ONE
The challenges of managing people

"To see what you can be,
start with who you are."

ANON

Globalisation, empowerment, cross-functional teams, downsizing, restructuring, learning organisations, knowledge workers. If these buzzwords don't sound familiar, they should, they are changing your life and the way you manage people.

Managers have to manage people. I would say managing people constitutes at least 80% of the managerial function. It is the most difficult and yet most rewarding function. Most managers do not want to own up to the fact that they are inadequate as far as managing people are concerned. Even some organisations do not want to accept that all managers need continuous training and support in relation to their function of managing people.

When I was a Senior Director at Management Centre Europe, Brussels I devised and introduced a programme in 1987 called 'Managing People'. My senior colleagues and even my 'boss' was against the idea of such a programme because they felt organisations would not enrol their managers for such a course. The course got an approval and it ran once a year. By the time I left MCE in 1989 it was scheduled to run several times a year. I am given to understand that it is now one of the most popular programmes at MCE.

It became popular because, in my opinion, organisations and managers began to realise the importance of the skill of managing

people, and that this skill needs to be sharpened on a continuous basis. Increasingly we live in a world where the rate of change is accelerating; goals are becoming more varied and complex and where knowledge as a key strategic asset is contributing to business success.

People are our greatest asset. Is this hype or reality? For those organisations who genuinely believe in their people, managing people becomes the foremost managerial skill.

Managing people is not a matter of manipulation. It is about working with your staff and colleagues on a partnership basis to achieve the strategic goals of the organisation.

The success of an organisation depends on managing three sets of expectations. They are:

- organisational expectations;
- employee expectations; and
- customer expectations.

What does managing employee expectations involve? It involves **understanding** and the subsequent application of the following:

- Understanding of human needs and behaviour.
- What makes people tick?
- How to form collaborative relationships.
- How to recruit and select staff.
- Understanding the nature of psychological contract.
- How to retain staff.
- How to formulate performance goals involving your staff.
- How to monitor and measure staff performance.
- How to lead and motivate staff.
- How to communicate effectively with your staff.

- How to develop talent in your organisation.

- How to make your staff work effectively in teams.

- How to empathise with your staff.

- How to act as a mentor or a coach.

- The nature of change.

- The significance of work-family balance.

- How to gain commitment from your staff.

- How to create a thriving work environment.

- Above all, understanding self.

This is a very daunting task but it is imperative to acquire competences in all these aspects to manage effectively. In practice various dimensions of managing people and the importance of people in bringing about organisational success, come together in different forms.

Listen for possibilities

"If you should try to understand me
Through the eyes of your experiences,
Your only understanding will be
Misunderstanding.
For we have walked different paths
And have known different fears.
And that which brings you laughter just
Might bring me tears.

So if you can learn to accept me
And the strange things I say and do,
Maybe through your acceptance
You will gain understanding."

Anon.

People management issues in practice

Chapter 18 of this book introduces some case studies that reflect some of the issues of managing people. These are national and international case studies.

(Disclaimer: I have no relationship whatsoever with the organisations which have supplied case studies. I use them to highlight and reinforce different dimensions of managing people involved in practice.)

Continuous improvement

It is also important to constantly review motivational and leadership factors involved in enhancing organisational effectiveness, irrespective of how successful you are at present. If a successful organisation like Dell finds it necessary to do so, so should other organisations.

So what has Dell done? The following is an article which appeared in Management Centre Europe E-Newsletter written by the author.

Managing by principles – Dell's way

By Sultan Kermally, freelance writer and management author.

In Business Week 0f November 3, 2003, there is a cover story on Dell entitled 'What You Don't Know About Dell'. In this article the writers highlight the following six management principles Dell have adopted and presented them as 'Management secrets of the best-run company in technology'. These principles are:

- Be direct.
- Leave the ego at the door.
- No excuses.
- No easy targets.
- No victory laps.
- Worry about saving money, not saving face.

How do these principles translate into developing and managing talent in your organisation and enable you to formulate a talent development strategy?

BE DIRECT

According to the writers, workers are supposed to challenge their bosses and question everything. What lessons can organisations learn from this principle?

In practice this has implications in terms of recruitment and development.

organisations at the recruitment stage should look for potential employees who have a challenging attitude. Choosing an expert in the field is fine but testing for interpersonal communication is also important. However, one should aim at selecting individuals with a challenging mindset. This is all about individual attitude and encouraging such an attitude within the context of corporate culture that facilitates promoting such an attitude.

LEAVE THE EGO AT THE DOOR

According to the Business Week article Dell "favours 'two-in-a-box' management in which two executives share responsibility for product, a region, or a company function."

This is about working in a team and as a team member. According to Peter Senge, the 'guru' of Learning organisation, collective knowledge is created by working in teams. However, being a team member is not enough. What matters is individual attitude towards the concept of team work? One has to be trained to understand the importance of team dynamics and participate in productive dialogues and discussion. An 'I am important' or 'I am an expert' attitude leads toone's ego preventing team learning and knowledge creation.

NO EXCUSES

This is about taking responsibility and being accountable for one's actions. Employees should have the courage to admit their weaknesses and take action to minimise or eliminate them. There should be no 'them syndrome'; it should be about asking the question 'What can I do to resolve the problem at hand?'. Again this requires a particular mindset and empowering culture. This is the true nature of empowerment.

NO EASY TARGETS

Employees must contribute to profit and growth. In practice this means incorporating stretch objectives in appraisal plans. S.M.A.R.T objectives in this case should be translated as **S**pecific and stretch; **M**easurable and meaningful; **A**ttainable and aligned; **R**ealistic and time and **T**arget related.

NO VICTORY LAPS

"The founder's mantra: 'Celebrate for a nanosecond, then move on'", say the writers.

There are numerous stories of many organisations having won total quality awards or 'Best company to work for' awards who drift into complacency.

Achievements should be followed by further achievements and this in practice necessitates implementation of the continuous improvement principle.

WORRY ABOUT SAVING MONEY, NOT SAVING FACE

Employees should be trained to 'pull the plug on disappointing new ventures'. Again, this requires a business mindset and tolerant culture. Face saving in modern organisations stifles innovation and stops what Peter Drucker called 'creative destruction'?

Dell's management principles are a reflection of five disciplines of the learning organisation presented by Peter Senge in his book *'The Fifth Discipline* (1990). These five disciplines are:

1   Personal mastery (individual growth and learning).

2   Mental models (attitude and behaviour).

3   Shared vision (Direct and honest Communication).

4   Team learning (creating synergy within teams).

5   System thinking (seeing the big picture – organisational core competence).

Senge's five disciplines and Dell's six management principles direct organisations towards formulating talent development strategies focussing on three core components – **personal development, corporate culture and effective leadership**.

(Sultan Kermally is a freelance writer and management author. His book 'Managing and Developing Talent' will be published by Thorogood in 2004.) Source: Management Centre Europe.

The subsequent chapters relate to various 'gurus' on managing people. **The bottom line of managing people is motivation and leadership**. I have selected 14 gurus on four aspects of managing people, namely:

- motivation;

- leadership;

- culture; and

- knowledge.

In addition, I have included Charles Handy and Peter Drucker who have various contributions to make on different aspects of managing people. I had to be selective and since the field of managing people is so vast I have left out many academic and corporate gurus like Alderfer, Locke, Lawler, Schein, Pascale, Ulrich, Quinn, Trompenaars, Covey, John Harvey Jones, Jack Welch, Bill Gates, Andrew Grove, Arie de Geus and so on. Some may even include Dilbert in this list!

However, **the gurus selected represent all the key issues and dimensions of managing people effectively.**