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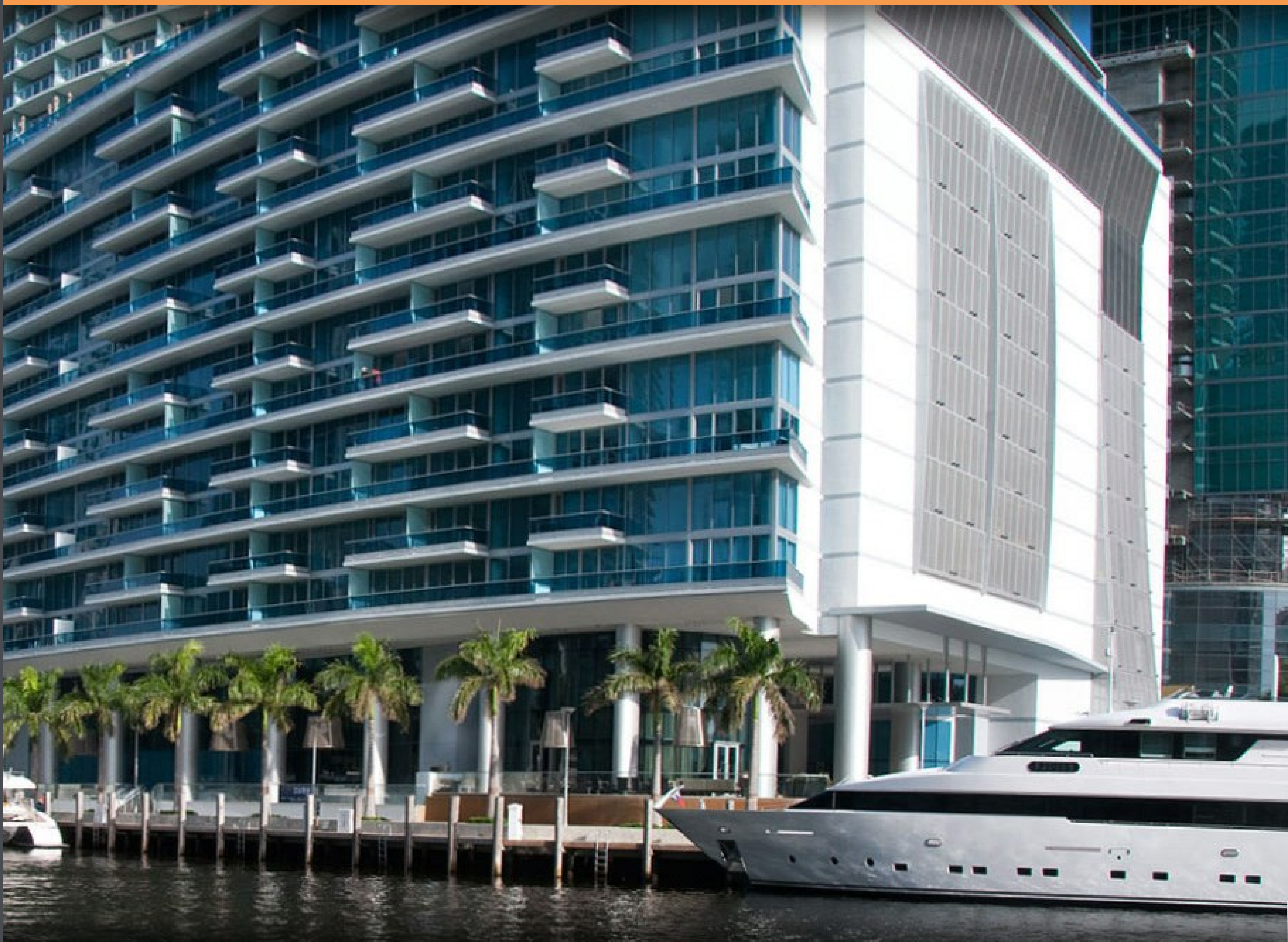
What do HR People do?

Understanding Organisations

Tony Greener



Tony Greener

Understanding Organisations – What do HR People do

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1 HR Management; Recruitment & Selection

1.1 Introduction

HR Management is changing. For a long time, Personnel, as it was formerly known, was regarded as rather a Cinderella of managerial disciplines, being preoccupied with the minutiae of hiring and firing and, occasionally, a disciplinary case to add variety to an otherwise rather tedious existence.

These days, it is a much more central and strategic resource – at least, that is what its champions would have us believe. Organisations such as the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) have been making some progress in having the discipline accepted into the main stream of managerial activities, playing a more strategic role in helping an organisation to be fully equipped in human terms with the resources it needs to do the job.

Not all managers yet subscribe to this newly fashioned function; some remain sceptical of the worth of a unit which has usually shunned the limelight and has been perceived to be wherever the high risk projects are not. Certainly it is still unusual to see HR staff being made redundant and, although they may not be paid particularly well, there is also still scepticism in some areas about whether they really have a useful role in modern day organisations.

Some of the relatively new wave of management writers – Marchington, Harrrison, Weightman and so on who have delved more deeply into HR thought – believe that it is an emerging skill which, if used correctly, can enhance the organisation's ability to achieve. They view it as a more strategic resource than it has even been in the past and much of the current teaching of HR management is aligned to this viewpoint. Both first and higher degrees are now available in aspects of HR management and, in most universities, are often over-subscribed. This alone, of course, does not make it a grown-up discipline, but it does point the way to the future in a rather more constructive fashion than that which we are used to seeing with HR.

