

# **Equipping Managers for an Uncertain Future**

**Developing Your Managers  
on a Tight Budget**

**Blair McPherson**

*A volume in the series  
Management Development on a Tight Budget*



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# Preface

The job you are doing now will not be the job you are doing in two or three years time. The pace of change is getting faster and managers need to be equipped to keep up. This is why we face an uncertain future.

We no longer train people for a management post; we require all managers to have a set of core management competences which include managing finance, managing information, managing equipment and buildings and, most significant of all, managing people. This way they can cope with whatever uncertainty throws at them.

Manager's people-management skills are even more relevant when the uncertain future includes the certainty of a harsh financial climate when they are required to do more with less, to increase their spans of responsibility, to negotiate new ways of working and to keep partners on board when their instincts are to retreat to their core business.

This type of manager requires a management development programme which aims to develop generic managers, people with transferable management skills, people who have the confidence and ability to move from one service to another, people who are equipped for a fast changing and uncertain future.

Through executive coaching, management learning sets and mentoring individuals are encouraged to use the material in this manual to explore a range of typical management issues, to think about how their behaviour affects others and to identify the type of management behaviour their organisation is seeking to encourage.

The material in this manual focuses on life as a manager at a time of uncertainty, budget cuts, services reductions and redundancies. The aim is to get the reader thinking and talking about how you keep staff motivated, how you keep customers satisfied and how you will develop as a manager in the new climate of uncertainty and austerity.

The 52 concise and questioning reflections in this manual have been specifically written to help develop the differing types and qualities of managers that various organisations need, by encouraging reflection and discussion in:

- individual study
- group sessions
- supervision
- mentoring

They can be used as and when, to focus on matters arising, or they can be used systematically to help create a cost-effective management programme that is expressly tailored to your organisation's needs. They will help managers in your organisation develop greater flexibility.

Blair McPherson

***Equipping Managers for an Uncertain Future*** will help you improve and maintain high standards in your management of people, even as your organisation's resources for management development are being reduced. It is the second in a series of manuals called *Management Development on a Tight Budget* designed to help develop a cost effective approach to developing managers' whatever the nature of your business or size of your organisation.

Already published:

***People Management in a Harsh Financial Climate***

Developing your managers on a tight budget

In preparation:

***Managing a Diverse Workforce***

Developing your managers on a tight budget

***When Things Go Wrong: Disciplinarys, Grievances and Complaints***

Developing your managers on a tight budget

***Getting the Message Across***

Developing your managers on a tight budget

# Using this manual

## What is in this book

These 52 lively, relevant and challenging articles are presented with questions to stimulate thought and discussion. The material focuses on life as a manager at a time of uncertainty arising from budget cuts, services reductions and redundancies.

The aim of this manual is to get the reader comfortable with and skilled at ways of developing their management skills on the job . . . so they can adapt and address whatever the uncertain future brings. These on-the-job management techniques are:

- executive coaching
- management learning sets
- mentoring
- making informed decisions about your development as a manager
- group discussion

This is done by getting the reader thinking and talking about how you keep staff motivated, how you keep customers satisfied and how you develop as a manager. All are explored in the context of:

- Hiring, firing and rewarding
- Redeployment, redundancy and transferable skills
- Equipping managers to manage a diverse workforce
- How to be a corporate manager
- Managing your manager
- Doing more with less
- How to improve staff moral
- Managing mavericks
- Selling the budget
- The secret of outstanding leadership

This is not a manual that pretends to provide 'the answers'. What is right for one organisation at a particular time may be different at another time or in another organisation. So, questions are suggested to get readers thinking critically about the role of a manager, how a manager's behaviour affects others around them, and what specific management behaviour their own organisation is seeking to encourage.



## Who it is for

Anyone involved in developing aspiring managers, supporting new managers or mentoring ambitious managers in the public, voluntary and not-for-profit organisations. It is principally for those working in the people services, including children's services, adult services, social work, education, housing, community and justice services.

## Using this book in organisations of any size

This material is versatile and although it has been developed and used in a large organisation, it can be used in small ones too. It could be used as part of a formal management development programme, or be used by an individual as a self-help tool for developing management skills.

Whether through the encouragement of individual reflection or by stimulating discussion – in a group, or between two individuals – the intent is always to provide opportunities to explore:

- different ways of working
- alternative views on the manager's role
- how changing a manager's behaviour can impact those they manage and change the way things are done in the organisation.

So as to offer maximum flexibility, each of the 52 sections stand alone. Trainers, managers and mentors can pull out material that is relevant to each person they are supporting at any stage in their development. At its simplest, this involves individuals or groups reading an article and then using the questions at the end of each section to start a discussion. By sharing their views and experience with, for example, a group or their mentor, they can reflect on how they manage people and what they might do differently in the future. Those who are not yet managers, but aspire to be (or who just want to think about whether becoming a manager is their ambition) can read the material to get a better idea of what modern management is all about.

The guidance on photocopying this book, on page xiii, sets the context for sharing the content of this manual with mentors and mentees, managers at work and their supervisors, and groups. In each case you can use this manual to open up the debate within your organisation, or even in conjunction with partner organisations. The debate is thereby focused on a shared set of questions and concerns, but can go forward in directions that participating learners choose, or in those directions that your organisation wants to lead them.

Immediately after the section on photocopying permission is an offer to obtain this manual in electronic format, so as to assist its distribution, whether in printed-out hard copies or via your computer system. By buying the electronic version and posting it on your IT system, you can give all of your managers access to it at any time. The advantage of this is that managers, whether in some kind of organised learning, or not, can dip in and out of this discussion material, start to think about the issues it raises and reflect on their own practice.

In summary, the material in this manual can be used:

- by sharing the manual itself
- by distributing photocopies of sections from it (see page xiii).
- by placing all of the manual's learning material on your organisation's IT system (see page xiii).

Whether you run a small organisation, or help run a big one, using this approach and the material in this manual can make a major contribution to helping you develop the type of manager you require – despite the harsh financial climate.

### **Developing effective managers cost-effectively**

It bears repeating that the material in this manual is versatile. In each of the possible contexts for its use, in organisations large or small, a key consideration is that it encourages managers to draw on existing resources. This has at least two benefits.

1. it helps keep costs down.
2. it helps focus development on an organisation's specific circumstances and needs.

### **Meeting needs as they arise**

At any time, in organisations of any size, this management development material can be used to help individuals or groups reflect on a wide range of issues that arise in the contemporary management of people. As an example the section on recruitment should give the reader an insight into how organisations fill management posts and what they are looking for in candidates as well as a few tips on how to do well in the recruitment process. By asking questions, it goes beyond describing things as they are – to encouraging thought on how they might be better.

As such, this book is a useful resource to have on hand and to turn to as and when matters arise.

### **Systematic use of this manual**

The material in this manual can also be used in a systematic way by showing how to manage people by drawing on existing resources. This could, for example, be by way of a scheduled discussion of each section during weekly or monthly supervisions, after those involved have read and thought about a section for a few days. A similar approach could be taken in a mentor/mentee relationship, whether both mentor and mentee are in the same organisation, or from different organisations.

Furthermore, the manual's material can be used as part of a much longer-term, planned programme of management development, again with the emphasis on drawing on existing resources. To explain this as effectively as possible, it is useful first to consider the contemporary context of management training.

### ***The contemporary context of management training***

When budgets are tight, management training is particularly vulnerable as it is often seen as desirable rather than essential. This is especially true in a harsh financial climate. At the time of writing this book, the climate is harsh due to national political and global economic pressures.

But cutting management training is short sighted. When you have to make less go further, what you need is highly skilled and innovative management. So, either you recruit the finished article or you develop your existing managers. The former is not a viable option because you're fishing from too small a pool and, in any case, you require all your managers to be innovative and highly skilled as people managers.

Traditional management development is expensive. Frequently courses are developed with local universities allowing them to be tailored to your organisation's needs, with an emphasis on work related situations in return for a guaranteed supply of students. Managers enjoy the fact that they can bring in their work experience but their real popularity with them is that the resulting qualification looks good on the CV. Few employers can justify this level of expenditure on a small proportion of their managers when budgets are under severe pressure and this is not the most effective way of growing the type of manager specific to your organisation's needs.

What is needed is:

- A cost effective way of developing the leadership skills of large numbers of managers and moulding them in to the type of manager best suited to your organisation.
- Preferably without taking them away from their day jobs.
- Ideally through an approach that allows them to dip in and out when time and opportunity permits.

This manual, and the accompanying books in the *Management Development on a Tight Budget* series, demonstrates how such a management development programme can be built around learning sets, mentoring and the Intranet using the material provided.

Included within each manual in this series are:

- Brief guidance (in the appendix on page 112) on how to set up a bespoke management development programme using one-to-one executive coaching, management learning sets, 360 degree feedback, mentoring and management surgeries.

- Material to stimulate group and individual discussion within that context to challenge individuals to examine their own behaviour, and re-think how they could better respond to the management scenarios that are presented.

### **The benefits of using this manual**

The above section has been developed to help you see a range of the possible benefits that can accrue to individuals and organisations from using this manual, and the range of different contexts in which it can be used.

These benefits include:

- Low cost
- The management development budget can be stretched to offer something to all managers within the organisation.
- The material can also be used with aspiring managers as part of a grow-your-own approach.
- The material reflects the current economic climate with budget cuts, service reductions and redundancies and helps managers deal with these situations.
- The material develops managers' people management skills, giving managers increased confidence to deal with issues like poor performance, inappropriate behaviour or poor attendance.
- The material emphasises transferable management skills so better equipping managers for a future which is uncertain.

The following section outlines ways in which the author and publisher are offering additional ways of achieving these benefits, including:

- supplying copies at discounted prices
- granting copying permission
- supplying the manual in electronic format.

You are asked and encouraged to read the following section carefully if you are interested in any of these options.

# Copying permission and electronic supply of the learning materials

## Using the material within your organisation

For a definition of 'organisation', see the sidebox on this page.

### **Purchasers of this manual can photocopy the learning materials for use with up to three learners each year within their organisation.**

The learning materials are those pages in this manual marked with the footer: '© 2011 Blair McPherson *Equipping Managers for an Uncertain Future* www.russellhouse.co.uk'

### **Purchasers of this manual who wish to copy the learning resources for use with more than three learners per year within their organisation may:**

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- OR **buy the PDF version of the manual to post on their organisation's intranet** . . . Please use the coupon in the back of this manual to purchase the learning material in PDF format and thereby obtain permission to post the material on your intranet and copy the material across your organisation.

## Using the material in more than one organisation

Anyone who is providing training, education or mentoring to people from more than one organisation and who want to work with material from this manual should please make sure that each organisation buys a copy of the manual.

### **Definition of 'organisation'**

The permission given to 'organisations' for the use of the PDF version of this manual, is set out on pages xiii–xiv of this manual, whereby the author and publisher are happy for the manual to be:

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- Used across various parts of a health trust.
- Used within all parts of a large charity that is constituted as a single organisation.

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**Blair McPherson** was until recently Director of Community Services at Lancashire County Council. He has worked as a Deputy Director in Social Services and as a senior manager in a large Housing Association. He has been a member of the Professional Executive Committee of three Primary Care Trusts and works closely with a range of organisations in the voluntary, community and not for profit sector. His management career started in Birmingham City Council where he acquired his passion for equality and diversity and his recognition of the need for high quality management. He is a regular contributor to the professional press with over 150 articles published. He is the author of:

- *An Elephant in the Room: An Equality and Diversity Manual*, RHP (2007)
- *UnLearning Management: Short Stories on Modern Management*, RHP (2009)
- *People Management in a Harsh Financial Climate* RHP (2010) (part of the series *Management Development on a Tight Budget*) one.

## Acknowledgement

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# Introduction

The only certainties in life are death and taxes. When it comes to management we could add that the job you are doing now will not be the job you are doing in two or three years time. The pace of change is getting faster and managers need to be equipped to keep up. We no longer train people for a management post; we require all managers to have a set of core management competences which include managing finance, managing information, managing equipment and buildings and, most significantly, managing people. Managers' people management skills are often summed up as leadership skills, that is, the ability to inspire staff and the willingness to take responsibility. These leadership skills also include the ability to influence and shape decision-making and the ability to network and develop partnerships. Skills which become even more relevant in a harsh financial climate when managers are required to do more with less, to increase their spans of responsibility, to negotiate new ways of working and to keep partners on board when their instincts are to retreat to their core business.

This type of manager requires a management development programme which aims is to develop generic managers, people with transferable management skills, people who have the confidence and ability to move from one service to another, people who are equipped for a fast changing and uncertain future.

Through executive coaching, management learning sets and mentoring, individuals are encouraged to use the material in this manual to explore a range of typical management issues, to think about how their behaviour affects others and to identify the type of management behaviour their organisation is seeking to encourage.

The manual is divided into five parts. Each part describes a different management development technique, explains how it works and provides learning and discussion material. At the end of each piece of discussion material there are three questions to stimulate debate.

**Part One** is about executive coaching. The thinking behind this approach is that to develop as a manager you need to see yourself as others see you. You can get this feedback from those you work with or you can get it from an independent person – a coach who observes you in action and then discusses with you what they saw. The more honest the feedback the more useful it is in identifying what you need to work on. The material includes an example of a 360 degree feedback questionnaire which can be adapted to focus on people management/ leadership skills.

**Part Two** is about management learning sets. The idea is that managers can learn a lot from each other by sharing their experience. Managers from different professional backgrounds and different areas of business often think their problems are unique; they are not. The material in part two can be used to focus the group around typical management tasks like hiring, firing and inspiring staff or a discussion about how to 'do more with less'. At some point in their career a manager is going to feel vulnerable, maybe in relation to tackling a member of their



team over their attendance record or an accusation from an employee of discrimination or bullying. As HR restrict themselves to impartial advice and your line manager distances themselves, it is good to know that others in the group have been through this, and that being the subject of a grievance or complaint does not make you a bad manager.

**Part Three** is about mentoring. The idea is that every manager can benefit from guidance from a more experienced manager. A mentor shares their wisdom. Initially people tend to use their mentor for career advice help with putting together a CV or job application and preparing for an interview. A mentor can advise on how to deal with a difficult boss or an unhelpful colleague. A good mentor can also make you reflect on your management style. Often a mentor will say *I am a resource, use me as you see fit, we can discuss whatever you like*. But the mentee is uncertain about what issues to raise and how to go about it. The material in part three provides some relevant topics to explore together.

Some people are not managers, they think they would like to be a manager but they are not sure what managers do. **Part Four** is designed to help these aspiring managers. The material provides typical management scenarios, helps with the language of management and provides an opportunity to make an informed decision about becoming a manager rather than just falling into it.

Developing managers on a tight budget is all about providing them with material that is relevant to the day job, which answers practical questions, addresses topical issues and explores phrases that have suddenly become management speak. The material in **Part Five** supplements the material elsewhere in the manual. It focuses on life as a manager at a time of budget cuts, services reductions and redundancies. The aim is to get the reader thinking and talking about how you keep staff motivated, how you keep customers satisfied and how you change your management style in the new financial climate.

A case example showing how all five of these management development approaches can be used as part of a co-ordinated management development programme within an organisation is provided in Appendix 1.



## Part One

# Executive coaching

Executive coaching is based on one-to-one sessions in which the coach provides feedback to the individual. This feedback follows the coach's close observation, over a number of days or weeks, of the individual in a range of management situations:

- team meetings
- board meetings
- addressing large staff groups
- making presentations to multi-agency groups
- influencing and shaping strategies
- negotiating with partner agencies

The coach also provides feedback from the 360 degree questionnaires completed by the individual's colleagues and from direct reports. The aim is to help the individual gain insight into how their behaviour affects those they work with and manage.

Senior managers are not accustomed to getting direct feedback on how they are perceived by colleagues or a detailed assessment of their observed performance so this can be a very powerful tool. Some of the feedback may be blunt e.g. 'talks too much', 'needs to listen more', 'needs to recognise the need to move at the pace of the slowest ship in the convoy', 'can come over as demanding and impatient'. This needs to be balanced by plenty of positive feedback for example colleagues and direct reports may describe the individual as being supportive and making their expectations clear, people may also recognise passion and the ability to get things done.

The coach discusses this feedback with the individual, encouraging them to see themselves the way others see them and then asking how these perceptions can be changed. The payoff for

the manager who is prepared to risk exposing themselves in this way is that they can learn how to be more effective particularly around the people skills involved in shaping and influencing decisions, negotiating and networking.

The effectiveness of the executive coaching can be judged by the extent that colleagues' and direct report perceptions of the individual change. This can be measured by a 'before and after' 360 degree evaluation questionnaire, an example of which is included in this section.

*Do your staff think you're a better manager?*

You have completed the management development programme but how do you demonstrate it was money well spent? How should your manager judge whether this investment in your professional development is benefiting the organisation? Perhaps more importantly, do your staff think you're a better manager?

## Section 1

# 360 degree feedback

We are not always the best judges of our own strengths and weaknesses and one way of finding out how significant others see us is the use of 360 degree evaluations. The idea is to ask the people you manage, your colleagues and your boss to provide information about you as a manager: getting the views from this cross-section of people should provide a rounded picture of how others assess your strengths and weaknesses.

This approach can be applied to measuring the effectiveness of management training by undertaking 360 degree evaluation prior to management training and then again on its completion. If the management training has made a difference, then this should be picked up by those who work with and for you.

However, many 360 degree evaluation schemes rely on time consuming completion of forms, a software package to collate and analyse the responses and an expensive management consultant to interpret the findings. What's required is a simple and practical tool that is easy to use, quick to administer and requires no specialist knowledge to interpret.

In response to this an easy to use version of the 360 degree evaluation was devised to be used prior to and then immediately following the management development programme. The 360 degree evaluation format designed was based on taking managers core competencies from their job descriptions and rating these from one to six (one being poor and six being excellent). Using a rating of one to six required people completing the form to identify this competence as a strength or a weakness, rather than opting for the safe middle ground. The management competencies selected reflected people management skills, such as: the ability to communicate effectively, the ability to influence others, and networking skills.

Evaluating any training initiative has always proved problematic when the aim of training is to change people's behaviour and improve complex skills like managing people. The main advantages of this approach are that it:

- Recognises the importance of the views of those the individual manages and works with.
- Is an *easy to use* and *inexpensive* tool.

This dramatically increases the chances of it being used before and after the training whereas all too often the evaluation is neglected. The results from this 360 degree evaluation also identify areas for future development, thus reinforcing the idea that management development is not a one off event but an ongoing commitment.

### The 360 degree questionnaire

On a scale of one to six (one being poor and six being excellent) rate your manager on the following statements by circling your choice:

My manager is able to explain clearly their expectations.

1 2 3 4 5 6

My manager is able to communicate complex ideas in straightforward language.

1 2 3 4 5 6

My manager provides helpful and regular feedback on performance.

1 2 3 4 5 6

My manager knows me as an individual not just as an employee.

1 2 3 4 5 6

My manager is accessible and approachable (I feel comfortable raising work related issues, even sensitive issues).

1 2 3 4 5 6

My manager makes me feel valued and values what I bring to the work team.

1 2 3 4 5 6

My manager provides me with a clear set of priorities.

1 2 3 4 5 6

My manager supports my professional development.

1 2 3 4 5 6

My manager is an effective networker.

1 2 3 4 5 6

My manager is able to influence key decision makers.

1 2 3 4 5 6

My manager contributes effectively in meetings.

1 2 3 4 5 6

My manager takes a broader view and looks beyond the needs of own service.

1 2 3 4 5 6

My manager contributes to corporate initiatives.

1 2 3 4 5 6

## Part Two

# Management learning sets

The challenge is to develop a management development programme that can be delivered to a large number of managers within a timescale that is effective in changing the culture of the organisation. Executive coaching is effective for small numbers of senior managers but is too expensive and too time intensive to be a model for all the managers in an organisation. Management learning sets are a viable cost effective alternative.

A management learning set usually consists of 10 to 15 managers with two facilitators. Groups are more effective if they are made up of managers at the same level but from different service backgrounds and experience (for example operational managers as well as managers from finance, IT and policy). This will ensure a wide range of views and experience, it will encourage more options to be explored and it will quickly reveal that managers whatever their background face similar issues and challenges.

Typically a set might meet for half a day a month over a nine month period.

At each meeting a participant would introduce a live management issue for group discussion. The issue might be to do with recruitment for example giving feedback to unsuccessful internal candidates, managing absenteeism or understanding what it means to be corporate.

The material in this section can be used to help individuals identify topics and it can be used to start a discussion within the group. Individuals then share their experience. The facilitators ensure that ground rules are set and followed. These might cover confidentiality, allowing everyone to have their say and challenging in appropriate ways. The presenting manager is asked to sum up the discussion at the end and take forward, on behalf of the group, any issues with senior management or HR. I have found that the learning sets are even more effective if one of the facilitators is a senior manager. This provides a senior management perspective, and allows views to be expressed more directly rather than being conveyed second hand by a

trainer. This is very important if the aim is to change the existing management culture in an organisation. Senior managers also find this a good use of their time as they get lots of direct feedback about what is actually happening on the front line, as opposed to having it filtered through line management.



## Section 2

# Management isn't what you think it is

Management isn't about controlling people, it isn't about knowing things and it isn't about doing things. It is about asking good questions, freeing people up to get on with it and helping people get another job.

