



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

**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

# Managing to do better when things are looking bad

This manual provides encouragement and resources to help you achieve high standards in your management of people:

- not only when a harsh financial climate causes questions to be asked about how much time and effort can realistically be devoted to the task of being good at managing people
- but also when budgets for developing managers' skills are tight.

It takes the view that:

- precisely because of these challenges, the best possible people management is essential
- abandoning the pursuit of high standards will be counterproductive
- good managers can still be developed when budgets are tight
- changes in approach may be needed.

To help you develop cost-effective approaches, this manual offers 37 concise and questioning reflections on people management issues that arise everywhere.

They 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 development programme that is expressly tailored to your organisation's needs.

They will help managers in your organisation develop greater flexibility to:

- motivate and inspire staff, despite job insecurity and increasing pressures, to deliver more for less
- encourage innovative ways of delivering services
- cope with wider areas of responsibility, working across traditional service boundaries





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- apply their management skills in services in which they have not actually worked previously
- maintain training – or introduce it – around issues such as equality and diversity, and so emphasise how treating staff well helps any organisation, in any climate, to survive and thrive.

*People Management in a Harsh Financial Climate* 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 first in a series of manuals called *Management Development on a Tight Budget*. Each manual addresses skills that managers need to learn in order to thrive personally, and to serve their organisation well when both the future and the availability of funding are uncertain.

Other books by Blair McPherson in the *Management Development on a Tight Budget* series will cover:

**Equipping managers for an uncertain future:** developing your managers on a tight budget

**Managing a diverse workforce:** developing your managers on a tight budget

**When things go wrong: disciplinaries, grievances and complaints:** developing your managers on a tight budget

**Getting the message across: 2-way communication:** developing your managers on a tight budget





# Using this manual

## What is in this book

Lively, pertinent, challenging and copiable (along lines set out in the guidance provided on page xiii) the 37 concise and questioning reflections on people management issues in this manual cover a range of issues that managers may need to wrestle with at anytime. Some of these issues arise precisely because the financial climate is harsh. Others can arise at anytime, but present in different ways, or need different responses, at such times. They include:

- changing working practices
- tackling absenteeism
- challenging poor standards of work or inappropriate behaviour
- managing a diverse workforce
- dealing with complaints of sexist behaviour, racial harassment or homophobic bullying
- recruiting and developing staff
- issues around redeployment and redundancy
- the challenges of working within a reduced budget.

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.



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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 37 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 focussed 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.



## PEOPLE MANAGEMENT IN A HARSH FINANCIAL CLIMATE

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 organisations 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 immediately following section) on how to set up a bespoke management development programme using one-to-one executive coaching, management learning sets, 360 degree feed back, 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.

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

This section suggests how you can set up an in-house model of management development, based on using management learning sets followed up by management mentoring.

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 within the learning set it also opens up the possibility of mentors being provided from outside of the organisation. This has the advantage of offering a different perspective to the one the manager will be receiving from their line manager.

Management learning sets are made up of managers at the same level but covering a range of services or activities, for example from support services like finance, IT and HR.

Drawing together learning sets from within a small organisation can be impossible and, indeed, it may be difficult even in a large one that is under what are becoming budgetary restrictions at the time of writing this manual. But the material in this manual is versatile. It could readily be used in learning sets with people from more than one organisation. Indeed there may sometimes be benefits from pulling together learning sets in this way. If you do, please refer to the permissions set out on page xiii concerning use of this manual in more than one organisation.

This approach suggested in this model (but which is by no means the only one in which this manual can be used) emphasises that all managers require the same core management competences around managing people and that managers from very different areas of work will find themselves addressing very similar issues. This might be around changing working practices, recruiting staff, tackling absenteeism, challenging poor standards of work or inappropriate behaviour. It will increasingly be about managing a diverse workforce and dealing with complaints of sexist behaviour, racial harassment or homophobic bullying.

The material in this manual was developed as a result of management learning sets that were initially co-facilitated by a trainer and a senior manager. The training officer provided the experience in group work, establishing at the outset the ground rules for behaviour such as confidentiality, being supportive and actively listening. The senior manager's involvement was evidence of the level of commitment, and it reinforced messages about the type of manager and the type of management behaviour the organisation wanted to encourage.

As the model developed and confidence grew, learning sets were co-facilitated by senior managers with the advantage that several learning sets were able to operate at any one time all using the same material.

These learning sets typically consisted of 12 managers. Sets met for six half-day sessions over a period of six to nine months with a recall session to review learning a couple of months later. At each session two managers were asked to take it in turns to present a management issue for discussion.

All managers completing a learning set were offered a mentor. Mentoring was seen as a way of building on the experience and insights gained through the learning set, and as recognition that an individual's development as a manager is ongoing.



The effectiveness of this approach was tested by asking staff and colleagues to evaluate the managers who were participating, before and after the programme, using a simple 360 degree feed back questionnaire. Success was taken as staff reporting an improvement in their manager's people management skills.

### **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:

- Developing managers on a lower expenditure.
- Spreading your management development budget over a wider number of managers and aspirant managers, not just on those you can afford to send on expensive courses.
- Developing managers to meet your own specific needs and aspirations, and who can:
  - Motivate and inspire staff, despite job insecurity and increasing pressures to deliver more for less.
  - Encourage innovative ways of delivering services.
  - Cope with wider areas of responsibility, working across traditional service boundaries.
  - Apply their management skills in services in which they have not actually worked previously.
  - Maintain training – or introduce it – around issues such as equality and diversity, and so emphasise how treating staff well helps any organisation, in any climate, to survive and thrive.

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## Introduction

# What issues does a harsh financial climate raise for people management?

The predicted financial crises in the public sector means the message is going out management posts will be cut, hierarchies will be flattened, more will have to be done with less and services will have to be delivered in different ways. Whilst your organisation may continue to function with fewer managers, are you confident that the remaining managers can inspire staff when services are being cut and staff made redundant? Do your managers have the negotiating and influencing skills to get people to work in different ways? Delivering more with less will require innovation, are your managers innovative? Partnerships will be threatened as budgets are tightened. Can your managers maintain good relationships when partners retreat to core business? Flatter management structures will mean greater spans of management control – can your managers manage across traditional service boundaries, can they manage services they don't have a professional background in, and can they cope with not knowing the detail?

To deliver in this climate all managers will need good people management skills – that is the ability to inspire people, a willingness to take responsibility, the ability to challenge appropriately and the confidence to let people get on with it.

This is not the time to cut back on management training and development however tempting that might appear. It may, however, be the time to review management development to do more with less and ensure you are equipping managers with the skills and experiences that will benefit the organisation.

## Part One

### *When budgets are tight*

In a harsh financial climate, redeployment and redundancy become a reality. 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. What are transferable skills and how do you develop them? When senior managers talk of **redeployment, redundancy and transferable skills**, they also discuss **who should we let go?** When it comes to management posts it's not last in first out, so what are the discussions? New ways of working and more efficient ways of delivering services need to be identified to save money, but often when professionals get involved they over complicate things. How do we help people understand that in a difficult financial climate '**good enough will have to do**'. Maybe the story about the USA space project will strike a chord (see page 7). Organisations will certainly need to encourage innovation if more is to be achieved with less, but so often they end up discouraging it. How can an organisation develop an environment that promotes **confidence and success**.



*WHAT ISSUES DOES A HARSH FINANCIAL CLIMATE RAISE FOR PEOPLE MANAGEMENT?*

When services are being restructured, posts cut and redundancies identified, then a climate of fear can develop. Yet to thrive and survive in difficult economic times an organisation needs to adapt and innovate. To do this it needs to engage with staff, develop a climate of trust and rely on the people skills of its managers. This then, is not a time to cut back on leadership development. This is a time to invest in managers. It is a time to help managers develop insight into how their behaviour affects those around them. It is a time for peer group support and learning.

In this way organisations can **tackle fear in a recession**. Of course you could seek to bring in outside talent to deliver changes – if you can find what you are looking for. What you really want is to change the management culture – not just one or two individuals – so you will be more likely to be successful in the longer term if you **grow your own**. In which case you will need to look at why some very capable people in your organisation are not on their way to becoming the senior managers of tomorrow.

This means looking at what **a woman's place is . . .** in the organisation. It also means deciding if some of your managers still have fire in their bellies and how you might go about **keeping the fires burning**. It is however not just issues of gender and age that need to be addressed, the modern workforce is increasingly diverse so the rhetorical question is **can we afford equality and do we still want diversity**.

## **Part Two**

### ***Good people management skills***

Does a harsh financial climate require a harsher type of management? 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? **Is it better to be feared than loved?** Sport offers lots of examples of leadership. **The wisdom of Brian Clough** meant that he was both loved and feared by his team, but does his style of leadership and his success offer us a model or does your organisation want a different type of leadership, one in which all managers are expected to inspire their staff and to take responsibility? Certainly at interview all managers claim to be passionate about their work, so, why when performance is weak, customer care is poor or bad practice exists **why are more managers not more angry more often?** Of course being justifiably angry is not the same as losing control of your emotions; shouting or abusing staff is not acceptable. You think you are being firm but fair but **are you a bully?** Do we all seek **power, success and recognition** and how far are you prepared to go to get it? Do you think those at the top have a streak of ruthlessness and a hint of menace to go with the charm?



## PEOPLE MANAGEMENT IN A HARSH FINANCIAL CLIMATE

We all have a sneaky admiration for the mavericks – those who seem to flout the rules, ride rough shod over bureaucracy and let nothing get in the way of getting the job done. If we are to think differently, to be creative and innovative in coming up with ways of getting the job done with less resources, then we need managers who are prepared to challenge the way things are done round here. But it's a challenge **managing mavericks**.

A third of staff in a survey said **my manager doesn't understand me**. To get the best out of staff you need to know their strengths and weaknesses but you also need to know about them as an individual if you are to be good at people management. Try this little test to see what you know about your direct reports. I recently helped a couple of people I was mentoring to draw up a revised CV. It's amazing just how interesting some people are if you ask the right questions. The type of management behaviour being encouraged through this programme is the opposite of what is often referred to disparagingly as macho management. In **treat them mean, keep them keen** we examine what does macho management look like? It all very well getting to know people but what are the boundaries between manager and employee, how much personal stuff is it appropriate to share and what type of personal information would make you feel uncomfortable?

