

Interpersonal Style Orientation of Supervisors in Engineering Organizations in India

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This paper deals with interpersonal orientation of supervisors in Indian public and private sector companies in the manufacturing/engineering sector. Supervisors are the intermediate category of employees between workers and managers in India. One fundamental assumption transactional analysis makes is that everybody displays functional and dysfunctional styles, only the intensity varies from person to person. Another fundamental assumption this study starts with is that functional styles contribute towards the overall effectiveness of people working in organizations. The findings make a case for re-examination of deployment of supervisors in organizations in public or private sectors. The study makes a comparison of supervisors between public and private sectors.

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Introduction

Behavior is what most organizations are trying to monitor and change in accordance with the organization's culture and demands imposed by the external environment. Behavioral issues are directly linked to personal effectiveness which in turn has a direct bearing on organizational effectiveness. Organizations today are striving for excellence which is the highest level of organizational effectiveness. And undoubtedly people are the driver of excellence/ effectiveness in any organization (Koene, 1986; Lim, 1995). One of the most important or crucial behavioral dimensions is interpersonal style. How does an individual react and interact with others is of fundamental importance since this is what determines interpersonal relationships, leader-follower interactions, peer group interactions and so on, all of which are fundamentally important in the life of any organization. Muriel James and Dorothy Jongeward (1978) had gone to the extent of describing winners in life as individuals who respond authentically to others, which essentially is interpersonal style.

Transactional Analysis

The theory of transactional analysis deals with human transactions, how people interact with each other and henceforth is contingent on an individual's interpersonal style or rather is an explanation of interpersonal styles. In fact, transactional analysis is a useful conceptual framework to describe an individual's interpersonal style (Pareek, 2002). The theory of transactional analysis was popularized by Eric Berne's *Games People Play* (1961) and later on by Thomas Harris's "I am OK, You are OK". The theory of transactional analysis states that an individual can make an interaction using any of the three ego states – parent, child and adult. An ego state can be defined as "A consistent pattern of feeling and experience directly related to a corresponding consistent pattern of behavior". The parent ego state contains the attitudes and behavior incorporated from external sources, primarily parents. Outwardly, it often is expressed towards others in a prejudicial, critical and nurturing behavior. Inwardly, it is experienced as old parental messages which continue to influence the inner child. The adult ego state is not related to a person's age. It is oriented to current reality and the objective gathering of information. It is organized, adaptable, intelligent, and functions by testing the reality, estimating probabilities and computing dispassionately. The child ego state contains all the impulses that come naturally to an infant. It also contains the recordings of child's early experiences, responses, and the positions taken about self and others. It is expressed as old

archaic behavior from childhood (Muriel James & Dorothy Jongeward, 1978)

Muriel James (1975) observed that three ego states had subdivisions which could be described as the critic, the coach, the shadow, the analyst, the pacifier and the inventor. She contended that all these subdivisions had functional/ dysfunctional dimensions. Moreover an understanding from this perspective of personality can help enhance effectiveness of people working in organizations with which organizations are so primarily concerned (Kalra Satish and Gupta Rajen, 1999). Using the same logic Pareek (1988) developed a framework of functional and dysfunctional ego states/ influence styles and also developed an instrument popularly known as SPIRO to assess the functional and dysfunctional influence styles of managers (Pareek, 1988). SPIRO is in effect an inventory which tells about the interpersonal orientation of respondents on which it is applied. Pareek describes these 12 styles as:

1. Supportive (+NP): In this style, support is provided when needed. Supervisors with this style are supportive coaches. They encourage their subordinates, cheer them up, and provide the necessary conditions for their continuous improvement. They help them to help themselves.
2. Rescuing (-NP): In this style, support is provided by almost imposing oneself on others. The belief is that the subordinate is not capable of taking care of himself. This style inculcates dependency-proneness.

