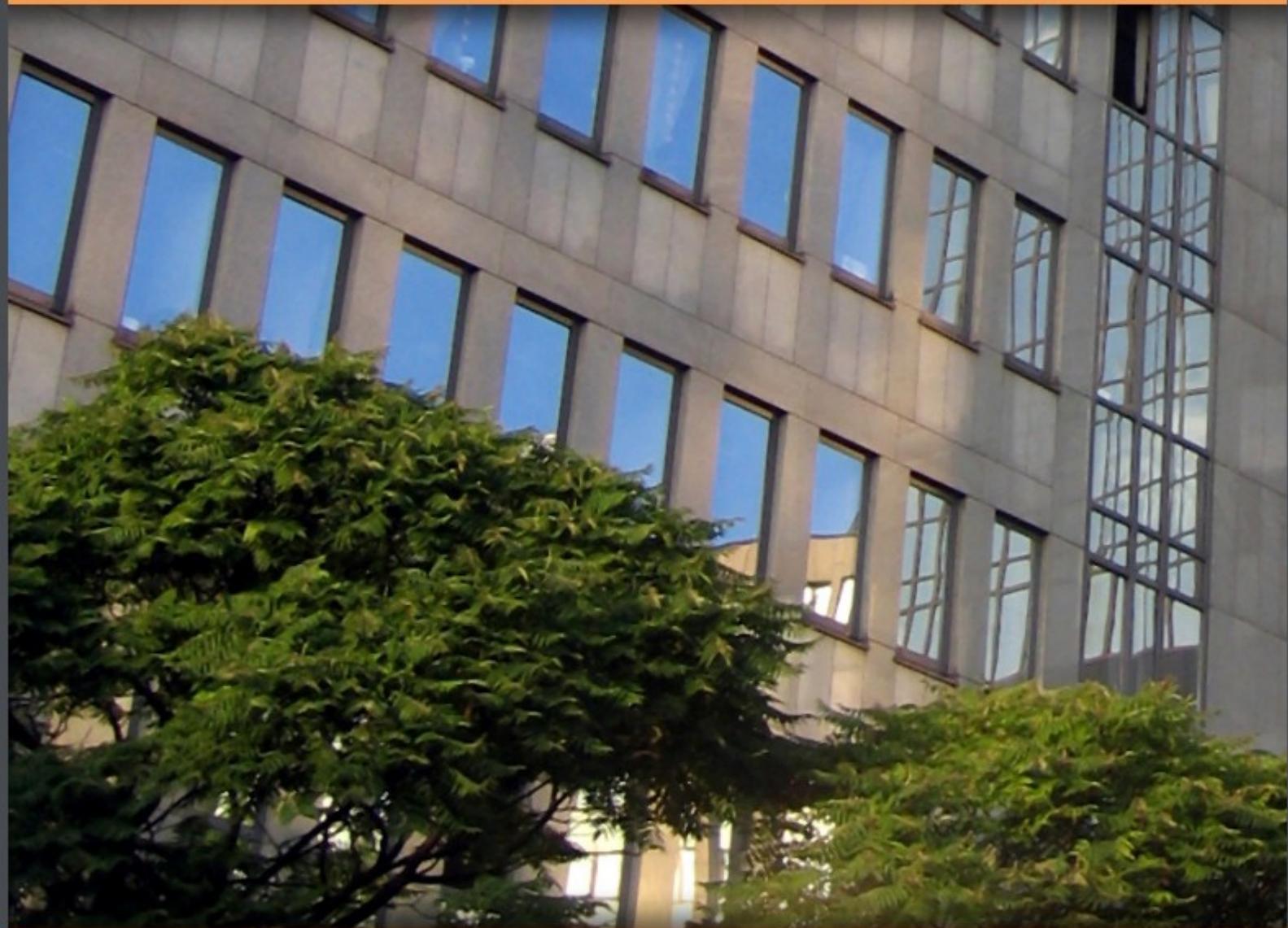


Understanding Organisations: Part II

Tony Greener



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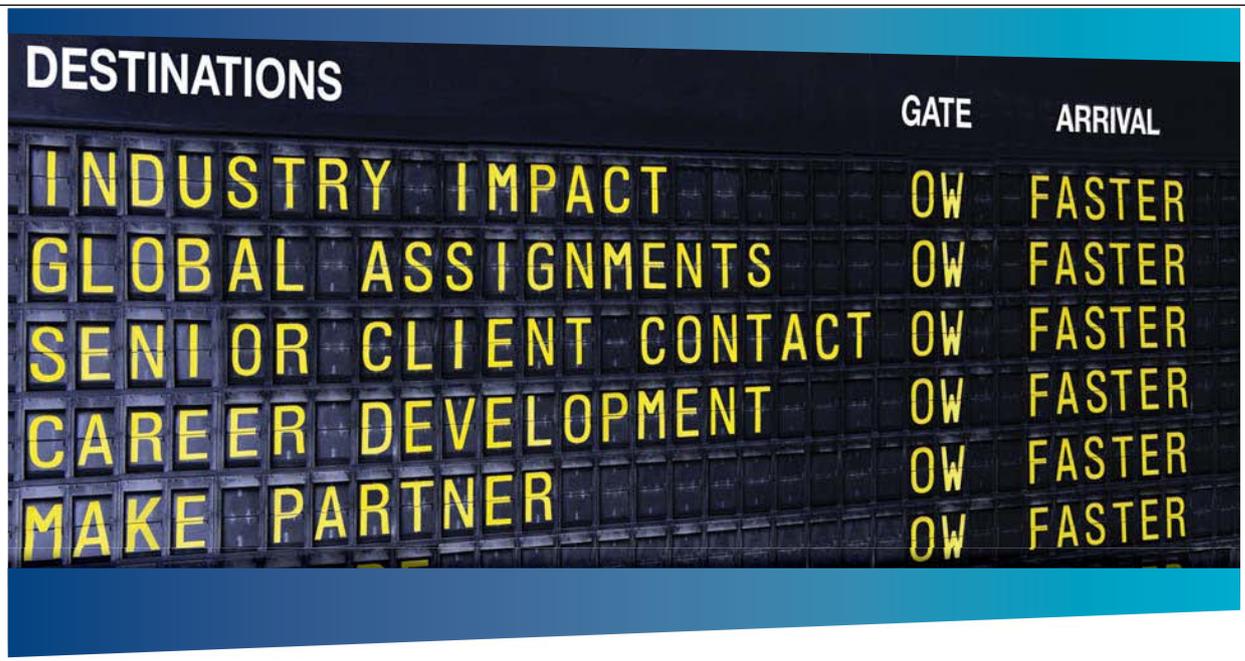
Understanding Organisations – Part II

Understanding Organisations – Part II
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1. Managing Employee Stress

1.1 Introduction

There has been an increasing amount of talk about “employee stress” over the past decade. Quite what it is and how best to combat it are two aspects which are rather less well-documented.

This chapter will try to decide - in a non-medical way - what it may be, how it may be caused, what relevance it has to organisations and their business and how it can best be avoided or treated.

Stress is a more subjective topic than most we have so far encountered. People may have widely differing views about its causes, impacts and, even, very existence. Management writers are divided about how it affects management.

One thing that this chapter cannot be is a medical reference point. That would require the authorship of a fully qualified and widely respected medical practitioner. Medical causes and remedies may be encountered along the way but strictly in a layman’s context. Equally, anyone reading this who believes he/she is suffering from stress – or an aspect of it – should consult their GP rather than attribute any great faith to this work. Medical conditions are not playthings to sustain a tap-room conversation and neither are personal relationships, which may be intimately entwined with any stress-related condition.

So, if in doubt, do the obvious and responsible thing and go to see your doctor. He or she may well be able to help with no further medical treatment required. But do not place your faith in a book that does not set out to be a medical tome.

Chapter content

- How to recognize stress
- Possible causes of work-related stress
- Possible treatments of work related stress
- Managers’ roles in stress

1.2 Recognising stress

Most people who suffer from work-related stress will know about it without having to be diagnosed. Obvious signs include worrying about work unnecessarily, being unable to switch off from work-related topics, losing energy, becoming frustrated and short-tempered and, eventually, showing signs of stress related illnesses, such as heart disease, high blood pressure and sleeplessness. The trouble facing a manager is that many of these symptoms and problems could be being caused by factors outside work – relationships, money worries, family life, health. Work in those instances might not actually be causing stress but could be aggravating the condition.

1.3 The organisational cost of stress

The cost, however, is undeniable. Apart from the human cost, there have been many studies of the actual cost to the economy in the past few years. Most of them arrive at roughly the same type of conclusion – that it is expensive. Huczynski and Buchanan, for instance, record that the CBI estimates that stress costs British industry about £7bn a year (Huczynski and Buchanan 2001, page156) which works out at over £300per employee per year. The Health & Safety Executive,(H&SE) further estimates that around 60% of absenteeism from work is caused by stress related injury; if 60% doesn't sound much, the H&SE equate it to about 40 million working days every year. A great deal could be achieved in 40 million working days.

Further evidence comes from the same source which believes that as many as one in five employees (20%) takes time off due to work-related stress. Nor is the problem confined to the UK. The EU has discovered that some 28% of European workers consider their health to be affected by stress at work and there are sundry other grim and updated facts on the CIPD website (CIPD.org.uk).

Against this, it has to be said that stress has become something of a flag of convenience. While not wishing to minimise or trivialise its undoubtedly harmful effects, it is always easier for an employee to claim stress as a factor or cause of non-appearance rather than, say, a hangover. However, even allowing for this, there clearly remains a problem which has to be tackled with rather more effort than is currently being displayed.

1.4 Causes of stress

An entire volume could be filled with the multifarious causes of stress. Some of the most obvious include:-

- physical working environment – especially, noise, heat or cold, bad lighting, lack of privacy (probably one of the worst factors, yet one which has arisen dramatically since the widespread adoption of open plan workplaces)
- poor job design – in other words, expecting an employee to cope with far too much responsibility, not supporting an employee properly, not training or inducting new employees, no real challenge, little use of skills, role ambiguity and lack of participation in decision making (especially when employees disagree with the decisions)
- poor management style – managers who are inconsistent, inadequate, uncaring, not intelligent enough to carry out the job, autocratic or bullying. Clearly some of these traits are more difficult to spot than others; for example, bullies can sometimes be seen only by the victims, not by their own managers.
- Poor relationships - with superiors, colleagues, receiving little or wrong feedback, discrimination (not always, despite all the political correctness, necessarily in a racist or sexist sense)
- Uncertain futures – lack of job security in the private sector, fear of redundancy or demotion, lack of sympathy for a person's self-respect, little or no opportunity for promotion or an unsuitably low-status job.

- Divided loyalties – stemming from a conflict between the organisation’s aspiration and those of the employee, sometimes a moral conflict or one between a family attitude and that of the employer.

This list could easily be extended, but these are probably some of the more common causes of work-related stress.

1.5 Symptoms

There are some rather easily recognised symptoms of stress and there are also some rather subtle tell-tale signs that might not become very apparent to many observers. Ironically, it can sometimes be the people displaying only the slight signs who need the most help – because they may be better at hiding the reality, but the reality may be more difficult for them to cope with.

To start with, there are generally recognised to be three major types of stress – everyday stress, work-related stress and severe stress.

Physical symptoms of any of these conditions could include:-

Fast breathing, dry mouth and throat, clammy hands, feeling hot, tense muscles, indigestion, diarrhoea, constipation, undue exhaustion (i.e. without having done much exertion), tension headaches, nervous twitching, fidgeting, increased pulse rate, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, ulcers and even cardiovascular disease.

Clearly there are also other causes for some of these conditions so that stress alone cannot always be held responsible for all of them. But they are an indication that everything is not as healthy as it could be. Moreover, if a person is susceptible to some of these conditions in the first place, stress could easily exacerbate the situation.

There are two further aspects for stress and its revelation through symptoms. The first is the **behavioural symptoms** which can include:-

Feeling upset, worried and tearful, irritated by others, (not, of course, something unique to stress!), misunderstood, powerless, unable to cope, restless, feeling a failure, unattractive, demotivated.

Finally, the signs of **stress in the workplace** itself, which are usually an indication that an employee has either got into the wrong job or is not being managed properly:-

Lower (or no) job satisfaction, reduced job performance, loss of vitality and energy, communications breakdowns, poor decision making, reduced creativity and innovation, focus on unproductive tasks (especially trivia which, even if it needs to be done at all, does not need to be done at that particular time or by that particular person), absenteeism and a high staff turnover.

Among the main causes of stress for these types of symptoms are:-

Working conditions, travel, family problems, money (or the lack of it), poor time management, work overload, major life events, role ambiguity and/or role conflict, relationships with colleagues, too much (or the wrong type of) responsibility, accountability, health worries, change of virtually anything around the employee, job insecurity (often leading to more financial insecurities) lack of status (often accompanied by lack of self-respect), the impact of the organisation and consequent feelings about job or career.

Stop and Think

Do you recognise any of these symptoms in people with whom you work or whom you know in any other capacity? Could it be that they are suffering from stress? Do you think they know what has caused it?

1.6 Detection of symptoms

There are various ways in which to self test for stress levels – and this can be a sensible exercise to try if people believe that they are being subjected to pressures which might lead to a stressful situation. By definition, remedies cannot be applied unless the problems is first diagnosed.

One of the best of these is based on the work of Holmes and Rahe who wrote a book entitled “The Social Adjustment Scale” as long ago as 1969. It is still relevant 40 years on. Scan the following factors which can lead to stress and award yourself marks according to how many you believe apply to you. As with most self-analysis models, there is no point in cheating.

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Death of partner	100
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Having ticked the boxes which might apply to you, please total your score. If you have over 250 points, there has clearly been a major change – or a series of minor changes – in your life and this, in itself, is enough to trigger a more stressful existence.

There are a number of interesting points in this model. First, there are a number of relatively pleasant activities or factors which can create stress. Aspects such as getting married, going on holiday, getting back together in a relationship or Christmas ought to be positive factors – but they can still create stress.

Another is the number of non work-related factors. Most of the high scoring factors, for example are about you and your life outside work – family, relationships, health and so on. So, work itself does not need to be a major contributor to stress. Even difficulties at work do not rate all that highly in the scale, the highest being major work changes at 39. Even then the change could be for the better – but the fact that it is a change is the key to this.

Change is nearly always stressful. Even when it is for the better, there is often a price that has to be paid before the improvement can be embedded in one's life. This makes it even more important that anyone whose working life is likely to be affected by change should be able to influence the way in which change comes about – or, indeed, whether it comes about at all. Most change literature is rather vague on this topic – but that does not make the issue any less important.

Stop and Think

If you have completed the self analysis questionnaire above, try to think about how you could reduce the stress levels in your life. How could you avoid the worst excesses of stress? Clearly not all people can avoid all symptoms and some aspects – such as Christmas – come once a year whether we like it or not. Christmas is, in fact a good case in point. Apparently, the suicide rate at Christmas is higher in the Western world than at any other time of the year. It is probably the very time of year when we do not want to feel alone, when family gatherings are most important. Yet, those who do not have a family or those who have been bereaved – especially recently - can feel the loss even more acutely when all around them are enjoying themselves and having a good time. Then the true meaning of loneliness can really hit home, sometimes with tragic results.

Life changes, too can be difficult to bear. One of my daughter's school friends was a star pupil, Head of School, Captain of Hockey and many other sport teams, gifted academically, assured of good A level results and had won a place at Oxford. The week before she was due to go up to university, her body was found in the sea at the bottom of a cliff. She had everything to live for but her suicide note expressed the feelings that everything was "so perfect that she couldn't bear to see it all change". Responsibility is useless in such a case. It is no use then saying that the school or her parents or her friends could have prevented it. The point is that nobody did prevent it. Most deaths are probably sad losses to those around the deceased. This one was all the more poignant in that a girl of 18 had everything to live for yet she chose to die instead.

So, if you have scored more than 250 on the questionnaire, what are you going to do about it? Nobody else has the responsibility to take control of your life. It's your life and you must live it, in whatever way seems best to you. Just don't waste it. One of my students once did this questionnaire and came out with a score of over 1600. She had no right to be alive in such a depressed state of mind, but she rallied, identified the key areas, took action to cope with them and to reduce the stress levels and embarked upon a new chapter of life and one which, so far, has appeared to be both fulfilled and happy. But she was considerably older than 18 and that might have had a bearing on her case.

1.7 Remedies for stress

So, what can you do to rescue the risk of stress dangers and how can you cope with difficulties in life? The answers would fill an entire volume and very few of the authors on the topic totally agree with one another. So, you can choose a remedy which seems both appropriate to your situation and, above all, practical to achieve. Provided it works there is no other criterion which is worth taking into account.

For what its worth, I reproduce a series of remedies widely observed in parts of Asia. We in the West, have much to learn about living our lives from Asian models. The following approach came from Singapore, a country in which I have extensive experience. The stress levels are immense, probably higher than in a city such as London. Materialism is all, the city never sleeps, life goes on at least 24 hours a day and, business often takes place at the weekends as well as in the week. The cliché about Singapore is that all life revolves around the Cs. These stand for, in various versions :-

Car – very few Singaporeans can afford to run a car. Road fund tax (or its equivalent) is prohibitively high to discourage private transport. Traffic jams are rare. So, a car, preferably a company car, is a sign of high achievement

Condominiums – most Singaporeans live in a condominium – or “condo” – which is nearly always owned by the government and leased to individuals or families on a part-owned, part-rented basis. Some are luxurious and spacious; rather more are cramped and limiting. So a good condo in a good area is a sign of having arrived and gained a degree of recognition and independence.

Credit card – most residents live on credit as indeed, we are increasingly doing in the West. So a good credit card, one which does not restrict the user or charge an outrageous interest rate is another sign of having a greater choice than poorer people.

Club – the great emblem of achievement is to belong to a club – usually a country club – first popularised by the British and often housed in the same buildings as those in which service men’s clubs were based before the Second World War. Sometimes it is a golf or tennis club. Most are reasonably exclusive, well-appointed and very expensive.

College – most Singaporeans regard a first degree as the start of a lifelong learning programme rather than as a means in itself. So, most enroll in various colleges or universities to further their education. It is rare to find someone who imagines that he or she has now finished with education and training and the right college (many are modeled on the US system and award themselves Ivy League-type status) can greatly assist with a career.

So, the Cs – and other issues – place a great deal of stress on to people in Singapore. How do they cope with it? Here is a widely circulated remedy – or series of remedies - that can be found in many aspects of Singaporean life, not just at work.

1.8 The Asian Approach to managing stress

Everyday stress – e.g. traffic jams, queues, voice mail, children, conflict etc

1. Meditate – when agitated, breathe deeply and focus on breathing until you relax
2. Visualise – something restful like a green park, the sea, snow capped mountains (very Japanese, but it works)
3. Sit and do nothing for 20 minutes – no calls, talking, TV, music etc. This is actually quite difficult to do, Most people’s mind wander around various aspects of their lives. Try meditating to eliminate this as far as possible.
4. Scale down your lifestyle needs – limit activities so you can concentrate on a few things you really enjoy
5. Learn to prioritise – must you do everything you do? If not, cut down activities,. If you do need to do everything, accept that other things in life may suffer eg housework
6. Eat well – don’t skip meals, eat healthy foods – high fibre carbohydrates, protein, fruit and vegetables. They will give energy to tackle stress
7. Be good to yourself – give yourself rewards for achieving – flowers, a meal out, a weekend trip away somewhere. This will re-balance life and give perspective

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1.9 Work Stress

8. Learn to manage your time; set goals early in the week and work towards them. Even better, set goals at the end of the previous week so that you don't worry over the weekend about all the work you have to do. Also share them with others so that you have a certain amount of control over your own time. Don't chit chat or spend too long at lunch
9. Don't be a slave to the phone; make it serve you. For example you do not have to answer the phone every time it rings, especially if you have a voice mail facility. If the call is important, most callers will leave a message.
10. Take a short break - especially when things pile up; short breaks increase productivity. One good rule is to go to the loo. You don't actually have to use the toilet, just get away from the desk and the office for a short while. But don't go and live in the loo.
11. Re-examine your work style; are you a perfectionist? "Perfection never yet built an empire" commented de Gaulle, one of the relatively few sayings of his that many British people might agree with. .
12. Exercise – sweat out the stress – but don't overdo it. You need energy to work as well as to play squash or go to the gym.
13. Learn to say "No" – to social invitations as well as to extra work. This can be hard to put into practice sometimes, especially if you really want to go to the pub, but its is worth persevering with. Social events are harder to avoid than work ones, sometimes.

Ultimate stress – e.g. bereavement, divorce, young family, ill relatives, moving house etc

14. Talk to someone – preferably someone with experience of the situation. Get it off your chest, perhaps many times, and look for help groups who can assist your eventual rehabilitation or reconciliation to realities such as loss. There are no points in life for being a dead hero or heroine.
15. Join a support group – you are not alone and sharing the issue can be very therapeutic.
16. Learn to accept some things that cannot be changed, not bang your head against a wall. There is an old Chinese saying about "influencing what I can change but accepting what I cannot change" and it works most times for all of us.
17. Accept the reality, don't run away from it. Cry by all means, take time out on a weekend at the furthest point of the country if you must, but sort yourself out, go back and face the reality.

None of this is particularly hard to do but all of it can help us through some of the most stressful times both at work and in life.

1.10 The role of the manager

Stress in the workplace has, understandably, taken up much executive time and managerial consideration in the past few years. Is society any nearer to a solution? Not according to The Sunday Times whose respected business writer, Roger Eglin had this to say in a recent issue: "Employers need to take the health and well-being of their staff seriously. Those that do could find that it helps them as much as it helps their workers." (Sunday Times, 28 November 2004.)

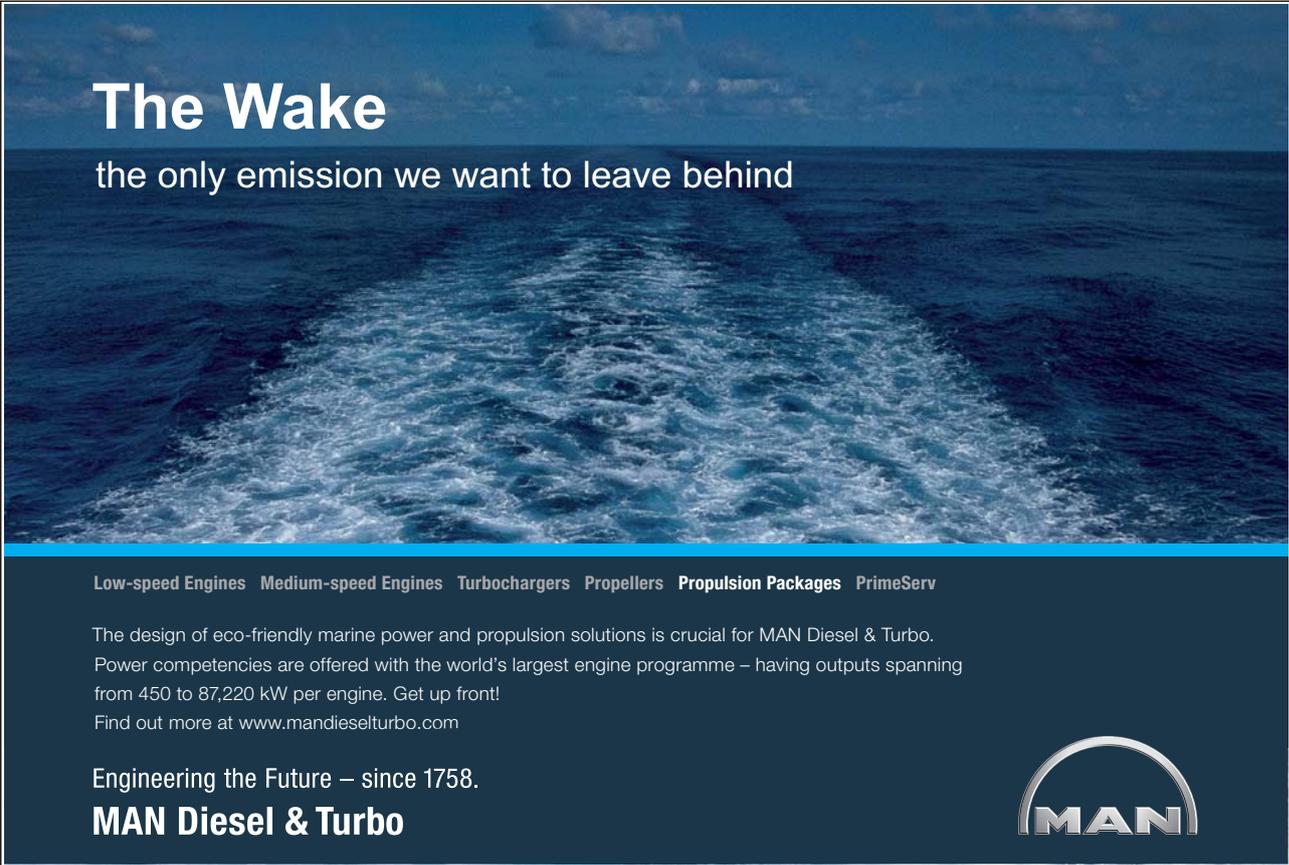
Sometimes, there is a responsibility on managers to, first, identify employees who are under stress and, second, to do something about it. Often, stress can be closely connected to an unsatisfactory job; so a good job description which empowers staff without heaping too much responsibility on them is often a good remedy.

