

# leadership

## Chapter 8: Leadership

*This chapter surveys how ideas about leadership have developed, and the debate whether one can learn to be a good leader or not. It asks if leadership is different from management, and whether it is better top-down or bottom-up. It looks at the importance of trust and flexibility, the key role of supervisors, and what can be learned from bad leaders.*

*“...how to grant suits,  
How to deny them, who t’advance, and who  
To trash for over-topping...”*

*The Tempest, William Shakespeare, 1611*

*In truth there wasn’t enough for everyone to do, but they turned up anyway, to do it. It was that kind of night. You had to be there, so that later you could say ‘...and I was there, that very night.’ Moist knew he ought to get some sleep, but he had to be there too, alive and sparkling. It was...amazing. They listened to him, they did things for him, they scuttled around as if he was a real leader and not some cheat and fraud.*

*Going Postal, Terry Pratchett, 2004*

*What are executives good at? Nothing in particular, really: they are ‘generalists’. They have studied in the top colleges such as Political Science and the Central School, where they have not learned much, other than how to impress selection panels. They read newspaper columns written by two or three people who just repeat commonplaces and received ideas, they spice up their talk with simplistic American jargon, and they make this all sound very important. Let’s be clear: executives are basically completely uncultured...Our high flyers have never had the time to read Michel Foucault, to listen to a Mozart opera or to watch a Fellini film. Oh, no! Never! They are swamped. By what? By how they spend their time. And how do they spend their time? In meetings...*

*Bonjour Paresse, Corinne Maier, 2004*

*“I want to see a quick and tangible return on the investment made in continuous improvement initiatives. This is partly because this measure is used by the Board as the main criterion in assessing my performance.”*

*(senior manager quoted in) Stuck in the Middle with You: the effects of incongruency of senior and middle managers’ orientations on TQM programmes, Ebrahim Soltani and Adrian Wilkinson, 2010*

**Key message of this chapter: Leadership is much studied, but is an art rather than a science, and we are clearer on what is bad leadership than on what is good.**

Leadership is a fashionable topic, as we see from the media and our own office gossip. But it almost sums up the

problem this book seeks to address: the difficulty of seeing the truth for the mirages.

Looking at the airport bookstalls, one might be forgiven for thinking that every top manager knows the secret of leadership. Bill Gates (Microsoft), Jim Collins (CNN), Richard Branson (Virgin Group), Robert K. Greenleaf (AT&T), Tom Peters (McKinsey), Alan Sugar (Amstrad), Donald Trump (The Trump Organization), Robert H. Waterman Jr (McKinsey), Sir John Harvey Jones (ICI), Jack Welch (General Electric), Andrew Grove (Intel), Steve Wozniak (Apple), Michael Dell (Dell), Fred Smith (FedEx), and hundreds of others have favoured us with their insights. Such books often tend to be written in ways which explain and justify the heroic achievements of these leaders.

But there is a great deal of difference between on the one hand these reminiscences, and on the other robust scientific findings about the effectiveness of leadership. Indeed, there is a great deal of difference between these reminiscences themselves. What are we to make of this?

One might think that it was all down to our celebrity culture. But the truth is that people have been writing stuff like this since Julius Caesar published *On the Gallic War*. The same social instinct that makes us gossip around the coffee machine has always made people enjoy listening to stories and exploring other people's personalities, and there have always been ambitious folk who have realised that getting their own story out there would be to their advantage, whether now or in terms of their legacy.

Again, that is not to say that the stories that leaders tell about their success is wrong. What it does say is that these appealing stories won't necessarily apply to you.

It also explains why leadership is a big issue, in the sense that it has attracted a great deal of attention and there are many different kinds of stories about it, and many important questions, such as:

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- Are leaders born, or made: can you learn to be a leader?
- Is there a right and a wrong way of behaving as a leader?
- Does leadership vary between different cultures?
- Do you need different leaders in different situations?
- Is “leadership” the same as “management”?

And if you have been reading this book from the start you will already know what I am going to say next: that a big issue like leadership is full of complexities which it is hard to measure and control for, and that therefore not much of it is capable of being empirically tested.