However, one word of caution is needed; many of the boundaries in which HR has traditionally operated are being radically re-drawn, especially in fields such as employee legislation which seems to change weekly. No book, therefore, can ever really match the pace of progress in this sector and the only safe way to maintain a grasp on HR law and its attendant activities, is to subscribe to a legal journal or organisation which will keep you up to date with changes as they happen. Cipd.org.uk would be a good place to start, the CIPD's website with frequent updates on current practice. No responsibility can therefore, be accepted by the publisher or author of this book who, although they have made every effort to incorporate the latest thinking, legislation and practice, cannot be constantly at the forefront of a rapidly changing environment when there is so much else to consider as well.

Chapter Content:-

- The thinking performer – STEEPLE
- Recruitment & selection
- Absence management
- Staff Retention

1.2 The Thinking Performer

This is the title with which the CIPD has dignified the profession of HR, still better known to many in management as Personnel. The justification is that aspects of HR management – especially employee resourcing, retention and upkeep on employment law – are aspects of corporate life which play a key and integral role in the corporate life of an organisation. To contribute fully to this life, the CIPD avers, the HR manager needs to be involved at strategic level, helping to devise plans to help the organisation both gain and retain a competitive edge.

HR staff, it follows, need to be part of the policy formulation process – sometimes retained by a small group of senior managers who really drive the direction and speed of the organisation, often known as the Dominant Coalition. Consequently, HR managers are now expected to play a fuller and more strategic role than their forbears in analysing and supplying the needs of the business. To do this, they are being increasingly educated in the business context parts of an organisation, and, thus, the HR manager becomes a performer in the success of the organisation who really thinks about the issues with which he or she is faced daily.

1.3 STEEPLE

Often, this new found knowledge can be found covering areas of knowledge in the traditional STEEPLE topics. This is an analytical tool used by strategic thinkers to assess the possibility of external factors influencing the progress of an organisation and is divided for convenience into the following categories;-

What aspects of the following factors could affect the organisation's well-being?

Social (or socio-cultural) – e.g. the changing shape of the family, the ageing population, higher illiteracy levels and other educational issues, social expectations of employers.

Technological – the internet and its effects on both corporate and private life, faster communications ability, labour-saving devices, such as voice-mail etc.

Economic – the role increasingly played by taxation, especially on business-sensitive areas such as fuel tax, exchange rates, the possibilities of entering the Eurozone, inflation.

Ecological – the Triple Bottom Line (the degree to which a business satisfies financial, social and ecological targets, rather than simply financial ones as used to happen with the traditional bottom line), dedication to green policies, limiting the negative impact on the environment and people's lives.

Political – whether a different complexion of government (now not as unthinkable as it has been for the past nine years) would materially change policies and lead to easier or harder business circumstances, remembering that the political dimension is present at regional, local and European-wide levels as well as at national UK level.

Legal – how recent and forthcoming legal changes have affected or might affect the organisation – e.g. increasing holiday rights for parents over childbirth, disability discrimination and human rights legislation and the vast raft of European directives concerning health and safety which have emerged over the past decade.

Ethical – aspects such as Corporate Social Responsibility and whether this is being done because of an intrinsic ethical, altruistic motive or whether it is merely good business practice.

Clearly, many of these issues concern many more managers than just the HR function, and nor does this function alone have jurisdiction over them. But they may all affect the way in which the organisation staffs up to take account of factors such as these, not just to be competitive in the market place or sector but to be ahead of the competition or to further their compliance with legal requirements. However, even 10 years ago, most HR personnel would have had little or no idea of any of these factors, whereas now, they form part of the educational process of many HR staff.

As such HR staff are now expected to think about issues such as these and to reconcile an organisation's objectives and strategies with a perceptive, HR aspect of strategic thinking – and to do this for all to see. Only HR staff who have some wider knowledge of the business of business are likely to be able to do so – hence the new drive towards higher levels of education and qualification.

1.4 Putting it into practice; Case study

A good example is BP, the largest UK company which in 2005 restructured its HR function along the following lines:-

The HR Function

To remain one of the world's premier integrated oil companies, BP recognises that it needs a highly respected, high performing, world class HR function, which combines providing strategic advice to business leaders with efficient and effective transaction support to line managers and employees.

> A new global HR head, was appointed in March 2005, and since then she and her colleagues have developed a new vision for the function. Its purpose is threefold:

- Operational Excellence – getting the trains to run on time (through a value-added infrastructure for systems and data)
- Business Partnering and Support – creating appropriately differentiated people and organisational solutions for BP's different businesses to support and enable the business strategies
- Governance, Policy and Coherence – creating coherence for the group by defining policy, governance and limitations.

The accompanying new organisational model has three components:

- A small corporate centre responsible for overall HR functional identity, efficiency and economies, and "fit for purpose" strategic direction on key people issues
- A business HR component, which will house the majority of the group's HR function (generalists and specialists alike) hardwired to the businesses giving highly business-aligned and business-differentiated HR delivery
- And HR in-country operations responsible for systems, data and transactional processes, compliance related activities, and the co-ordination of market-facing activities.

Realising this vision requires a major multi-year change programme encompassing all aspects of the function: structure, capabilities and infrastructure.

Central to the success of such a major change programme lies communication – the engagement and alignment of all the function's employees to the new HR vision and strategy, and the continuous development of robust three-way communication channels (up, down, across) in this very large, complex and geographically diverse function.

Qualifications

This example from BP is by no means unusual in the early part of the 21st century when the increasing focus on HR is best seen in higher education where there are now numerous courses aimed at HR staff to enable them to acquire semi-managerial levels of understanding and application. The most widely known award is the CIPD Diploma which usually involves up to three years part-time studying at university and may even be converted into a Masters level degree. While some academics and practitioners still regard it as an ersatz degree, there is equal evidence that more managers are beginning to recognise it as a highly desirable, if not yet actually essential, qualification for an HR manager.