3. Normative (+CP): Supervisors with this style are interested in developing proper norms of behavior with their subordinates and helping them to understand how some norms are more important than the others. The supervisor is concerned with setting appropriate norms by involving his subordinates in evolving these norms, and also in deciding how such norms will be followed.
4. Prescriptive (-CP): People with this style are critical of others' behavior. They impose themselves and want others to do what they think is right or wrong. Supervisors with this style prescribe solutions rather than helping subordinates to work out alternative solutions to the problem.
5. Problem solving (+A): In this style the concern of the person is to solve the problem by himself and involving others in it. He does not see the problem as being merely confined to the tasks. For him the problem has many dimensions.
6. Task obsessive (-A): The supervisor with this style is primarily concerned with tasks, and is so obsessed with the work to be done that he overlooks various other things. They are not concerned with feelings and, in fact, fail to recognize them, since they see them as related to the task. They function like computers.
7. Innovative (+FC): People with this style are enthusiastic about new approaches, and take others along with them. They pay enough attention to mustering an idea so that it results in concrete action, and is internalized in a system.
8. Bohemian (-FC): Such a supervisor does not stay with one idea and is obsessed with new ideas all the time. He overwhelms his subordinates with new ideas. He is less concerned about the working of these new ideas, and is mainly concerned with the ideas themselves. He hardly allows an idea or a practice to stabilize. He goes from one idea to another.
9. Confronting/Assertive (+RC): In this style the person is concerned with the exploration of a problem. Perseverance is the main characteristic. Such supervisors confront the organization in order to get things done for their subordinates. Even when something is to be explored with the person, the focus is always a particular issue or a problem and the person is not the target.
10. Aggressive(-RC): A person with this style is likely to show his aggressiveness by fighting, making heavy demands, fighting or going back to issues and never allowing these to be settled. Supervisors with this style will help achieve results. Their aggressiveness, however, makes people ignore them and not take them seriously.
11. Resilient (+CC): this style is characterized by functional compliance. The person respectfully accepts others' ideas which appeal to him, and changes his approach when needed.

12. Sulking (-CC): A supervisor with this style keeps negative feelings to himself, finds it difficult to share them and avoids meeting people if he has not been able to fulfill his part of the contract. Instead of confronting problems, a person with this style avoids them, feels bad about situations but does not express himself.

The study

TA has basically been used for managers. An attempt was made here to apply TA to supervisors in India. Supervisors are the intermediate category between workers and managers in most of the Indian corporates. This category is all the more pronounced in engineering organizations. The attempt here was to study the interpersonal orientation of supervisors in Indian engineering organizations. Supervisors being intermediate between workers and managers have a certain degree of authority, responsibilities and accountabilities attached to them and hence their interpersonal styles were very important. Moreover the earlier contention of James that the OK dimensions of ego states (which is nothing but interpersonal orientation) can help enhance effectiveness of people working in organizations holds good here also.

India being a mixed economy there is a distinction between public sector and private sector with the public sector being controlled by the Government. One public sector giant company and one private sector giant company were selected for the present study. Both the organizations were hard core engineering manufacturing firms with turnover exceeding Rs 1000 crores.

Methodology

To study the style profiles of supervisors the instrument that was used was Internal Personal Profile (IPP), a modified version of SPIRO developed by Rajen K Gupta and Satish Kalra at Management Development Institute, Gurgaon. This instrument had 48 items with 4 items in each of the twelve categories as described by Pareek. The response was taken on a 5-point scale which indicated the frequency of the behavior from rare or never to almost always. Thus the score for each category varied from 4 to 20. For functional style a score of 16-18 was considered healthy and for the dysfunctional style score above 11 was deemed to be unhealthy. Scores around 14-15 for functional style were considered to be in mid zone and scores around 12-13 were considered to be in mid zone for dysfunctional styles. The sample size was of 300 supervisors divided equally between public sector firm and private sector firm. While the public sector company chosen for this study was at one location the private sector company had multiple locations. Equal distribution from each department was taken so that a representative sample can be ensured. One more methodology that was used was the use of depth interviews. The employees selected for depth interview were chosen on the basis of their involvement in quality circles, TQM and TPM activities. Such employees would be more enlightened than the others to give opinion. Employees selected for depth interviews included both managers and supervisors. Hypotheses were formed for the purpose of testing whether

there is any difference between public sector and private sector when it comes to the total population on the basis of sample means coming out of survey.