So what do we really know about leadership? In fact we can be sure of less than the stories of heroic leaders might suggest, and to see how things stand it will help to take a highly condensed tour of the history of the discipline.

Theorising about leadership has a long history, going back to ancient writers like Plutarch in the first century: he grappled with the question whether good leaders were born or made – still, of course, a live question for organisations. The post-classical world was run by aristocrats, and for a very long time it preferred explanations that legitimised the idea of inheritance. This remained dominant for a long time, culminating in the Victorian Thomas Carlyle, and in Francis Galton, one of the first to seek to treat psychology as a science.

*Leadership – the back-ground*

Thus, attempts in the English civil war and the French revolution to set inheritance aside proved damp squibs. It was not until after the Second World War that there was a serious challenge, when Nazism had discredited the hitherto widely popular idea of racial differences, and with it all but the most robust ideas about heritable characteristics. At this time Stogdill and others were able to gain wide acceptance for evidence that leadership depended not on *character traits* consistently linked with success, but on its *environ-*

*ment* – the leader’s skills, organisation, situation, and followers. Since the 1980s, trait-based theories have fought back, especially with a (slightly desperate?) argument that it is packages of traits rather than individual traits which assure success. However, this may be a bit of a smoke-screen: the situation remains uncertain, and no school of thought has yet been able to declare its opponents’ paradigm defunct.

This question is a fundamental one. If permanent characteristics are what determines leadership success, then there is a limited supply of leaders, and choosing the right ones is possible and vital. If not, then leadership skills are learnable: anyone can be a leader, and the requisite skills may vary from case to case. There is probably room for compromise between these two polar positions; but in general my own vote (and I think the balance of current psychological opinion) goes for the conclusion that it is learnable rather than inherited.

However, there are two other basic questions which are also fundamental to what one thinks about leadership: (i) is there a difference between “leadership” and “management”?; and (ii) is leadership a matter of telling other people what to do, or enabling them to do things on their own initiative?

*Leader-  
ship and  
manage-  
ment*

“Leadership” and “management” used to be fairly interchangeable terms, until there was a move in the 1960s to separate them out. This led to the latter soon seeming to recall the deadening “science of management” invented by Frederick Taylor; while the former became able to evoke more exciting questions like what brings success in kingship and battles. Thus, in practice, management became seen as being, rather boringly, about the nuts-and-bolts aspects of control and decision-making, such as project plans, Gantt charts, call centre scripts and record-keeping. Leadership,

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on the other hand, was seen as being, much more dramatically, about inspiration, creativity, insight, loyalty and daring to do the impossible.

It is curious that “management” had such a bad press. For it remains the case that an awful lot of what executives actually do is setting up and enforcing complicated procedures to ensure that things are done right; indeed, the advent of ISO quality mechanisms, call centre scripting and other automated processes has meant that this is in fact an even bigger part of the job than it was in the past, and is vitally important in the way organisations are now run. But the word “leadership”, of course, won the unequal contest between the two terms. Indeed, the pair have now been repackaged as “transformational leadership” and “transactional leadership”<sup>189</sup>; this neatly sidesteps the question of whether there is a real difference between the two words. However, it does remain the case that things have to be organised if inspirations are to be delivered, and that a group of people needs a vision of where they are going even if their systems, records and procedures are already impeccably well sorted out.

Whether leadership should be authoritarian or participative was another issue much affected by fascism and the Second World War. We have seen that in the Edwardian era there was great enthusiasm for Taylor’s idea of Scientific Management, in which the Manager would decide how work was to be done, and the Worker would do as he was told. But, be that as it may, in the years following Auschwitz management writers felt duty bound to show that autocratic leadership styles were unsuccessful.

*Authoritarian  
&  
participative  
leadership*

And their thoughts were able to reach a wide audience. Douglas McGregor advocated what he called Theory Y<sup>190</sup>,

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<sup>189</sup> Since Burns J McG, 1978, *Leadership*. Note especially Bass B M, 1985, *Leadership and performance beyond expectation*. New York : Free Press.

