

## ARTICLE

### Management and Business - Hard Skills or Soft Skills?

We hear many times, statements like "people are our most valuable resource" and "nothing happens unless the people are on board". Most managers would certainly agree that people are important. However, whilst most managers will say they know people are important, the question is, do they really believe?

For me, such a question often receives an open answer! Too many times, people issues are initially dismissed by managers with a statement that "it's all common sense". This it may well be, but unfortunately whilst it may be "sense", all too often, it is not very common!

In business, there are many "hard" techniques such as budgets, MRP and SAP, which are most useful and can have a vital impact on efficiency. However to be effective, it is usually the things like teamwork, and motivation, which need the close attention of management? Business maybe technically simple, but it is usually managerially difficult.

### Perception is reality

So it is my belief in dealing with "managerially difficult people", that too many managers are content to just gloss over the issues. But it is how managers "view" these problems and issues that is important. As managers, what is critical, is how we look at things and then, being prepared to change this view.

When we view people, we have our "fixed" perception, which can, in effect, block our view! Therefore, if we are able to see differently, we need to change our perception.

Remember that perception is reality! The way we see, leads to what we do and what we do, leads to the results we get!

So to change the results, we really do need to change the way we see!

### A Polarised View

To help view our own reality of how we manage people, it is useful to take a polarised view, so that we can focus on two "opposites". (After such a "black and white" view, we can then search for the "grey" if we want to!)

Let me, therefore, put forward such a polarised stereotype of people that says, people run on emotion but justify things by calculation. In other words:

- The emotion view is seeing people as more "heart"/feelings based. It's all that "soft stuff" that is "gut feel" and subjective. It's "touchy/feely" and not at all, what a "macho manager" likes to deal with!
- The calculation view is, however, a more "head"/logic based view. It's the "hard stuff" that can be proved/quantified and is, therefore, more objective. It's all those who say, "the numbers speak for themselves".

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OK, OK, I would accept this looks just too "black and white". I know in the real world we are often more in the "shades of grey" zone. But we have to start somewhere and I am suggesting we should try and start with a polarised view and concentrate on the "soft stuff".

You see I believe it is all this soft stuff that is really the hard stuff! It is not the "technically simple" that causes us major problems, it is that which is more "managerially difficult".

But to get into this, we need to have a view of "where we are at". We need to be able to have the confidence to view which side we lean towards. Is it the "Emotion Soft Stuff" or the "Calculative Hard Stuff"?

Are we, ruled by the heart or by the head?

I suppose I better "come clean" at this stage! It is my belief that these stereotypes view is sound. For me, business heavily involves emotions (usually though covertly, as it's not British for us to show them). The calculative "bottom line" is, however, usually more overt. But it is, however, only an outcome of all the other activities! These other activities, for example, may even involve people showing each other "touchy/feely" mutual respect and trust in their business relationships.

So emotions, feelings, behaviour and thinking are all related. (Remember, as a person thinks, so they are).

Business is, therefore, at its roots, an emotional experience. Trying to pretend emotions don't exist is, therefore, dangerous.

But, how many really do try and ignore it? (The "big boys do not cry" syndrome hangs in well with the "macho managers").

### Some Viewpoints

So what does some of this "emotion soft stuff" involve? Let me put forward some views (which have been "culled" from the references mentioned later).

These will be radical and challenging for some people.

They will seem naive to others.

They will appear quite normal for yet others.

### Viewpoint List One

How many people have the following beliefs?

(Remember that your beliefs are reflected into the attitudes you hold and are then shown in your behaviour. Please do realise, that it is your attitude that will determine the altitude at which you operate).

- There is no failure, only feedback
- The way a person sees things is very real for them
- A positive intention underpins a person's behaviour
- At the time, every person makes the best choice available
- The meaning of communication is in its effect

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- There is always a solution to every problem
- Each person is unique

If you don't go along with these beliefs, ask yourself, what would I be like if I did?

(Pause for some real self-personal reflection here!)

If you then like what you see, then try on the belief!

Say, "if it is to be, then it is down to me".

Remember, your future is not determined by yesterday, it is determined by what you do today.

So, dare to challenge and change you!

(God gives you the nuts but you have the crack them!)

### Viewpoint List Two

How many managers are emotionally intelligent by showing the following characteristics?

- |   |           |                            |
|---|-----------|----------------------------|
| • Calmness                              | more than | Tension                    |
| • Energy                                | more than | Fatigue                    |
| • Attentiveness                         | more than | Ignorance                  |
| • Curiosity                             | more than | A closed superficiality    |
| • Concern                               | more than | Couldn't care less         |
| • Trust                                 | more than | Mistrust                   |
| • A commitment to an honourable purpose | more than | Just aimlessly drifting    |
| • Discernment                           | more than | Always going with the flow |

Be sure that others share the view you have of yourself on the above characteristics.

Ask someone whose opinion you respect. Ask what they feel about you!

Feelings so easily are facts. So maybe, just maybe, others feelings maybe "true"?

### Viewpoint List Three

This one can really get to you or "blow your mind" Get Ready!

- We all have two selves.
- An inner self that is thoughtful, reflective and occupied with feeling and thinking.
- An outer self that appears more task oriented and occupied with doing and achieving.
- Often, we are too busy externally, to awaken our inner self.
- But, life is about being, as well as doing.
- We are human beings not human doings!

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- Whilst our doing feeds the body, it is our being that feeds the mind inside.
- Should not companies need to provide this mind food?
- If they do not, then their people go hungry (and then, so does the company).
- It's all a question of not letting the within, become, a without.

No comments here, as I suspect this is the final straw for those hard/ tough /macho /kick ass type managers. Sorry, but this is the point. They need to think about seeing people and managing people, in a different way. They need to have the confidence to view which side on the "Hard / Soft divide" they lean towards.

You see you - your very self - will only ever start to become a more complete holistic person when you first see yourself as only one half. So often, to change results, you need to change the way that you see!

### How was it for you?

So, there are three views of this soft stuff.

For me, the ramifications into practical applications are really the hard stuff of business. However, space prevents an elaboration.

For certain all these viewpoints are "deep" and "meaningful" (maybe too much for some!).

They are not easy to apply and to get working effectively and consistently.

They are most certainly, "managerially difficult".

But then, maybe it is all common sense really! Unfortunately however whilst it may be "sense", all too often, it is not very common! Now isn't this where I came in?

### References

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Cooper and Sawef (1997) Executive EQ  
Covey and Merrill (1994) First Things First  
Goleman (1995) Emotional Intelligence  
Knight (1995) NLP at Work