



# Concentric Model of Relational Practices at Work: Organisational and Management levels

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## Abstract –

*“Relational practices” were identified by Fletcher and mentioned elaborately in her book in late nineties, as a result of an ethnographic survey and research conducted on six professionals of different departments from an organisation in Massachusetts, United States of America. It outlined few practices which marked the tasks undertaken by employees, managers and leaders, that are beyond the formal scope of their job but are inherent. Compliance of such practices ensures a cordial and cohesive environment within the organisation. It also has a positive impact on organisational Culture. Many researchers have conducted various studies on Relational practices and few have been successful in measuring them quantitatively. The present study attempts to enumerate and categorise the identified relational practices at various organisational levels, suggesting their concentric relations and the level of management namely operational, tactical and strategic level of management responsible to motivate and control that particular Relational Practices. This attempt is undertaken to augment the understanding of relational practices at all levels of organizations so that each level participants recognize their role in building up a robust relational practice structure and culture with a background of understanding of its direct consequences and benefits.*

**Index Terms:** Relational practices, Creating Team, Mutual Empowering, Preserving, Self-Achieving, organizational levels, strategic, tactical and operational management

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## Introduction

### 1. Relational Practices

Relational practices (RPs) are the methods employed or displayed as relational skills, such as emotional and social intelligence, to carry out tasks effectively and meet organizational objectives [1].

Early developmental and clinical theories show the occurrence of individuation, which highlights ego fortification, objectivity, obstinate individualistic limitations, controlling, and the capacity for delaying, and which frequently seems to be a symbol of superior growth and maturity. David Bakan [2] claimed that Our Society overrates the agentic ethic (self-defence, self-assurance, dictatorial, egotistical, and aggressive toward endeavours) at the expense of the communal

ethic (oneness with others, characterized by groups and teams). From Erikson [3] to Levinson [4], modern American academics of early psychological theory give the impression to view all growth as a process of separating yourself from other people's environments and becoming "one's own man". Similar to this, Freudian theory, which was founded on instinctive drives, depicts relationships as subordinate to the drive and opportunely ignores the relative theory postulates [5]. Relational theory and its related topics were introduced by Jean Baker Miller [6] and other psychologists at Wellesley College, and they were backed and supported by Carol Gilligan and others [7]. This made it important to pay attention to the voice and opinions of women in the workplace. The growth-in-connection



model, which is present and based on private sphere characteristics of mutuality, cooperation, and connection, is advocated by relational theory even though it is thought that the operative models for people and their accomplishments depend upon public-sphere features like individuality, freedom, and separation [8].

In her book, Fletcher argued against the conventional definition of work, which she defined as routine tasks performed at the workplace rather than the general work detailed in job descriptions, cards, manuals, and performance reviews. She noted the sources of relational conduct that were already in place and suggested other positive behaviour that encouraged people to engage in relational practices. It follows that the emphasis on connection rather than separation as a means of development in relational theory. The five positive aspects of the efficiency theory are what motivate relational interactions [9].

Jack Welsh, the CEO of General Electric, claims that today's organizations have no boundaries and that information is freely and openly shared among all departments and functions. According to Slater [10], these organizations should see themselves as different laboratories that work collaboratively through ideas, resources, and managers. Because the environment is constantly changing and becoming more difficult, dynamic organizations need employees who are both ongoing teachers and lifelong learners. According to Welsh, an organization's ability to learn, transmit that learning across all of its components, and respond quickly is its greatest sustainable competitive advantage. Fletcher defines relational practices as interactional behaviours performed by an employee at work based on a relational belief rather than as a requirement by the organization. One chooses to engage in relational forms of behaviour rather than being forced to. Even though these actions may not directly fall under an employee's organizational responsibilities, they are still highly favoured for organizational effectiveness. Instead of being driven by more agent-oriented requirements, it is a behaviour

that is influenced by a personal need for connection [1]. According to Carlson & Crawford [11], "relational practices are the many skills of offline, backstage, or collaborative work that people display that largely go unrecognized and unrewarded in the workplace."