<sup>190</sup> McGregor D, 1960, *The Human Side of the Enterprize*, McGraw-Hill, New York.

and Rensis Likert what he called System 4<sup>191</sup> – in each case arguing, on the basis of rather thin research evidence, for job enlargement, participative leadership and decentralisation of power. A fuller theoretical base for this was devised by Chris Argyris, who argued that as people grew to true adulthood they acquired an autonomy which was incompatible with the dependency demanded by authoritarian management styles<sup>192</sup>. It's interesting that no serious attempt was made by these authors to see how these ideas stacked up in a non-Euroamerican context, for example in the economic ebullience of Japan, Taiwan and South Korea, where quite different studies of cultural norms were at the same time suggesting that individual initiative was much less valued than in the USA<sup>193</sup>.

Moreover, the extent to which enthusiasm for participative leadership has actually made much difference to leadership practice is open to question. Command-and-control styles are alive and well all over the place<sup>194</sup>, and even leaders who do not choose to use such a style may revert to it under pressure<sup>195</sup>.

Most of the more influential subsequent interventions on leadership have been variations on these themes. Participative leadership has increasingly been looked at with the aid of ideas of “followership”: an understanding that people being led can develop their ability to participate in

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<sup>191</sup> Likert R, 1970, “New Patterns of Management”, in Vroom V H and Deci E L, *Management and Motivation*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth.

<sup>192</sup> Argyris C, 1957, *Personality and Organisation*, Harper and Row, New York.

<sup>193</sup> Hofstede G, 2001, *Culture's Consequences: comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations* (2nd ed.), Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage Publications, ISBN 978-0-8039-7323-7; Trompenaars F, and Hampden-Turner C, 1997, *Riding The Waves of Culture: Understanding Diversity in Global Business*. Argyris had wisely pointed out that his argument was culturally restricted, though he did not develop the implications of this; certainly its assumptions look to be a good deal more fragile outside the suburban United States and northern Europe.

<sup>194</sup> Evan Rosen cited in *Performance Preview*, pub Ernst and Young, May 2011 p. 9.

<sup>195</sup> Dotlich D L and Cairo P C, 2002, *Unnatural Leadership: going against intuition and experience to develop ten new leadership instincts*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.

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decision-making rather than just do as they are told, and that successful leaders are able to pitch their leadership style so as to be attuned to (i) their own personality strengths, (ii) the situation and character of the group they lead, and (iii) the maturity of followership achieved by its members<sup>196</sup>. Participative leadership probably reached its peak with the idea of the leader's role being in the service of the group being led, or "servant leadership"<sup>197</sup>.

Studies of leadership tend to focus on the top leaders. This is possibly because researchers themselves get better lunches and more pay in such work. But it is also because top leaders are seen as very powerful. There is in psychology something called rather impenetrably the "fundamental attribution error": it means that people prefer to give personal explanations for other people's behaviour, rather than looking to situational causes for it. This means that we tend to see changes as being made by people on purpose, rather than simply being the outcome of impersonal market forces (which may be why it is easier to get an idea across by telling a story than by delivering a dry analysis).

*Celebrity  
leaders*

Thus a study of American press reports (and other evidence) in the 1970s found that when firms were doing very well or badly, rather than just coasting along, people were more likely to attribute this to the Chief Executive's doing, than to the market, or to an entrenched organisational culture, or to any other abstract imponderable which might

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<sup>196</sup> Fiedler F E, 1967, *A theory of leadership effectiveness*, NY: McGraw-Hill; Hersey P & Blanchard K, 1972, *Management of Organizational Behavior: Utilizing Human Resources*, Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice Hall.

<sup>197</sup> Greenleaf R K, 1977, *Servant-Leadership: A journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness*, Mahwah, NJ : Paulist Press (mind you, servant leadership is not a new idea, the Popes having described themselves as "servant of the servants of God" since the sixth century, though it is food for thought that this has apparently not been incompatible with a lot of authoritarian behaviour by the Papacy, especially in the late middle ages).

seem on reflection pretty likely to be the real influence at work<sup>198</sup>.

