



Sustainable Leadership

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Part 1

Meet the New Boss, Same as the Old Boss

Rock fans amongst you will recognise the above as the closing line from the *Who* song '*Won't Get Fooled Again*' featured on their album '*Who's Next*'. Any or all of these titles could also be a summary of employee relations today.

Background

The converging economic and environmental crises of our generation mean that effective leadership is now of a magnitude and importance never previously experienced. Whilst the ultimate solutions may be the prerogative of world leaders, we in the business world, be it private or public sector, have a critical role to play.

I have worked in the field of learning and development since 1978 and in all that time I have yet to hear anyone disagree with the sentiments that:

- an organisation's most important resource is its people
- a leader's job is to provide an environment in which people can be empowered to fulfil their potential

Indeed, much the same has been said for over fifty years during which time countless sums have been spent on management and leadership development.

Perhaps the real question is why does micro-management remain the default position for many and which of the many tools and approaches can reverse this so that leadership style and organisational culture evolve to meet the demands of the present day?

In part 1 of this e-book, I will share my experiences from research I undertook, in the public sector in the late 1980s [1], plus later research on personality and emotional intelligence [2].

In part 2, we will look at some current data to see how, or if, things have changed, consider the ramifications for L & D professionals such as ourselves, and consider a new approach to leadership development.

Research – Expectations and Problems of First Line Managers

I was keen to learn from middle managers what they expected from First Line Managers [FLM] and their perception of any performance problems



For the former I took the Ministry of Defence annual appraisal form and a departmental report [3], as a start point.

I then added some aspects of my own and invited additional nominations as people saw fit. The final list comprised:

- ❖ Foresight
- ❖ Enthusiasm/Drive
- ❖ Confidence
- ❖ Stamina
- ❖ Judgement
- ❖ Written Communication
- ❖ Oral Communication
- ❖ Sensitivity to others
- ❖ Political awareness
- ❖ Questioning of constraints
- ❖ Proactivity [i.e. initiating action]
- ❖ Decisive
- ❖ Calmness under pressure
- ❖ Numeracy
- ❖ Innovation
- ❖ Initiative

The results showed that enthusiasm and judgement were the aspects most eagerly sought whilst political awareness, questioning of constraints, proactivity and innovation were not rated very highly. A jaundiced way of looking at this is that middle managers wanted the managers below them to do as they were told with enthusiasm!

When it came to performance problems, the list came entirely from the previously mentioned report and consisted of:

Low morale/lack of enthusiasm	React to events – no attempt to exercise control
Don't always know what is expected of them	Want to be told how to do things
Lack of overview of their job	Reluctant to exercise discipline
Feel powerless to improve matters in their area	Reluctant to give feedback to staff
Fail to see people as their most important resource	Not very skilful at giving feedback to staff
Unable to identify what they can change	Don't see staff development as their responsibility
Too busy doing the job, no time to plan	Resistant to change
Reluctant to challenge constraints	

A lack of planning, powerlessness and low morale were seen as the most significant weaknesses.

It seems to me that it is hardly surprising that these problems are highlighted given that the same respondents show little regard for questioning, proactivity and innovation!

Interestingly, when FLMS were surveyed, only 28% felt that higher level tasks were delegated to them either frequently or very often.

Similarly only 44% considered that they were involved in decisions that affected their work but that were outside of their authority.

Historically, leaders have taken personal responsibility for ensuring the success of their team by resorting to working harder, faster and longer when the going gets tough – in short, heroic personal overload. Problem solving and decision making is centred at the ‘top of the shop’ with the value of contributions being directly linked to the seniority of the proposer consequently insufficient use is made of delegation – classic Command and Control culture.

Leaders and Emotional Intelligence

In 2003 I produced Ref. 3 titled ‘Emotional Intelligence and Team Roles’ which, amongst other things, looked at how 180 senior civil servants scored against the competencies in Daniel Goleman’s model of Emotional Intelligence.



