

Publication	Hindustan Times (Shine)
Date	April 26, 2011
Edition	Delhi

HEALTHY WARS

Healthy wars



Productive rivalry at the workplace could help employees contribute more than what is expected, and even open a new route to innovation, says

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Archana Chib, an IT professional, was recently asked by her boss to try and rework a code designed by her colleague. Though she was hesitant at first, she tackled the task with a 'vengeance' once she came to know that her colleague, too, had been asked to do something similar - test the code designed by Chib.

This brings us to a pertinent question - how fair and beneficial is it to encourage collision between two specialists or pit one employee against another?

Avoiding negativity

While it's true that productive rivalry encourages innovation, spurs creativity, enhances productivity and teamwork, it may show its ugly side if an organisation fails to make its people see the logic behind it. It shouldn't lead to any kind of negativity among employees as harmony is integral to the smooth functioning and execution of work. It can also promote unhealthy competition if not managed well and cause attrition if the company is unable to manage the same peo-

ple it is pitting against each other.

"Productive rivalry in organisations proves to be beneficial only when employees are made aware of its larger goal. Since everyone is consciously aware of the parallel rivalry, it motivates one to excel in the task in the given time frame. The quality of output increases manifold. Moreover, everyone's work needs to be criticised or appreciated to make them aware of their strong and weak points," points out Manuel D'Souza, chief human resource officer, Intelnet Global Services.

Competition in organisations is generally never institutionalised. It happens on an informal basis and comes naturally to employees who are unknowingly led to it because of the social ethos. A certain degree of competition has been instilled in us right from childhood - in school, in college and it naturally shows up at the workplace. It internally drives people, churns their competitive juices and helps them produce better.

"Internal competition helps in implementing new strategies and achieves immediate results. It creates a sense of urgency among team members, increases teamwork and efficiency. Everybody ends up working for a cause - to achieve targets," says Kamal Karanth, MD, Kelly Services.

If carefully managed it can prove to be a tool that can stimulate innovation without disrupting cooperation. It also ensures smooth integration of competence and talent in a team. The team then starts to work for a goal

instead of one member turning against another - especially if it has multiple talent.

According to Nandakumar Bhat, vice president, development and testing, CSS Corp, productive rivalry paves the way for innovation and for innovation, a slight disruption is imperative. The motive here is to inspire employees to ideate and come up with out-of-the box ideas. Therefore, employees are given the freedom to think deeper and harder. Productive rivalry thus inculcates a sense of ownership with in employees and the evident consequence is a great result! However, the key is to create a spirit of healthy competition and not encourage personal rivalry.

Encouraging innovation

When an idea is worked at by various participants with varied approaches, it gives birth to a masterpiece. As everybody gets down to adding some new perspective, it gives rise to the most celebrated outcome - innovation.

Productive rivalry forces exploration of new alternatives leading to innovation. Rivalry fuels a desire to contribute more than what is expected and opens a route to innovation.

"To fuel innovation, a certain amount of competition helps. In addition, these competitions also generate positive energy and fun that make the workplace lively.

The implementation of feasible innovative ideas leads to employees

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“owning” the organisation system and it helps in better employee engagement,” points out Bansod.

Productive rivalry builds in two conflicting threads - rivalry (competition) and productivity (cooperation). While it's competition that helps us to excel; it's cooperation that helps us to punch above our weight. As such, productive rivalry in an organisation weaves in benefits of competition with an overall focus on team/organisation productivity, he adds.

Shaun Langdon, general manager, Crowne Plaza, Bengaluru, Electronics City, says that his company has a culture of sharing best practices amongst hotels and the hotels vie with each other to offer the best solutions for common goals such as driving more revenue, benchmarking of guest satisfaction scores among other things.

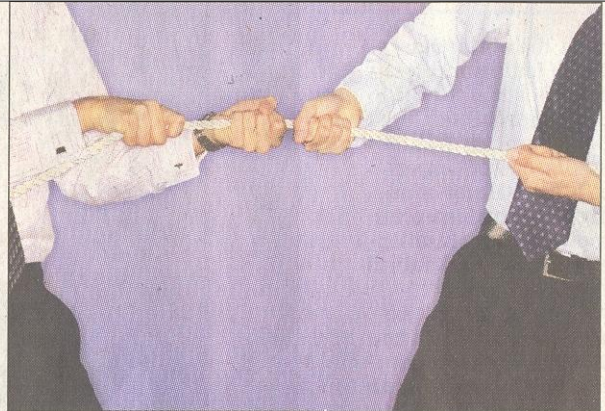
The challenges

The main challenge involved in implementing the internal competition strategy is that some people get too carried away by competition and miss out on the other benefits associated with the exercise.

Competition should not give rise to negative feelings such as fear or insecurity, which might backfire as an impediment to the free flow of thought. This shouldn't lead to any animosity among employees as their harmony is integral to a smooth system.

Critical challenges to nurture productive rivalry are - strike a balance between competition and cooperation, an appreciative, critical and timely evaluation of the innovation threads and timely implementation of feasible ideas.

The biggest challenge is that it cannot be used to deal with each and every problem and



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needs to be used with caution. If a customer complains about a defect in a product, one cannot announce a prize for the person who is able to fix it in the best possible way. Its biggest plus point is that it can challenge both new and old employees to come up with new ideas/designs. The old team is inspired to put in its best and regenerate itself in the process, adds Ashok Saxena, head, Kronos Noida R&D Centre.

Some organisations believe that creating internal competition is not imperative to promoting a culture of innovation. According to Margaret Rodrigues, associate manager

- corporate HR at Directi, a flat organisational structure ensures that there is no rat race for promotions. “If we encourage internal competition, it will increase stress levels unnecessarily and will lead to a drop in productivity. Imposing internal competition may provide short-term gains, but may prove detrimental to an organisation's ability to grow in the longer context. We have designed our policies in a way that they promote team work rather than individual achievement.”

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