There will always be enthusiasm for formulas offering magical hope of improvement. And even people who are bright enough to spot that they are unlikely to win the Euro-lottery often fasten on their own character as something they may be more likely to control than the outside world. Hence nostrums such as Stephen Covey's self-help book *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, which sprang in 1989 from a soil made up mainly of Mormonism and the American Dream. It sold over 15 million copies, for it came at the right time: the 1990s saw a revival and burgeoning of the idea of the heroic transformational leader who drove the success of a company by his genius alone. Turbulent economic fortunes, of course, have now tarnished this model, which has often been overtaken by ideas of participative or distributed leadership<sup>199</sup>.

Like organisational change, leadership is action in a very complex environment, often full of organisational politics, where those aspects capable of being properly measured and controlled for are relatively limited. The real consequences of leadership actions, as a result, are hard to predict. So, like change, it is an area where science can make a contribution, but where informed good judgement is often the best guide. There are several theoretical

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<sup>198</sup> Meindl J R, Ehrlich S B, Dukerich J M, 1985, "The romance of leadership", *Administrative Science Quarterly*, vol 30 pp 78-102.

<sup>199</sup> Collins J argued that the "hero-leader" is an unstable though highly successful model (2001, *Good to Great*, Random House, London, p. 46: "the towering genius, the primary driving force in the company's success, is a great asset, so long as the genius sticks around"); see also Morrow I J, *Defining a New Type of Organizational Leadership: The Heroic Leader*, 1999, Faculty Working Papers: Paper 22 [http://digitalcommons.pace.edu/lubinfaculty\\_workingpapers/22](http://digitalcommons.pace.edu/lubinfaculty_workingpapers/22); Ainsworth P, 2009, *No more heroes? Does collaboration spell the death of the heroic leader?*, National College for School Leadership, Nottingham. See in addition Goffee R and Jones G, 2000, "Why should anyone be led by you?", *Harvard Business Review*, September.

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approaches which offer useful insights, but none which is manifestly superior.

A great deal of effort has been put into trying to spot personal characteristics that make for good leaders. This has come up with answers ranging from dominance to masculinity, and from extraversion to technical knowledge<sup>200</sup>; conscientiousness has also been linked to leadership success<sup>201</sup>.

*Is there  
a formula?*

However, it cannot be said that there are very consistent results from such studies, though we need not go so far as one recent survey of the leadership literature, which concluded that it was "...a strange mixture of alchemy, romantic idealism, and reason", and found that the lack of consistent, actionable findings prompted business people "...to wash their hands of the whole subject, talent shortage or no talent shortage."<sup>202</sup> It is important to get the focus right. Probably the most authoritative study found as long ago as 1948 that, while there are a few high-level common factors among leaders – who do tend to be relatively more intelligent, educated, vigorous, and high up the class ladder – it is not innate personality characteristics that make for good leadership<sup>203</sup>. The truth seems to be that the kind of leadership needed varies from organisation to organi-

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<sup>200</sup> Stogdill R M, 1974, *Handbook of Leadership: A Survey of Theory and Research*, New York, Free Press; House R J and Baetz M L, 1979, "Leadership: some empirical generalisations and new research directions" – in B M Staw (ed.), *Research in Organizational Behavior*, Greenwich USA, J.A.I. Press; Mann R D, 1959, "A review of the relationships between personality and performance in small groups", *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol 56(4), Jul, 241-270; Schaumberg R, & Flynn F, 2012, "Uneasy Lies the Head That Wears the Crown: The Link Between Guilt Proneness and Leadership", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.

<sup>201</sup> van Iddekinge C *et al.*, "Test of a Multistage Model of Distal and Proximal Antecedents of Leader Performance", *Personnel Psychology*, 2009 vol. 62 pp 463-495.

<sup>202</sup> Kramer R J, 2008, "Have we learned anything about leadership development?", *Conference Board Review*, 45, pp 26-30: a short but influential contribution.

<sup>203</sup> Stogdill R M, 1948, "Personal factors associated with leadership", *Journal of Psychology*, 23 35-71; Kramer 2008, without citing an evidence base, comes to similar conclusions.

sation and from situation to situation; and that in most cases a range of individuals can provide it.