Management is not about knowing things. Put another way, being good at your profession doesn't qualify you for management. Lots of managers have excellent technical skills, they were a great engineer, a brilliant teacher, a skilful lawyer, an accomplished accountant but now they are a manager and they need to develop management skills. Managers should not spend time doing things because that usually means they are trying to do someone else's job, possibly drawing on those professional skills that served them so well in the past. Now they have to delegate and learn to manage people who have technical knowledge and skills in areas they don't. Instead, they must rely on their management skills. Management skills are about knowing the right questions to ask, the ones that make people stop and think, and those that demonstrate you are taking an interest. These are often 'how' and 'why' questions. Why are we doing this, how will this benefit customers?

Management is not about controlling people, it's about trusting them, building up their confidence in their own ability, and supporting them by removing the obstacles which stop them from doing a good job. This means delegating financial decisions so that the individual does not have to get authorisation from above before they do what they know needs doing. As long as someone stays within their budget, why do they need you to authorise expenditure?

In order to delegate tasks and decisions you have to help the individual develop the necessary knowledge and skills. This is not about sending someone on a course, it is about showing them how to do something, being there to answer questions and advise. Of course, delegating is initially time consuming, it's quicker to do it yourself, but in the longer term if you skill up someone, then that's another thing you don't have to do.

Why would someone want to take on more responsibility, learn new skills and increase their knowledge? Why, to get a better job of course! So, a good manager helps their best people to leave.

### Discussion Questions

1. Why can't you just tell someone to do what you say – after all you are the manager?
2. Don't people expect managers to have the answers, so isn't management about knowing more than those you manage?
3. Why would a manager want their best staff to leave?

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## Section 3

# No more heroes

Traditionally a leader is a charismatic individual who by sheer force of personality and will drives through change and makes things happen, a heroic figure. An organisation can only have one such leader. This approach to leadership does not encourage partnership working and co-operation. Yet increasingly it is recognised that one organisation or one Directorate working in isolation cannot effectively tackle health inequality, homelessness, juvenile crime, drug abuse, unemployment or discrimination.

Working through partnerships to co-ordinate efforts and pool resources requires a different type of leadership, one in which all managers are leaders. They inspire their staff, they take responsibility, they understand the impact their behaviour has on others and they have good people skills.

This requires a management development programme that views all managers as leaders. This view of leadership reflects a new type of public sector organisation, one that works in partnership with others and where senior managers model the type of management behaviour they want to encourage across the organisation.

An example of this type of public sector management development programme was developed in Lancashire County Council and is described below.

There are 500 managers in this Directorate. The Management Development Programme is based around executive coaching, leadership development groups, mentoring, shadowing and the aspiring manager's programme. The origins of the programme arose from the corporate management development Initiative which sought to emphasise that all managers, irrespective of their areas of responsibility or professional background, required the same management competencies and that one of these management competencies was good people management skills. The corporate management programme was a 'sheep dip' approach in which during a residential week, all managers were exposed to the same experiences, encouraged to recognise that they shared common challenges and had common skills and to promote more working across Directorates.

The executive coaching initiative was designed to build on this approach. The aim was to provide the top 30 managers in the Directorate with the opportunity of having detailed feedback on their performance as a way of helping them gain insight into the impact of their behaviour and then specific guidance or coaching to improve their performance. The detailed feedback was provided by one of two management consultants who would observe the individual in a range of management settings and activities over the equivalent of two working days. After each observation session one-to-one feedback was provided. The information from these sessions was supplemented by 360 degree feedback questionnaires completed by the

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individual's manager, colleagues and the staff they manage. For most senior managers this type of direct feedback was not something they had experienced since they first started out in their professional career. Despite some initial anxieties the evaluation showed that people found the experience positive and helpful.

The idea of 30 top managers acting as a leadership group grew out of the shared experience of executive coaching. The leadership group became a formal forum for discussing the type of organisation we wanted to be, the type of management behaviour we wanted to encourage and a way of getting out into the open some of the difficult management issues that people felt were being avoided.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. How can all managers be leaders – surely you only have one leader?
2. How would you go about persuading your organisation to offer managers executive coaching when budgets are tight?
3. How would you sell the idea of 360 degree feedback to managers and what would you do to ensure staff provided a frank assessment?

## Section 4

# The candidate blew me away but I didn't give them the job

'I really enjoyed that interview' the rest of the interview panel nodded in agreement. 'But they're not appointable' the interview panel again nodded in agreement. The candidate was enthusiastic, engaging, well prepared and a little bit cheeky. The presentation was one of the most entertaining, original and well informed I have heard in many years of interviewing. The candidate established an instant rapport with the interview panel and I knew this person would be a big success with councillors and board members.

If the interview had ended there the job would have been theirs, no question. But the interview didn't end there. The panel had a few questions. Nothing I thought that should prove a problem to this candidate based on their presentation. But I was wrong.

This was a senior management post and the advert had stressed the strategic nature of the post; the job was all about changing people's life for the better through strategic partnerships. This exciting and inspiring candidate was unable to make the step up from partnership working to strategic partnership working. Their focus was on the individual. I was willing them to make the connection with the bigger picture but each answer stopped short. Increasingly it became obvious just how 'small town' their experience was.

The questions presented the challenges posed by working in a complex organisation with a large staff group and a large budget, challenges the individual just didn't recognise. Enthusiasm and charm can't overcome lack of managerial skills and experience. Enthusiasm can carry you a long way and it certainly helps in engaging with people but it needs to be tempered with a recognition of the constraints as well as the opportunities of working in a political environment.

Sometimes very able people try and miss out a couple of rungs on the career ladder. Sometimes their sheer enthusiasm and engaging personality can help them gain a post they are not yet equipped to deal with. Once in post the lack of experience resulting from being promoted too quickly too soon is exposed, their credibility is questioned and their confidence undermined.

Sometimes the best thing that can happen to a candidate is not to be offered the post.

### Discussion Questions

1. If the interview is to be scored out of a possible 100 how many points would you allocate to the presentation and why?
2. One of the candidates needs a lot of prompting through out the interview but gets there in the end. How do you reflect this in your scoring?
3. The successful candidate will need enthusiasm and experience but which do you think is most important. Why?

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## Section 5

# **'You asked for it' – giving feedback to unsuccessful candidates**

It's disappointing and frustrating when the phone rings and you are informed that you have been 'unsuccessful this time'. Disappointing because you really wanted that job, frustrating because you are not really sure where you went wrong.

I always encourage people to ask for feedback and I always recommend interview panels provide it. However the best time to receive feedback is not when you have just been told you have not got the job but a few days later when you are less raw and better able to take in what you are being told.

Providing feedback at a later date also gives time for the interviewer to prepare, to review their notes they took at the time and to identify what would be most helpful to the candidate in improving their future performance. Generalised feedback like 'your interview was good but the successful candidate had more experience' is not helpful.

I usually start a feedback conversation by trying to establish how much insight the candidate has into their own performance. How do you think it went? Often the candidate admits they waffled on a couple of questions or that they were surprised by a topic or a line of questioning. Sometimes they say that nerves got the better of them on the day and they recognised they spoke too fast and said too much. These people will learn from any feedback you give them and it's often helpful to start by telling them which questions they answered well before moving on to discussing the questions they did not answer well. It's extremely helpful to explain to the candidate what would have been a good answer and what the interview panel was hoping to get from the candidate by asking that question.

Some people will realise that better preparation would have helped them anticipate the questions and therefore prepare an answer. The job advert and the person specification provide strong clues as to the areas that are likely to be probed in an interview. In these feedback conversations it often becomes clear that people thought a more complicated answer was required than is usually the case. For example I recently asked candidates in an interview for a senior management post what they understood by the expression 'business like' as in we want to ensure managers in this service become more business like. The panel just wanted candidates to identify activities like marketing, customer care, income generation, budget management and bench marking. A short simple question requiring a short simple answer.

Some candidates don't have much insight into how they performed. Initially you hope to let them down gently by saying that they were being a little over ambitious applying for this post and their lack of experience came across in their answers to the questions. You then illustrate this by quoting back to them their answer to one of the questions followed by the type of

response you were hoping for. Unfortunately even then some individuals don't seem to recognise the poverty of their performance. Recently once such individual made me run through all the questions that we had asked, with me gradually becoming more blunt in my feedback yet still they did not acknowledge the weakness of their performance. Instead they concluded the conversation by inferring the panel had asked the wrong questions!

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What is the most useful feedback you have ever been given?
2. You may have interviewed a lot of candidates for the post, how can you ensure you are able to give detailed feedback to any one of them?
3. A common weakness in interviews is for candidates to go for quantity rather than quality; for example to list all the partnership working they have been involved in rather give a couple of examples highlighting the lessons learnt and how this would influence how they would approach the job they are applying for. Think about how you might phrase a question to encourage a candidate to focus on the quality of their experience. Test out the wording on a colleague then draft what you consider would be a model answer.

## Section 6

# A brilliant first day

### How to induct a new manager

It's exciting and a little nerve racking starting a new job. This is true whether it's your first management post or the Director's job. If you're joining a new organisation you suddenly realise how much of your previous job was about knowing who to speak to and who was responsible for what?

A good induction not only helps you settle in quickly it's a clear indication of the type of organisation and the type of boss you have come to work for. Unfortunately managers, particularly senior managers, rarely give enough thought to the first day's experience and the induction of a new member of staff. Managers are busy. They leave the detail to others but a vague commitment to meeting the new starter in their first week isn't very welcoming nor does it give a reassuring message about future support. Sink or swim is not a good induction policy. Managers are not very good at the practicalities so sorting out a laptop, mobile phone, car parking pass and ID card are likely to be delegated to their PA. The induction programme may be nothing more than asking the post holders secretary to arrange one to ones with their direct reports and leaving it to these manager's to arrange visits and meetings.

A good induction starts before the individual arrives.

- How did you keep in contact between offering them the job and their first day in post?
- Was there a hand over with the previous post holder?
- What did you tell colleagues about the successful candidate?
- You sent them lots of information prior to the interview about the organisation, the job description and the priorities but that was months ago. What's the current position of the budget and have the priorities changed?

So what makes a brilliant first day? It's a good start if they are expecting you and have reserved some where for you to park. Your line manager is there to greet you and has put aside a hour to welcome you, to explain what's expected in the first few weeks, to give you permission to get out and about to meet staff in your service and to visit the more distant establishments before your diary becomes full of meetings and your inbox full of e-mails. It helps if you're introduced to a few people but not taken round the whole building and expected to remember everyones name and what they do. In fact it's important not to over load people with information or burden them with a list of unresolved issues and problems which have been waiting for them to arrive to sort out. The best thing you can do is book in some time each week for the first four or five weeks to answer their questions. Then you can meet on a monthly basis for a one to one to agree priorities, set updates and offer advice and support.

Some information is useful in a big and diverse organisation so it will take you a while to find your way around and identify who is responsible for what. However you will find the organisation Intranet provides structure charts and a comprehensive who's who and one advantage of the open plan office is there are lots of people around to ask. It's useful to know that local traffic conditions mean you need to give yourself extra time when travelling to certain locations. The fact that the Chief Executive is a big football fan and supports Liverpool may appear less relevant.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. How was your first day in your current job?
2. Describe your induction as a new manager in a new organisation.
3. How would you rate the induction you provided for the last person to join your team?



## Section 7

# Who is making you sick?

- Does your boss make you ill?
- Do your colleagues make you sick?
- Is it the work, the place or the people?

Something is making a lot of people ill in the public sector. Absenteeism levels continue to be higher than in the private sector. In the current financial climate we simply can't afford high levels of absenteeism. Absenteeism in local government is highest in areas like Social Services. When it comes to managing attendance does the caring profession have to become less caring?

The single biggest reason given for long-term absence from work is stress. This is not a medical diagnosis but a phrase used to describe a situation where an individual is not sleeping or eating properly, maybe drinking more and having mood swings which they attribute to something that is happening at work. An employee may have a stressful home situation caring for young children or a frail elderly parent and any problems at work just tip the balance.

Some staff report a bad atmosphere and tension in their place of work arising out of personality clashes between individuals or cliques which rule the roost and make the lives of non members miserable. This may have a racial or sexuality dimension as in 'people are excluding me and talking behind my back because I am gay'.

It may be the nature of the work. Absence levels are higher amongst staff that have direct contact with the public. This could be the receptionist, the housing officer or the social worker who is in the firing line for the frustration and anger that someone feels about their situation. Providing hands on care and support to older people who have dementia, people with a learning disability who have challenging behaviour or working with individuals who are severely depressed is physically tiring and emotionally draining. Is it so surprising if staff sick notes refer to exhaustion?

Maybe it is down to an over demanding boss who sets unrealistic timescales, issues conflicting priorities and is critical and unsupportive. Perhaps the boss is fronting up public meetings to announce service cuts, dealing with angry service users, deleting posts and identifying staff to be made redundant. Doing the job of two managers whilst feeling increasingly vulnerable and knowing if anything goes wrong they will be held accountable only contributes to the stressful condition.

None of these situations will be resolved by more effective monitoring arrangements or tougher policies and procedures or encouraging staff to eat healthier and exercise more. What

these issues have in common is a need for better people management skills. Managers who have insight into how their behaviour affects others, managers with the confidence to tackle rather than avoid difficult issues, managers who know how to support their staff and managers who have access to peer group support.

Whilst better people management on its own won't solve the absenteeism problem, it will go a long way to creating a healthier work environment.

I may be overstating the impact of individual managers but I don't think so: how else can we explain dramatically different absence rates between two day centres or two residential homes?

### **Discussion Questions**

1. How can managers reduce absenteeism?
2. What does 'zero tolerance' mean when applied to verbal abuse, racist comments or violence against staff? Under what circumstances would you still expect staff to provide a service despite the individuals behaviour?
3. Under what circumstances do you feel uncomfortable about tackling someone about their attendance record?

## Section 8

# Redundancy, redeployment and transferable skills

It is becoming increasingly obvious that the financial crisis will dramatically change the way the public sector looks in the future. Many outside the public sector and some inside, consider that the management structures built in the good times are bloated, unaffordable and unsustainable. Slimmer structures are predicated with fewer tiers and greater spans of responsibility. This will inevitably mean redundancies and redeployments. The survivors will be those who can demonstrate transferable skills, the ability to work across traditional service boundaries and the ability to manage without knowing the detail. This will come as a shock to some colleagues.

Recently a shoe shop manager was appointed to a management post in the Registrars service. This was much to the disapproval of some colleagues who felt the individual's lack of a professional background in the service should have disqualified them. 'What will they know about the service and the procedures?' It was apparent that these colleagues did not give as much value to the experience of hitting income targets, managing a large staff group, operating a seven day a week service, dealing with customer complaints, and dealing with building maintenance and security as did the interview panel.

As a result of financial pressures many of us will find ourselves doing the work of two people. This will require us to look at how we are spending our time. Which meetings are essential? Am I doing this because of who's asked me to do it, because I enjoy it or because it's crucial to the business?

Fewer managers means greater spans of control, working across client groups and across service areas and being responsible for services you do not have a background in. It means knowing less about more and more, since the more services you are responsible for, the less you will be familiar with what is going on in these services. You will be more reliant on your managers telling you what you need to know. You will worry more about what you don't know which some will find stressful. Keeping yourself informed will require regular one to one's. With twice as many managers directly reporting to you it will be essential to plan these one to one's. Rather than saying your door is always open, dates will need to be booked in diaries.

The informal catch up will need to be replaced by a more structured approach with an agenda agreed in advance, providing progress reports and alerting you to any emerging issues or politically sensitive situations. This means these meetings will need to take place at least four weekly if you are not to be inundated with backside covering e-mails and overwhelmed with 'for information' briefing notes.

The traditional weekly team meeting will be seen as a luxury. In any case the team meeting will no longer be relevant. Your managers represent such a diverse range of services there is little by way of a common agenda. Corporate briefs can be provided electronically.

Not so much a brave new world for managers as a scary new world. A world which focuses a lot more on management skills and a lot less on professional knowledge. A world where you are responsible for more but know less. A world where you need to empower managers because you haven't the capacity to micro manage. A world where you need to encourage managers to be innovative in order to do more with less. All of which means you're less in control – scary.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What are transferable management skills?
2. How can manager's best deal with increased spans of responsibility?
3. What changes could you make to the way you manage your team in order to increase your capacity?

## Section 9

# Doing more with less

The harsh financial climate in the public sector means we will have to do more with less. But what does doing more with less mean?

- Is it another way of saying be more efficient?
- Is it part of the myth that there are some painless options for reducing spending without cutting services or reducing staff?
- Is it a belief that technology will save us if we just embrace it?
- Is it based on an assumption that if you have less managers they will concentrate more on what's important?
- Does it reflect the view that the best way to improve a service is cut its budget, and, in so doing focus minds and force people to be innovative?

It's difficult to argue that any organisation couldn't be more efficient but if the price means being less effective is that acceptable in public services? Should the NHS use cheaper but less effective drugs? The NHS spends millions on drugs yet primary care trusts want GPs to use cheaper generic drugs. GPs want the right to prescribe branded drugs if they think they will be more effective.

In the public sector costs are mostly about staffing and the number of people employed. So efficiencies are about getting staff to work harder and longer, to pay them less or get someone else to do it cheaper. Alternatively you can replace some teaching posts with cheaper teaching assistant posts and not pay them for school holidays. Instead of using expensive supply teachers to cover for absent teachers you can use cheaper teaching assistants. Of course this may impact on quality. The NHS is often criticised for using expensive agency nurses, but if a hospital bans the use of such staff it may find it has to close a ward due to staffing shortages – with the result that waiting list for operations will increase.

Another way of doing more with less is to use economies of scale in procurement, that is to get together with others and negotiate a discount for bulk purchasing. This can work with office furniture or computers but it's difficult to see how this would work in buying residential care for older people where block contracts are to be replaced with people having the money to buy their own care.

Accommodation for all these staff is expensive so if we can get more staff into fewer buildings we will be more efficient. Hence the fashion for hot desking, mobile working and home working. This is also an example of making use of technology like Blackberries and laptops to enable people to work away from the office.

Another example of embracing new technology and reducing admin costs is electronic filing. Do you know how much it costs just to rent the floor space for all those filing cabinets? Of course everyone should do their own typing. The typing pool is a thing of the past, no-one has their own PA any more, but on the down side, how many hours a day does a manager spend wading through e-mails?

Reducing the number of managers without having an adverse effect on frontline services sounds attractive and would appear to constitute doing the same with less. However, increasing an individual manager's span of control and responsibility, or removing a tier of management, essentially means someone doing the job of two people. As this is not achievable within the working week decisions have to be made about what will and won't get done.

Partnership working is often given as an example of how duplication could be removed and how, if people would only just look at the bigger picture and take a whole systems approach, then they would see it was in their interests to work together to achieve common goals. The only problem is that managers tend to be judged against their performance in areas specific to their organisation and their responsibility. The NHS might see the value in tackling homelessness, poor housing or long term unemployment in improving people's health, but hospital managers are focused on waiting lists. There is also a tendency when budgets are tight and services are being cut, for organisations to retreat to core business and shunt costs to partners. Hospitals seek to discharge elderly patients from expensive acute beds as quickly as possible hence forcing some to go into expensive residential care, paid for by someone else. A jointly funded health and social care rehabilitation service would allow for speedy hospital discharge and prevent unnecessary admissions, but why should the NHS contribute to funding if it can get the local authority to pay for it?

Back office savings are often presented as a painless way of reducing costs. The aim is to deliver the same service for less. An example of this in local authorities is the centralisation of the human resource function. Why do departments need their own HR staff? Bring them all together in one smaller team and save on management costs.

Why not also outsource the majority of the work which is around administration – for example placing job adverts, sending out job application forms, arranging interviews, sending out letters of appointment etc whilst at the same time retaining the expertise around employment legislation.

The risk is that some of the work that was carried out by HR is now left to managers. This may not be the best use of their time and of course, as a result of reducing management posts, they are already doing more with less help following the reduction in admin posts.

It is possible to do more with less, but this may result in doing less and doing it less well.

## **Discussion Questions**

1. How is the expression 'doing more with less' used in your organisation?
2. What would be the advantages and disadvantages of out sourcing 'back office' services in your organisation?
3. If you end up with fewer managers in your organisation what would you suggest managers stop doing?

## Section 10

# How to be a corporate manager

The difference between yesterday's managers and the manager of tomorrow is the breadth of their vision. Head down and blinkered just won't do. Today's manager needs to be more aware and more involved in what's going on around them, in particular what's going on in other services and other parts of the organisation. It's no longer just senior managers who are expected to be corporate. Each service needs to be clear about the contribution it will make to the organisations goals.

It's not so long ago that a manager told me being corporate meant you had to take people off the redeployment list. In so far as this recognises staff work for the council as opposed to social services or education this is true but is much more. Being part of one organisation means resisting the temptation to make special pleading for your service or department. As in why you shouldn't be required to make budget cuts or why you should keep your own IT department or human resources staff.

As organisations try to rationalise their support services in order to make efficiency savings managers corporate credentials are tested. The role of manager continues to change yet many managers have still to understand the implications behind the expression 'one organisation'.

### Discussion Questions

1. Do they see it as losing their HR staff?
2. Do they argue their managers training needs cannot be adequately met by a corporate management development programme designed to meet the common needs of managers across the organisation?
3. Do departments complain they haven't the capacity to free up managers to participate in corporate working groups?
4. When it comes to equality and diversity, community cohesion or economic development do departments do their own thing or do they recognise that such issues can't be tackled by services or directorates working in isolation?
5. Do departments complain about slow ships in the convoy or see themselves as all in the same boat?
6. Do managers think their departments approach to annual appraisals is the best way and resist attempts to standardise the process across the whole organisation?
7. Do managers invite colleagues from other departments to be part of interview panels to fill posts in their service or are such invitations only extended to external partners?