Style Profile in Public Sector

As is evident from the statistical analysis (Table 1, N=150) supervisors in public sector had a high supportive style but at the same time a high rescuing style as well. (This is paradoxical but can be explained on the basis of organizational culture and societal culture both of whom may contrast since culture practices in organizations draw heavily from the West while on the other hand there is Indian society and culture. Both of these have a bearing on parental styles of individuals working in organizations. Hence supervisors display both styles in different cases.) Depth interviews revealed that supportive style can be attributed to the cultures of these organizations and training and development of supervisors. Rescuing style can be attributed to the upbringing of children in Indian culture where the parents and teachers displayed a definite rescuing style. This meant that sometimes supervisors used supportive style and at times were rescuing. Normative style was high. This could be attributed to the fact that most public sector corporations have standard operating procedures so there is a normative boundary set for them before hand. But on the same side the dysfunctional prescriptive style was high. Most of the people interviewed were of the view that this could be due to expectations on the part of many supervisors that each and every matter should be referred to them.

This made them feel as if they are in control. The depth interviews further revealed that this style was adopted by supervisors higher in age who considered young frontline managers who were actually in control, as their competitors.

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The adult ego state problem solving was in the mid zone. This could largely be attributed to the increased focus on training and development in public sector in India which has a direct bearing on the efficacy of supervisors. But depth interviews revealed that this was largely limited to routine problems rather than unique ones. Task obsessive style was low. This, the people in public sector interviewed attributed to the familial nature of organization in public sector where there is a great deal of stress on personal relationships and social life. Innovative style was high. Overall innovations are encouraged in public sector with the government instituting a plethora of awards for personnel working in public sector. Bohemian was low since application of ideas is not expected out of supervisors. Aggressive style is high among supervisors. This can be attributed to unionization, job security and particularly a feeling among supervisors that every cause is a joint cause for them. Assertive style was in the mid zone. Here the depth interviews revealed an interesting facet. Supervisors who have risen from the ranks of workers are not assertive. But supervisors who were di-

rect recruits and had technical qualifications with them tended to confront the frontline managers with their own understanding and logic of things. Coming to sulking style which again was in the mid zone there were divisions between the ranks. Supervisors who had risen from the ranks of workers were happy and contented with their new found promo-

tions which might not have happened through their careers. But supervisors who were direct recruits had a tendency to sulk because they felt that they were competent but their voice is not being heard by managers. Resilience was also in mid zone. This again the people interviewed felt could be due to division in ranks.

Table 1 Mean of Various Styles along with their Categorization (High/Low) Public Sector

TRANSACTIONAL STYLE	OK/NOT OK	MEAN	HIGH/LOW
SUPPORTIVE	OK	17.23	HIGH
RESCUING	NOT OK	16.43	HIGH
NORMATIVE	OK	16.73	HIGH
PRESCRIPTIVE	NOT OK	12.24	MID ZONE
PROBLEM SOLVING	OK	14.87	Mid zone
TASK OBSESSIVENESS	NOT OK	9.25	LOW
INNOVATIVE	OK	15.48	MIDZONE
BOHEMIAN	NOT OK	10.19	LOW
AGGRESSIVENESS	NOT OK	15.39	HIGH
ASSERTIVE	OK	15.21	MID ZONE
SULKING	NOT OK	12.17	MID ZONE
RESILIENT	OK	15.05	MID ZONE

Style Profile in Private Sector

From the statistical analysis (Table-2, N=150) it is clear that the supervisors in private sector, like their counterparts in the public sector, had high supportive but at the same time a high rescuing style with nearly the same reasons as was in the case of public sector supervisors. Normative style was high since, as is the case with most private sector organizations the organization in study also had standard operating procedures and there was a boundary under which workers and supervisors had to operate. Prescriptive style was conversely low in pri-

vate sector which the depth interviews attributed to the organizational culture of these companies which laid stress on not being prescriptive. This lack of stress in the depth interviews indicated could be due to either style of managers above supervisors or training & development of supervisors. One more reason that could be attributed to this tendency of supervisors was that they had well trained workers below them. But surprisingly problem solving style was not high but in midzone among supervisors. This was against the general stereotype about Indian private sector. Through depth interviews it was tried to ascertain the reason behind this.