1.5 HR Planning

As with most disciplines, planning is key to good HR management. Marchington and Wilkinson (2000), arguably the most approachable as well as one of the most comprehensive partnerships writing about HR, recommend a combination of forecasting future demand combined with a move to forecast future internal supply. The difference between the two, clearly, is the gap that has to be filled and a good and thorough internal supply audit (of known available resources) will usually also identify possible skills within the organisation. Although this principle is sound enough, Marchington and Wilkinson suggest (pp. 102–105) that, in practice, it is not followed by many HR functions, partly because they spend much of their time trying to fill roles and vacancies at the behest of management impatient to resource up to full strength to maintain production or to fill order banks. This is, of course, another strong argument in favour of planning HR resource more fully in advance but many HR manager appear to be reluctant – for whatever reason – to persuade general management of the virtues of this approach.

Recruitment and Selection

Many HR staff spend a good deal of their time recruiting new employees into an organisation. Where there is a general shortage of skilled people with which to fill these posts (as in the computer industry, according to the BBC on 17 November, 2006), this can be a frustrating, time consuming and expensive process. There is a relatively simple formula which will help to put the process on a logical footing:-

- Job Analysis – that is, identifying the tasks which the new recruit will have to undertake. Techniques such as observation, job diaries, interviews and questionnaires are all employed in this process; usually more than one of these techniques will be necessary to elicit a balanced view of a job
- Job Description (JD) – that is, the job title, location, lines of responsibility to and for, main, purpose, duties, working conditions (including pay scales, benefits, working hours, pension details etc.), other duties and matters as applicable. JDs form the basis of job adverts and can attract – or repel – potential employees so that they need to be carefully constructed, a skill at which some HR managers are gradually improving

- Person Specification – that is the human qualities, characteristics and attributes which someone will need to carry out the job well. Distinction is often made between what is essential and what is desirable. Under relatively new laws, care must be taken not to discriminate against sections of the community on the grounds of age, race, education or gender.

There is also a check list for person specifications used in HR called the Munro Fraser Five-Point plan; the five points are:-

1. impact on others
2. acquired knowledge (or experience)
3. innate abilities (or, for this purpose, skills)
4. motivation
5. adjustment (to a new working environment)

all of which are reasonably self-explanatory.

Recruitment methods

Briefly there are four main methods of recruiting; ;-

a) internally, where existing staff could carry out the work, as well as or instead of some work that they are already doing. This may involve promotion or a sideways move; in these cases, HR managers should always assess any extra stress levels which could be imposed, as discussed in the previous chapter.
b) ask existing staff to identify suitable recruits or to recruit from previously known sources such as former employees or existing employees' families
c) specialist Personnel & Development staff to identify sources, suitable candidates and match the two aspects to take the process further
d) sub-contract the process to an external specialist – such as a recruitment firm or headhunter. This can be more expensive but, if it produces suitable candidates in a short time can also be time-saving and therefore cost effective.

Stop and Think

Does your organisation follow similar lines to the methods outlined above? If not, how does it attract the right calibre candidate for key roles?

Recruitment adverts and application forms

These are two of the most important documents that any organisation can ever produce because they give an impression of that organisation to many external stakeholders, not just the people who may or may not apply for a job. Consequently, they both need to be carefully designed to reflect both reality and aspiration to attract interest, applications, respect and good will. Often they are best designed and placed in the media by a specialist recruitment agency which will create a house style to give an impression that soon identifies the organisation to its key stakeholders. Although there is initial financial outlay on this type of service, it often produces better results in the medium and longer term than having an inexpert in-house HR function try to achieve what they have not been trained to do.

Lewis (p. 185) indicated four rules for recruitment advertising:-

1. target the right audience through the most appropriate media
2. an adequate number of replies should be generated to allow for reasonable choice
3. minimise the number of unsuitable – and, therefore, wasted – replies
4. promote the organisation as a good employer.

Although this might appear to be good business practice combined with common sense, a number of writers in the HR field – notably Lewis and Marchington & Wilkinson themselves, regard the adherence to these simple rules as the exception rather than the norm. When compared to promotional advertising, certainly, recruitment advertising is often the poor relation, often suffering from much lower budgets, a lack of clear planning and insufficient evaluation of media and messaging.

These points are equally applicable to recruitment application forms and some writers – especially Jenkins (1983 p. 259) – believe that a number of suitable candidates are discouraged from taking their applications further by badly produced and unclear application literature. The best application literature is that which reflects the person specification and the core competencies (or job specification) that has already been produced.

Some organisations – for instance the Employment Service – now specify key competencies for certain roles. These usually include a nucleus of seven competencies:-

1. getting on with people
2. communication skills
3. planning and prioritising work
4. adapting to and managing change
5. taking decisions
6. managing a team
7. developing other staff members

which would appear to be a useful blueprint for many other organisations.

An example of current good practice in this field can again be drawn from BP which recently specified a role as follows:-

"Head of Internal Communications

This individual will lead on this activity for a function of 1700 people, reporting to the VP HR Capability; they will also be part of the Communications function within BP, reporting to the Group Head of Internal Communications.

Success in the role is expected to lead to a longer term career in the communications function within BP.

Key responsibilities

Create and get senior HR leadership team support to an appropriate communications strategy; agree objectives and milestones.

Develop the right basic infrastructure for the activity, including building networks of colleagues who will support and help progress the agenda, putting in place light touch governance, developing cascade channels and distribution lists etc.

