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THE MANAGER

Let us close this examination of the basics of management by looking very briefly at one of the most important basics: the manager as a person. 'The manager' is not often a subject of study in management training and education programmes, but this chapter will hopefully help the reader (1) tie up a few loose ends from earlier chapters, and (2) develop a more personal approach to their studies and work. The following are issues that will impact on a manager at some point, and, just as with the other more formal disciplines of management, the time to begin considering these is during the earliest stages of training and development.

MANAGERIAL CAREERS

First, managerial careers rarely follow a simple trajectory. In our grandfathers' time, a manager – indeed, any worker – might expect to join an organization as a young person and, provided the business remained sound and the manager themselves was competent, remain with that same organization until retirement 40 or so years later. This does still happen, but it is becoming increasingly rare. Organizations are constantly reshaping and changing themselves, and activities that were considered essential one year may be redundant by the following year. Most managers can expect to have their jobs disappear out from under them at least once in their career; many managers spend a fair portion of their time anticipating when this will happen and focusing on how to move on before it actually does happen.

At the same time, the constant shaping and reshaping of organizations means that many new jobs will open up. Many people

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now pursue ‘portfolio careers’, where managers change jobs and companies every few years in pursuit of new opportunities. These career opportunities are particularly available to highly skilled and qualified managers; those whose training is out of date or irrelevant to modern needs will have a much harder time finding new work. One of the mantras of modern management is ‘lifelong learning’ or ‘career-long learning’; managers must seek to constantly update their skills and knowledge if they are to be able to get well-paid and responsible jobs. In other words, the initial graduate or undergraduate training at the start of a career is just a first step; the manager needs to go on learning until the day they retire. Continuous professional development (CPD) is a requirement in some organizations, and promotion and advancement often depend on the amount of CPD the manager has undertaken.

Increasingly, too, responsibility for this learning is becoming that of individual managers and not of organizations the employ them. Organizations offer training programmes, but they are usually devoted to developing skills and knowledge that suit that company’s needs. The manager has to be careful to ensure that personal needs for knowledge and skills are not neglected. In sum, the manager has to be prepared to take charge of his or her career, serving each employer faithfully and to the best of their ability, but always taking care that his or her own interests do not become entirely sublimated. CPD should be for the good of the individual, not just their employer.

MANAGERIAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Managers have a responsibility to themselves, but there are also other responsibilities. Businesses, especially very large businesses, are powerful entities, and they can have a great deal of impact on those around them. Every manager has responsibilities when it comes to dealing with colleagues, employees, customers, suppliers, government and society at large.

Managers must of course obey the law, even when laws may seem absurd. Taxes may be deemed unfair; they still have to be paid, and measures taken to reduce tax must be within the bounds of the law. But the law should not be the only guide to managerial conduct. All managers are also citizens, and they are guided by the same ethical rules that guide everyone else. One does not shed citizenship at the door of the office. Indeed, the power that many managers wield means that if anything, their ethical responsibilities are even greater.

ETHICS

Being an ethical manager is not easy. Conflicts will often arise. Suppose a supplier in a foreign country asks a manager to pay an illegal bribe. If the manager refuses, as they are perfectly entitled to do, this could mean a loss of business in the home country; a factory might have to be shut down, people would be put out of work. Which is the ethical choice? (The dilemma above might sound far-fetched, but in fact managers working in countries where the rule of law is weak often face this problem.)

Codes of conduct show managers what is expected of them in certain situations, but no code can cover every situation. Ultimately, the manager's own ethical beliefs must help them to decide what is right. It is therefore important that every manager has a clear understanding of ethical principles and their moral responsibility towards others. As we discussed in Chapter 1, this means not only behaving correctly and ensuring that we follow laws and codes of conduct, but also that we ensure the best possible outcome for all those we are responsible to: employees, bosses, the organization as a whole, customers, suppliers, the wider community and the planet itself.

CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

We discussed corporate governance in Chapter 7. Little needs to be added here save a reminder that managers do not own the companies they run. They are stewards, legally and morally responsible to the owners of the company's share capital, the shareholders. Among the principal responsibilities of the manager is a duty of care towards the shareholders. Actions which are against the interests of the shareholders are wrong, as is concealing information from shareholders for personal gain, or even out of fear that shareholders will not approve. This again poses some real dilemmas and conflicts of interest for managers, and each of these will have its own particular solution, to be worked out using a combination of knowledge of where responsibilities lie and common sense. But in no case should the manager put his or her personal interests ahead of those of the shareholders.

