

Essay on employee relations

[Business](#), [Management](#)



UNITARY AND PLURALISTIC FRAMES OF REFERENCE

According to Fox's (1966) way of looking at the relationship between the employer and the employee, managers have a divergent 'frames of reference'. The frame of reference is the lens through which a manager sees the employment relationships. Fox (1966) described three ideal frames of reference, viz. Unitary, pluralistic, and radical. However, unitary and pluralistic frames of references have become more popular over the time.

Unitary Frame of Reference

Unitary frame of reference talks about a way of thinking, values, attitudes, and practices related to the membership of organizations. It is based on the assumption that members of the organization, irrespective of their roles, should share the same objectives, goals, and values. Unitary frame of references was influenced by the work of Parsons (1966). According to Parsons (1966), the society is a unified system whose components are independent to each other. Interdependence between these various parts of the society leads to order in the society. The integration of the society in turn is based on the values that are shared by the people. In the context of organizations, unitary frame of reference is expressed through the implementation of organizations' mission statements and the achievement of the actual set objectives. Under the unitary frame of reference, management plays a parental role and workers are expected to serve the company loyally.

According to the unitary frame of reference, trade unions' involvement in managerial issues can divide loyalties and undermine the authority of the

management. However, the role of trade unions is no entirely neglected. Trade Unions are seen as a useful channel of communication with the organizations' workers. However, trade unions are also perceived to be playing a counterproductive role by providing support to the disruptive elements in the organization. Organizations that follow the unitary frame of reference deter the involvement of trade unions in the organization but heavily emphasize on team building and effective management training for preventing conflicts. Unitary frame of reference is more visible in the modern IT industry where employees are strictly required to adhere to the norms laid down by the management.

Advantages of Unitary Frame of Reference

- Emphasis on consensus and harmony.
- Employees are socialised into a team culture.
- Employees are respected, and emphasis is put on their integrity and dignity.
- Management plays a central role in integrating the hard and soft, technical and social activities within the firm.

Disadvantages of Unitary Frame of Reference

- Cannot easily accommodate people with unorthodox views like people who want a life outside of work.
- Different viewpoints among the workers when not properly accommodated leads to friction among the employees.

Pluralistic Frame of Reference

In contrast to the unitary frame of reference, a pluralistic frame of reference emphasises the neutral and mediating role of the organization's management. Under this frame of reference, the organization is perceived to be made up of multiple sub-groups that have their own legal loyalties with their own set of objectives and leaders. Broadly, the two main sub-groups under the pluralistic frame of reference are the management and trade unions. Management plays the role of influencing and coordination of issues among the employees and less of controlling and enforcing its will forcibly on the employees. The existing of inherent competing interests in the organization inevitably leads to some conflicts among the various subgroups in the organization. In contrast to the unitary frame of reference, trade unions are given more importance and are deemed to be the legal representatives of the organizations' employees. Conflict is not perceived to be a wrong thing and conflicts between different stakeholders of the organization are addressed through collective bargaining. Pluralistic frame of reference is evident in the modern automobile industry where employees are given freedom to organize themselves into groups. Employees are also free to form themselves into unions and settle conflicts with the management through the process of bargaining. United Automobile Workers, the union for America's auto workers played a key role in negotiations with the government and management during the 2008 financial crisis.

Advantages of Unitary Frame of Reference

- Interests of various stakeholders in the organization like owners and workers are well balanced.

- Efficient utilization of conflict management strategies.
- Roles and procedures for conflict resolution are well understood by all the stakeholders involved.
- More importance to industrial relations in resolving conflicts among the stakeholders.

Disadvantages of Unitary Frame of Reference

- Increased role of trade unions makes bargaining a necessary ritual for resolving every single conflict.
- Too much focus on the interests of workers leads to inefficiencies in the productivity of employees.
- Need for formal consultations with elected representatives of different sub-groups makes stakeholder meetings resistant to change.

References

Fox, A. (1966). Industrial Sociology and Industrial Relations. London: HMSO.

Parsons, T. (1966). The Evolution of Societies. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.