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8. Is there a willingness to learn from the experience of another service/department or are you more likely to read about an example of best practice in your organisation through the professional press?
9. Do people in other parts of the country, in the same area of business, know more about what you're doing than colleagues in another part of your own organisation?
10. At meetings with partner organisations do managers represent their service/department or the organisation?

## Section 11

# The Godfather

'No-one leaves this room until . . .' I didn't hear the rest of the sentence as I was pondering the menacing tone and veiled threat of these words. The suits sat round a large, long table. At the top of the table sat the boss of bosses and next to him the money man. We were all playing the numbers game but the take was down. The capital projects would have to be put on hold. Contracts were to be taken out. Some people didn't realise when they were onto a good thing maybe someone should tell them. We would negotiate by making them an offer they couldn't refuse. Accept the new terms and conditions or join the unemployed. A reporter from the local rag was asking questions. Make sure people know what to say. Would the politicians play ball? They want to get re elected don't they! Word had come back that some individuals were taking liberties; bosses were told 'keep your people in order'.

Money or the lack of it and fear for your own future – these senior management team meetings were becoming more like something from a mafia movie. But as the chief executive said 'it's not personal it's just business'.

Is this the new business model for the public sector? Is strong management back in fashion?

### Discussion Questions

1. How would this more confident and assertive style of management deal with issues like high levels of absenteeism and budget cuts?
2. Why should you own unpopular decisions made by senior management? What will happen if you don't?
3. In a harsh financial climate pay is cut, people are made redundant, services to vulnerable people are reduced and deals with partners are renege. How do you maintain your integrity and still do the job you're paid to do?

## Section 12

# Equipping managers to manage a diverse workforce

Managers in the public sector are often not well equipped to manage an increasingly diverse work force. Many managers have not acquired the necessary confidence and skills to deal with situations which have a racial dimension or involve a gay or disabled member of staff.

In the past the response has been a short recruitment and selection course to ensure managers follow procedures designed to reduce the risk of unintended discrimination supplemented with an equal opportunity training course aimed at making managers more culturally sensitive and aware. However this limited training does not equip managers to manage a diverse workforce, to deal with people who hold different values and views and who spend their time outside work very differently. It doesn't equip managers to resolve conflicts between members of staff which may or may not be to do with their race or sexuality. It doesn't equip managers with the necessary people management skills.

Managers need to recognise that people bring into the world of work their experience of the wider world. If that experience is of prejudice, discrimination and constant negative stereotypes in the media, then when they are overlooked for promotion or are unsuccessful in gaining a place on a course or are excluded from conversations or believe people are talking about them behind their back they will ask themselves, 'is it because I am black?' If the response of management is dismissive then these staff will take this as further evidence the organisation does not recognise prejudice and discrimination except in its most blatant forms. However if management appears to willing to interpret any complaint by a black member of staff as evidence of racism, then the staff group as a whole will lose confidence in management and lose faith in the fairness of the organisation's procedures and policies. What's true about race is also true about sexuality, gender, disability and faith.

Management is about managing people and the more diverse the people the more challenging the task.

If a manager lacks the skill and confidence to address an issue of poor attendance when faced with a member of staff who claims this is harassment. If a manager struggles to deal with a member of staff who responds to being taken to task for failing to meet agreed deadlines, by citing bullying as the cause. How much more difficult will they find it to deal with a member of staff who responds with allegations of racism, complains of harassment due to their sexuality or accuses the manager or insensitivity to their disability.

The individual may well perceive that their treatment is because they are black or gay or disabled but that does not make it so. The manager needs to have the skill and confidence to manage a diverse workforce and to be sensitive to issues of race, gender, disability, faith, age,

and sexuality. However, this does not mean that he has to let poor practise go unchallenged, inappropriate behaviour go unchecked or tolerate lower standards of work.

To gain the skills and confidence to manage a diverse workforce managers need to develop their people management skills. This can best be achieved through management development programmes that emphasise 360 degree feedback, coaching, mentoring and action learning sets. These support/learning forums can then be used to explore scenarios based on the type of situations managers find themselves in. Either with their mentor or in their learning set managers can work through these scenarios.

## **Discussion Questions**

1. What is your experience of:
  - dealing with an attendance issue when the member of staff has a disability.
  - dealing with a conflict between two members of the team when one is black.
  - responding appropriately to a member of the team who claims they are being excluded and people are talking behind their back because of their sexuality.
  - dealing with resentment arising out of a member of staff's request for annual leave to fit in with religious festivals?
2. Is it likely that you will come across issues like this at some point?
3. What would increase your confidence in dealing with these types of situations?

## Section 13

# Equality and diversity training scenarios for managers

The purpose of these scenarios is to elicit and develop participants' managers understanding of dealing with equality and diversity issues that may arise in the workplace.

### *Physical disability*

1. An employee (A) with a hearing impairment asks a question in a staff meeting. You are having difficulty understanding their speech and have asked them to repeat their question a number of times. This is becoming embarrassing. The meeting is scheduled to last for 30 minutes and other employees are raising their hands to ask questions. You tell A you will answer his question at the end of the meeting.
2. A member of staff has a senior position in the company. She is in a wheelchair due to a decline in her multiple sclerosis. She says she is happy to continue with her work but expresses concern over a change in her colleagues' attitude towards her, and their treatment of her. She cites three examples:
  - (a) Their lack of direct eye contact when discussing work issues.
  - (b) Whispering when she is in the office, to her exclusion.
  - (c) Talking down to her (physically and verbally).
3. A member of staff at work has a stammer. Nobody appears to mock him for this. In general, his colleagues try to help him by finishing his sentences for him. However, he appears sullen and angry at work whenever he has a conversation with them.

### *Gender or sex discrimination*

1. A female member of staff complains that she is being passed over for promotion, as employees who are promoted seem to be those who work long hours (on average, up until 8pm) and who are expected to travel. She is unable to do this as she is a lone parent and requires flexible working hours. You argue that the job demands networking, hence the travel, and a strong work ethic as the unit is small and needs to survive the current economic downturn and the re-structuring that is taking place.
2. A member of staff (J) has informed you, and colleagues, that she is undertaking male-female gender realignment. She acknowledges that most members of staff have been supportive but is concerned and upset by sniggering and sarcastic comments from other members of staff (e.g. 'come on ladies . . . and I use that term in the loosest possible sense'). When she has confronted these staff, they insist she is 'paranoid' and the comments weren't

directed at her. You, as a manager, are also aware that two female members of staff have confidentially expressed their unhappiness at J going to the female toilets.

#### *Sexual orientation*

1. A male member of staff (B) comes to you and confides that he feels under pressure at work. He believes that he is being isolated and excluded, possibly because of his sexuality. He cannot identify any specific incidents of direct discrimination against him. However, he noted that the office supervisor often used the expression 'that's gay' about anything he considers substandard (e.g. poor photocopying). B has mentioned that he doesn't like this term but the office supervisor replied that it was 'just a figure of speech'. B is also uncomfortable that the supervisor is talking about putting an office football team together but has only asked men who he thinks 'would be most likely to play', and has not included B.

2. A member of staff is involved, as a side interest, in an LGBT sub-group within the department. Since letting her colleagues know of her sexuality through this group, she is concerned that she is being excluded, although acknowledges that she may 'be feeling insecure about how others are reacting to the news at the moment'. She noted that she had not been invited on the works night out (she was last year, before she discussed her sexuality) and that her comments appeared to be ignored in meetings, then when others repeat the ideas she made earlier they receive the credit for them.

### **Age discrimination**

1. A man in his 60s works with a team of colleagues in their 20s and 30s. The team, including the manager, often go out socialising but don't ask him along. He finds out that they discuss work issues during those trips and feels undervalued and left out.

2. A supervisor wishes to undertake training along with two of her staff. She is told that, as she will be retiring in two years, this would not be a good investment on the department's part. While the other employees are allowed to go, she is not permitted. She has 19 years service with the department.

3. You are told by a trusted member of staff, who has been assigned as a line manager to a new employee, that she is 'not pulling her weight' and 'keeps making mistakes'. The new employee is still on her probationary period. When you speak to her about the concerns raised, she busts into tears and complains that her line manager is withholding information she requires to do her job and is not complying with her requests for key pieces of information. Furthermore, she believes that he treats her like a 'child or a young assistant' due to her age. She adds that she will inevitably make mistakes because of this abuse.

#### *Race, ethnicity and beliefs*

1. Two white British men and one black British male apply for the post of director of a project you have the responsibility of managing. You think one of the white applicants performed

better in interview and give him the job. The black British male expressed concerns about racial discrimination, pointing out that he has better qualifications than the man who was appointed.

2. A member of staff from another department telephones you. They are from Bangladesh, having moved to the UK ten years ago, and speak English as a second language. You are unable to establish their needs because you cannot understand their accent. You summarise what you think they are saying and ask them to speak more slowly as you are having problems understanding what they are saying. When you put the phone down, you mention this member of staff's name to your colleague, who agrees that this person is difficult to understand and suggests that they should have an interpreter on site.

3. You are the manager of a thriving unit; central to its success is the emphasis on maintaining an 'impeccable corporate image'. Your department dress code requests that staff do not wear headgear, must be clean shaven and must dress modestly. Exceptions to some of these rules have been made for staff who are required to wear specific clothing for religious reasons e.g. turban or burkha. However, one member of staff has been refused the right to wear a hat on the grounds that his Rastafarianism 'is not a religion'.

4. A number of your employees request holidays over religious festivals. Most recently, two members of staff who are Hindu in faith have requested five days off for Diwali. This is due to fall in October or November, which is the busiest time of the year for the company. You are tempted to grant the request but other staff are angry, stating that this will put too much burden on their workload over a busy period.

5. Mohammed is a member of your team. John, another team member, would always be the first to acknowledge how good a worker Mohammed is but would in the same breath say you need to 'watch him with his rucksack' which he carries to work daily. John was always known as a practical joker so team members would just laugh and dismissed John as silly and not pay him much attention. However when a new member of staff joined the team John was always the one who showed them around and every time he introduced Mohammed to them he would always make a crack about Mohammed and his rucksack even though he would do this out of hearing of Mohammed. Mohammed got to know about John's remarks and became upset, reporting to you that he should not have to put up with John's behaviour. You know John for years and believe that he is only jesting so you are not inclined to do any thing about Mohammed's complaint.

### **Physical appearance/background**

1. You are involved in interviews for catering staff. Your manager tells you 'Make sure that candidate doesn't get the job. They looked really scruffy'.

2. Your department advocates and promotes a strong health policy for all. One team member is often taking time off for hospital appointments or GP's appointments. You noticed that she

is significantly overweight and is often breathless. She is a very good worker and contributes well to the overall work of the team and is competent and very skilled. I just wish she would talk to me, maybe I could help her. How far can I go, as a concerned manager, in showing concern about her welfare? I certainly wouldn't like to lose her.

3. A member of staff has worked with you in accounts for six months and appears honest and highly motivated. However, you have just been told that he comes from a traveller family who are notorious criminals and he should not be trusted. You are concerned at the implications of this.

#### *Mental health*

1. A young man is employed as a carer. He is intellectually bright and generally a hard worker but comes in late at least twice a week. When you speak with him, he says he is taking anti-psychotic medication which makes him drowsy first thing in the morning. You were unaware that he was taking this medication or had a mental health problem before employing him.

2. Two candidates apply for a promotion. Both are well qualified and have a significant amount of experience. Candidate A, however, took six months off work with depression the year before. You are struggling as a team to meet all the necessary caseload requirements. A and B are both appointable. Although you like candidate A, your preference was for candidate B because you believe she will be a more reliable employee and you can't afford to take any chances. The panel were also in favour of appointing B for the same reasons. What should we do?

#### *Generic bullying, harassment and work-related stress*

1. Two members of staff working on a specific project come to see you. They complain that they have had to do most of the work towards this project and that other staff members in the group leave work early while they stay 'after-hours' to complete tasks. This reached a peak the previous day when the group needed to finalise a document and work that was supposed to have been written by other staff was not produced. This resulted in a major argument and the working atmosphere is now 'hostile and tense'. The pair are confident that they could do this work as a pair and ask if they can complete the project themselves, excluding the members of staff who have 'let the team down'.

2. You explain a work procedure to an employee colleague, who you have supervisory responsibility over. He doesn't understand, so you explain it again, spending time explaining this conceptually. The employee says he still doesn't understand. You re-explain, carefully checking for any particular difficulties. However, the employee becomes quite frustrated, stating that he doesn't understand 'anything you are talking about' and says there is a problem with your communication skills. You think he is stupid! After an hour, you both leave feeling angry and de-motivated.



3. A team-leader comes to you stating they are feeling stressed out and anxious due to their heavy workload; this is the third time in six months they have complained about this. You have attempted to reduce their workload but are not prepared to do so this time as they are, in your opinion, doing less work than other team leaders.

4. As a manager you have very little time so you communicate information to your staff via e-mail most of the time. However, a member of staff approaches you to say she is feeling stressed and harassed because of being 'bombarded' by your e-mails. She says that other members of staff feel the same but, when you call them into your office, they say they are not feeling bombarded. What do you do?

### *Religion*

I manage a team of eight, five of whom are practicing Muslim. All five are friends and requested the same time off during Ramadan pointing out that the time off requested is an important time for worship and celebration. You know the significance of this religious festival in the Islamic calendar but feel that the service you provide would almost come to an halt if you were to give all five the time off, what do you do especially as Mohammed quoted a passage from the Qur'an which would seem to make it clear that it is essential that they get the time off. He further cited The Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003 stating that they could take a case against me on the grounds that they are being treated differently on grounds of their belief if they were not allowed to get this very important time out for prayer. He also pointed out that I did let Agnes have time off when she had a religious festivity. Agnes is Catholic.

### **General questions to consider:**

Looking at each of the scenarios, consider some or all of the following:

1. What is the equality of opportunity issues here?
2. Should all employers be treated the same?
3. What are the costs and benefits of treating people on a discretionary basis?
4. Is everyone getting the same training opportunities and chance to progress and improve?
5. What examples of possible discrimination are there in the scenario you are reading?
6. What examples of definite discrimination are there in the scenario you are reading?
7. How would you, as a colleague or manager, assess this situation?
8. How would you, as a colleague or manager, help to address or resolve this situation?
9. As a manager, what additional information would you need to find out in this scenario?

10. What pieces of legislation are relevant to this situation?
11. How might you address this issue with the group as a whole, e.g. if mediating in a group meeting?
12. Would it be best to address this on an individual basis?
13. What do you feel is going on here, and how should you, as manager, respond?

## Section 14

# Do you trust your manager?

In today's harsh financial climate the most valuable management commodity is trust. Unfortunately it seems to be in short supply.

Only 26 per cent of staff in the public sector trusts their manager 'completely'. According to research by Investors in People, eight out of ten staff believes their manager has let them down in the past. Staff report managers failing to provide support, failing to respond to their concerns and withholding information. The result is low morale, damaged team spirit and a cynical attitude towards changes. Yet the current financial climate requires managers to deliver efficiencies and innovate. This means getting staff to work in different ways and getting them to do more with less.

How should managers build trust? Managers need to get to know their staff as individuals. This means knowing something about their lives outside of work, the name of their partner, if they have children – what's happening in their lives, do they have a pet, are they training for the London marathon or learning Portuguese? This isn't about courting popularity. As a manager, your aim is not to be liked but to be seen to treat people fairly. This may be in how you allocate work, how you respond to requests to go on training courses or how you organise the annual leave rota. How hard you work at sharing information with staff will also influence their view about how open and honest you are. Do you work on a strictly needs-to-know basis or do you share what you know? Of course, sometimes you have information that would be of interest but you have been asked not to share it at this point.

Integrity is an undervalued management quality. Staff will quickly form a view as to whether you are a manager who says what they think and does what they say. Clearly staff won't trust a manager who says one thing to one person and something different to another. Nor will they trust someone who makes a commitment and then doesn't deliver.

Often however, when staff say they don't trust management, they are not referring to their direct line manager, they are thinking of senior managers or those at Headquarters. They trust their line manager but think this person is equally kept in the dark. This is a reflection of their perception of the culture within the organisation, how they feel decisions that affect them are made and are conveyed. This can be anything from introducing staff car parking charges or implementing a no smoking policy to relocating staff and restructuring services. This comes down to how good the organisation is at communicating with its staff, how willing it is to listen and how safe staff feel in expressing dissent.

Trust in an organisation is also generated by whether staff perceive the processes for filling posts, dealing with grievances and conducting disciplinaries as fair. Is promotion dependent on who you know? Are posts filled by competitive interview? If you make a complaint against a

manager, will it be treated seriously and independently investigated? Are disciplinaries witch-hunts? Are junior staff dismissed but senior managers paid off?

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What happens in your organisation that undermines trust?
2. What can you do to build up trust between you and your staff?
3. There are higher levels of trust between staff and their immediate managers than between staff and senior management. Why is this and what can you do about it, do you think you have a responsibility to do any thing?

## Section 15

# Men make better managers

I was surprised to learn that people prefer to work for a man. Notice I said, prefer to work for, not as most of the headlines stated men make better bosses. What staff consider makes a good boss is not necessarily what employers look for in recruiting managers. The most revealing finding of this survey by Ukjobs.net was not who makes better bosses men or women, which is like asking who make better drivers guaranteed to start a pointless argument. What was interesting was that the 3,000 employees questioned were in broad agreement that the best boss was someone who was fair, approachable and a good listener. Two things strike me about this, a recent survey by the Chartered Institute of Management revealed that most managers whether male or female think they are particularly strong in these areas and that employers tend to emphasise budget management and decision making skill over these people skills. This leads me to conclude that managers have little insight into their strengths and weaknesses and that staff want different things from their managers than do their employers.

I think most business management schools and recruitment specialists would agree that the modern manager needs to have good people management skills as well as budget management skills and the ability to evaluate options. In many ways the more organisations are forced to focus on budget cuts the more they need managers with good people skills. If you are going to reduce services, make redundancies, require people to do more for the same or less pay then you are going to need managers that have good negotiating and influencing skills, who are confident enough to able to explain decisions without appearing defensive and not so rigid in their views that they come accross as arrogant or not prepared to listen. You will need managers who can maintain positive relationships with partner agencies, voluntary and community groups whilst reducing their funding or asking them to take over additional responsibilities. You will need managers who can make staff feel valued whilst posts are cut, managers who can get staff to deliver high quality services in increasingly difficult circumstances, managers who known how to let staff say what they are really thinking yet maintain their enthusiasm for the job and commitment to the customer.

In short, managers need good people skills irrespective of whether they are men or women.

### Discussion Questions

1. Examine the Job Description and Person Specification for a current management vacancy in your organisation. What emphasis is put on people management skills?
2. What recommendations would you make for future management Job Descriptions and Person Specification to make them better reflect people management skills?
3. Make two lists one of what employees want from their line manager and the other what your organisation is looking for in its managers. What are the differences and what are the implications of these differences?

## Section 16

# How to fail without really trying

You need three ingredients to be really unsuccessful. You need to be blind, you need to be blind to the fact that you're blind and you need to have very selective hearing. That's according to Sir David Varney and he should know he has just resigned after only six months as chair of the worst performing NHS Trust.

As a highly respected and experienced trouble shooter he has held senior posts at Shell and British Gas and was adviser to the previous prime minister on public service transformation. He learnt the hard way that senior management teams need to see the bigger picture, be aware that they only ever have a snapshot of what going on and accept that they don't always know best.

Varney refers to his experience of working for Shell during the Brent Spar fiasco when Shell's plans to dispose of the oil platform at sea provoked a very high profile environmental campaign and resulted in an embarrassing and expensive climb down. In an interview with the Guardian newspaper he states that 'we didn't see at an early stage that what was a technically correct answer was not politically acceptable. Then we insisted on going ahead despite the fact that we had evidence that we shouldn't. And then when voices started to say internally this may not be the right thing to do, people tended to define the issue in terms of loyalty to the organisation'.

As a former senior manager in a large local authority I recognise this scenario all too clearly. The determination to bring about radical change can result in leaders and their senior managers forcing ahead, ignoring information that doesn't support their view and being dismissive of those who ask awkward questions or put forward alternatives. When the changes are unpopular it is all too easy to see all opposition as motivated by self interested and dismissed as 'well they would say that wouldn't they' or the even more derogatory 'turkeys don't vote for Christmas'.

A willingness to listen does not show a lack of resolve. The ability to take on board criticism without appearing defensive and the willingness to explain decisions shows true confidence without arrogance and the recognition that sometimes even the right decisions have to be reversed shows insight and courage. This is very difficult in the political environment in which the public sector operates where party political point scoring can get in the way of good management and the media don't let the facts get in the way of a good human interest story.

The harsh financial climate in the public sector requires the highest quality of leadership, managers who can take unpopular decisions and can deliver change. If you are part of a senior management team you have a responsibility not to become so hardened in your resolve and so certain in your beliefs that you can't see alternative views.

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## **Discussion Questions**

1. List the factors which you think make an organisation likely to fail in its aims.
2. Why do you think senior management teams fall into the trap of continuing with a course of action or a policy despite clear evidence that it's not working?
3. Is it only senior management teams who are guilty of this? How can it be avoided?

## Section 17

# Firing the incompetent

Being useless at the job is not a good enough reason to get the sack. So it came as no surprise to me to learn that only 18 teachers had been dismissed for incompetence in the last 40 years.