Second, some managers are not good at listening, especially to people with stress-related problems. There is often a feeling that it may be embarrassing or that it might lead to having to grant concessions which might be unfair to other members of staff. These are both valid only to weak managers. Strong managers with a genuine interest in their staff will usually listen, advise and take action which does not disadvantage other staff but which might make all the difference to the employee affected by stress.

Third, job satisfaction is a factor which can help to outweigh other considerations, such as bereavement or illness in a close family member. So, perceptive managers might ask a member of staff to take on extra responsibility as a way of taking an employee's mind off other pressures. This will only work however, if the employee's character is well known to the manager; if used wrongly it could create more stress than existed before so, on some occasions, a more gentle approach to aspects of work such as deadlines and administrative support could work better.

Regular routines for communication with staff on a one-to-one basis are also useful. This is partly why regular appraisals have become a more familiar feature of working life in the past ten years than they were before. But appraisals are usually only as good as the people involved and it takes both parties to be fully prepared, acting assertively and absolutely honest with each other if material improvement is to be achieved and, more important, sustained.

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2. HR Management; Recruitment & Selection

2.1 Introduction

HR Management is changing. For a long time, Personnel, as it was formerly known, was regarded as rather a Cinderella of managerial disciplines, being preoccupied with the minutiae of hiring and firing and, occasionally, a disciplinary case to add variety to an otherwise rather tedious existence.

These days, it is a much more central and strategic resource – at least, that is what its champions would have us believe. Organisations such as the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) have been making some progress in having the discipline accepted into the main stream of managerial activities, playing a more strategic role in helping an organisation to be fully equipped in human terms with the resources it needs to do the job.

Not all managers yet subscribe to this newly fashioned function; some remain sceptical of the worth of a unit which has usually shunned the limelight and has been perceived to be wherever the high risk projects are not. Certainly it is still unusual to see HR staff being made redundant and, although they may not be paid particularly well, there is also still scepticism in some areas about whether they really have a useful role in modern day organisations.

Some of the relatively new wave of management writers – Marchington, Harrison, Weightman and so on who have delved more deeply into HR thought - believe that it is an emerging skill which, if used correctly, can enhance the organisation's ability to achieve. They view it as a more strategic resource than it has even been in the past and much of the current teaching of HR management is aligned to this viewpoint. Both first and higher degrees are now available in aspects of HR management and, in most universities, are often over-subscribed. This alone, of course, does not make it a grown-up discipline, but it does point the way to the future in a rather more constructive fashion than that which we are used to seeing with HR.

However, one word of caution is needed; many of the boundaries in which HR has traditionally operated are being radically re-drawn, especially in fields such as employee legislation which seems to change weekly. No book, therefore, can ever really match the pace of progress in this sector and the only safe way to maintain a grasp on HR law and its attendant activities, is to subscribe to a legal journal or organisation which will keep you up to date with changes as they happen. [Cipd.org.uk](http://cipd.org.uk) would be a good place to start, the CIPD's website with frequent updates on current practice. No responsibility can therefore, be accepted by the publisher or author of this book who, although they have made every effort to incorporate the latest thinking, legislation and practice, cannot be constantly at the forefront of a rapidly changing environment when there is so much else to consider as well.

Chapter Content:-

- The thinking performer – STEEPLE
- Recruitment & selection
- Absence management
- Staff Retention

2.2 The Thinking Performer

This is the title with which the CIPD has dignified the profession of HR, still better known to many in management as Personnel. The justification is that aspects of HR management – especially employee resourcing, retention and upkeep on employment law – are aspects of corporate life which play a key and integral role in the corporate life of an organisation. To contribute fully to this life, the CIPD avers, the HR manager needs to be involved at strategic level, helping to devise plans to help the organisation both gain and retain a competitive edge.

HR staff, it follows, need to be part of the policy formulation process – sometimes retained by a small group of senior managers who really drive the direction and speed of the organisation, often known as the Dominant Coalition. Consequently, HR managers are now expected to play a fuller and more strategic role than their forbears in analysing and supplying the needs of the business. To do this, they are being increasingly educated in the business context parts of an organisation, and, thus, the HR manager becomes a performer in the success of the organisation who really thinks about the issues with which he or she is faced daily.

2.3 STEEPLE

Often, this new found knowledge can be found covering areas of knowledge in the traditional STEEPLE topics. This is an analytical tool used by strategic thinkers to assess the possibility of external factors influencing the progress of an organisation and is divided for convenience into the following categories;-

What aspects of the following factors could affect the organisation's well-being?

Social (or socio-cultural) – e.g. the changing shape of the family, the ageing population, higher illiteracy levels and other educational issues, social expectations of employers

Technological – the internet and its effects on both corporate and private life, faster communications ability, labour-saving devices, such as voice-mail etc

Economic – the role increasingly played by taxation, especially on business-sensitive areas such as fuel tax, exchange rates, the possibilities of entering the Eurozone, inflation

Ecological – the Triple Bottom Line (the degree to which a business satisfies financial, social and ecological targets, rather than simply financial ones as used to happen with the traditional bottom line), dedication to green policies, limiting the negative impact on the environment and people's lives

Political – whether a different complexion of government (now not as unthinkable as it has been for the past nine years) would materially change policies and lead to easier or harder business circumstances, remembering that the political dimension is present at regional, local and European-wide levels as well as at national UK level

Legal – how recent and forthcoming legal changes have affected or might affect the organisation – e.g. increasing holiday rights for parents over childbirth, disability discrimination and human rights legislation and the vast raft of European directives concerning health and safety which have emerged over the past decade.

Ethical – aspects such as Corporate Social Responsibility and whether this is being done because of an intrinsic ethical, altruistic motive or whether it is merely good business practice.

Clearly, many of these issues concern many more managers than just the HR function, and nor does this function alone have jurisdiction over them. But they may all affect the way in which the organisation staffs up to take account of factors such as these, not just to be competitive in the market place or sector but to be ahead of the competition or to further their compliance with legal requirements. However, even 10 years ago, most HR personnel would have had little or no idea of any of these factors, whereas now, they form part of the educational process of many HR staff.

As such HR staff are now expected to think about issues such as these and to reconcile an organisation's objectives and strategies with a perceptive, HR aspect of strategic thinking – and to do this for all to see. Only HR staff who have some wider knowledge of the business of business are likely to be able to do so – hence the new drive towards higher levels of education and qualification.

2.4 Putting it into practice; Case study

A good example is BP, the largest UK company which in 2005 restructured its HR function along the following lines:-

The HR Function

To remain one of the world's premier integrated oil companies, BP recognises that it needs a highly respected, high performing, world class HR function, which combines providing strategic advice to business leaders with efficient and effective transaction support to line managers and employees.

A new global HR head, was appointed in March 2005, and since then she and her colleagues have developed a new vision for the function. Its purpose is threefold:

- Operational Excellence - getting the trains to run on time (through a value-added infrastructure for systems and data)
- Business Partnering and Support – creating appropriately differentiated people and organisational solutions for BP's different businesses to support and enable the business strategies
- Governance, Policy and Coherence – creating coherence for the group by defining policy, governance and limitations.

The accompanying new organisational model has three components:

- A small corporate centre responsible for overall HR functional identity, efficiency and economies, and “fit for purpose” strategic direction on key people issues
- A business HR component, which will house the majority of the group’s HR function (generalists and specialists alike) hardwired to the businesses giving highly business-aligned and business-differentiated HR delivery
- And HR in-country operations responsible for systems, data and transactional processes, compliance related activities, and the co-ordination of market-facing activities.

Realising this vision requires a major multi-year change programme encompassing all aspects of the function: structure, capabilities and infrastructure.

Central to the success of such a major change programme lies communication – the engagement and alignment of all the function’s employees to the new HR vision and strategy, and the continuous development of robust three-way communication channels (up, down, across) in this very large, complex and geographically diverse function.

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Qualifications

This example from BP is by no means unusual in the early part of the 21st century when the increasing focus on HR is best seen in higher education where there are now numerous courses aimed at HR staff to enable them to acquire semi-managerial levels of understanding and application. The most widely known award is the CIPD Diploma which usually involves up to three years part-time studying at university and may even be converted into a Masters level degree. While some academics and practitioners still regard it as an ersatz degree, there is equal evidence that more managers are beginning to recognise it as a highly desirable, if not yet actually essential, qualification for an HR manager.

2.5 HR Planning

As with most disciplines, planning is key to good HR management. Marchington and Wilkinson (2000), arguably the most approachable as well as one of the most comprehensive partnerships writing about HR, recommend a combination of forecasting future demand combined with a move to forecast future internal supply. The difference between the two, clearly, is the gap that has to be filled and a good and thorough internal supply audit (of known available resources) will usually also identify possible skills within the organisation. Although this principle is sound enough, Marchington and Wilkinson suggest (pp102-105) that, in practice, it is not followed by many HR functions, partly because they spend much of their time trying to fill roles and vacancies at the behest of management impatient to resource up to full strength to maintain production or to fill order banks. This is, of course, another strong argument in favour of planning HR resource more fully in advance but many HR manager appear to be reluctant – for whatever reason – to persuade general management of the virtues of this approach.

Recruitment and Selection

Many HR staff spend a good deal of their time recruiting new employees into an organisation. Where there is a general shortage of skilled people with which to fill these posts (as in the computer industry, according to the BBC on 17 November, 2006), this can be a frustrating, time consuming and expensive process. There is a relatively simple formula which will help to put the process on a logical footing:-

- Job Analysis – that is, identifying the tasks which the new recruit will have to undertake. Techniques such as observation, job diaries, interviews and questionnaires are all employed in this process; usually more than one of these techniques will be necessary to elicit a balanced view of a job
- Job Description (JD) – that is, the job title, location, lines of responsibility to and for, main, purpose, duties, working conditions (including pay scales, benefits, working hours, pension details etc), other duties and matters as applicable. JDs form the basis of job adverts and can attract – or repel – potential employees so that they need to be carefully constructed, a skill at which some HR managers are gradually improving
- Person Specification – that is the human qualities, characteristics and attributes which someone will need to carry out the job well. Distinction is often made between what is essential and what is desirable. Under relatively new laws, care must be taken not to discriminate against sections of the community on the grounds of age, race, education or gender.

There is also a check list for person specifications used in HR called the Munro Fraser Five-Point plan; the five points are:-

1. impact on others
2. acquired knowledge (or experience)
3. innate abilities (or, for this purpose, skills)
4. motivation
5. adjustment (to a new working environment)

all of which are reasonably self-explanatory.

Recruitment methods

Briefly there are four main methods of recruiting; :-

- a) internally, where existing staff could carry out the work, as well as or instead of some work that they are already doing. This may involve promotion or a sideways move; in these cases, HR managers should always assess any extra stress levels which could be imposed, as discussed in the previous chapter.
- b) ask existing staff to identify suitable recruits or to recruit from previously known sources such as former employees or existing employees' families
- c) specialist Personnel & Development staff to identify sources, suitable candidates and match the two aspects to take the process further
- d) sub-contract the process to an external specialist – such as a recruitment firm or headhunter. This can be more expensive but, if it produces suitable candidates in a short time can also be time-saving and therefore cost effective.

Stop and Think

Does your organisation follow similar lines to the methods outlined above? If not, how does it attract the right calibre candidate for key roles?

Recruitment adverts and application forms

These are two of the most important documents that any organisation can ever produce because they give an impression of that organisation to many external stakeholders, not just the people who may or may not apply for a job. Consequently, they both need to be carefully designed to reflect both reality and aspiration to attract interest, applications, respect and good will. Often they are best designed and placed in the media by a specialist recruitment agency which will create a house style to give an impression that soon identifies the organisation to its key stakeholders. Although there is initial financial outlay on this type of service, it often produces better results in the medium and longer term than having an inexperienced in-house HR function try to achieve what they have not been trained to do.

Lewis (p185) indicated four rules for recruitment advertising:-

1. target the right audience through the most appropriate media
2. an adequate number of replies should be generated to allow for reasonable choice
3. minimise the number of unsuitable – and, therefore, wasted – replies
4. promote the organisation as a good employer.

Although this might appear to be good business practice combined with common sense, a number of writers in the HR field – notably Lewis and Marchington & Wilkinson themselves, regard the adherence to these simple rules as the exception rather than the norm. When compared to promotional advertising, certainly, recruitment advertising is often the poor relation, often suffering from much lower budgets, a lack of clear planning and insufficient evaluation of media and messaging.

These points are equally applicable to recruitment application forms and some writers – especially Jenkins (1983 p259) - believe that a number of suitable candidates are discouraged from taking their applications further by badly produced and unclear application literature. The best application literature is that which reflects the person specification and the core competencies (or job specification) that has already been produced.

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Some organisations – for instance the Employment Service – now specify key competencies for certain roles. These usually include a nucleus of seven competencies:-

1. getting on with people
2. communication skills
3. planning and prioritising work
4. adapting to and managing change
5. taking decisions
6. managing a team
7. developing other staff members

which would appear to be a useful blueprint for many other organisations.

An example of current good practice in this field can again be drawn from BP which recently specified a role as follows:-

“Head of Internal Communications

This individual will lead on this activity for a function of 1700 people, reporting to the VP HR Capability; they will also be part of the Communications function within BP, reporting to the Group Head of Internal Communications.

Success in the role is expected to lead to a longer term career in the communications function within BP.

Key responsibilities

Create and get senior HR leadership team support to an appropriate communications strategy; agree objectives and milestones

Develop the right basic infrastructure for the activity, including building networks of colleagues who will support and help progress the agenda, putting in place light touch governance, developing cascade channels and distribution lists etc

Craft the main messages arising out of the HR change programme, and develop the “story”;

Co-ordinate and develop the channels needed for effective communication through the function; for example, through Town Halls, through newsletters (eg “HR Matters”), through the development of an intranet site; through webcasts.

Assist the HR function to communicate better with BP’s line managers and employees on those elements of the change programme that will affect them e.g. through the introduction of new technology etc.

Help colleagues to develop a common look and feel for all HR communications, including “One HR”, the intranet site for employees.

Draft the speeches given by the Group Head of HR

Assist the various areas of HR with their own two-way communications plans, in order to develop strong engagement and help employees understand how their day to day work relates to the goals of the function as a whole.

Install and monitor measurement systems of effectiveness, including use of staff surveys.

Person specification

The successful candidate is likely to be accustomed to working at senior levels in major international or multinational companies, either in-house or as a consultant. They will be recognised by their peers for their innovative and effective technical communications knowledge, their understanding of an organisational change agenda, and their focus on execution.

They are likely to possess all or most of the following:

Experience

- *Sound internal communications experience and track record supporting organisational change, possibly gained through a mix of consulting and corporate experience.*
- *Experienced at delivering in large, complex, matrixed businesses.*
- *Experienced at delivering and executing work as an individual contributor, with a track record of building networks and attracting support from people across the businesses.*
- *Some prior knowledge of the HR function would be an advantage.*

Personal Attributes

- *Business fluent as well as a communications expert, ideally including some PR and marketing communications experience.*
- *Strong oral and written communication skills.*
- *Good judgement in their professional field, knowing how to craft the right messages and where to focus resources and effort; able to articulate the rationale for their proposals, so gaining the trust and respect of the leadership population in the BP HR function.*
- *Appropriate balance of big picture thinking with very strong execution skills and attention to detail; able to set the agenda whilst always seeking practical, implement-able solutions.*
- *Able to think logically and prioritise.*

- *The drive and energy needed to bring about change in a large, global multinational organisation; resilience and stamina, not easily frustrated by set backs.*
- *Strong influencing and networking skills; a natural relationship builder with strong stakeholder management skills, able to adopt a very consultative style with good listening skills.*
- *Comfortable working with ambiguity*
- *Cultural sensitivity and strong listening skills.*

Terms of Appointment

Salary will be negotiated with the preferred candidate.

There is also a bonus plus other benefits.

The role will be based at BP's offices in Sunbury. The individual should also expect to spend some time every week at BP's head office in St James Square in central London, and undertake some international travel."

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Stop and Think

How does your organisation recruit new people? Can you recognise some of these principles in the ways in which it approaches potential new staff?

2.6 The choice of selection methods

First it is important to remember that selection is a two-way process. Both the candidate and the organisation are seizing up each other, wondering whether the match can be made to work. No technique is perfect for this process, and there is never any guarantee that a perfect match can be found.

Also, most employers use a combination of different types of selection procedure. Most use both references (generally including one from the current employer, if appropriate) and application forms. Only about a quarter of organisations use aptitude or other tests, although these grow in significance when more senior appointments are being considered. Perhaps most importantly, a range of methods should be used which are appropriate in themselves to each selection. In summary these are Practicability, Sensitivity, Reliability and Validity.

Practicability

This is the most important criterion of all. The method has to be acceptable to all parties and sometimes to independent watchdog bodies, it must be economical in both costs and time and it must be within the capability of the appointing employers.

Sensitivity

Sensitivity needs to be kept in proportion. The aim of the employing organisation is to determine whether the candidate can do the job. As such it can discriminate between candidates – but on ability and aptitude only, not on any other spurious ground such as race or age.

Reliability

Essentially this means that the process cannot be unduly affected by chance. One example often cited is that of tests for a job. Clearly, if one candidate has had special coaching to be able to fulfill such tests easily and well, it is not necessarily a fair basis for comparison with other candidates, but that does not mean that one of them could not do the job equally well. It is necessary to test the aptitude for the job, not aptitude for the test.

Validity

This means the correctness of the inferences which can be drawn from the selection method. It might measure the characteristic of the candidate or it might also mean being able to predict future behaviour in the role to be filled.

Interviews

These remain the most widely used method of recruitment in the UK. They are often also the most roundly criticised when candidates are appointed but subsequently disappoint all around them. In truth, the issue is often one of not having prepared for the interview properly. There are two schools of thought in job interviews; one is that they are “a chat with a purpose”, the other that they can be made more scientific with high levels of reliability and validity so that the outcome is a more satisfactory appointment.

Interview formats can differ from one-to-ones (useful in higher office, providing the person carrying out the interview has breadth and experience of the role and is prepared to work with his/her choice once they arrive in the job) through tandem interviews, (where two people interview a candidate together, presumably sharing the blame if their choice turns out not to be the right one) to panel interviews (in which the candidate is grilled by a small group of up to five people). The latter is probably the most commonly used because it seems to avoid overt discrimination, gives balance to a decision and allows most of the managers who will work with the new employee the opportunity to meet him or her at first hand.

There are several drawbacks to the panel interview; these include:-

- the belief that all managers are good interviewers
- it looks easy
- applicants are defined as “good” if they comply with the interview rules but “bad” if they do not
- candidates who mirror the feelings and viewpoints of the interview panel are often appointed; this might not be the ideal outcome
- it is seen as a ritual and can demonstrate equally superstitious and unscientific characteristics as can most arcane rituals

To try to overcome some of these perceived problems, some employers, especially in the public sector, have derived a series of identical questions which are put to every candidate. This might appear to be fairer but, in reality, probably simply differentiates between good and bad interviewees, rather than good or bad potential employees.

2.7 Selection testing

As doubts over the validity of interviewing have arisen, more testing has emerged in selection. One source estimates that over half of all employers with 200 or more employees now use some form of testing (Marchington and Wilkinson p125) These widely include psychological testing of various kinds, usually psychometric tests and personality tests.

Psychometric tests measure mental ability, personal characteristics and, sometimes, aptitude for a particular role. They are, essentially a snapshot in time so that reliability and validity can both suffer if a candidate encounters them on a bad or non-typical day. There are also tests for general intelligence and for special abilities – such as verbal, numerical or special (e.g. IT literate) dexterity.

These are all well and good provided the employer has staff who know how to use and interpret them correctly. One public sector body was recently discovered subjecting all candidates to a host of these tests and then ignoring all the resulting data by storing it (unread) in a spare filing cabinet. Apparently nobody was prepared to take the responsibility for interpreting the data. Incidents like this might be rather more common than many candidates realise.

Psychometric questionnaires identify traits in a person. No trait is good or bad, theoretically, but some are in demand more than others. Many of these originated in the US and do not travel particularly well across the Atlantic. To these can be added, interest, values and work-based questionnaires which all do more or less what their titles suggest.

There is a CIPD Code of Practice on Psychological Testing (cipd.org.uk) which can help in selecting appropriate methods and in avoiding some of the more obvious pitfalls. Essentially, there are five rules for application:-

1. tests should measure attributes relevant to the employment
2. the tests should have been rigorously developed and proved
3. data on the reliability, validity and effectiveness of the tests should be available
4. evidence should be available to show that certain groups are not disadvantaged by the tests
5. test suppliers should provide norms which satisfy all the employers' queries.

Assessment Centres

These combine a number of other selection methods to try to arrive at a balanced conclusion. Often computerised, they also rely on skilled assessors and usually exist commercially outside any particular employer, rather like a consultancy. As such they are not cheap and care has to be taken to access only the more reputable and cost effective on the market. But for larger organisations, especially those who have experienced trouble in recruiting the right type of employee, they are a useful short-cut to a cost-effective solution.

Assessment centres often use devices such as Biodata – a set of biographical information to give a factually based view of a person's life which can, sometimes, predict how a person will act in given circumstances.

Graphology is another assessment centre device which will analyse handwriting to help determine suitability for a role. It is, apparently, the fourth most widely used process in France, with the rest of Europe hardly using it at all. Draw your own conclusions.

3. Performance Management

Chapter content

- Performance management
- Appraisal systems
- Attendance and absence management
- HPW
- AMO
- EAPs

3.1 Introduction

Much is made in management text books about performance management – but what exactly does it mean and how does it work? How do we judge performance and how do we ensure that acceptable standards are maintained?

On top of this, in a related issue, the UK – and many European states - has been fixated for some years now about managing equality and diversity. How do we ensure that people of other ethnic groups, religions, age, gender and sexuality are not discriminated against at work? How do we allow for cultural differences when, for example, considering applicants for a job? And, is this all a knee-jerk reaction which will gradually find its own level in society in years to come?

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Finally, in this chapter, what are the bases for current disciplinary procedures? What can we do at work and what can we not expect to get away with? Is the law – and the vast raft of new legislation and European directives in particular - helping or hindering common sense in the workplace?

We will explore these areas in this chapter and try to form a logical conclusion while finding some answers to these and other questions.

3.2 Performance Management

The classic definition is “to translate the goals of strategic management into individual performance” (Anderson & Evenden 1993 cited in Marchington & Wilkinson p134). In other words, this means to persuade the staff of an organisation to work appropriately (i.e. willingly and continuously) to achieve the corporate objectives. Put like that, it sounds easy. In fact, it is not.

