

## **"Manage the Flow and Watch the Company Grow"**

### **Better ways to manage and supervise people**

This is not an article about the flow of goods and information in supply chains. It is about a far more important flow - the flow that is generated when there is effective people management.

It has been said that supply chains are technically simple, but remain, managerially difficult. Management is not only just about applying hard objective and technically simple skills, but also, more critically, involves using subjective emotions and the application of soft skills.

Many people do know this, but then, so often, this knowledge of the subjective side gets "lost" during the application. Most companies recognise in their strategy, that people are their most effective resource. Indeed, most company annual reports will contain a similar statement. However, as with all strategy, it needs to be turned into meaningful action. It must not get corrupted in the process from strategy formulation to the "the doing" and the action. When this corruption happens, it means that a blockage has occurred. So often, this can then mean a fatal blockage occurs in the ways that people are managed.

Now all this may seem normal and may seem to be common sense, but as has been said, it maybe common sense, but is often, not very common. Why is this? Well the reasons are varied, but one of these variables involves a manager's style or simply, "how they come over" to others.

### **Management Styles**

The way managers "manage" varies, and can be seen in their personal management style. We can see below an "extremes" view, which gives a broad polarised view of management styles:

#### **Management Styles**

**Autocrats are those who:**

- drive and push people
- do not lead
- have a "single", "my" viewpoint
- are a one way communicator
- say, "do it my way, now"

**Procrastinators are those managers who:**

- abdicate from taking decisions
- use group viewpoints
- are indecisive and "dither"
- say, "what do you all want to do, whenever"

**Charismatics are those managers who:**

- pull more than push
- are two way communicators
- people will follow naturally, as they lead
- say, "I think this, what do we think"

Autocrats are similar to the Captain Mainwaring in Dads Army - *"don't question my orders you stupid boy"*. However, the Procrastinator is more like Sergeant Wilson - *"I say chaps, would you mind awfully, in your own time, when you are ready."*

A charismatic manager is perhaps the rarest style found. Does this mean, perhaps, we can all too readily recognise the autocrats? Maybe with "command and control," many autocrats are found. However, are the times like this anymore; are autocrats the model that is needed? Maybe they are needed in an emergency, but surely not for, "all time" use?

This need for a re-examination and for a change from previous management styles can also be seen in comparing another view below on of "old" and "new" ways of managing:

**"Old" and "new" managing**

**"Old" managing** represents:

- keeping control
- holding onto people
- being judgmental
- "telling"
- seeing through a "pinhole"
- being directive and more autocratic
- using a "push" approach

**"New" managing**, (some call it leading, coaching, or empowering), represents more of the following:

- letting people try
- given people a "self release"
- being non judgmental

- "selling"
- seeing the wider view
- being supportive and more charismatic
- using a "pull" approach

It is interesting that these differences are very similar to recent changes in Supply Chains. Here, after recognising that it is demand that drives the supply chain, many companies have changed from push to pull approaches. Furthermore, all the supply/demand - chain/pipeline players, have to find the balance between on the one hand: handling uncertainty and having to be flexible; or on the other hand: handling more of a stable certainty.

Much of supply chains behaviour results from how the flexible/stable balance is handled. This basic balance is then reflected in the differences found in supply chains.

Within a workforce for example, the individuals also will differ and will respond to different styles. Therefore these managers who do things one way with every individual, can then be like a clock that has stopped - they are correct only twice a day. It is plain fact that people differ and need managing differently. Failure of managers to recognise this will mean managing people, sub-optimally. Some "food for thought" here maybe?

### **People are different**

People differ, and many managers will benefit from celebrating the differences in their people. After all, teams require the right blend of unique individual strength, along with a common and shared goal, and no sports team was ever successful from having identically skilled players.

