

# **Improving quality work by infusing a “Sense of Belongingness” in lowest-level workers.**

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## **ABSTRACT**

**Objective:** Improving quality work by infusing a “sense of belongingness” in lowest-level workers. The present work focuses on the management of human resources in an enterprise where contract workers are involved in carrying out quality work related to the parent organisation. In today’s world, where the number of supervisors has reduced significantly, it is a challenge to maintain the quality of work at a satisfactory level. The paper proposes to enhance the quality of work by infusing a “sense of belongingness” into lowest-level workers.

**Methodologies adopted:** Case studies.

The first case study was conducted between 2007-2011 during a project related to Rural Electrification Work in the Bokaro district under the scheme RGGVY. The author was deputed to supervise the rural electrification work of 300 villages with thousands of kilometres of 11kv and 415V distribution lines, along with over 400 distribution transformers in four blocks of the Bokaro district in Jharkhand. Contractors engaged local workers for erection of all infrastructure. The author explained the process of erection to local communities and brought about a sense of belongingness in them towards the infrastructure being developed.

The second case review was conducted between 2013-16 at Chandrapura, Bokaro, during the operation and maintenance work of the 220KV switchyard. Six workers were involved in the maintenance work of the switchyard. They rectified faults during emergencies and took care of housekeeping. However, they only followed orders and never worked proactively. The author divided the workplace into eighteen parts, each maintaining three parts. During monthly walk-in inspections, one worker was awarded as the best contractor’s employee of the month of that section, which introduced a sense of competition among them.

**Analysis:** During the first case study, after pointing out the benefits of the infrastructure being developed and how the quality of work will help in its sustainability for an extended period, villagers realised its importance in their well-being. As a result, they kept vigil over the contractor’s work during the erection process. In second case study, the repetitive external motivation (awards and appreciation) infused a “sense of belongingness” in them. Thus, all employees started functioning proactively. As a result, the occurrence of electrical faults was reduced drastically, and housekeeping improved.

**Findings:** These two case studies lead the author to coin the term “sense of belongingness”, which can lead to improve the quality of work by the lowest-level workers in a company. There are five ways to develop a “Sense of Belongingness” (SOB) among workers- external motivation, which can lead to internal

motivation; mutual respect; a sense of duty (every person has their own responsibility); brainstorming sessions (to make them feel as an integral part of the department); encouraging them to do more than expected.

Conclusion: All these steps help to develop a “sense of belongingness” among the lowest-level workers in an organisation. Without these principles, it will be a challenge to achieve quality work. The paper addresses all the processes in detail to improve the work culture in a department and, ultimately, an organisation.

Keywords: Sense of belongingness, motivation, Sense of duty, lowest level worker, quality

## **Introduction**

HR mantra is a strategy to manage people or workman and workmanship for the company, the nation and ultimately for the humankind. Human resource management is all about managing people in any organization, structure, interests of employees, staff, training and development, award management, focusing on results and ultimately, it should be designed to cater maximum output from any employee to make the company more competitive and professional.

Initially during the course of human development, consumers always bought the work output from the workers. E.g. People exchanged or traded the work output (earthen pots, clothes, shoes, food items and many more) with either their own work output like in barter system or with currency. Gradually people started hiring workers for their work force in the place of work output. Workers get hired for specific period and they get paid for their work time/ force. The employer started finding ways to get maximum output from hired workers and from that time, HR management started. It involved selecting and hiring workers as per their requirements, providing training in the field of their company's work field, developing strong relations between management and employees, ensuring different types of compensation and remuneration, motivating by introducing appreciation and awards etc. The objective of human resource management was always to get maximum output from their workers for longest period of time.

Any organisation is divided in layers of work force like lowest level workers, junior, mid-level and senior level management. In today's world, where the number of supervisors has reduced significantly, it is a challenge to maintain the quality of work at a satisfactory level. Management always finds it difficult to get quality work from lowest level workers as they don't feel connected with the company and all they concerned about the payment they get for their work. There is always a tendency to waste time in unproductive things if not constantly monitored. Nowadays in this competitive world every employee needs to play a vital role in work and keep improving the quality of work culture and it's an expensive affair to hire so many supervisors to monitor every working gang.

