

# ***What Works at Work***

*A Guide for Thoughtful Managers*

***Mark O'Sullivan***



***The Starbank Press***

2014

*What Works at Work* was published in 2014 by The Starbank Press  
at 58 Greenway Lane, Bath, Somerset BA2 4LL

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publishers.

© Mark O'Sullivan 2014

The right of Mark O'Sullivan  
to be identified as the author of this work  
has been asserted in accordance with Section 77 of the Copyright, Designs and  
Patents Act 1988

A CIP record for this book  
is available from the British Library  
ISBN 978-0-9569812-1-9

Also by Mark O'Sullivan:  
*Britanniae* (Starbank Press, Bath, 2011)

*The Starbank Press is an imprint of Resource Synergies Ltd,  
58 Greenway Lane, Bath, Somerset BA2 4LL*

## *CONTENTS*

1	Why you need this book	1
2	Recruitment	9
3	Skills	28
4	Engagement	44
5	Communication	67
6	Conflict	76
7	Change	85
8	Leadership	95
9	Action	114

# what works at work

## *Preface*

This slim book runs over the main areas of people-management and seeks to offer managers a brief guide, written in ordinary language rather than some impenetrable mid-Atlantic jargon, which will help them see the wood from the trees when looking at some fundamental challenges. Chapter 1 explains a bit more at whom the book is aimed, and why they might want to read it.

However, you ought to have my basic assumptions at the start. I believe that how people are managed at work is important, since it is one of the main influences on our standard of living, and since most of us spend half our lives in our jobs and need to know that we are not wasting our time. I believe social science gives us quite a lot of real knowledge of what works in management and what does not, and that we ought to try and do the things that work and avoid those that do not. And I believe that, because people are complicated, their organisations are complex too, so that it's important not just to grasp at what looks like the obvious solution to a problem, but to try carefully to think through all the ramifications before taking action.

My thanks are due to David Guest and his team at Birkbeck who first guided me through the jungle of management science; to my colleagues in organisations, mainly in the civil service, who provided a wealth of practical examples of how management should (and shouldn't) be done; to the members of the Association for Business Psychology, who have remained loyal to the cause of evidence-based management, despite the deafening marketing hype of popular management gurus; and to the taxpayer, who funded a series of excellent courses at the Civil Service College, led by Julian Rizzello and others, which did more than most to enable me to reflect on the world of organisations and my experience of it.

Mark O'Sullivan  
Bath, Somerset  
January 2014

## what works at work

### *About the author*

After reading Classics as a scholar at Cambridge, Mark O'Sullivan joined the Department of the Environment, serving in a range of policy advice roles and supporting Michael Heseltine's introduction of new business methods known as *Management Information for Ministers*. Subsequently he assisted with the Financial Management Initiative, including, as head of the Finance Division in the 20,000-strong Property Services Agency, the introduction there of commercial accounting.

In 1989 he moved to the Scottish Office, initially to the finance team, and set out to get practical qualifications with a MSc in Organisational Behaviour from Birkbeck College London, a diploma from the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants, and Fellowship of the Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development. In Scotland he handled policy on the environment and on education, set up central services in the new Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland, reviewed governance in the Scottish Examination Board, and led analysis of the staffing changes required for the new Scottish Government.

He returned to England to an international post in DEFRA, and subsequently moved across to local government as a director in the Cambridgeshire County Council. He left the public sector in 2005 for consultancy work advising public, private and third sectors, primarily on leadership, project management and organisational change. In 2012 he stepped down after 8 years as a director of the Association of Business Psychologists; he currently sits on the Rural Economy Sector Group of the West of England Local Enterprise Partnership, and holds a Ministerial appointment on the Cotswolds Conservation Board.

Mr O'Sullivan, a Londoner by birth, lives in Bath. He has written in a number of professional works, most recently *Retaining School Leaders: a guide to keeping talented leaders engaged* (National College for School Leadership, 2007). In 2008 he edited a work of fiction by the late Richard Ogden, *Inquiry into an Unknown Planet*, and in 2011 he published a historical novel, *Britanniae*.