Another, rather less well supported view is that performance management is all about establishing a framework in which performance by individuals can be directed, monitored, motivated and refined. This is a much larger task, including as it does, lots of people management issues and skills. In fact it could be said to embrace much of what is often called general management.

What is performance management for? Do you find that managers are taught or developed to prepare them for managing performance? Taylor suggests it is all about improving organisational performance – do you agree? He also makes clear that other things get in the way of this objective – such as personal power trips, internal politics etc. Could we suggest that other things get in the way of performance management – for example:-

- lack of understanding about what the job entails?
- Out of date job descriptions?
- No idea to what standard a job should be performed?
- A demotivated team which encourages individuals to take it easy?
- No real idea what the organisation is about?
- A limited view of the whole picture?
- No incentive (financial or non-financial) to improve performance?
- Under-resourcing which means individuals cannot find time and resource to do their own jobs and are required to do others’ tasks too?
- Appraisal systems which score and judge without much appeal?
- Appraisal scoring which is reflected directly in the pay packet?
- No kind of appraisal?
- Appraisals which come along like buses and then vanish for a few years?
- What else could you add to this list?

If we are to manage performance, we need data on performance. Especially if we take a standards-based approach.

We could look for data on productivity, on quality and on objectives set and met such as:-

- Productivity measures - output over time. Compare time periods and different individuals or teams to check performance. May need to introduce quality control element.
- Quality measures: criteria, competencies, star ratings. Assessor judges how far criteria are met. Includes customer questionnaires / surveys. Mystery shops. Large element of subjectivity, perception.
- Objectives set and met: judging performance by the extent to which agreed objectives are met over a period of time. This can be difficult where elements of objectives are not under individual/team control. But they can apply to a wider range of jobs than simple output measures.

Data that is easily measurable is not found relating to all aspects of anyone's performance. So when we try to use such data, it skews the picture we might have of the individual's performance by focussing on measureables such as output, cost reductions, customer complaints, punctuality, contributions to high profile projects. Also, an individual's performance in a workplace is generally affected by variables outside their control – late deliveries, people off sick, other departments' failures, the weather etc

Hence the alternative view that behaviour measures are more appropriate – even if the outcomes are not produced, if behaviour is appropriate we can discount uncontrollable variables. To assess behaviour we can use rating scales, critical incidents and reactive approaches.

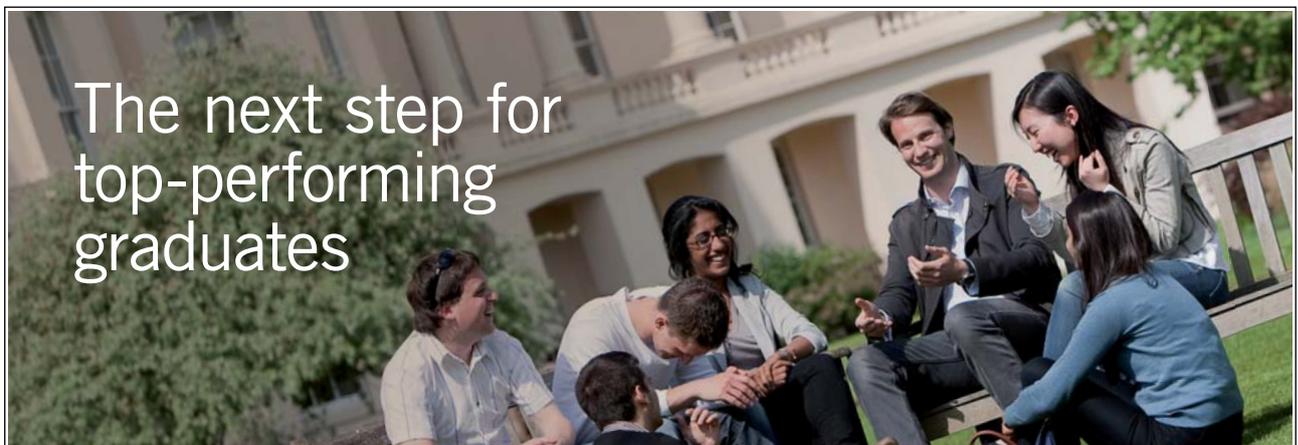
- Rating scales eg Likert - looking at aspects of behaviour agreed to be relevant to performance. See page 226 of Taylor for a five point rating scale on timekeeping, appearance, communication skills, relationship with subordinates, relationship with senior staff, organisation skills - all set against excellent, vg, g, average, poor. Or Carrell's (1995) non-graphic rating scales i.e. a series of alternative phrases. - suggested higher validity of this method. It is often easier to get common agreement on descriptive phrases.
- Critical incidents - examples of very good or poor performance during review period. - would need to be recorded at time rather than stored up in memory (affected by time). By identifying what is good and bad about current performance, employees can be encouraged to improve performance. This is similar to the behavioural interviewing approach to selection using real concrete examples. Who chooses the incidents?
- Reactive approaches – these are less systematic, can be immediate reaction to poor or vg performance. Can you imagine a workplace where there were no reactive approaches? How would that work? Would it help or hinder? How do we ensure fairness in dealing with reported poor performance via email, cctv, gossip?

Having gained some data, what do we do with it?

Here are Taylor's suggestions summarised:

1. Negotiate win-win. Formal e.g. productivity agreement, informal.
2. Persuasion. Improve without incentive. Based on Macgregor's Theory Y (1960). Coaching (ie active listening, questioning, giving praise and recognition, building rapport, creating trust, being non-judgemental, being candid and challenging, giving encouragement and support, focusing on future opportunities. Avoiding subjective judgements and criticism [Kalinauckas and King 1994]). Transformational leadership (charisma, inspiration, intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration, the right people and culture in organisation is needed for effective performance improvement through persuasion [Bernard Bass 1990]). Development.
3. Discipline. Written procedures. Lower trust and morale? In regular use. Theory X. Needs to be seen to be fair and reasonable.
4. Reward. Financial incentives and bonuses, Performance related pay (PRP). Vroom Expectancy theory (1964) (people take rational decisions when choosing which course to follow and their decision is most influenced by a perception of which course will deliver most reward. There are extrinsic and intrinsic rewards. Intrinsic is based on expectation of pleasure of activity, not on results. Intrinsic is based on self-administered rewards. Can only be encouraged by managers. Extrinsic e.g. praise, not just money. Money reward for good performance creates inequity).
5. Work design. More interesting and challenging work. job rotation, enlargement and job enrichment
6. Counselling. Solve personal problems. Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs – see below).

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So we have some data and we have decided broadly what to do with it. This should help us manage performance – at least from the standards-based perspective. What role is there for appraisal in this? Presumably an evaluative appraisal which focuses principally on how we are doing and looking for gaps in performance to put things right.

Whereas effective appraisal is much more likely to be based around continuous improvement and development – stretching people to look forward and do better.

Stop and Think

How do they work in your organisation? Do a SWOT analysis of your appraisal system, what does it tell you?

Generally we get a picture from the literature that appraisal for all is increasing, that relatively few systems are linked directly to pay (since if it is, people are less likely to be honest in appraising their own performance), that increasingly they are focussed on individual development and linked to organisation objectives and to competency frameworks where these are used.

What is appraisal for?

- to reach a common understanding of job and expected performance standards
- to acknowledge strengths and achievements
- to explore any concerns about roles and responsibilities and seek assistance
- to understand the job in relation to others
- to identify realistic targets
- to identify training and development needs
- to contribute more effectively to delivery or support of quality education and training

Clearly to do this as a one-off annual event doesn't make much sense – it does need to key in to other parts of performance management. Suppose I did something stupid last week, there was a reactive approach to that performance behaviour which threatened disciplinary action and involved an uncomfortable interview. Suppose my appraisal came up this week and no mention was made of last week's problem. I am going to assume everyone has forgotten it. We cannot behave as eternal confidant and mentor in appraisal when we are reprimanding at other times. The point of this is to clarify that the appraisal (or development review etc) is a very challenging management activity, which is frequently poorly prepared and fitted in around other work as a chore. As a result, staff lose confidence in the outcomes of appraisal, especially when they don't occur as regularly as originally promised and actions agreed in appraisal don't materialise.

What can we do to remedy this?

We can prepare appraisers and appraisees well. We can ensure that appraisal is not just a nice-to-have add-on to the working day but is meaningful and tackles concerns as well as comfortable praising. We can ensure that the skills used by appraisers are developed so that they help the appraisees explore their role in and their future with the organisation. That SMART goals are set and actions on development are recorded and carried out.

There are some problems with performance appraisal:

1. Specific practical problems - rating systems errors, recency, fear of conflict with appraisee leads to inflated scores, using mid-points, giving “good people” good scores despite poor performance, not giving high scores on principle etc. and Beer (1985) poor listening by managers, not encouraging participation and Philip (1990) poor preparation, insufficient time, allowing interruptions.
2. General practical problems - reluctance of managers to do them, fit with personal management style, over formal, confrontational, hierarchical, poor time management, crisis management,
3. Performance Management bureaucracy, yet another programme. etc. and political nature of some appraisal decisions - not objective view of performance but manipulated by a manager for some reason.
4. Theoretical criticisms - W. Edwards Deming (the quality guru) sees objective setting as dangerous and can lead to supervision rather than leadership, can be over restrictive, result in little participation and ownership, can create fear and an adversarial view of management. anti TQM. (see article Performance Management: TQM versus HRM – Lessons learned – Management Research News vol 26 no 8, 2003 - to explore this conflict with TQM). Also knowledge based, professional jobs difficult to appraise (see article in Personnel Review, vol 32 no 1, 2003 by Molleman and Timmerman. when innovation and learning become critical performance indicators); inflexibility of the one year or six month time horizon.
5. Legal issues - fairness and justice if use appraisal as evidence in dismissal etc. Can be discriminatory - how objective are performance ratings?
6. International differences - Hofstede quoted by Fletcher: people of Chinese origin are often uncomfortable with asserting own views directly to a superior, Sparrow and Hiltrop (1994) French management culture is uneasy with participative objective setting (high power-distance and high uncertainty = avoidance culture).
7. Flexible firm issues - Murphy and Cleveland (1995) predict more output-based systems where home-working and looser controls are in place, and appraisal is increasingly irrelevant to part-time, subcontracted workers with few internal career progression opportunities.

360 degree appraisal is costly, tends to be used at managerial level, often for developmental purposes as one-off or beginning and end of developmental programme and is often carried out by external agency. It tends to focus on evaluative perspective; its developmental use will be critically affected by the skills used in delivering results and helping people work through their reactions to those results and proposals for personal development. See article by Luthans and Peterson in Human Resource Management Fall 2003, vol 42, no 3 pp 243-256 for a discussion of using 360 feedback with systematic coaching to improve performance.

3.3 Absence management

Can we decide what absence is? Everyone measures absence in slightly different ways and there are often debates about what to include and what not to include. For instance, how many people use days lost or hours lost? How many people allow for short spells of absence by using the Bradford Factor?

Stop and Think

Do you have a presenteeism problem in your workplace? What measures are being taken to combat this? Is it harming the organisation? Is it harming individuals? How do you get this point across to a senior manager who is him/herself a presentee?

It is always important as an HR manager to understand both the ideas about an HR activity (eg the conflicting ideas about absence management – what works and why it happens, staff turnover – what works and why it happens) and the implementation issues around reducing and controlling the problem eg reducing absence and controlling turnover).

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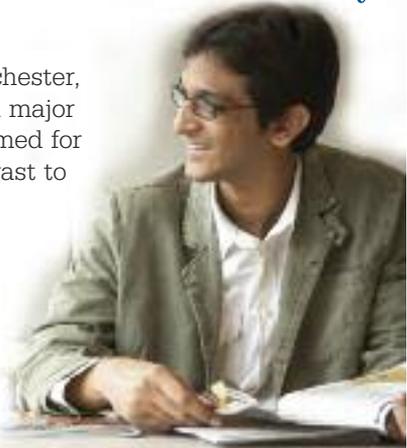
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For example, could you and do you estimate the costs of absence in your organisation? Taylor suggests we include pay, on-costs, temporary staff, overtime for others, reduced quality of work, absence tracking time for managers, reallocation of work by managers and low morale. Are there other costs? Are all these costs taken into account when assessing the problem of absence in your organisation?

What do you think about ALIEDIM (see below) as a model to investigate and act on absence? Does it help in any real way or is this just a tick box list of how most problems can be addressed? Why should we only use it for absence management?

There are also punitive measures, attendance incentives and preventive measures. If you had to propose a business case to improve rates of absence in your organisation, would you use all three types of measure or are there some which are not acceptable in your organisation's culture? For example, would an attendance bonus create unfairness and confusion? How could it be measured and set up to work fairly? What impact might it have on staff? Would you use it for all categories of staff, and if not, how would you justify that?

3.4 The return to work interview

- Formality or informality dictated by absence length and pattern
- Should be on first day back
- Discuss:
 - Any key changes or developments they should know
 - Any specific support arrangements needed by the employee
 - Expectations and work priorities
 - If necessary after eg surgery, agree date for short follow up meeting to assess needs following return
 - Any concerns they have relating to their absence

The Steers and Rhodes model of employee attendance (1978) was a major improvement in thinking in its time. Its approach to understanding absence as affected by both perceived ability to attend and an attendance motivation which related to much broader underlying issues at work was a breakthrough. How do you think this model works now? There are also issues around employee attitudes and history of attendance or personality types, age and gender all affecting attendance motivation. Taylor also identifies home circumstances, transportation complexities and whether the employee's income is main or supplementary – all impacting on that attendance decision. Would perceptions of job security related to economic conditions fit into the Steers and Rhodes model? If so, where? And how do control systems figure in the model?

Taylor also discusses dissatisfaction with work at some length, suggesting conflict in writers on the subject. If you work through the list of factors cited by Huczynski and Fitzpatrick for such dissatisfaction, you come up with a list very similar to a list of work stressors. Is dissatisfaction simply another term for "stress" at work?

On page 287, Taylor asks: Think about recent occasions when you have been absent. Which of the above causes played a role in your case? This is a good question to tackle. But also think about what kind of different answers you might expect from people in different circumstances and jobs from you.

Just focus for a while on the practical management of sickness absence. Here are some suggestions and CIPD approved guidelines for approaching it.

- It is perfectly valid for managers to look into causes of absence.
- We must treat personal information in strict confidence.
- Set targets for improvement if this is relevant and possible.
- Clearly communicate rules and police them.
- Keep records
- Ask don't assume.
- Act reasonably and be seen to do so.
- Genuine underlying sickness is different from other absence reasons.
- Be sensitive to other reasons why an employee doesn't attend.

3.5 What kinds of sickness absence are there?

- Short term persistent sickness - no underlying medical condition.
- Persistent medium term absenteeism - patterns of absence - often chronic medical conditions.
- Long term absence – e.g. longer than 3-4 weeks, could be operations/surgery, chronic disease, sudden physical illness or stress or mental illness

3.6 Managing short term sickness absence

- Make sure all employees know the procedures from induction onwards
- Employee rings in sick – ask how long they are likely to be off, are there set times for this call?
- Notify and record absence via sickness certificate, keep your own records to look for patterns, problems
- On return, ask... how are they?, did they see a doctor?, are they going to need any on-going treatment or medication? Are there any health and safety implications or action required to prevent re-occurrence?
- For persistent absence – consider patterns or genuine causes, may need formal interview

3.7 Serious sickness absence

- Operations/surgery
 - Try to establish before the operation how long they may be off
 - On their return home, make contact
 - Discuss: sick pay, regular contact and updates, submission of sick notes, possible return to work arrangements, possible Occupational Health referrals
 - Write and confirm all this

- For periods of six weeks plus, ensure you make contact at least every two weeks, record details
- A week before return to work, contact to discuss return arrangements
- On return, interview.
- Chronic disease or sudden physical illness
 - Establish full details as quickly as possible
 - Establish contact arrangements with employee or relative/partner
 - If appropriate, visit
 - Write and confirm pay arrangements and anything else agreed
 - Consider occupational health check for details of estimated return time
 - Write & request such a check of the employee – outlining their rights in relation to the Access to Medical Reports Act
 - Be specific about what you want the Occupational Health doctor to establish – give full details of job, environment and workload
 - Stay in telephone contact and keep records of calls
 - Consider strategy of work and time off if possible
 - Contact a week before return to discuss arrangements
 - On return, interview

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- Stress or mental illness
 - Establish phone contact as soon as possible, offer help & support, confirm regular contact arrangements
 - Try to clarify condition early on
 - Try to visit if absent more than 4 weeks
 - Agree pay situation and that you will keep in touch; discuss concerns about return to work
 - More than 10 weeks absence – ask for consent for OH referral. If discussed at home visit, write to confirm
 - Give OH doctor maximum information on job, request information on return timing and capability for current role, possible medication which could affect work, support which might be needed
 - Seek advice if you are considering dismissal on incapacity grounds because of DDA
 - On return, interview
- Stop and think: how would you deal with these issues?
 1. A new member of staff, who had only been with you two months, had had four separate days of sickness absence. She then broke her ankle and was off work for a month. In addition to this, she had also had two weeks unpaid leave during this time (requested after two weeks employment). You do not pay sick pay during first year of service.
 2. A member of staff who has been with you for six years has begun to have a lot of sickness absence over the last two years. Initially this was just a number of odd days for colds, stomach upsets, etc; however over the last year this has increased to a series of two and three day absences. In last six months, this member of staff has had 11 days sickness absence. She has just returned to work.

3.8 Staff turnover

Some key issues

- Controllable and uncontrollable reasons
- Decision making process (Mobley 1977)
- Link with economy?
- Low turnover could be bad?
- Costs of turnover and its measurement
- Exit interviews, surveys, analyses
- Reduction strategies: enrichment, environment, supervision quality, fair treatment, flexible working – just good management?

Most performance management systems have, in practice, a number of common elements:-

- mission statements communicated to all staff, to reinforce corporate messages and to inform about changes or potential changes
- regular communication about business plans and progress

- integration with TQM systems and other initiatives
- clear focus on performance achievements and links with remuneration
- performance expectations fully communicated, regularly reviewed and agreed with staff
- performance appraisal processes forming a key part of the overall staff review process
- performance-related pay schemes
- ongoing reviews to identify areas of training, development and investment that can satisfy both individual needs and those of the organisation.

This list is by no means exhaustive but it does give an idea of the breadth and complexity of the issues which can be encountered.

Stop and Think

What kind of performance management initiatives exist in your organisation? How well do you think they work?

Most Performance management systems describe a cycle – usually virtuous – in which elements of determining performance expectations lead to supporting performance which in turn leads to reviewing and appraising performance and finally to managing performance standards which then links back into determining performance expectations again. And so on (Torrington & Hall 1995)

Once analysed, this is pure common sense rather than HR rocket science. Each stage can be scrutinised to examine how well or not the employee is doing and remedial action taken to improve the situation if necessary. One of the assumptions is that most disappointing performance is partly a result of the organisation not supporting the individual properly – an enlightened approach if one which, at times, tends towards the naive.

3.9 Putting it into practice

Local government is probably not the automatic example in most peoples' minds of efficient organisation but it does have a reasonably good record in terms of performance management – by its own standards at any rate. It is often cited as a good example of how to introduce comprehensive performance management packages, especially in the face of (sometimes not terribly determined) opposition from unions. It is often believed to have been inspired by increased government pressure to introduce efficiencies in the era (1980s-1990s) of compulsory competitive tendering (CCT) and also to improve employee involvement. It often used combinations of employee appraisals and attendance allowances (the public sector absentee rate is almost twice that of the private sector in the UK, standing at around 18 unauthorised days off /employee/year). Employees are encouraged to work towards clearly defined and agreed targets.

One snag with performance management initiatives is that they have been criticised as being largely retrospective. Rather like quality inspection they seek to apply standards and regulation after the event, rather than to predict problems and apply remedial action in advance. Egan (1995) even reports managers being several years behind in their performance reviews but persevering anyway.

Stop and Think

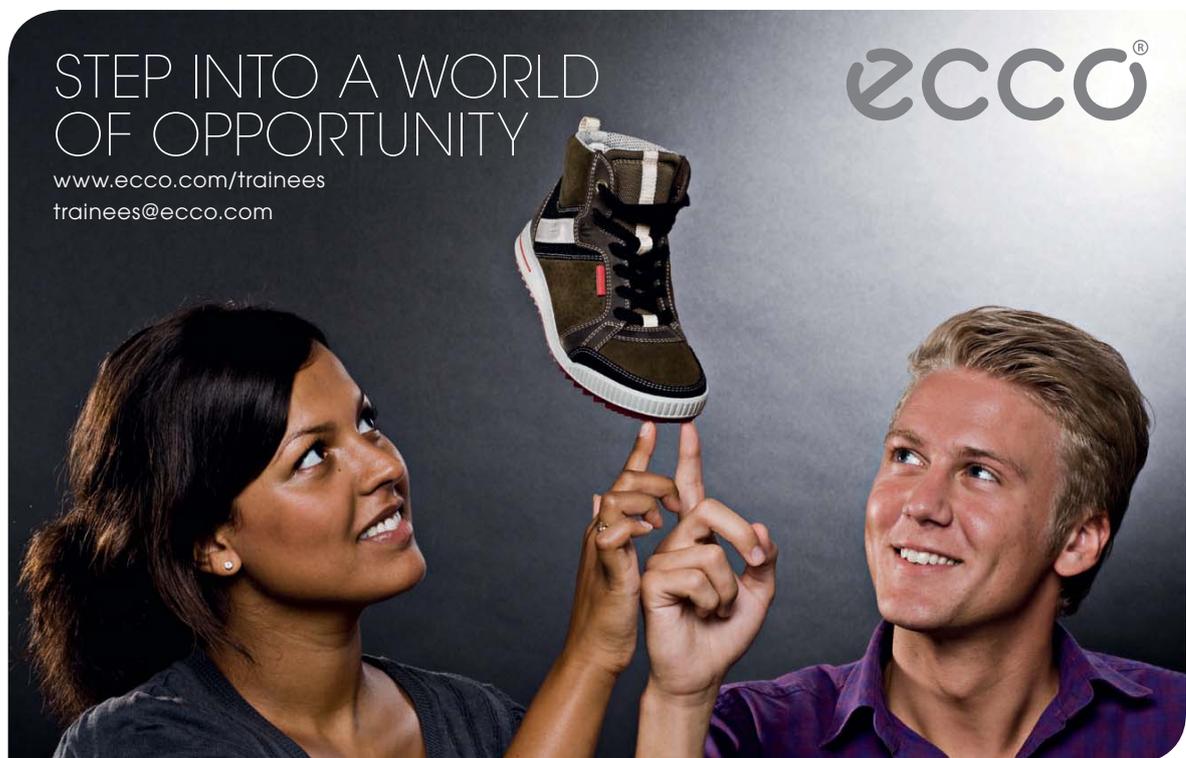
How well does your organisation manage unauthorized absence? Do you know the penalties for taking time off work without good reason or the incentives to ensure that you do not?

3.10 Performance Appraisal

Surprisingly, although HR writers wax lyrical about appraisal techniques and regard them with something approaching awe, they are not exactly new. There is evidence that Robert Owen was using them in his New Lanark textile mills early in the Nineteenth century and they may not have progressed very far in the intervening couple of centuries.

Appraisal. In a nutshell, this is the process whereby current performance is observed and discussed with a view to adding value to that level of performance. In other words, usually to improve the productivity of each employee while, perhaps also identifying development opportunities for that member of staff. Again, largely good business management overlaid with a modern veneer of HR expertise.