As a senior manager I have dismissed staff for theft, verbal or physical abuse, accessing pornography in their work computer, frequent or prolonged absence from work or failing their probationary period, but never because they were useless at their job. This is not because I have never come across people who are incompetent at their job. The fact is that with the exception of people on their six months probationary period it is a very long and arduous process to dismiss someone in the public sector for being useless at their job.

This process involves setting clear work targets with time scales, monitoring progress, providing frequent feedback identifying areas for improvement, providing training and support to help the individual gain or improve skills and giving the individual the time and the opportunity to demonstrate improvement. It involves lots of uncomfortable conversations and keeping detailed records. If the individual is cooperative and has a degree of insight into their own performance then all this effort may see the necessary improvement. However it is more likely that this process will leave the individual in no doubt about your assessment of their abilities and they will retaliate with an harassment and bullying complaint. This complaint will need to be formerly investigated which will involve the manager justifying their actions and demonstrating that their expectations were reasonable and consistent with their treatment of other members of staff. Managers can find this a very stressful process particularly if the individual claims their performance is being scrutinised because of their race, gender or sexuality. During this period the individual frequently goes off sick with stress.

It is not hard to see why a lot of managers consider addressing poor work performance through the competency process just isn't worth the hassle. The most common way this gets dealt with is either the individual finds themselves another job, a management or service restructuring takes place and their job disappears or they are dismissed as a result of long term absence. None of these solutions are right. If the person applies for another job the manager may be tempted to give them a glowing reference to get rid of them. They will certainly be advised by HR not to focus on concerns about their competence but play safe and provide a bland factual reference which cannot be challenged at an employment tribunal for constructive dismissal. It is clearly inappropriate to distort a restructuring to get rid of a member of staff and may result in a structure which ends up having to be changed again. It is of course one explanation for frequent restructurings. It clearly not an appropriate use of the absence policy to use it to dismiss someone when the real issue is their performance not their health but it is less contentious presenting someone's attendance record than commenting on their performance.

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One way or another a determined manager can move on a poor performing member of staff but it will take 18 months to two years and they probably won't use the competency procedures.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Jobs change so much and so quickly it is not really surprising if you find you have a member of staff who has got left behind and clearly can't do the job that now needs doing. What obligations does the organisation have to staff in this position?
2. What are your obligations to the organisation, the rest of the team and the individual?
3. What recommendations would you make to get a better balance between speeding up the process, protecting the individual and supporting managers?

## Section 18

# How to do employee engagement

The financial climate and the savage budget cuts in the Public Sector require big changes in what we do and how we do it. Organisations can simply say 'turkeys don't vote for Christmas' and ignore the views of staff and impose changes or they can recognise that the people at the front line are in a very good position to say how things can be made to work better. Employee engagement is now seen as a way of achieving the goal of doing more with less by tapping into the knowledge and creativity of front line staff and managers. As a first line manager or front line member of staff you may not agree with the changes proposed, you may not be able to prevent them being introduced but it would be short sighted to ignore an opportunity to shape and influence how these changes are implemented.

Ten things to think about:

1. Senior managers don't have all the answers, they don't know the detail and they only ever have a snapshot of what's happening at the front line. A willingness to listen does not show a lack of resolve, the ability to take on board criticism without appearing defensive shows true confidence and recognising that sometimes even the right decisions have to be reversed shows insight and courage.
2. Front line staff know what really goes on and have suggestions for improvements
3. People don't say what they really think if they are afraid. The fear may be of being publicly rebuked, labelled as disloyal or jeopardising their career.
4. Managers need to lead by example and routinely explain decisions.
5. Staff questionnaires, employee engagement groups, the Directors blog will only work if they get a quick and positive response from senior management.
6. Don't be surprised at first if the only ones who 'engage' are the ones who want to moan about management – this is normal.
7. If senior management are not prepared to address issues about the quality of management then staff will assume you are not serious about changing things.
8. What does it say about your organisation if you talk all the time about listening to service users but ignore your staff?
9. Middle managers will need reassuring that they are not being bypassed as staff use employee engagement initiatives to speak directly to senior management.
10. Employee engagement is not a substitute for working closely with the Trade Unions but it does recognise that in many organisations less than half the staff belong to a trade union.

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Make it meaningful. If staff engagement is to be more than an easy, if meaningless, mechanism for getting feedback from staff, if staff engagement is to be more than just an opportunity to moan about 'management' and if staff engagement is to be an opportunity to influence thinking, and change the way things are done, then two things must happen. The organisation needs to be a safe place to say what you are thinking and the management style promoted needs to be more people focused. This has implications for management development, for creating opportunities for staff to explore issues and for helping staff learn how to shape and influence thinking, challenge and be challenged.

If as a result of financial necessity senior management increasingly recognise and value the input of the front line in making things work, better than something good may yet come out of this harsh financial climate.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. How would you go about making your organisation or team a safe place for staff to say what they are really thinking?
2. What are the implications for management development of introducing employee engagement?
3. What recommendations would you make for helping staff to know how to challenge management appropriately, what is appropriate?

## Section 19

### **Don't make me work with idiots**

The team expects you as their manager and leader to make sure they don't have to work with people who are lazy, incompetent or difficult. The type of person who can start an argument over having a window open or whose turn it is to wash up the coffee cups. The cynic whose negative attitude brings everyone else down, the one who undermines team work with their 'why should I' attitude, whose moodiness creates a tense atmosphere and whose frequent absences mean others are always having to pick up their work.

The team don't think this individual should be allowed to get away with missed deadlines and poor standards of work, they think they should be confronted with their attendance record and made to do their fair share. And they are right. Some people in the team will be more vocal about this than others but it would be a mistake to see this as a personality clash.

Your team is right to expect you to set the standards of work and behaviour. You are right to suspect that this individual will not respond well to you tackling them about your concerns and they will probably counter with claims of harassment and bullying. Your life could become quite uncomfortable – all the more so if the member of staff claims you are harassing them because of their race or sexuality. Is it worth the hassle, the protected investigation, the formal proceedings, the scrutiny of your management practice? Managers who are leaders know the answer.

The issue then is how best to support managers who find themselves in this position. The answer is not to pass the problem over to the HR department. To do this would simply propel you even more quickly into formal proceedings resulting in the manager feeling they are the one on trial. Most HR staff are familiar with the scenario and complain they spend a lot of time digging managers out of holes they have made for themselves and getting very little thanks for it.

The problem is that managing people is not easy, and some people seem determined to make it harder. Just as managers need to be able to manage budgets they need to be able to manage people. Managers need the skills to challenge as well as support, to get people to do what needs doing but also to be seen as reasonable and fair. Management development needs to focus on developing these people's management skills. One way of doing this is through a management learning set where managers get together to examine typical management scenarios, share their experiences and gain some insight into how their behaviour affects those they work with. Another way is to recognise that management is a lot about confidence and experience and a good mentor can help a manager gain both more quickly.

Whilst challenging and confronting won't make your life any easier in the short term it will certainly demonstrate that you are not shirking your responsibilities as a manager.

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## Discussion Questions

1. If you have had experience of tackling a team member how did it go and was it worth the hassle?
2. How supported do you feel in tackling issues like this by your manager/Human Resources/your management colleagues/the Trade Union?
3. What recommendations would you make to better support managers?

## Section 20

# Hiring, firing and rewarding

In a harsh financial climate the public sector needs to change the ways it hires, fires and rewards employees. Everyone knows it takes too long to recruit staff in the public sector and redeploying people rather than making them redundant isn't an option when the aim is to lose one in five managers.

In the name of fairness, and increasingly with the aim of saving money, it takes on average six months to fill a management post in local government. Admittedly three months of that is the notice the employee has to typically give their current employer but nevertheless this is way too long.

It's not just about streamlining the recruitment approach – for every management vacancy there is now a robust challenge about whether we do really need this post? Can we afford it? While we think about this and come up with a new slimmer structure should we bring in an experienced interim manager?

Our new slimmer structure is now in place but now we don't have the management capacity to get a number of important projects off the ground should we bring in someone on a two year fixed term contract or make more use of expensive management consultants?

In the past local government has gone to great lengths not to make anyone compulsorily redundant. The subsequent redeployments have resulted in a number of square pegs in round holes. Much to the frustration of managers who ended up with people in jobs they were neither suited to nor wanted.

Added to this employees have often found it difficult to recognise they have transferable skills. When LAs were closing their residential homes for older people many managers found it difficult even to acknowledge that their generic management skills around budget management, people management, recruitment and staff development were equally as appropriate in other services with other client groups: for example in day care for people with a learning disability. If there is such reluctance to move out of their comfort zone what chance of moving from Social Services to Cultural Services from day centres to libraries?

In the public sector there is a long tradition of only letting go, those who want to go. This means either voluntary redundancy or early retirement. In the past local authorities fired people for misconduct but rarely if ever sacked someone for being useless at their job. This was not because there were no incompetent managers but because it was a very drawn out process and very difficult to demonstrate someone was incompetent. Despite all the talk of a more businesslike approach, performance targets and annual appraisals there is still a culture of unaccountability.

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Typically, in the private sector, managers don't know what their colleagues are paid. Your salary is a private matter between you and your boss. The reward system recognises that people may be doing the same job but that some are doing it better than others. If you generate more business for the company you're due a bonus. Your salary may be decided by annual negotiations between you and your boss. If the company is doing well you can expect a raise. How much may depend on your ability to demonstrate your value to the organisation or the extent your actions contributed to your boss's bonus. Likewise if the company isn't doing well then there will be no increase in salary and there could even be a cut.

In the public sector everyone knows what everyone earns because all managers on the same posts are paid the same. As everyone at this grade carries the same level of responsibility they are paid the same. You can expect a small annual incremental increase that allows you to move from the bottom of the salary grade to the top of the salary grade over three or four years just for sticking around. Salary cuts in the public sector are unheard of even if you are redeployed to a less responsible less well paid post your salary is protected for a number of years. Or it always has been in the past.

Rather than rewards, the public sector talks of recognition which may be a personal thank you note from the chief executive or simply a positive annual appraisal.

Clearly when it comes to hiring, firing and rewarding the public and private sector do it very differently. But the harsh financial climate means the public sector will have to change its ways: will it become more like the private sector or find a different way?

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What recommendations would you make to streamline recruitment in your organisation?
2. Some people will have to go how should we decide who?
3. One test of how corporate you are as a manager is your response to redeployment. What does this mean?





## Part Three

# Mentoring

Management development is an ongoing process. The experience of executive coaching or a management learning set needs to be built upon. One very effective way for a manager to continue their development is to identify a mentor. A management mentor is:

- A guide.
- Someone with greater experience and the wisdom that comes with it.
- Someone who can offer impartial advice and support.

Many senior managers find their own mentor, who may be someone:

- From outside their organisation.
- They met at a conference.
- They know from a previous job.
- Whose judgment they respect.
- They trust and have developed a rapport with.

Many organisations recognise the value of mentoring particularly for newly appointed and inexperienced managers and set up a mentoring scheme where senior managers agree to take on a mentoring role. But it doesn't have to be a senior manager. Some of the best mentors are first line or middle managers: usually people who have been around for some time, are content to have found their place in the hierarchy and are not competing for promotion, but want to put their experience to greatest effect by channelling their energies into encouraging others. The best mentoring schemes tap into this reservoir of experience. They allow people to focus their energies in areas where their wisdom will benefit less experienced managers and in so doing give them the opportunity to leave a legacy in the form of helping, supporting and inspiring the next generation of managers.

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A mentoring relationship often starts with a request for advice and help about career development. The material in this section explains how drawing up a new CV will get you both started. It then goes on to explain how you both can use a mentoring relationship to prepare for an interview. The material covers typical mentoring session topics like managing your manager and reflecting on your management style. There are conversations that you can't have with your line manager and ones that benefit from discussions with someone who is impartial and who has probably dealt with these issues in their own career. Mentoring provides the individual with the opportunity to discuss a live issue in a safe environment and to use this to explore options and the type of manager you want to be.

If you are in a mentoring scheme you will probably have a written agreement covering confidentiality, frequency of meetings and an end date for the relationship. The onus is usually on the mentee to come to sessions with a live issue to discuss. The material in this manual can provide the topic and the starting point.

## Section 21

### A mentor's tale

I was fortunate that someone took an interest in my career development. This was not a formal mentoring arrangement but a relationship with a more experienced manager that grew into a mentoring arrangement whereby I rang them up and asked for advice or shared a problem with a sympathetic listener. I was also given some good career advice along the way. I want to offer others what was offered to me.

Somewhat later, I found the mentoring scheme that the directorate was piloting to be too formal, too bureaucratic and too prescriptive. This has led me to question whether this was the best use of my time and the other person's time I had been matched with. I resented filling in the detailed questionnaire at the start of the process. After all I am an experienced manager and have mentored before – surely it's enough to offer my services! I was 'allocated' someone to mentor who was pleasant and ambitious but after our initial sessions I wasn't sure if we had the same expectations.

Having discussed the scheme with other mentors I was reassured to learn that I was not the only one with doubts. I began to appreciate that the idea of the directorate offering mentoring to all managers who wanted it was ambitious and would only work if we adopted a structured, formal approach. It was me who had to change, not the scheme. I did have to read the guidance rather than busking it on the basis of having mentored people before but I recommended that a much shorter, less off-putting version be produced.

Wearing my senior manager's hat I realised we needed to look at expanding the potential pool of mentors by inviting all managers to be mentors. We also needed to establish clear criteria for who should be offered mentoring and treat applications to be a mentee in the same way that we would treat an application to go on a training course. I also thought we needed to be more explicit about where mentoring fits alongside coaching, shadowing and managing within a diverse workforce as part of the leadership development programme.

I am now clear that the mentee should drive the agenda and I am enthusiastic about the approach the directorate is taking.

#### *Starting a mentoring relationship*

The first few meetings can be awkward if there is no agenda. It takes time to get to know each other and to work out how best to use the meetings. In this situation the mentor should take the lead. I have found a good way is to ask the individual to come to the first meeting with an up to date CV. The aim is to use this to learn about the individual's career to date.

A lot of people seek a mentor to help them think about their next career move, to discuss options and get advice and even help to put together a good application form. A mentor can

do this and help the individual prepare for an interview and even be a referee. A good starting point is therefore to use the first few sessions to help improve the CV.

Even where posts ask you not to submit a CV but to complete their application form the information from a CV can be easily transferred to the form so making applying for posts easier and less time consuming.

Exploring their CV with the individual will help you get to know them as a person as well as the details of their career to date. The most common mistake that inexperienced candidates make in completing a CV is to omit their experiences outside the workplace. I often start by asking questions like what type of holiday do you go on, beach, sightseeing or adventure? What is your favourite city or country? Do you speak any foreign languages? Someone who struggled to put together a few paragraphs on their CV suddenly reveals that they spent a gap year in rural Italy working in a vineyard, that their family originally comes from Poland where they still have family and that they have always wanted to visit Alaska. From this you can pull out stories that reveal interests, skills and experience which differentiate this individual from other candidates.

On another occasion, someone I was mentoring asked me if I thought it appropriate for them to refer to the fact that they had a son with a learning disability. Would this count against them in applying for a post? As they were currently working in health and social care and saw their career continuing in this direction I felt that their experience of the NHS, of the education system and of social services *as a customer* gave them insights which would be valued by a potential employer especially if they could relate it to the organisation's approach to engaging service users and promoting customer care.

Even if someone is not intending to apply for another job in the immediate future most people recognised the value in having an up to date CV.

As part of developing trust I share my own CV with mentees.

## Section 22

# Getting an interview for that senior management post

You're ambitious and capable with an impressive track record. You have considerable management experience in your area of service. You're good at what you do. Can you show how the skills and experience you so clearly have in your current job, can be transferred to the post you have applied for?

As a Director I have recently been involved in recruiting for a senior management post within my team. A number of potentially strong candidates fell at the first hurdle because they did not know how to write an application form for a senior management post. Basically they failed to do themselves justice when it came to the supporting information section of the form. Too many candidates fall into the trap of submitting a really good application for their existing post. They submit up to six sides of A4 describing how extensive their responsibilities are and how effective they have been in carrying these out.

It is not sufficient to simply provide evidence of how successful you have been in your current role. It is essential that you demonstrate how this success and the skills and experience you acquired are transferable to the new more strategic role you have applied for. Remember it is your management and leadership skills that are transferable and therefore significant, not your professional and service background.

But demonstrating transferable skills is not sufficient when applying for a senior management post; you also need to be able to demonstrate your understanding of how the post you have applied for will contribute to corporate objectives. To do this you need to show familiarity with the vehicles for bringing about change at a strategic level that is Local Area Agreements (LAA), Multi Area Agreements (MAA) and Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP). You will need to evidence that you can see the bigger picture, that is, how the service can contribute to achieving corporate objectives like social and economic development, healthy equality, community safety, community cohesion and community engagement.

You need to explain how you would seek to influence the agenda at a local, sub region and regional level. To do this you will need to evidence your experience and skills in working with partners at a strategic level since these objectives cannot be achieved by one service or organisation working in isolation. You will also need to demonstrate you are a leader not just a manager. That is that you can inspire staff, you can paint a vision of the future, explain what success will look like and the contribution individuals will need to make to get there. This will involve talking about your values:

- What's most important to you?
- Hitting targets?

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- Staying within budget?
- Improving customer satisfaction?
- If you are driven by the desire to make a difference to people's life, how has that shown itself in the past?
- What's more important, getting the job done or retaining your integrity?

Can you make your application a good read that hits all the points on the person specification without resorting to a list of bullet points which:

- Look ugly
- Are inappropriate
- Is lazy
- Disrupts the flow

Can you make your case without resorting to bland unsubstantiated statements such as 'I am an excellent communicator', 'I am passionate about my work' and 'I am an innovator and very effective in bringing about changes'. Can you convey all this on two sides of A4?

### **Discussion Questions**

1. How did the last application form you completed compare to the comments here about what makes a good application?
2. What are your transferable skills?
3. What is the difference between a leader and a manager?

## Section 23

# Difficult conversations

Managers talk a lot, in meetings, to small groups, to large audiences, at conferences and in committees but it is when they need to have 'difficult' conversations that they show their management skills. These are usually one-to-one conversations which are difficult because of the subject matter and the likely response of the individual. The topics could be concerns about absence levels, relationships with colleagues or the quality of their work.

These conversations are difficult because the individual either lacks insight into how their behaviour affects others or simply refuses to acknowledge that there is a problem. 'I can't help being off sick' is a frequent response to a manager bringing up an individual's attendance record. The management issue here is not to question whether someone is genuinely ill, but to point out the level of absence and then try to establish if there is an underlying reason for this. It could be that the individual was not in fact ill but is struggling to care for a disabled relative or a change in family circumstances has caused problems with childcare arrangements. If it is a health problem then the usual course of action is a referral to the occupational health service for advice. Either way you have made clear your expectations and your intention to investigate poor attendance.

Problems with relationships between colleagues in the same office are surprisingly common. It is surprising because you would have thought that adults would behave better. The issues can be anything from leaving their unwashed cups around the place, gossiping about colleagues, being excessively untidy or arguing about who sits where. The problem often seems to focus around one disruptive individual although sometimes the response of their colleagues lacks maturity, courtesy and tolerance.

The individual will often see themselves as the victim. The management issue here is not to take sides or resolve individual disputes but insist on a standard of behaviour where people are polite and courteous to each other. They don't have to be friends but they do have to be professional. If firm management action is not taken to challenge group behaviour, as well as that of individuals, then formal grievance and harassment complaints will start flying around. This would take up a disproportionate amount of management time before coming to the obvious conclusion that people just need to be more tolerant and nicer to each other.

A conversation with an individual about the quality of their work is often difficult unless there are specifics like frequent failure to meet deadlines, tasks not undertaken or careless mistakes. A manager needs to be prepared to address issues of workloads and priorities. As a manager you need to be sure you are not being unreasonable in your expectations and demands. It is perfectly reasonable for someone to ask which tasks are a priority and, even if you think they all are, you need to be more helpful and decide which ones you want doing first. Deadlines should

be negotiated not imposed – however everyone needs to recognise that sometimes they are externally set and so beyond the control of the manager.

Sometimes poor quality work is not down to lack of ability but lack of motivation. This is often characterised by uneven work, a brilliant piece of work can be followed by a careless poorly thought out piece of work. In which case it may be that the individual is not being stretched enough, they are bored and frustrated and possibly using their skills in a negative and unhelpful way. The solution is to recognise the ability and set more interesting and demanding tasks.

Some people are just not competent to do the job: either they have been promoted beyond their ability or they have always been unsuited to the work but have been allowed to get away with it by poor management.

The general message for managers is:

- Don't avoid difficult conversations.
- Do rehearse what you are going to say.
- Do stick to the facts.
- Do take advice beforehand from HR.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. How would you go about preparing for a one-to-one meeting with a member of your team to discuss their poor attendance record?
2. It's an open plan office and during a hot spell of weather conflict arises over having windows wide open. One member of staff in particular who sits near a window complains about the draft saying it is giving her a 'bad neck'. The arguments are starting to effect people's work. What do you do?
3. What support would you expect from HR, and what from your manager, in tackling a member of the team's poor quality of work?



## Section 24

# Managing your manager

Recent research found that 60 per cent of people leave their manager not their organisation. Staff surveys regularly find a high proportion of employees believe they could do a better job than their manager. Management bullying is reported to be on the increase across all sectors of local government as the pressure to meet demanding performance targets and stay within tight budgets increases. The general picture is of organisations with demanding yet incompetent managers who fail to value their staff. Better people management skills would certainly go a long way in changing how managers are viewed by their staff, but is it all down to incompetent managers or could it be that some staff doesn't appreciate the need to 'manage their manager'?