### **Statement of problem**

In absence of supervisors, lowest level workers fail to deliver quality of work and it's not possible to hire many supervisors in this cutthroat competition in business.

Authors tried to find the root cause of the issue. Authors derived an approach to enhance the quality of work by infusing a "sense of belongingness" into lowest-level workers. They used two case studies and succeeded to cater quality work from them.

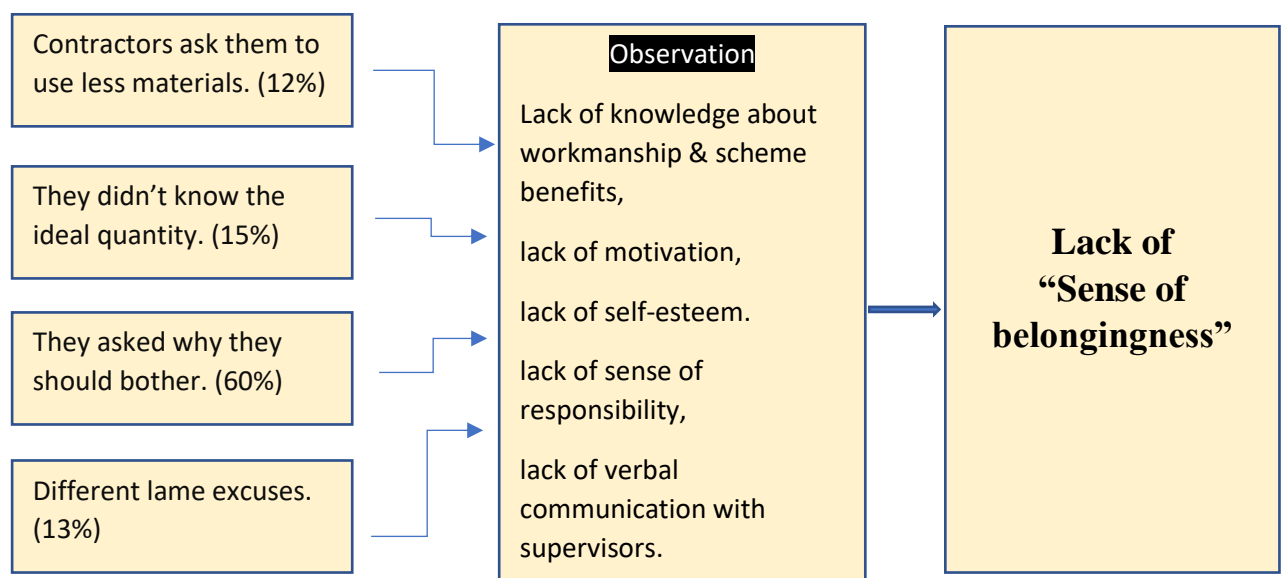
### **Case study1 (2007-2011)**

The first case study was conducted between 2007-2011 during a project related to Rural Electrification Work in the Bokaro district under the scheme RGGVY. The author was deputed to supervise the rural electrification work of more than 300 villages with thousands of kilometres of 11kv and 415V distribution lines, two 33/11kv substation in two blocks along with over 400 distribution transformers in four blocks of the Bokaro district in Jharkhand.

The project involved erection of cement poles, which was required to be well compacted using burnt brick (jhama) for better results. At every angle point where lines need to be erected, stay wires need to be erected to support the poles. The grouting of the stay wires were supposed to be well grouted

using concrete mix in a specific ratio. All households who were under below poverty lines (BPL) were eligible for free electricity connections. These are works required instant monitoring at the time of erection because they went underground after completion. After erection, the only way to check the quality of the work was to dig the ground and check. Quality check and rectification if found something bad, made the process too slow to complete the project in time. Also, it was not possible to keep vigil on every structure or pole during erection.