**It's personal** looks at where the boundary between personal and professional gets uncomfortable for managers when someone is going through a messy divorce or knowing how to respond if you think someone may be suffering domestic violence. Often when managers are trying to tackle absenteeism they find that the reasons for poor attendance can vary from problems at home to problems at work hence the heading **who is making you sick?** In a harsh financial climate no business can operate with high levels of absenteeism but there is more to managing absenteeism than better monitoring arrangements, tougher policies and urging managers to improve the statistics. In **stop giving managers stick over absenteeism** we look at how to help and support managers. Not only can managers support each other they can **reduce the boss's anxiety** which they just might find is in their own interest.

### Part Three

#### **Doing things differently**

When the talk is all about saving money and being more efficient then the expectation is managers will be **doing more with less**. What does this mean, and how is it achieved? It certainly will involve doing things differently starting with a different approach to the use of office accommodation but can you expect staff to adopt new practices if senior managers still cling on to status symbols like the corner office with the view? **Open plan, hot desking and home working for senior managers. A senior manager working from home** on a regular basis! This is a good example of **resistance from the top** to change.





## WHAT ISSUES DOES A HARSH FINANCIAL CLIMATE RAISE FOR PEOPLE MANAGEMENT?

Managers use words like **affordability, efficiency and value for money** but what do they mean and how can these business sector ideas be successfully transplanted to the public sector?

Doing things differently could see **the end of the traditional team meeting**, it could even make managers question **when is a team not a team?** It will certainly make managers think more about **how to be a corporate manager**.

### Part Four

#### **Getting the right person**

In a harsh financial climate it is more important than ever that you don't appoint the wrong person. Getting the right person will save you money by helping you introduce the innovation which will result in being able to do more with less. If you have been letting people go because they are the wrong type of person then it is important that you recruit the right type of person for your organisation. But if you recruit in the same old way you will recruit the same old people.

#### *Help to candidates*

The first thing to acknowledge is that you might have the right people in your organisation already: they're just in the wrong job or working for the wrong manager. Don't assume there is always someone out there in another organisation who has all the qualities, skills and knowledge that you are looking for and wants to work for you. Do help your managers get on. It's the sign of a good manager that they help their best staff to leave. So help to candidates should include you, as their manager, providing encouragement and assistance with the application form and help in preparing for the interview: this is not cheating, it's best practice. Of course if you are interviewing for the post you cannot provide this level of support. This is just an extension of the thinking behind 'grow your own'. Helping the candidate get in the right frame of mind for the stress of an interview is covered in **interviews are like penalty shoot outs**. However the first step is to get an interview. **Getting an interview for that senior management post** is about giving candidates an insight into how recruiters think and what they are looking for. But it's not all down to a carefully crafted application form and good interview technique, you have to look the part which involves **sharp suits and shiny shoes**. Finally preparing someone for an interview involves helping them identify the likely questions and drawing out from them how they can illustrate their answer by reference to their achievements and experience. Just how much help you can legitimately give is the subject of **is it cheating to give them the answers?**

#### *Help to recruiters*

We invest a lot of time, energy and money into the recruitment process but we tend to focus on the interview at the expense of what happens before and after. Help to recruiters



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acknowledges the importance of making it as easy as possible for candidates to shine. **The acting up interview** is about the importance of giving people the opportunity to gain new skills and increased confidence. Sometimes a candidate can be very impressive but is not right for the post: this is the situation in **the candidate blew me away but I didn't give them the job**. It's disappointing not getting a job but it helps if you understand why and can use that feedback to do better next time. Giving helpful and detailed feedback to unsuccessful candidates can be an uncomfortable experience and is not always well received: hence **you asked for it**. Last but not least, ensuring that the successful candidate has **a brilliant first day**.





## Part One

# **When budgets are tight**







## Section 1

# 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.

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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 2

### Who should we let go?

There is a view that the public sector has too many managers and that the current financial climate is an opportunity to address this. So, if one in five management posts had to go, how would you decide who to 'let go'? Do you ask for volunteers, identify those you don't want or simply remove a whole tier of management?

What if the volunteers aren't the ones you want to go? What if they contain individuals with experience and skills that will be difficult to replace or have the very skills required to deliver more with less. What about the well known cynics, those promoted beyond their level of competence or the square pegs in round holes? Surely they wouldn't be missed! Can we agree who they are? Can we get away with this approach? After all, if they were incompetent or 'unsuitable' shouldn't we have dealt with them before?

An employment tribunal might think so. In any case, some of these maverick managers that challenge the way things are done round here, are the innovators and we certainly need innovation if we are to respond to the budget pressure by doing things differently.

If there are too many tiers of management why not just delete a whole tier? It's a clear rationale for making someone redundant to say that your post and all the others at this level are no longer in the new structure. This way it's nothing to do with individual personalities or arbitrary judgements on competence. Which tier then? It has to be a middle tier. We can't take out all the senior managers – you would simply end up replacing them. We can't take out first line managers as they are the ones who ensure things get done. So middle managers it is then. Only some of them are very good and if we get rid of all of them where will the senior managers of tomorrow come from? Well do we need all of them? So we are back to selecting who stays and who goes. We could make managers apply for a job in the new structure. Lots of interviews, very time consuming, maybe a lot of challenges and appeals or what about looking at the age profile of the management workforce?

We want managers with the energy and enthusiasm to be able to do more with less. We want managers who can motivate and inspire staff to work in new ways. Have some of our older managers still got the fire in their bellies, have they the passion and drive to bring about the radical changes that are required? Well I'm not convinced this is anything to do with age. You can't say that everyone over 55 has lost their passion, become cynical and is out of step with the organisation anymore than you can say that everyone under 50 is energetic, committed and innovative. In fact there are some very cynical and rather lethargic, if ambitious, people in their thirties and we have some very dynamic and progressive people who are in their fifties. Perhaps we had better ask who wants to go and hope that it's not too many.





## Discussion Questions

1. If you have to reduce your management posts how will you do this?
2. How will you help the remaining managers do the job of two people?
3. How many of your managers have fire in their bellies? What are you going to do to rekindle the flames?





## Section 3

# 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. Give examples of where colleagues have 'over complicated' solutions.
2. What is your experience of using management consultants? When has it worked best?
3. How do you ensure the right people get involved in projects as opposed to the one's that can be spared?





## Section 4

# Confidence and success

### Creating the conditions for innovation

Efficiency savings won't be enough. Given the size of the budget cuts predicted for the public sector, managers will need to innovate. The best ideas come from the front line. Unless we find ways to empower the managers who are closest to the customer, we won't create the right conditions for innovation. The confidence to try something new, the absence of the fear of failure and the knowledge that success will be celebrated, breeds confidence and success. So what is it that organisations do that undermines managers' confidence and reduces their effectiveness?

The best job I ever had was when I was a Team Manager in Birmingham. I had the power to do things and was close enough to the action to see the difference I and the team were making. I have had jobs with more status and power where I could influence policies and shape strategies across the whole organisation, jobs that paid a lot better, but I have never been as effective.

A team manager has limited authority, a small budget and few staff. In Birmingham I was one of very many and that was the secret of my success. I was below senior management's radar. No one bothered what I was doing in a little corner of Birmingham with a tiny amount of services for older people. I discovered that the most effective way to proceed was to assume I could do anything that was not expressly against financial regulations or HR policy. This is where I learnt to ask *how* I could rather than *if* I could. I cultivated finance and HR contacts and they proved well worth the effort rescuing me on more than one occasion.

Of course I was young and naive with no family commitments and no mortgage. I had boundless enthusiasm and huge reserves of energy and lots of ideas. What I didn't appreciate at the time was that I had a very self assured and supportive area manager. Not only did he trust me to get on with it, he worked behind the scenes to reassure and placate senior managers when my more high profile activities occasionally came to their attention. I also benefited from a wise mentor, although I was not familiar with that term at the time. She steered me in the right direction, gave me contacts in HR and Finance and guided me away from some potential confrontations.

Successes increased everyone's confidence and helped create a 'yes we can' culture within the team and with those we worked with. I was seen as an effective manager and I felt I was making a real difference.

I moved on and up. In one organisation I was considered a loose cannon, in another I made my boss feel uncomfortable, one organisation was too small for anything to go unnoticed so there was less scope to innovate and take risks. In another I was so far removed from the front line that I couldn't see what impact I was having. In some places it was harder than others to

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cultivate contacts in finance and HR. In some places line managers were suspicious of mentors. I became a senior manager. Now I reflect on what made me an effective manager and try and create the right environment for others to be effective.

The lessons I have learnt from my experience are simple, but not easy to apply. If an organisation wants to boost the confidence of managers and make them more effective it must encourage them at all levels to back their own judgment. They have appointed the right person for the job now let them get on with it. The organisation needs to resist using finance and HR staff to police it's polices. Instead of the people who say 'No' in finance and HR, staff need to be seen as the people who will 'show you how'. The organisation needs to provide every manager with a line manager who is not threatened by someone with ability, ambition and enthusiasm and provide every new manager with access to someone who has the wisdom and experience they lack.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Give an example of when you felt empowered as a manager?
2. Who can make a real difference to the customer – the front line manager or the senior manager? Why? Who?
3. If devolving power is a good thing, what stops it from happening?



## Section 5

# Tackling fear in a recession

Most organisations create a climate of fear – an environment where people don't say what they think for fear of recriminations. They don't set out to do this and are often surprised and disappointed to hear their staff describe their workplace in this way. In normal times this climate may inhibit people from making comments that might be considered not politically correct or a reluctance to be seen as less than enthusiastic about the latest senior management initiative, but these are not normal times. When services are being restructured, posts cut and redundancies identified, then a climate in which people feel unable to discuss issues openly and honestly can become a climate where people think dissent may lead to dismissal. It maybe a workplace where management bullying goes unchallenged because managers fear the consequences of not delivering or an environment where favouritism flourishes and discrimination is suspected but not addressed.