Craft the main messages arising out of the HR change programme, and develop the "story";

Co-ordinate and develop the channels needed for effective communication through the function; for example, through Town Halls, through newsletters (eg "HR Matters"), through the development of an intranet site; through webcasts.

Assist the HR function to communicate better with BP's line managers and employees on those elements of the change programme that will affect them e.g. through the introduction of new technology etc.

Help colleagues to develop a common look and feel for all HR communications, including "One HR", the intranet site for employees.

Draft the speeches given by the Group Head of HR.

Assist the various areas of HR with their own two-way communications plans, in order to develop strong engagement and help employees understand how their day to day work relates to the goals of the function as a whole.

Install and monitor measurement systems of effectiveness, including use of staff surveys.

Person specification

The successful candidate is likely to be accustomed to working at senior levels in major international or multinational companies, either in-house or as a consultant. They will be recognised by their peers for their innovative and effective technical communications knowledge, their understanding of an organisational change agenda, and their focus on execution.

They are likely to possess all or most of the following:

Experience

- *Sound internal communications experience and track record supporting organisational change, possibly gained through a mix of consulting and corporate experience.*
- *Experienced at delivering in large, complex, matrixed businesses.*
- *Experienced at delivering and executing work as an individual contributor, with a track record of building networks and attracting support from people across the businesses.*
- *Some prior knowledge of the HR function would be an advantage.*

Personal Attributes

- *Business fluent as well as a communications expert, ideally including some PR and marketing communications experience.*
- *Strong oral and written communication skills.*
- *Good judgement in their professional field, knowing how to craft the right messages and where to focus resources and effort; able to articulate the rationale for their proposals, so gaining the trust and respect of the leadership population in the BP HR function.*
- *Appropriate balance of big picture thinking with very strong execution skills and attention to detail; able to set the agenda whilst always seeking practical, implement-able solutions.*
- *Able to think logically and prioritise.*
- *The drive and energy needed to bring about change in a large, global multinational organisation; resilience and stamina, not easily frustrated by set backs.*
- *Strong influencing and networking skills; a natural relationship builder with strong stakeholder management skills, able to adopt a very consultative style with good listening skills.*
- *Comfortable working with ambiguity.*
- *Cultural sensitivity and strong listening skills.*

Terms of Appointment

Salary will be negotiated with the preferred candidate.

There is also a bonus plus other benefits.

The role will be based at BP's offices in Sunbury. The individual should also expect to spend some time every week at BP's head office in St James Square in central London, and undertake some international travel.

Stop and Think

How does your organisation recruit new people? Can you recognise some of these principles in the ways in which it approaches potential new staff?

1.6 The choice of selection methods

First it is important to remember that selection is a two-way process. Both the candidate and the organisation are seizing up each other, wondering whether the match can be made to work. No technique is perfect for this process, and there is never any guarantee that a perfect match can be found.

Also, most employers use a combination of different types of selection procedure. Most use both references (generally including one from the current employer, if appropriate) and application forms. Only about a quarter of organisations use aptitude or other tests, although these grow in significance when more senior appointments are begin considered. Perhaps most importantly, a range of methods should be used which are appropriate in themselves to each selection. In summary these are Practicability, Sensitivity, Reliability and Validity.

Practicability

This is the most important criterion of all. The method has to acceptable to all parties and sometimes to independent watchdog bodies, it must be economical in both costs and time and it must be within the capability of the appointing employers.

Sensitivity

Sensitivity needs to be kept in proportion. The aim of the employing organisation is to determine whether the candidate can do the job. As such it can discriminate between candidates – but on ability and aptitude only, not on any other spurious ground such as race or age.

Reliability

Essentially this means that the process cannot be unduly affected by chance. One example often cited is that of tests for a job. Clearly, if one candidate has had special coaching to be able to fulfill such tests easily and well, it is not necessarily a fair basis for comparison with other candidates, but that does not mean that one of them could not do the job equally well. It is necessary to test the aptitude for the job, not aptitude for the test.

Validity

This means the correctness of the inferences which can be drawn from the selection method. It might measure the characteristic of the candidate or it might also mean being able to predict future behaviour in the role to be filled.

Interviews

These remain the most widely used method of recruitment in the UK. They are often also the most roundly criticised when candidates are appointed but subsequently disappoint all around them. In truth, the issue is often one of not having prepared for the interview properly. There are two schools of thought in job interviews; one is that they are "a chat with a purpose", the other that they can be made more scientific with high levels of reliability and validity so that the outcome is a more satisfactory appointment.

Interview formats can differ from one-to-ones (useful in higher office, providing the person carrying out the interview has breadth and experience of the role and is prepared to work with his/her choice once they arrive in the job) through tandem interviews, (where two people interview a candidate together, presumably sharing the blame if their choice turns out not to be the right one) to panel interviews (in which the candidate is grilled by a small group of up to five people). The latter is probably the most commonly used because it seems to avoid overt discrimination, gives balance to a decision and allows most of the managers who will work with the new employee the opportunity to meet him or her at first hand.

There are several drawbacks to the panel interview; these include:-

- the belief that all managers are good interviewers
- it looks easy
- applicants are defined as "good" if they comply with the interview rules but "bad" if they do not
- candidates who mirror the feelings and viewpoints of the interview panel are often appointed; this might not be the ideal outcome
- it is seen as a ritual and can demonstrate equally superstitious and unscientific characteristics as can most arcane rituals

To try to overcome some of these perceived problems, some employers, especially in the public sector, have derived a series of identical questions which are put to every candidate. This might appear to be fairer but, in reality, probably simply differentiates between good and bad interviewees, rather than good or bad potential employees.

