

Workplace Culture:

Improving Communication Between Employer and Employee

WHEN TALKING TO OWNERS, OR MANAGERS OF COMPANIES ABOUT THE CHALLENGES EGYPTIAN COMPANIES FACE, FINDING AND KEEPING WORKERS IS ALWAYS THE MOST PRESSING ISSUE. TURNOVER RATES IN SOME SECTORS ARE AS HIGH AS 60 PERCENT – RETAINING WORKERS PROVES TO BE AS DIFFICULT A TASK AS FINDING THEM IN THE FIRST PLACE. AND WHILE SOME SECTORS, LIKE THE READY-MADE GARMENT PRODUCERS, FACE BIGGER PROBLEMS THAN OTHERS, THERE ARE A LOT OF COMMON REASONS FOR THE DIFFICULTIES.

A lack of experience with the world of work, long commutes, difficult transportation situations or cultural restrictions like problems for women to work late shifts or social prejudices towards certain occupations are some of the reasons that cause difficulties. While there are some issues that are extremely difficult to overcome, one factor when it comes to work

place behavior could well make a big difference: Communication.

In a very hierarchical society like Egypt, expressing doubts in decisions taken by superiors is not a common behavior. At the same time, managers or superiors seldom take the time to explain criticism or give feedback in a constructive way. In discussions with employ-

ers, the difficult situation comes to light: One of our new employees, a telephone operator was criticized on her first day, for not answering the phone appropriately - she didn't use the company name correctly and her tone of voice was unfriendly. The following day, she failed to show up. Asked the reason for her absence, she said, she thought she had been fired.

A clear case of miscommunication – but examples like this are common. The lack of experience with work, a work culture that does not build on respectful communication, and a certain degree of openness all play a role in the high turnover rates that companies face.

“Make Work Work for Us”

To tackle this problem, MKI-vetEP, the German-Egyptian youth employment program, focuses on building an understanding for



'Make Work Work for Us', a scene from the short films showing critical incidents at the workplace.

respectful and beneficial exchange processes. The program's underlying concept of interactive employability tries to clarify misconceptions for job seekers, employees and employers, by supporting exchange and communication; and creating a common ground for both sides.

It especially focuses on improving communication skills and conflict management capabilities of new recruits and their employers. The program has now entered into cooperation with MKI-Dual System schools and the private-sector based Regional Units for the Dual System (RUDS). The idea being that the technical training MKI-DS students receive will be reinforced by the MKI-vetEP toolkit – "Make work work for us" – which is part of the curriculum in the first year of the apprenticeship.

Students will improve their soft skills and receive a preparation for working life that equips them with the capacity to handle difficult situations at work, in an appropriate way. They learn that leaving one's job is only the last resort, and that conflicts at the workplace can be resolved in a way that helps both sides - and that they can actively shape their working environment and the behavior of others around them by acting in a responsible way.

The approach is designed to work at different levels. It will enhance cooperation between the private sector and the government within the structures of the MKI-DS. The Mubarak-Kohl students in 6th of October City and Cairo will participate in the training, which will help them prepare for their careers in the constantly evolving work scenario.

The toolkit training "Make Work Work for Us" uses short films, which were produced in Arabic language with young Egyptian actors, showing typical scenes from working life involving employer-employee interaction. The films depict situations at the workplace that leads to difficulties in communication between employer and employee. After the "critical incident", three possible scenarios follow - each scenario showing how the employee could have communicated in a different way or responded to the situation.



After watching a conflict scene between employer and employee, students watch three possible reactions and learn which reaction is the most appropriate.

Differentiating between aggressive, submissive and assertive behavior, participants learn what kind of behavior triggers what kind of reaction. The film scenes were developed together with Egyptian youth and employers, based on real life situations and are both believable, and within the scope of the participants experience.

Watching and discussing the scenes, MKI-DS students learn how to deal with conflicts at the workplace and what kind of behavior will help resolve these situations.

In February, a training course for teachers and RUDS personnel began to familiarize participants with the toolkit and improve its effective implementation. The training deliberately brings together the representatives of the private sector and the teachers - to create a joint understanding with regard to the importance and difficulties of effective and respectful communication at the workplace.

The trained facilitators already started working with Mubarak-Kohl students in their first year of the apprenticeship, establishing work orientation as an integral part of the MKI-DS apprenticeship scheme.

Not a One-Way Road

But improved communication at work is

not a one-way road. As much as the employees can influence a better environment at work, they are not solely responsible for improved work relationships. Smooth communication is also essential for good leadership. From human resource managers to every person with a supervisory role in a company, good communication is an essential part of good management. Thus, while focusing on young employees or apprentices, the toolkit training also addresses the people at the companies that the new job entrants will deal with. Essentially, it is designed to make both sides understand each other better and learn how to avoid problematic situations from the start.

The training toolkit will not be limited to schools, however. While for now, MKI-vetEP implements the work orientation training in MKI-DS schools, cooperation with the private sector and a possible integration of soft-skill training into technical, in-company training courses is an approach already in the pipeline. Meanwhile, on the employers' side, MKI-vetEP is developing a training module for improved human resource management in companies. ▲

*If you are interested in more details about the training and the approach of MKI-vetEP with regard to work orientation training, please contact MKI-vetEP program director Eng. Niveen Sakr
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