How to recognise what skills match what situations is still debated. The key focus for a long time was on whether in a particular case a leader needed to focus his or her action on production or employees, since it was argued that the former was essential to maximise production capacity, at least in manufacturing firms, while the latter was a key to unlocking discretionary staff effort<sup>204</sup>. Yet a study in 1978 identified as many as 14 variables that might usefully be consulted, and the discussion continues to this day<sup>205</sup>.

So the answer may be not so much choosing the right leader, as for the leader chosen to adopt the right leadership style for the situation. There are, however, at least as yet, no agreed ground rules about what style might be right for a particular case, so that this choice must simply be left to the intuition of the leader.

That said, there is a fair amount of agreement that that style has to be one with which he or she can be comfortable, and good training for leaders can therefore achieve a great deal, addressing issues such as authenticity, which is always important in leadership, as well as more technical skills such as communication. We have seen how important people's trust in their organisation is, if they are to respect their unwritten contract with their employer, and how crucial in maintaining it is the behaviour of senior leaders (page 51). Personal contact with managers is vital for staff, as it enables them to use verbal and non-verbal cues to judge their sincerity and the worth of the messages they are

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<sup>204</sup> Steiner I D, 1976, "Task-performing groups", in Thibaut J W, Spence J T and Carson R C (eds), *Contemporary Topics in Social Psychology*, General Learning Press, Morristown NJ USA.

<sup>205</sup> Kerr S and Jernier J M, 1978, "Substitutes for Leadership: their meaning and measurement", *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, vol. 22 pp. 375-403.

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giving: bosses who hide in their office, sending out reams of written managerialist gobbledegook, will carry no conviction, and will damage morale and motivation<sup>206</sup>.

There may also be cultural factors involved, and managers of multicultural teams will need to be alert to this. Research in this area is not far advanced. Current indications are that resourcefulness and relationship skills are highly valued in managers across different cultures. Work-life balance skills, however, seem to vary greatly, being valued very little in Russia, and only moderately in Austria, Hong Kong, Japan, Taiwan and the UK, while they are much more highly thought of in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, Australia, New Zealand and Colombia<sup>207</sup>.

In recent years an important contribution to this debate has been made by turning the problem on its head, and trying to work out not what makes for good leaders, but what makes for poor ones<sup>208</sup>. For bad leaders are very costly: large US organisations have estimated the cost of a failed senior manager at over \$1m, not counting the effect on their colleagues' and subordinates' morale, stress and motivation; and it has been suggested (admittedly by someone with a vested interest in psychometric tests which might be useful if it were true) "that two thirds of existing

*Bad  
leader-  
ship*

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<sup>206</sup> Hope-Hailey V, Searle R and Dietz G, 2012, *Where has all the trust gone?*, CIPD, Wimbledon p 15;

<sup>207</sup> Gentry W A and Sparks T E, 2012, "A Convergence/Divergence Perspective of Leadership Competencies Managers Believe are Most Important for Success in Organizations: A Cross-Cultural Multilevel Analysis of 40 Countries", *Journal of Business Psychology*, vol 27 pp 15-30.

<sup>208</sup> The model text here is Hogan J, Hogan R and Kaiser R B, 2010, "Managerial Derailment", in Zedeck S, 2010, *APA Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, American Psychological Association, Washington DC, USA, vol 3 cap 15.

managers are insufferable and that half will eventually fail”<sup>209</sup>.

The main problems shown by poor leaders (in war, as well as in organisations) vary between studies, but are chiefly around interpersonal issues such as sensitivity to others, tact, political skills, dealing with conflict, weak emotional control, indecision, procrastination, and poor team-building (also to some extent around over-concern with detail, difficulties in adopting strategic change, selfishness and poor performance management). Research has, as usual, mostly been in the USA, but has reached similar results in Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the UK<sup>210</sup>.