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So the benefits of appraisal are specifically:-

- it can identify an individual's strengths and areas for development
- it can help to reveal problems that may be restricting progress and overcome any work difficulties
- it can develop a greater degree of consistent management through regular feedback on performance and agreement on potential
- it can provide useful data for HR planning, assist succession planning, determine suitability for promotion and assess training needs
- it can improve internal communications by providing staff with an outlet to express their feelings and contribute good ideas to assist productivity etc

Several rainforests have been slaughtered to create the books and journals dedicated to furthering the cause of appraisal and one wonders why it was necessary in such a simple concept. There can sometimes be debate about who carries out such an appraisal, the usual suspects being:-

- the individual's immediate supervisor (known as parent appraisal)
- the employee's supervisors' supervisor (the grandparent appraisal, useful if there are known differences between the appraisee and his/her manager)
- similar level colleagues (peer appraisal)
- internal customers of the appraisee (aunt/uncle appraisals)
- external customers (client appraisal)
- the appraisee's subordinates (upwards appraisal)
- the employee him/herself

This form of appraisal is often known as 360 degree appraisal because it takes the feedback from a circle of the employee's colleagues and contacts. One aspect to bear in mind is that, since there are often sensitive issues which might arise, it has to be professionally fed back to the employee; this can be both time-consuming and expensive but may well be worth it in the long run. Normally, with other systems, the feedback is handled by the immediate manager, unless there are known personality clashes or other circumstances which would suggest this not to be the best approach.

Stop and Think

When did you last have an appraisal with your superior or using a 360 degree approach? What form did it take? Was it useful? If not why not?

There is an argument for dividing appraisal into two distinct sections – one for development purposes and the other for assessment and reward. The reason is that too often, appraisal is seen as being inextricably linked with pay and reward, although the purist view is that these are separate areas and should be retained as such. One solution to this has been to adopt more open appraisal systems, such as 360 degree appraisals. The main arguments in favour of this are:-

- they fit better with notions of employee involvement and empowerment
- it is often difficult for one manager to cope with all the appraisees who might ultimately report to him/her
- appraisers need to be protected from employee harassment – or, even, legal action in extreme cases – as a result of employees’ greater access to hitherto confidential personnel files and records.
- Traditional, top-down approaches tend to provide only a single viewpoint; more open systems (such as 360 degree) create more validity and less potential for prejudice or inappropriate viewpoints becoming enshrined in a personnel file.
- Open comments are more likely to be taken seriously by an employee who may then act upon them to improve performance.
- They mostly avoid bias on the part of the appraiser

There is, however, a strong school of thought that 360 degree appraisal should not replace more traditional approaches but complement them. Peter Ward, HR director of Tesco is a leading proponent of this belief. (Marchington & Wilkinson p144)

3.11 Other types of performance management

There are several other forms of performance management, including coaching, mentoring and continuous monitoring. Although they share some common elements, they also have some very distinct characteristics.

Coaching

A coach is a personal trainer, sometimes a “consoling guide to turn to when things are going badly.” (S Greener, Personnel Management 28 July 2005). Today every manager is supposed to be adding coaching to the managerial repertoire – but this is easier said than done. The clarity of many HR writers disappears rapidly when coaching and mentoring share the same sentence. Let’s be clear; coaching is personal training, encouraging and sharing new skills; mentoring involves a wiser person – often an older manager who has been through the same kind of issues – meeting a younger manager occasionally often informally to help sort out problems, a sort of listening post with skills and suggestions. The relationship is based on the credibility of the mentor.

Coaches know all about a job and are there to help somebody else master it. So, coaches can be line managers, although often additional coaches are brought in from outside to help the learning process even more.

If, however, the need is for someone to inspire and motivate, provide fresh perspectives and offer this help in a way which can be personally challenging, then we are looking for a mentor. This usually works best in a one-to-one relationship which can develop over time. Often the mentor does not even work in the same organisation, sometimes he or she is retired but retains a knowledge of the difficulties facing the young manager.

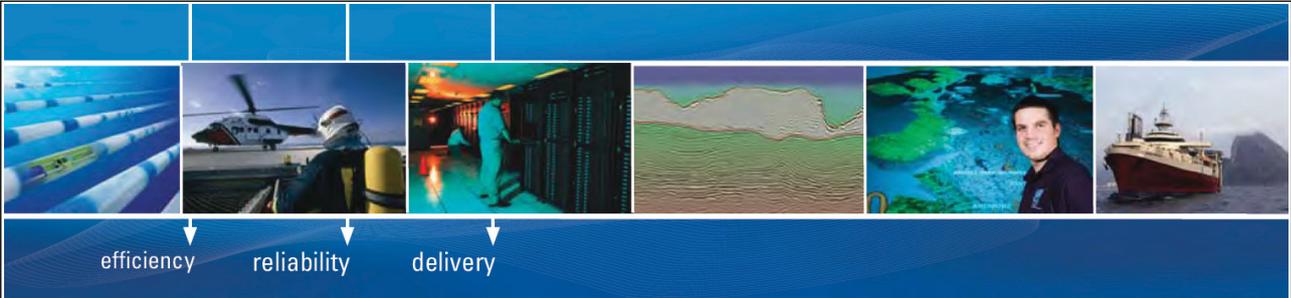
A newer – and more American – word is that of “buddy”. Not a fugitive from a bad Western but a buddy is often used synonymously with “mentor”. This can be misleading however. A buddy does not have that distant perspective in relation to an individual’s career. The buddy relationship works best when the status between the two is fairly equal - for instance, between a final year and a first student. The buddy has information and recent experience that can assist a young manager to find a way through policies, practices and people which both he/she and the buddy have probably encountered. By definition, the relationship is usually short term, although some go on to become genuine friends.

Some or all of these roles may have a part to play in continuously monitoring the performance of a manager, as well, of course as the manager’s own boss. There is no single type that is better than the others; it is a question of who is available and who fits the bill most closely in a particular situation.

Training and personal development

It is clearly in the interests of both employer and employee that adequate training is provided, either on or off the job and that the development of the individual is maximized. Many training managers see their role as being complementary to that of the recruitment function; the new employee may not be the finished article on arrival but a sound training course, based on scientifically deduced needs, will often remedy that relatively quickly.

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Informal training and short-term courses – perhaps lasting a day or two – are the most popular types of training although online training is rapidly coming to the fore as a means of convenience training. The traditional on the job training – sometimes known as SBN, or Sit-by-Nellie and learn by watching to see how she does it, often used in computer training for instance, is becoming an outdated mode of practice. Online learning, with its materials loaded and then downloaded by students at their own convenience, is appealing in its simplicity, outreach and global appeal. Increasingly, degree courses are being managed this way across the world and online learning – or e-learning – is becoming the preferred delivery mode of the future.

For the employer, any form of training is likely to minimise the loss of staff to poaching by other employers, notably competitors. Some employers even require trainees to sign an agreement not to leave that employment within, say, a year of receiving the training, although this is now becoming less popular as training costs are coming down and as legislation enabling free movement of staff is tightened up.

Over a longer period than the usual short-term training, employers who invest in the longer term person development which is becoming more widespread are effectively investing in their own agility to meet and overcome new challenges. A highly trained and empowered workforce will usually be able to respond to, say, market changes more rapidly and successfully than the competition – so training becomes an HR-led competitive advantage in its own right.

To be absolutely clear about the differences between training and development – terms which are often lumped together with no thought about the distinction - it is as well to quote Malone:-

Training – is a planned and systematic way of improving a person’s knowledge, skills and attitudes so that he/she can perform the job more competently.

Development is the process of preparing a person to take on more onerous responsibilities or equip him/her for future promotion

Learning is the process which brings about persistent change in behaviour. Learning gives a person increased competence to deal successfully with the environment by acquiring knowledge.

(cited in Rayner & Adam-Smith 2005 p.140)

The best way to acquire learning is still to go to a recognised university and complete a degree course. Other ways seek to approach this level but none have yet achieved it.

Attendance Management

Absenteeism remains a major problem in British working life, in both private and, especially, public sectors. The CBI has estimated that the cost to UK industry is at least £16bn every year (Marchington & Wilkinson p145) and there is no indication that the figure is being reduced. Much HR time and energy has been expended in the past decade or so to try to alleviate this problem, but, so far, there are precious few signs of it coming under control, despite the current vogue for re-naming the issue Presenteeism.

There is a multitude of connections with employee relations and some also with employee reward so the issue is more complex than first sight would suggest. Some blame can clearly be attached to lax or ineffective management who do not have adequate systems for monitoring attendance. It is a difficult issue for some managers to tackle head-on, partly because it can lead to difficulties in inter-personal relationships which can sour a whole team at work.

There is a model originally coined by Huczynski and Buchanan in 1989 and still in use today. It is called the ALIEDIM model which, while not exactly tripping off the tongue, describes its component parts logically enough:-

Assess the problem; how significant is it in reality (as opposed to the emotive perspective), how much is it costing the organisation?

Locate the cause of the problem by identifying where in the organisation it is most common and trying to determine any patterns of absenteeism that could be isolated and dealt with Identify and prioritise the main causes to attempt to discover a pattern in one area, one type of employee, one section of an individual supervisor and so on.

Evaluate absence control approaches, determining whether these are the most appropriate for the type of employee involved and whether existing systems work properly (e.g are staff ringing in to report sick?)

Design the absence control programme by choosing from a range of options before implementing the ones which appear to be best suited to the case. Factors might include the organisational cultures, the geographical spread of the problems and the cost of implementing the solution.

Implement the control programme by preparing the ground for changes and anticipating and overcoming resistance to such changes.

Monitor the effectiveness against established benchmarks and performance criteria, including an assessment of the system's benefits.

Stop and Think

How does your organisation manage absence?

It is important to differentiate between authorised and unauthorised absence. For a start, absence on holidays, genuine sickness or occupations such as jury service or local government duties are not absenteeism. So unauthorised absence is being absent without leave, without telling anyone or without a good reason.

However, a measure which has emerged over the past few years and which has served to blur the distinction between authorised and unauthorised absence is the use of self-certification. Many organisations now trust their employees to act honestly in revealing the cause of absence. Perhaps this has contributed to the growing problem of absenteeism but it is a meritorious approach, if, sometimes, a rather naïve one.

Also different cases require different approaches. If, for instance, an employee has been absent for a number of single days, especially Fridays and Mondays as seems to be on the increase, (particularly around New Year!), a quiet word might have the desired effect. If, on the other hand an employee has been absent for a period of weeks or even months at a time, no amount of quiet words are likely to make much difference.

The first stage in tackling absenteeism, most writers agree, is to collect data identifying patterns and trends. There are numerous models in use here, many of them complex, cumbersome and difficult to explain briefly. Most concentrate on a number of factors:-

1. the number of days lost./employee/annum. There are norms at work here; 2-5 is considered low (we all get colds and flu) eight is the average in the private sector (19 in the public sector) while anything over 20 would almost certainly bear further investigation.
2. the number of absences in any one year; that is the number of times (not days) that an employee has failed to arrive for work. Here, again, two is low, four is average and anything above five is worth looking at.
3. reasons given for absence, especially in an era of self-certification. Here, poor health (either of oneself or one’s family) is the highest single factor but, in the absence of medical evidence, often cannot be proved or disproved. Consequently, too much may be taken on trust.

Some models notably that developed by Rhodes and Steers (1978) also try to identify the differences between motivation to attend and ability to attend, not always successfully.

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These models have led to recent adoptions in many organisations of two further policies; the trigger for further investigation (often a set number of days' absence, perhaps, 10 a year) and automatic interviews on return to work. A drawback with triggers is that they are often notified by a computer system which cannot differentiate between genuine causes and invented excuses. At the risk of repeating a truism computer systems are only as good as the managers who operate them and human discretion is often needed to avoid either alienating an employee or allowing a malingerer to escape detection.

Return to work interviews provide a good opportunity not only to probe for the real reason behind the absence but also to identify any long term problems which the employee might be having. There is a fairly self-evident formula for such interviews:-

- Preparation – previous work records, both attendance and quality, advice from colleagues, all relevant paper work etc
- The interview itself – explaining its purposes, using open questions to elicit information, displaying sensitivity, attempting to arrive at a mutually beneficial solution, concluding with an action plan
- Follow-up – copies of meeting notes to relevant colleagues also placed on the personnel file, any promised action put in hand, support provided if necessary.

High Performance Working (HPW)

This is a relatively new development, having been extended in scope over the past five years. It places great emphasis on effective people management and development, believing – probably rightly – that this is key to any sustainable improvement. For some managers, it will mean merely an acceptance that what they already do is valuable; for others it may mean wholesale and, possibly, unwelcome change.

HPW requires, first a vision of increasing customer value by differentiating an organisation's products or services and a process of moving towards satisfying individual needs by providing individual solutions. It needs leadership from the top to create and sustain momentum and to measure progress.

The main characteristics are:-

- Decentralised, developed decision making, made by those close to the customer.
- Learning at all levels to develop peoples' capacities, freedom to act and to exert improving pressure on the way the organisation does things.
- Improved team-based capabilities, so that problems are identified before they become major issues and so that pre-emptive or remedial action can be taken.

In practice, this often means moving away from hierarchies towards flatter structures, so HPW is not likely to occur too often in, say, power cultures.

A recent (2003) report, funded by the DTI and written by Sung and Ashton, surveyed 294 organisations and brought together in-depth studies of ten leading companies. It found that, among other factors, regular appraisals were used by 95% of those organisations. While this might not seem terribly earth-shattering, it is worth remembering that appraisal have not really been put into practice by many organisations until about five years ago. So any evidence suggestive of a move towards engaging with, empowering and involving staff has to be a sign of something better around the corner.

There was also a strong relationship between HPW practices and performance goals, with a further correlation between leadership and skill development. Skills are developed in HPW not for their own sake but only for the furtherance of organisational goals. It is, however, something of a current fashion (with strong support from government circles that may not be best experienced in the ways of management) with little wisdom that is absolutely new, so future generations might wonder, with the benefit of hindsight, what all the official fuss was about, rather as they might wonder about TQM. For the official version, go to <http://www.dti.gov.uk/files/file21267.pdf>

AMO

Another modern development and one which promises rather more than HPW is Ability, Motivation and Opportunity (AMO). This model, widely feted in HR circles but none the worse for that, rests on two strong factors; the role of front-line managers in implementing HR practice and the nature of the corporate culture which can either facilitate front-line management responsibility for decision making or stifle it. It is also sometimes known as the People and Performance model, which describes rather better what is different about it.

A couple of specific definitions might help to bring out its character.

Ability, here in the assumption that people want jobs that make use of their talents; to have their attributes recognised and are willing to learn new skills.

Motivation, in this context, assumes that people can be motivated to use their ability productively and to behave in positive ways

Opportunity, here means that people will perform well, especially in high-quality work, and participate in wider activities than their strict role requires; these might include team initiatives or problem solving, if the opportunity is given to them.

AMO is also useful in building strong front-line manager responsibility for aspects of people and performance management, especially in areas such as:-

- Building good working relationships with staff, notably by leading, listening, asking, being fair, responding to suggestions and dealing with problems.
- Coaching and guiding employees to help them do their jobs better.
- Build effective teams skillfully
- Performance appraisal
- Training, coaching and guidance

- Involvement (of staff) and generally good communications
- Openness – making it easy for employees to discuss aspects of the job with their managers
- Work-life balance – an aspect on which the NGS, for example, has been spending much time and effort recently
- Recognition - how employees feel their contribution is recognised, reflecting Herzberg's motivational theories.

3.12 Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs)

Finally, it is worth noting the recent development and rapid growth of EAPs. These are a way of alleviating irksome issues such as absenteeism, as well as revealing any deep seated problems with individual employees.

EAPs are largely concerned with the employee's life outside work – covering a wide range of issues from health to family (or, even, extra-family) relationships. Recent research has shown that there is a stronger relationship between work and non-working lives than at any time in the recent past. Factors such as working mothers have also increased concentration on this aspect of HR.

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Some of this work is not new, however. Victorian England was, probably better at identifying and solving employees' problems than we are today, although it did so from an unashamed perspective of wanting to increase productivity and avoid disruption. EAPs as such first appeared in the UK in the late 1980s, having been partly (but not exhaustively) trialled in the US. Their objective is to use managerial skills (such as behavioural science) to alleviate both work and non-work factors which may be adversely affecting an employee's performance. One drawback is that something might have to go wrong with an employee's life before they are implemented. Pre-emptive EAPs would seem to be a sound innovation but many managers are concerned that this might infringe the human rights of the employee.

Two of the professed experts in the field, Berridge and Cooper (1994) have identified the most common issues encountered as being, in no particular order:-

- Health issues
- Disabilities (sometimes not visible or officially recognised)
- Gambling
- Marital problems
- Retirement (presumably imminent retirement)
- Alcohol abuse
- Divorce
- Legal matters
- Racial harassment
- Verbal abuse
- Bereavement
- Financial difficulties
- Literacy (or the lack of it)
- Redundancy
- Obesity

This is a formidable list and one which serves in many ways as a microcosm of the UK in the early 21st century. Clearly, an employer's ability to affect some of these is minimal. But, equally clearly, someone has to start to trigger assistance from experts in some of these areas and, if the employer can do so, it seems to be a sensible approach.

Some EAP scheme are run externally, mainly because employers often realise that try themselves are not counsellors but can act as catalysts to access appropriate help.

Disciplinary procedures will be covered in the next chapter but, as a preliminary note, it is worth remembering that, while there is a well-worn path through disciplinary procedures in the UK, some aspects are having to be revised in light of recent legal changes, such as the Human Rights Act.

4. Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures, Managing Equality and Diversity

4.1 Introduction

Enlightened though the new era of HR management might be – as we saw in the two preceding chapters – some kind of disciplinary and grievance procedure is still necessary – and presumably always will be. It might have evolved somewhat from the rather more harsh conditions of the earlier part of the last century but it still has to be vigorous enough to act as an effective deterrent and to redress wrongs which might inadvertently or otherwise have been perpetrated.

Equally, a new era and, in some ways, a new society have led to the need for new policies to defend the interest of minority groups – generally termed managing equality and diversity – and it is right that we consider these in this chapter to conclude this section on HR Management.

Clearly, not all organisations will need to have recourse to either of these areas of policy and activity very often; indeed, the less frequently the better, but it behoves all who purport to be new managers in the 21st century to have at least a modest knowledge of these provisions, what they do and how to abide by them.

Consequently we shall explore the outline of these two areas in this chapter, although, as with most aspects of HR, these are specialised spheres of activity and should not be undertaken without expert advice from appropriate professionals.

Chapter Content

- Disciplinary procedures
- Grievance procedures
- Managing equality and diversity

4.2 Disciplinary procedures

Since the beginning of the 1970s (with the 1971 Industrial Relations Act) there has been a move towards protecting the rights of working people from unscrupulous employers. Over that time, legitimate reasons for dismissal have been tightened up so that there are now only five:-

1. the person cannot carry out the work that he/she was recruited to do; this can include a health reason, if appropriate
2. The employee's conduct has been at fault – e.g. criminal, negligent or otherwise worthy of being deemed “gross misconduct”
3. the employee's position has been made redundant
4. the employee could not continue without contravening a legal enactment
5. any other “substantial” reason which justifies dismissal – e.g. re-organisation.

It can be seen that the last two could be regarded as “get-out” causes, although the circumstances in which they are applied would usually be open to semi-public scrutiny, for example at an industrial tribunal. Nevertheless, there is clearly some leeway in the law here and arbitration procedures, including hearings, are increasingly common. The employer may have to justify the stance taken with the employee and to show that it has acted fairly and given the employee full and appropriate warning of, say, an unsatisfactory level of performance while also having offered help to improve this.

There is also a statutory disciplinary, dismissal and grievance procedure, enshrined in the Employment Act 2002. These statutory procedures amount to minimum standard that must be followed. The main features are:-

- a three-step procedure which must be followed (see below)
- employers will pay a potential increase of 10%-50% if they do not follow the recognised procedures
- employees must also follow the procedure if they wish to lodge a claim in the employment tribunal

The three step procedure on which most of this hangs can be summarised as a letter, followed by a meeting and concluded by an appeal if necessary. Grounds for procedures can take the form of all kinds of employee misconduct including:-

- continued lateness
- failure to follow a reasonable management instruction

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- abuse of the organisation's computer system or internet access
- bullying or creating a hostile work atmosphere
- theft
- fighting
- committing a criminal offence

Most of these are fairly clear with the criminal offence being a catch-all in case there is doubt over the exact actions described earlier.

Records need to be meticulously kept in case the claim reaches an industrial tribunal. The burden of proof is on the employer to show that the employee has erred in a serious fashion, adding to the need to keep accurate and full records including minutes (or notes) of meetings, notes of phone calls and copies of all correspondence.

Disciplinary procedures

There are also punitive measures, attendance incentives and preventive measures. If you had to propose a business case to improve rates of absence in your organisation, would you use all three types of measure or are there some which are not acceptable in your organisation's culture? For example, would an attendance bonus create unfairness and confusion? How could it be measured and set up to work fairly? What impact might it have on staff? Would you use it for all categories of staff, and if not, how would you justify that?

Disciplinary interviews

These are often unpleasant interludes for all concerned and are best approached in a very professional way. Key points are:-

- Ensure you have investigated all the relevant facts in advance
- Plan your approach
- Ensure the employee knows why he/she has to attend; this should be very clear in the letter inviting him/her to the meeting
- Give reasonable notice of the meeting – more than 48 hours is the CIPD advice
- Always have another manager there to take notes and help conduct the interview
- Allow the employee to have a work colleague or TU official present if he/she requests it
- Never pre-judge the outcome; there may be facts of which you have been unaware
- Begin by stating the exact complaint, including witness statements if appropriate
- Give the employee ample opportunity to state a defence and call witnesses if necessary
- Use adjournments to allow a cooling off period if necessary and to consider any new information that has come to light
- Deliver the final decision with full reasons, give details of appeal procedures and review periods if appropriate
- Confirm the decision in writing quickly after the meeting – preferably the same day

- Observe all the details of this procedure; if just one aspect has not been properly followed, the employee may have a good case for appeal

4.3 Outcomes

Broadly there are likely to be three main outcomes from this disciplinary procedure.

1. No action. For example an employee might not have been clear about what was expected, in which case, his/her manager rather than the employee should be taken to task.
2. Warnings. This might vary slightly depending on the organisation's exact policy but would usually follow the pattern of a recorded oral warning, then a first written warning and, finally a final written warning. Unless there are special circumstances – such as extreme misconduct – it would be wrong to skip stages in this process. Dismissal can only usually follow if all these stages have been effected. Warnings should have a specific life after which they are deemed to have lapsed; typically this will be six months for a recorded oral warning, one year for a first written warning and two years for a final written warning. Occasionally, if conduct is serious, a final warning may last indefinitely.
3. Dismissal; There are six permitted reasons for dismissal:-
 - 3.1. misconduct
 - 3.2. incapability
 - 3.3. breach of statutory regulations
 - 3.4. redundancy
 - 3.5. retirement – but this must be handled correctly now that the 65 year cut-off point has been removed with effect from 1 Oct 2006. See the CIPD's website (cipd.org.uk) for up to date clarification.
 - 3.6. some other substantial reason – another catch-all in case the exact circumstances have not already been covered elsewhere.

In addition it is important that the organisation ensures that it has acted in a way which would be accepted as reasonable by an industrial tribunal, including following all the recognised processes.

Grievance policy and practice

Clearly, equity and justice dictate that all employees are treated in the same manner. Failure to do so can lead to residual anger, unrest and even industrial dispute. Employees must know to whom they can turn for support and advice; the organisation must clearly show that they have made this information available to all.

Most grievances can pass through a two-stage process. The first stage is

Informal

Employees should be encouraged to raise any issues informally with their line manager so that any concerns can be aired and responded to as quickly as possible. Sometimes, this is all that is needed; a good manager can often resolve any issues without the need for more formality. But, if this stage does not satisfactorily resolve the issue, a second, more formal stage may be needed.

