

0.1 Chapter 2: work: Sorrows of Work

0.2 Sorrows of Work

1 Machismo and Management

Broadly, we like to think we are becoming a less macho society. But this style of behaviour remains a problem in the workplace: an overbearing, insensitive boss; a bullying colleague; a manager who never accepts any reasons why a project may run into difficulties; a client seems to take satisfaction delivering negative feedback.

Machismo has never been very nice. But that's not the real issue. The problem is it is an ineffective way of managing working relationships.



Yet it wasn't always like this. Machismo has its roots in ways of behaving that in the past seemed reasonable. For a long time, machismo was an effective strategy.

Giving brusque commands makes perfect sense in some situations. It's a very good way to get people to turn a boat swiftly starboard, push coal trolleys faster, or increase the rate of production at the blast

furnace in a steel mill. When these were the primary forms of work, it was helpful to lead this way.

And it makes sense to deny vulnerability when having doubts and second thoughts carries no advantage. Far back, the warrior needed to be fully protected; a chink in the armour was all it took to meet your end; fierceness was a key asset.



1.0.0.0.1 When its very easy to get a serious flesh wound, you have to wear a lot of armour and act fierce

You didnt actually need to be nice to people. A worker could feel underappreciated or bullied but still be able to perform their required task. Around physical work, emotional distress didnt hold things up.



1.0.0.0.2 You could still operate the brick making machine at maximum speed, even if you hated your boss

In any case, unhappy workers didnt usually have the option of changing jobs.



Even if the head gardener had a bit of a macho streak, the men digging the vegetables, watering in the greenhouses, or pruning in the orchard had few alternative kinds of work available to them. They couldnt just get up and leave because they found the workplace oppressive.

Today the world of work is very different. A lot of work now involves careful attention to detail, sustained concentration, being a bit creative, thinking strategically. Were working with our minds, and so we get very susceptible to the emotional atmosphere. We need respect, recognition and encouragement in order to do our best.



Barked commands and rough treatment are now counterproductive. A wounding comment from a supervisor will drag an accounts manager down all day and clients notice even if the boss doesn't.

And people can change jobs more easily. If you upset someone they can go across town, across the world or work for the competition. You've lost their talent and they'll probably never tell you why.



Often, the very things that make employees valuable—sensitivity, ambition, confidence, independence—also make them likely to leave when they come up against macho behaviour.

Getting the best out of people around work is a delicate and complex task and one of the most important practical tasks of management. The workers who understand the value of what they are doing, who don't get distracted or disenchanted and aren't drained by anxiety and conflict will produce more and better work. Sensitivity, good communication and empathy (of which machismo is short) are keys to increased productivity and hence profit.

Conclusion

In the history of work, managing the psyches of our colleagues and employees is a very new challenge. Machismo was a response to a situation we don't find ourselves in any more. It's a general issue: we learn skills and attitudes in one environment and get into the habit of relying on them. Then the situation changes, but we don't manage to adapt. At college we get trained to write long essays with lots of footnotes and lots of evidence and arguments; two years later your powerpoint presentation is judged on brevity and clarity. It's the same issue in emotional management. We're only just learning the next move.