



Developing a Culture of Responsibility

By **Senthil SSG**

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S MALL and Medium Enterprises, SMEs, often do not have the capacity that larger organisations have for training and development. In most instances, it is both a financial and capacity constraint.

At the same time, despite these very constraints, SMEs need to get the most out of every one of their employees.

The good news is that it is possible. The bad news is that very few people know how. This is because there is a problem that does not allow people to stay focused on the results of the company. In fact, it does the opposite. It keeps people focused on themselves and their doings.

This focus on oneself invites people problems. These people problems manifest in a thousand different ways, negatively impacting relationships, communication, trust, accountability, motivation, team-building, conflict resolution, and leadership.

If leaders were to reflect on the amount of time they spend trying to address their litany of people problems and keep staff focused on results, it can be mind boggling. In fact, it drains the energy of these leaders and substantially undermines the potential and performance of these companies.

As SMEs tend to be structurally lean, productivity and leadership acumen are the keys to success. They, therefore, have to find effective ways to bring out the potential of their people and ensure that they are in sync with company objectives, mission, and vision.

However, in trying to achieve this, SMEs could sometimes be barking up the wrong tree. Human resource departments scramble to implement workplace initiatives to build team cohesion and motivation. More training programmes are prescribed. But what if people problems in their many different manifestations are nothing more than symptomatic of a single deeper problem which keeps us self-focused and therefore in a state of resistance?

Let's take a real life scenario. This is an organisation with about 150 employees. The culture in the organisation is such that the people are only motivated to please and impress their CEO and senior managers. This promotes silos and a string of middle level managers who protect their turf and refrain from cooperating with team members for fear of "losing out".

This leads to a culture that hampers creativity, innovation, and trust, and breeds poor relationships and a host of people problems. The CEO therefore carries the responsibility of innovation and idea generation and drives them personally. He constantly laments about the lack of independent thinking, vision and cohesion among his managers.

What are the implications if the trend continues?

What we have is an organisation where people are trapped in a box, unable to focus on outcomes and results because they are too focused on themselves and on justifying their own


actions. So teamwork and team spirit is thrown out the door. Conflicts become routine. Matters that could be resolved within minutes over a phone call take days and after a chain of E-mails, and in most cases, only with the intervention of the senior managers or the CEO.

This type of situation is not uncommon in SMEs and larger organisations. It leads to underperformance and wastage of resources and energy. SME leaders and staff therefore need to figure a way to stay focused on the results. In each of the key directions at work—towards customers, co-workers, employees, and managers.

Through a very interesting and engaging story, The Arbinger Institute, in their book *Leadership and Self-Deception* talks about how self-focus and resistance leads to people neglecting organisational results and becoming consumed with defending themselves and blaming others.

Arbinger principles and technologies, discovered by scholars working at the deeper levels of the human sciences, provide a framework to maximise staff potential and nurture high performance. Through the Arbinger Results System, leaders are able to learn to embed a system that keeps their employees focused on results.

More specifically, it shows them the way to interact with customers, co-workers, team members, and managers. This focus on results then drives a lot of business decisions including hiring, firing, benefits and rewards packages, and performance appraisal.

Leaders of SMEs need to empower themselves and their people to be able to move forward to realise their goals and vision. By mastering the keys to focusing on results, and developing a mentality of responsibility rather than of blame, people can then clearly determine, prioritise, and order all of their workplace efforts. This eventually leads to a focused, aligned, and mutually supportive and high performing environment, where people are accountable for their results and their impact on the ability of others to get results. 

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