Formal

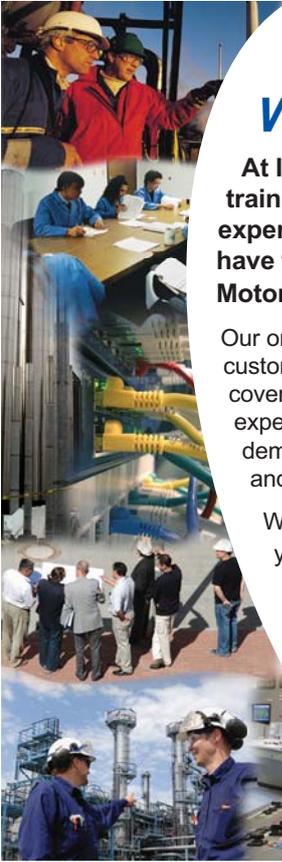
Employees need to be aware of the formal route open to them including:-

- the three stages of the statutory procedure
- the right person with whom to raise the complaint
- the timescales involved
- how a complaint may be raised at the next level of management above that which has not resolved the issue
- all employees have the right to be accompanied at grievance hearings by a colleague or TU representative
- full and accurate records must be kept of all grievance hearings

Ensuring that employees are all treated fairly in a hostile-free environment is an important factor in creating a productive working context. Where possible, matters should be resolved informally with the minimum fuss and delay; this way, minor concerns can be dealt with swiftly and with minimum disruption and embarrassment.

When informal processes are ineffective, or where personality issues preclude them, formal mechanisms can resolve the issue firmly and permanently, provided the guidelines are followed. This will also help to contain staff turnover and absenteeism. All managers must have appropriate training in these matters; both ACAS and the CIPD are able to arrange this.

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ACAS

One of the prime movers in establishing a fair basis for discipline is the Arbitration and Conciliation Service (ACAS)

A government sponsored body, it made headlines regularly during the dark days industrial unrest in the 1970s by being appealed to frequently to help settle pay and other related disputes in large firms, such as British Leyland, Ford and, in the 1980s, the National Coal Board. ACAS has a handbook worth investing in if you are ever going to pursue a career in HR – called Disputes at Work. This guide gives the latest wisdom, court findings, settlements, impact of new legislation and so on. An extract to summarise the current position on disciplinary procedures includes:-

- all should be in writing (although appropriate verbal counseling should also have taken place earlier)
- all should specify exactly to whom they apply
- all should provide for matters to be dealt with quickly
- they should indicate the disciplinary actions which may be taken
- they should specify the levels of management involved; one recommendation is that no manager should ever have supreme authority over an employee in his/her direct reporting line; a more senior manager should always be involved to ensure scrupulous fairness
- they should be timely enough to allow individuals to be advised of the charges against them, well in advance of a hearing to allow them to prepare a defence.
- Individuals always have the right to be accompanied to a hearing by a trade union official
- No employee should be dismissed for a first breach of discipline, except in cases of gross misconduct
- No disciplinary action should be taken until after the case has been heard
- All individuals should be given full reasons for any disciplinary action imposed
- All should have a right of appeal and should be informed of the procedure
- All disciplinary actions should apply to all employees equally, regardless of length of service or any other factor
- All should be non-discriminatory
- Suspension should be paid (not necessarily at full pay levels)

On the face of it, this is all sound thinking and logical in its approach. The very fact that it has to be imposed on some organisations might indicate that HR has not always been so scrupulous in its dealings with employees.

According to the Industrial Relations Society who surveyed this area few years ago, the ten most common causes of disciplinary action are:-

1. absenteeism
2. poor performance
3. poor time-keeping
4. refusal to obey a reasonable instruction
5. theft/fraud

6. sexual/racial harassment
7. verbal abuse
8. health & safety infringements
9. fighting
10. alcohol/drug abuse

Minor misconduct – being just a few minutes late for instance, should be dealt with by verbal warnings; actions must be seen to be appropriate to the circumstances. Moreover, managers should be counseling as well as punishing employees to try to prevent a recurrence. Below par performance, in particular, should be the subject of a concerted effort to improve, by the manager as well as the employee. More training, for instance, might be required and the employer should be seen to be providing this. Moreover, there are wider implications of over-hasty disciplinary action which was the fourth most common cause of strike action in the UK in 1994.

4.4 Equality and Diversity

Evaluation of People Resourcing systems

If People Resourcing is to become a business partner rather than an unproductive overhead, then it must be able to evaluate its contribution to the business and relate all activities to business objectives. Such value could only be assessed in relation to things that go better because of HR intervention and activities and specific organisation goals achieved through HR.

However formal evaluation hits measurement problems because much impact is not clearly related to financial outcomes.

Clearly **when** or **over what period** does it work, cut cost and remain fair is a reasonable additional question and authors such as Taylor attempt to deal with this when debating short and long term approaches and forward and backward looking criteria. He discusses straightforward quantitative metrics such as absence rates and proportion of recruits from ethnic minorities, also ratios such as profit per employee, recruitment cost per recruit. He also proposes audit questions of the quantitative and qualitative type – assuming the HR function can justify the cost of running such internal audits on a regular basis.

Stop and Think

Have you experience of designing or running an internal audit of HR activity? Did you use questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, online surveys or a mixture? Did you encounter any problems such as low return rates, ambiguous questions, reluctance to take part more than once in a lifetime, moans rather than constructive comments on which action could be taken?

Gathering data for a purpose i.e. primary research is not a straightforward activity as you may already have found. There is an old but still extremely detailed and useful book on questionnaire design by A N Oppenheim – widely available in most libraries – which can help with such problems.

In terms of gathering data to evaluate HR function and activity internally – the major barriers are likely to be time and political will. Senior level commitment to the exercise may be necessary to get a good volume of response. As Taylor suggests, benchmarking is another way of providing data to evaluate your activity. This is usually not freely available from competitors unless you have agreements with them to do this. Benchmarking can, of course, be internal against other departments, or it can be functional, industry based or generic. Published external benchmarking information should always be used with caution, but can be helpful. Taylor recommends IDS and IRS as good published sources, perhaps the CIPD should also be added.

Stop and Think

What issues could you identify as affecting the outcomes of a goal based evaluation exercise i.e. the setting and measuring of performance of HR against SMART goals, and the development of Return on Investment (ROI) calculations for HR interventions? How do internal politics, degrees of internal interdependence and external environmental (eg PESTLE or STEEPLE) factors affect such evaluation measures?

4.5 Legal obligations

There is overlap here with Employment Law and it is necessary to summarise some of the key areas which currently affect issues like this.

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Key current UK legislation relating to People Resourcing:-

- Equal Pay Act 1970 and as amended in 1984
- Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and 1986 and Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003
- Race Relations Act 1976 and the Amendment Act 2000 and Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003 SI 2003/1660.
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and (Amendment) Regulations (SI 2003/1673) 2003
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Employment Act 2002
- Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 & Police Act 1997
- Asylum and Immigration Act 1996
- Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 (also Factories Act 1961, Offices, Shops and Railway Premises Act 1963) & Workplace Health, Safety and Welfare Regulations 1992, Health and Safety (Consultation with Employees) Regulations 1996, COSHH 1988, RIDDOR 1995
- Employment Rights Act 1996
- Working Time Regulations 1998
- Employment Protection (part-time employees) Regulations 1995
- Employment Relations Act 1999
- Access to Medical Records Act 1988

How do you stay up to date as an HR professional ? In what cases can you use a legal professional ? How do you ensure the key legal requirements are understood by management and staff ? Is print in the staff handbook or uploading information to an intranet sufficient ? How do you keep HR staff up to date, let alone other staff ? What are the equivalent EU laws if you have offices in Europe Remember this list will need constant updating if you refer to it subsequently.? Or in the rest of the world if you have offices there ?

Specific equality and diversity issues

Within the list of key legislation, the areas of equality and diversity, health and safety and individual rights at work are strongly represented. Most laws of this kind come into being to protect potential and actual victims of exploitation, but by their nature can become a “sledgehammer to crack a nut” i.e. their impact can be much wider than intended and entail significant extra work and cost for everyone, not just those who may have exploited employees. Perhaps it is human nature always to look for loopholes, and as a result the law becomes progressively tighter over time.

In terms of equality and diversity, many organisations are operating on very low standards. HR people are required to remain objective and to look out for cases where prejudice and ignorance result in discrimination and unfair practice leading to victimisation or harassment. It is easy to believe that well educated people have fewer prejudices – but beware. Here is a useful piece on prejudice from Heery and Noon (2001) from their Dictionary of Human Resource Management (this is cited in Beardwell, Holden and Claydon p 233).

In the context of discrimination at work, prejudice means holding negative attitudes towards a particular group, and viewing all members of that group in a negative light, irrespective of their individual qualities and attributes. Typically we think of prejudice as being against a particular group based on gender, race/ethnicity, religion, disability, age and sexual orientation. However, prejudice extends much further and is frequently directed at other groups based on features such as accent, height, weight, hair colour, beards, body piercings, tattoos and clothes. It is extremely rare to find a person who is not prejudiced against any group – although most of us are reluctant to admit to our prejudices.

Is it the job of businesses to pursue social justice in their organisations? This is a debatable point. So what other business reasons might be used to justify diversity management?

- Making sure organisations find the right talent, maximising human resource potential in the workforce
- Relate better to a wider diversity of customers
- Wider pool of labour for recruitment
- Becoming an employer of choice – sometimes leading to employer branding
- Public and therefore brand/product/service image improved
- Avoiding cost of tribunals – complying with the law

There is also the view that these arguments will only really have impact when there are skill shortages and profitability is not impacted (e.g. by making special provision for people with disabilities)?

There is a good question on p 237 of the Beardwell, Holden and Claydon book : Should the absence or weakness of a “business case” for eliminating unfair discrimination and disadvantage absolve managers from trying to do so?

The UK Commission for Racial Equality (www.cre.gov.uk) lists ten points for good practice in employment – go to the website to find more detail, in summary they are:-

1. Equal opportunities policy
2. Action plan with targets
3. Training for all levels of staff especially those recruiting, selecting and training others
4. Assess current position – audit
5. Review recruitment, selection, promotion and training procedures against policy
6. Draw up clear and justifiable job criteria
7. Offer pre-employment training where appropriate
8. Consider organisation’s image
9. Consider flexible working opportunities and practices
10. Develop links with community groups, organisations and schools to broaden pool of applicants.

Chapter 17 pp465-469 in Taylor, People Resourcing, refers to this topic.
Some issues to consider include:

1. The debate on market forces and capitalism building a strong economy and **more wealth for all versus human rights** and the needs of weaker individuals to be protected.
2. CIPD professional conduct as regulated by the Institute through its **codes of practice and policies** relating to members.
3. **Inequality of power** in the employment relationship offering the possibility of abuse of power.
4. Personnel & Development's (P&D) reliance on the decisions of other managers – the need to wield **influence** over others from this function if ethical views are to be pursued.
5. **Possible conflicts of interest** between the objectives and needs of the individual employee and the objectives and needs of the business.
6. The P&D response is generally towards **codes of ethical practice/conduct** – to what extent is this for public image or for use in determining ethical decisions?
7. Taylor argues for a **pragmatic approach to ethics** which promotes the rights of the individual only so far as this does not damage corporate performance
8. A principle based on the “**least of all evils**”? (p468). Who judges what is least? This can be immensely subjective and are frequently misapplied in organisations to build cases which are partial or biased. How do we judge what honesty is? How much truth are we prepared to tell when we have the confidence of senior managers and value this as an influencing tool, yet are party to information which could injure or concern others, perhaps unnecessarily? How open and honest can we be when we have to apply senior management decisions with which we do not agree?
9. “...it is unprofessional and **unethical to treat employees other than as adults** with whom the organisation has an economic relationship.” (p 468 Taylor). Do we treat them as adults when we require them to attend at specific times to suit us, when we impose rules about breaks and status, when we prescribe exactly how jobs should be done, when we apply common competencies across organisations which do not allow for individual difference, when we deny promotion to people working flexibly, when we see going home at an agreed time as “clockwatching” and lacking commitment, when we enforce workplace rules which only appear in a lever arch file held in Personnel, when we allocate work and opportunities to earn overtime pay but do not give clear criteria for such decisions, when we pay people differently for similar work on the basis of qualifications or gender etc ?
10. Taylor proposes the options of pursuing a **moral, business and or legal line** when influencing decisions. He raises the question of when it is appropriate to resign because you personally do not agree with a decision – a vital but generally unaddressed question.

Chapter 8 in Corbridge and Pilbeam focuses on equality of opportunity, diversity, harassment at work etc and gives a detailed summary of relevant legislation and recent change in workplace diversity policy and practice. This includes references again to “**reasonableness**” in adjusting the workplace or the job conditions to accommodate employees’ needs, for example in the light of disability. Reasonable adjustments are seen to include physical alteration of premises, allocating some job duties to another person, redeploying the person to another location, amending working times, accepting absence for treatment or assistance, providing additional training or supervision and providing a reader or interpreter. Whether these accommodations are “reasonable” or sufficient is determined by the ease or difficulty of making the adjustment, the cost of doing so and the employer’s resources. (Corbridge and Pilbeam, p180).

The chapter also refers to the **Human Rights Act 1998** through which UK citizens have protected rights to peaceful assembly, respect for privacy and family life and freedom of thought, conscience, religion and expression. Implications for the workplace include dress codes, rights for religious observance, right to a fair disciplinary hearing, the right to collectivise/join a union and the right to reject a long-hours culture which affects privacy or family life (Corbridge and Pilbeam p 183). The Act only applies directly to public bodies, but private sector organisations need to monitor and meet such requirements if they are to be “fair” or “best practice” employers.

Chapter 14 in this book refers to “sensitive employment issues” again relating to ethical debate – and covers issues such as **positive health policies at work, smoking, alcohol and drug abuse, HIV and AIDS, violence at work and stress and distress**. In each case policies are proposed which attempt to prepare an environment in which fairness and communication can prevail. There must be a risk of over-preparing for dangers such as these in a small-medium sized organisation (SME), however; clear policies which spell out what can and should be done will usually prevent “knee-jerk” reactions under pressure when such occasions arise. It is important to note that discrimination does not have to be racial; it can also be on grounds of age, gender and disability as well. In fact, most of the cases brought in the UIK are probably not racial but based on age or gender.

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The **stress debate** is interesting in that a relationship between pressure and performance is proposed in which (p355) low levels of pressure and performance can cause as much stress (“rust-out”) as high levels of pressure – associated with drops in performance (“burn-out”). The ideal state (eustress) is an optimum level of stress associated with high performance and average pressure. This is a good theory because it seems intuitively accurate – but how can we apply this? Managers need an understanding of the optimum performance level but need to interpret this from individuals’ reactions to the job, since each individual will respond differently to pressure. An organisation without employee support mechanisms (advice line, EAP, health screening, social networking etc) is unlikely to pick up serious stress problems before distress is caused.

Chapter 7 in Beardwell, Holden and Claydon also refers to equality and diversity under the ethics heading. In discussing discrimination, Noon – the author of this chapter – introduces the idea (based on Healy (1993) and Kirton and Greene (2000)) of a **hierarchy of organisations in relation to equality of opportunity**:

- The negative organisation (has no equal opportunities policy, doesn’t claim to be an equal opportunities employer, may not comply with the law)
- The minimalist organisation (claims to be an equal opportunities employer but has no written policy or procedure, reactive to cases of discrimination.)
- The compliant organisation (has a policy and procedures and initiatives to comply with some aspects of good practice recommendations)
- The proactive organisation (has a policy and procedures and initiatives, monitors outcomes of initiatives, promotes equality using good practice guidelines, improves the way discrimination is dealt with proactively).

Stop and Think

Where is your organisation on this scale?

Finally a quotation from this chapter (page 245) said to be from former US President Lyndon Johnson at the time of the introduction of race legislation in 1965 (note this is significantly earlier than in the UK). This is also quoted in Noon and Blyton 2002 (p 278).

“Imagine a hundred yard dash in which one of the two runners has his legs shackled together. He has progressed 10 yards, while the unshackled runner has gone 50 yards. At that point the judges decide that the race is unfair. How do they rectify the situation? Do they merely remove the shackles and allow the race to proceed? Then they could say that “equal opportunity” now prevailed. But one of the runners would still be forty yards ahead of the other. Would it not be the better part of justice to allow the previously shackled runner to make up the forty yard gap; or to start the race all over again?”

How can you relate this to equality and ethics in the workplace? Organisations need to be comfortable with:-

- Codes of practice and codes of conduct (examples, value etc),
- influencing, ethical principles such as consistency, reasonableness etc,
- rights of employers vs rights of employees,
- Human Rights Act 1998,
- stress debate,
- hierarchy of organisations in relation to equality of opportunity

A couple of case studies might help to illustrate this complex world which is still coming to terms with a new set of principles and how they need to be applied.

Making it work 1

The Mersey Regional Ambulance Service NHS Trust

This trust has 1,100 employees in a number of sites. In 2001 ACAS was called in over issues of bullying and harassment. In discussions with both managers and unions, it became apparent that the policy on bullying was not working properly.

A series of workshops was held attended by most employees who helped to identify the key issues and the shortcomings of the current policy. A joint working party was then set up and established a new policy covering these issues and entitled “Dignity at Work”. This was followed by managerial approval and a strategy for raising awareness of the new policy throughout the trust. This included seminars for all senior managers and union leaders.

A new position – that of Fair Treatment Advisers – was established and a suitable incumbent recruited. Ten were appointed to educate staff about the new procedures, providing help and support to cope with issues around bullying and harassment. Further training sessions were held for nearly 100 managers and these have since been rolled out to most staff throughout the trust. A leaflet was produced outlining the new procedures and space given to the new initiative in the staff newsletter.

Outcomes

The trust believes that behaviour has changed significantly as a result of Dignity at Work. The project was evaluated in 2003 and it was found that any employees who had previously complained of bullying were now empowered to address the issues internally – with the option of involving a colleague – by informally facing the source of the problem, explaining the effect of the behaviour and requesting that it be changed. In some cases, managers were asked to set up meetings with all those concerned to thrash out the issues. It was felt that in the past few managers had much understanding of the impact that bullying behaviour could have at work and that the new policy had raised issues like this to the surface.

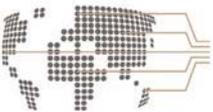
Another outcome was that employees were more willing to report incidents without fear of repercussion. Consequently, many grievances are now being raised which would probably not have surfaced in the past because the culture in the trust is now to be open about such issues. Because of the focus on early intervention, one manager described how “much pain has been removed from the problem”. Advisers reported that staff are now generally more aware of their impact on others and were highly receptive to the new policy. Managers believe that advisers are now acting as a temperature gauge of staff opinion and morale which are strongly linked to dignity issues.

A further survey late in 2003 showed that the trust was then in the top 20% of organisations in respect of staff satisfaction on issues around bullying and harassment. The revised policy has also played a pivotal role in reinforcing a new culture of openness and receptivity to different viewpoints that managers are trying to engender.

(taken from ACAS, Tackling Bullying and Harassment, ACAS.org.uk)

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Currently there are five sites throughout the UK with about 750 staff in total. Ironically, most staff are white, especially in Wigan, the site of the head office, where there is perceived to be a low level of ethnic employees. Both morale and working conditions are generally regarded as good with an open door policy encouraging all employees to air issues at any time. There is also a policy of regular communication at all levels.

However, discipline and grievance was an area in which it was thought desirable to involve ACAS, particularly as there was no practical training for managers in this field in 2003 when ACAS was called in. The aim was to provide training in best disciplinary practice for all managers since many lacked the confidence to tackle such issues and since there were no very clear guidelines to help them. Many had simply passed problems straight to HR without making enough attempt to solve them first. So, persuading managers to take more responsibility themselves was one of the outcomes of the project.

ACAS set up a training programme, mainly through half day workshops. 36 managers were trained as well as the HR and union staff in the following key areas:-

1. the reasons for discipline; why it is a requirement and how it can be used as a positive way of setting standards
2. best practice; correct procedures for handling discipline and grievance situations
3. work in delegate groups to play through similar situations from other organisations so that managers could learn from benchmarking
4. guidance on handling awkward or difficult situations; viewing from an objective standpoint, avoiding conflict and personality clashes.

Feedback from these sessions was positive and the newly created environment seemed to be more suited to solve difficult situations productively. A few changes were made to the codes of practice at ACAS's behest arising out of problems which had been flagged up during the training.

Outcomes

Since the training, not only has a more constructive culture been created but there are tangible measures of success. Absenteeism has dropped and morale has improved even further. A subsequent survey showed that people felt "they were being treated more fairly" and were happier coming to work.

(adapted from ACAS Improving discipline and grievance procedures at Pataks. ACAS.org.uk)

5. Personal Management Competencies

5.1 Introduction

Many managers find that, at some stage in their careers, they wish they knew a bit more about a particular skill. It might be that they are having a difficult time with a subordinate who is proving troublesome to manage and they would like to know the secrets of good delegation.

Or they might find that they never seem to have time to do anything properly or to spend more time with their families, in which case time management could be useful to them.

Equally, an opportunity might arise to give a presentation that might, if it's good enough, convince a major client to retain their services, in which case the manager might wish he/she was a little more polished in front of an audience.

So, in this chapter we will cast an eye over these skills – delegation, time management and presentation skills. Even if a manager is already capable in some of these areas, he/she can always improve; they are skills at which we can all, always, improve. The principles are not hard, the application to a given job might be harder but, once mastered, most of these skills will remain for life.

So, we will consider, in order:-

- Delegation to colleagues
- Time management
- Presentation and public speaking skills

5.2 Delegation

There are often objections among managers, especially junior and middle managers, to delegating work to others. One of the most common complaints is that they “haven't got time” and, “by the time they have explained what has to be done, they could have done the job themselves.” This is, of course, nonsense. Where would Virgin be now if Sir Richard Branson had never delegated anything? Probably still being run from a public phone box in South London. All managers have to delegate and to do that, they need to know when to let go and when to intervene.

So, why would managers delegate? There are perhaps four main reasons:-

1. You have more work than you can effectively do yourself in the time available – probably the most common reason.
2. You cannot make enough time for your priority tasks
3. You believe that the task can be done adequately – or better – by somebody else, especially someone who is paid less and, so, saves the organisation money.
4. You want to develop an individual's skills, competencies and confidence as well as empowering that person to achieve things without referring back to you all the time.

It seems simple put like that. The snag is that many managers don't think through this process logically and prefer to carry on trying to do everything themselves and, often, digging an early grave. So, how do managers decide what they can delegate? There is a fairly simple format for this as well. Managers can delegate:-

- Tasks that they don't have to do themselves
- Tasks which will develop others
- Authority to do the task
- Tasks which somebody else could do as well as or even better than they could
- Resources to achieve the task
- Information to achieve the task
- But, never, responsibility for the task, if it goes wrong it is still the manager's fault and the buck stops there.

So, there is probably far more scope for most managers to delegate than they often think there is. Keeping tasks and knowledge close to one's chest can often be a mistake in management. Apart, from anything else how is the job going to get done if anything happens to that manager?

Stop and Think

Do all the managers that you know delegate as often as they could or should do? If not, why do you think this is?

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Delegation is, therefore, best approached as a key managerial duty, rather than one which will offload a good deal of tedious work on to somebody else. That is not on. Managers cannot just dump the drudgery and low-interest level work on to a subordinate and expect that person to be happy or properly motivated in a job. Yet some try to, unfairly and, usually, with disastrous results.

Effective delegation, therefore, requires an agreement between the manager who is doing the delegating and the person to whom the task is being delegated. Without such an agreement, (normally negotiated rather than imposed), the process is likely to be both unworkable and unpleasant. Thus, the parties involved, have to agree on:-

- The nature and scope of the task involved
- The exact results to be achieved
- The timescale by which they need to be achieved
- The method which will be used for evaluating the performance – in other words, what success will look like
- The nature and extent of the authority needed to enable the task to be successfully completed.

Once these parameters have been established, there is no reason why the task cannot be taken ahead and successfully completed. But one thing the delegating manager cannot do is sit in the back seat and try to drive the car. Once delegated, he/she has to leave the person to whom it is delegated well alone to get on with the job without undue interference. Back seat drivers have no place in successful management.

There is even a case for allowing people to make mistakes, provided they will not be too damaging to the organisation. Only by making mistakes will some people learn. It is sometimes better to allow the odd error than to jump in as soon as it is seen coming to avoid it. Jumping in will often destroy a person's belief in the manager as someone who will not leave well alone.

