

Management

Leadership and management are inseparable – the two sides of the same coin – and yet quite different. We have already seen that leadership is about *who you are*. Management is about *what you do*. Management is the process of getting the most of out the resources at your disposal, and in particular about the process of getting the most out of your team. The first stage is to set good objectives.

Setting Objectives

Civil servants have traditionally drafted their own objectives or job plan. Indeed, this approach was enshrined in official guidance published in the 1980s. However, I find this very odd. It is surely axiomatic that managers should take responsibility for defining what jobs they want done, what sort of person they want to do them and what standard of performance is expected. This should be clearly set out in a document which draws as necessary on the department's and division's written objectives, and should in the first instance be drafted by the manager, not the managed. After all, who else but the manager can in the first instance say why a particular individual is employed within their team?

I also dislike job descriptions which are all about what people do ('I give policy advice . . .', 'I manage . . .') rather than what they are trying to achieve. The usual response, of course, is that things like the health of an industry, or of the population, are dependent upon so many variables that it is positively unfair to credit any one civil servant with their improvement. There is of course some truth in this but it is also true that a great deal of effort will be wasted unless it is directed towards an identifiable (even if distant) objective. Also, the adoption of challenging and worthwhile objectives leads quickly to innovation, team-working and other good practices.

Objectives should be 'SMART', i.e. Specific, Measurable, Agreed, Realistic and Time-dependent. And they should be kept simple and relevant to the person who owns them. For instance, few of us can cope with more than three tiers of Aims/Vision, Objectives and Targets. And whilst an objective of the Permanent Secretary of the Home Office might be to cut crime, or keep it to a certain figure, this would become part of the vision of more junior officials who might be responsible for the Police Pension Scheme. The important thing is that those in charge of the pension scheme should know that it needs to be so designed that it will attract and retain high calibre police officers (and that is their objective) in order that they might cut crime.

And if anyone has difficulty in identifying worthwhile objectives, as distinct from day to day targets and activities, it is helpful to ask what would change, or how they and their team would be missed, if they did not exist. I have yet to meet anyone who has, when challenged in this way, failed to justify their employment in terms of meaningful objectives.

But take care! Objectives are powerful things, especially when linked (as they

should be) to appraisal. Get them wrong and your whole organisation will go off in the wrong direction. Take particular care if you are tempted to define your objectives in monetary terms. This approach can sometimes be very effective. Equally, it can turn you all into novice accountants, quite oblivious to your wider or longer-term responsibilities. See also the advice on measurement in the section on planning, below.

Although the job plan should emphasise the importance of achieving worthwhile objectives, rather than the ability to demonstrate a range of grade-related skills or behaviour, it should also make it clear what levels of skill, effort and achievement represent satisfactory performance. This will help those who wish to show that their performance has been much better than satisfactory. It can also be useful to deploy the concept of 'breakthrough performance' when trying to explain the difference between what is in the civil service generally known as 'Box 2' rather than 'Box 3' (i.e. satisfactory) performance.

Although I always write the first draft of the person's objectives, the document obviously has to be shown in draft to the person being managed. In particular, I have often found it helpful to ask colleagues to say, in effect, what they offer to do by way of satisfactory performance. This can help dispel unreal expectations that satisfactory performance is somehow deserving of an exceptional report. Indeed, I take the firm view that Box 2 breakthrough performance cannot be recognised in the absence of a clear agreement between manager and managed which specifies the level of performance which has been exceeded.

Planning and Measurement

Having set your objectives, you must now plan how you will get there.

Planning is of course an unnatural process. It is, after all, much more fun to do something. And the other nice thing about not planning is that failure comes as a complete surprise rather than being preceded by a period of worry and depression. But experienced managers know that planning is (a) relatively simple (which is perhaps another reason why it does not appeal to many civil servants) and (b) an indispensable precursor to success. The main thing, therefore, is to do it! But when you do it, these are the key points which need to be borne in mind.

- Keep it simple;
- Focus on results, i.e. what is to be achieved;
- Ensure individual responsibility for all members of the team, preferably by managing through a structured breakdown of the project into constituent parts which are the responsibility of named individuals;
- Communicate, and in particular clearly communicate both objectives and progress both within and outside the team;

- Monitor progress both carefully and frequently.

Much of the above implies measurement. This lies at the heart of effective management, whether of the policy process or of anything else. We all know – though we often forget – that ‘you cannot manage what you do not measure’. Another version of this saying is that ‘If you measure it, you change it’ - which leads to the conclusion that you should ‘Make the important measurable, not the measurable important.’ This really is the key to success in all your endeavours, and time spent on unmeasured activity is the most likely time to be wasted.

Building Successful Teams

Much has been written about how to create and build successful teams, but Judy Foster (judy.foster@tiscali.co.uk) summarises it very well when she stresses that there are five key enabling factors:

1. Coherent policies
2. Effective professional development
3. A sense of autonomy: the ability to innovate in response to customers’ needs
4. Sound support structures, including well-run and genuinely participative management meetings
5. Sufficient **mental space** to be able to process difficult emotional situations, see clearly and think creatively. This includes supportive supervision provided by more experienced colleagues.

Judy’s research showed that mental space is particularly vital – and in short supply in some of the social work teams that she studied. I suspect that much the same can be said of many civil service teams who spend too much time attending inefficient meetings and/or fire-fighting in response to short-term pressures, and taking far too little time to think clearly and creatively.

Team Morale

Civil servants often worry about the morale of their team, as if good morale is one of their objectives. This is almost always a mistake.

Morale, just like happiness, is surprisingly elusive. It is a great mistake to try directly to improve morale. Good morale comes naturally to any well-managed team, and never comes to a team that is poorly led, lacks clear objectives, is poorly trained or lacks good honest communication. So if you are lead and manage well, high morale will inevitably follow, however difficult the surrounding circumstances.

Do also bear in mind that morale will inevitably dip during a period of rapid change. The team does not at first realise that it needs to change. (This state is sometimes unkindly referred to as ‘unconscious incompetence’.) Once it faces up to

its problems then confidence and morale will inevitably decline ('conscious incompetence'). It will then begin to do better, although perhaps rather self-consciously ('conscious competence') and finally morale will rise rapidly once the new way of working has become second nature ('unconscious competence'). It is then the job of the leader to ensure that this state is maintained for as long as possible, through seeking continuous improvement, so that the team does not slip back into unconscious incompetence.