If you know your manager then you know how to influence them, you know the best way to get additional resources and you know how to get their support for something you want to do. In this way you manage them. Most managers recognise that their staff try to manage them, just as most managers try and manage their boss.

There are two basic types of manager: those who are influenced by values and those who are influenced by facts. A winning argument for the former is 'it's the right thing to do' emphasising fairness. In the latter case a winning argument is 'it is the rational and logical thing to do' emphasising the evidence. Managers who are value orientated tend to focus on the big picture at the expense of the detail, whereas those who want the facts and figures tend to focus on the detail. Of course in presenting your case you need to cover both aspects but in managing your manager you need to know where to put the emphasis.

In addition you need to know whether your manager wants to be seen as an innovator, a trend setter, the first to try new ways and willing to take risks or as someone who wants to be seen as measured and wise, a safe pair of hands, someone whose judgment can be trusted. A trend setter will want to be associated with high profile initiatives 'let's tell people what we are doing' whereas the wise approach is more likely to favour a low profile 'let's wait and see if it works first'.

The Myers-Briggs psychometric indicator takes a more sophisticated and scientific approach to this and identifies 16 personality or management types. Myers-Briggs is used to help managers identify their preferred style and give them an insight into how they can become more effective. It is also used in the recruitment process when the aim is to have a diverse team where people have complementary strengths. Of course, this also means that if you can spot what type of manager your colleague is, or what type of manager your manager is, then you can use this knowledge to manage them.

Using the Myers-Briggs test my boss came out as someone who makes decisions by involving others, can tolerate a high degree of ambiguity as long as core values are not under attack and

looks at the facts last. He thinks at a macro level about how ideas will affect people and is irritated by people who glorify the importance of facts and data. Lots of clues here about how to manage my manager.

As you can imagine, it's extremely useful to be able to know the management personality type of your Director of Finance. You may have thought that somebody in this type of post would be obsessed by the detail, interested only in the facts and not persuaded by talk of values, someone who wants to see the evidence before they are persuaded and someone who believes in evolution rather than revolution. This is an example of stereotyping which could lead you to make assumptions about how to upwardly manage this individual. The Myers-Briggs test might well reveal that this is a big picture person, excited by radical change, enthusiastic, attracted to grand ideas, irritated by those who think productivity is everything and those who lack commitment.

I am not saying that if you are unfortunate enough to be managed by an indecisive, moody, unappreciative and insecure manager, it's your fault for not managing them properly. I am merely suggesting that if you know your manager then you know how to influence them, you know the best way to get additional resources and you know how to get their support for something you want to do. In this way managing your manager is as important as managing your staff.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What type of manager do you have?
2. If your manager's obsession with the detail is driving you to distraction what can you do about it?
3. Your new manager has a very broad span of responsibility and no background in your service. You want them to understand what your service is all about but every time you start explaining their eyes glaze over and after a few minutes they try and change the subject. What should you do?

## Section 25

# The importance of trivia

If you want to be a successful manager and an effective leader you need to be able to do trivia. You may have an impressive CV, you may have the right experience, relevant skills and an extensive knowledge but if you don't do trivia you will get the interview but not the job.

There is good trivia and bad trivia. Bad trivia is where every meeting with the Chief Executive starts with comments about how their football team got on at the weekend. People who clearly have no interest in football feel obliged to contribute in order to keep in with the boss. It serves only to irritate and alienate people. However if during the course of going round the table getting management updates one of your colleagues gives a particularly long list of issues and concerns and you say well at least your football team is doing well, this is good trivia. It is intended to lighten the mood and take some tension out of the situation.

Good trivia isn't saying 'did you have a good Christmas', good trivia is saying 'did the surprise present you planned for your partner go down well?' This shows you are taking an interest in the person, you have listened to what they said and remembered it. Asking a colleague what's the latest news on their son or daughter's gap year adventure would be another example of good trivia. In fact good trivia isn't trivia at all, it's a non-work conversation in which both parties share information about their non-work lives. Trivia etiquette requires that if someone asks you a question like this you respond fully and then ask them a similar question.

I have never seen 'must be able to do trivia' or 'needs to be able to make small talk to strangers' on a person specification for a top management job but the assessment process for most senior management posts involves an informal meeting where candidates are required to socialise with stakeholders. This is about exchanging trivia with strangers who will later be asked how you came over. You would be making a fundamental error if you thought this was an opportunity to show off your work related knowledge. It is in fact about your social skills and whether you are perceived as friendly, approachable and interesting, in other words someone they could work with. Even in the formal interview the panel is looking for clues about your personality. So it is not just getting the answer right it is about how you are coming across, yes they want someone who is confident and knowledgeable but they don't want stern and overbearing. Hence a good piece of interview advice given to me by my manager – smile.

If this all sounds a bit trivial then think of it this way, senior management posts need people of substance who have passion and gravitas but they also need people who can relate to a whole range of different people who are comfortable talking to anyone and can immediately make people feel comfortable about talking to them. So there is nothing trivial about being able to do trivia.

## **Discussion Questions**

1. Think of your own examples of good and bad trivia.
2. What implications does this article have for preparing for an interview?
3. List the work situations where being good at trivia would be useful.

## Section 26

# When revolting is good

So the England football team went into revolt against their manager and his leadership. Basically they didn't like what he was doing and how he was treating them. They claimed this was the real reason for the team's poor performance. Every manager knows that feeling, when the rumbling turns into open revolt and the disgruntled minority suddenly seem to be speaking for everyone.

It's the classic management dilemma, re-assert your authority or bow to the pressure. Listen to what they have to say, thank them for their honesty and bravery but tell them you are paid to make the decisions: remind them it is not a democracy and that whilst you are the manager we do things your way. Everyone is clear you are in charge, for now. But if things don't improve and without their co-operation the future doesn't look good. Alternatively, give in and say OK we will try it your way: the crisis is averted, they are happy, you're a manager who listens and is prepared to change their mind. The trouble is will they think every decision is up for debate, will they question everything you do – and what happens when they don't agree amongst themselves, which is quite often. Is this really a challenge to your leadership by one of the team, a dominant individual who has become the unofficial leader and who may not be as representative as they claim? And what if performance still does not improve, you are still the manager and your boss will hold you accountable and they won't be too impressed if you say 'well I did it this way because that's what the team wanted'.

The art of leadership is to know when to change your mind and when to maintain your resolve. The basic guide is to remember you can't get it right all the time but you aim to get it right 95 per cent of the time. That being the case you do need to listen because you may have made your original decision without some information that is now available. In other words you made the right decision at the time but you need to be prepared to reconsider in light of new information. By listening you may become aware that your instructions have been misunderstood or not accurately passed on. This is your chance to clarify and explain what you want and why. Never compromise your values they are what you believe in and cannot without loss of integrity be suspended for short term expediency. Popularity is a passing phase not something that should concern managers, loss of face is embarrassing but short lived what will be remembered is whether you said what you meant and meant what you said – and still got it right most of the time.

### Discussion Questions

1. When should you try it their way and when should you say it's not up for debate?
2. Why is integrity so important – don't all successful managers lie sometimes?
3. What is the difference between letting them have their say and listening to what they have to say?

## Section 27

### The silent killer

I was fit at 50. At 54 I had high cholesterol, high blood pressure and a quadruple heart bypass. I didn't know I had high blood pressure that's why they call it the silent killer. I didn't consider myself to be particularly stressed at work. Sure there were efficiency initiatives, demanding performance targets, a management restructuring to deliver and the usual disciplinary hearings, complaints and MPs letters. But that's the point it was the usual stuff that you have to deal with as a manager in the public sector and I had been dealing with it for years. That was the problem.

When my GP asked if I had a stressful job I said 'not particularly'. I thought stressful meant struggling to cope, not being able to sleep the night before an important meeting, replaying decisions over in my head, being worried about the impact on someone's life of dismissing them, having deadlines that I might not be able to meet or being set a task I was going to struggle to complete. I didn't doubt my abilities and I genuinely thought there was nothing that my working day could throw up that I hadn't dealt with before and therefore nothing that would justify being stressed.

I didn't realise the pressure and stress I was under till it stopped. Three months after retiring early I now accept that work dominated my life. Things that seemed so important at the time now seem fairly insignificant. Much of the pressure was self imposed it was my impatience that wanted everything done today, it was me who squeezed in an extra meeting at the end of the day, it was me who didn't leave enough travelling time between meetings or failed to put adequate preparation time to work on that important presentation. It was my desire to impress that led me to volunteer to lead various initiatives and never to decline invitations to join a working group. It was my naked ambition that led me to distant parts of England, and once Wales, and put myself through gruelling assessment centres, trial by sherry and beauty parades masquerading as a rigorous selection process. All the more difficult to justify now as I acknowledge I enjoyed my job, liked the people I worked with and my family were happy living where we were.

Some pressures are self imposed and it is important to have the insight to recognise this because you can do something about them. Other pressures are external and a new era of budget cuts, efficiency drives, compulsory redundancies, wage freezes and service reductions will increase the pressure on managers. These pressures may not give you a heart attack or stroke but they will increase the risk that you become preoccupied with work, lose contact with your friends and neglect your family. So what can you do to manage the pressure and reduce the stress? Well if I knew then what I know now this would be my survival plan.

1. Take your full allocation of annual leave. Do not carry over annual leave to be taken at some point in the future. You need the break now.

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2. Have a three week holiday as opposed to two weeks. This is all about getting people to do things in your absence rather than waiting till you get back. It will also reduce your e-mails: you get less if you are away for three weeks rather than two, its true try it.
3. There should be no meetings booked in your diary first day back at work, this is catch up time and if you don't do it now you will spend the next two weeks doing it at the end of which you will feel like you have never been away.
4. Take a lunch hour. You probably got in early and are staying late: you will be more productive and less tired if you have a break away from the office. Yes it is hard to do if you're worried that colleagues grabbing a sandwich at their desk will think you less committed, but modern management is about what you deliver not the hours you put in.
5. Stay an extra hour in the office if it means you won't have to take work home. With any luck the traffic will have died down and you will have a quicker less stressful journey home.
6. Try leaving the brief case at work. If you take it home you will be tempted to open it later in the evening and do some work.
7. It's very convenient being able to access e-mails and reports at home on your laptop but don't fall into the trap of extending your working day into the evenings or weekends. Instead negotiate a regular working from home day. If senior managers can't negotiate this for themselves because of the 'culture' in the organisation then this is a weakness in their negotiating skills. If senior managers are doing it then that gives permission for other managers to do it.
8. Delegate. With increased spans of responsibility the modern manager cannot micro manage, do not do your staff's job for them, do not get involved in the detail. Your job is to explain what needs doing and ensure they have the skills, knowledge and resources to do it.
9. Don't do urgent – only do important. It's surprising how few things are important. Embrace this approach in your expectations of your staff in other words something is not important simply because it came from you.
10. E-mails, I altered my machine to bounce back any e-mails which I was copied into. These were mostly people covering themselves by telling me what they had already done. Overnight I reduced my e-mails by a third and my blood pressure by a similar amount.

## Discussion Questions

1. What does being stressed at work mean?
2. What behaviours increase stress?
3. Which of points 1 to 10 could you not do? Why?

## Section 28

# The art of deception or just getting into the role

According to the Financial Times, RADA have been giving politicians and bankers acting lessons. The aim is to equip them with the techniques that actors use to be convincing in their roles. To learn how to smile sympathetically, to adjust their vocal habits to be more engaging, to use body language, to appear trustworthy and even how to power walk. It is easy to be cynical about this especially in the lead up to an election but it is not only politicians who fake it.

We can dismiss this as another example of deception that ultimately fools no one – but politicians are not the only ones who act a part. When I was training to be a teacher we had practice placements in school where we acted the part of being a teacher when we clearly felt like students. We pretended to be teachers, insisted on being called Sir or Mr and acted our part in the classroom and staff room. Once we qualified and became real teachers we gradually grew into the role and had to act less and less. It was the same when I went from being a social worker to a manager and a manager to a senior manager. Social workers don't wear suits nor do their managers although they might wear a jacket and tie. Senior managers do wear suits because everyone knows you have to look the part.

Due to their status senior managers don't get a lot of direct feedback so when they do they are often surprised to be described as distant, rather severe and not very approachable. Hence the fashion for offering managers coaching sessions on how to appear friendlier, more willing to listen and more relaxed at informal staff gatherings. And of course more trustworthy at those difficult public meetings to discuss budget cuts and service reductions.

As they are frequently accused of not listening, senior managers try hard to appear to be listening particularly when they have asked for staff's views. The wrong body language can reveal what the manager really thinks. I don't mean to imply that senior managers are only pretending to listen. They want to convince the audience they are listening because if they don't people will stop participating and then the chance of hearing something that might influence their thinking will be lost along with their credibility. This is why techniques such as summarising and repeating back what someone has just said ('so what you are saying is . . .') are so useful. Another technique is to make a point of taking notes in response to an issue raised by a member of the audience. It's all part of being seen to take views and feeling seriously even if they appear to you irrelevant and irrational. Finally there is the talking to people one-to-one and asking and remembering their name. Whilst all this comes naturally to some you might be surprised at how many senior managers find this difficult, their lack of confidence making them appear distant and severe.

Like politician's senior managers are asking staff to have confidence in them. Just like politicians we will judge them not by their acting skills but whether they do what they say they will do.

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## **Discussion Questions**

1. To what extent are suits and ties just costumes to help managers get into role?
2. What acting do you do in your role as a manager?
3. How can acting techniques help you in your role as a manager?

## Section 29

# Snakes in suits

Snakes in suits hide and thrive in large organisations. A snake in a suit is not just a bad boss, someone who is quick to blame and slow to praise, someone who complains staff don't use their initiative but expects all decisions to be cleared by them, someone who is moody and unpredictable. No, a snake in a suit is more dangerous than a bad boss.

A snake in a suit is clever in a cunning way, ruthlessly ambitious and often quite successful. Their long hours, constant need to keep in touch with the office and the fact that they often don't take their full holiday entitlement is seen as a sign of commitment and dedication but it is in reality based on their suspicion of what others might get up to in their absence.

They are a bully to those they manage and sycophantic with those they think can influence their career prospects. They are convinced it is who you know not what you know. Despite their show of bravado with their subordinates they lack confidence and live in constant fear that their lack of competence will be exposed. They think all colleagues are out to get them so they trust no one. They think like this because they believe the only way to get on is to do others down, so they undermine people, start whispering campaigns and play people off against each other. They will lie, take the credit for the work of others and blame others for their own failings. If they feel threatened they will go to extraordinary lengths to damage their perceived adversary, make false accusations even plant incriminating evidence.

A deputy director I worked for became director by spreading the rumour that the director was having an affair with one of their senior managers. Their first action on becoming director was to delete the deputy post so no one could do to them what they had done to their boss.

Snakes in suits demand absolute loyalty and unquestioning compliance. They reward those who don't question their decisions and methods. The end justifies the means and if they fiddle the performance figures it is in the best interests of the organisation. Don't cross a snake they don't forgive, they don't forget and they don't play by the rules.

Snakes in suits can be male or female. One of their favourite ploys is to befriend a colleague, encourage them to be indiscreet about another colleague and then repeat these unguarded comments to the individual concerned. In this way they pose as friend and ally whilst dripping poison into ears.

Whilst most organisations have their fair share of bad managers few have such dangerous and disruptive individuals – but they do exist and are best avoided.

## Discussion Questions

1. Why is a snake in a suit more dangerous than a bad manager?
2. What is the difference between a snake and a bully?
3. If snakes are so wicked how come they seem to be so good at climbing the corporate ladder?

## Section 30

# It's not such a big deal getting the sack

It not such a big deal getting the sack. Of course they don't call it the sack if you're a senior manager. You don't have to get caught fiddling your expenses, having inappropriate sexual relations or overheard making a racist comment to be told you no longer have a future in the organisation. In local government it could be you are just too closely associated with the previous administration. Sometimes it is just a case of the new chief executive wanting to appoint their own senior management team. Occasionally someone needs to take the fall if some high profile project fails to deliver and turns out to be costing a lot more than was budgeted for; or a very critical inspection report embarrasses the council, publically requiring them to be seen to take swift and dramatic action. Being ineffective and poor at your job isn't usually grounds for getting rid of someone in either the public or private sector so getting the sack doesn't mean you are incompetent or that you have done something wrong. What it means is the leader of the council, chair of the board, chief executive or director don't want you around anymore.

It happened to me twice, once I was pushed and on another occasion I jumped before I was pushed. The hardest thing was to accept that I wasn't going to get a reason for why I had to go. I wanted to be told what I had done wrong so I could put my side but that's not how it works its difficult to explain this to friends and family. The first time this happened I confronted the chief executive who simply said we don't feel you have a future here – all that's for discussion is your exit package. I wrote to the chair, who I felt I had a good relationship with, and he simply said 'these things happen Blair'. At the time I thought this was a pathetic response, but now I see that it is true and the way to deal with it is to move on and not dwell on the unfairness of it all since this will only make you feel worse.

To get the sack once is unfortunate but twice begins to look like a pattern which is why it is better to jump than wait till you're pushed. What this means is that you may have to take a sideways move rather than the promotion you were aiming for. If as a result of the elections or the new austerity regime you do find yourself as a square peg in a round hole, increasingly isolated and uncomfortable with how things are being done, better to go somewhere where your skills and abilities will be recognised, your enthusiasm acknowledged and your energies channelled in the right direction. A sideways move may put back your career ambitions by a couple of years but it shouldn't derail them.

### Discussion Questions

1. Why should you not assume someone was either misbehaving or incompetent if they get the sack?
2. Why is it better to jump rather than wait till you're pushed?
3. Under what circumstances would you jump?

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## Section 31

# You're having a laugh

Happy staff work harder and achieve more. This is probably not a big surprise to most managers nor I suspect is the view that if staff are unhappy it affects their work. A team of researchers from the Warwick Business School led by Professor Andrew Oswald have conducted a number of experiments on students which confirm this or as they put it 'Positive emotions appear to invigorate human beings, whilst negative emotions have the opposite effect'.

One experiment involved two groups of participants completing routine tasks involving adding up numbers. The tasks interspersed with ten-minute video clips. One group were shown comedy clips and other patterns of different coloured sticks. Those in the group who had a laugh performed the tasks 12 per cent better.

In the past there has been much debate about the impact of skill training, new technology and reward schemes on improving performance. The researchers believe that their findings published in the latest edition of Warwick's Economic Research Journal highlight the importance of 'human emotions'.

In the current harsh economic climate it would be a lot more helpful to managers if researchers could suggest how to keep staff happy whilst freezing their pay, making their colleagues redundant and charging them more for office car parking. I don't think that posting a 'joke of the day' on the office intranet or showing clips of 'mock the week' is going to do the trick.

So how are managers to keep staff motivated whilst budgets are cut? It is true that external factors influence peoples' feelings of well-being. If England had won the world cup then the 'feel good' factor would have resulted in increased productivity in the short term. If an individual is experiencing a personal problem like going through a divorce, then we know their work can suffer. But in general we know that people report they feel happy in work if they get on with their colleagues and their line manager. The implication is that the organisation may be going through a bad time but in this team we still enjoy coming to work. The other key factor for staff in the public sector is why they do the job in the first place. Auxiliary nurses, care assistants and hospital porters are low paid, they could earn more money stacking shelves in their local supermarket, but get a lot of satisfaction from helping vulnerable people who are grateful for the support they receive. Contrast this with staff who deal directly with the public on reception or in a call centre who are often subjected to verbal abuse from frustrated and distressed callers.

Happiness at work for public sector workers is determined by their relationships with colleagues and their interaction with the public. Managers are responsible for fostering good working relationships within the team and supporting staff in their dealings with the public. This is not

always easy as personality conflicts can erupt within teams, an individual can be viewed by others as not pulling their weight or getting favourable treatment. The manager cannot ignore this if they want staff to feel happy coming to work. When staff are dealing with customers who are angry that their service has been reduced or taken away as a result of budget cuts or a change to a cheaper service provider has caused anxiety and frustration then a managers support needs to be tangible. This means being prepared to take the call and take the brunt of the caller's anger.

A manager is responsible for keeping their staff happy in their work but this doesn't involve telling jokes or performing amusing impressions of senior managers – not unless you want to be known as a bit of a comedian.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What is the difference between happy staff and well motivated staff? Can staff be unhappy but well motivated?
2. In a period of redundancies, pay freezes and cut-backs what can a manager do to maintain a positive attitude in the team?
3. To what extent are you as a manager responsible for how your staff view the organisation?

## Section 32

### A good ending

How you leave an organisation is as important as how you start a new job. A good ending is not only satisfying, it puts your time into perspective and determines what you feel and what you say about the organisation you have left. In a period of down-sizing' through redundancies and early retirements 'leaving' is very topical and getting it right is very important for the individual and the organisation.

Whether it is to reduce the size of the workforce or to slim down the management structure, organisations generally start by making it easy for those who want to go. Early retirements and voluntary redundancies are on 'offer'. However this is only the start. The size of budget cuts required by the current financial climate means major restructurings and compulsory redundancies are inevitable.