All workers, who were engaged in the erection work belonged to the local area, were called for a meeting. A brainstorming session was done among all workers regarding improvement of quality of work. The whole scheme was made clear to them and tried to note down their viewpoints on the quality of work. A survey was conducted with the sample size of more than 200 workers engaged in all four different blocks of Bokaro district. Most common quotes of workers when asked about the bad workmanship, are shown the figure 1.



*Figure:1*

It was clearly noted that workers were not interested in maintaining or improving quality of work because of several reasons. They were lacking self-esteem because of less motivation to work, less confidence and de-connected from the major cause (electrification of all un-electrified villages or even households). Lack of knowledge regarding the objective of the project and its benefits. Every

probable cause could be addressed by improving the coined term “sense of belongingness” among workers. When any person has this feeling, he/she puts an additional effort towards improving the quality of work benefitting the person concerned as well as to the system. An executive who are placed in management level works with full potential. They know the importance of the work and if something goes wrong, only they must rectify it at minimum time. They believe that its their own work and feel connected to it. Now the author has the challenge to infuse sense of belongingness amongst all the lowest level workers.

### **Work plan**

Brainstorming sessions: gathering was called with the support of the gram panchayat and explained the objective of the project to everyone present. Under the rural electrification project, every village must get the infrastructure to cater connections to every households and BPL families will get one connection free of cost. If the infrastructure had be strong, then it would last many coming years. Process of erection of poles, uses of burnt bricks, putting base plate under the pole, quantity of concrete in stays etc were explained to them so that the local villagers and workers could understand, and they could act like supervisors. After brainstorming session, workers start doing quality work without negligence and even villagers were acting like supervisor. They knew that it was all getting done for their benefits. They never ignored quality even after their employer asked them to do. They got motivated and worked with high self-esteem. Now they started feeling connected with the project and they had the sense of belongingness.