Emotional Intelligence is the capability and capacity to manage our own feelings and those of others in order to maximise relationships. Goleman’s research [4] demonstrates that this in turn leads to greater output and more effective management.

The Emotional Competence Inventory [ECI] is a 360° feedback questionnaire developed by Daniel Goleman in conjunction with Hay/McBer in 1988. At that time, it covered 20 competencies in 4 clusters.

Each competency has a target level beyond which performance improves exponentially thereby separating average from star performers.

<p>SELF-WARENESS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional Self-Awareness • Accurate Self-Assessment • Self Confidence 	<p>SOCIAL AWARENESS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empathy • Organisational Awareness • Service Orientation
<p>SELF-MANAGEMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-Control • Trustworthiness • Conscientiousness • Adaptability • Achievement Orientation • Initiative 	<p>SOCIAL SKILLS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing Others • Leadership • Influence • Communication • Change Catalyst • Conflict Management • Building Bonds • Teamwork/Collaboration

Strengths [i.e. scores above the target level] of this group lie in Self Confidence, Trustworthiness, and Self Control.

They have a good understanding of how their organisation works and what their customers require.

They are perceived as Influential, good Communicators and able to set a direction in times of change [Leadership] – Developing Others, and Teamwork are also strong.

Weaknesses are to do with sensitivity [Emotional Self Awareness, Accurate Self Assessment and Empathy], Building Bonds, delivery [Conscientiousness and Achievement Orientation], responding to new demands [Initiative, Adaptability, and Change Catalyst], Building Bonds, and Conflict Management.

Whilst Developing Others, and Teamwork may contribute towards maximising the potential of others, the remaining strengths are much more to do with command and control. Several of the weaknesses mitigate against development whilst the others are a great cause for concern given the rate of change and uncertainty faced at the time.

Conclusions and Implications

Whilst this data is far from extensive or conclusive, [in an academic sense], it does reflect my recollection of attitudes prevalent at the time – this being gleaned from direct contact with thousands of managers and their anecdotal musings.

If you accept my position above, then it is possible to hypothesise a circle of cause and

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effect with junior managers who have been discouraged from sensitivity, challenge and enterprise evolving into middle managers with similar values – thus perpetuating the culture.

The current work climate is increasingly demanding in the areas of delivery and transformational change.



Often, where new initiatives are carried through successfully, it is not without casualties who need empathy and support.

Trevor Gay, a former senior manager in the NHS says in his article ‘Simplicity is the Key’ [5]. **‘If you give responsibility to people at the front line and let them have their head, the manager’s job becomes more appropriate, they are able to be more strategic’.**

This time it really is imperative that senior leaders behave strategically whilst those at a lower level have their talents and potential fully utilised. This takes us back to my original question of the leadership styles now in play and the implications for ourselves. In part two, I will attempt to answer both questions and provide a pragmatic and effective way to release the potential locked up in many organisations.

References:

- [1] The Training and Development of New Executive Officers in the Ministry of Defence – R F Howells, M.Phil 1989
- [2] Emotional Intelligence and Team Roles – R F Howells, Team Management Systems Research Manual Edition 3. 2003
- [3] Future Programme of Work for the Management Studies Centre [Paper to the MOD Civilian Training Board] – Owen Sweeney Head of Civilian Management Training 1988
- [4] Emotional Intelligence: Why it can Matter More Than IQ – Daniel Goleman 1996
- [5] Simplicity: not as easy as it looks – Trevor Gay, Management Today, April 2008



Part 2

In Part 1 I asked ‘why does micro-management remain the default position for many and which of the many tools and approaches can reverse this so that leadership style and organisational culture evolve to meet the demands of the present day?’; I also reprised some research I conducted in the late 1980s and mid 1990s which suggested that the culture of command and control flourished at that time.

In part 2, I’ll introduce some current data and speculate where we might go from here.