A long drawn out process does not make for a good ending. Uncertainty is what people find hardest to cope with. Will I have a job in the new structure? Will I have to go through a competitive interview for a job or be slotted in? What criteria will be used to decide who stays and who goes? When will I know if I have a job or not? It is important to have a realistic time scale for implementing a new structure and a clear rationale for which posts are to go. Once this is established it is best to avoid long goodbyes. There is little to be gained by telling people their jobs are going and then having them hang round the work place. This is particularly true for managers – the more senior they are the quicker they should go. Once the word gets out, staff and partner agencies will want to deal with someone who can give future commitments and make decisions about next year's budget. Even staff who accept their fate with good grace can't be expected to show much interest or commitment beyond tying up a few loose ends and making some interim handover arrangements. This does not mean there is no time to discuss with the individual their circumstances and options. Redeployment may no longer be an option but managers should still do all they can to help their staff get another job. I don't believe managers should leave this to HR. For a start it means so much more if your manager explains that it was a decision to delete the post not a comment on your abilities. The manager can support the individual with a fuller than usual reference which they should be willing to share with the individual before they leave. The emphasis on achievements and successes will help at a time when confidence and self esteem can take a real knock.

Of course if you are made redundant it feels personal and occasionally it is. I have known a whole management restructuring be altered and distorted simply to get rid of one individual. Not only does this risk an expensive unfair dismissal claim, it is counterproductive if it results in a new structure that is not best suited to the needs of the service and will result in another restructuring within a short space of time.

A good ending recognises someone's contribution, hence the need for a leaving do and a thank you speech from the manager. Maybe even an e-mail from the director or chief executive

if your work brought you in contact with them. Hopefully this occasion will not be the first time the line manager has recognised the efforts and achievements of the individual!

Senior managers want to leave a legacy, something that will last when they have gone. However, if you have not influenced thinking or changed behaviour over the years you are not going to do it in your last few weeks. And trying to name your successor in order to maintain your ways of doing things is a sign of failure and an act of desperation.

A bad ending leaves someone feeling why me? A bad ending is often an unexpected ending and therefore unplanned. 'I didn't see it coming', 'I thought I was valued, my contribution recognised, my job safe'. A good ending is therefore one which is anticipated if not welcomed, where the reasons are understood even though they may not be popular, where it is the post not the individual that is no longer required and where the individual is credited for the contribution they have made. A good ending is not drawn out nor does it involve people disappearing overnight. A good ending may not be a happy ending but it should leave the individual feeling good about themselves, their contribution and their time in the organisation.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Why is a good ending important?
2. How can you make it a 'good ending' if it is unplanned and unwanted like compulsory redundancy?
3. What would you want your legacy to be?



## Section 33

### The manager's quiz

1. Have you ever made someone cry – how do you know you haven't?
2. If that report comes back all wrong do you think 'I didn't explain what was required well enough'?
3. Do you help your best staff to move on?
4. How do you feel when one of your team challenges your view?
5. Have you ever had 360 degree feedback? How would you feel about your staff and colleagues commenting on your ability as a manager? How would they describe you?
6. How would you feel about someone observing you in a series of management situations and giving you critical feedback?
7. How many times last week did you say 'Well done'?
8. When you inform an unsuccessful candidate for a post do you prepare your feedback in advance: do you just send a letter; do you inform the successful candidate and leave HR to tell the rest?
9. When someone comes back from sick leave do you say 'Are you better now' or do you arrange a formal back-to-work interview? Do you only do this with persistent offenders?
10. Have you ever sacked anyone? Did it make you feel uncomfortable? Did you think about it much afterwards?
11. Have any of your staff ever said 'I'm not clear what you mean' or 'I did not realise I was supposed to do that'?
12. Have you ever been accused of bullying or harassment by a member of staff? If yes, in retrospect do you understand why someone felt this? If no, do you think you avoid conflict?

#### **Words or phrases to describe how managers behave**

##### *Words*

aggressive	calm	consistent	explicit
approachable	challenges	critical	fair
assertive	clear	demanding	flexible
autocratic	creative	enthusiastic	friendly
avoids conflict	confident	even-handed	hands-off

impatient	optimistic	quiet	supportive
innovative	passionate	reliable	team player
inspiring	persistent	ruthless	visible
modest	praises	serious	warm
motivates	pragmatic	strict	
organises	proactive	spontaneous	

*Phrases*

- Able to link team objectives to corporate strategy
- Concerned with detail
- Concerned with facts
- Delegates everything
- Doesn't let go of the interesting tasks
- Doesn't share his vision of the future
- Doesn't take others with him
- Doesn't listen
- Does the key tasks himself
- Emphasises values
- Fails to develop staff or understand their training needs
- Fails to take on board the views of others when making important decisions
- Good at involving others in the decision making process
- I never know whether I've done a good job or not
- Leads by example
- Leads from the front
- Not letting go of the interesting tasks
- Makes their mind up quickly
- Prepared to delegate and take the risks
- Prepared to share ideas and thoughts
- Rarely gives colleagues the whole picture
- Sees the big picture
- Sets high standards for self and others

Seldom gives credit to anyone but self

Spends a long time networking

Sympathetic and constructive listener

Very good at communicating and giving feedback to subordinates

Takes time to make decisions

Won't back off in team discussions, wants to win the battle

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Select the words or phrases that best describe your behaviour as a manager
2. Which of these words or phrases have been used by others to describe your behaviour?



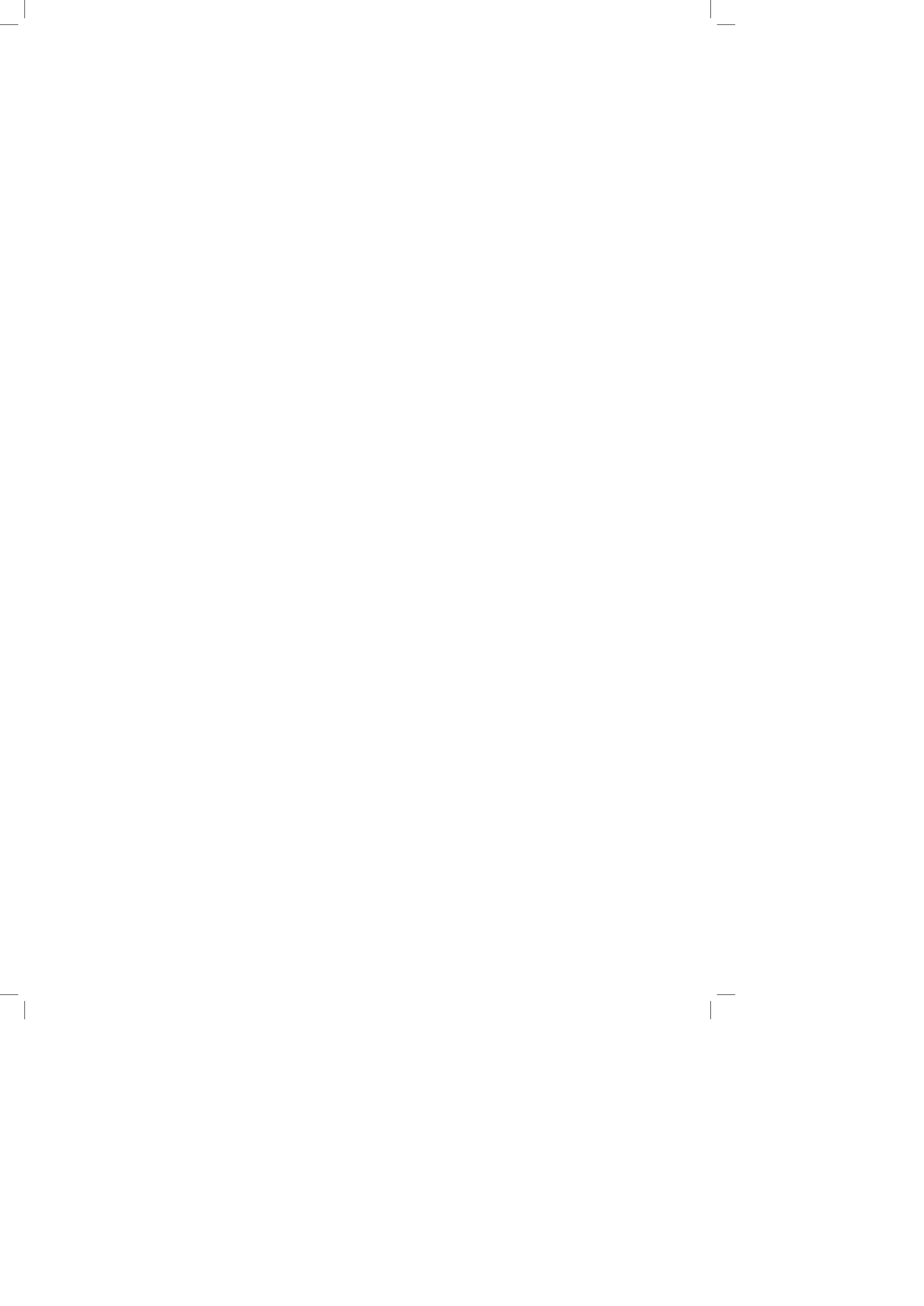
## Part Four

# Aspiring managers programme

In every organisation there are people who aspire to be managers. Encouraging people with potential will improve the management pool. Encouraging more women and more people from ethnic minority groups to go into management will help make management at every level more representative. Helping people understand what managers do and the expectations that the organisation has of managers will improve the quality of applications and interviews and help people decide whether they really are cut out for management.

The material in this section starts with a series of typical front line management scenarios and asks the individual what they would do. The material is most effective when used in small group discussions. Introducing individuals to management involves helping them understand the language of management and giving them the confidence not to use it! If you are ambitious you need to develop ways of letting significant others know about your achievements. If you don't tell them who will? This is also an important lesson in management – the power of positive feedback.

All the material in this manual can be used with people who aspire to be a manager in that the material clearly shows what managers do and the type of situations they deal with. The manual provides the aspiring manager with a good insight into the role of manager.



## Section 34

# Management scenarios

1. You witness a staff member talking in a corner of the office to another staff member. You think that you overheard them discussing a personal matter relating to another member of staff. Confidentiality is something that is extremely important within the job that they perform.

Describe the next steps you would take, if any.

2. You line manage a person who you have noticed has started to arrive late for work and also on occasion late for meetings. You have no issues at all with the standard of work this person carries out and you regularly get feedback regarding how well they have dealt with situations.

What, if anything, do you do?

3. You witness a member of your team sharing a joke about old people with a friend whilst they are talking on the telephone. A key part of the job they perform is about empathy with our customers.

What do you do?

4. You have asked a person to assist you with an urgent and important task; they tell you that they are very busy with something urgent right now so are unable to help. Five minutes later you see the person slowly doing some filing.

What do you do?

5. Your quarterly returns are due and you have requested assistance from a team member. The work they produce is full of basic errors and this means that your submission is late as you have had to stay behind to do the corrections.

What do you do?

6. A member of your team never joins in any of the 'fun' activities that you or the team arrange. You suspect they enjoy their own company yet you have noticed that this is having an effect on the closeness of the team.

What do you do?

7. It has come to your attention that a standard letter your team has been issuing is badly typed and contains language that is not customer friendly. When you talk to the person who sends this letter out they respond by saying 'it's always been like that, I didn't write it'.

What do you do?

8. We are having a heat wave and it is very hot in the office as there is no air-conditioning. You have provided fans and there is a water cooler but you have noticed that some of the staff are coming to work in clothes more suitable for the beach.

What do you do?

9. Every time you have a team meeting and provide feedback on what is happening in the Directorate you get a very negative and cynical response from some team members. Their negative attitude 'We've seen it all before, nothing changes, senior managers don't know what they're talking about' is beginning to make you dread team meetings and is taking away the enthusiasm and energy that has in the past been a characteristic of your work.

What do you do?



## Section 35

# Learn the language just don't speak it

Aspiring managers should, by all means, learn 'management language' so that they know what is being talked about but shouldn't ever use it. Management speak tends to confuse and it doesn't make you sound as clever as you think. Inexperienced managers and those who lack confidence, think reports sound better if they are hard to understand. The idea of writing a report is not to impress but to explain, influence and persuade – it's exactly the same in meetings.

Of course, this is not *rocket science*, everyone knows that you *can't make an omelette without breaking some eggs*; the main thing is for everyone to be *singing from the same song sheet*. Having *run this idea up the flagpole* the main thing is for everyone to realise is that this is not just *an exercise in ticking the boxes*. However, it is important that an individual *steps up to the plate*, recognises we don't have time for *hand holding* and *puts all their ducks in line*. And remember, when it comes to costing proposals, what we need is a *ballpark figure*.

Put like this, these expressions sound silly. Most are American in origin and many are sporting terms. Originally these expressions were designed to explain or illustrate in a way more likely to be understood by the intended audience, hence the sporting language. So, stepping up to the plate is a baseball phrase used to mean taking responsibility and the ballpark figure is the estimated or rounded up number as in the attendance at a sporting event. Its not rocket science is intended to emphasise that something is not difficult. Running an idea up the flagpole is about drawing an idea to everyone's attention like waving a flag. You can't make an omelette without breaking eggs is another way of saying, you can't get something done without upsetting someone and the end result is worth the short term pain. We are all on message or singing from the same song sheet when everyone is clear what is expected and we are all saying the same things to our staff and customers.

A favourite management expression at the moment is *this is not an exercise in ticking the boxes*. This is intended to convince staff that we are not just going through the motions but want to see real action. The expression comes from the fact that we have all become used to completing computerised tick box forms. Finally, if you want to negotiate a good deal or make a persuasive argument, you need to get everything in order, or *get all your ducks in line*.

Many of these expressions have become overused and rather than illustrating a point, they have become shorthand. The result is that some people use the shorthand without understanding what it is shorthand for. Much better to just say what you mean.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Which of the words and expressions used in this article have you heard used at work?
2. Can you think of other words and expression that are frequently used by management?
3. Find a recent management newsletter, blog or e-mail and underline all the jargon words or phrases and replace them with everyday words or expressions that mean the same.

## Section 36

# Praise you – how to get recognition and feel valued

A recent national survey of NHS staff revealed that a worryingly high proportion felt undervalued. Managers are often accused of being quick to blame and slow to praise. All too often the first time you hear your manager publicly praise you is at your leaving do. Employees say if managers just said 'thank you' once in a while they would feel less taken for granted. I worked for a chief executive who really took this on board. I regularly received a personal thank you note acknowledging my helpful contribution to a meeting or my stimulating presentation in a workshop. My initial pleasure and feelings of appreciation were short lived once I realised everyone else who attended the meeting or made a presentation received a similar thank you note, not only that but it soon became clear that this was standard practice after every workshop or away day. The idea was good but it had become devalued with indiscriminate use. It would have been much more effective simply to take individuals aside and thank them for their contribution and save the personal thank you note for something special.

Whilst we all want to be appreciated for what we do we also need to recognise that this is work and we are paid to do it. We do however expect some acknowledgment that the caring business operates on a lot of good will. We rely on people being prepared to stay after their shift has officially finished to see something through or the willingness of people to change shifts at short notice to cover for colleagues. Team-work requires people to be prepared to muck in and help out as opposed to saying 'it's not my job' and we need people who will take responsibility rather than leaving it to someone else.

Positive feedback from our boss or colleagues will make us feel valued, so how can we ensure we get our fair share? Part of the secret of how to get noticed at work is presentation and professionalism. How you look will determine whether you're treated seriously. I once worked with an ambitious and able PCT chief executive who insisted on wearing low cut tops and short skirts. She considered this part of expressing her individuality, but this coupled with the fact that her office was full of wobbly towers of files precariously balanced on filing cabinets and chairs, thus totally obscuring her desk and most of the floor space, gave the impression of someone who was at best eccentric and at worst not on top of things. Being professional includes preparing well for meetings so that you can make lots of useful and considered comments and suggestions as opposed to scanning the papers for the meeting whilst the chair is doing the introductions. If you want to be noticed you need to put yourself forward for some tasks as opposed to trying to avoid the chair's eye contact at this point in the meeting. Your boss and colleagues will value you more if they think you are the type of person who will help them.

How will people know what you have done if you don't tell them? It is unrealistic to expect your boss or your colleagues to keep up with what you have been doing as they are all too busy

doing what they have to do. Don't leave it till your annual appraisal to list every thing you have been doing over the past twelve months, this just comes over as someone who is trying to prove they have been working hard. Instead find opportunities during informal conversations to let others know what you have been up to. This is not about telling people how great you are, it is about letting people know what you are doing, particularly how you are trying to influence others on issues that affect the team. This might be your work with HR, finance or partner agencies. It is also an opportunity to praise others and if you note their successes, they will soon note yours.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Give examples of the ways your job or service relies on the goodwill of staff.
2. What have you done over the last two or three months that you are most proud of?
3. How could you show your appreciation to colleagues who have helped you?

## Section 37

# Most managers fall into the job

According to the chartered management institute (CMI) 60 per cent of managers fell into their job. The survey also reports that 40 per cent of managers didn't want the responsibility.

It's unfortunate that to obtain promotion and more money, most professionals have to become managers. Unfortunate, because not everyone makes a good manager. A major part of management is not about exercising control over a budget or developing strategies, it's about managing people. It's therefore amazing that so many managers find this part of the job unattractive and unrewarding. Anyone can manage a team full of highly motivated, very able and experienced staff that get on with each other, are clear about what has to be done and are united in how to do it. The trouble is this situation rarely occurs. Jobs change, some people don't like the new direction, others struggle to acquire new skills, not everyone shares the same view and not everyone can cope with the same amount of pressure.

Add to this an increasingly diverse workforce, where people of different faiths, culture and sexuality are expected to get on with each other despite work being the only time they mix with people different to themselves.

Managers make teams work. Managers also set standards. Many managers struggle with giving appropriate feedback on performance. Either they say nothing or are over critical. They don't praise enough or they praise too much.

A good indication of a manager's people skills is how they deal with absenteeism. Do they avoid the issue; say nothing despite the murmurings within the team about a colleague's attendance record? This inaction can be because they fear being accused of picking on an individual and being the subject of a complaint. This is a common anxiety amongst managers who lack confidence or who are cynical, especially if the member of staff is black, has a disability or is a woman managed by a man. Such managers often cite the experience of a colleague forced to defend their actions to a grievance hearing, who as a result take the view 'it's not worth the aggravation'. Other managers seem to think absenteeism is the responsibility of HR and complain that occupational health are unhelpful because they won't agree to getting rid of an individual.

Another simple test of a manager's aptitude for management is how they deal with a member of staff coming to work inappropriately dressed. Ignore it. Tell the member of staff not to come to work dressed like that and send them home. Ask HR to send staff a copy of a dress code. 'What do you mean there's no dress code?' Get someone else to have a quiet word with the individual about what is and isn't appropriate to wear in hot weather. Male managers are often uncomfortable about challenging young female staff about fashionable clothing that reveals too much flesh, for fear of being accused of being sexist. 'Well you shouldn't be looking at my cleavage anyway.'

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How managers deal with poor standards of work says much about their people management skills.

- Do you accept a lower standard of work from a member of staff on the grounds that not everyone is bright and enthusiastic?
- How do you set reasonable objectives and targets?
- How do you increase someone's confidence and experience?
- How much should you delegate to someone whose work you always have to correct?
- If you make demands won't you be accused of bullying or worse – be accused of racism?

Management is about managing people. Management is not about avoiding conflict or ignoring problems. Managers to be effective need to have a sense of purpose, the confidence to challenge and the appetite for responsibility.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Why do people go into management?
2. What are the pressures of management?
3. Management includes managing people: what sort of issues do managers have to deal with when managing staff?

## Part Five

# Management guru

The intranet offers the opportunity of making discussion material widely available across the organisation. The material can be used in one to one sessions or discussion groups. Individuals who aspire to be managers can read it and gain some insight into the role and the curious can have a look at what their managers are discussing. Each article is a quick read, no more than 500 words, is topical and is thought provoking even provocative. The aim is to get people talking and thinking about what it is to be a manager.





## Section 38

# How to improve morale and does it matter anyway?

Morale is low in the teaching profession as teachers complain salaries have not kept pace with inflation and head teachers report that league tables put them under too much pressure. Morale is low in the NHS as a result of staff feeling undervalued and unsafe. Morale is low amongst social workers who feel budget cuts and pressure to meet targets undermines professional values. Does it matter? Does low morale affect the quality of service?

Morale in the public sector will be affected by constant changes imposed by an impatient central Government and whether budgets allow for growth or require cut backs. I have worked in organisations where the budget has allowed for growth and the service has been held in high regard but morale has been low. I have worked in places where services were being cut to the bone and where criticism in the local press and from local MPs was relentless, yet staff morale remained high. Two facts seemed to influence morale: the quality of leadership within the organisation and the people management skills of line managers. Yet in both sets of circumstances there was no direct relationship I could find between the level of morale and the individuals commitment to doing a good job for the service user. This seems to be because people's commitment in the public sector is to the service user rather than the organisation. They don't pull out all the stops for the organisation's reputation, to hit Government targets or to make senior management look good, they do it to make a difference to an individual's life. They can be fed up with the way the profession is treated and feel undervalued and unappreciated by the organisation, but they will still do their best to help the individual because this is why they joined the profession in the first place. Or at least this has been my experience in the past.

I am less sure this will always be the case in the future. It's not just about the gradual erosion of goodwill over many years, rather it is recognition that as professions have broadened their intake, we can no longer assume that the prime motivation is to make a difference. Increasingly, people come to work as nurses, teachers and social workers, not as a vocation but because these professions are considered good careers with a certain amount of social status. Such individuals will be keen to see the status and rewards maintained.

In general people who work in the public sector are proud of what they do. People can feel very positive about the work of their team or service but negative about the organisation they work for. This often comes to light when organisations prepare for Investors in People accreditation. The senior managers fret over what staff will say to the assessors in light of budget cuts and management reorganisations but staff are asked about what they do and they are invariably positive about their own work and that of their team.