These weaknesses, though falling within the range of normal personality and not strong enough to get them classed as personality disorders, are rather sensationally referred to by psychologists as “the dark side”. Most of them are ones which we all to some extent share, and which only become a problem when taken to excess. However, it is argued that they are often concealed early in someone’s career, and that they are more likely actually to become manifested in *senior* managers, because these may risk less by being rather more self-indulgent in their managerial behaviour, and are also subject to greater job pressures which can more often drive them to let down their emotional guard.

The fact that such problems seem to be so widely shared means that the issue cannot be addressed, collectively at least, by trying to select people who are altogether without them. There simply would not be enough of these, so such an approach would be a perfectionist mistake.

Training is a better answer, since simply improving managers’ self-awareness is likely to help them to correct

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<sup>209</sup> Hogan &c 2010, p. 3.

<sup>210</sup> Hogan &c 2010, pp. 5-10.

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the impact of these weaknesses for themselves<sup>211</sup>. People form habits of thought and behaviour in order to minimise the effort involved in dealing with repeated situations<sup>212</sup>. Such habits then become hard to break without conscious effort. But with help, reflection and practice, this can be done.

However, habits may have become so embedded that a lot of introspection is needed to bring them to the level of awareness needed. And work of this sort can go well beyond what most busy managers would expect of management coaching, and into the borders of psychotherapeutic counselling – which they may well resist, thinking that it implies a sickness or eccentricity which they do not experience and which it would be imprudent to acknowledge in a work context.

Another way of improving self-awareness is through 360° feedback, in which managers receive regular reports on their performance not just from their own line manager but from their colleagues at similar and more junior levels. This is an important tool, not least because poor leaders are often a good deal worse at managing their subordinates than at managing upwards (indeed, grooming their own managers may be what got them to where they are). Hence a good 360° feedback approach will often open up key issues which might otherwise fester throughout a career<sup>213</sup>. However, it does need to be properly administered, since a number of pitfalls can open up if it is done on the cheap.

An area of management which deserves special attention is first-line managers or supervisors. These are

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<sup>211</sup> Though it is not yet clear whether this is true, or usefully true, of everyone.

<sup>212</sup> Douglas M, 1986, *How Institutions Think*, Routledge, London; see also Iyengar S S & Kamenica E, 2010, “Choice proliferation, simplicity seeking, and asset allocation”, *Journal of Public Economics*, 94(7), 530-539.

<sup>213</sup> Kaplan R E, Drath W H and Kofodimos J R, 1991, *Beyond Ambition*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.

people whose role is described by the anthropologists as “liminal”, meaning that they are not quite wholly managers and not quite wholly workers, but on the boundary, sometimes one and sometimes the other, which is an uncomfortable place to be.

*Junior  
mana-  
gers*

Only one major study before the Second World War looked at the relationship between productivity levels and first-line supervisors: it found that there was one, but not why<sup>214</sup>. Subsequently, a good deal of effort was put at an Institute of Social Research in Michigan into leadership styles at first-line supervisor level; it suggested, satisfactorily in the post-war context, that autocratic styles were less successful than more participative ones.

However, by the 1950s it was emerging that there had been problems with the methods used in these studies, and that the true position was rather more complicated. For example, more autonomous groups were not necessarily more productive; whether supervisors adopted a participative style was often dependent not so much on their own skills or aptitudes, as on whether top management was sympathetic or not; and what was cause and what was effect were often rather arguable<sup>215</sup>. However, first-line supervisors are now back in fashion again<sup>216</sup>, following recognition that their role has grown with technical and organisational changes such as delayering<sup>217</sup>.

This is largely because supervisors are responsible for implementing staff management policies. In some large organisations this role drifted over to HR in the late 20<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Feldman H, 1937, *Problems in Labor Relations*, Macmillan, New York.

<sup>215</sup> Rose M, 1975, *Industrial Behaviour: theoretical development since Taylor*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth pp 163-166.

<sup>216</sup> eg Hales C, 2005, “Rooted in Supervision, Branching into Management: Continuity and Change in the Role of First-Line Manager”, *Journal of Management Studies* Vol 42, Issue 3, pages 471-506; see also “In Praise of David Brent”, *Economist*, 27 August 2011 p. 58.