To survive and thrive in difficult economic times an organisation needs to stay healthy. A healthy organisation does not make people feel that they can not talk about issues openly and honestly. When things get tough it is the very time an organisation needs to engage with its staff, develop a climate of trust and rely on the people skills of its managers. This is not a time to cut back on leadership development, this is a time to invest in managers. It is a time to help managers develop insight into how their behaviour affects those around them, it is a time for peer group support and learning, it is a time for making use of the wisdom accumulated by those with years of experience. This is not a time to pull the plug on the executive coaching initiative, to curtail the management learning sets or to restrict mentoring opportunities, but it may be a time to stop funding managers to go on expensive MBAs.

If your organisation has been investing in leadership development programmes it should start to benefit now because of the willingness to take responsibility, to have the confidence to act and the ability to bring staff along shows itself most clearly when the pressure is on. If your organisation has not yet tapped into the wisdom of those with experience or recognised the value of properly facilitated management learning sets or fully appreciated the benefits of one to one executive coaching, it's not too late – but it soon will be.

(*Executive coaching* is where a coach observes a manager in a variety of work situations like chairing a multi agency meeting, delivering a presentation, undertaking a mentoring session, briefing a politician or board member and provides feedback and suggestions for improvement. The aim is to give the individual insight and improve their effectiveness.)





## Discussion Questions

1. In your organisation how does it affect an individuals job prospects if they say what they are thinking?
2. How do senior managers/your manager/you respond to a critical challenge from a member of staff?
3. Where is the 'wisdom' in your team/service/organisation?





## Section 6

# Grow your own

### Addressing the management recruitment challenge

Our experience of recruiting to a number of senior management posts has highlighted the scarcity of exciting talent at this level. The demographics combined with an ageing workforce meant that at the same time as an increasing number of senior posts became vacant, there are fewer people eligible to apply. We can either just accept this shortage and its implications for the number and quality of applicants or we can grow our own. In a large organisation such as ours, there are always internal candidates who have something to offer but we don't want to give the impression that we have adopted 'Buggins turn', which is automatically promoting the next in line.

There are five ways we can address this leadership shortage –

- faster
- longer
- better
- wider
- fewer.

We could speed up the rate of career progression, talent spot and fast track people. How do we decide who to fast track and how do we ensure we don't fall foul of our own commitment to equal opportunities? We could adopt a Britain's Got Talent approach where we give everyone who believes they have talent the opportunity to impress a recruitment panel, identifying people to go forward to a long list for fast tracking.

We could keep our older leaders longer, reversing the trend to early retirement and making more use of flexible retirement. When people retire they could come back to work at the same grade but for fewer hours.

We could make jobs more attractive. We are limited on what more we can do with salaries having already reviewed them, but maybe we could stress our eagerness to free people up to influence the national agenda, or simply say we don't want our senior managers bogged down in the mundane boring stuff so we guarantee a proper level of executive support.

We could recruit from a wider pool of candidates by reviewing the person specification to place less emphasis on experience in terms of years and be more flexible in what we consider appropriate experience. We could also give more thought to why it is that we don't attract more women to this level of post. For example, we have evidence from our own research that

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many women will only apply for senior posts if encouraged to do so by their line manager, another senior manager or mentor. In the past we have tended to go for very tight person specifications, the assumption being that we want to be able to whittle down applicants to four or five strong candidates because we only want to spend one day interviewing.

As a result we may rule out some potentially good candidates and put too much emphasis on application forms. We could adopt the same approach for all management posts that recruitment consultants use for chief officer posts. That is, to draw up a long list and interview a lot of people in order to recommend a short list to the interview panel. Would we be prepared to leave the long listing to a senior HR representative and the manager with the vacancy? How would this affect our commitment to interview panels balanced in terms of race and gender? We could review our management structure with a view to having fewer posts at this level, therefore reducing the need to recruit.

An effective recruitment strategy would be faster, longer, better, wider and possibly fewer. However, a large organisation such as ours could make a strong business case for investing in a 'grow your own' strategy. This would involve cramming the maximum amount of experience into the minimum amount of time. We have already set up a mentoring scheme but this needs extending to all managers as part of benefiting from the wisdom of a more experienced colleague. The executive coaching scheme with its emphasis on 360 degree feedback and one to one sessions, has proved popular with senior managers but has even greater potential to speed up the development of managers at other levels, if we could only find a way of supporting the bigger numbers.

What we need is not managers with many years experience in the same area of work, but managers with a broad range of experience. Five years in the same area of work, at the same level, does not necessarily equal five years experience, all too often it is one years experience repeated five times. As the organisation increasingly adopts a project management approach to delivering change, then there are more opportunities for people to gain experience outside of their normal area of work. We could maximise this by encouraging people to get involved in corporate projects and encourage an exchange of skills by a reciprocal arrangement for directorate projects. How many people from outside of the directorate are currently members of directorate projects? However, this type of thing will only happen if we make it a clear expectation that every manager should be involved in at least one major project. This could be built into annual appraisals. Aspiring senior managers would be expected to be involved in a corporate project and to have been a project manager for a directorate project. Participation in a project, or better still being a project manager, is an effective way of broadening an individuals experience in a relatively short period of time.

The most effective way of broadening a manager's experience and strengthening their management skills is to ask them to lead outside of their technical or professional specialism. This forces them to delegate, as they are not able to fall back on their superior professional knowledge, rather they have to develop their management skills. These management skills include: managing and influencing people, seeing the bigger picture, being strategic, quickly



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grasping complex information about new areas of service/business, the ability to paint a clear picture to a diverse group of people showing what the future will look like and explaining how we will get there. This will involve being radical in offering people placements in areas of service outside of their comfort zone, taking operational staff and putting them in policy, IT or HR posts and taking support staff and putting them in operational posts. If this at first seems hopelessly impractical, remember that the average director comes from an operational background and on appointment assumes line management responsibility for the Assistant Director of Finance, the head of HR and the head of IT. No one thinks this strange or points out that the Director is not a qualified accountant, doesn't have a personnel qualification and is barely IT literate. You don't have to be a teacher to run a school or be a director of education. We often say management skills are transferable, but how often do we back this up in our approach to recruitment?

I have personal experience of this approach. I was appointed on a two year secondment to deliver a major project early on in my management career. I managed a team which included senior finance and IT staff and operational staff from Mental Health and Learning Disability services, even though my own experience was limited to children's residential and older people services. In truth, I got the job because no one individual could offer the breadth of experience the post required so they went for enthusiasm and potential. Which is exactly what is involved in 'growing your own'.

### Discussion Questions

1. If you had six weeks to train one of your team up to do your job how would you go about it?
2. What is 'talent' when it comes to management?
3. What, apart from higher salaries, would make management jobs in your organisation more attractive?





## Section 7

### **A woman's place is . . .**

Why do women make up 70 per cent of Local Authority employees but only 21 per cent of them are Council Chief Executives? In fact why do women make up only 30 per cent of senior managers? A small unscientific survey carried out with my own organisation provided some explanations. We wanted to know why it was that women managers were not applying for the senior management posts that they were well qualified for.

An increasing number of men and women seem to be saying that they don't want the hassle. The pressure to keep within reduced budgets, the pressure to deliver continuous improvement and the pressure to meet ever more demanding performance targets just puts some people off.

There were however some specific explanations that women gave, typical of these was the individual who said 'they were not sure if they could do 100 per cent of the job' and that they didn't feel able to apply for a post unless they were certain they would succeed at it. This was in marked contrast to the view of men who were much more prepared to give it a go as one said 'If they don't think I can do it they won't appoint me'. The barrier here seems to be unreasonably high expectations that women place on themselves. The answer is either encouragement from a line manager or mentor.

Many women thought that a higher pay job was not only more demanding but required a higher level of commitment. By this they meant longer hours, the ability to routinely work evenings and weekends. That is attending evening meetings, taking phone calls at home and reading reports over the weekend. Women frequently said they were not free to do this as they had family commitments outside of work. In fact many of the women who are in senior management roles are notable for not having any dependents or family commitments. Of course the long hour's culture and achieving the right balance between home and work is an issue for both men and women.

Many women said they felt uncomfortable with the traditional macho management style that they perceived as still predominating. They noted the focus on budgets and performance rather than partnerships and people. What's interesting about this is that the modern Chief Executive is an influencer and a shaper, someone who needs good people skills and the ability to make partnerships work. Local Authority objectives can no longer be achieved by working in isolation.

The message would appear to be that organisations need to change their culture in order to attract more women into senior management posts. The irony of this is that most organisations claim to want to be the type of organisation that most women say they want to work for.





## Discussion Questions

1. What does a macho management style look like?
2. How do you convince people they will be judged on achievements not how many hours they spend at their desk?
3. What does 'commitment' involve in this organisation/service/ team?





## Section 8

# Keeping the fires burning

How many of your managers still have fire in their bellies? The age profile of managers in most organisations is 50 plus yet we tend to associate drive, energy and passion with the young. We don't want the organisation to stand still, so we can't afford to have managers coasting when they hit the 55 to 60 group. But how do you keep the passion burning when the energy levels are dropping? Is it inevitable that managers will feel less strongly about issues, become more weary from fighting the same battles and more cynical as they see the same issue come round time and time again?

If a manager was cynical at 30 then they are not likely to be less so at 50 or 55. But this does not mean managers inevitably become more cynical with age. I might find it difficult to get passionate about selling baked beans or washing powder but my job is about helping people – in particular vulnerable people – and I get just as angry now as I did in my early days in management at social injustice, discrimination and the abuse of power. But just as I can no longer party all night, I can no longer direct my energy in as many directions as I once could. I need to use my experience to greatest effect, I need to direct my energies. I make more use of delegation, take more risks in not knowing the detail but relying on others who do. As I am no longer competing for promotion I put more time and energy into encouraging others, mentoring, management development – recruitment and selection. I also spend more time on the opposite of mentoring and developing, disciplining and dismissing. As an experienced manager I am very clear on what good practise is, what is unacceptable behaviour and what constitutes a good case for a second chance. Nothing inspires me more than a good interviewee, someone with enthusiasm, creativity and integrity and nothing gets me more fired up than challenging bad practice.

