



PERSONNEL PSYCHOLOGY NZ LTD

MANAGING YOUR MANAGER

*A multi-directional
management training strategy*

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MANAGING YOUR MANAGER

A multi-directional management training strategy

This outline presents the philosophy and implementation of a team building and training programme that simultaneously relieves managers of much of the pressure of managing and opens up the way for staff to gain genuine autonomy and control in their jobs. It is based on re-casting the manager-staff relationship using concepts and practices that participants take for granted and in fact demand as of right in their daily lives.

.. Background

BACKGROUND

Over the years we have conducted a large number of management training workshops which, while very well received at the time, did not always produce the lasting changes in behaviour that the client organisation was seeking.

Our work in the area of staff attitude surveys (we have now surveyed in excess of 10,000 people) clearly indicates that this problem is not confined to our training but is almost universal. Despite the millions of dollars spent on management training the tangible benefits have been slow in coming.

Our direct contact with managers and staff during training, consulting and performance counselling assignments invariably reveals high levels of frustration and confusion on both sides.

For their part, staff cite poor communication, lack of feedback, insufficient contact, lack of clear direction, managerial interference, lack of trust, managers only focusing on the negatives and 'us versus them' tensions.

Managers, on the other hand, often feel overloaded, rush from crisis to crisis, become frustrated that nothing gets done the way they ask for it to be done, feel that staff expect the impossible, and often suspect their staff are working against them rather than for them.

The problem is often seen as starting and ending with poorly trained and ineffective managers and a prevailing attitude that there is little if anything staff can do to alleviate the situation. This perception has the weight of authority by being unquestioningly reinforced in the majority of management texts, articles and university training programmes.

The message, when looked at a little cynically, is that managers and staff are essentially different 'classes' of people. Managers 'think' and staff 'do'; managers solve problems and staff create problems; managers are responsible for making everything work within the organisation and it is up to managers to empower staff.

This message, which places the burden of responsibility on managers, is best expressed by the French industrialist Henri Fayol, who in 1916 identified the role of the manager as being planning, organising, leading, coordinating and controlling. While there can be little doubt that Fayol was well intentioned, the underlying assumptions are paternalistic and disempowering. We have yet to meet a person who genuinely wants their manager to plan, organise, lead, coordinate and control their work for them; most are quite capable of doing this for themselves. Fayol's basic management tenet has, nevertheless, gone virtually unchallenged for over eighty years.

While not denying for one second the need for effective management training, we have come to the realisation that this is only part of the solution.

A much more comprehensive solution involving permanent change and genuine self-empowerment appears to occur when those being managed begin viewing themselves as having a shared responsibility in the management process while still maintaining a clear perspective on

who they are accountable to and for what. In other words: when people stop viewing themselves as subordinates and start viewing themselves as service providers.

Achieving this outcome calls for training built around the goal of generating a major shift from a culture characterised by the control oriented, top-down management style that has evolved in many organisations to a culture that is characterised by individual influence and personal responsibility at all levels regardless of the prevailing management styles.

THE REALITIES OF ORGANISATIONS

There are a number of realities about the way people behave in organisations. Many of these realities undermine attempts to implement effective management practices.

Creeping Intelligence. The first reality is that when a member of a group is appointed to a position of responsibility over the group that person will usually begin behaving differently toward the group members. The person may begin to solve problems, take responsibility for decisions or tell people what to do. This occurs almost without conscious thought and is often tacitly encouraged by the group members. To an external observer, however, the person would appear to be behaving as though they were more intelligent than the group members.

This process continues as individuals move up within the organisation. Most senior managers genuinely disagree with the suggestion that they see themselves as the most intelligent people in the organisation and yet an analysis of the types of tasks carried out and decisions made by senior managers coupled with the operating procedures within the organisation leads inevitably to the assumption of higher intelligence. This subtle and insidious process disempowers staff and over-burdens managers.

Organisational Cash-flow. The second reality is that the revenue-generating work in most organisations is done by the staff rather than the managers. However, the funds that are thus generated are distributed downwards from the top of the organisation rather than upwards from bottom. Given that most people will instinctively pay attention to those who can do them the greatest harm, the needs of those above rather than those below will usually take precedence. On paper, a manager is paid to look after the needs of his or her staff. In reality, consistently placing the requests of staff ahead of requests from senior management will jeopardise the manager's career prospects.

Expert Managers. The third reality is that there are some very strong forces encouraging managers to devote the majority of their time to their area of greatest technical expertise. This is usually the area in which they feel most comfortable and where they feel they can produce tangible results. It is also an area where they can gain recognition and respect by drawing on their experience to solve complex problems. There is a much lesser degree of comfort with, and an element of resistance to, the idea that their primary role has shifted from managing resources to managing behaviour; this is a new and strange craft.