Diversity in people can therefore be turned into management strengths. We will find that people have preferences, and for example, some people are:

- orientated more to planning, organising process and methods
- more concerned with meeting deadlines
- totally directive
- more creative and thoughtful
- totally supportive
- "utility players" and are flexible

These differences come from the "mixing" of individually acquired skills, with an individual attitude. We do usually recognise that not everyone has the same skills, however, we do not often accept, that people do not have the same "views"! But people do have different attitudes and they will also then behave differently.

More differences are therefore found when observing and looking at people's behaviour, (which is simply, "what we say or do"). Behaviour is underpinned and supported by an individual's attitude and their beliefs and values. Attitudes are simply, the "way we see and think about things", and beliefs/values are "what we know to be true." As our habits, or what we do regularly, are often a result of repeated and learned behaviour, it surely then follows, that to change the habit, we have to change the attitude that creates it. To change a person's behaviour, then we have to change the way they "see and think about things".

This can be difficult because, "whether you see it wrong or see it right, you are right", "90 per cent of perception is behind the eyes" and "as a person thinks so they are". The following list gives a view of the deep differences in "seeing and thinking" that can be found when we look at the viewpoints shown by managers.

#### **Different Managerial Viewpoints**

"I am right, I know best"	"I would like to know your opinion"
"Listen to me"	"Let me listen to your view"
Seeing obstacles and problems	Seeing solutions and opportunities
Finding fault	Giving support
Feeling frustrated when with people	Feels calm when with people
Makes others feel guilty	Makes people learn
Looks for who is wrong	Looks for what is wrong
Mistakes are to be punished	Mistakes are opportunities to learn

The left side is more about "blame", whereas the right hand side is more about "gain".

When managing people, those managers who behave totally autocratically, will then take more of a blame view. The Left side items in the list above represent the way such managers behave and how others may observe them. These managers do not behave with a more charismatic style and are not coaching types of managers, who are represented more by the "gain" listing.

It will usually follow that the morale and motivation levels in a company will then reflect these "blame" and "gain" aspects of the influencing managers. More, serious food for thought maybe?

### **Morale and motivation**

Many managers in companies do not seem to be aware, or have perhaps forgotten, that the behaviour of all the people in a company can be seen. It is especially and clearly visible to any "outsiders" and to those who are irregular visitors to a company. Such outsiders will recognise the underpinning morale and the individual levels of motivation in a company by:

- The appearance of the premises e.g. is it clean and tidy?
- The appearance of the people, e.g. the clothing that is worn
- The conduct of people, e.g. the "buzz," and the respect shown for other people
- The workflow, e.g. it is unhurried and appears organised

All of these are clearly visible to outsiders. I know, because I see them all the time; for some other people, these signs are "painted", subconsciously.

Meanwhile those working inside the company are able to measure the morale and motivation levels by using objective indicators, such as absenteeism levels, discipline levels, and accident records. However, some managers do not know what these indicators are for their own company or for their department. This is strange, as the existing general atmosphere and morale for a company influences both directly and indirectly all the people who work there and will be shown in the behaviour.

We can find that poor morale at work will often exist where the following is found:

#### **Signs of Poor Morale at Work**

- Management shows no interest in employees = no Worth
- Objectives are not understood = no Focus
- Employees are given no feedback = no Worth
- Employees feel that cannot influence management = no Opportunity
- Rules are not fairly and equally applied = no Support

- There is little job satisfaction = no Worth
- Managers do not know their people = no Support
- There is only destructive criticisms = no Worth
- There is poor "team spirit" = no Learning together

There is no flow in this listing, but there are many blockages. Companies, who have such blockages to the flow of effective people management, have not recognised the importance of "winning the home games first." This blockage will however be clearly visible to many "outsiders," and also to some of the employees. Unfortunately, some of the employees may however be pursuing a game of negative compliance and "keeping their heads down".

Managers may therefore, wrongly believe, that "everything is fine here."

To raise morale at work, it is possible to do the opposite of the above signs of poor morale. It will not however, be sufficient, to place motivational posters on the office wall, pin "flag-waving" newsletters next to the clocking in machine, or, have the mission/vision statements printed on laminated cards and given to every employee. Morale has to be raised much more practically. This can be done by demonstrating and encouraging, good and effective leadership with more supportive than directive, management styles. Additionally, individual self-discipline will be needed, along with good communication that ensures a 2-way understanding with employee's involvement in many decisions, especially those decisions that affect them directly.