<sup>217</sup> Kerr S, Hill K D, Broedling L, 1986, “The First-Line Supervisor: phasing out or here to stay?”, *Academy of Management Review*, 1986, pp 103-117.

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century, and may now seem rather a new task for line management; but, of course, this would be misleading, and it is a core part of the job. Supervisors are able to do much by example, for instance by carrying out appraisals enthusiastically and creatively instead of perfunctorily, or by making the effort to coach and enthuse their team. They can do the job of local leadership well, by being fair and open and consistent, by listening to their team and consulting them before making decisions, by judging sensibly when they need to supervise closely and when they can delegate. They should also feed their teams' views back to middle and senior management, so that the latter understand the impact of their own actions on the morale of the employees.

There is a loose package of people-management policies which has acquired the description of "HR policies and practices"<sup>218</sup>. The recent Purcell study of performance<sup>219</sup> has shown a good correlation between satisfaction with front-line leadership and such management policies, especially involvement, "respect shown by my line manager", communication and openness; and this was mostly tied in with a sense of commitment to the organisation. The case studies in this work showed some evidence, following expansion of the line manager role, of recruitment difficulties being eased and of praise becoming a new and material motivator. This reinforces in today's world long-standing evidence for the importance of the part played by line managers in motivating employees.

*"Human resource management" practices*

Above all, perhaps, supervisors have a key role in modelling actions for their teams. For example, in nearly all

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<sup>218</sup> Originally these were techniques designed to evade management-union confrontation through co-opting employee commitment to managerial goals: various quality initiatives, integration of personnel policies into strategic business planning, job flexibility, and non-union works councils (Millward N, 1994, *The New Industrial Relations?*, Policy Studies Institute, London, p 3); though quality is still on the list, the emphasis now tends to be around communication, involvement/delegation and skills acquisition (Purcell &c 2003 p 41).

<sup>219</sup> See page 53.

jobs, there are things you are told you have to do (the specified content), and other things which it would be useful to do (the discretionary content) – such as doing things a bit faster, or deciding what ought to be done in situations which your instructions don't cover. The main difference between good performance and adequate performance is that good performance has lots of discretionary content (although the strengthening of work standardisation, as briefly described on page 57, does tend to have narrowed the opportunities for it). A good supervisor will show his team that he himself does discretionary things, and will also encourage them to do discretionary things in their own jobs<sup>220</sup>.

The recent Hope-Hailey study<sup>221</sup> examined various patterns of trust in organisations and concluded that trust in line managers was the most resilient kind of trust relationship. It warned, however, that first-line supervisors, if abandoned by managers preoccupied with other crises, could easily “go native”, so that it was vital to make sure they understood the corporate strategy and behaved in tune with it<sup>222</sup>. The motivation and commitment of supervisors was looked at in the Purcell work, which found that provision of training and career opportunities, along with support from their own line managers, was crucial to sustain them<sup>223</sup>.

Consistency in the signals sent by senior management is vital for this. Work on why 60%-90% of quality initiatives fail has suggested that this is often down to short-termism. Consider this example. Typically, senior managers seek to impress directors by launching a quality improvement drive (for example by getting production right first time instead of relying on quality checks to identify errors). They are then

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<sup>220</sup> Purcell J, Kinnie N, Hutchinson S, Rayton B and Swart J, 2003, *Understanding the People and Performance Link: unlocking the black box*, CIPD London, pp 37-49.

<sup>221</sup> See page 51.

<sup>222</sup> Hope-Hailey R, Searle R and Dietz G, 2012, *Where has all the trust gone?*, CIPD, Wimbledon pp 22, 34-35.

<sup>223</sup> Purcell J, Kinnie N, Hutchinson S, Rayton B and Swart J, 2003, *op.cit.*, pp 67-68.