There is a good seven point plan which many managers find useful when delegating:-

1. Ask, "Should I be doing this job?"
2. Plan thoroughly before delegating
3. Identify the right person(s) – someone with most of the required skills, with the time to do the job and with the interest to do the job.
4. Establish appropriate reporting links, responsibility and authority
5. Delegate and brief in full, without holding back any important information
6. Set progress reviews at reasonable times and also set a series of completion targets and dates
7. Praise good work in public or semi-public at least three times; deliver a reprimand in private only once. Many people do not at first realise that it is they who is being praised so often the statement needs to be repeated so that it can sink in.

Stop and Think

When someone has delegated a task to you, have they left you alone to get on with it?
If they have interfered, what was your reaction?

Finally, a good question to ask at convenient junctures – weekly, monthly or as a new responsibility appears on the horizon – is “Can I delegate more?” Very often, the answer is in the affirmative, provided the manager keeps an open mind.

The questioning process could be something like this:-

- Is there someone who could do the task better than me? Am I - and is the organisation - really benefiting from the expertise of other people in the office?
- Is there someone who could do the task just as well as me, albeit in a different way?
- Could the task be done by someone who is paid less than me, thus saving money for the organisation?
- If I can't do it today – or soon – could somebody else do it more quickly than I could?
- Would somebody else's personal development benefit from being able to do this task? Could it form part of their development programme?

5.3 Delegating upwards

Finally, delegation does not just flow downwards; it can also be leveraged upwards. Without wishing to “boss the boss” there are ways of demonstrating that delegation can be successful at many levels. Delegating upwards is not as difficult as it might sound, even with an autocratic boss.

But it needs to be handled carefully, even discreetly. There are a few stages which might help the process:-

- agree your working relationships; this will demonstrate how far you can go and where you need to be more tactful
- Respond to your boss's motivation needs; e.g. what motivates him/her? How can you help him/her to achieve those goals? How can you make yourself, first useful and, later, invaluable?
- Be proactive – make your boss aware of issues before it is too late to affect them
- Keep your boss aware of your activities so that he/she doesn't get a surprise, especially an unpleasant one
- Clearly demonstrate that you are taking responsibility where it is desirable and leaving more important issues to him/her where it is not
- Say “no” if it is appropriate but do it politely and tactfully and offer some kind of acceptable alternative
- Where appropriate, ask for help to complete tasks
- Communicate with him/her regularly; your boss should not have to chase you for progress reports
- Always take the initiative

This should ensure at least a good working relationship; it might even allow you to exert reasonable influence over your boss. At all events it is worth a protracted try.

Personal Organisation

What is usually meant by this term is the way in which a manager organises him/herself to extract the maximum benefit from the working day. Many managers are not terribly good at it, especially when it comes to time management, usually doing the most obvious – but not necessarily the most important – task next. So we will consider time management here – briefly - as a useful skill that most managers could improve. Following that we will also look at presentation skills because all the knowledge in the world is of little use unless you can communicate it successfully.

5.4 Time Management

Closely linked to delegation in some ways is time management, in that more time can be freed up for key tasks if more delegation can be achieved.

Time is one of those commodities which can seem endlessly elastic; but it is also one which disappears very rapidly once major work programmes have got under way.

A key part of time management is deciding what to do next; prioritisation, in other words. Ideally, time management is about:-

- planning and allocating key events as early as possible
- breaking down core tasks into smaller steps, then allocating and scheduling them
- reviewing progress at regular intervals – perhaps the start and end of every day
- using the best quality time that your body clock dictates to do the hardest tasks.
- Planning for social and relaxation time to help recharge the batteries.

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This is easy to write but much harder to put into practice. Keeping some kind of diary and “to do” lists will help, but they need to be kept up to date frequently - which can, in itself, be a drain on time. Allocating jobs according to goals is another key device to get the work done in an orderly but timely manner. Travel time implications are also a factor to take into account – especially in the South-East of England, for example, where all journeys seem to take far longer than they should do.

Weekly project lists might help to achieve a good time balance, as can daily lists of key tasks, but these have to be identified and entered into the log at an early stage. A seductive – but ultimately, fairly useless – school of thought is an American model called the Schwab Principle. This states that we identify the key priority, go to work, start on that priority as soon as we get there and do nothing else – not even answer the phone or talk to somebody – until we have achieved that key task. Clearly, this can put the practitioner well outside the human race, and telling your boss to go away because you are busy is unlikely to stand in your favour for long. So, Schwab, while appearing seductive in the pages of a management text book, is strictly confined to that text book rather than applicable to real life.

A good guide to the fundamentals of time management is to:-

- identify your quality work times. When are you feeling mentally and physically alert and “up for it”? For many people, this is first thing in the morning when they get into work. That is when the key priority task needs to be done. But what do many people do when they first arrive at work.? Talk about last night’s football match, where they went for dinner or how their love life is developing. This is all very human and helps the world to go around more pleasantly – but it is not getting the hard work done. More people regard the afternoon, straight after lunch as the downtime of the day; lunch and a full morning’s work have often made them, if not drowsy, then more relaxed than at other times. It is no coincidence that siestas are taken after lunch in hot countries or that, in the Middle East, office hours are often 8.00-1.00 and then 5.0-8.00, with a few hours off in the hottest part of the day.
- Prevent displacement activity. But we all like doing displacement activity – that is, doing pleasant things (which may, or may not, be part of work). Talking to old friends on the phone, perhaps with a work excuse, playing Solitaire on the computer, (apparently the most accessed computer programme in the Western world), catching up on emails, or filling in a few forms might be easy and pleasant ways to spend some time, but they are unlikely to help to get the work done.
- Minimise interruptions and time robbers. Again this is harder to apply than to write. Most time robbers are usually other people wanting your attention – maybe even your boss, so ignoring them is not exactly easy. Another major interrupter is the telephone; many people feel the need to answer this whenever it rings, otherwise there may not be much point in having it. One colleague, when in a meeting, simply puts the whole machine, receiver and all, unanswered into the drawer of her desk when it rings. That might be allowed in her world of banking – it certainly shows the view bankers have of the world – but it might be much less practicable for lesser mortals. Perhaps a discreet compromise of allowing an answer phone or voice mail system to take the call for you might be a practical solution.

- Use saved time constructively. But do we? What happens to all the time we save with modern, time saving technology? We usually find a pleasant way of spending it without necessarily focusing on work. That in itself is no bad thing; life cannot be all work. But it does beg the question of what we do with all the time we save and what the point was of saving it in the first place.

So, prioritising tasks is a key skill in this area of time management. There is a good model developed by Steven Covey some years ago which might help to achieve this.

First list all the tasks you have to do over the next week. Usually, this means work-related tasks but it could be extended to family, social and recreational tasks if necessary. Number them for easy reference later, from 1 to whatever you end up with. It is best to have at least a dozen or so tasks listed as this makes the model run more easily.

Now grade them for importance. If they are important, put a capital “I” against them. If they are critically important put an asterisk against the I – but be sparing with asterisks. And remember the task giver when deciding importance. A simple task – like making a cup of coffee – might seem unimportant but, if the requester is the Chair and the coffee is for the most important client your firm has, then the task assumes disproportionate importance.

Now grade them for urgency – clearly, not the same thing. Again if a task is urgent put a capital “U” against it and if it is critically urgent, as asterisk against the U – but again be sparing with asterisks. Now you have a long, numbered list with some Is and some Us and a few asterisks. Draw a rectangle, similar to the one in Fig 1 with an Importance axis on the left hand side and an Urgent one at the top, Please note that the urgent axis goes the opposite way to normal graphs in that, the more urgent the task is, the nearer to the left it goes, not the right.

Then load your tasks on to the matrix, using the numbers you originally gave them. Don’t arrange them in any particular order, just dot them around in a scattergram. Clearly, the urgent ones will go near the left and the important ones near the top. Asterisked items will also go to the extremes of the grid.

Now add in the central dividing lines – the crosshairs. For some reason, probably buried deep in the human psyche, loading the numbers after you have added the crosshairs is not a good idea because people try to force their tasks into one quadrant or another when, in reality, they need to be allowed to settle wherever is most fitting. Now you have an obvious and clear pattern; everything you have toward the top and towards the left is clearly both urgent and important so they must be done first. The bottom right hand quadrant is least important so can be done fourth. Otherwise, Importance takes priority over urgency so number two is top right and number three is bottom left.

And there you have a Covey Grid with a clear and logical divide between the various tasks. Perhaps 80%-90% of people to whom this model is introduced find it helps them significantly in deciding their priorities, so it may well work for you.

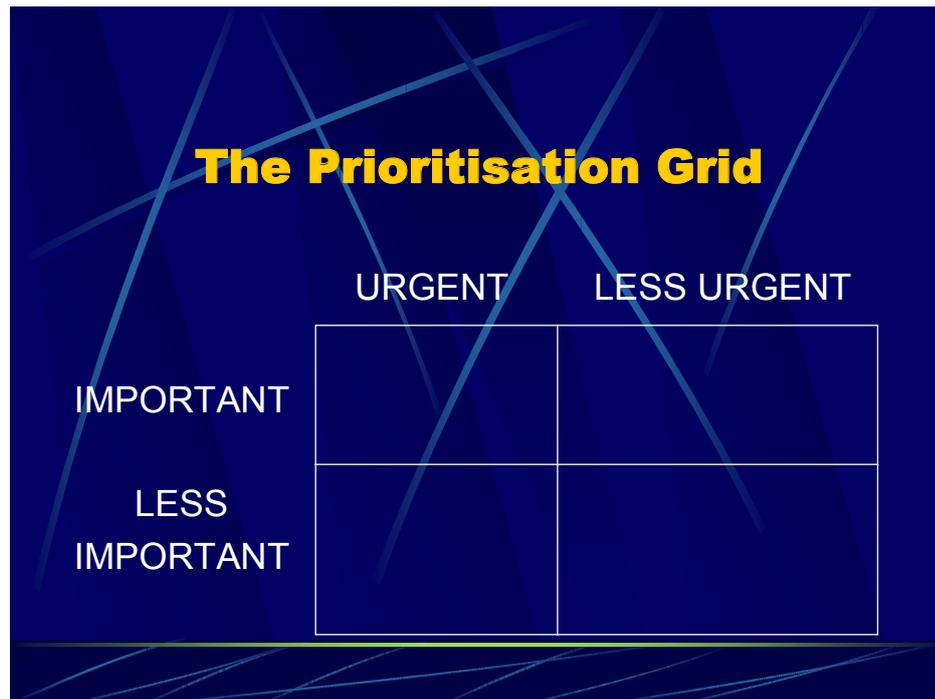


Fig.1; The Covey grid

Another aspect of Covey is that it helps us to relax in the knowledge that our time planning has been done. If this grid is completed towards the end of a Friday, it is surprising how relaxing and enjoyable the weekend becomes because there are no nagging doubts about what to do when going in to work the following Monday. So it helps to create peace of mind and alleviate stress as well as enabling us to tackle the workload with some sense of logic.

Finally, on Time Management, try to keep some sort of diary to enable you to see what you have done with the time available over the past period of time. A good idea is to keep this for at least seven consecutive working days, otherwise it may not be representative enough to do much good as an analytical tool. Can you save time by combining tasks, by eliminating other tasks and by delegating yet others? How does what your diary – or time log – tell you fit in with your job description, your boss and his/her demands on your time and on what you know the workload to be? How can you improve the balance between what you have done in the recent past and what you know you'll need to do in the near future?

Once you can answer some of these questions, time management should not be a problem.

Stop and Think

How do you allocate your time at work to key tasks and to less important tasks? Do you keep some kind of diary? If so, how frequently do you fill it in?

5.5 Presentation and public speaking skills

At least 75% of the secret of good presentation techniques lies not in delivering the material but in preparing the material properly first. Once the material is prepared and familiar, very little can really go wrong. When speakers fail to make a good impression it is usually a sign that they are under prepared, do not know their subject matter thoroughly or are otherwise caught having not done enough work in advance.

Consequently we will examine the key stages of preparation before examining the accepted delivery techniques.

Preparation

1. Identifying the objective

Why are you there? Why are you speaking to these people? Without knowing the answers to these questions, the whole presentation might well go awry.

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Are you there to:-

- teach
- inform
- sell or persuade
- inspire
- convince
- entertain
- some other reason

Most speakers are there to carry out a combination of all these things – selling is usually present in terms of the image of the organisation which the speaker represents, if in no other way. Whatever the reason, there is no excuse for a boring, turgid presentation – and the audience will probably not stand for it anyway. So, to help establish the answers:-

1. Think about the audience
2. Why are they there? Do they want to be there or have they been told to attend? (If so, you'll have to work twice as hard to make them believe its worth their while)
3. Have they paid to be there – even indirectly? If so, again you'll have to work twice as hard to demonstrate value for money
4. What do they expect from you? Authority, probably, expertise, maybe entertainment and a good time. You are the specialist in the subject; they are there to learn. So make them concentrate and give them value
5. How many of them are there? Does it matter? Only in so far as some speakers prefer smaller groups (up to 20) others prefer large groups which are, by definition, more impersonal. Once the audience has reached around 100, they cease to be individuals and become little dots beyond the spotlights. This can be daunting – but, equally, it can also be stimulating.

3. Develop your theme creatively.

Long lists in linear writing format – like shopping lists – are probably too conventional and restricting for a presentation. Try a Mind Map (Buzan) which frees up the creative juices somewhat and is ideal for presentations. It forces you to stick to the main theme and allows a more imaginative approach to prevail. Just Google Mind map or Buzan and you'll be inundated with websites about it.

4. Establish a clear structure.

Audiences and speakers alike benefit from structure. It gives both parties an idea of what is coming next, how much more there might be and where to hit the heights. It also lends itself to mind mapping – or vice versa – and ensure that you don't depart from the script too far, which is a common problem with ad hoc speakers.

5. Do you need notes?

Yes, you do. Only an idiot would try to speak for any length of time without anything to remind him/her where the presentation is now and where it is going. There are some speakers who look effortless without apparently referring to anything. Don't be fooled. Most have a subtle but nonetheless, distinct set of crib sheets secreted somewhere about their persons. Remembering what comes next is not easy on your feet in front of a lot of expectant looking people.

Some speakers, thinking they know it all, do without notes and usually embark upon long rambling backwaters which, while possibly fascinating to them, are often hugely soporific to their audiences. The average length of an adult audience's attention span is just 12 minutes. You don't have time for rambling backwaters, attractive though they might seem at the time.

There are three commonly-used kinds of notes – verbatim script, headlines and detailed notes. Verbatim script is difficult to deliver well. Newsreaders on TV do it all the time – but that is all they do, they are professionals and it has taken many of them a long time to master the art. Most lesser mortals find verbatim script leads to a wooden delivery, especially if they use Autocue without having practiced it properly.

Detailed notes can be difficult to follow – and, in front of a demanding audience, you don't want anything to be more difficult than it is already. Unless they're clearly typed in block caps with double spacing, it's very easy to lose your way – and very easy for the audience to lose interest.

Headline notes are probably the best compromise for most people. They can be based on Power Point slides, brief notes or anything that can provide logical and clear speaker slides. Short, simple bullet points are best; these can be recognised easily and bestow a confidence on speakers that may not, in fact, be present otherwise. There are no hard rules for headline notes, but block caps, plenty of white space between lines and paragraphs and colour coding of key areas are all good ideas. Whatever is easiest for you to read in a hurry while being rather more nervous than usual is likely to work best.

6. Notes – the mechanics

Whatever form you have, tag the pages together. It is all too easy for notes pages to become detached at the very time that you wish them not to.

Putting it into practice – or not.....

I once saw a very senior captain of industry deliver a speech to about 3,500 people at Wembley Conference Centre. Because it was a very important, keynote speech, he had it all printed out verbatim on 46 pages of A4. These were not attached to each other except by a paper clip. While on page 16, he made an expansive gesture with his right hand and forearm and swept all the pages right off the podium, off the stage over the boxes of flowers and down into the front row of the auditorium. A number of acolytes desperately gathered up all the loose pages and returned them to him.

He kept on talking – but started again at the first page handed back to him – which turned out to be page 43. Clearly, this did not bear much resemblance to the point at which he had stopped on page 16. The audience soon realised this and began to laugh, tittering softly at first and then more openly. The captain of industry became more and more agitated and eventually lost his temper altogether. The following week he lost his job as well. Captains of industry are paid a lot of money to keep both their notes and their tempers under control.

7. Beginning with impact.

The opening of a presentation is critical. The audience will size up a speaker within a couple of seconds of him/her appearing on stage or in front of them. If the speaker looks nervous, the audience will catch this mood and worry. So, look confident; even if you don't feel it you soon will if you look it. And the audience does not want to see a cringing, wee slickit, timorous beastie, to borrow a phrase from Burns; it wants to see an authoritative, calm and inspiring speaker.

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One well-used device is to start with impact:-

A – Attention; grab their attention with something slightly off the wall – but not too frivolous or silly.

B – Benefits; share the benefits of the audience paying attention to you; maybe they will learn something that could be useful to them. Tell them what's in it for them

C- Credentials – tell them why you have a right to tell them about the topic, what qualifications you have and your relevant experience. Don't give them a full autobiography though, you don't have time for that.

D - Design – share the design of the presentation with them so that they can anticipate what is coming next, how much longer it will go on and when they had better sit up and take notice. It will enhance audience attention no end.

8. Keeping their interest in the middle.

This is the hard part. Most audiences, when asked, will remember something of what you said when you first stood up and some of what you said just before you finished; many will totally forget the bits in the middle. This does not mean that you can forget about the middle or load any old irrelevant facts in there. It must still be accurate, but you can gloss over some of the detail and treat the middle as the place to put the lightweight stuff. Most audiences will become totally confused over detail, especially technical detail. As de Gaulle said; “No empire has ever yet been built on details” – and he should have known.

So, try to involve the audience with humour, anecdotes, examples which will be relatively familiar to them, anything which will keep them on-side for another few minutes. When you think you've said enough, you probably have, so stop. As Alice in Wonderland famously said: “Start at the beginning, go on to the end and then stop”; more speakers could usefully observe that rule.

But beware of humour. One person's humour is another person's insult, especially these days when political correctness appears to lurk in many alleyways, waiting for the chance to pounce on the unwary. Avoid jokes about race, religion, age, sexual orientation and politics, unless you know and are very sure of your audience. Even then, there may be a few guests whom you don't know and who could be offended so take care. Several high profile careers have been jeopardised by unguarded comments, which were probably meant innocently but which have been taken out of context.

9. Positive and powerful endings

The last points you make will be the culmination of your presentation and will leave the audience with the impact that you have planned – so they must be strong comments. Try ending with a call to arms of some sort. Ask the audience to do something as a result of what you have been talking about. Ask them to think, act, speak or do something different as a result of your presentation; if you do not do this, what was the point of the presentation?

You can also employ the odd device to show them that you are finishing. A good phrase to use here is “...and finally” but then make sure that you do finish quite soon and not go on to make another 16 points. The phrase will alert the audience to an ending and they will re-double their attention and expect an imminent closure. So give them one.

Delivery

The key to delivery is to look confident. Being confident helps too, but is more likely to follow if you look it first. If anyone ever tells you that they don't suffer from nerves before giving a presentation, don't believe them; they're either lying or stupid – or possibly both. Everyone needs some nervous energy, some adrenalin to flow to make it a special occasion. Giving presentations is a little piece of theatre – and you need all the drama that goes with a performance like that to make it memorable and successful. So, don't deny that you are nervous but use the nervous energy to rise to a higher level when you present.

Sometimes if you're horribly nervous, it's a good idea to build a horror floor. Imagine the worst that could happen – but not as you go on to the stage. What would be the result? You might make a bit of a fool of yourself – that happens regularly to all of us. It isn't the end of the world. The sun will still rise in the East tomorrow. In all probability, you won't be sacked for one imperfect presentation. If you are, you didn't want that job anyway. So, the risk is relatively limited.

Someone researched the most common phobias in the US a few years ago and discovered that public speaking was the second worst phobia among businessmen (the first being crippled in an accident) Why? What is there to worry about to that extent? Things go wrong occasionally – that's life. But there is no reason why your presentation should go wrong, certainly no more so than anyone else's. If you've fully prepared and you know your subject, the likelihood is that it will be a perfectly professional performance – and nobody can do better than that.

Body Language

Much of the success of a presentation comes from what you look like when you deliver a script. Body language counts for 55% of the impact of a presentation so you have to look good – confident, relaxed, professional. Within the context of the occasion, wear whatever makes you feel confident and professional. The recent trend for dressing down might not accord with audience's expectations of you – and it may not do wonders for your confidence either. Power dressing was no isolated feature of the 1980s and, for a lot of people, it worked well. Tee-shirts and jeans have their place, but that place is probably not on the platform in front of a fairly distinguished audiences. So, dress up, within reason.

Body language – better described as communication without words – can be segmented into several areas:-

- Eyes
- Face
- Posture
- Hands
- Voice
- Pause

We will briefly look at each in turn.

Eyes

The window to the soul and all that – but true enough. What do you think of people who refuse to make eye contact with you? Well, that is what an audience will feel if you don't make eye contact with them. So, be generous with your eye contact. Try to bring in every member of the audience with your gaze at some time – this is more difficult in a very large auditorium with hundreds of people so pick key areas of the room and talk to them in turn. Don't overdo this and pick on one or two people all the time; they may become quite paranoid that you are singling them out for special attention.

The really important aspect of your eyes is that they must make contact with your audience before you speak, before you even get across the stage to the podium. The audience will have judged you before you have had time to say anything verbally, so let your eyes speak for you and captivate the audience before you even open your speech. Speakers who do not do this always have a very hard job to establish a rapport with their audience.

Face

Relax the face so that it is expressive and use the full range of your facial expression. This might feel unduly theatrical while you are on stage but, in fact, with the physical gap between you and the audience, it will not come over as anything other than natural to an audience. A smile, for instance – a highly useful weapon in presenting – will only come over as a smile if you overdo it slightly; otherwise it might appear as more of a grimace, which could have unfortunate consequences.

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Smiles are nearly always appropriate. They relax the audience into thinking that you are confident, posed and in command of your subject matter – even if you are none of those things – and they relax you into a more secure and confident frame of mind, so both parties win. They can also disarm aggression – if you are unfortunate to encounter any; this is comparatively rare, however, most audiences want their speakers to succeed; only in political speeches, or hustings, do any audiences really bear a grudge.

Don't obscure your face. Even a pair of spectacles could have an unfortunate effect of masking part of your expression. Most audiences want to see how you are treating your subject matter and this cannot be done if part or most of your face is hidden in any way. So, push or tie back hair if it obscures part your face. Spectacles can also create an artificial lens in front of the eye, meaning that it can be difficult for an audience to see your real expression, especially if the stage lights are also reflecting off the glasses. If you can wear contact lenses instead, then do so. If you don't need glasses to read a set of notes a couple of feet away, then do without them.

Posture

Stand tall if possible. Audiences resent speakers slouching in a casual, disrespectful or inattentive way in front of them. Audiences usually expect to see respect reflected in a speaker's body language and that definitely includes posture. It will also help you to breathe well, allowing your voice to be projected effortlessly. If you don't look alert and enthusiastic, it is somewhat unreasonable to expect your audience to look alert and enthusiastic.

Imagine that your spine is being supported by hanging from a hook in the ceiling above you – without the pain. That will help you to stand tall, breath easily and support your diaphragm without it appearing that you are on a parade ground. Keep your shoulders back and down, because that will also help your posture and your breathing. Leave your hands by your side and, if you ever feel really nervous, just touch the podium or a chair with the tips of your fingers. You don't need to put any weight on them; the act of touching the furniture earths you and makes you feel reassuringly grounded. The finger tips are very tactile and this act is hugely comforting.

Hands

Don't fiddle with notes, pens, glasses or anything else. Use your hands to extend your gestures and don't be afraid of using gestures. Very few speakers overdo this, although many are fearful that they will. Hands reinforce words in a unique way and should be allowed, even encouraged, to do so. It is unlikely that you will end up being mistaken for Mussolini just because you are employing hand gestures. Holding your notes in one hand can emphasise the gesture even more, because an A4 sheet of white paper is probably more visible to the audience than your bare hand.