### **Lessons from Experience**

Imagine however, the impact of all we have said so far, on a newly promoted manager who has only observed management from how they have been managed. How do you think they may start to manage?

In my training and development work, it is not uncommon to find those who have recently been promoted into management, experiencing problems. These people may have only been used to the "old" ways of managing; after all, they only know what they know. But these ways are perhaps just no longer valid; therefore, different ways will be needed. This can represent a challenge, not only to the individuals concerned but also, to the existing "guard" of managers.

It is my firm conviction when training and developing newly promoted supervisors, which they, naturally, want to lean more towards the above gain listing and to the coaching styles. They soon see the logic and common sense of taking on board, attitudes of praising more than criticising. They readily embrace recognising that people are built on strengths and not on the weaknesses and that; weaknesses are there to be managed out. They readily accept that it is positive feedback that will build and develop people far more effectively, and that positive feedback will help to get people working more willingly towards the common aims and objectives in the work place.

It is then, too often disappointing, to find these newly promoted managers, whilst agreeing that this type of approach is beneficial and the one to follow; then continue by saying that the reality where they work, is that "the boss," never does it, or will, allow them to do it. Here, we have a "real" blockage to the flow principles in managing people!

If I had £10 for each time that newly promoted managers have reported such reality, then I would no longer be doing the lottery! However, "as a person thinks so they are", then the only answer is to change, how they think. To do this, is very really simple, if somewhat challenging. They can always be asked to, "go and do it how you really believe it should be done". This is perhaps a little too dangerous and it can also, too easily, not actually get done! Therefore, my preferred and safer option is to say, "let's get the boss in here and find out why they will not do it your preferred way". I do prefer this latter approach, which has always had a very positive outcome. This approach also moves towards changing and developing **all** of the people involved!

This is certainly an area where an external facilitator can truly add value to a company. It does however, need to be handled properly, it can not be quite as simple as it seems and I certainly, do not want anyone making a "career decision," by doing this and getting it wrong!

### **The Real Problem**

The real problem I find is that management, as a whole group, just does not discuss effective people management. Perhaps they assume everyone else already knows all there is to know about it. This is a dangerous, if an understandable, viewpoint to hold. Managers can be too easily become distant from the reality. Additionally, and unfortunately, the "preferred

messages," do so often get been corrupted or, get lost in the translation from strategy to action. But, it is only, by sharing in a constructive and positive way that these issues will ever get sorted out. The isolationist route just does not work.

The questions therefore you now need to be asking yourself are:

- Is what has been said true?
- It seems to be common sense, but is it common here?
- Can we benefit from more effective people management?
- What are we going to do about it?

After all, it is not only the newly promoted managers, who need to learn effective ways to manage. All other managers will need at least a refresher and also, involvement within all the management groups, so that they can determine, just how they want, universally, to manage. One this has been done, then they can perhaps better act as a management team? Few unfortunately seem to and are just not "all together". Inconsistency is a common complaint not only from employees, but can also be visible, very destructively, when managers are overheard interacting with their peers and colleagues

### **And Finally**

There are still some companies who seem opposed to learning to change the way they do things. This is strange. If this was true, then all new recruits would have to learn nothing as every thing would be like it is, every where else. A Company opposed to learning is logically, therefore, impossible. Unfortunately however, not every company would seem to operate logically.

It is like talking about change - it can never end; but the strange thing with some management is that they keep making the same mistakes; they will not learn, therefore, they cannot change. Many companies do not often even think, about how they can manage people more effectively. Such companies will not therefore create flow. If there is no flow, then somewhere, they are blockages being created. Therefore to remove the blockages, they must manage the flows and then, they can watch the company grow.

But, then is this not all common sense and, is it not where I came in?

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