Current Findings

Between January 2008 and May 2009, 254 senior, public sector managers undertook 360° feedback on their Situational Leadership Styles. SITLEAD maps the degree of directive [task] and supportive [relationship] behaviour exercised by leaders against follower levels of ability and motivation [willingness]. There are 4 styles viz.

- Telling [S1] – high direction, low support
- Selling [S2] – high direction and support
- Participating [S3] – low direction and high support
- Delegating [S4] – low direction and support

S1 should be matched with low ability and motivation; S2 with low ability but high motivation; S3 with high ability but low motivation and S4 with high ability and motivation.

Style adaptability [i.e. the degree to which leaders vary their style] came out as low with almost 75% of responses falling under S2 or S3 – see Figure 1 below

Fig. 1 Situational Leadership, distribution of styles

S3 – Participating 27.5%	S2 – Selling 46.7%
S4 – Delegating 6.7%	S1 – Telling 19.1%

One possibility is that there are very few followers who combine high levels of ability with similar levels of motivation; another is that these leaders are uneasy about taking their hand off the tiller. I should add that this preference for styles S2 and 3 is prevalent across all sectors in the western business world.

During this period I also worked with 132 of the most senior managers in a large, well performing, local authority.

They form part of the sample above but also completed the Personal Styles Inventory which measures preferences for working in different ways. There are 4 pairs of preferences:

- ❖ Introversion and Extroversion which consider whether a person is most influenced by their own thoughts [I] or by the world around them [E].
- ❖ Sensing [S] and Intuition [N] which determine how we process information – sensors are detail orientated whilst intuitives look for the big picture.
- ❖ Thinking [T] and Feeling [F] demonstrate whether our decisions are driven by data [T] or values and emotions [F].
- ❖ Judging [J] and Perceiving [P] which lean towards closure of an issue[J] or exploration [P]



This gives 16 combinations:

Fig. 2 PSI Distribution

ISTJ 30% 14%	ISFJ 1% 13%	INFJ 2%	INTJ 2% 1%
ISTP 1% 6%	ISFP 1% 6%	INFP 1% 3%	INTP 2%
ESTP 6%	ESFP 9%	ENFP 6% 6%	ENTP 3%
ESTJ 35% 10%	ESFJ 13% 13%	ENFJ 4% 3%	ENTJ 6% 3%

The reason for the blanks in the table are that no one in this particular organisation fell into these categories.

Top figure in each box denotes the percentage of the group that were of this type. The lower figure is that for the general population [1].

Preferences mapped as follows - E = 65%, I = 35%; S = 80%, N = 20%; T = 73%, F = 27%; J = 90%, P = 10%.

As can be seen, 65% of respondents fell into the STJ category. David Keirse [2] categorised STJ as being 'regulatory' with ISTJ playing an inspecting/certifying role whilst ESTJ carried out a supervisory/enforcing function.

This fits well with Styles 2 and 3 above and is essential to good administration such as in local authorities however, in times of change and uncertainty, other skills will need to be developed.

Where do we go from here?



From my own experience of being managed, as well as anecdotal evidence from literally thousands of course participants, it seems that command and control /micro-management continues to be both perpetuated and rewarded. The result is that our leaders are working harder than ever and, as a consequence, exhaustion and burnout are quite common - as is frustration on the part of those being over-managed. This, clearly, is something which is not sustainable for individuals, organisations or society and led me to consider why there was such a mismatch between what was espoused and what was practiced.

I drew the following conclusions:

1. Success in organisational life usually comes from heroic personal effort i.e. individuals work hard, become proficient in solving problems and learn to rely on themselves. Thus personal responsibility for completing tasks becomes a habit and leaders attempt to work harder, faster and longer.
2. Successful people set high standards and worry that others may not reach them. Accordingly fears about maintaining quality deter delegation
3. If the foregoing can be overcome and employees are empowered, leaders then worry that they will be seen as superfluous - so status and security concerns become blockers.