1.7 Selection testing

As doubts over the validity of interviewing have arisen, more testing has emerged in selection. One source estimates that over half of all employers with 200 or more employees now use some form of testing (Marchington and Wilkinson p. 125) These widely include psychological testing of various kinds, usually psychometric tests and personality tests.

Psychometric tests measure mental ability, personal characteristics and, sometimes, aptitude for a particular role. They are, essentially a snapshot in time so that reliability and validity can both suffer if a candidate encounters them on a bad or non-typical day. There are also tests for general intelligence and for special abilities – such as verbal, numerical or special (e.g. IT literate) dexterity.

These are all well and good provided the employer has staff who know how to use and interpret them correctly. One public sector body was recently discovered subjecting all candidates to a host of these tests and then ignoring all the resulting data by storing it (unread) in a spare filing cabinet. Apparently nobody was prepared to take the responsibility for interpreting the data. Incidents like this might be rather more common than many candidates realise.

Psychometric questionnaires identify traits in a person. No trait is good or bad, theoretically, but some are in demand more than others. Many of these originated in the US and do not travel particularly well across the Atlantic. To these can be added, interest, values and work-based questionnaires which all do more or less what their titles suggest.

There is a CIPD Code of Practice on Psychological Testing (cipd.org.uk) which can help in selecting appropriate methods and in avoiding some of the more obvious pitfalls. Essentially, there are five rules for application:-

1. tests should measure attributes relevant to the employment
2. the tests should have been rigorously developed and proved
3. data on the reliability, validity and effectiveness of the tests should be available
4. evidence should be available to show that certain groups are not disadvantaged by the tests
5. test suppliers should provide norms which satisfy all the employers' queries.

Assessment Centres

These combine a number of other selection methods to try to arrive at a balanced conclusion. Often computerised, they also rely on skilled assessors and usually exist commercially outside any particular employer, rather like a consultancy. As such they are not cheap and care has to be taken to access only the more reputable and cost effective on the market. But for larger organisations, especially those who have experienced trouble in recruiting the right type of employee, they are a useful short-cut to a cost-effective solution.

Assessment centres often use devices such as Biodata – a set of biographical information to give a factually based view of a person's life which can, sometimes, predict how a person will act in given circumstances.

Graphology is another assessment centre device which will analyse handwriting to help determine suitability for a role. It is, apparently, the fourth most widely used process in France, with the rest of Europe hardly using it at all. Draw your own conclusions.

2 Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures, Managing Equality and Diversity

2.1 Introduction

Enlightened though the new era of HR management might be – as we saw in the two preceding chapters – some kind of disciplinary and grievance procedure is still necessary – and presumably always will be. It might have evolved somewhat from the rather more harsh conditions of the earlier part of the last century but it still has to be vigorous enough to act as an effective deterrent and to redress wrongs which might inadvertently or otherwise have been perpetrated.

Equally, a new era and, in some ways, a new society have lead to the need for new policies to defend the interest of minority groups – generally termed managing equality and diversity – and it is right that we consider these in this chapter to conclude this section on HR Management.

Clearly, not all organisations will need to have recourse to either of these areas of policy and activity very often; indeed, the less frequently the better, but it behoves all who purport to be new managers in the 21st century to have at least a modest knowledge of these provisions, what they do and how to abide by them.

Consequently we shall explore the outline of these two areas in this chapter, although, as with most aspects of HR, these are specialised spheres of activity and should not be undertaken without expert advice from appropriate professionals.

Chapter Content

- Disciplinary procedures
- Grievance procedures
- Managing equality and diversity

2.2 Disciplinary procedures

Since the beginning of the 1970s (with the 1971 Industrial Relations Act) there has been a move towards protecting the rights of working people from unscrupulous employers. Over that time, legitimate reasons for dismissal have been tightened up so that there are now only five:-

1. the person cannot carry out the work that he/she was recruited to do; this can include a health reason, if appropriate
2. The employee's conduct has been at fault – e.g. criminal, negligent or otherwise worthy of being deemed "gross misconduct"
3. the employee's position has been made redundant
4. the employee could not continue without contravening a legal enactment
5. any other "substantial" reason which justifies dismissal – e.g. re-organisation.

It can be seen that the last two could be regarded as "get-out" causes, although the circumstances in which they are applied would usually be open to semi-public scrutiny, for example at an industrial tribunal. Nevertheless, there is clearly some leeway in the law here and arbitration procedures, including hearings, are increasingly common. The employer may have to justify the stance taken with the employee and to show that it has acted fairly and given the employee full and appropriate warning of, say, an unsatisfactory level of performance while also having offered help to improve this.

There is also a statutory disciplinary, dismissal and grievance procedure, enshrined in the Employment Act 2002. These statutory procedures amount to minimum standard that mist be followed. The main features are:-

- a three-step procedure which must be followed (see below)
- employers will pay a potential increase of 10%–50% if they do not follow the recognised procedures
- employees must also follow the procedure if they wish to lodge a claim in the employment tribunal

The three step procedure on which most of this hangs can be summarised as a letter, followed by a meeting and concluded by an appeal if necessary. Grounds for procedures can take the form of all kinds of employee misconduct including:-

- continued lateness
- failure to follow a reasonable management instruction
- abuse of the organisation's computer system or internet access
- bullying or creating a hostile work atmosphere
- theft
- fighting
- committing a criminal offence

Most of these are fairly clear with the criminal offence being a catch-all in case there is doubt over the exact actions described earlier.

Records need to be meticulously kept in case the claim reaches an industrial tribunal. The burden of proof is on the employer to show that the employee has erred in a serious fashion, adding to the need to keep accurate and full records including minutes (or notes) of meetings, notes of phone calls and copies of all correspondence.