People who work in parts of the public sector are highly motivated by the prospect of helping people and making a difference to an individual's life. If they get on with their line manager,

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trust them, feel valued and that their efforts are recognised, then what's happening outside of their team/establishment has limited impact on their morale. This works both ways as if there is conflict within the team, if there is a lack of trust in the manager then any additional pressure caused by staffing vacancies, service cuts or changes in the way work is organised will result in people feeling unhappy at work, looking for other jobs and complaining about their lot.

So improving morale in the public sector is initially about not putting obstacles in the way of worker's efforts to help people. Secondly, it is about good people management skills. Thirdly, it is about developing an organisational culture that takes care over the way it manages major change, whether that is how it introduces a non smoking policy or how it implements an equal pay review. Most organisations don't think about how policies and procedures, designed to be fair, consistent and transparent to the service user, may be making it harder for staff to help people. This is often referred to as the bureaucracy of the organisation or how difficult it is to get things done. Organisations traditionally focused on the financial competencies of managers as opposed to developing their people management skills. And some organisations are careless in the way they introduce major change, spending too little time and effort explaining why change is necessary and creating too few opportunities for staff to influence how changes are implemented.

Does it matter if staff morale is low? At a team level it will certainly effect whether people enjoy coming to work and the extent of teamwork. At an organisational level it will impact on how smoothly or antagonistically major change is achieved and at a national level if teachers, nurses and social workers feel undervalued then the profession will become less attractive to new entrants with adverse consequences for the public sector as a whole.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What are your responsibilities as a manager beyond ensuring your team is doing a good job?
2. What motivates you?
3. How would you tackle cynicism in your team?

## Section 39

# Received wisdom about management

There is a lot of received wisdom about management, things that are accepted as true, but are they? Management is not a popularity contest, you won't get promoted if you upset people, managers have to put in long hours and managers need to be educated to degree level.

It is true that managers have to make unpopular decisions, anything from deciding who gets to go on a course or conference, to dismissing someone for gross misconduct. Your staff want a friendly atmosphere in the office, they don't want to be your friend. They don't want you to have favourites; they do want you to take an interest in them as an individual. However, my experience is that management often is a popularity contest. It starts at the job interview. A good shortlist means that all the candidates can do the job and they are all appointable, the decision is who do we think we could best work with? I have noticed that when it comes to reorganisations, some managers are found other jobs more easily than others. This is only partly down to experience and skills; often it's whether they are seen as easy to work with.

Managers do a lot of work with partner agencies and people get reputations. They may be very knowledgeable, very experienced, very enthusiastic, but do people like working with them? Are they reliable, do they do what they say they will do, are they willing to do things a different way or only their way, do they share the work and credit, or do they leave it to others and then claim it as their own. If things don't work out, do they blame everyone else?

The idea that if you rock the boat you will undermine your chances starts early in life. I remember a teacher at school having a quiet word with me to the effect that as I was applying to go to university, this was not a good time to make myself unpopular with the head by leading the criticism about some aspect of school policy. It's much the same at work. Your manager implies that senior management or the chief executive has commented that 'you're getting a bit of a reputation as a member of the awkward squad'. The general advice seems to be don't raise your head above the parapet, or you risk getting it knocked off. The opposite view is that if you want to get on, you need to get noticed, that having a view, even if it is a different view, says a lot more about you than having no view or not being prepared to express a view.

I believe managers should be opinionated. They should have a view on work issues, they should be prepared to express it and defend it. Of course, they should also accept that others have views that may be different and being right isn't all its cracked up to be.

Some people are put off seeking promotion fearing that the expectation of putting in long hours is not worth the sacrifice to family life. Where does it say managers have to put in long hours? Managers who work long hours do so out of choice. Managers are people who are assertive, confident, good at determining priorities and delegate enthusiastically. Therefore, if they are first in the office and last to leave it must be because they choose to be.

I have noticed that person specifications for management posts increasingly state that the applicant must be educated to degree level. I think this is intended to reflect a desire to attract a broad range of candidates, however it could be seen as saying if you haven't been to university you can't be a good manager. More worryingly, it reflects a view that academic qualifications are an essential pre-requisite for management. Have you noticed a lot of incompetent managers have formal academic management qualifications? I'm sure your organisation would never send an incompetent manager on an MBA course just to get them out of the way for a while, but it has been known.

I have also come across staff from black and ethnic minority groups who are vastly over qualified for the job they are in. It seems that some organisations have been sending staff from black and ethnic minority groups on MBAs even though they are not in management posts. The explanation seems to be: aspiring black manager applies for a number of management posts and is unsuccessful. The feedback is you did a good interview but the successful candidate was more experienced and better qualified. After a number of frustrating experiences, the candidate starts challenging the feedback and asking the organisation how they are supposed to get experience and qualifications, when the only people seconded are already managers.

Suddenly the organisation is keen to send black staff on MBAs. You don't need an MBA to be a first line manager or even a middle manager and it's perfectly possible to be a very competent senior manager without an MBA.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What's the difference between being liked as a manager and being respected?
2. What would put able candidates off applying for management posts in your organisation?
3. This article implies that academic qualifications are over rated when it comes to management so why do so many organisations seek to appoint managers with degrees and management qualifications?

## Section 40

### Would you drop your manager in it?

You wouldn't want your staff to drop you in it, but has any manager the right to expect unconditional loyalty?

Does your loyalty extend to covering up for your manager or would your ambition tempt you to expose your manager's failings? And if not your ambition then your sense of what's right.

You are escorting a senior manager on a 'walk about' when they refer to the annual appraisal process clearly under the impression that this is routine for all staff. Do you make the right noises about it being helpful to give staff feedback and set targets for the forthcoming year or do you say your manager hasn't got round to it yet? You know your manager thinks this is a huge waste of time and effort. Do you keep this to your self?

You agree to give management input into some training sessions for an area of service you are not directly responsible for. You refer to the importance the organisation attaches to regular one-to-one sessions between employee and manager and go on at some length about the benefits and how to get the most out of these meetings, when you realise there are a lot of blank stares around the room. The course organiser confirms that they regularly receive comments that the manager for this area of service does not think this type of supervision and support is appropriate or practical. Do you raise this with your colleague, do you raise it with someone else or do you let sleeping dogs lie? After all it's not your area of service and therefore not your responsibility.

You are aware that the department is 'adjusting' its performance figures before submitting them. The director has made it clear he is not prepared to submit figures which show deterioration in performance from last year which has led to some minor rounding up. You are uncomfortable about this but it is highly unlikely that the figures will be questioned. What do you do if anything?

Your department employs people with a disability to make office furniture. This is part of a commercial business; however councillors have made it clear they expect all departments to support this venture as part of the Local Authorities Social Inclusion strategy. One department in particular ignores this expectation; the director concerned has made it known to their staff that they think managers should buy their furniture from wherever they can get the best deal. Despite your offer to match any like-for-like deal, managers continue to place large orders elsewhere. At a meeting of the Social Inclusion Committee you have the opportunity to raise your frustrations about this lack of support. Should you do it or do you subscribe to the view that officers should not involve members in their disputes?

When is it appropriate to involve members? I worked in an organisation where the deputy director had gone to the relevant cabinet member to express concern about the breakdown in

working relations within the senior management team as a result of the affair the director was having with one of the assistant directors. He felt this was part of his role as deputy and was encouraged in this by the other assistant directors. The director was subsequently forced to leave. The deputy became acting director then director. His first action as director was to do away with the post of deputy. After all, it is easy to get rid of someone if you have a ready made replacement.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What do we mean by loyalty in a work situation, loyalty to your colleagues, to your boss, to the organisation?
2. In the scenario described someone shopped their boss in order to get their job, it worked but what are the implications?
3. Is it possible in the modern work place to be ambitious and successful and retain your integrity?

## Section 41

# What happens if someone complains about you?

We are not all the same. This has never been more apparent than it is in today's workforce. It's not just age, gender and disability, a modern manager needs to be sensitive to issues of race, faith and sexuality. Some awareness training is necessary for all managers in order that they don't unintentionally cause offence or slip into casual stereotyping. Training which involves people sharing their experiences and anxieties can also help managers feel more confident and comfortable managing a diverse team. More important than knowing about religious festivals or cultural beliefs is recognising that if staff feel valued and respected, if they feel that they are treated fairly, then the organisation is unlikely to be one characterised by bullying, harassment and discrimination.

How managers treat their staff is crucial but in turn managers need to feel valued, respected and trusted by their managers. In this respect senior managers do need to lead by example but what counts is how your immediate manager behaves.

Another way of expressing this is that managers need to be good people managers. Managers are often appointed as a result of their professional expertise. People management skills have to be learned in the same way financial management skills have to be learned. However, people management skills are not learned in the same way.

The policies on recruitment and selection or absence management can be taught but it is the skill with which managers apply these policies that will determine whether staff feel valued, respected or treated fairly.

Improving managers' people skills requires an approach which develops the individual's insight into the impact their behaviour has on others. 360 degree feedback from colleagues is one way of managers finding out how their behaviour impacts on those they manage and those they work with. Myers-Briggs psychometric assessments will give the individual an understanding of their own preferences and therefore their strengths and potential blind spots. Building on this information requires the opportunity to receive some one-to-one coaching. The idea is for a specialist coach to observe the individual in action and give them detailed feedback. In this way the individual will be helped to develop greater insight into how their behaviour in a range of management settings, impacts on others and how, by making adjustments and trying different approaches, they can be more effective leaders.

Initially managers may be apprehensive for many it will have been a long time since they have been given any impartial direct feedback about their behaviour.

Things some staff say about their manager

That manager will never give a black person like me a job in their team.

My manager has his favourites.

The policies on annual leave and sickness absence are applied differently to different people.

My manager doesn't like people going on courses because providing cover is difficult.

My manager lets some people get away with murder but is always threatening me with disciplinary action.

My manager doesn't believe in negotiating deadlines, she imposes them.

We have noticed our female manager does not employ women with young children, we think this is because she believes they will take time off to look after them.

The boss takes all the school holidays off for annual leave but tells the rest of us to work out our annual leave arrangements between ourselves.

Our manager makes decisions that affect all of us without consulting us. When we raised this she says 'that's what I am paid to do'.

My manager doesn't challenge staff when they make inappropriate comments.

My manager says their door is always open but if you try to raise something with him he says he is busy and can it wait until supervision.

It is always the same managers on the recruitment panel: they have turned me down before so there is no point in me applying again.

My manager just doesn't listen.

My manager takes any questioning of their decisions as personal criticism.

My manager makes it clear he doesn't want debate.

The quotes from staff clearly illustrate that some staff feel their managers don't act fairly.

## Discussion Questions

1. Is this evidence of discrimination, poor management or the fact that some staff will always complain if they don't get what they want?
2. How would you go about addressing the issues staff raise in their comments about their managers?
3. Management is about having the self-confidence to admit you have got it wrong. How do you develop this self-confidence and how does it differ from arrogance or weakness?



## Section 42

# Is it better to be feared than loved?

- Can you claim to value staff and cut their pay?
- Can you maintain a position of openness and honesty when you are going to make people redundant?
- Can you afford to be sensitive and caring when you are going to cut services to vulnerable people?
- Can you be committed to partners who want to protect their own budgets at your expense?
- Does a recession need a different type of leader – one who is feared rather than loved?
- Do these difficult economic times require a different type of manager and are you cut out to be that type of manager?

We all want recognition, we all want to be considered successful and a little bit of power wouldn't hurt, but how far are you prepared to go?

- Is it OK even inevitable to step on a few toes on your way up?
- Do you feel comfortable pushing yourself to the front of the crowd?
- Do you think you should be 'spotted' or do you think you have to get yourself noticed?
- Do you think it is OK to be openly ambitious or is it something you find a little vulgar?
- Do you mind if colleagues see your enthusiasm to please the boss, to demonstrate your commitment by staying late or volunteering for projects?
- Do you think it is who you know rather than what you know?
- If your boss was singing your praises about a piece of work that was mostly the result of the efforts of someone else, would you own up or keep quiet?
- If the current mess was down to one of your colleagues would you drop them in it or would you accept collective responsibility?
- Do you think an effective manager needs a hint of menace to go with the charm?
- Do you think it is better to be feared than loved?
- Do you think effective managers if not loved should be respected? If the economic situation puts a strain on partnerships isn't this when we most need senior managers with relationship building skills. When budgets are cut and we are required to do more with less, then we need managers who are innovative. When efficiencies require services to be

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delivered in different ways and working practices to be changed, we need managers with leadership skills who can inspire staff. When people face a cut in real wages and are worried about future employment, we certainly need managers with good people skills.

It is in difficult times that we most need inspirational leaders – people we trust and people with integrity. Most of all we need managers with leadership qualities and good people management skills. It is when partnerships are strained that we most need managers skilled in relationship building and those who can see beyond the immediate budget problem.

This is not a time for Machiavellian managers.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What is a Machiavellian manager?
2. How do you get people to trust you?
3. Why then do some people who are manipulative, untrustworthy may be even a bully appear to be successful?

## Section 43

# Why are more managers not more angry more often?

Being described as 'an angry young man' used to be taken as a compliment – meaning someone who was passionate about righting wrongs. At interview every manager claims to be passionate about the job, so how is it that more of them don't get angry more often?

Despite what you may have been led to believe it is OK to get angry at work. Conventional advice is stay cool and don't show your emotions, but the cold bloody chillingly unemotional manager can be just as difficult to work with as the volcanic boss. Sometimes it is right to be angry and reasonable to show your anger. Management is about promoting good practice and challenging bad practice. Why would you not get angry about the ill treatment of vulnerable people? Why would you not get angry with staff who abuse their power?

People think anger is inappropriate in the work place because of its links to violence. But showing you are angry is not the same as losing control. We have all seen Sir Alan Sugar on TV make his displeasure known to his apprentices but neither us, nor them, think that there is a risk he may turn violent.

A parent who never shows any anger but administers punishments in a cold, unemotional way is not seen as caring. If you really care and are passionate about the issue, then you don't stay quiet, you don't let it go unchallenged, you don't remain coldly indifferent and dispassionate. We want manager's who care about the treatment of patients, who are upset about the neglect of older people or who are genuinely shocked about the abuse of vulnerable people. This does not mean it is acceptable or appropriate to shout or be abusive to colleagues. Managers need to channel their anger and be able to show they are angry but still be in control of their emotions.

As a trainee teacher I learnt the value of showing the class when I was angry with them – even the need to exaggerate my emotions to get my point across. This is very different to what the pupils refer to as 'losing it big time' when an individual is no longer in control of their emotions and they do not know what they will do next nor do to those around them.

So being angry and showing your anger is OK but being out of control is not.

### Discussion Questions

1. The article claims it is OK to show your emotions but what's the difference between being angry because you care passionately and shouting at people because you are a bully?
2. What makes you angry, how do you show it?
3. How would you respond if a member of staff told you that their boss regularly shouts at them?

## Section 44

# Managing mavericks

I have been reading a lot of detective novels recently. The central figures invariably have flawed personal lives, broken marriages, rarely see their children and friends: they have lost touch with all of them because of the demands of the job. The central figure is always anti authority despite working in a very hierarchical organisation – the police force. They have no time for paperwork, office politics or standard procedures. They ignore the rules, cut corners, upset their bosses but they catch the criminals.

Often these individuals lack interpersonal skills, drink too much and have none too secret vices, gambling, collecting rare first editions or supporting an unfashionable football club. They may be interesting, but they are not attractive individuals. They are not particularly successful as their career has stalled despite their cleverness. Successive bosses consider them a liability – likely to upset important people like politicians by saying the wrong thing at the wrong time even though it may be the right solution.

Their passion for the job is acknowledged but not admired by their less able, less committed, more cynical career minded colleagues. But they often command the loyalty and respect of their team.

Why are such figures so common and so popular in literature and television? Perhaps it is the dynamic, rebellious manager we would all like to be if only we didn't have a mortgage and kids at university. The reality is that most of us are not like this. We make compromises, we do the boring stuff like responding to e-mails, keeping the recording up to date, authorising expenditure, attending meetings and we follow policy and procedures most of the time and do not disagree with our boss too often – at least in public. We may not be compliant by nature but are made so by the work place. Yet the organisation also needs people who challenge the way things are done in order to respond to changing circumstances. If budgets are cut, whilst demand is increasing, if service user expectations are rising and continuous improvement is to be maintained then managers will need to be innovative. So just like watching the detectives some insubordination, deviance and disregard for accepted ways of doing things will be tolerated, provided it gets results.

One thing to remember is that these detective stories are always written from the point of view of the maverick cop – no thought is given to the person who has to manage them! One is never quite sure what they will say or do next, which important and influential person their cavalier attitude and characteristic bluntness will upset, which carefully nurtured relationship they will jeopardise by their rash actions or what damage their disregard for procedures might cause to the reputation of the organisation. In the real world these things matter.

## Discussion Questions

1. What's good about mavericks, what's not so good about mavericks?
2. How would you encourage innovation and creativity in your staff?
3. If a very able and committed member of staff had a tendency to ignore procedures and upset people with their bluntness how would you deal with this?

## Section 45

# I've been to New York – I've seen the future

I've been to New York – I've seen the future. It's fast, efficient, cheap and intimidating. The future of our public services if they follow the previous pattern of imitating the US business model will be like a New York breakfast. That is, fast, efficient, cheap and intimidating.

It needs to be fast because everyone is in a hurry. It needs to be efficient because it's very busy and people don't like waiting. It needs to be cheap or people will go elsewhere and of course there needs to be extensive choice because the customer expects it.

If you know exactly what you want and you know how the system works you can get a cheap, quick breakfast of your choice. But efficiency depends on people being decisive and the speed depends on people knowing what to do and not asking lots of 'dumb' questions in a hard to follow accent. For those not used to this self service system it is off-putting, even intimidating. The result for me was not getting the breakfast I wanted but the one easiest to order. Cheap and quick but not a satisfying experience. The thing is though, you do get used to it!

No doubt this is how it would be if the public sector adopted this model. I can see that in personal social services people with a physical disability would soon get to understand the system, the middle class parents of people with a learning disability would exploit it to their benefit, most elderly people would be put off except those lucky enough to have a capable son or daughter to guide them.

This approach is not a million miles away from the 'Easy Council' and its no frills service based on the economy airline model. This also requires a certain amount of know-how and confidence to book on-line, to understand the need to travel light due to weight restrictions and limits on hand luggage, the implications of not having allocated seating and the fact that everything is an extra which is charged for.

What these models have in common is that they are cheap, they are efficient and, in so far as they do what they say they do, good value for money.

But I can't help thinking they are neither customer friendly or accessible to the whole community. Cost and choice are not the only measures of success.

### Discussion Questions

1. When budgets are being squeezed efficiency becomes very important. From a customer point of view what's the down side to the focus on efficiency?
2. What would an 'Easy Council' service look like?
3. How do you get the balance right between being customer-focused and efficient?

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## Section 46

# Fire your worst customers

'Fire your worst customers' is the latest example of useless lessons from the private sector. This tip for how to be a successful organisation recently appeared in the *Times* business section. A successful business apparently identifies those customers who demand too much, complain too often and pay too little. Having identified these bad customers the efficient business rejects them.

Well the public sector certainly has its fair share of difficult customers, vexatious complainants and people who can't pay, won't pay. But the public sector does not get to choose its customers. We are a service for all, even those that don't want us (interfering in their lives or as we prefer to phrase it protecting the vulnerable).

But is this lesson from the private sector any less inappropriate than other private sector ways of doing things that we have been encouraged to embrace with enthusiasm. I am thinking of star ratings, performance pay, league tables, outsourcing and the latest wheeze 'no frills' services.

Most of these approaches arise out of two fundamentals of the private sector which either don't apply or are not appropriate for the public sector – competition and profit. To survive and thrive a private sector business must be competitive and make a profit. Whereas the public sector with its multiple objectives recognises the need for co-operation in order to be effective. In fact the public sector recognises that no one agency or department working in isolation can tackle the big issues facing the public sector like unemployment, health inequality, community cohesion, homelessness, crime and drug abuse.

We have been intimidated by the self promoting claims of the private sector who state they do it better, when what they mean is cheaper. They act as if they invented customer care when in fact we are the ones motivated by care. We have promoted choice as the measure of success when in fact what counts is effectiveness – making a difference to people lives.

In the current economic climate the public sector is being required to do more with less and the way to achieve this we are told is be more like the private sector. It is right that the public sector has to justify how it spends the taxpayer's pound but we should not be apologetic for not being as efficient as the private sector. The public sector exists because the private sector is selective – it does not attempt to provide a universal service but seeks profitable niche markets. Any one can be efficient if they fire their worst customers.

### Discussion Questions

1. What is the best way to deal with 'difficult' customers?
2. What practises have the public sector been encouraged to adopt from the private sector?
3. What could the private sector learn from the public sector?

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## Section 47

# Selling the budget

We need a people carrier, we want a Range Rover, we can afford a mini and a second hand one at that. It's started the process of trying to get the council budget agreed. This is like trying to sell a second hand car. Councillors thought they would be able to buy a new car, a more efficient car, a car that was kinder to the environment, albeit a smaller car. The old car was expensive to run, there were concerns about its reliability, and whilst it continued to pass its MOT the list of things that needed putting right continued to grow. A new car was needed and the reduced insurance, better fuel consumption and the absence of expensive maintenance would mean it would pay for itself within a few years. Unfortunately we don't have as much money as we expected in fact we have a lot less than we thought, so it will have to be a second hand car and a small car with none of the extras. This is going to mean not only can we cope with fewer passengers but it will be a less comfortable ride. This will be unpopular.