Just as organisations need to retain a level of experience in their management group, they also need to ensure that managers retain their passion. The best way to do this is allow people to focus their energies into areas where their wisdom will benefit less experienced managers, give them the opportunity to leave a legacy in the form of helping, supporting and inspiring the next generation of managers. Change the conversations within management teams from a preoccupation with performance to an exploration of values if you want to stoke the fire in their bellies.

### Discussion Questions

1. How do we encourage experienced managers to become mentors?
2. What type of experience and wisdom is most valued by people in management.
3. How do you get and keep people talking about values?

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## Section 9

# Can we afford equality and do we still want diversity?

Equal opportunity and diversity awareness training for all is desirable but is it essential? After all it's expensive and time consuming and what evidence is there that it changes attitudes? Clearly managers need to be aware of their legal responsibilities not to discriminate and the importance of following HR procedures drawn up to ensure compliance with best practise. But can we afford a two day awareness course for all when staffing cuts mean we are all doing the job of two people?

Isn't this the time to let the older managers go at least those who no longer have fire in their bellies. We can't afford to have managers coasting when their energy levels start dropping. Isn't it inevitable that managers will feel less strongly about issues, become more weary from fighting the same battles and more cynical as they see the same issue come round time and time again? Some may in any case prefer to go than spend their last years dismantling what they have spent most of their management career building.

It is absolutely right that women should have the same opportunities as men to reach the top, but many are not comfortable with the macho management style that exists in many organisations. Is this the right time to be adopting a softer, more people focused approach? Are we not entering an era where the focus has to be on budgets and performance? Most organisations will be down sizing, making people redundant and requiring people to do two peoples jobs. I am not suggesting women can't make tough decisions. I am suggesting a lot of people won't want the hassle that goes with being a manager when services are being cut and staff are being made redundant yet performance has to be maintained.

Is now the time to take risks with key appointments? Surely you want people with the experience to hit the ground running. The business can't afford the luxury of a lengthy induction and neither you nor your colleagues have the time for handholding. In fact you don't have the time for mentoring even though you recognise it can be of benefit to those who aspire to senior management especially those from under represented groups. Is this another one of those things that's nice but not essential?

A workforce that is representative of the local community is a good aspiration but if it requires a lot of extra effort, time and money to persuade more people to apply from minority ethnic groups is it realistic in the current climate when even a basic admin post attracts over a 100 applicants? With so many people looking for work is it realistic to expect that someone with a learning disability is going to get a job in competition with so many others? Would it be fair with so many unemployed to give preferential treatment to someone on the basis they come from a disadvantaged group? Would it be fair to the individual to put them into a work

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*CAN WE AFFORD EQUALITY AND DO WE STILL WANT DIVERSITY?*

situation where staffing cut backs mean you would not be able to give them the extra support they are likely to need certainly when they first start.

We serve an increasingly diverse population and we work alongside people whose faith, and ethnicity and sexuality is different to ours. We live in an ageing population, one in which the roles of men and women have significantly changed in our life times. We cannot ignore this reality. We cannot provide a good service to our customers if we do not recognise that our customers are made up of people from different communities with different wants and needs. If we don't provide a good service we will not survive. Our workforce is already diverse although it may not yet be representative at every level. Managers need to be able to deal appropriately with conflicts between staff and issues of performance or attendance when these may have involved staff of different race, faith or sexuality. Unskilled management and clumsy responses can very easily end up in time consuming and expensive formal proceedings or an employment tribunal. Busy managers do not want to spend time with lawyers defending their actions.

There is no reason to assume that managers become more cynical with age or that they become less passionate about issues. Wisdom and experience can generally compensate for reduced energy levels since experienced managers will meet very few problems they have not dealt with before. A lot of the energy of youth is channelled into furthering the career and getting the next job rather than concentrating on this one. You must have noticed that the young ambitious manager spends about two years in a post before moving on. Some movement is good, but successful teams also need stability.

A difficult financial climate means we need to do more with less, which means we need managers who are innovative. A macho management style where failure is punished does not encourage innovation. Fewer managers with larger spans of responsibility means less emphasis on professional expertise and more on people management skills. If women can help bring about this change in management styles then they should be encouraged.

Some might say a crisis is the very time you do take risks because dramatic and radical changes are required. If you appoint from the traditional talent pool you will get traditional managers comfortable with the way things have always been done.

I have noticed that when graduates are appointed to basic admin posts they get bored quickly with the routine tasks and require managers to find something interesting for them to do. This is just something they are doing till something better comes along. I have noticed however that the young person with a learning disability is so keen they ask for more work, have to be persuaded to take their annual leave, are hardly ever off sick and make it clear they never intend to leave.

The reality is we have a diverse workforce and we serve diverse communities so we can not afford not to recognise this in how we deliver services or manage our staff.





## Discussion Questions

1. How would you respond to those who say that in a harsh financial climate being PC is a luxury we can't afford?
2. How can we find the time, generate the energy and identify the budget for improving equality in the organisation?
3. Very few people would argue a woman couldn't do this job or a black person shouldn't do this job but what about a person with a disability – a learning disability?





## Part Two

# **Good people management skills**







## Section 10

### 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. To what extent does a harsh financial climate force you to be a harsh manager?
2. How do you get the balance right between supporting and demanding?
3. How do you lift spirits and inspire people to do more with less?





## Section 11

# The wisdom of Brian

Even if you are not a football fan, haven't read the book or seen the film you will know of the man. Brian Clough once described his management abilities by saying 'I wouldn't say I was the best manager in the league but I would certainly put myself in the top one'. He certainly did not lack confidence in his own abilities – he gave that impression anyway.

These days all managers are expected to be leaders, that is they are not simply relying on the authority that comes with the position but they are able to inspire their team/staff. You cannot inspire others by uncertainty and self doubt, you need to be confident and have confidence in your team's ability to deliver. Asking yourself if you are doing the right thing maybe the sign of a questioning mind and a reflective personality, but such doubts spoken out loud, or inferred by inaction, will erode the confidence and self belief of those you seek to motivate.

A leader does not introduce a new initiative by saying the senior management team 'have decided' – in other words 'it's nothing to do with me'. A leader takes ownership. A leader does not bring about change by stating that targets are unrealistic, timescales unreasonable or objectives unachievable. A leader says 'yes we can'.

Clough, like all modern managers, realised that communication was a two way process and he was prepared to listen to suggestions or alternative proposals from team members. He described the process as 'If someone comes to me with an idea or a suggestion I listen to them, we talk it over for about 20 minutes and then we agree I was right.' This is what most manager's do, it was just that Cloughie was more honest about it.

Being right is not always enough. On taking up a new management post Clough was quick to realise the need for restructuring. Some long serving staff no longer fitted in with his plans for the future. He realised if the organisation/club was to flourish, then young talented people needed to be recruited who were prepared to do things differently. Unfortunately for him, the organisation was not ready for such radical, if, essential change. He was fired, but his analysis was proved correct as the organisation went into gradual decline. He took his talents to an under performing organisation where the need for radical change was recognised and new ways of working were embraced. It was here that he made a real difference. Most senior managers would now recognise the wisdom of going to an organisation that is struggling if you want to make a name for yourself.

Clough was most successful during the periods he worked with Peter Taylor. Thus proving that even the most brilliant leader needs a good second in command, someone whose skills compliment their own and whose judgment they trust.

Clough was not known for his diplomacy, he was blunt and direct, his team got plenty of feedback and each individual knew exactly what was expected of them. He got some

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spectacular results because whereas managers get people to do things, leaders get people to deliver to their full potential. He also got talented individuals to work together to support and help each other. Clough didn't do compromise and so it was his way or no way. Very few of us can operate like this and as he was to learn that being the best does not guarantee you the top job, because diplomacy and compromise have their place.

It is a fine line between supreme confidence and arrogance and 'old big head' as he was affectionately known, was always in danger of straying across it.

Clough was a charismatic leader and someone who achieved against the odds by sheer force of personality. An organisation can only have one such leader and my way or no way is not conducive to partnership working. The modern Public Sector manager has to be a shaper and an influencer, not a dictator, because no one organisation working in isolation can successfully tackle the big issues like climate change, unemployment, homelessness, health inequality, racism, drug abuse and juvenile crime.

One thing he did say which is just as relevant now as it was then is 'managers take too much credit when things go well and too much blame when things go wrong'.

### Discussion Questions

1. Is passion in management a good thing or a bad thing? How does it help? When does it become counter productive?
2. How would you feel if your performance in a meeting was described as 'passionate'? How would you feel if your behaviour was described as angry? What's the difference?
3. Would you rather manage someone who was passionate and therefore on occasions challenging or someone who was unemotional about work viewing it simply as a way of paying the bills.





## Section 12

# 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. Think of an occasion where you thought your actions reasonable, your manner calm, your voice and tone appropriate, yet others have thought you upset or angry.

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2. What is a flame mail? Have you ever fired off an e-mail in the heat of the moment then wished you hadn't. What prompted this rash action and what did you do to try and undo any damage?
3. What was the outcome of your 360 degree feedback – any surprises?





## Section 13

### Are you a bully?

You like to think you are a manager who delivers and who gets things done. You like to think you are decisive and make your expectations clear. You don't regard a deadline as a starting point for negotiation. You are assertive but you like to think you listen to other people's opinions. You agree you can be a demanding manager to work for but you think you are approachable, fair and supportive.

- But do your staff see it that way?
- Would they tell you if they didn't?
- Are you prepared to seek feedback?
- Dare you do the test?

#### How would your staff answer the following questions?

On a scale of one to six (so there is no fence sitting) 1 being totally agree and 6 being totally disagree:

- Are your views and opinions ignored?
- Are you are set unrealistic timescales?
- Are you are regularly allocated an unmanageable workload?
- Are you are given work which is beyond your pay grade?
- Do you feel your work is unjustifiably criticised?
- Do you feel you are excessively monitored?
- Do you feel you are treated less favourably when it comes to annual leave requests or putting yourself forward to a training course?