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pushed to improve short-term results (in the private sector, generally financial ones; elsewhere, often KPIs of some sort), and this has to be done by renewed emphasis on quality checks, diverting resource from the process improvements which were to bring about better initial production<sup>224</sup>. Junior managers, meanwhile, who have been acquiring quality skills (such as encouraging team autonomy and devolving their own authority), will then find this coming back to bite them as they are suddenly expected to deliver better old-style results, hindered by their bewildered teams who now feel empowered to challenge the new instructions. The new way of working has no time to bed down, and instead staff are worked harder in the old way<sup>225</sup>. The result is not at all satisfactory for anyone.

There is one additional matter here. A fair amount of work has been done on leadership teams, which suggests that analysis of team roles can be of importance in this area. Two team role analysis systems are in common use<sup>226</sup>, and their publishers make various claims for them, including that they identify several functions required to tackle projects (such as initiator, ideas person, co-ordinator, completer, auditor), and can be used to ensure that teams are not made up in ways which miss out key roles or skills.

*Teams*

These claims have not been borne out by robust independent tests<sup>227</sup>, but in practice users seem to find that

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<sup>224</sup> Soltani E and Wilkinson A, 2010, "Stuck in the Middle with You: the effects of incongruency of senior and middle managers' orientations on TQM programmes", *International Journal of Operations and Production Management*, vol 30 no 4 pp 365-397.

<sup>225</sup> See also Kerr S, 1995, "On the folly of rewarding A, while hoping for B", *Academy of Management Executive*; vol 9, issue 1; pg. 7 (originally published 1975: reprinted by popular demand).

<sup>226</sup> These are the Belbin Team-Role Self-Perception Inventory and the Margerison-McCann Team Management System.

<sup>227</sup> See for example Furnham A, Steele H and Pendleton D, 1993, "A Psychometric assessment of the Belbin Team-Role Self-Perception Inventory", *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, vol. 66, pp. 245-257; Fisher S G.,

the approach carries a fair amount of conviction. However, you cannot look at ideas like this too mechanically, not least because a chief officer who has a particular team role on the main board will also have quite a different team role elsewhere – on the board he might be the ideas person, but in his own department he will probably have a chairing/ leadership/co-ordinating role. So he needs to be able to perform *both* roles effectively...

Leadership involves a lot of fire-fighting, and so is by nature an activity liable to distraction. This is an essential characteristic of the task and cannot be eliminated. But many managers are swamped by it. Half the activities engaged in by the five Chief Executives in one major study lasted less than nine minutes, and only 10% exceeded one hour; while work on 56 U.S. foremen found that they averaged 583 activities per eight-hour shift, an average of one every 48 seconds<sup>228</sup>.

It is unsurprising that many find it hard to take purposeful action as a result. So it is essential that organisations take what opportunities there are to support their leaders' focus, through for example mentoring, coaching, emotional support and accountability processes<sup>229</sup>.

Planning can be a help or a hindrance here. The term is used to cover a set of rather different activities: plans can range from disciplined bureaucratic devices needed to make sure things happen the right way with the right resources at the right time, to feelgood portraits of a desired future; and

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Macrosson W D K and Sharp G, 1996, "Further evidence concerning the Belbin Team-Role Self-Perception Inventory", *Personnel Review*, vol 25 no 2, pp 61-67.

<sup>228</sup> Mintzberg H, 1975, "The Manager's Job: Folklore and Fact", *Harvard Business Review*, July-August 1975.

<sup>229</sup> Ghoshal S and Bruch H, *A Bias for Action*, Harvard Business School Press, 2004; Ghoshal S and Bruch H, 2010, "Management is the art of doing and getting done", *Business Strategy Review*, London Business School, Q2 issue, pp 70-75.

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they can have timescales ranging from a week or two, to decades into the future.

Nothing happens without a plan of some sort, but large organisations frequently squander vast amounts of resource on maintaining plans which are constantly rewritten yet which nobody ever seems to refer to or use. As with so many other aspects of organisational life, plans need to be tailored sensitively to their purpose and context, and jettisoned when their usefulness is over. There is no more than a smidgen of truth in the suggestion that it is the process of planning rather than the plan itself which has value. A good plan, well put together with the commitment of all involved, and then executed with care, attention and common sense, is an invaluable guide to action. And action is a part of organisational life to which we next turn.