

Enlightened doer-ship

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Making the case for a rewards system that recognises the collective effort of the team in achieving the larger, organisational goals.

The presence of individual rewards in organisations presents an interesting problem. The 'worker' in such a system is constantly drawn by two impulses, often at odds with each other — the first is the impulse to perform his duties effectively, and the second is to match his efforts towards the individual rewards on offer. This often leads to individual behaviours that are counter-productive to the larger goals and merely serve the short-term needs of individual rewards.

However, in reality all organisational accomplishment is possible only with the accomplishment of the collective, not an individual alone. Thus, an alternative view could be taken of the entire purpose of rewards, and the way to deliver them given the collective nature of organisational achievement. In this article, one such alternative approach is described.

ENLIGHTENED 'DOER'-SHIP

The idea of enlightened doer-ship is based on two key ideas. The first idea is that the work is the primary reward in itself for the individual performing it.

In the absence of any individual reward other than the quality of work itself, one can expect people to focus purely on their creative energies being fully expressed through their work, and drop all other extraneous distractions.

The second feature of enlightened 'doer'-ship is that results are measured purely on the basis of the achievement of the larger objective, and not individual contribution. This would ensure that detrimental behaviours such as credit seeking, unhealthy competition, and impression management would be eliminated. Success is defined purely at the level of a team, or a larger commune and not at the level of an individual. This ensures that all the horses drawing the cart, as it were, are doing so in the same direction and either everyone is rewarded or no one.

Enlightened 'doer'-ship may at first sight seem to be an idealised state, where people believe the work itself is the reward, and constantly look at the larger organisational goal as a measure of performance. However, a deeper analysis will reveal that these are the two primary forces that lead to individual satisfaction.

The concept of monetary and non-monetary rewards for work is really a construct that admits that these two forces do not exist in the organisation.

And the reason why they don't exist is that the 'design' of work and its rewards in complex, hierarchical systems places more importance on design simplicity, and management of egos than ideal solutions based on individual fulfilment.

DESIGNING A SYSTEM TOWARDS ENLIGHTENED DOER-SHIP

While enlightened doer-ship may appear to be a feature of an ideal society or organisation, there are ways to create a system based on this principle. Four key drivers can enable this change.

The first is the effective design of roles and the mapping of roles to the right people. Here, the first step is to ensure that each role is essentially one complete creative unit of the larger picture. The second step is to map the 'meta' creative actions underlying that piece of work, with the capabilities of the person selected for the role. Achieving this first step also has another benefit — namely, a reduction in free riding on the part of individuals, given that all notions of rewards and success are linked to team performance (not individual performance). Once the right person is doing the right role, that is in synch with that person's creative impulse, the tendency to free ride would be minimal.

The second element of designing an enlightened doer-ship system would be a flat, functional hierarchy. Hierarchy, as applied today, has essentially become a form of reward. Superfluous levels are created in many organisations for no purpose other than to act as a reward to keep people motivated in the short term. The hierarchy in an enlightened doer-ship system would be essentially

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functional and contextual, and 'permanent' levels would be created only where unavoidable. This means that the role of a leader in a group could potentially be played by different people in different contexts or assignments.

The third element is to ensure that all variable rewards are linked to performance at the level of the team or commune. Among other benefits, this will also ensure that all stakeholders are working towards the accomplishment of organisational goals first, followed by individual glory.

The fourth element is, of course, a receptive culture that values the entire concept. This may be the biggest challenge, and the transition period may be painful for an established organisation, given the degree of "unlearning" of past habits that would be required. For a start-up with a clean slate as it were, creating such a system would be relatively easier.

CONCLUSION

Enlightened doer-ship as described above is not intended to disregard talent or individual flair. All it does is dissociate talent and individual flair from the reward process. In other words, unless the larger goal is accomplished, no one in the collective is rewarded. And the individual is constantly rewarded for his individual flair on a day-to-day basis through his own work content. The path towards achieving this 'enlightened' goal is a difficult one, and one that is made more complex given the scale of modern organisations, but is a path that must be taken, from the perspective of individual and organisational purpose fulfilment.

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