Disciplinary procedures

There are also punitive measures, attendance incentives and preventive measures. If you had to propose a business case to improve rates of absence in your organisation, would you use all three types of measure or are there some which are not acceptable in your organisation's culture? For example, would an attendance bonus create unfairness and confusion? How could it be measured and set up to work fairly? What impact might it have on staff? Would you use it for all categories of staff, and if not, how would you justify that?

Disciplinary interviews

These are often unpleasant interludes for all concerned and are best approached in a very professional way. Key points are:-

- Ensure you have investigated all the relevant facts in advance
- Plan your approach
- Ensure the employee knows why he/she has to attend; this should be very clear in the letter inviting him/her to the meeting
- Give reasonable notice of the meeting – more than 48 hours is the CIPD advice
- Always have another manger there to take notes and help conduct the interview
- Allow the employee to have a work colleague or TU official present if he/she requests it
- Never pre-judge the outcome; there may be facts of which you have been unaware
- Begin by stating the exact complaint, including witness statements if appropriate
- Give the employee amply opportunity to state a defence and call witnesses if necessary
- Use adjournments to allow a cooling off period if necessary and to consider any new information that has come to light
- Deliver the final decision with full reasons, give details of appeal procedures and review periods if appropriate
- Confirm the decision in writing quickly after the meeting – preferably the same day
- Observe all the details of this procedure; if just one aspect has not been properly followed, the employee may have a good case for appeal

2.3 Outcomes

Broadly there are likely to be three man outcomes from this disciplinary procedure.

1. No action. For example an employee might not have been clear about what was expected, in which case, his/her manager rather than the employee should be taken to task.
2. Warnings. This might vary slightly depending on the organisation's exact policy but would usually follow the pattern of a recorded oral warning, then a first written warning and, finally a final written warning. Unless there are special circumstances – such a extreme misconduct – it would be wrong to skip stages in this process. Dismissal can only usually follow if all these stages have been effected. Warnings should have a specific life after which they are deemed to have lapsed; typically this will be six months for a recorded oral warning, one year for a first written warning and two years for a final written warning. Occasionally, if conduct is serious, a final warning may last indefinitely.

3. Dismissal; There are six permitted reason for dismissal:-
   3.1 misconduct
   3.2 incapability
   3.3 breach of statutory regulations
   3.4 redundancy
   3.5 retirement – but this must be handled correctly now that the 65 year cut-off point has been removed with effect from 1 Oct 2006. See the CIPD' website (cipd.org.uk) for up to date clarification.
   3.6 some other substantial reason – another catch-all in case the exact circumstances have not already been covered elsewhere.

In addition it is important that the organisation ensures that it has acted in a way which would be accepted as reasonable by an industrial tribunal, including following all the recognised processes.

Grievance policy and practice

Clearly, equity and justice dictate that all employees are treated in the same manner. Failure to do so can lead to residual anger, unrest and even industrial dispute. Employees must know to whom they can turn for support and advice; the organisation must clearly sow that thy have made this information available to all.

Most grievances can pass through a two-stage process. The first stage is

Informal

Employees should be encouraged to raise any issues informally with their line manager so that any concerns can be aired and responded to as quickly as possible. Sometimes, this is all that is needed; a good manager can often resolve any issues without the need for more formality. But, if this stage does not satisfactorily resolve the issue, a second, more formal stage may be needed.

Formal

Employees need to be aware of the formal route open to them including:-

- the three stages of the statutory procedure
- the right person with whom to raise the complaint
- the timescales involved
- how a complaint may be raised at the next level of management above that which has not resolved the issue
- all employees have the right to be accompanied at grievance hearings by a colleague or TU representative
- full and accurate records must be kept of all grievance hearings

Ensuring that employees are all treated fairly in a hostile-free environment is an important factor in creating a productive working context. Where possible, matters should be resolved informally with the minimum fuss and delay; this way, minor concerns can be dealt with swiftly and with minimum disruption and embarrassment.

When informal processes are ineffective, or where personality issues preclude them, form mechanisms can resolve the issue firmly and permanently, provided the guidelines are followed. This will also help to contain staff turnover and absenteeism. All mangers must have appropriate training in these matters; both ACAS and the CIPD are able to arrange this.

ACAS

One of the prime movers in establishing a fair basis for discipline is the Arbitration and Conciliation Service (ACAS).

A government sponsored body, it made headlines regularly during the dark days industrial unrest in the 1970s by being appealed to frequently to help settle pay and other related disputes in large firms, such as British Leyland, Ford and, in the 1980s, the National Coal Board. ACAS has a handbook worth investing in if you are ever going to pursue a career in HR – called Disputes at Work. This guide gives the latest wisdom, court findings, settlements, impact of new legislation and so on. An extract to summarise the current position on disciplinary procedures includes:-

- all should be in writing (although appropriate verbal counseling should also have taken place earlier)
- all should specify exactly to whom they apply
- all should provide for matters to be dealt with quickly
- they should indicate the disciplinary actions which may be taken
- they should specify the levels of management involved; one recommendation is that no manager should ever have supreme authority over an employee in his/her direct reporting line; a more senior manager should always be involved to ensure scrupulous fairness
- they should be timely enough to allow individuals to e advised of the charges against them, well in advance of a hearing to allow them to prepare a defence
- Individuals always have the right to be accompanied to a hearing by a trade union official
- No employee should be dismissed for a first breach of discipline, except in cases of gross misconduct

- No disciplinary action should be taken until after the case has been heard
- All individuals should be given full reasons for any disciplinary action imposed
- All should have a right of appeal and should be informed of the procedure
- All disciplinary actions should apply to all employees equally, regardless of length of service or any other factor
- All should be non-discriminatory
- Suspension should be paid (not necessarily at full pay levels)

On the face of it, this is all sound thinking and logical in its approach. The very fact that it has to be imposed on some organisations might indicate that HR has not always been so scrupulous in its dealings with employees.