Just because a member of staff feels they are being bullied doesn't make it so. After all what is an unrealistic time scale and what is an unmanageable work load? Some people want to be stretched by more demanding tasks, others thrive on working to tight deadlines. But sometimes managers don't realise the effect their behaviour has on their staff. The problem is that most victims of bullying are unlikely to report it for fear of repercussions or the belief that nothing will be done about it. This means that an organisation can have excellent harassment polices and procedure but that they are rarely invoked. In any case, once it has got to the formal stage, working relationships are difficult to repair.

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The onus is on managers to be aware of how their behaviour is affecting those they manage. One way is through 360 degree feedback. That is asking those you manage and those you work with to give you feedback usually in the form of an anonymous questionnaire. Another approach is executive coaching where an independent management coach observes the manager in a number of work situations and then shares their observations with the individual. The aim is to increase the managers' insight into how their behaviour impacts on others and in so doing helps them identify ways of improving their influencing and negotiating skills.

It may be as simple as giving people more space and opportunity to respond or asking more open ended questions. Like driving, over time we all develop bad habits yet few of us would admit to being a poor driver. Under pressure our driving deteriorates. So a bit of constructive impartial feedback can make us think about what we are doing.

Management is about getting people to do things, sometimes things they would rather put off or not do. If management was just issuing orders and disciplining those who failed to respond quickly enough it would require little or no skill. Managing people requires considerable skill, it is as much about negotiation and persuasion as it is about clarity, decisiveness and consistency. It's about challenging bad practice and promoting good practice. It also involves creating an environment where people feel able to challenge you.

### **What the scores tell you**

- All 6's – you are a bully and they are too afraid to tell you.
- Mostly 5/6 – too good to be true, are you managing them or are they managing you?
- Mostly 3/4 – you are not always popular but they respect you.
- Mostly 2/3 – If they trust you enough to fill in this questionnaire then there is hope.
- All 1's – They don't like you and it's obvious why.





## Section 14

# Power, success and recognition

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 as what the Americans refer to as 'brown nosing'.
- 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 nice people come second?
- Is self confidence, ability and ambition enough to take you to the top or do you also have to have the killer instinct?
- Do you think those at the top have a streak of ruthlessness and a hint of menace to go with the charm?

My experience is that ability and enthusiasm are recognised within organisations, but you do sometimes have to tell people what you have achieved. This could take the form of writing up the project in a professional journal in which you acknowledge the contribution of the team and present a positive image of the organisation. Being ambitious does not mean you are desperate to please your boss but cynicism is rarely viewed positively. Being ambitious doesn't mean you volunteer for every project going but it does mean you recognise that a corporate project would broaden your experience and raise your profile, which might be a reasonable trade off for the extra work. Keeping up with current thinking by reading the professional journals and listening out for the clues about which management books the chief exec's currently reading shows you are open to new ideas. But don't be tempted to show off – there will always be someone who is better read than you.

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Claiming credit for the work of others is counter productive in the long term as you will lose their cooperation. Undermining colleagues will not go unnoticed and people will start to wonder what you are saying to others behind their back. A much cleverer approach is to publicly recognise the efforts and skills of others and they will feel obliged to do the same for you. People who seek to influence others can be charming – whether they are ruthless probably depends on whether you think the end justifies the means.

Of course the best way to get on is to choose the right boss, to work for someone who is not threatened by an able, enthusiastic and ambitious member of staff. Someone who sees their role as developing the potential of their staff and who gets satisfaction at seeing their staff go on to better and greater things. If you can't select your manager you can at least select a mentor – someone with the wisdom of experience who can guide you in the ways of management.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. How ambitious are you?
2. What is the best way to get on in this service, department or organisation?
3. Think of someone you have come across through work that you admire. What is it that you most admire about this person?





## Section 15

# 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. Do you know someone at work who is passionate about the job, someone who doesn't always follow procedures – how are they regarded by colleagues and their boss?
2. When is insubordination acceptable or appropriate?
3. Do the ends ever justify the means? Give an example from your work.





## Section 16

# My manager doesn't understand me

More than a third of workers in the public sector feel their managers don't understand them. That is the finding of a survey undertaken by OPP Business Psychology Consultancy. What is even more disconcerting is that a confident 97 per cent of public sector managers say they know their people well!

The study revealed that employees felt that managers did not understand their skills, preferences and motivation and therefore did not make the best use of them. This seemed to be confirmed by managers who reported that they relied on gut instincts to make decisions such as appointing new staff, promoting staff, or identifying individuals to lead on projects.

Perhaps it is not surprising then, that seven out of ten of this group of managers said they would change past decisions if they had the chance.

The study highlighted a culture of decisions based on subjective information and inconsistent criteria resulting in missed opportunities and costly bad decisions.

Of course the authors of this report have their own agenda, they want to sell a range of expensive tools based around psychometric testing which identify the strengths, preferences and suitability of candidates – thus improving the quality of decision making by making it less subjective. But is it true that managers know so little about their staff? Well here is a quick, easy to use, inexpensive way to find out.

Ask yourself of those people you directly manage:

- Do you know their partner's name?
- Do you know the names and ages of their children, whether they are at university or currently in an important exam year?
- Are they caring for an elderly parent?
- Do they go on activity holidays or do they prefer sight seeing and culture, chill out on the beach or an adventure to an exotic location.
- Do they speak another language?

Can this survey be right in identifying that the majority of managers, particularly senior managers, are blissfully ignorant of what staff really think, yet they have convinced themselves they are in tune with the shop floor? Well, speaking as a senior manager, I can confirm that I do think I know what my staff are thinking. It is also true that I don't put this to the test very often but when I or my colleagues on the senior management team do, we are frequently

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surprised at how misunderstood our policies are, how so much information could have bypassed so many and how so few know who the Deputy Director is!

**Discussion Questions**

1. How much do you know about the personal lives of people you directly manage?
2. How much should senior managers rely on their managers to keep them in touch with the mood on the front line?
3. Some senior managers think a regular 'walk about' helps give them a feel for what's going. What do you think?





## Section 17

# Treat them mean, keep them keen

### **Macho management explained**

How would a more confident and assertive style of management deal with today's public sector issues like high levels of absenteeism, poor performance, staff questioning management decisions and no longer keen to volunteer for extra work?

- *High levels of absenteeism?* Just let it be known that attendance is a factor in deciding who is to be made redundant.
- *Performance targets dipping?* Link pay to performance by keeping basic salaries low and bonuses subject to hitting demanding targets.
- *Staff no longer keen to volunteer for extra work?* Make it clear promotion is dependent on 'attitude' and your recommendation.
- *Staff starting to question your decisions?* Use the annual appraisal process to make the individual justify their post and salary.

Obviously salaries are an individual and personal matter so people don't need to know what someone else is earning. Reinforce your position by communicating on a 'needs to know basis only'. Don't give explanations. You're the boss and the fact that you want it done should be enough. Explaining only makes you look weak. Any really unpopular decision and you should make it clear that this was down to senior management – 'take it up with them, if you don't want a future here'.

Don't encourage staff to moan to you about their petty problems, it is just a waste of your time. Don't get drawn into pointless debates about political correctness. The following stock responses should deal with any complaints about colleagues:

- What can I do about it?
- You're adults, sort it out amongst yourselves.
- If you feel that strongly then presumably you think it is a resigning matter.

Remember networking is good for the career but partnerships rarely are. Don't get sucked into anything that allows someone else to spend your budget or commit your staff's time. Remember too that the office is a hierarchy not a democracy. The customer may be king but it's your boss who determines your future. If you're keeping your boss happy, hitting performance targets and achieving budget cuts, if you are doing more with less staff well – your job's safe. You may even get a promotion out of the next management restructuring.

Remind you of any one you know?

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### **Discussion Questions**

1. Describe an example of macho management in your service/department/organisation.
2. How can you make a partnership work even if your partners don't seem to be trying very hard?
3. What is meant by the expression 'the office is a hierarchy not a democracy' and what are the implications?





## Section 18

### It's personal

It's important to know your staff as individuals if you want to be good at people management. But what happens when home life starts to affect work life. How involved should managers get in employees personal lives?

If you work in a large open plan office then you are probably not sitting far away from a woman who is suffering domestic abuse, a member of staff with a mental health problem or someone who is abusing alcohol or drugs. It is very likely that some people have financial problems and almost certainly others will be caring for an elderly or disabled relative and of course someone will be in the middle of a messy divorce. How does any work get done?

As a manager should you ignore this and encourage people to leave their problems at home when they come to work? No doubt some will find work a pleasant distraction, the behaviour of others suddenly becomes more understandable but no more acceptable once you know what is going on at home. If you have a very able and normally conscientious member of staff who is going through a difficult period you will cut them some slack. You might encourage them to take time off to get things sorted out. Of course if the alcohol or drug abuse starts affecting attendance and quality of work you can't ignore it. You can refer to the organisation's welfare service but you might still end up sacking the individual. If the problem is caring for a disabled or elderly relative it may be possible to adjust work patterns but there is a limit to how flexible you can be if this is a long-term issue.

In the case of domestic violence

- The individual may not choose to confide in you as their line manager but what if colleagues raise their suspicions and concerns, do you have a responsibility to the individual as an employer?
- How would you go about raising your concerns?
- Would you know what to do?

Does your organisation have a policy on domestic violence?

- Does the policy spell out the role of managers to:
  - Provide a sensitive and non-judgemental approach.
  - Ensure that confidentiality is respected as far as possible.
  - Understand that the employee may not wish to approach their line manager and may prefer to involve a third party such as a colleague or human resources manager.

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- Recognise that the employee may need some time to decide what to do and may try many different options during this process.
- Discuss measures to prioritise safety in the workplace.
- Be aware of what support is available and explore these options with the employee. This may address leave and time off work, financial issues and health effects.
- Does the policy cover training for managers to identify and provide support to ensure that managers can:
  - Identify if an employee is experiencing difficulties.
  - Respond appropriately to victims and perpetrators.
  - Provide initial support.
  - Discuss safety.
  - Discuss options for support and refer to other agencies.
  - Link with policies on performance monitoring and appraisals, health and safety, confidentiality, flexible working, disciplinary and grievance in a supportive way.

