuals who gain prestige or status within the group also become more cohesive to the group while individuals with less prestige and status have lesser cohesiveness. It has also been proven that in all informal groups, when group members are in cooperative relationship, there is high cohesion as opposed to the case where there exist constant competitions within the group.

When informal work groups engage in more attractive and recreational programs, it builds cohesion within members. When such groups are attacked from the outside, their cohesion increases as members deal with the external threat collectively because they view themselves as people having a common goal. This threat is dealt with using this phrase "united we stand and divided we fall". If outsiders who are well respected in the society view and evaluate the activities of any informal work group as negative, such groups will experience a decrease in group cohesion. Also, if there is no equality on group's participation by individuals, the group will experience decrease in cohesiveness (Mintzberg, 1973). Group cohesion may be reduced if group members

view the activities to be too great a risk to carry on and also when there is poor communication among group members (Grover 1993).

Group leadership

All informal work groups have people that take leadership roles. Two general conclusions have been reduced on informal work group leadership, these are: the group selects as its leader the individual the group perceives to have the most competent in helping the group achieve its objectives; and, the group selects as its leader the individual with strong communication skills especially in the areas of setting objectives for the group, giving direction, and summarizing information for the group. Group leadership basically has to do with the ability of the leader to coordinate the group activities in a manner that will make the group to attain both individual members' objectives and those of the informal group (Morgeson, DeRue & Karam2010).

Additionally, informal work groups seek to control the behavior of their members to ensure uniform and consistent behavior on the side of the members. Group members work collectively with close sentimental attachment. They are mostly brought together by their interaction at the job side or in the organization and they try to eliminate those conditions that limit their smooth functioning in the organization they work in. Informal groups have a high degree of loyalty, effective skills of interaction and high performance goal ability. Indeed, team building is a defining tool that set their objective (Grover 1993).

WHY MUST ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT PARTICIPATE IN INFORMAL WORK GROUPS?

The participation of management in informal work groups enables managers to set a balance between formal and informal requirements of organizations (Waldstrom 2001). The participation of management in informal work groups is proposed as a process that will help reignite the willingness to serve, encourage smooth communication and promote a common purpose for group members and the organization. The basic assumption is that the group is initially created to address personal needs that they (members of informal work groups) think they should be getting from the organization but are not in any formal way. The presence of managers in such groups is to reassure the attainment of these needs to group members so as to enable group members to be more committed to organizational goals (Barnard 1938; Simon 1997) where they (Managers) gather and process useful information from the group. Such information could relate to identifying ongoing problems in the organization before they grow out of hand or to spotting opportunities that would otherwise be missed in the absence of managers in such groups (Waldstrom 2001). In order for this to be done, managers must have first-hand information on those factors common to informal groups and what specifically brings about the formation of such groups. Upon acquiring this knowledge, managers will clearly understand how to interact with these groups in a manner that will not make the groups to become harmful / hostile to the organization.

Informal organization may affect the activities of formal organization (Asci, Cemberci, Civelek & Gunel 2015, p. 28-29; Barnard 1938) and reduce or increase productivity. For this reason managers have to play significant roles in ensuring efforts to see that the activities of informal work groups are closely monitored so that they do not become harmful to the agenda of the formal organization as a result of conflicting loyalty (Waldstrom 2001). The function of the manager in such groups is to inculcate and impose organization culture into the members of

informal work groups and this is done through communication in a pacified (active listening) manner (Simon 1997; Waldstrom 2001; Grover 1993). As Barnard (1938); Likert (1961); Likert (1967); Grover (1993) & Simon (1997) emphasized, communication in organizations must not be done in such a way that administrative hierarchy decides on everything, but rather encourages a bottom-up approach in decision-making process. With such an approach, informal work group members will become more committed to the organization because they are given the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process of the organization. Grover (1993) held that in order for an organization to be successful in managing programs and people, administrators must lead and motivate the people within the organization. He also advocates for a relationship between individuals in the organization where effective communication is used to make and implement decisions.

Emphasis has been given to Likert (1967) and Likert (1961) Linking-Pin-Concept where managers are a link between the organization and the workers (groups). This implies that managers' roles in informal work group is to build trust within the group members that the organization has their interest at heart. This must be seen with action and not just verbally. Action entails that managers should channel the worries of these groups to higher authority and higher authority should treat such worries accordingly so as to please the workers and keep their commitment to the organization to attain organizational efficiency and effectiveness. The outcome of such linking-pin processes will be that the inducements workers get from organization for the contribution they make to the organization is more than what they contribute because informal work groups exist as a result of the fact that most of the basic needs of workers are not met by the organization and they create these informal work groups to correct such organizational limitations.

The role of management in informal work groups can be seen as a trust-building role where they try to instill in the minds of group members that they should have trust in the organization because the organization always works to see that their needs are met.

CONCLUSION

The formation of informal work groups in organizations is a natural phenomenon that cannot be avoided because organizations are made up of humans who have those social instincts to interact and build relationships. The negative notion that many organizational leaders have for informal work groups can be reversed to positive notion if these leaders get themselves closer to these groups. Informal work groups if well managed and monitored by organizational managers are more likely to produce good organizational output, reason why managers must get closer to these groups to positively influence the objectives of these groups to be aligned with the goals of the organization.

Likert (1961) in his discourse in the "Linking-Pin-Concept" encourages that managers should make the work environment participatory to motivate members of the organization to meet-up with the organizational goals in both work group and non-work group situations respectively. Likert held that leaders have as a role to serve as a link between the different groups (both formal and informal) and the organization. To him, such linkage will help top management better understand ongoing problems at the bottom, and the personnel at bottom of the hierarchy can easily communicate their problems through their managers to the top management for their problems to be solved.

The absence of management in informal work groups will create a gap that will make the problems of informal work groups not to be easily solved and this will make these groups become

hostile to the organization because their needs are not met as expected. A good understanding of informal work groups' dynamics would enable managers to effectively coordinate workers such that they become productive as opposed to destructive elements of the organization.

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