The reason came out to be the typical profile expected out of supervisors by the management. Supervisors were by and large expected to do paper work rather than meaningful technical work. So even despite training & development their edges remained blunt when it came to problem solving where front line managers had to step in. On the other hand the dysfunctional adult style task obsessive was high. Depth interviews revealed that the reason was low familial nature of private sector organizations barring a few exceptions. In private sector somewhere down the line there was a tendency of every man for himself. This could be the reason for high task obsessive style.

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Innovative style was low among supervisors in the private sector. This again was against the stereotype and surprising too. But by and large the reasons remained the same as they were for low problem solving. Depth interviews revealed that nearly 80% of the time of supervisors was meant for retention (paper work, record keeping, etc) leaving them with only 20% of their time for improvements which was insufficient to carry out any meaningful innovations making even training and development redundant. Bohemian style was low as was in the public sector with the same reason. Aggressiveness and assertiveness-the functional and dysfunctional style both were low. Low aggressiveness the depth interviews attributed to feeling of job insecurity and weak

unionization of supervisors in private sector. Whereas low assertiveness could be attributed to the organizational culture of these organizations and initial induction of supervisors which laid little stress on confronting issues and work profile of supervisors in which they were mostly doing paper work rather than asserting their authority. This particular aspect made them run of the mill supervisors who had little to say and more to comply. Sulking style was high in supervisors in private sector. This the depth interviews attributed to the work profile of supervisors and organizational expectations out of them. While they are technically qualified but their work profile is largely retention work. Though only a more comprehensive study can determine their level job satisfaction but ab-initio they were dissatisfied at not being able to do some real innovative work, miffed at direct contact between workers and front line managers and at the same time being asked to control workers as when the situation demanded. But one thing nearly all of the people interviewed in the private sector said that while sulking supervisors kept their negative emotions to themselves but they hardly displayed them. The sulking instead got converted to turnover (leaving present company to join another company in the hope that would get a better deal over there). This was largely due to the organizational culture of private sector companies which was not very tolerant of sulking tendencies of employees despite tall claims about making their work place an enjoyable place to work for. So instead of redressing why a particular supervisor was sulking he instead got being reprimanded. Resilience was low since sulk-

Table 2 Mean of Various Styles along with their Categorization (High/Low) Private Sector

TRANSACTIONAL STYLE	OK/NOT OK	MEAN	HIGH/LOW
SUPPORTIVE	OK	17.45	HIGH
RESCUING	NOT OK	16.85	HIGH
NORMATIVE	OK	16.47	HIGH
PRESCRIPTIVE	NOT OK	9.37	LOW
PROBLEM SOLVING	OK	14.37	Mid zone
TASK OBSESSIVENESS	NOT OK	15.16	HIGH
INNOVATIVE	OK	12.87	LOW
BOHEMIAN	NOT OK	10.08	LOW
AGGRESSIVENESS	NOT OK	10.61	LOW
ASSERTIVE	OK	13.93	LOW
SULKING	NOT OK	15.21	HIGH
RESILIENT	OK	13.79	LOW

ing was the predominant style in this ego state.

Hypothesis Testing

The hypotheses testing leads to the conclusion that (Table 3):

1. Supporting style is equally visible in both public and private sector organizations .
2. Rescuing style is equally visible in both public and private sector organizations.
3. Normative style is equally visible in both public and private sector organizations.
4. Prescriptive style is more visible in public sector organizations.
5. Problem solving style is more visible in public sector organizations.
6. Being task obsessive is more visible in private sector organizations.