When you are not gesturing, let your hands fall naturally down to your sides or on to the podium. Do not put your hand into your pocket (let alone two hands); this appears to be too casual and disrespectful to the audience and many people dislike seeing it at a relatively formal occasion. Don't grip your podium or your notes – or anything else – for grim death. Some speakers grasp the podium so tightly that it looks as though they are on a white knuckle ride – which doesn't do much to encourage the audience's confidence in them. The podium is unlikely to fall over if you don't grip it; so let gravity do its work while you do yours. And don't clasp your hands together in a supplicating gesture; you are not Uriah Heep.

Voice

Vary the pace, the tone and the volume. Your voice is a musical instrument and can be used as such. Reserve more volume for the important bits and slow down for these sections to give them more weight. Use a lighter, faster tone and pitch for the detailed bits – assuming you've left any in. A higher tone is usually lighter; faster can also help to wake up the audience – if you need to do so. But too fast for too long can have the opposite effect so only use it sparingly.

Project your voice to the far wall of the room. This will usually ensure that everyone sitting between you and that wall will be able to hear without straining their ears. This is also easier if the voice has enough air in the windpipe to be able to breathe easily, making posture even more important. Check that the audience can hear you before you start, but do be prepared to do something about it if they say they cannot.

If you are using an unfamiliar venue, get there early and check out that you know whether there are microphones and a full or partial public address (PA) system. Get used to using it and practice for a couple of minutes if you have never used one before. They take a little getting used to, especially if they start to feed back your voice as you are speaking. A sound technician will often be on hand to remedy this, but, if one is not, just stand a little further back, away from the microphone and that will usually stop the problem.

And, don't forget, the microphone will be switched on unless you switch it off, so never say anything remotely contentious if you are unsure whether it is on or off. Several high profile careers have been suddenly extinguished by an unwary comment which the speaker thought was inaudible. Jokes, especially, need to be aired only privately (if at all) never if there is the slightest possibility that the microphone might be still switched on.

Pause

Silence is, arguably, the most effective part of your presentation. Silence prepares the ear for whatever you are going to say next. Just as, in music, it prepares the ear for the next notes. So use it tactically; slow down before a really important point, perhaps even give a bit of a pause and then let the audience have that point with redoubled volume and distinct clarity. It will almost always work well. Some speakers seem to be afraid of a pause; in fact, it is possible to pause for up to three seconds without the audience realising that anything is wrong. Pauses, therefore, can work well to your advantage.

If you sense that an audience has lost a little interest, use a pause to refocus them. Silence will often reawaken their attention and allow you to proceed with a renewed interest. Most audience are usually about one-third of a second behind the speaker, in that this is the time it takes them to listen to your words, process and translate them into an imaginable context and, perhaps, file them away for use later. So, you can nearly always leave a gap of up to three seconds without worrying. This might help you to find your place again or it might just help you to refocus your own thoughts, but it can be a useful device to employ.

If you are going to take questions at the end and answer them – sometimes a brave option but often a successful one, never let this Q and A session finish with the last answer to the last question. You have written a conclusion to your original presentation so, after all the questions, give them this conclusion again. That is the impact with which you originally wished to leave them and that is the impact, therefore, with which you must leave them.

Finally, be well prepared, know your subject and the environment in which you are speaking and enjoy the presentation. It will almost always be a success.

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6. New Technologies In The Workplace

6.1 Introduction

It is clear that the manager's life has been revolutionised by new technology over the past decade or so. Facilities which were simply undreamt of a few years ago are now taken for granted in the life of most commercial and non-commercial organisations.

There are many forms of new technology but most can be expressed as being off-shoots of IT – that is, information technology, which is, in its strictest sense, the science of collecting, storing, processing and transmitting information.

It is sometimes called ICT – Information and Communication Technology – which has largely emerged over the last 20 years. This is important because it includes aspects that have become so familiar to most managers – the internet, intranets, computer aided design and manufacture, automated teller machines, biotechnology, telecommunications, robotics and many other, related systems.

We will explore some of these main areas and try to evaluate the contribution that each is making to the managerial workplace. Since this is not a technical manual, we will not concern ourselves unduly with how they work, rather with what they can do to ease the lot of the manager.

Chapter content

Briefly, we will explore:-

- Microelectronics
- Computing
- Telecommunications
- Transportation
- Energy supply
- Medicine
- Robotics
- Electronic communications

And we will also try to explore the impact that technology of various sorts has made on organisations.

Organisational research across a range of bodies has shown that technology can influence peoples' behaviour in work settings in many ways including for example:-

- influencing the design of each employee's pattern of work especially the skills which are exercised, the organisation and control of work
- it affects the nature of social interactions
- it can also influence the pace and intensity of work

Stop and Think

To make the best use of technology we must support and develop the effectiveness of organisations rather than adapt business activities to the technology. How can we go about making the best use of technology? Is technology becoming too much our master rather than our servant?

6.2 Microelectronics

The power of microelectronics is relentlessly increasing computing capacity. Greater miniaturization, further specialisation and the ever decreasing price of powerful chips has made it possible to revolutionise many everyday machines, such as household goods, cars, TV sets, dishwashers, microwaves and virtually all office equipment. Speed, low cost and reliability have become the key aspects of new technology.

Many of the latest products on the market originate in low labour cost countries such as China where, although innovation may still lag behind more developed nations, the ability to copy and produce at extremely low prices has created a very sharp competitive edge. The Audi A6, for example, boasts that it contains more technology than that employed to first put man on the moon and there is no sign yet of a stalling of this technological surge of progress.

It is possible, however, that increased democracy and human rights issues in some emerging nations – China, Eastern Europe and much of SE Asia – will reduce their current edge and create a more even playing field in future years. No political regime lasts for ever.

6.3 Computing

The computer is now such a normal part of everyday life that it is difficult to remember what we did before it was widely accessible. Yet this was not so long ago. Even in the mid-1980s, computers were the exception rather than the rule and the great wave of development and democratisation did not really take off until the 1990s.

From the first computers weighing almost 30 tons to the lightweight, slim line microcomputer technology of today, the computer has pursued a relentless developmental path, probably exceeding anything previously seen in the history of civilisation.

Now, microcomputers operate in networks, with hand-helds and laptops adding extra flexibility. They have extraordinary versatility – most of us probably use very little more than 1% or 2% of the processing power of our laptops. The key to this development was the shift from centralised, data storage and processing to one based on networked, interactive computer power sharing.

This has brought many social, economic and managerial implications; many employees now work partly from home for instance, (tele-working) enabled by modems and other computer peripherals which can be linked in to the workplace, thereby losing none of the efficiency (often, quite the opposite) but allowing more freedom of choice for employees.

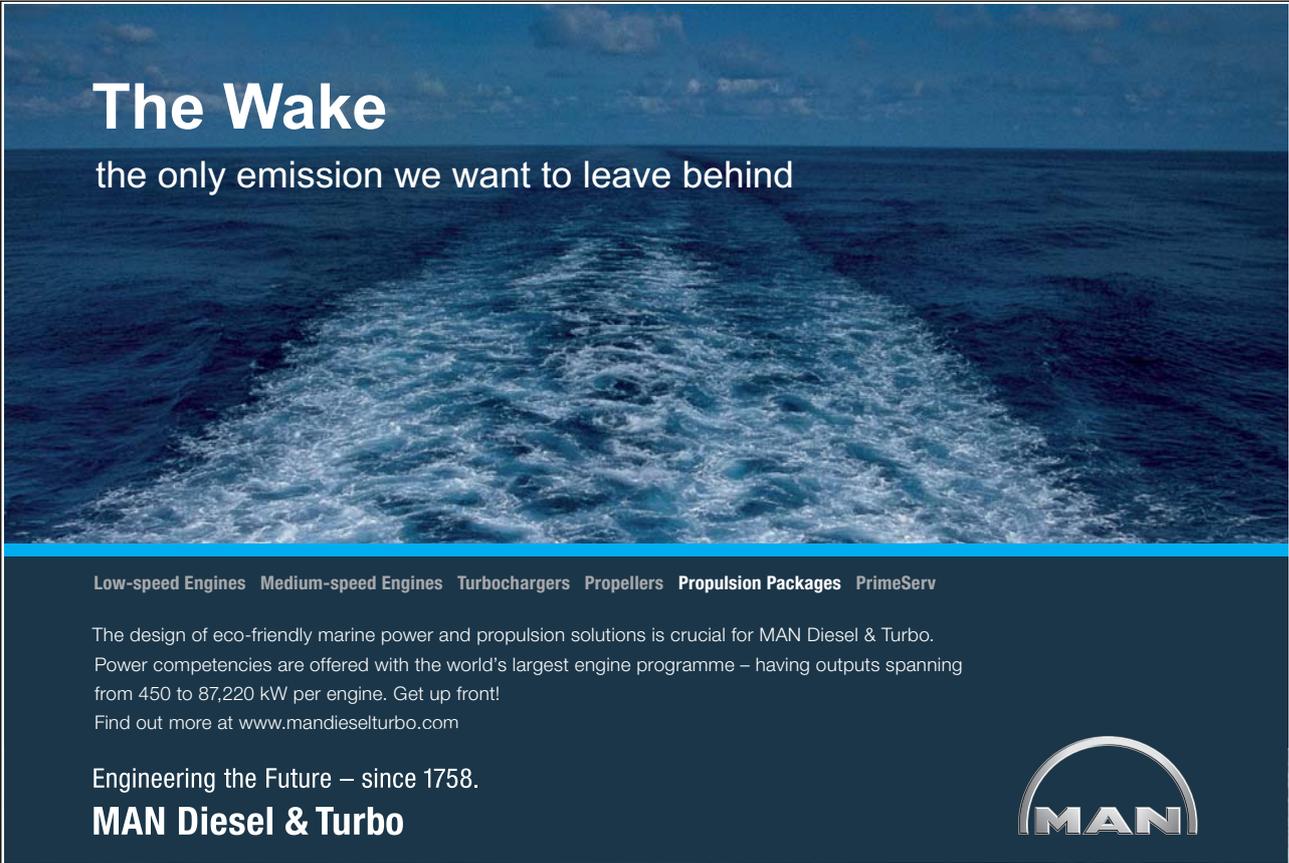
Some people view computers with fear and suspicion; in truth, the best way to regard them is as a clever tool which can materially assist in achieving a number of business and organisational goals that might otherwise be impossible. Most of us do not need to know how they work, any more than we need to know, say, how a ball point pen works. What we do need to have some idea of is how they can help us to achieve what we want to achieve. In this respect they become just a very clever pen and a great deal more besides.

Making it happen

They do have unsuspected consequences, however. In the early days of computerising offices, a large and very successful advertising agency in London wanted to install computers at every desk to allow all its employees (about 130) to communicate with each other and with clients and suppliers more easily. They were duly installed and everyone received a modicum of training to know, at least, how to switch them on.

After about three weeks, it was noticed that many of the female employees had not made any attempt to use them or even to access their capacity. It soon became clear that most women working in the agency were extremely image conscious and believed that, if a man saw them with a computer switched on, they would be asked to do some typing, even though they were managers and directors. Old habits (and prejudices), it seems, die hard.

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6.4 Telecommunications

If anything, this has been the scene of more progress than in any other walk of life. Mobile phones, interactive TV sets, a plethora of entertainment and information systems and a relentless marketing approach to the latest piece of technology has made former entertainment and communications systems, all but obsolete and unrecognisable in a few short years. This must be the biggest single communications step since Caxton developed the printing press in the 1480s.

Fibre optics, cable and laser transmission technology has revolutionised the whole spectrum of telecommunications, allowing for broadband and wireless internet access and a whole raft of affordable by-products whose very existence would have seemed a science fiction dream only a few years ago. Mobile technology and social software, using computer power to route messages, information and images, now provides the basis for ubiquitous computing and interactive electronic communication. How did we manage to live before it all came about?

6.5 Transportation

Real benefits accrue from using microchips and computers in transport systems. Traffic flows can be regulated, allowing for fewer traffic jams (in theory) and flight handling at airports is mostly now controlled by computer, with human back-up for safety reasons. Similarly, railway signalling and port navigation are both computer-controlled in many parts of the world.

The internal combustion engine, having reigned unopposed for over a century, is now facing real challenges from developing technology. Electric cars are not new but the technological development of minimising the battery weight – the big drawback to electric cars for three decades – is gradually making real progress. Similarly, dual-fuel cars are now coming on to the market, although in small numbers and at high prices, although the extent of their genuine contribution to the environment is still doubtful. Satellite navigation – or “sat-nav” – is a regular option on most cars and can help to direct the driver through unfamiliar territory. Many train services in the UK rely on satellites to open doors at railway stations – an apparently unnecessary complication which has led to doors not opening at all on some stations when passengers wanted to alight – and has not helped the already tarnished reputation of the train operating companies either. Perhaps most significantly all these areas seem to offer unlimited opportunities for unethical governments to load yet more stealth taxes on to an already over-taxed population

It would seem that technology is in danger of being used everywhere, whether it is appropriate and reliable or not – and that is the main drawback. Like fire, technology is a very good servant but a very bad master. If we overuse it, or use it in inappropriate applications, it may well contribute more damage than good to modern living. Certainly there is a strong movement to suggest that advances in, say, air travel are not always positive because of the contribution jet engines make to global pollution.

On the other hand once people have become accustomed to aspects of life such as relatively cheap air travel, no government with any sense of self preservation (and all governments have that built-in) would attempt to forcibly take away that privilege without fearing a backlash at the polls.

6.6 Energy supply

Increasing use is being made of more natural than technological sources of energy. While gas, electricity and coal have supplied our energy needs since the Industrial Revolution about 200 years ago, and are still the main sources of energy along with nuclear power, more pressure on the earth's fragile climate systems and ecology is forcing research scientists to search for less environmentally damaging sources.

While wave and solar research are still in their infancy – and have not yet produced an alternative system with the potential to provide enough power for use by the majority of humanity – wind power is becoming more common, even on a private scale. Wind turbines can be bought for about £1,500 (2007 prices) in UK superstores and are supposed to have a payback period of less than three years while minimising the damage to the environment. Using them does, however, require a complete check and revalidation of all electrical appliances in the home – and that is likely to cost far more than the anticipated savings, in the short term at least

One curious feature of wind power is that many of the people who first clamoured for alternative energy sources to be developed now appear to be implacably opposed to new wind farms.

So the debates continue with no clear outcome as yet. One thing is clear, however; that mankind must take action against further despoiling of the planet before long. Agreed accords emerging from international talks – such as the Kyoto Agreement – may be a step in the right direction but may not deliver the necessary actions if global warming and long term environmental damage is to be avoided, as the disappointingly unclear Copenhagen conference proved in late 2009.

One of most rampant problems seems to be the rapid emergence as industrial nations of Asian giants. Even if the western world were to dramatically change its energy sources and clean up the atmosphere, the result may be negligible because of the vast environmental damage being created in Asia. Tellingly, China was blamed by many western delegates for the lack of progress at Copenhagen, although whether this was smoke screen, time alone may tell.

6.7 Medicine

If technology has assisted in energy supply and other areas of modern day living, it has revolutionised medicine. Or, rather, it is in the process of revolutionising medicine because the major developments are occurring almost daily.

Key to this is the development of medical information systems. Apart from the disastrous NHS computer service – which has, allegedly, already cost well over £700m without yet functioning properly – most medical services are now administered by a computerised system of some sort. Mostly, these work well in that they allow medical staff to recall patient records rapidly and electronically.

Putting it into practice

There has, however, been a political row in the UK over the past few years about where the systems should operate. The Dental Records Office, for instance, located in Eastbourne, keeps the dental records of most of the UK's 60 million-odd people. Ten years ago it employed about 2,400 staff in Eastbourne, making it one of the larger employers in this essentially retirement and holiday seaside town.

However, the outsourcing of most of the data processing work to Sri Lanka over about eight years in the 1990s has left the employment level in Eastbourne at only a few hundred. There may be a cost saving in having exported an essentially routine task to a country where wage levels are a fraction of those in the UK, but the cost in higher British and regional unemployment could well outweigh this advantage.

This is symptomatic of a trend that has seen many thousands of jobs exported from the UK over the past ten years or so. While essentially a political rather than a managerial issue, it clearly has managerial implications. For managers who are charged with saving cost, it is an easy option. For those who are involved in assisting regional development, it is a disaster. To a certain extent, it is a straight choice between the devil you know and the devil you don't know. Facilities in certain overseas countries might be much cheaper than in the UK but they are also quite likely to be less efficient and to have quality issues with carrying out the work.

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Many banks and finance houses, for example have exported aspects such as call centres to India, specifically to Mumbai. In fact, Mumbai has been such a popular destination for call centres that it has virtually reached bursting point and has started to sub-contract several service industries to even cheaper states in SE Asia, notably Vietnam and Thailand, not always with the knowledge – let alone the approval – of the UK client. Results have been mixed at best with some banks now re-establishing such facilities in the UK, usually in areas of less expensive wage levels such as Scotland, Northern Ireland and the North of England. The future may hold further developments along these lines, although the picture is complicated by the immense influx of cheap labour from Eastern Europe in the past few years.

6.8 Robotics

Robotics have had a major effect on manufacturing industry since the late 1970s. Pioneered originally by the then-BL Cars (the Metro investment in 1979-80 cost about £280m of which half went towards a revolutionary robotics assembly system for the car's body shell) robotics have now taken over many tasks formerly undertaken by hand. Automated warehouses with automatic stock picking facilities are common and highly efficient – unless they go wrong. They replace tedious and, sometimes dangerous jobs, thereby allowing both lower staff levels and freeing up staff to work on more interesting and challenging tasks.

They are particularly good for repetitive tasks which can result in human injury – such as Repetitive Strain Syndrome, often caused by people repeating the same manual task many times a day – and will carry out every task to an equally high level of quality, thereby removing the uncertainty of human variations in the task. Although not initially cheap, they often have a fairly short payback period because of the enhanced quality levels and the ability they give organisations to shed jobs.

One key outcome of this technological revolution has been the impact it has had - and is still having - on organisational structure. Many organisational changes have been aimed at redefining employment practices, for instance, introducing lean production systems which needed fewer employees, perhaps with new and different skills to traditional employees. They have saved labour, although this is a two-edged sword in that the creation of new jobs through new technology to replace the dispossessed jobs has slowed down markedly over the past five years. The initial result has been to eliminate some jobs, automating others and de-layering management structures to cope with a new and leaner production system.

That at least is the case in the private sector, but the public sector has, on the whole, been eager to employ even more people over the past ten years. Civil service numbers have grown to nearly two million compared with about 600,000 in the mid 1980s. While manufacturing and, to a lesser extent, service industries were thriving, this was just about affordable, but, when the latest recession arrived in 2008, the bill for the inflated public sector has become very difficult (some would say impossible) to meet from private sector earnings.

Stop and Think

How does your organisation view and use new technology? Has it contributed to job losses or has it actually created new jobs? Could you do your own job without the aid of computers or other new technology processes?

6.9 Communications technology

Unquestionably, however, the really big revolution for most managers has been in the communications sector. Advances in areas such as telephony, computing, electronic mail and audio and video conferencing have really changed the look of the office as well as its ability to handle workloads.

Most, if not all, offices are now equipped with all the trappings of the ICT era – voice mail, PCs for all staff, email, mobiles, intranet, wifi, internet-access, on-line sourcing and recruitment. Such equipment has steadily become cheaper, easier to access and use and of better quality to give more reliability. Global competition has often triggered this investment which is increasingly seen as essential if an organisation is to keep or establish competitiveness in its field.

At the same time, a new profession – that of computer technologists – has been formed out of this revolution and this has created additional overheads for many organisations – although overheads which, in most cases fully pay for themselves rapidly. However, these technicians were unknown a few years ago while now they are usually seen as essential to the continued workings of even conventional organisations.

Problems can arise however, when technicians are deemed responsible for various areas that used to be – or ought to be – the preserve of trained managers. In some organisations, for example, technicians virtually control internal communications because, by default they are the only people who know which buttons to press to send the message. Clearly this has its downside. The decision about what to communicate, when and how is not one which a technician should readily take because he/she is unlikely to know the bigger picture which will guide this process. On the other hand, if nobody else knows what to do, there is not much option. In truth, we can all be sufficiently conversant with mainstream communications technology to avoid this type of anomaly – and that is a desirable outcome, if one which is taking some time to achieve.

This is not the place to give lessons about using computers for any purpose; there are plenty of specialised training resources which will do that. But it is increasingly necessary for anyone at almost any level in an organisation to know their way around a few computer software programs reasonably well:-

- Word processing– for basic communication in the form of letters, emails and reports;
- Spreadsheets - to be able to express financial or statistical information clearly
- Presentation software to be able to put together a professional looking presentation to communicate effectively.
- Database software – to store, convert and retrieve data about products, processes, customers and staff

Increasingly, these skills are being required and taught in both Further and Higher Education, although not as often in the very place where they might usefully be taught, which is in school. However, since the functional adult illiteracy rate in the UK is around 25%, (actually 24.7%, according to the UN survey carried out in 2000) perhaps it is asking too much of schools to be able to embrace new technology as well as traditional skills.

Stop and Think

Are there technological processes in your organisation about which you know too little to be able to operate them? How could you find out how to acquire a working knowledge of such technology?

6.10 E-mail use

Conventional training skills have not traditionally included using email properly, which is one of today's most important methods of communication in the work place. So, here is a recently created guide to email use with some tips about what to do and what not to do.

Notes for Internet writing

Cyberwriting – a term often used for emails and websites – a cross between a phone conversation and a letter

It has its own language shorthand – e.g. LOL (Laughing Out Loud). Some terms and signs include:-

importance

emphasis

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SHOUTING

But... is this style really appropriate for the target audience?

Never write or send anything you would not be happy to see in a newspaper; lack of security means there is no hope of confidentiality.

Do not write/send anything abusive, threatening or harrowing – the laws about conventional libel, slander and so on all apply to electronic communications as well

Be careful about humour – without your face/voice to back it up it can be misinterpreted. One person's joke is often another person's insult, especially in this day and age.

Remember also that laws on copyright, defamation, discrimination and libel apply to the internet.

Keep everything brief.

Page layouts should be:-

- Short paragraphs
- Lines less than 75 characters
- Messages/texts less than 25 lines
- Plain text
- Replace gestures and intonations – eg smileys, asterisks etc
- Use plenty of white space & creative punctuation

Be aware of what cues readers will use to form an impression of you – e.g.

Grammar, punctuation, spelling, layout, formality, domain name etc all really matter despite the informality of the message system.

Above all, never send an email unless you are happy that it will not cause offence. Many do and are not stopped at source. There is no post room where an unwisely worded letter can be recalled and amended by the writer before it is committed to the postal service. The old adage of sleeping on a problem is very apt for emails – we have all sent emails which have rebounded on us and then regretted it afterwards, once it is too late to repair the damage. For most email usage, simply develop the habit of re-reading before sending

The main aspect of technology which we need to cope with is that it is changing many accepted norms and practices. So, our last chapter will be on Change Management – a much discussed but often elusive skill – in the hope that it will point the way to some future considerations.

In summary, it can be seen that technology can have a major impact on the ways in which we live our working lives and upon aspects of management such as job satisfaction. While use of new technology may advance job skills, experiences will also be profoundly affected by the social interactivity enabled by technology and also by the intensity of work. Technical change and the way technology is being used is a major feature of the increasingly intense modern work patterns.

6.11 The Network Society

The basis of the network society consists of:-

- Information is the new raw material. Technologies act on information rather than the other way around
- Pervasiveness of the effects of new technology. Most processes of our individual and collective existence are directly shaped by new technology.
- Networking logic. Using new ICTs the network can be implemented in all kinds of processes and organisations.
- Flexible IT. This mainly affects the configuration of organisations through IT. For instance, overseas subsidiaries and global partners can be contacted and communicated with much more easily and quickly than before. This can be a liberating process but it can also be repressive. Sometimes only a personal visit is still the only way to really establish what is happening in these overseas areas.
- Converging technologies into an integrated system. Old, separate technologies become indistinguishable so most technologies are now being integrated into information systems.