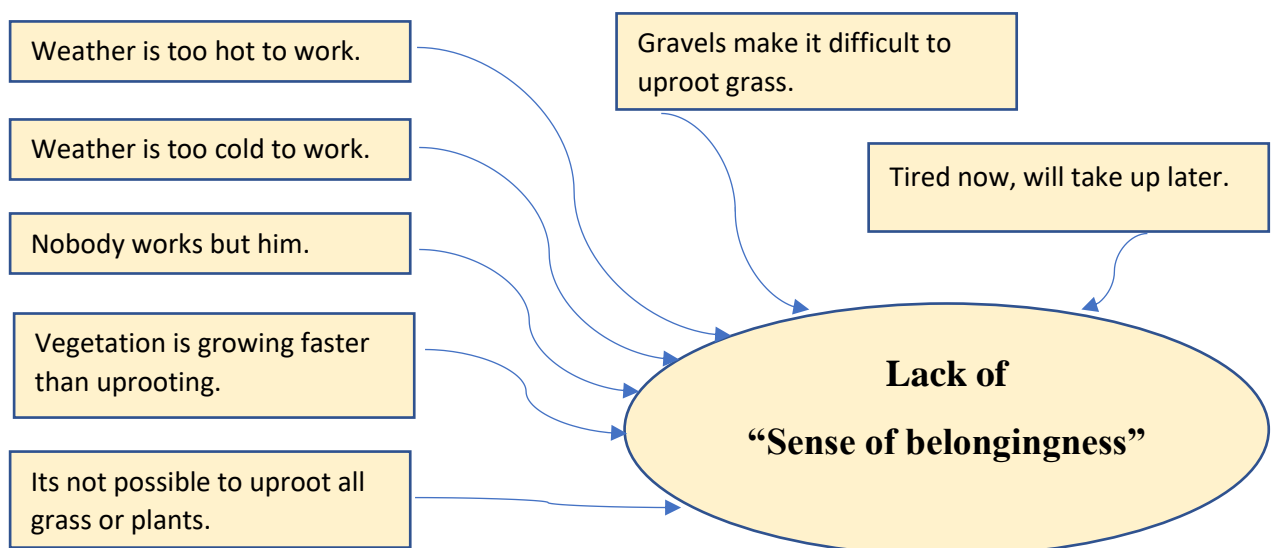
### **Case study 2 (2013-2016)**

The second case study was conducted between 2013-16 at DVC, CTPS, Chandrapura, Bokaro, (2X250MW power plant) during the operation and maintenance work of the 220KV switchyard. An annual maintenance contract (AMC) was running for the day-to-day maintenance work of the switchyard. Six workers were involved in the maintenance work. Their job responsibilities were to rectify faults during any emergency or tripping of the system and took care of housekeeping. Many

electrical equipment-like transformers, bays which includes isolators, breakers, CTs, PTs etc along with many other infrastructures were spread in more than ten acres of land.

The ground beneath all equipment in switchyard were filled with gravels for electrical safety. It reduces the step and touch potential and protects the operator in any fault situation. Over a period, unwanted grass and plants grow over gravels which is a threat for electrical safety. All workers were instructed to uproot all vegetations and keep the area free from all grass and plants whenever they get free time during official timing after attending any preventive or breakdown maintenance. But it was observed that all workers go and work as and when required to attend any electrical maintenance but never got involved in uprooting vegetation. When they got instructions to go and clear all grass, they used to waste time by gossiping to each other and never worked proactively. It was the main reason for spreading of vegetation across the switchyard area.

Getting experience from the previous successful case study, authors again called for the brainstorming session and all points or excuses regarding cleanliness of the switchyard were noted down.



It was clear from all answers that they were not working proactively and giving lame excuses. They complete the work of maintenance and leave all scrap materials behind stating that it will be cleaned later as they were tired. It kept lying there for several days and got cleaned after scolding by the site

in charge. It can easily be derived from their lame excuses that they were lacking sense of belongingness for the work and workplace. They worked religiously for the maintenance of the equipment as they knew that its important to attend those work for the smooth running of the unit for the generation of power and if they don't do, some serious actions could be taken against them. But when the matter of house keeping surfaced, they never showed any willingness to work.

### **Work plan**

The area of Switchyard was divided into 18 parts and all six workers were asked to adopt three parts. They would be responsible and accountable for its cleanliness. Walkin inspections were planned by site in charge and other higher officials in every week. The worker who had kept their area cleaner than others, was awarded "Person of the month of that section" and "The employee Champion". His name was put on a board in the control room for one month with a heading "the employee champion". He was felicitated in the presence of sectional head. It started a race among them to keep their areas clean as it put a feeling of competitiveness among them. When ever they got any free time, they used to pass that time uprooting all vegetation in their adopted part of the switchyard. Not only this, when they visit any bay for any preventive or breakdown maintenance, the person who adopted that part, started cleaning all scraps left after the work in their respective areas. He knew that if he had to win the award, only he had to clean his area. They started believing that those adopted part of switchyard belonged to them and he had to take care of them. It resulted better housekeeping and helped in minimising electrical faults thus improving power plant performance.

Award and felicitation are external motivation for any employee. External motivation is short lived. But with repetitive external motivation, any person can be internally motivated. Internal motivation stays. This practice of award and felicitation lasted for 3 years due to which sense of belongingness inculcated in all workers of that section. They started working proactively and with high esteem.

### **Analysis**

During the first case study, after pointing out the benefits of the infrastructure being developed and how the quality of work will help in its sustainability for an extended period, villagers realised its importance in their well-being. As a result, they kept vigil over the contractor's work during the erection process. In second case study, the repetitive external motivation (awards and appreciation) infused a "sense of belongingness" in them. Thus, all employees started functioning proactively. As a result, the occurrence of electrical faults was reduced drastically, and housekeeping improved.