Inspection Policies. The fourth reality is that we respect not what the boss *expects*, but what the boss *inspects*. Senior managers very rarely inspect, for example, the extent to which one of

their reports is providing on-the-job coaching, feedback or communication. The areas that senior managers do inspect tend to be primarily technical reports, weekly or monthly reports, figures, costs and even spelling and grammar. Not surprisingly, these are the aspects that receive priority.

Managers are Human. In an ideal world managers would be emotionally stable characters who provide regular positive feedback, coach their staff, keep themselves fully informed on what everyone is doing, communicate effectively, place people issues ahead of technical issues, have a clear future vision, solve problems quickly, make consistent decisions and empower and motivate their staff.

We always encourage managers to act in this way but are continually confronted with the reality that managers are as human as everyone else. They have their share of anxiety, doubt, indecision, despondency and frustration.

Some managers harbour doubts about their own abilities. Studies in America have revealed that up to 60 percent of successful managers experience the 'Impostor Syndrome'. This is an underlying feeling that they are not as competent as others think they are, that they got where they are by being in the right place at the right time, and that sooner or later they will be 'found out'.

Conversely, some managers are arrogant, status seeking and egotistical. Others are highly competitive and will never miss an opportunity to advance themselves at someone else's expense. Some are patently dishonest and there are those that are literally out of their depth and simply lack the ability to do the job effectively.

When confronted with problems and tensions managers cope using a vast array of different methods. Some withdraw into their offices, others go on a witch-hunt, some try to take control by doing everything themselves and others simply abdicate. Some methods are effective but a significant number only serve to make the situation worse.

The fifth reality, therefore, is that managers are human and that any management system must take this factor into account.

In Summary... Taken together, these and other realities lead to the conclusion that organisations have always been and in all probability will continue to be hierarchical, that turning the pyramid upside down is both physically and logically impractical, and that the forces encouraging managers to look after their staff will usually be outweighed by the forces demanding that managers place their priorities on the needs of those above them in the organisation. Sadly, the customer, despite all the laudable intentions to the contrary, is frequently left at the very bottom of the priority list.

.. *Moving to a Solution*

MOVING TO A SOLUTION

There are four key elements to the solution process:

- Providing an understanding of behaviour
- Equipping managers and staff with behaviour management tools
- Providing a framework for change
- Building an implementation strategy

Behaviour Management Training

When it comes to managing behaviour everybody in an organisation is a behaviour manager.

- A salesman who complains to other staff about a manager is subtly shaping the attitudes, feelings and behaviour of those to whom he speaks
- A typist whose surly and abrasive manner leads her manager to quietly hand-correct errors on letters is managing the behaviour of that manager
- A manager who laughs at his deputy's facetious remark about the CEO is increasing the likelihood of ongoing disloyalty.

Every person is continually shaping the behaviour of others by selectively paying positive or negative attention or by ignoring specific behaviours, but seldom with little real appreciation of the longer term effects.

The laws that govern the development and maintenance of behaviour work in all directions, not just downwards, and are as constant as any law of physics. For example, the higher a person moves within an organisation the less positive feedback they generally receive. Consequently, it is often easier for staff to positively shape the behaviour of a senior manager than for the senior manager to shape the behaviour of staff.

Similarly, it can be shown that staff will increase the frequency of any behaviour a manager pays attention to. For example, if the manager pays attention to mistakes, mistakes will increase in frequency. This is not the result of a conscious decision on the part of staff to make mistakes but rather the outcome of the subconscious mind constantly monitoring the environment in order to adjust behaviour patterns.

Finally, there is no 'non-option'. If a manager withholds attention from staff then staff will find a way to obtain that attention, even if they have to resort to generating problems, complaints, disputes or grievances.

By providing both managers and staff with a clear understanding of the principles of behaviour management both groups can begin to appreciate how they influence each other and how they inadvertently perpetuate problems. Providing this training only to the managers places an unfair burden on the managers and denies staff the opportunity to exercise personal initiative.

Equipping Everyone with a Tool-kit

There are no 'correct' ways to solve individual problems of a behavioural nature. Each tends to be different and requires different approaches and strategies. The challenge is not to provide the ultimate solution but to equip people with the ability to identify the key elements of a problem and then use one or more of a variety of behavioural tools to overcome the difficulty. These tools, such as the problem solving interview, pairing, selective reinforcement, reverse psychology and reframing, are all quite simple in their own right but provide a great deal of flexibility in sorting out performance issues.

Providing a Framework for Change

In the vast majority of organisations, large or small, tensions will inevitably arise between management and staff. These tensions can range from mild differences of opinion through to bitter argument and litigation. There is also very often a feeling on the part of staff that they are to a large extent rendered powerless by the failure of their managers to communicate effectively and consult when making decisions and commitments.

Trying to resolve these differences is fraught with difficulties. Attempts to mediate between the parties often become bogged down trying to deal with differences of opinion and charged emotions.