Two women a week are murdered and 10 commit suicide as a result of domestic violence. One in four women report being subject to domestic violence. The Local Government workforce is made up of 70 per cent women yet all too often strategies for tackling domestic violence drawn up by Local Authorities ignore their role as an employer.

### Discussion Questions

1. How involved should you get in the personal lives of your staff?
2. Describe a situation where you felt uncomfortable with the details a member of staff was sharing with you about their personal life.
3. If your boss was having an affair with another member of the team how would you respond?





## Section 19

# 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

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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.

### 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 20

# Stop giving managers stick over absenteeism

What happens when the accepted ways of tackling high levels of absenteeism don't deliver the anticipated reductions?

Is there an alternative to the shouting from the sidelines from senior managers?

Back to work interviews seem to be effective in managing short-term absences but long-term absences continue to inflate the statistics. Monitoring arrangements are being improved, procedures have been streamlined and policies tightened up. Managers have been told they are under the microscope and are expected to be active in reducing levels of absenteeism in their service. The centralisation of HR has meant support on these matters can seem more distant and less accessible. Managers don't lack commitment to tackle absenteeism but some may lack the confidence and experience. How else do you explain dramatic variations in levels of absenteeism between teams and establishments in the same area of work facing the same working conditions?

First line managers can clearly make a difference but they don't need yet more calls for greater effort from senior managers, what they need is support and help.

Identify the areas of highest absenteeism (in the case of a typical social service department day centres for people with a learning disability and residential homes for older people) and bring these officers in charge and managers together in a facilitated support group. The group needs to be independently facilitated to keep it focused on absence management and prevent it becoming an opportunity to moan about the difficulties of first line management. The aim is to share positive experience of working with occupational health (OH), how to make an effective referral and how to get an OH report that will be helpful. Share the experience of taking staff to an attendance panel and how to get the result you are looking for. Use the group to set up a 'buddy system' where managers grappling with high levels of absenteeism or a particularly difficult case, could have an experienced manager to support them. In this way managers will start to believe that they can make an impact on long term absenteeism, people will receive support from colleagues who understand just how difficult it can be to challenge the culture within an establishment or to negotiate through the torturous absence management procedures and people will be encouraged by the success stories of others.

The support group will need to meet fortnightly as monthly would be too big a gap to keep up the momentum. However, after six months it should be possible to establish whether a significant reduction in absenteeism had been achieved and whether the money saved, funded the cost of running the support group. Since the biggest factor in absence statistics is long term absenteeism if the backlog of people absent for months was tackled then managers would feel

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more in control and more able to maintain low levels of absenteeism. So a little less stick and a little more support please.

**Discussion Questions**

1. What support do you get from colleagues, HR and your manager in addressing absenteeism?
2. What additional support would help?
3. What levels of absenteeism do you think are realistically achievable in your service or team in view of the nature of the work, the mood of the workforce and the general state of the economy?





## Section 21

# Reducing the boss's anxiety

An effective manager is one who is good at reducing their boss's anxiety. Senior managers are best kept at arms length from the action. They are strategic, they deal with the big picture and the longer term, that's what they are good at. When senior managers get anxious they start to get too involved in the detail, they get more hands on, set more targets and require more monitoring reports. Their sudden interest in specific areas can distort priorities, divert resources, cause confusion and have unintended consequences.

What is required is greater clarity not increased activity.

Senior managers worry about what they don't know and this is often about an increasingly diverse range of services. This is because the trend towards slimmer flatter management structures has increased their span of responsibility to services they have little direct knowledge or experience off. Suddenly their responsibilities include housing, libraries, museums, registrars, coroners support and consumer protection. Life was a lot simpler as Director of Social Services or Director of Education.

Senior manager's anxiety levels are raised by impending inspections or audits.

- What will they find?
- What will they be told?
- How can we ensure there are no surprises?
- Are we consistently doing what we are supposed to be doing?
- Where are we vulnerable and how can we reduce the risk?
- Are people doing what they say they are?
- Are people following policies and procedures?

In addition senior managers are worried about what's gone wrong elsewhere, could it happen here?

So it's important to manage your manager's anxiety. They don't need to know everything, they just need to know who to ask. They don't need to have more briefing meetings and more progress reports, they just need to know there will be no unpleasant surprises. If something isn't going to plan they will be told before it becomes a crisis. Inspections and audits won't tell us anything we don't already know and we aren't already dealing with. They don't need to worry about what people will say because we already know what they will say because we encourage them to tell us direct. They don't need to be concerned about the day to day management of services because we have taken great care to appoint confident and capable

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managers and support them. They do need to be clear about what services will look like in the future, they do need to reinforce the values and repeat the priorities and they do need success stories.

**Discussion Questions**

1. How would you go about getting what you want from your boss?
2. What is most likely to raise your boss's levels of anxiety?
3. How does your boss show that they are worried or anxious about some work issue?





## Part Three

# **Doing things differently**







## Section 22

# 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.

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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 23

# Open plan, hot desking and home working for senior managers

Many managers pay lip service to the idea of leading by example but, given the choice, how many senior managers would be prepared to give up their own office and status that it confers? But that is exactly what the senior management team of Lancashire CC Social Services Directorate has done.

The team decided it would be difficult to ask managers to give up their offices while senior management retained theirs. The Director and his five assistant directors gave up their individual offices and moved into a room the size of one of their previous offices. This shared space has four hot desks and two touch-down points, occupied on a first-come, first-served basis. This could have been the recipe for disaster, but four months into the pilot, the opposite seems to have occurred. The team feels closer, stronger and more effective. Members have benefited from sending fewer e-mails to one another and exchanging information face to face.

Before the change, managers had been struggling to accommodate expanding teams within Lancashire's grade II listed social services headquarters. The Park Hotel, as it was originally, was built in the 19th century. The main conference room is still referred to as the ballroom. As in most organisations, managers at a certain level had become accustomed to having their own office, often with panoramic views across a park, while other staff were crammed six or more into what were originally bedrooms.

An accommodation strategy for the whole organisation was drawn up to address the issues of overcrowding and high maintenance costs. The strategy was based on providing high-quality accommodation through fewer, but purpose-built, offices. In September, senior managers moved into one room. Each was allocated just a single drawer for their personal belongings and a drawer for papers they were working on. As managers had used their offices for meetings and supervision sessions, additional meeting rooms had to be set up. Four meeting rooms and a quiet room were established from the six offices released.

Technology has been essential to making the pilot work. A policy of only having one copy of a document, and holding that copy electronically, has resulted in no filing cabinets and 24 bin bags full of paper for disposal. Managers have each been given a laptop which they place on a docking station at their chosen hot desk.

Most of the anticipated problems of noise and cramped working conditions have not materialised. Giving up your own desk is not as hard as giving up your own office, but some colleagues' love of the hard copy has proved more of a challenge.

At first, the senior management team did not believe that six people could work from four hot desks. But a survey of the amount of time these managers spent within their own office

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revealed they were either in a meeting or out of the building altogether for 60 per cent of the time. Even the manager who claimed to always be in the office was, in fact, out 30 per cent of the time. Added to this, most weeks someone would be on annual leave, at a conference or on a training event. The survey proved it is very rare for all six senior managers to be in their office at the same time.

Teething problems have included personal assistants not being able to keep track of which desk managers were sitting at. This has been solved by introducing portable phones for each manager. If a highly sensitive call comes in, the manager will walk to one of several meeting rooms set aside. Over the next three months, all middle managers based at HQ will move into shared offices next to the senior management team. All managers will move to the ground floor. The senior management team will be based next to reception, becoming more visible and accessible.

The programme sends out a clear message that modernising the organisation requires a different approach – but we are not asking others to do something we are not prepared to do ourselves.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What would it take for you to give up your office?
2. After a while people tended to sit in the same place and make it their hot desk. Why might this be a problem and what could be done about it?
3. Managers were encouraged to work from home on a regular basis using the laptops and Blackberries provided. What would be the reaction in your organisation to managers at all levels working from home on a regular basis? How should this be addressed?





## Section 24

### A senior manager working from home!

The work life balance is a bigger issue today than ever, with UK staff working longer hours than their European counterparts. So over the past few months I have tried working from home one day a week. Initially, I only did this on the odd occasion. I soon found, however, that unless I planned ahead and booked a day to work from home, the space in the diary was filled. I didn't want to book the same day working from home every week as that might give the impression that I was working a four-day week. It would also have reduced my availability, if, for instance, I was always working from home on Wednesdays.

Working from home on a regular basis is unusual for someone at a senior level. I'm not sure why this is the case since directors, more than most, are judged not on the hours they put in, nor the number of meetings they attend, but on their effectiveness in managing the budget, hitting performance targets and influencing key figures in partner agencies.

The problem is we all have this Protestant work ethic instilled in us. Somehow we feel we must be showing others we are working hard – it's not good enough just to deliver.

The other day the executive director was looking for a volunteer to cover a meeting on Friday morning. That was a Friday and I was due to work from home so I could have covered the meeting without rearranging my diary, but I was reluctant, knowing all the work I had planned for the day. I didn't want people to think that working from home days were empty spaces in my diary that could be filled. On the other hand I felt a bit uncomfortable. Are meetings more important than other pieces of work? Anyway my dilemma was resolved by somebody else volunteering.

People who work from home will be familiar with the distractions and expectations that go with this. For instance, that I will walk the dogs, collect the dry cleaning, get something in for tea on the basis that I am at home. And I didn't realise just how many phone calls you get during the day from companies who want you to swap your utilities provider or sign up to a credit card. I have to answer all these calls because it might be work.

Then there's the gardener – I say gardener, he just cuts the grass, but apparently he gets a cup of tea and a biscuit as well. And the parcel for next door – they are always getting parcels and they're never in. It's my responsibility to empty the dishwasher. This goes some way to explain why some people get a response to their e-mails dated Sunday evening.