Fletcher gathered every instance of potential relationally motivated behaviour and categorizes it into four main groups. According to Fletcher, the four main categories of relational practices are:

- Creating team;
- Mutual empowering;
- Preserving;
- Self-achieving

Fascinatingly, according to Fletcher, relational practices that were as such unfamiliar in the context of the work organization setup she studied were built on personal style, a natural expression of gender, or behaviour appropriate for the inner sphere but inappropriate for the outer or public circle.

Carlson and Crawford examined the relationship between femininity and work through an investigation of relationally motivated behaviour at work. They also worked on quantifying the RPs and further categorizing them making them eight prominent Relational Practices.

- Creating Team: Reducing Conflict (RP1): Communication and other forms of interaction that encourage people by providing empathic listening or prompt attention to individual needs, circumstances, and preferences to promote group life.
- Creating Team: Reducing Stress (RP2): This step involves creating scenarios between people in order to foster teamwork and cooperation.
- Mutual Empowering: Empathetic teaching (RP3) is a method of teaching that focuses on the learner rather than the teacher while taking into account the learner's intellect, relational context, and emotional state.
- Mutual Empowering: Reducing Tension (RP4): This refers to resolving potentially explosive situations or

conflicts in people's relationships that could be harmful to one or both of the workers' abilities and potentially have an impact on their efficiency and accomplishments.

- Preserving: Increasing Visibility (RP5): This refers to taking on or accepting responsibility for the work that needs to be done in addition to the technical requirements and job or task definition.
- Preserving: Extending Responsibility (RP6): Extending responsibility entails a willingness to extend not only to horizontal aspects of one's job but also without hesitation into vertical aspects of it.
- Self-Achieving: Reflecting (RP7): It entails going back to one's own emotions, which is a form of self-evaluation from the standpoint of one's own actions.
- Self-Achieving: Reconnecting (RP8): This tactic entails reaching out to a co-worker after a perceived or apparent conflict and going above and beyond to mend fences with him.

Relational practices refer to the ways employees interact and relate to one another [12]. This can include communication patterns, conflict resolution strategies, and power dynamics. Relational practices can be studied in various fields, such as sociology, psychology, and anthropology, and can be used to improve relationships in personal and professional contexts [1].

In organizations, relational practices refer to the ways in which individuals and groups within the organization interact and relate to one another [13]. These practices can have a significant impact on the overall functioning and success of the organization [14]. Examples of relational practices in organizations include:

- Communication patterns: how information is shared and decisions are made within the organization.
- Leadership styles: how leaders interact with and manage their team members.

- Team dynamics: how teams work together, collaborate, and make decisions.
- Conflict resolution strategies: how conflicts and disagreements are handled within the organization.
- Power dynamics: how power is distributed and exercised within the organization.

## *II. Levels of Organisational Behaviour*

Blakeney [15] examines organizational behaviour at the individual, group, and organizational levels. His study integrates these three levels within an organization using general systems theory. With the discussion on these three levels, the importance of transactional analysis for understanding dynamics and organizational processes is brought to light. Using given three levels namely, individual, group and organisational level can lead to a more comprehensive understanding of human behaviour [16].

A study by Yaakobi [17], creates a framework for predicting three aspects of employee performance (quality, innovation, and efficiency) based on an assessment of each participant's Individual (self and professional), group (collective efficacies) as well as those of their organizational (means) networks.

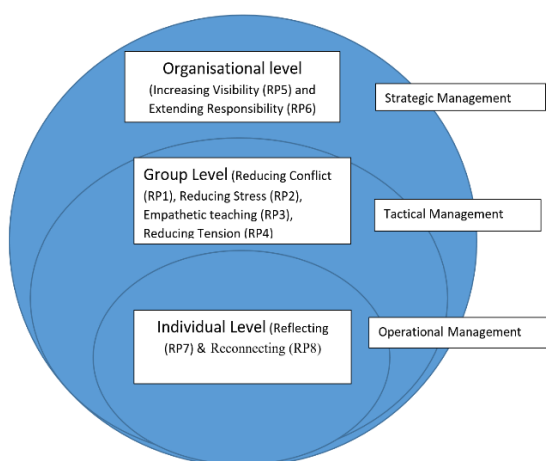
In a recent study, Kahrovic [18] suggests a modified model of organizational behaviour with three levels of analysis, a large number of independent variables that have an impact on employees' behaviour at the individual level, and dependent variables that can take the form of individual, group, or organizational phenomena.