If over-management is to be eradicated then current leaders have to be offered the prospect of something in its stead.

Traditional training programmes pay, at best, only fleeting attention to the leader's incentive to empower their people – concentrating, instead, on the mechanics of the process. Consequently more emphasis needs to be placed on the personal and organisational opportunity costs of micro management as well as the creation of a vision of an alternative, more successful, way of doing things. The benefits would include better business results; better environmental management and better work-life balance.

Only by drawing on the combined brainpower of all employees can a leader hope to create headroom. Time is required if genuine thought leadership is to be pursued and initiatives taken to ensure both business, and environmental prosperity - in short to demonstrate Sustainable Leadership.

Such a shift is not easy as it requires leaders to give up some of the behaviours that have made them successful and replace them with skills that have yet to be perfected.

It also involves a change of focus - less operational to more strategic though this is not to say that sound operational leadership isn't vital. A similar challenge also faces staff, particularly in relation to accepting responsibility. Ultimately, staff should act as if they were running their own business i.e. self managed or 'self employed employees'.

By giving responsibility to people at the coalface, and letting them use their initiative and intelligence, the leader is able to concentrate on more appropriate work and become more strategic.

This is a challenge for all levels, not just Top Management, to step back and consider their environmental and business footprint.

Sustainable Leadership

To help further this process I developed the Sustainable Leadership Model shown at figure 3.

It has 4 domains, each underpinned by 4 competencies.

Fig. 3 The Sustainable Leadership Model



Each domain has a primary objective as follows:

- **Personal Vision** – to identify and pursue new, strategic opportunities.
- **Encouraging Management** – to prepare and motivate staff to become self managed.
- **Enquiring and Enterprising Employees** – to release the creativity and ingenuity of staff.
- **Ethics and Environment** – to preserve the wealth and potential of self, others and the environment.

A good place to start is with Ethics and the Environment. I recently asked the Board of a large organisation to work in pairs discussing the ethics that underpinned their day to day actions. This turned out to be far more difficult than anticipated – it is useful to challenge people to identify what is truly important to them. Next, ensuring an understanding of the reality of our current environmental and economic crises is essential since this is the leadership context in which society moves towards a more uncertain future.



These 2 things should form the basis for developing a Personal Vision. I ask people to identify what they could do, given the time, to make a real difference to their organisation. Sufficient time needs to be allocated in order for a coherent argument to be rehearsed, and then challenged so that something meaningful emerges – rather than a list of routine bullet points.

A compelling personal vision is the key since it creates a world of possibilities and identifies something to aspire to. Encouraging Management covers the bulk of what is currently provided by way of management development training with the aim of making people more proficient.

The trick now is to empower employees to capitalise on their training and to become Enquiring and Enterprising and, in so doing, take some of the burden from the shoulders of their leader.

Such a strategy should integrate things like ‘employee engagement’, ‘LEAN’ and a whole litany of other ‘initiatives’ into everyday working practice. Change would be what we do and not something led by a ‘Champion’ or consultant.

This time it really is imperative that senior leaders behave strategically whilst those at a lower level have their talents and potential fully utilised. Very few people now deny the threats that exist and we, as leaders, must rise to the challenge – ensuring that we leave a worthwhile legacy for generations to come.

References:

[1] Taken from the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator Manual supplement 1998

[2] Please Understand Me II [1998] – David Keirse

Roy Howells has worked as a training and development specialist, both in the UK and internationally, for over 30 years. In 2008 he founded the Centre for Sustainable Leadership



www.centreforsustainableleadership.com and in 2009 launched the ‘SUSTAIN’ self scoreable, leader diagnostic questionnaire [available at www.mlruk.com]. Exploration of the profile generated, and its implications, will lead to the identification of characteristics essential to a successful, and socially responsible, organisation. A 360° feedback version will be available in the New Year.

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