Remote working

Justifying e-operations

Some recent developments including e-learning and e-communications, have started to revolutionise the way in which many organisations work. While there are – and will probably continue to be – a number of Luddites who resist attempts to integrate them into the Network society, there are a number of compelling reasons to join in. These include:-

- Developing a global workforce. Similar messages can be sent to all employees within a few seconds, reducing the probability of misinterpretation and speeding up sometimes complex communications. American Express is one example of an organisation which has put this new technology to very effective use over the past decade and is continuing to do so.
- Responding to shorter product development cycles. Manufacturing cycles continue to shrink and this places even more pressure on competitors. It is now standard practice to replace a car every four-five years rather than to leave a model in production for nearly ten years as used to happen only a decade or so ago. Only global design and communications technology can ensure that this happens, as the Japanese and Korean manufacturers are continually proving
- Managing flat organisations. Leaner, flatter organisations often require faster communications to keep everyone up to date. Modern ICT, including e-learning and search engine abilities can develop foundation skills, provide just-in-time solutions and access to globally distributed centres of expertise, hone more advance skills, assist in coaching and mentoring and reach instantly accessible knowledge management systems.

- Adjusting to employees' needs. New working arrangements are often only possible through using ICT to the full. Teleworking, virtual offices and flexible contracts are now the norm rather than the exception and, although there is a school of thought which believes that these developments have materially hampered efficient working, the prevailing opinion is that, if properly managed, this kind of work can be just as competitive as the more traditional kinds. Neither case is yet proven but, as employees demand more flexibility in working time and conditions and as the flood of part-time workers expands yet further, it is likely that this pattern will either increase or remain at least static for some time to come.
- Enabling a contingent workforce. Employees such as temporary workers, consultants and self-employed contractors has grown substantially in recent years. Web-based communications provide an affordable and effective way of keeping in touch with and informing and developing these people
- Retaining valuable workers. Access to distance learning qualifications is now becoming widespread and flexible technology enables an improving work-life balance
- Increasing productivity and profitability. Acquisition of skills by employees represents an organisation's ability to compete in a cut-throat global market place. Using modern technology, employees can deal with complex tasks more quickly and effectively, faster and with fewer errors.



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Strategic reasons for adopting e-communications and e-learning are more likely to carry weight if they assist other business goals. But tactical reasons are sometimes easier to understand, especially by more junior managers. Here are seven of the more obvious:-

1. Reducing travel and related costs (e.g. accommodation)
2. Enabling learning and communication at any time and any place. (sometimes called asynchronous e-communication, as in the use of discussion boards)
3. Providing just-in-time information
4. Leveraging the existing infrastructure. (E-learning in particular can make better and extended use of existing technology if an organisation has already invested in such tools as a corporate intranet, dial-in access and PCs for staff.
5. Enabling delivery (of communications) independent of a platform. Most communications programmes that an organisation would use are accessible from Macs, PCs and many other systems.
6. Providing tools for tracking and record keeping.
7. Making updates of information easier. Modern systems do not need CD-ROMs, printed manuals or updated videos.

6.12 Tele-working

Tele-working allows employees to spend an agreed part of their time at a location remote from the office. There are four main categories:-

1. Traditional mobile workers – such as sales reps and delivery drivers.
2. Managers and others who spend an agreed two/three days a week at home in contact with the office by computers
3. Specialists and support staff who carry out a range of duties from home or other remote locations. IT workers are often in this category.
4. Telecottagers who operate from local centres with computer linkages and telecommunications links

Clearly, there are advantages for both parties here. Office space and equipment can be saved by the organisation while the employee can, for example look after dependents more easily from home. Productivity can be improved because office politics are unlikely to creep into the home – although gossip often will. Time and money spent commuting is reduced greatly – and health can often benefit as a result. Consequently, absenteeism and staff turnover can also be reduced.

However, there are also some disadvantages. Performance can be difficult to manage remotely. Providing suitable technology can be expensive for the organisation. Some employees may feel socially isolated – but that is their choice. Career development and training may also suffer and there can be health and safety issues with working at home. Organisation's insurance policies may not cover employees working from their own homes and there are a few other factors which are worth considering:-

- Changes to a contract of employment may have to be agreed.
- Employees must be self-motivated, determined, self-disciplined and capable of working with little or no supervision.

- Employees' homes (and atmosphere) must be suitable for working
- Health and safety issues might have to be considered.
- Any property used by the employee but owned by the organisation must be secure, safe and insured.
- Any computer work must be authorised with a reliable password or other code system to prevent misuse.
- Any restrictions to working times must be agreed in advance.
- The organisation may wish to consider giving the employee a contribution to lighting and heating costs – although this is rare in the UK at the time of writing
- The employee may have to inform the landlord (in a rented property) insurance companies, mortgage lenders, the local authority and the Inland Revenue and some costs may rise as a result of this.
- Arrangements may have to be made for effective management, target setting and meeting, regular contact, appraisals and access to training.

So, overall, there are undoubted benefits but also some potential pitfalls.

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7. Change Management

7.1 Introduction

If there is one thing upon which a manager can depend, it is that change will happen frequently and, often, unexpectedly. The one constant in most managers' lives is that, when arriving at the office in the morning, something will have changed since they left it the previous evening. The change might be subtle and, at first, hard to perceive or define or it might be radical (an unexpected takeover, for example) and something that requires immediate action.

There has been much managerial and academic energy expended upon change, especially in the last 15 years. Hughes (2006) believes that change management as a practice, only really began around 1990 so most of the literature and wisdom is pretty much contemporary.

One issue which always needs to be resolved is that of responsibility for change. The manager arriving at the office will not always be part of the change design team; if so, it can be an uncomfortable process to undergo. One can design change, champion it, communicate it, ignore it or resist it but one has to cope with it somehow. Much of the conventional wisdom about change, for instance, believes that resistance is wrong, whereas, in fact, it can be both beneficial and constructive as Waddell and others have shown.

We will briefly examine some of the more accepted schools of thought concerning change management, identify the key change models and question whether we can ever influence change if we did not think of it first.

Chapter Contents:-

- Change Models – especially Lewin,
- Resisting change
- Forecasting resistance and working with it

7.2 Change models

The grand old man of change management is Kurt Lewin, who was proposing models to meet apparent difficulties half a century ago. As with many other thinkers, his views have not been challenged seriously since and his model of change is still seen by many to be fundamental to many change processes, whether deliberately or otherwise.

Perhaps Lewin's continuing popularity has something to do with the analogies he drew for the change process. His abiding image is that grappling with change is similar to coping with an iceberg in which an organisation has been solidly frozen.

His parallel is interesting. An organisation, according to Lewin, closely resembles an iceberg; all the component parts are in there somewhere but are impossible to re-arrange because they are frozen solidly deep in the ice. In order to get at the different parts, therefore, it is necessary to melt the iceberg. This being a managerial analogy, however, the concept of melting was, perhaps, seen as being a bit too humdrum so Lewin changed it to “unfreezing”.

So, the iceberg is unfrozen, the parts are re-arranged until they seem to be in the new, best order and then, to allow the organisation to function again, the ice is refrozen. Like so many good managerial models, Lewin’s benefits from simplicity. There is little that can go wrong with this, except perhaps that the iceberg takes a very long time to unfreeze or that the component parts are not always apparent once it has been unfrozen. Lewin has a way out of these slight difficulties; if the iceberg refuses to melt, a catalyst is needed, of which more later. If the change managers have not yet worked out how to re-arrange the components, then the unfreezing is put off until they have.

The catalyst issue creates the first, real difficulty with Lewin. Catalysts, by definition, are not easy to control; they tend to happen when people, especially managers, least expect them. So this catalyst may not be very pleasant. It must act in a way which will shock an organisation out of its comfort zone, out of its stability and out of its complacency. Consequently it is often a highly negative event – a rapidly falling set of sales figures, for example or a looming financial disaster, even a credible threat to the future of the organisation. These are not pleasant issues or issues which are easy to fake.

Some change managers, therefore, must be alert for signs of a catalyst such as these and be able to use them to leverage change in the organisation. But, if the catalyst does not arise of its own volition, what then? Then, according to not only Lewin but many more change writers, the catalyst might have to be deliberately provoked.

This might sound rather Machiavellian but it does have a few good precedents. The argument goes that, unless the status quo is materially threatened, most people will do a good deal to avoid having to change too much. The problem with change is that it is nearly always uncomfortable for some.

Stop and Think

Just think back to the last time you moved house; what was it like? It probably involved a good deal of short term upheaval, upset, unfamiliarity and perhaps even distress. But there was a positive outcome, was there not? A move to a better house, in a nicer area or with more accommodation?

That is a key principle of change, that some pain may have to be undergone in order to achieve a better outcome.

Putting it into practice – the Russian Revolution of 1917.

It would be unfair to a real live organisation to single it out for notoriety by depicting, deconstructing and mercilessly analysing every last aspect of its change programme. Almost every organisation which has ever changed has made errors of judgment somewhere along the line and it would be invidious to broadcast them for ridicule here. So, let us take an example from modern history which also happens to almost perfectly illustrate the principle.

In the First World War, the position of the Romanov Empire in Russia was particularly precarious. Still hidebound by centuries of tradition, it had barely passed beyond the Middle Ages compared to its more modern Western European neighbours. Serfdom, extinct in most of Europe since the Renaissance, had only been abolished in living memory – as recently as 1860. The economy was predominantly agrarian, the inhabitants predominantly peasant and the culture one of stoical acceptance of a traditional, if not always comfortable lifestyle.

There were many factors which contributed to this acceptance; a firm conviction that the Imperial Family was the natural head of state, a deeply felt, orthodox Christianity, poor communications which hampered any attempt at organising resistance and, above all, an apathy which meant that, unless life became intolerably worse, the current status quo was probably going to be retained.

Against this unpromising background arose one of the political giants of the twentieth century – Lenin. He had been snapping at the heels of the Russian ruling class system for at least 15 years by 1917 but conditions had never really been favourable for major change. There had been a minor revolution in 1905 but the Tsar, not quite as dim as some historians have made out, granted a limited number of reforms and was able to stave off further agitation by the promise of more reform in due course – what he meant by this, in other words, was probably that more reform could occur after his reign.

Lenin was largely impotent against this massive inertia. By and large, Russian people had enough to eat and (more importantly) drink and that was, in many cases, the limit of their worldly ambition. Lenin himself was exiled in Switzerland, not even in a position to deeply affect thinking in his home country. What Lenin badly needed was a catalyst.

The First World War provided such a catalyst, although even Lenin might have balked at having to cause such a conflict to achieve his ends. Allied with Britain and France, Russia committed vast numbers of troops to its own Western front, fighting a combination of German and Austrian forces. But numbers was the only chief advantage held by the Russian army. It was poorly equipped and even more poorly led. Contemporary accounts describe how there were not enough rifles for all the infantry so that, those in the second rank had to wait for a soldier in the first rank to be killed or badly wounded to equip himself with a rifle. Even then, there was insufficient ammunition and much fighting was still being done on horseback using cavalry sabers, as in the Napoleonic wars of a century earlier.

Against this was a highly efficient, well equipped and well-officered German army, run on Prussian lines. It had the latest deadly Maxim machine guns, it had order and discipline and it had proper clothing and equipment. In the bitter Russian winter, some of the frontline Imperial troops did not even have adequate greatcoats to keep out the cold. The outcome was never really in doubt. After over two years of largely fruitless efforts, the Russian army was on the brink of collapse.

Underfed, ill-equipped and badly led (many of the higher ranking officers were drawn from the Imperial family or its nearest scions) the Russians were no match for the German and Austrian troops. Late in 1916, Russian losses, probably impossible ever to verify, were believed to be at least four million men and, possibly, as high as seven million. Crops were being left to rot, (most of the troops were conscripts who, in their normal lives were farm labourers) many people were starving, no new territory had been acquired – indeed some had been lost - and there was serious civil unrest even in the far-off cities of Moscow and St Petersburg.

This background provided Lenin with his catalyst. Even the stoical Russian peasant belief in the sanctity of the Tsar had, in their eyes, been shaken by the deaths of so many men in such a fruitless cause. Such protests as there had been in the centre of St Petersburg had been brutally suppressed by the Cossack cavalry who were acting on the orders of the Cheka, the Imperial secret police. If only Lenin could reach Moscow or St Petersburg he thought he could effect revolution. Germany, hard pressed on the Western front and keen to negate one of the major theatres of the war in its favour, sued for peace – but with Lenin rather than the Tsar.

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Lenin agreed to cease hostilities if he could be transported to Russia and given a free hand to prosecute his revolution. Germany sent him by a sealed train “like a bacillus” from Switzerland to Russia. The train was sealed because the fear of Lenin’s brand of Bolshevik Communism was equally strong in Germany and the Kaiser had no wish to share the impending fate of his cousin, Tsar Nicholas II. Once in Russia, Lenin was able to seize power, declare peace with Germany and transform the nation into the world’s first Communist state.

The point behind this is that Lenin needed a catalyst to shake the Russian people out of their apathy – and the War provided possibly the best catalyst for change in recent history. Without the War his job would have been much harder and, possibly impossible. Although historians disagree on some aspects of the Russian Revolution, this is one aspect on which most agree; the First World War with its human and political disasters, was absolutely necessary if Lenin was to change Russian society - political, economic and military - for ever.

So in politics, as in organisations, which are, in the final analysis, largely a microcosm of politics. Heaven forbid that an organisation could find itself in a state even half as bad as that of Imperial Russia in 1916, but some organisations find themselves in very difficult circumstances from time to time and, when they do, change usually occurs, although not always soon enough or radically enough to save the organisation.

7.3 Resistance to change

Resistance is often regarded as the villain of the piece in change management. “How could anyone be so disruptive and self-centred?” is the usual question posed. In truth, however, resistance is not always negative; it can have a beneficial effect and it can serve to clarify thoughts and issues which have become murky in the muddied waters of the change process.

Resistance occurs because change inevitably creates uncertainties among many involved in the change process. This uncertainty can often directly affect aspects of life which nobody wants to lose – job security, seniority, the chances of advancement, the criteria used to assess success, even a safe pension. Consequently, and unsurprisingly, resistance surfaces whenever a change is proposed about which employees or other stakeholders are suspicious.

The pattern is often similar in that there are a few common ways in which change is resisted. Typically, change is proposed by some elements of management, with or without the assent of their peers. Communication of change is often poor and a dismayed workforce reacts – or overreacts – with horror and despair over what they often see as being a treasonable act against their employed security and personal safety. This can be described in a few common factors which, seen from an unwilling employee’s view are often:-

1. There will be economic disadvantages to my job – I either won’t earn as much as I did before or the possibility of earning overtime or bonus will be materially reduced. Therefore I will be less well off – and I have a mortgage/rent to service.

2. I may not be able to cope with the new demands which my employer will make of me. This is particularly common among people who have seen a proportion of their jobs computerised; many people would still prefer not to work with computers which they regard with suspicion and, sometimes hatred. Although there may be an age profile issue here as well (many people in their fifties, for example, are resistant to changing to a computer system because they fear that they may not be able to cope with it) it is also a product of a more rigid and less flexible (and, in some cases, a less well educated) workforce than would ideally be the case.
3. This is an inconvenience that I could well do without. Even if I realise the value of the change process (a dubious event in itself) I will be seriously inconvenienced by these new proposals and, anyway, nobody asked my opinion of the new ideas. Do I not have a right to input into the future of my own job?
4. This is only changing because he/she wants it to change. There is no intrinsic merit in this change, it is simply someone's else's ambition
5. If this change goes through I will lose (money, status, comfort, security etc). Therefore I will try to stop it.

Stop and Think

Have you ever been involved against your will in a change at work? What did it feel like? How was it communicated to you? How did you respond?

If resistance is seen as the only way to bring about a halt to the change process, or is seen to be a way of influencing the change so that it impacts upon an employee to a lesser extent than might have been the case, then there are several ways of trying to resist change; here are some of the more commonly used:-

- Divert resources away from the change focus. So, if a good deal of capital is spent on a project which has long been agreed, it will leave less – and possibly insufficient – cash for the change process.
- Exploit inertia. This is a very common method in the public sector and in the civil service particularly. There is always a good reason to put off actually taking the action that the change programme calls for – waiting for a report which has been commissioned, a bye-election or a full election, another public sector body taking the initiative first, an awaited review of operations and so on. This can be spun out for a considerable time until either the originators of the change have passed out of office (if elected) or until other circumstances make it unrealistic or simply until everyone has forgotten all about it.
- Establish – or re-write – the goals so that they are vague and complex. This could mean that only a handful of people in the organisation really understand what is needed and, if they are too busy doing something else, the change will not happen immediately, or in a short time or, even, at all.
- Involve so many representatives or experts that progress becomes bogged down and eventually stops altogether. This is a simple tactic and one which often has the weight of law or good practice behind it. If for example under new European directives, all major decisions have to be shared with a workforce before being adopted, this can be a process which could take a very long time, thus putting off the evil day when something has to actually happen. The longer it is put off, the more likely it is that circumstances will alter and that the originally envisaged change is no longer appropriate

- Dissipate energy on surveys, special meetings, data collection and anything else which will slow down the rate of change so that it may eventually be abandoned altogether. It is believed in some quarters that this was the prime method used to persuade the Blair government to abandon the Deputy Prime Minister’s proposed referenda on regional governance, thereby rendering the whole initiative null and void – but not before it had consumed at least £65m of taxpayers’ money. Bureaucracy can usually be trusted to evade, delay or cause the abandonment of change altogether
- Reduce the change agent’s (the change Champion’s) credibility, often by spreading rumours, usually unfounded ones. While this descends to a rather unpleasant, personal level of attack on a change programme, it is by no means unknown and can be the source of a successful guerilla tactic. It is not likely that normal relationships with the change agent can be resumed after all the fuss has died down, however.
- Keep quiet and hope that it all goes away. Surprisingly, it sometimes will, perhaps because other, more vocal opponents have already made their opposition known. There is also some (dubious) merit in being seen not to oppose a certain proposed action. For instance, in one local government body it is a matter of policy that, sometimes all staff are instructed to display NOR – No Obvious Reaction – to an idea put forward either by a councilor or by external consultants. This will probably not be found in the Induction booklet but it happens wholesale nevertheless

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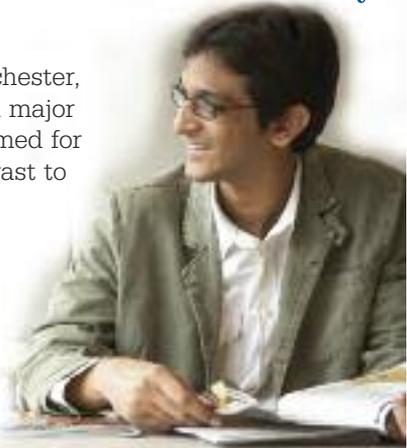
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7.4 Overcoming resistance

So, what can a change agent do to overcome such a barrage of opposition? According to Buchanan and Boddy (1992) which is still one of the key benchmarks for change managers, there are eight major actions:-

1. Establish a clear direction and objectives. This might sound simple but, in practice, some change managers are not very sure about what their objectives are; without this clarity, the change programme is very likely to fail.
2. Employ simple, phased programming. Again, too many change managers try to change too much all at once. People need time to get used to the concept of change, never mind the reality. So, a phased introduction of key but smaller changes is often better than trying to change the world all at once. Not many people have succeeded in doing that.
3. Adopt a fixer-facilitator-negotiator role. This piece of management jargon comes down to some common sense. Fixing is putting something right, so a change manager first has to identify an aspect of the organisation which is not working very well. That should be quite easy. Then he/she has to suggest solutions (which will clearly involve change) and facilitate the introduction of such solutions, involving as many staff as seems appropriate. Finally, the change manager should be able to negotiate with affected staff on behalf of the new solutions to ensure as far as possible, their full and successful adoption. Then the change has happened.
4. Rely on face to face influence. Many changes will be rejected if contained in a report or other piece of paper or even (especially?) on a computer screen. As with any sales process, the key interaction is that between individuals which often takes place most successfully face to face. So, change managers need to be good salespeople; selling ideas is much harder than selling products.
5. Seek out and respond to resistance. Once confronted openly, resistance will often disappear, at least to all intents and purposes. However, the really hard resistance to combat is that kind which lurks below the surface but does not often emerge in public. So the change manager has to seek it out, bring it out into the open and confront it then. By doing so, it may be possible, to allay fears and to end the resistance. At least its worth a good shot.
6. Exploit a crisis. Rather as Lenin did in 1917. There is even a murky school of thought which is not averse to provoking a crisis in the first place, just to be able to solve it and change the organisation in the process. However, this is not recommended – unless there is no other option and you are confident that you can cover your tracks very well.
7. Co-opt support early by building coalitions. This is key; if the change is to succeed it will usually be necessary to ensure that most of the vocal and influential members of staff support it. Even if there has to be some kind of reward in it for them, it is often worth adopting this route mainly because it is unlikely that the change will be adopted otherwise. The staff involved then also become change champions and will probably try to ensure its successful assimilation.
8. Make efforts to co-opt the meaningful committee, task force or change team which genuinely carries weight with the employees and other key stakeholders. This is an extension of the previous aspect, based on the same principle of aligning allies as early as possible. As with number 7, the key grouping is likely to be the dominant coalition, that is the few people who really run the organisation. If these powerful allies can be persuaded that the successful route to the future lies with this particular change, then most of the other barriers will mysteriously fall.

7.5 Attributes of successful change agents

Consequently it can be seen that change agents – or change champions as they are sometimes known – need a set number of attributes if they are to succeed. Buchanan and Boddy again supply the conventional wisdom, although most other change writers back them up on this. Change agents need:-

- Sensitivity to top management perspectives, market conditions and key personnel; without any one of these, the change may not work,
- The ability to set very clear and attainable goals which might well take a major change process step by step.
- The vision to know when it is worth taking a risk and when it is not. This usually comes with experience rather than from a textbook
- The ability to build successful teams no matter what the raw material is like. There is an analogy with successful football managers here; very few of them arrive at a club and find exactly the right blend of players; they have to recruit either from within the younger ranks or by transferring in players from other clubs. So it is with change managers.
- Good networking skills - so that they can observe how other organisations have tackled a similar problem, so that they can poach good change staff from elsewhere and so that they can keep a finger on the pulse of the external marketplace.
- Tolerance of uncertainty. Change managers may need to exist for quite some time in a very uncertain environment, never knowing quite who is for or against a change – for it will vary from week to week. Clearly, this is not a place for the fainthearted or those with significant self-doubts.
- Highly effective communication skills. This is an understatement. What is probably needed most often is a persuasiveness bordering on charisma, certainly, an ability to sell difficult solutions to suspicious staff. It is, in American parlance, rather like trying to get turkeys to vote for Christmas.

7.6 Getting commitment to change

Finally, how do we then achieve commitment to change? There are a number of approved ways suggested by the key change writers – Kotter, Lewin, Buchanan & Boddy, Hughes and so on. Drawn from all of these, here are the seven deadly virtues of change management:-

1. People usually support what they help to create – so ensure that as many staff as possible are involved in the change formulation process.
2. Agree the objectives and the strategic agenda by which these objectives will be achieved as widely as possible
3. Define success – what will a successful change process look like? – and fully support all those who are supporting this change programme.
4. Provide incentives – preferably including pay, promotion, enhanced development and training possibilities and increased responsibility, much as Herzberg would suggest
5. Communicate fully not just to all employees but to all stakeholders who could be affected – suppliers, partners, customers and so on

6. Work vigorously with groups and teams to enable them to achieve a shared success. Teams can achieve what individuals cannot and this includes genuine change
7. Ideally, allow time for one change to become embedded before embarking upon the next one; if that is not possible, at least accept that it takes time for change to become accepted and base a timetable on that reality.

Finally, as Churchill would have said, never, ever, ever give up.

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