As per the above discussion and literature review, it makes a management sense to categorise RPs at individual, group and organisational level so as to simplify the dynamics attached to them. It would facilitate a better exercise and control of such activities which are going to benefit the organisation at many levels including performance.

To augment the current discussion, role of strategic, tactical and operational management can deepen the discussion and takes the control to more specific levels [19].

## The model

The eight RPs namely Reducing Conflict (RP1), Reducing Stress (RP2), Empathetic teaching (RP3), Reducing Tension (RP4), Increasing Visibility (RP5), Extending Responsibility (RP6), Reflecting (RP7) and Reconnecting (RP8) may very well be related to three levels of organisational behaviour namely Individual, group and Organisational level. This way they can be set up in concentric circles where point of emphasis flows from individual to organisation level (Figure 1). Also, the individual level control lies with operational managers (Lower Management), group level with tactical managers (Middle Management) and organisational level lies with strategic managers (Top Management)



**Figure 1: The Model: Concentric Relation of organisational levels, management and RPs**

Reducing Conflict (RP1) and Reducing Stress (RP2) are part of creating team. It reflects the group efforts to strengthen the group so that it can work efficiently by reducing any potential conflict and abating any stress there on. These Two RPs fall under group behaviour, hence task of middle management to motivate the group to exhibit such practices more.

Empathetic teaching (RP3) and Reducing Tension (RP4) are constituents of major RP, Mutual Empowering. Mutual work is a strong characteristic of a group and hence middle management should tactically inculcate such practices in the employees.

Increasing Visibility (RP5) and Extending Responsibility (RP6) are conjoined in preserving RP. Preserving the organisation, its resources specially the human resource is responsibility of Top Management. It should propagate the importance of assuming responsibilities more than assigned and far sightedness in the employees.

Reflecting (RP7) and Reconnecting (RP8) are part of self-achieving RP. Here the unit of measurement is reflected as self that is individual employee. It's the core responsibility of low management or immediate supervisors to give direction and time for reflection to an individual employee as well as strength to reconnect.

## Conclusion

The model under study is a first concentric model elaborating the significance of relational practices for various levels in organisational behaviour. It directs the path of RPs and makes it more clear. Once the employees understand the levels at which such practices can be performed may lead to better adoption of RPs.

Effective relational practices within an organization can lead to increased productivity, improved teamwork and collaboration, and better decision making[20]. On the other hand, poor relational practices can result in low morale, lack of trust, and poor communication which can lead to decreased productivity and high staff turnover[21]. Therefore, many organizations have invested in building positive relational practices by implementing programs such as team building activities, coaching and mentoring, and effective communication training[22].

The proposed model effectively relates various RPs to the different organisational levels. The employees may find it comfortable to understand which relational practice can be performed at which level. At the management side, each level of management (operational, tactical and strategic) will understand the RPs it has to promote and control for organisational effectiveness. For instance, the operational level management will become clear that Reflecting (RP7) and

Reconnecting are the two aspects of self-achieving. In order to increase performance at individual level, it is imperative to provide clear direction and space to the individual. Similarly, task of middle level management is to enhance the team bonding and mutual empowering of employees to get better organisational performance. Nevertheless, top management is tasked to strategize the human resource in a manner to ensure preserving through Increasing Visibility (RP5) and Extending Responsibility (RP6). Hence a clear classification and overlapping roles of levels of management suggests a clear picture to be pursued by employees in order to gain from RPs.

#### Limitations

The present study suffers with limitations of definitions of RPs. The literature on RPs is limited and hence finding documented instances of RPs posed a challenge. Also, while considering the organisational levels, another level namely society at large could be tested. In addition, only three levels of management are elaborated in this study. There are various studies in management literature pointing at varied levels of management. A new model or adaptation of this model can be carried out to relate it to Organizational effectiveness, job performance, Organization Citizenship Behaviour [23] and job satisfaction in future studies. Lastly, the present theoretical model can be empirically tested in future studies for its viability and validity in real life.

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