There is always a trade-off in setting the budget. You can't achieve a five, 10 or 15 per cent saving by cutting all budgets by the same amount. Some services are so small that to cut their budget would mean that they are just no longer viable. This is the argument small voluntary organisations make when threatened with a cut in their grant. Other services make a compelling argument that despite the financial situation their budget needs to be increased to meet rising demand or new requirements. This is the argument used by Children's Services especially in relation to child protection. Some budgets will be offered a degree of protection at the expense of others depending on the priorities adopted by the ruling party and a political judgment on what the voters will accept. Should we charge more for home help, make fewer people eligible for the service or pay those who provide the service less? Should we save money by closing day centres for older people or libraries?

During a recession perhaps the priority is economic development so expensive in-house services are retained because otherwise there are large numbers of redundancies and local unemployment is increased with a knock-on effect on the local economy. Alternatively the priority could be tackling health inequality and narrowing the gap in life expectancy between those who live in the more affluent parts of the county compared to those who live in the most deprived areas. In which case swimming pools stay open but museums close.

The trade offs are never easy or welcome when what you really wanted was a shiny new set of efficient services.

### Discussion Questions

1. When is efficiency saving a budget cut?
2. What are your responsibilities as a manager when it comes to selling the budget?
3. Budget decisions are not always made on the basis of the best business case what else has to be taken into consideration?

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## Section 48

# Good enough will have to do

My wife thinks it's a great shame more people don't have it. My Gran saw it as the answer to everything. My sociology lecturer said it didn't exist and in my experience it is very rarely found amongst groups of professionals, the so called experts and management consultants. I am referring to common sense or the lack of it and the tendency to overcomplicate – especially where a generous budget and a tight timescale are involved.

As President of the USA, JF Kennedy announced that America would be the first to put a man on the moon – money was no object. When the mission required a pen that would write in zero gravity then money and expertise were thrown at the problem. A few million dollars and the best technical brains eventually came up with a pen that could write upside down and in zero gravity. A triumph for USA technical know how. The Russians working on a more limited budget took a pencil into space.

In the past some of us in the public sector have responded to the pressure of ambitious plans and imposed deadlines in the same way as NASA and bought in expensive management consultants who have produced an over complicated solution and a large bill.

Over complicated solutions are often the result of the best intentions. Fired by the vision and not wishing to make compromises, the desire is to come up with the perfect solution. Professionals always strive for the best even when they know that only a select few will be able to afford it. The harsh financial climate the public sector is now entering means that we should not waste time and energy designing a perfect model for world class commissioning. The task is to come up with something that will do the job and we can afford.

I am not suggesting service cuts and redundancies are a good thing. I am suggesting that a lack of money may be the opportunity to rethink and do things differently and to overcome the inbuilt resistance to radical change. I am also suggesting it may not be such a bad thing to have to be less idealistic and more pragmatic, to accept that good enough will have to do. Or as my Gran would say 'show a little common sense'.

### Discussion Questions

1. What do we mean by common sense?
2. Why do 'professionals' often end up with over-complicated solutions?
3. What is the management role especially when budgets are under severe pressure?

## Section 49

### Return to the bad old ways

Is the harsh financial climate in the public sector leading to a return to the bad old ways of 'macho' management in the NHS and management bullying in local authorities? Do 'savage' budget cuts, demands for increased efficiencies, exhortations to do more with less and threats to management posts lead to bad management or simply expose the bad managers?

Is this a climate which breeds the wrong type of management behaviour in which arrogance, secrecy and bullying flourishes? Or are such claims the response of professionals who have become used to year on year budget growth, who have been protected from the harsh realities of the real world and who just can't accept that the good times have come to an end. In my view the problem is not a failure to recognise the need for change, to do things differently and even stop doing some things. The problem arises out of managers' lack of skill in managing people.

We still seem to think managers are born rather than developed. People are promoted to management post on the basis of their professional skills. We don't routinely expect managers to have a management qualification except for the most senior posts and even then MBAs are used as a selection criteria in their own right rather than evidence of management competence. In my experience MBAs are good at helping managers develop their strategic thinking but don't focus on people management skills.

The first management post is the hardest. It's not usually managing the budget that causes the problems but managing the staff. Tackling an individual about their time-keeping, their attendance, their inappropriate summer clothing, their reluctance to attend training courses, their cynicism towards any new initiative, their antagonism towards certain colleagues, inappropriate 'jokes', insensitive comments, underlying sexist, racist or homophobic attitudes.

Effective managers are explicit in their expectations, challenge poor practice, get people to do what needs to be done and show no favourites. Managers with good people skills recognise there is a difference between being friendly and being friends with the staff you manage.

If all staff feel valued and respected, if they feel they are treated fairly, then the organisation they work for is unlikely to be characterised by bullying, harassment and discrimination. This requires managers to become more sensitive to peoples' needs and to improve their leadership skills by gaining insight into how their behavior affects the people they manage.

Unfortunately many public sector organisations will view the current financial climate as the time to cut back on management development rather than recognising that it will be their managers that get them through these difficult times. These will be the organisations where managers start talking about 'less consultation and more action' where any unpopular decision is justified by the financial climate where very quickly trust evaporates where there is no room for debate and leadership turns into dictatorship.

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## Discussion Questions

1. Did the bad old ways referred to ever really go away?
2. Why would the first management post you have be the hardest?
3. What is the difference between being friendly and being friends with those you manage?

## Section 50

### Who has it better?

The private sector thinks the public sector has it better. According to a study by IFF Research amongst 500 workers in the private and public sector, private sector workers think life is more attractive in the public sector. This view has no doubt been encouraged by redundancies, job insecurity, pay freezes and even pay cuts in the private sector at the same time as the numbers employed in the public sector were increasing and annual pay rises were the norm.

For years business schools had been trying to convince us that the two sectors were coming closer together. The public sector was acting more business like and the private sector was being more socially responsible. The public sector has certainly adopted many techniques from the private sector for example performance management and being customer focused but as those like me who have worked in both sectors know the cultures are very different. The approach to hiring, firing and rewarding is the clearest example of this. The private sector is quick to hire and quick to fire and views financial reward as a key motivator. The public sector has long and torturous recruitment processes, local government has in the past done almost anything rather than make people compulsory redundant and is adverse to singling out individuals for reward.

In a time of recession and rising unemployment it is little wonder that those in the private sector would envy the perceived job security in the public sector. But this may be just a time lag as the public sector catches up with the private sector pay it also starts to feel the impact of budget cuts and job losses.

Of course the culture is still different, a reduction of one in five management posts in the public sector is described as 'savage cuts' whereas in the private sector this is just standard practice in reducing overheads and staying competitive.

It is too simplistic to characterise the private sector as performance driven and the public sector as people centred. Many parts of the NHS and local government are characterised by a macho management style that focuses on the numbers. Whereas as private sector 'creative industries' like IT companies would consider such an approach inappropriate and counter productive.

So it may be that there is a coming together of private and public sectors that increasingly makes it hard to differentiate between them, however it will take a lot longer to change people's perceptions that the private sector rewards better and the public sector offers greater job security.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What are the advantages typically associated in working in the private sector?
2. What are the advantages typically associated in working in the public sector?
3. What would be different about working for a 'not-for-profit' organisation or a social enterprise company?

## Section 51

### **Are public sector managers up to the job?**

Two reports published recently claim to provide evidence that public sector managers are ill equipped to respond to the challenges ahead as budgets are cut.

A report by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) claims managers from supervisors to senior leaders lack the people management skills to get more out of staff and to deliver more with less. Of course it is difficult to inspire staff at a time of redundancies and service cuts but that is the task.

A survey by the management recruitment group HAY reinforces this message by reporting that the majority of staff surveyed do not have confidence in management's ability to do what was necessary to get them through these difficult times. Two examples are given of the ineffectiveness of public sector managers. The first is in relation to managing absenteeism where absence rates in the public sector are considerably higher than in the private sector. The average annual figure for the public sector is 9.7 days lost per employee compared with a figure of 6.4 in the private sector. The report claims that reduced absenteeism would result in millions of pounds saved in overtime and agency staffing costs.

The other example given of the weakness of public sector managers is in dealing with conflict. Public sector managers are characterised as shying away from challenging individual's poor performance and where managers do act on issues of inappropriate or unacceptable conduct, cases drag on far too long taking up a disproportionate amount of the organisation's time and energy.

The public sector covers a wide range of services including the NHS, local government and the civil service. Some, like the NHS, do have a reputation for a macho management style, others are characterised by stifling bureaucracy and insensitive senior management. However, there is plenty of evidence from inspections and audits that throughout the public sector there are centres of excellence, examples of inspirational leadership and evidence of outstanding performance improvement.

Absenteeism in the public sector is higher but closer scrutiny reveals that absenteeism amongst office staff is no higher in the public sector than in the private sector. Public sector absenteeism is higher where staff are dealing with people whose behaviour can be aggressive and abusive, so for example ambulance staff dealing with drunks or people who are on drugs or staff on a Social Services reception desk dealing with people at a point of crisis in their lives when the frustration sometimes boils over and is directed at those in front of them. This would indicate that high levels of absenteeism are more to do with the nature of the job rather than the culture of the organisation.

As a senior manager I have plenty of experience to support the argument that our processes and procedures for dealing with disciplinaries and grievances take far too long. A small minority

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of staff abuse the system, submitting grievances against managers who have quite appropriately challenged their performance or dragging out disciplinary investigations by going off sick or making themselves unavailable and so continuing to draw their pay before eventually being dismissed. As an experienced chair of disciplinary hearings I can certainly confirm that when it comes to local government we do not tolerate people abusing their position of power and have no hesitation dismissing people who have mistreated the vulnerable people they were employed to care for.

It is, however, true that some managers lack the confidence and skills to manage an increasingly diverse workforce. If they find it difficult to challenge someone about their attendance or the quality of their work then how much more difficult will it be to challenge someone who responds by saying you are not taking proper account of my disability or you are picking on me because I am gay. So how can we equip managers with people management skills which are even more essential at a time of budget cuts, service reductions and changes in the way we work? How can we ensure that all managers have leadership skills and are able to inspire their staff? And how can we ensure all managers have the confidence to challenge appropriately and take responsibility for bringing about change?

Traditional management training does not deliver these skills, it either focuses on academic theory or on the purely practical, how to manage the budget, how to meet health and safety regulations, how to draw up a business plan. The current financial climate requires managers with good people management skills. This starts with managers having an insight into how their behaviour affects others. A starting point is feedback from colleagues and direct reports, One way to get this is from 360 degree feedback questionnaires. Another method is executive coaching, that is an independent trainer or coach observes the manager in a range of typical management situations, for example a team meeting, a presentation to the board, a negotiation with partner organisation. The coach then provides the individual with detailed feedback and together they agree ways in which they could improve their skills at influencing others and identify areas to work on such as listening more, speaking less. This type of direct detailed feedback is rarely provided to managers and almost never provided to senior managers so when it is it can be very powerful. A further approach is for managers to have access to a mentor, someone outside their line management with more experience who is willing to share their wisdom. Someone the manager can confide in, someone who will offer impartial advice and support.

## Discussion Questions

1. Are the examples of the ineffectiveness of managers in the public sector still accurate?
2. Is it reasonable to assume from this that managers in the public sector are unlikely to be able to deliver radical change? Why?
3. Is this more about confidence and skills or about out dated policies and practices? As a manager what would you put on your shopping list to increase your confidence and skills?

## Section 52

# How the new ferociously determined leadership is making an impact

People expect change if there is new leadership at the top of the organisation but they don't always anticipate it correctly. They expect a new set of priorities and expect 'talk' of a change in the culture.

They expect a management restructuring, changes in job titles and job descriptions. However, these are often cosmetic changes; the real change is in management style and people often don't like it.

Most managers recognise there is room for improvement, that things could be done differently and better, that within their organisation there are islands of good practice but that there is not enough shared learning.

They know a silo mentality exists in some departments, that there is a tendency to over complicate things and all too often the professionals want to go for a top-notch solution rather than something that is affordable and good enough. They know the financial situation will require painful and unpopular changes – possibly changes they themselves have previously championed but for which the leadership had no appetite.

The language of management has changed. The talk is now of 'savage' budget cuts, the pressure to 'do more with less' and managers are described as standing on a 'burning platform'.

Leaders start using phrases such as 'less consultation and more action'. The move to a more corporate way of doing things becomes a centralising straitjacket, driven by cost cutting. The desire to achieve a consensus on shared priorities and a common vision is replaced by a requirement to accept and own the leadership view, a view which is never explicitly stated but implied, requiring individual managers to agree first and work out later what is needed, because questions are discouraged and debate replaced by self censorship.

Professionals who have become used to year-on-year budget growth, who have been protected from the harsh realities of the real world and who just can't accept that the good times have come to an end will wave their shrouds, while senior managers will be adamant that their management structures are not bloated and that their job is not possible without their current level of support services. Turkeys don't vote for Christmas so debate is pointless.

This is the new, humble but ferociously determined leadership. It is not about an inspirational or charismatic individual who by sheer force of personality brings about change. It is not about consensus leadership based on shared values and good people management skills. This

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leadership style is the quiet individual, the ordinary Joe, who appears to have little interest in making a name for themselves or having a high profile but who is determined to do what ever needs to be done. A style that others may perceive as unnerving, even intimidating.

It is a leadership style that often delivers in the short term but what about the longer term? Having shaken things up, these leaders tend to move on before they are moved on. If your organisation is characterised by a bout of this type of leadership you would be unwise to challenge it.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What types of leader are identified in the article?
2. What examples have you from your organisation of management language that reflects a leadership style?
3. What's the difference between this 'ferociously determined' leadership style and bullying?

## Appendix 1

# **Incorporating this manual into a bespoke and cost-effective management development programme – one model and case study**

This case example demonstrates how the model of management development described in this manual works in practice. The case example is of a large complex organisation but the methods and material work equally as well in a small organisation. Executive coaching and mentoring are one-to-one activities so the size of the organisation and number of managers makes no difference. However management learning sets are group activities which benefit from a diverse range of managers so a small voluntary organisation may find it more effective to join together with other small organisations to deliver this management development programme. Not only will this provide a greater range of experience to draw upon with in the learning set it also opens up the possibility of mentors being provided from outside the organisation. This has the advantage of offering a different perspective to the one the manager will be receiving from their line manager. The material can however be used by an individual as a self help management development programme as each topic presents the reader with a view on an aspect of modern management and a number of questions relating to the topic. The section on recruitment should give the reader an insight into how organisations fill management posts and what they are looking for in candidates as well as a few tips on how to do well in the recruitment process.

### **Case example**

#### ***About the organisation***

The Adult and Community Services Directorate in Lancashire County Council has over 500 managers. Management Development consisted of sending three or four managers a year on university courses to gain a management qualification (MBA). All new managers went on short one or two day in-house courses covering health and safety and recruitment and selection. Managers were professionally very skilled but there was a growing realisation that being a very able teacher, librarian, social worker or engineer did not equip the individual for management.

Employee surveys plus an analysis of harassment and bullying complaints revealed that many staff thought their manager had poor people management skills. The Directorate set out to improve managers' people management skills stating that all managers should have leadership qualities that is the ability to inspire their staff and a willingness to take responsibility.

There was no additional money to fund this leadership development programme. The Senior Management Team decided to stop funding MBAs and instead use the budget released to

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build a leadership development programme. The building block for this programme was to be one-to-one executive coaching. The idea was to give managers more insight into how their behaviour effected those they managed and thus help them use this to develop their people management skills.

#### *The pilot with senior managers*

In order to lead by example the senior management team agreed to pilot a form of executive coaching operated by two management consultants who they had previously worked with in team building exercises. 360 degree feedback questionnaires were issued to colleagues and direct reports. A consultant observed each member of the senior management team in a range of management situations:

- team meetings
- board meetings
- addressing large staff groups
- making presentations to multi agency groups
- influencing and shaping strategies
- negotiating with partner agencies

The consultants spent the equivalent of two days with each member of the senior management team over a period of three or four weeks. The consultant then sat down with each individual and discussed the outcome of the 360 degree feedback and the management interactions they had observed.

There was initially some apprehension as senior managers are not accustomed to getting direct feedback on how they are perceived by colleagues or a detailed assessment of their observed performance.

The feedback was well received even though some of the messages were blunt e.g. 'talks too much', 'needs to listen more', 'needs to recognise the need to move at the pace of the slowest ship in the convoy', 'can come over as demanding and impatient'. This was balanced by plenty of positive feedback around individuals being supportive and making their expectations clear.

#### *Rolling out the programme*

The pilot was deemed a success and was rolled out to all 30 senior managers. Executive coaching was not presented as optional and it was difficult for senior managers to object when their boss had been through the same process. However, as a reassurance to some who were apprehensive it was agreed that material gathered by the consultants would be kept confidential and only shared in detail with the individual manager. Managers were nevertheless

expected to identify their developmental needs in their annual appraisal by referring to their experience of executive coaching.

The rolling out of executive coaching to all senior managers promoted considerable discussion about what type of manager and what type of management behaviour the organisation wanted to promote. If all managers were to be good at people management then all managers needed opportunities to gain insight into how their behaviour affected others and how they might adapt their management style. Ideally all managers would have access to executive coaching but this was impracticable and too expensive.

A simplified 360 degree questionnaire was produced specific to assessing an individual's people management skills which would be interpreted without a computer software package or skilled technician. Two management learning sets were set up with 15 managers in each. The learning sets were facilitated by the consultants with the aim of giving the next tier of management an opportunity to explore how their behaviour affected others. The emphasis was on discussing the type of management situations they routinely came across and to share their experience in dealing with these.

#### *Learning sets*

One learning set worked very well, the other was less successful, largely because three individuals were very cynical about the motives behind the programme and were clearly frustrated about the difficulties they were experiencing which were particular to their area of business. This was eventually resolved by sub dividing the learning set into three smaller groups so that people could address the issues that were important to them without dominating the agenda of the whole group.

#### *Management surgeries*

It became clear that learning sets were identifying within middle managers the need for more and ongoing support. In response to this the idea of management surgeries was developed. Four days were put in the calendar over the following twelve months when the management consultants would be available for an hour's slot booked in advance to discuss any issue any manager wanted to raise. It was also agreed that all managers would be offered a mentor starting with those who had been in a management learning set. This was seen as a way of building on the work already started with individuals whilst recognising that management development was not a one-off exercise.

To assist the discussions in management learning sets and mentoring sessions a series of short topical papers were produced and posted on the intranet under the heading 'Management Guru'. The idea was that managers could dip into and out of this material as and when. The material was also used as homework for managers.

All senior managers were expected to offer themselves as mentors.

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*Revised management learning sets*

The next round of management learning sets were to be facilitated by two senior managers from a pool of 12 who had volunteered to deliver six learning sets in year one building up to twelve in year two. In this way it was anticipated that significant numbers of managers could be offered this type of management development. It was felt essential that large numbers of managers were exposed to the opportunity of exploring what type of manager the organisation wanted in order that the management culture within the organisation could be changed.

Initially only one management learning set facilitated by senior managers was delivered (although three others were later delivered). The reasons for this were twofold, a major service reorganisation preoccupied managers and it also became clear that despite their experience some senior managers did not feel confident facilitating learning sets without more support and more of a structure to what was to be covered. As a result it was decided that for the foreseeable future learning sets would be co-facilitated by a consultant and a senior manager. This was more expensive and reduced the number of groups that could be run each year but it was a way of ensuring that management learning sets were delivered.

*Aspiring managers*

During this time a group of staff were identified who aspired to be managers but either lacked the confidence to apply or had insufficient insight into the role to perform well in interview. Many of these staff came from ethnic minority groups who were under-represented in management posts. When some one-off workshops were opened up to aspiring managers significant numbers of women were also identified who were 'thinking about' applying for management posts. These aspiring managers were encouraged to access the material on the intranet on the management guru site. This material not only described the type of manager and management behaviour the organisation wished to promote but offered an insight into the type of people management issues managers had to deal with. Increasingly these issues were about managing a diverse workforce. It became clear that many managers struggled with addressing issues of attendance or performance with their staff when this involved a racial dimension or where the member of staff was gay or disabled.

In response to the demand from aspiring managers an aspiring manager's programme was developed based around half day workshops with topics such as performance management, equality and diversity, being customer focused, how to do a good application and improving interview skills. In addition a shadowing scheme was set up in order that any member of staff could shadow a senior manager for a half day to help them better understand the role of management.

The issues raised in relation to managing a diverse workforce were addressed by developing a two day course for managers to equip them with the confidence and skills to respond to typical management scenarios that involved issues of race, gender, faith, sexuality and disability. In this

way equality and diversity training was incorporated into the management development programme.

*How much did it cost?*

All of this was funded out of the money released from not sending four people a year on an MBA. This in-house management development programme continues to roll forward with the intention that the involvement of consultants will be gradually phased out. The programme has been running for over four years, during which time there has been the level of senior management turnover that would be expected. In order to ensure that all senior managers understand and own the approach to management development all new senior managers are offered executive coaching.

*Different ways to use this manual*

This manual does not have to be used in the way described in the case example. The material is versatile and can be used by an individual as a self-help management development programme, in which the individual is exposed to different ways of working, alternative views on the managers' role and the opportunity to reflect on how their behaviour as a manager affects others. The sections stand alone so trainers and mentors can pull out material that is relevant to the individual at any given stage in their development as a manager.

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