The other week I had my haircut on the day I was working from home. I tell myself this is OK because I'll make up the time later. However, I am reminded of what my son, who works shifts, said when he appeared at lunchtime: 'Have you got the day off again?'





## **Discussion Questions**

1. Why is it still so unusual for a senior manager to work from home on a regular basis?
2. What are the advantages of working from home for the organisation?
3. What are the risks for managers if we further blur the separation of work from home?





## Section 25

### Resistance from the top

A harsh financial climate is a good time to challenge the assumption that resistance to change comes from lower down the organisation. If you read management books it's all about leadership. That is, those at the top having the skills to drive through changes. This involves overcoming resistance to change from lower down the organisation. If people can just be persuaded to do things differently, to be open to new ways of working, to be flexible about roles, accept more responsibility and be more creative then performance will improve, customer satisfaction will increase, and the organisation will be more efficient. It's not just about cutting budgets or reshaping services, it's about changing the way we do things.

Most employees would identify a gap between this rhetoric and the practice. Most people would accept that if change is to be real, as opposed to cosmetic or tokenistic, it must be modelled from the top. If you want a different management style throughout the organisation then senior managers have to behave differently and be more aware of how their behaviour affects others. 'Do as I say' rather than 'do as I do' is not a very persuasive argument.

It's not difficult to find examples of where senior managers have not followed what they preached. Even if some of these examples seem minor they assume greater significance as symbols of resistance from the top:

- The Assistant Director who tells staff to embrace new technology but 'doesn't do e-mails'.
- The Chief Exec who promotes open plan office working but retains their own large office with a view.
- The Directors who advocate the savings to be made from back office rationalisation but won't share a PA.

It's often senior managers who maintain the silo mentality, not the teacher, the social worker or the housing officer who at a grass roots level, work across organisational boundaries in their day to day work with district nurses or beat officers. Its senior managers who see their department as in competition with other departments for scarce resources, who make special pleading against budget cuts, who emphasise the different nature of their services yet know little about services within their organisation but outside of their department. When budgets are tight, senior managers can revert to previous behaviour patterns seeking to retain under spends and hiding funds in order to stop money being redistributed to less financially responsible colleagues in other departments. Such behaviour is not corporate but is evidence that resistance to change isn't just something that happens further down the organisation.





## Discussion Questions

1. What examples are there in your organisation of senior managers saying one thing and doing another?
2. You are prepared to be corporate but your colleagues say you are being naive if you think managers in other departments will look beyond the interests of their own departments. How do you respond?
3. How do you feel about freeing up some of your most able managers to participate in a corporate project when there are so many demands on their time already?





## Section 26

# Affordability, efficiency and value for money

### **Making the budget stretch**

I asked my dad why he always bought biscuits that no-one liked, he replied 'they last longer'. This philosophy has long been applied to the public sector, sometimes referred to as 'take it or leave it', and other times as 'well what do you expect for free'. But it is best summed up as giving people only what they need as opposed to what they want/would like.

### **Value for money**

A couple come out of a restaurant, one says to the other 'the food they served in that place was disgusting'. The other replies 'Yes, and such small portions'. Some people have argued it would be better value for money if the portions were bigger but the price remained the same! Clearly the answer is not to give people more of what they don't want.

### **Affordability**

I had a friend who couldn't resist a bargain and he would return from the sales with an Armani jacket that was too small or a Boss shirt in an unflattering colour. Yes, he would agree it didn't fit and he didn't like the colour but 'I got it for less than half price'. Needless to say neither garment was ever seen in public. A good quality service is only cheap if it is the right fit for your organisation. Buy what you can afford, not what you aspire to.

### **New rationing**

In the past local authorities were wary about telling the public about their services in case they were overwhelmed by demand. For a number of years the stated aim of local government has been to make it easier for citizens to access information about services. At the same time budget pressure has led Social Service departments to raise eligibility criteria so as to make it harder to get a service. The risk is that success becomes more people knowing what they are not entitled to and fewer people receiving a service.

### **The corporate pot and top slicing**

The Head of Physical Education has a large cupboard full of rugby balls. When the new PE teacher asks why, he was told that rather than risk having an under spend used to justify reducing the department's budget next year, it was better to spend any money left over. 'You can never have too many rugby balls.'

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In a harsh financial climate you don't get to keep your under spends as these need to be returned to the centre to contribute to the overall savings. Result – no opportunities to do something creative and managers spend under spends rather than lose them.

Innovation and change needs some pump priming funds so each department may have money taken from it and be top sliced. Then departments bid for funds in competition with the Chief Exec or the Leaders favoured project.

### **The budget airline model**

Budget airlines are cheap. The costs are kept to a minimum. Ticketing is on line, you print out your own ticket, which is both convenient and cheaper for the airline. There are no seats allocated, it's sit where you like which means everyone rushes to get on board. Very convenient for an airline trying to have very quick turnaround times. There is a strict weight limit on baggage with a heavy financial penalty for excess. Less luggage and less weight means less aviation fuel, so it's cheaper for the airlines. Weight restrictions mean more passengers carry more hand luggage, resulting in longer delays in airport security which is not very convenient for passengers.

Being very efficient and therefore cheap may work for an airline but in the public sector services must also be run for the convenience of service users.

### **The satellite TV model of choice**

Satellite and cable TV offer various packages, pulling together sport, films or entertainment that offer better value for money than subscribing to receive all their channels. The packages are designed to appeal to the majority of viewers. However it would not be economic for the company to offer a pick and mix services where you simply select the channels you want. So there is choice and there is value for money if you buy off the peg but you can't have a tailored pack.

In the public sector choice has been presented as offering the tailored package. For example social services are being encouraged to offer older people care and support tailored to their wants.

The reality is people find themselves faced with going to bed at 6.30 p.m. or only able to have a bath on a Wednesday afternoon. Frail elderly people, like most people, tend to want to go to bed late in the evening but the agency providing the service has to make the most effective use of staff so some people are going to be first on the list and helped into bed at 6.30 p.m.





## Discussion Questions

1. What is the relationship between choice and cost?
2. What can we learn from these Private sector models about efficiency?
3. What is the difference between being customer focused and providing good customer care?





## Section 27

# The end of the traditional team meeting

Reducing management overheads, removing tiers of management and increasing spans of control has implications for how managers manage. If you suddenly find yourself managing a wide range of services that have nothing in common, then the traditional team meeting is no longer relevant. From being a senior manager responsible for social services I find myself responsible for a diverse range of services including adult education, libraries, museums, records and arts, and registrars and coroners support. These services do not have a lot in common other than their managers all report directly to me.

Team meetings are now about sharing the 'hot issues'. Instead of a traditional agenda with papers submitted in advance we have a 'round robin' where each manager takes it in turn to update the team on what's happening in their service focusing on the hot issues. These issues are opened up into a discussion if others round the table want to explore it more or if it strikes a cord with events in their own service. Some issues provoke discussion because they cut across services, for example managing absenteeism, introducing new ways of working, recruitment, disciplinarians and efficiency initiatives.

In this way the meetings do establish common themes and interest, they help managers see the bigger picture and they help me keep up to speed with what is happening around the organisation. Clearly the old idea of meeting once a week is no longer appropriate as managers would not have much new to report. So we now meet monthly for an hour and a half. It's amazing now to think that we used to be able to fill a whole morning once a week when I was managing social services. Part of the problem is if your agenda expands to fill the space available and part was due to the fact that managers like to come and present their reports in person. Many didn't require a decision they just wanted recognition for their progress and achievements.

We have used some of this spare management capacity to introduce a monthly meeting with the wider team that is the next tier down. This is an attempt to be more inclusive and to get ownership of decisions by the wider group but also it is an opportunity to have thematic discussions. We agree topics for the year ahead and we invite speakers to kick off the discussions. Themes have included social inclusion, community cohesion, equality and diversity, economic development, use of volunteers, absence management and management development.

### Discussion Questions

1. If you were part of such a team what would you think would be the best use of team meetings?
2. What would you consider a hot issue?
3. How would you change your current team meetings if you had the opportunity?

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## Section 28

### When is a team not a team?

- Team work is good isn't it?
- Managers build teams don't they?
- What if a group of managers are responsible for totally different services?
- What if the only thing they have in common is the same boss?
- Does the team philosophy still apply at a senior level in organisations?
- Should the senior management team be more accurately called the senior management group?

If individuals are competent and if their services are performing well, does it matter that they don't see themselves as a team?

#### What's the difference between a group and a team?

A group can have a leader, a group can have a common identity, and a group can have a common sense of purpose. A group of individuals does not become a team just because they meet regularly and they have team in their title. Team implies some sort of bonding, mutual support and helping each other out.

- Can a group of senior managers be effective if they don't operate as a team?
- If there is no conflict within the group, if messages are consistent, if everyone is pulling in the same direction does it matter that they don't see themselves as a team?
- Does it matter that they have no desire to meet outside of work?

Just because group members don't socialise doesn't make them a dysfunctional team. You don't need to go out at Christmas or celebrate each other's birthday to be effective – but it could be fun. Chances are if it doesn't feel like a team then it isn't a team. Managers are frequently members of more than one team. Possibly some managers want a group rather than a team as part of a divide and rule style of management. Maybe we have become obsessed with the idea that even when managers are responsible for totally different services and meet only for a few hours a month, they need to bond in order to be effective.

Interestingly if one team doesn't feel like a team, then another one you are a member of probably does. Possibly we all feel the need to belong to a least one team in which we feel comfortable, that offers support and a bit of camaraderie. There is value in identifying common

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issues, sharing experiences, learning more about what each others services and identifying best practice. It is questionable if this can be achieved without being a team.

Usually it's the team leader who wants to turn the group into a team.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What if the boss sees no need to get the team to bond?
2. Can an individual feel comfortable in such a team?
3. Do managers need to feel comfortable with each other to be effective?
4. Do they need to feel comfortable in each others company if they only meet every other week for a couple of hours?
5. What if the boss doesn't want them to be too comfortable?



## Section 29

# 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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HOW TO BE A CORPORATE MANAGER

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?







