Assumptions of The Human Element Approach

The key principles of The Human Element—truth, choice, and awareness—when applied, change many of our common beliefs about the way people work. These new assumptions can have a profound effect on our work, our relationships, and our lives.

Self-Esteem

Common belief: Focusing on self-esteem, per se drains energy from productive work. Feel-good activities should be conducted, if at all, on the employee's own time. Work is a place to concentrate on the job, not on personalities.

Human Element assumption: Self-esteem is the core of each person, the center from which all creativity, motivation, and productive work issue. A major aim of the organization is to optimize self-esteem for all employees.

Truth

Common belief: People should tell the truth as they know it, judiciously, taking care to not hurt others' feelings, to preserve privacy, and to avoid vulnerability. Many people can't handle the truth. They become angry, belligerent, or devastated. Managers should avoid telling the direct truth about personnel matters, salaries, imminent firings, and organizational secrets.

Human Element assumption: In most organizations, the number of legitimate organizational secrets is minimal. There are far fewer legitimate secrets than is usually believed. Secrets are poison. The more the organization tells the whole truth, the healthier and more productive it is. People are better able to handle the truth than they are given credit for.

Teamwork

Common belief: Team building is accomplished through the clarifying of team goals and missions, through appreciation and recognition of the validity of a variety of roles (gatekeeper, idea generator, and so on), and styles (analytical, emotive, and so on), and through improved communication and negotiating skills.

Human Element assumption: Poor teamwork does not arise primarily from differences among members but rather from rigidities (that is, attitudes held to rigidly). Rigidities result when people have low self-esteem, are defensive, and are fearful (for example, of being incompetent). To dissolve rigidities and improve teamwork, fears are best dealt with openly and truthfully.

Empowerment

Common belief: Participative management, in which everyone has input into a decision that a leader then makes, is a mechanism for empowering employees.

Human Element assumption: Empowerment is accomplished only through giving power. "Empower-
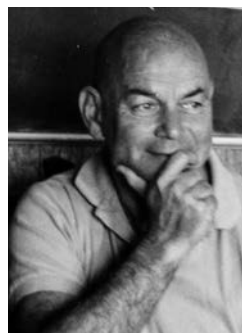
Will Schutz (1925-2002), creator of The Human Element, FIRO® theory and the Elements of Awareness.

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ees" participate equally with the leader and the final decision is made only when all agree.

Accountability

Common belief: It is important to have someone accountable for each task. Then responsibility and blame can be assigned when something goes wrong, and the problem can be fixed more quickly.

Human Element assumption: When anything goes wrong, everyone involved is 100 percent responsible, and no one is to blame. Then everyone is on the same team, trying to solve the problem.

Performance Appraisal

Common belief: The manager works with an employee to improve the employee's performance by negotiating the expectations of employment, writing out appraisal criteria, conducting a direct and supportive feedback session, and discussing behavior rather than the person.

Human Element assumption: An employee's performance is largely a function of the relationship between the employee and the manager. Therefore, improvement of performance is more effectively accomplished if the relationship between the two people is improved first.

Change

Common belief: To bring about change, enroll employees in a formal or informal program, set goals, make deadlines, plan procedures, create milestones, build in safeguards, and reward success along the way.

Human Element assumption: These change methods all work if everyone involved has made the basic decision to change. If not, then it's the "diet plan" phenomenon (lose twenty pounds and gain back more). People must learn why they have not wanted

to change, what the payoff is for not changing, and what they fear about the new state. If they are clear about all of that and then decide to change, the program will work.

Ethics

Common belief: People act ethically if they avoid temptation, if they are rewarded for ethical behavior, and if they are severely punished for transgressions. Ethics is a matter of character and internal moral fiber, motivated by internal values and authority.

Human Element assumption: If people feel good about themselves, they act ethically and feel pleasure from acting ethically. Ethical behavior that stems from fear is unstable and vulnerable to temptation.

Stress

Common belief: Stress is decreased through reduced workloads, time off, meditation, biofeedback, and psychotherapy. Special consideration should be given to people in high-stress jobs.

Human Element assumption: While these are all useful techniques, they do not reach the central issue: namely, why people choose to feel stress. Some people feel stress in everything they do; others in the same jobs never feel stress. When people become aware that they are choosing stress and uncover the payoff for feeling stressed, they may decide to make a different choice.

Decision Making

Common belief: Decisions should be made objectively, not subjectively. Everyone is to act "professionally" (that is, to overcome feelings).

Human Element assumption: Feelings exist. When everyone handles feelings by being aware of them, expressing them, including them in final decisions, and

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being conscious of when they are useful and of when they distort, feelings lead to improved creativity.

Leadership

Common belief: The leader should have a vision, enlist people behind the vision, and act decisively and quickly.

Human Element assumption: Leaders should mobilize all the talents of a group, including their own talents. The people most qualified and most affected by a decision make the best decisions, and these decisions are implemented quickly and with a minimum of resistance.