7. Innovative style is more visible in public sector organizations.
8. Bohemian tendency is equally visible in both public and private sector organizations.
9. Supervisors in public sector organization are more aggressive than their counterparts in private sector.
10. Supervisors in public sector organization are more assertive than their counterparts in private sector.
11. Private sector organization supervisors sulk more than their counterparts in public sector.
12. Supervisors in public sector organization are more resilient than their counterparts in private sector.

Conclusion

The study on style profiles revealed a lot many facets of human resource deployment and management. Some ste-

Table 3 Hypothesis Testing for Difference of Means of Public & Private Sectors Null Hypothesis Ho: Mean of Public = Mean of Private(m1=m2), Alternate Hypothesis Ha: specified in each case

S.NO	DIM.	DIMENSION	PUBLIC(m1)		PRIVATE(m2)		Z	Ha	5% significance	1% significance
CODE			Mean	Std.dev	Mean	Std.dev			Z<=1.645	Z<=2.33
1	D1	SUPPORTIVE	17.23	2.43	17.45	2.12	-0.84	m1<m2	Ho accepted	Ho accepted
2	D2	RESCUING	16.43	2.51	16.85	2.33	-1.50	m1<m2	Ho accepted	Ho accepted
3	D3	NORMATIVE	16.73	2.11	16.47	2.40	1.00	m1>m2	Ho accepted	Ho accepted
4	D4	PRESCRIPTIVE	12.24	2.60	9.37	1.98	10.76	m1>m2	Ho rejected	Ho rejected
5	D5	PROBLEM SOLVING	14.87	1.98	14.37	2.01	2.17	m1>m2	Ho rejected	Ho accepted
6	D6	TASK OBSESSIVENESS	9.25	2.61	15.16	2.11	-21.57	m1<m2	Ho rejected	Ho rejected
7	D7	INNOVATIVE	15.48	2.80	12.87	2.76	8.13	m1>m2	Ho rejected	Ho rejected
8	D8	BOHEMIAN	10.19	2.82	10.08	2.34	0.37	m1>m2	Ho accepted	Ho accepted
9	D9	AGGRESSIVENESS	15.39	2.22	10.61	2.56	17.28	m1>m2	Ho rejected	Ho rejected
10	D10	ASSERTIVENESS	15.21	2.34	13.93	1.98	5.11	m1>m2	Ho rejected	Ho rejected
11	D11	SULKING	12.17	2.50	15.21	2.87	-9.78	m1<m2	Ho rejected	Ho rejected
12	D12	RESILIENT	15.05	2.60	13.79	2.14	4.58	m1>m2	Ho rejected	Ho rejected

reotypes were broken in both the public sector and private sectors. For instance innovativeness is one attribute which is usually associated with people working in private sector and not with public sector. But both the questionnaire survey and in depth interviews indicated just the opposite of that. On many aspects private and public sectors had similarities, e.g. both supportive style and rescuing style had the same intensity in both public and private sectors. This has nothing to do with the sectors but about organizational culture, the type of society and of course upbringing of children in society. Style profiles are about organizational cultures, national cultures, societal profiles, induction and subsequent training and development, job profiles and organizational expectations. In depth interviews revealed that organizational expectations with supervisors are more in public sector than in private sector. There is more meaning to the work of supervisors in public sector than in private sector. But this is only a comparative statement and not an absolute one. And all is not well with supervisors in public sector either. There are grey areas in the public sector too, e.g. though being prescriptive is in the mid zone it needs to be improved and their aggressiveness is also high. Problem solving is also not of the level which should ideally be there.

The in depth interviews with people cutting across ranks in both

public sector and private sector point out that there is a fundamental need to examine the role of supervisors and what is expected out of them. The experiment with self managed teams has started in India which altogether eliminates the buffer category of supervisors between workers and managers. Role clarity and meaningful deployment especially when this cadre has a lot of technically qualified people is very necessary. From the data analysis (Tables 1, 2 &3) it can be said that the interpersonal orientation of supervisors in public sector is better than of those in the private sector.

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