## **Findings**

These two case studies lead the author to coin the term "sense of belongingness", which can lead to improve the quality of work by the lowest-level workers in a company. There are five ways to develop a "Sense of Belongingness" (SOB) among workers.

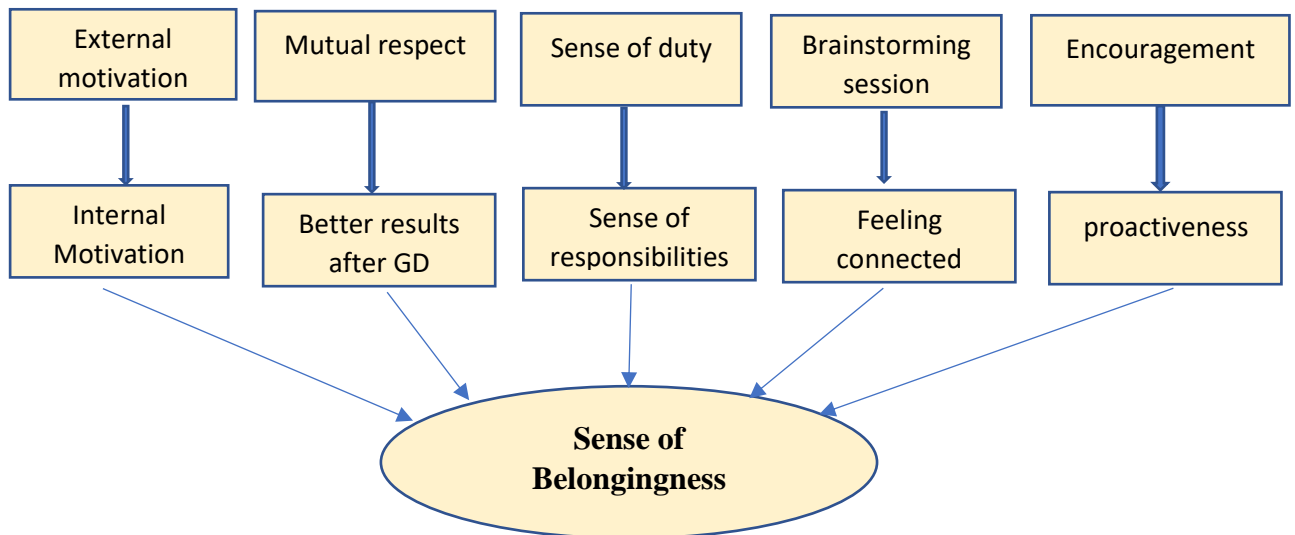
External motivation: It works well in developing internal motivation if practiced in repetitive manner for some extended time. People don't need to be asked or commanded by anyone for work. Internal motivation pushes them to work willingly and proactively.

Mutual respect: It helps to develop ways to solve the problem through group discussion without going into confrontation. People start respecting other's viewpoint and after a healthy discussion, the group concludes which is best for that work. Site in charge should also respect worker's viewpoint. It will increase their self-confidence and they will never hesitate to put their ideas forward.

Sense of duty: (Every person has their own responsibility). Regular communication with workers, site in charge can make them aware about their role in the whole project or work. It will help to increase their sense of duty and their role.

Brainstorming sessions: Regular brainstorming sessions will make them feel as an integral part of the department. Ultimately it will lead to increase their sense of belongingness.

Encouragement: As workers fear the failure and don't dare to initiate the work, encouraging them on regular basis can make them work proactively.



## Conclusion

Every employee works proactively and willingly, when they feel connected and have sense of belongingness for their workplace and the company. They feel motivated and confident if they know that their voice/idea will be heard. Every employee participated in the race to become employee champion. They're generally high performing, engaged employees that can pass this enthusiasm onto others. The Employee Champion aids employees to speak up and ensures they feel heard and respected at work. All these steps help to develop a "sense of belongingness" among the lowest-level workers in any organisation. Without these principles, it will be a challenge to achieve quality work.

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