And, of course, shareholders also do not own the company, only its share capital. They too have a duty of stewardship, and need to act accordingly and not just in such a way as to maximise their own profits. Managers and shareholders need to see each other as partners, each working for the greater good of the companies for which they are responsible.

EXERCISING LEADERSHIP

We noted earlier in this book that leadership and management are not entirely the same thing. John Kotter, probably the foremost American writer on leadership, has argued that while management focuses on co-ordination and execution, leadership focuses on planning and vision. Management is about the here-and-now; leadership is about the future. But Kotter does not believe that managers and leaders should be entirely separate people (although in many cases this does happen), but rather that management and leadership should be combined in the same person.

Managers should exercise leadership, even if only for the people around them. Leadership does not necessarily mean control over people; a leader is not required to have 'followers'. Rather, a leader in business terms is someone who generates new ideas, has the vision to see how those ideas can be developed and put into effect, and inspires those around him or her, through persuasion and example, to share that same vision. That, in essence, is what leadership in business requires. Leadership is necessary everywhere, and the organizations that are really successful are the ones where managers at all levels are willing to take charge, have an idea and see it through. Leadership is not restricted to the boardroom. Any manager can be a leader; and the managers that succeed are likely to be those with the greatest capacity for leadership.

CHALLENGES AND CRISES

'The only constant factor in business is change' is a mantra often heard. This is true, but change itself is a variable thing, affecting some areas of organizations and some management tasks more than others. Change *is* a constant. New technology appears, fashions and customer preferences change, competitors make sudden and unexpected moves, shareholders begin buying or selling shares for no apparent reason, governments introduce new laws, employee motivation changes as staff grow older and more experienced. All these things mean that the world of organizations is a constantly shifting kaleidoscope of small moving parts constantly resorting themselves.

Those who study managers at work, such as Henry Mintzberg, note that managers seem to spend a high proportion of their time 'firefighting', dealing with sudden unplanned changes that emerge and require action. Often these changes are quite small, and a simple solution can be easily found. Sometimes they are more complex; occasionally they are massive shifts that threaten the entire organization, or the entire industry. The only way to deal with these is to ensure that the business is strong, healthy and flexible enough to deal with challenges and crises when they occur. That they will occur must be taken for granted; managers can control many things, but they cannot control everything in their environment. Any plan or forecast must take into account the possibility that the situation envisaged will not come to pass. A German military strategist, Field-Marshal von Moltke, once remarked that 'No plan survives contact with the enemy'. In fact, the simple statement 'No plan survives' would have been equally accurate.

Paradoxically, as Jim Collins argues in his book *Good to Great*, managing through times of change actually requires even more attention to the basics of management. Just as important as knowing what to change is knowing what not to change. Powerful though the forces of change are, some eternal verities remain. Every business needs a goal; to reach that goal it requires an organization; to make that organization work it needs people. Businesses need customers; customers need products and services; knowledge of what customers need and how to make it will allow the business to supply customers and make a profit; capital investment is needed before production begins. Keeping these truths in mind allows the study of management to become simpler, and can help give structure and pattern to the mass of knowledge and information the student will receive. And ultimately, it will make the tasks of management simpler as well.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

Bennis, W.G. and Nanus, B., *Leaders*, Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1985. One of the classic studies of leadership, including the many problems that leaders must face. Very readable and informative.

Follett, M.P., *Creative Experience*, New York: Longmans Green, 1923. The best-selling management book of the 1920s, this isn't about management at all, but is about power, control, coordination, responsibility, creativity and change. Each new generation of managers re-discovers this book all over again; be the first in your generation to do so!

Kotter, J.P., *The General Managers*, New York: The Free Press, 1982. A very fine study of management at the top level. See also his *A Force for Change: How Leadership Differs from Management* (New York: The Free Press, 1990).

Mintzberg, H., *Mintzberg on Management*, New York: Free Press, 1989. A collection of interesting and thought-provoking articles and essays by the Canadian guru.

Sinek, S., *Leaders Eat Last: Why Some Teams Pull Together and Others Don't*, London: Penguin, 2017. Interesting and thoughtful observations on management and leadership.