According to the Industrial Relations Society who surveyed this area few years ago, the ten most common causes of disciplinary action are:-

1. absenteeism
2. poor performance
3. poor time-keeping
4. refusal to obey a reasonable instruction
5. theft/fraud
6. sexual/racial harassment
7. verbal abuse
8. health & safety infringements
9. fighting
10. alcohol/drug abuse

Minor misconduct – being just a few minutes late for instance, should be dealt with by verbal warnings; actions must be seen to be appropriate to the circumstances. Moreover, managers should be counseling as well as punishing employees to try to prevent a recurrence. Below par performance, in particularly, should be the subject of a concerted effort to improve, by the manager as well as the employee. More training, for instance, might be required and the employer should be seen to be providing this. Moreover, there are wider implications of over-hasty disciplinary action which was the fourth most common cause of strike action in the UK in 1994.

2.4 Equality and Diversity

Evaluation of People Resourcing systems

If People Resourcing is to become a business partner rather than an unproductive overhead, then it must be able to evaluate its contribution to the business and relate all activities to business objectives. Such value could only be assessed in relation to things that go better because of HR intervention and activities and specific organisation goals achieved through HR.

However formal evaluation hits measurement problems because much impact is not clearly related to financial outcomes.

Clearly **when** or **over what period** does it work, cut cost and remain fair is a reasonable additional question and authors such as Taylor attempt to deal with this when debating short and long term approaches and forward and backward looking criteria. He discusses straightforward quantitative metrics such as absence rates and proportion of recruits from ethnic minorities, also ratios such as profit per employee, recruitment cost per recruit. He also proposes audit questions of the quantitative and qualitative type – assuming the HR function can justify the cost of running such internal audits on a regular basis.

Stop and Think

Have you experience of designing or running an internal audit of HR activity? Did you use questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, online surveys or a mixture? Did you encounter any problems such as low return rates, ambiguous questions, reluctance to take part more than once in a lifetime, moans rather than constructive comments on which action could be taken?

Gathering data for a purpose i.e. primary research is not a straightforward activity as you may already have found. There is an old but still extremely detailed and useful book on questionnaire design by A N Oppenheim – widely available in most libraries – which can help with such problems.

In terms of gathering data to evaluate HR function and activity internally – the major barriers are likely to be time and political will. Senior level commitment to the exercise may be necessary to get a good volume of response. As Taylor suggests, benchmarking is another way of providing data to evaluate your activity. This is usually not freely available from competitors unless you have agreements with them to do this. Benchmarking can, of course, be internal against other departments, or it can be functional, industry based or generic. Published external benchmarking information should always be used with caution, but can be helpful. Taylor recommends IDS and IRS as good published sources, perhaps the CIPD should also be added.

Stop and Think

What issues could you identify as affecting the outcomes of a goal based evaluation exercise i.e. the setting and measuring of performance of HR against SMART goals, and the development of Return on Investment (ROI) calculations for HR interventions? How do internal politics, degrees of internal interdependence and external environmental (eg PESTLE or STEEPLE) factors affect such evaluation measures?

2.5 Legal obligations

There is overlap here with Employment Law and it is necessary to summarise some of the key areas which currently affect issues like this.

Key current UK legislation relating to People Resourcing:-

- Equal Pay Act 1970 and as amended in 1984
- Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and 1986 and Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003
- Race Relations Act 1976 and the Amendment Act 2000 and Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003 SI 2003/1660.
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and (Amendment) Regulations (SI 2003/1673) 2003
- Human Rights Act 1998

- Employment Act 2002
- Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 & Police Act 1997
- Asylum and Immigration Act 1996
- Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 (also Factories Act 1961, Offices, Shops and Railway Premises Act 1963) & Workplace Health, Safety and Welfare Regulations 1992, Health and Safety (Consultation with Employees) Regulations 1996, COSHH 1988, RIDDOR 1995
- Employment Rights Act 1996
- Working Time Regulations 1998
- Employment Protection (part-time employees) Regulations 1995
- Employment Relations Act 1999
- Access to Medical Records Act 1988

How do you stay up to date as an HR professional? In what cases can you use a legal professional ? How do you ensure the key legal requirements are understood by management and staff? Is print in the staff handbook or uploading information to an intranet sufficient? How do you keep HR staff up to date, let alone other staff? What are the equivalent EU laws if you have offices in Europe Remember this list will need constant updating if you refer to it subsequently? Or in the rest of the world if you have offices there?

Specific equality and diversity issues

Within the list of key legislation, the areas of equality and diversity, health and safety and individual rights at work are strongly represented. Most laws of this kind come into being to protect potential and actual victims of exploitation, but by their nature can become a "sledgehammer to crack a nut" i.e. their impact can be much wider than intended and entail significant extra work and cost for everyone, not just those who may have exploited employees. Perhaps it is human nature always to look for loopholes, and as a result the law becomes progressively tighter over time.

In terms of equality and diversity, many organisations are operating on very low standards. HR people are required to remain objective and to look out for cases where prejudice and ignorance result in discrimination and unfair practice leading to victimisation or harassment. It is easy to believe that well educated people have fewer prejudices – but beware. Here is a useful piece on prejudice from Heery and Noon (2001) from their Dictionary of Human Resource Management (this is cited in Beardwell, Holden and Claydon p. 233).