## Part Four

# Getting the right person







## Section 30

# Interviews are like penalty shoot-outs

Interviews are like penalty shoot-outs, lots of pressure and just one opportunity to get it right. Some remain calm and composed, others let the occasion and significance undermine their performance. Could the techniques of sports psychology help individuals remain confident, focussed and in control of interview situations?

As a senior manager and a mentor, I am involved in management development and I often help people prepare for job interviews. I know from experience that some very able candidates don't do themselves justice in interview situations, they let their nervousness undermine their performance or they try too hard and come across as unfocussed or even desperate. For example, they talk too fast, or say too much and instead of answering the question, they tell the interview panel everything that comes into their head.

Just as in sport, when it comes to interviews, mental preparation is key to success. It's not just about anticipating the questions and working out the answers, it's about remaining calm, confident and focussed. In sport, mental preparation involves positive self-affirmation and visualisation. Affirmation is what you say to yourself to stay positive and confident. Perhaps you are sitting with the other candidates waiting to be called for interview, you realise one is an internal candidate and another is already doing the job in another authority. This could undermine your confidence and make you more nervous. You could start to think that the competition is stronger, more experienced and has an 'insider's knowledge' of the organisation's culture. Or you could remind yourself of your strengths, skills and your successes.

You can practice your presentation to ensure you are word perfect and within the allotted time, then you could visualise your performance. Think about the perfect presentation, see yourself in front of the interview panel, where are you standing, what does it feel like to be confident, calm and in control of your emotions. Your voice sounds strong and confident, your speech is clear, the pace of your delivery is just right, you are keeping eye contact with the panel and smiling. Your enthusiasm is infectious. They smile back and nod encouragingly. They like you. You get the job.

### Discussion Questions

1. Describe the last job interview you attended.
2. What went well?
3. How much practice did you put in before hand?





## Section 31

# 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, 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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## GETTING AN INTERVIEW FOR THAT SENIOR MANAGEMENT POST

- 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 32

# Sharp suits and shiny shoes

A good hair cut, a sharp suit and shiny shoes may look the part but they do not an effective manager make, so maybe these do:

An MBA from a prestigious university.

X years experience in a related area.

The ability to analyse complex information.

Good communication skills.

The ability to inspire others.

The willingness to take responsibility.

Political sensitivity.

The ability to see the bigger picture.

Ambition.

Stamina.

A willingness to take the credit for the efforts of others?

The last characteristic is not usually listed under essential qualities in the person specification but I have seen all the others used to describe the type of manager we are looking for.

Having an MBA may look good on the CV but it's an academic qualification. It says you have studied to a post graduate level, you have read a few, or a lot, of books and articles on American management theory and organisation development, you have had the opportunity of broadening your horizons and to think more strategically. But has it improved your people management skills? Being familiar with the set texts on leadership does not mean you can inspire others.

You have three, five or even ten years professional experience but being an accomplished teacher, social worker, engineer or architect doesn't mean you will be any good when it comes to managing absenteeism or negotiating new working practices. Even the number of years is no indication of experience if you haven't learnt anything new after the first 12 months.

Excellent communication skills seem to be a standard requirement for every management post but most managers struggle to write a report that can be understood by anyone other than their professional colleagues. Many managers are poor public speakers and incapable of speaking to a large group of front line staff.

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It is currently fashionable to expect all managers to be leaders and to be able to inspire their staff. Certainly managers do need to be able to say how they would get people to do what needs to be done. But most managers would acknowledge that there were occasions when staff simply could not be persuaded that a new way of working was better. On such occasions it may be more a case of requiring rather than inspiring staff to do what needs doing.

If qualifications and experience have their limitations as indicators of likely effectiveness and personal qualities like leadership set the bar high so only a limited charismatic few can clear it, what can we reasonably expect of our managers?

I would sum it up as all managers need good people management skills to be effective. They need integrity because people will not retain confidence in a manager who does not say what they think and do what they say. A manager needs insight into the impact their behaviour has on others. The modern manager needs to recognise they are managing an increasing diverse workforce; not everyone thinks the same way as them or shares their experiences. A manager needs the confidence to deal with poor performance and bad practice. A manager needs the energy and commitment to make things better.

It is difficult to assess these qualities at interview which is why sharp suits and shiny shoes are so popular.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. Describe what you would wear to an interview and why?
2. How would you demonstrate you had five years experience as opposed to one year  $\times$  five?
3. What can you do to improve your public speaking?



## Section 33

### Is it cheating to give them the answers?

I believe it's part of being a good manager to help people leave – to help them fulfil their potential and move on and up. This involves helping them write an application form and preparing them for an interview. As a senior manager and an experienced interviewer I can look at a job description and a person specification and identify the type of questions that are likely to be asked. With my knowledge of the individuals experience and skills, I can suggest examples they might refer to in answering these questions.

Recently as an interviewer, I have experimented with giving all the candidates the questions in advance of the interview in the hope that they would provide more thoughtful answers on which to judge their suitability for the post. After all the aim of an interview is to get the best out of the candidate and many a candidate has not done themselves justice through nerves or being thrown by obscure or long winded questions. Most interviews have a presentation question which the candidate is given in advance so why not give them all the questions in advance?

I routinely provide candidates with detailed feedback. Going through each question, reviewing their answer, explaining what the panel were looking for and how they could answer the question better. Sometimes I have referred to another candidate's good answer because often there is not one right answer. I have sometimes re-interviewed candidates using only slightly different versions of the questions only to discover that even when given the answers some people can't do a good interview.

Of course being good at interviews is not the same as being good at the job. What's more research has consistently shown that the traditional panel interview is deeply flawed. We tend to form our opinions about candidates within the first few minutes despite complicated scoring systems and questions designed to relate to specific areas of the person specification. In fact the traditional interview panel are only interested in one question 'Do we like you?' This isn't as daft as it sounds if we understand this to mean could I work with you? do I trust you? can I understand what you are saying? and do we share values and beliefs? The trouble is an interview situation is not the best way of finding this out. This is why assessment centres have become so popular as part of the recruitment process particularly for senior management posts. An assessment centre over a couple of days can test out a candidates numeracy skills, verbal reasoning, leadership style, interpersonal skills and provides an opportunity through an in-tray exercise, to gauge how they would respond to typical work situations.

An assessment centre has many advantages provided it is used to decide who makes it to the interview. All too often all the short listed candidates are interviewed and the assessment centre results ignored if they don't coincide with the panels preferred choice. Giving people the questions in advance and even the answers, probably doesn't undermine the process – it just confirms interviews are a bit of a lottery.





## **Discussion Questions**

1. How would you go about helping a member of your team get a promotion they wanted?
2. Think of the last time you interviewed – how detailed was the feedback to unsuccessful candidates?
3. The interview panel is divided on who to appoint. You are the chair. How do you resolve the situation?





## Section 34

### The acting up interview

Today I made someone happy, someone unhappy and disappointed a third. Acting up interviews are like that. The whole process is more intimate because the people you're interviewing are not strangers. You know them and they know you and you will all still be working together after you have elevated one of them. The process needs to be fair and seen to be fair. Feedback to the unsuccessful candidates is more important and more sensitive than in interviews with external candidates.

Acting up can be good for your career giving you additional experience and therefore making you a stronger candidate for a permanent post in the future. As a manager it can tell you some uncomfortable things about how good you are at developing your staff and communicating with them.

An acting up arrangement is usually used to fill a post quickly to cover for a short term vacancy. Maybe the manager has just got a new job and you want cover during the three or possibly more months it would take to advertise and recruit a replacement. Maybe there is a short-term gap to fill whilst someone recovers from a major operation.

Best practice is to invite team members to express an interest and undertake a formal interview even if there is only one candidate. This way you avoid the suspicion of favouritism and you ensure the candidate is suitable and understands what would be required. Covering in the short term is very different from taking up a new permanent post. The remit will be to ensure there is no disruption to the service rather than to introduce radical change. The individual will not only be managing former colleagues but will be returning to be one of them. Have they the strength of character required?

The candidate must achieve a balance between not under selling themselves on the basis the interview panel know them and what they have done and over loading the panel with detailed and lengthy responses. For example, a straight forward question like 'What do you think will be the key priorities for the acting up period?' requires an answer that gives the top three priorities and why they are priorities – short and simple showing clarity and thought and understanding of the role. Whilst the interview may feel more informal because everyone knows everyone else, it is a mistake to treat it differently to a formal competitive interview. Candidates need to do their homework. They need to think about the questions they are likely to be asked and prepare an answer. They need to think about the job, the role and the context just as they would if applying to an external organisation. Often acting up candidates think they know what their manager does and so homework is not necessary, but often they have a very incomplete picture and this will be revealed in the interview.

Feedback to unsuccessful candidates is even more important when they will continue to work with you. Feedback should be specific as in this is the answer we were looking for, and your

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answer would have been stronger if you had included the following. However, content is unlikely to have been the only issue – often in interviews people are understandably nervous and speak too quickly and say too much. Covering all the right points but taking 20 minutes to get there won't impress the interviewer who is looking for a clear thinker who can express themselves succinctly. Feedback needs to be honest to be useful but not so brutal as to undermine the individual's confidence. Best to emphasise all the things that were right about the interview before identifying what could have been better.

Acting up is an opportunity as a manager to take a risk on someone's potential – enthusiasm is more important than experience. It provides an opportunity for a member of staff to show what they can do given the chance.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. What is the difference between an acting up vacancy and a temporary vacancy?
2. Do you agree that acting up is an opportunity for a manager to take a risk on a candidate's potential rather than their experience? What can go wrong?
3. What happens when the individual has to return to their substantive post?



## Section 35

# 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 36

# 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

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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 was the best, most helpful feedback you ever had and why?
2. How blunt should you be if a candidate clearly has no insight into how poorly they performed?
3. Would your feedback include comments about the candidates appearance, distracting mannerisms, body language and flippancy? Or would you stick to the quality of answers even though you know the panel was as influenced by these other things?





## Section 37

# 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.





## PEOPLE MANAGEMENT IN A HARSH FINANCIAL CLIMATE

Some information is useful as we are such 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?







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