We have often heard, for example, staff members bitterly claim that there is no way they are going to 'give in' and do things the way the manager wants, or that they feel they are doing a good job and their manager just has it 'in' for them.

Ironically, those same staff members would, in all probability, show equal indignance toward a waiter who sullenly refused to fulfill a request or failed to provide the level of service they expected.

There are direct parallels between the two scenarios. In both situations one person is *paying* someone to do something and the other is *being paid* to do something. Anyone who pays for a product or service is by definition a 'customer' and anybody who is paid to provide a product or service is a 'supplier'. In respect of the manager the staff member is a supplier, and in respect of the waiter the staff member is a customer.

Throughout history people have proudly supplied goods and services for payment. The basic tenet of the seller is that success in business is directly related to customer satisfaction.

Successful suppliers always hold themselves, not their customers, responsible for the success of the business. They take for granted that their ability to keep selling is limited only by their ability to identify and fulfill the needs of their customers regardless of the individual foibles or personality characteristics these customers may show.

Similarly, there cannot, by definition, be a personality conflict between a shopkeeper and a customer; the customer is always 'right'. (If the customer is 'wrong' the supplier can, with a little

effort, establish why the customer is 'wrong' and attempt to gently guide them back to the straight and narrow.)

Hidden within this customer-supplier relationship is the framework for self empowerment.

Where a staff member is locked into a state of conflict with a manager, the mere suggestion that the manager is the staff member's primary customer and should be treated as such is generally totally unpalatable and is usually rejected with a great deal of emotion. The idea of acting in the manager's interest involves feelings of backing down, giving in and losing too much personal pride and dignity.

We have, however, observed very swift and radical changes in staff behaviour when the individual concerned realises that the model is designed to work in their interest rather than the manager's and that, if handled correctly, the manager may well be largely unaware that a fundamental shift has occurred.

This is the real power of the customer-supplier model when applied to the manager-staff relationship: it can be driven entirely by the staff member, does not require the active support or participation of the manager, and can be accomplished without 'giving in' to anybody.

Invoking the customer-supplier model in the manager-staff member relationship effectively replaces 'bosses' who have power over people and tell them what to do, with 'customers' who need to be actively looked after.

Properly applied, this way of viewing the manager-staff member relationship eliminates most of the negative emotion and psychologically restructures the hierarchy within the organisation while retaining very clear accountability at all levels. No longer are there layers upon layers of bosses but simply a supply chain with a series of customers.

Feedback from managers exposed to this approach has been that for the first time they feel as though their staff genuinely understand what is important to them. Feedback from the staff has been that they have acquired the freedom and flexibility, regardless of what type of manager they have, to implement the changes that they believe are in the best interests of their manager, the organisation and external customers.

This approach to organisational functioning is basically a tool designed to allow staff to empower themselves in a way that draws the organisation together as a very focused and successful team. The training covers both the techniques used by successful suppliers and the responsibilities of customers.

.. The Training Programme

THE TRAINING PROGRAMME

The programme is designed as an initial one day workshop with the option of follow-up training as the need arises.

To enable the programme to work it is essential that the workshop participants be drawn from different levels within the reporting structure. The ideal, if possible, is to have managers, supervisors and staff from the same section or unit on the workshop together.

Content

- **Issues**

Short discussion in sub-groups to identify the main issues of concern within the organisation. Responses from the sub-groups are collated for use later in the programme.

- **Understanding the Barriers to Effective Management**

- Creeping Intelligence
- Vocational versus Behaviour Management
- Organisational Cashflows
- Inspection Regimes

- **The Role of the Manager**

- What managers should be doing
- Developing a management time budget
- Why managers work longer hours than anybody else

- **Clarifying Responsibility to Managers, Peers and Staff**

- Reality based priority setting
- Who truly belongs to a team and who doesn't
- Dignified 'followership' versus 'boot-licking'

- **The Freedom Scale**

- Understanding the five levels of freedom
- Mapping your own position
- The fatal problem-solver trap
- How to work up the Freedom Scale
- Using the Freedom Scale to generate initiative

.. continued

Content

(Continued)

• **The Laws of Learning**

- The principles behind 'trial and error' and 'pairing'
- How others covertly shape your behaviour and attitudes
- How managers encourage the behaviours they want least
- Quick ways to kill or encourage enthusiasm and initiative
- Strategic use of behaviour management

• **The Customer-Supplier Model**

- Clarifying accountability
- Liking, trusting and loving
- Finding out what is going on inside the customer's head
- The role of advertising
- Developing your manager's vision
- Guaranteeing a regular high quality feedback
- Integrating a Total Quality Service model

• **Putting it all together**

Using the principles covered in the workshop a series of solution strategies are developed by sub-groups to deal with the issues that were identified in the opening exercise. Each group reports back to the full workshop and at the completion of the presentations an overall plan is discussed and agreed.