

Managing or Coping?

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Sample of Content:

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Content:

Why do we have managers?

I asked this question on a recent seminar and got into an intense argument with one of the attendees who was a large employer! I like to mix it a little and what fun it was to ask an employer to justify the existence of his managers:

Vernon: Why do you have managers?

Employer: To manage

Vernon: You mean, to cope

Employer: I mean, to manage

Vernon: If not "manage" as in "to cope", "manage" as in ...what?

Employer: Our managers are not just coping, they are making judgements and making decisions based on those judgements

Vernon: Do your staff, including managers, have procedures to follow?

Employer: Yes, everything that could happen has a procedure

Vernon: So, why do you need managers?

Employer: Er, to deal with exceptions

Vernon: Not covered by the procedures?

Employer: Well, for instance, if there is a split decision to be made - say a late delivery is going out and one customer has to be disadvantaged over another, the manager will decide which customer to let down and may decide how to approach the customer

Vernon: And would your company look into the failure - the late delivery - and put it right for next time? Would your company write into its procedures how to prioritise customers if such a failure occurred again?

Employer: I know what you're getting at, but not everything can be set to a procedure.

Who won the argument? The employer did of course, not that it was an argument in the true sense - I just enjoyed posing some awkward questions. I don't believe that we can ever completely do away with managers. What I do believe is that we can dramatically reduce the amount of managers out there making ad-hoc decisions that could have been covered by a more systemised approach and at a lower level. Staff would often be perfectly capable of following a pre-planned decision tree or some other systemised way of coming to decisions without the need to refer to a manager. You could call this empowerment of the lower ranks. You could even call it downsizing if you wish. But it does make sense to have potential conflicts resolved in a consistent way and at the lowest rate of pay by taking some of the mystery out of management decisions and putting them through a decision-making machine.

But not all procedures will cover every issue that arises. Even if a company was to take up this challenge and sack all its managers they will soon be caught out. The world changes as technology progresses, new laws are passed and competitors, suppliers or customers change their way of working. Managers help companies keep up with the times.

My point is that many managers do not manage a few exceptions to the rule or manage change. Many of them make routine decisions day in and day out. Take this scenario: employee goes to the manager and tells him that the printer is broken and no invoices can be sent out. The manager telephones the repair company and calls them out. Here the manager is being an overpaid messenger. Another scenario: a salesman can only close a deal by busting his permitted discount and eating into potential margin. He must go to his manager to get authorisation. Does the sales manager have a better calculator than the salesman? Surely the employee with the faulty printer could have telephoned the repair company himself? Surely it is possible for a salesman to have a remuneration system that could be flexed to allow reward or punishment based on the amount of profit margin he could achieve. Exploring this scenario further, one may argue that the sales manager can see a bigger picture than an individual salesman and can decide whether to eat into

margin based on this wider knowledgebase. Question is: why couldn't the salesman be made aware of the bigger picture?

I think that a great manager spends his time trying to do himself out of a job. He not only solves day to day problems but puts in place procedures and structures to prevent such problems recurring. He anticipates future changes and helps to smooth bumps along the way before they become obstacles. This kind of manager would be happy to do himself out of a job because he knows he will be promoted or, at the least, be given a larger department to manage. Er...well, not always, though. Managers that anticipate problems are not always noticed by senior management, especially in large organisations. This is because they don't cause problems and therefore are not often seen solving them. The truth is, of course, that good managers solve problems before they become problems. Boring isn't it? - but this style of working is worth its weight in gold and it's a pity that some CEOs don't always recognise this fact. That aside, it must surely be beneficial to have a manager that gives away his authority to his staff through systemising decision-making, empowering staff and making his department so efficient that he is no longer required - or at least only required for a few hours each week.

Another example: a veterinary practice has a problem with fly infestation in the height of summer. What does a good manager do about this? Well, the manager needs look no further than Arkay Hygiene. This company sells a wide range of Insectocutor fly killers. If the it is to be on display to the public (and the pets!) then perhaps a good looking fly killer machine, such as the Insectocutor SE44, may do the trick, especially if the room to be protected is as large as 300 square metres. Just when I thought I had defined a good manager I went and found a new definition - someone knows a good fly killer machine when they see one!

[Fly Killers and uv bulbs](#) from Arkay Hygiene. Have a look at the stylish [SE44](#)

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