In the context of discrimination at work, prejudice means holding negative attitudes towards a particular group, and viewing all members of that group in a negative light, irrespective of their individual qualities and attributes. Typically we think of prejudice as being against a particular group based on gender, race/ethnicity, religion, disability, age and sexual orientation. However, prejudice extends much further and is frequently directed at other groups based on features such as accent, height, weight, hair colour, beards, body piercings, tattoos and clothes. It is extremely rare to find a person who is not prejudiced against any group – although most of us are reluctant to admit to our prejudices.

Is it the job of businesses to pursue social justice in their organisations? This is a debatable point. So what other business reasons might be used to justify diversity management?

- Making sure organisations find the right talent, maximising human resource potential in the workforce
- Relate better to a wider diversity of customers
- Wider pool of labour for recruitment
- Becoming an employer of choice – sometimes leading to employer branding
- Public and therefore brand/product/service image improved
- Avoiding cost of tribunals – complying with the law

There is also the view that these arguments will only really have impact when there are skill shortages and profitability is not impacted (e.g. by making special provision for people with disabilities)?

There is a good question on p 237 of the Beardwell, Holden and Claydon book: Should the absence or weakness of a "business case" for eliminating unfair discrimination and disadvantage absolve managers from trying to do so?

The UK Commission for Racial Equality (www.cre.gov.uk) lists ten points for good practice in employment – go to the website to find more detail, in summary they are:-

1. Equal opportunities policy
2. Action plan with targets
3. Training for all levels of staff especially those recruiting, selecting and training others
4. Assess current position – audit
5. Review recruitment, selection, promotion and training procedures against policy
6. Draw up clear and justifiable job criteria
7. Offer pre-employment training where appropriate
8. Consider organisation's image
9. Consider flexible working opportunities and practices
10. Develop links with community groups, organisations and schools to broaden pool of applicants.

Chapter 17 pp. 465–469 in Taylor, People Resourcing, refers to this topic. Some issues to consider include:

1. The debate on market forces and capitalism building a strong economy and **more wealth for all versus human rights** and the needs of weaker individuals to be protected.
2. CIPD professional conduct as regulated by the Institute through its **codes of practice and policies** relating to members.
3. **Inequality of power** in the employment relationship offering the possibility of abuse of power.
4. Personnel & Development's (P&D) reliance on the decisions of other managers – the need to wield **influence** over others from this function if ethical views are to be pursued.
5. **Possible conflicts of interest** between the objectives and needs of the individual employee and the objectives and needs of the business.
6. The P&D response is generally towards **codes of ethical practice/conduct** – to what extent is this for public image or for use in determining ethical decisions?
7. Taylor argues for **a pragmatic approach to ethics** which promotes the rights of the individual only so far as this does not damage corporate performance

8. A principle based on the "**least of all evils**"? (p. 468). Who judges what is least? This can be immensely subjective and are frequently misapplied in organisations to build cases which are partial or biased. How do we judge what honesty is? How much truth are we prepared to tell when we have the confidence of senior managers and value this as an influencing tool, yet are party to information which could injure or concern others, perhaps unnecessarily? How open and honest can we be when we have to apply senior management decisions with which we do not agree?
9. "…it is unprofessional and **unethical to treat employees other than as adults** with whom the organisation has an economic relationship." (p. 468 Taylor). Do we treat them as adults when we require them to attend at specific times to suit us, when we impose rules about breaks and status, when we prescribe exactly how jobs should be done, when we apply common competencies across organisations which do not allow for individual difference, when we deny promotion to people working flexibly, when we see going home at an agreed time as "clockwatching" and lacking commitment, when we enforce workplace rules which only appear in a lever arch file held in Personnel, when we allocate work and opportunities to earn overtime pay but do not give clear criteria for such decisions, when we pay people differently for similar work on the basis of qualifications or gender etc.?
10. Taylor proposes the options of pursuing a **moral, business and or legal line** when influencing decisions. He raises the question of when it is appropriate to resign because you personally do not agree with a decision – a vital but generally unaddressed question.

Chapter 8 in Corbridge and Pilbeam focuses on equality of opportunity, diversity, harassment at work etc and gives a detailed summary of relevant legislation and recent change in workplace diversity policy and practice. This includes references again to "**reasonableness**" in adjusting the workplace or the job conditions to accommodate employees' needs, for example in the light of disability. Reasonable adjustments are seen to include physical alteration of premises, allocating some job duties to another person, redeploying the person to another location, amending working times, accepting absence for treatment or assistance, providing additional training or supervision and providing a reader or interpreter. Whether these accommodations are "reasonable" or sufficient is determined by the ease or difficulty of making the adjustment, the cost of doing so and the employer's resources. (Corbridge and Pilbeam, p. 180).

The chapter also refers to the **Human Rights Act 1998** through which UK citizens have protected rights to peaceful assembly, respect for privacy and family life and freedom of thought, conscience, religion and expression. Implications for the workplace include dress codes, rights for religious observance, right to a fair disciplinary hearing, the right to collectivise/join a union and the right to reject a long-hours culture which affects privacy or family life (Corbridge and Pilbeam p. 183). The Act only applies directly to public bodies, but private sector organisations need to monitor and meet such requirements if they are to be "fair" or "best practice" employers.

Chapter 14 in this book refers to "sensitive employment issues" again relating to ethical debate – and covers issues such as **positive health policies at work, smoking, alcohol and drug abuse, HIV and AIDS, violence at work and stress and distress**. In each case policies are proposed which attempt to prepare an environment in which fairness and communication can prevail. There must be a risk of over-preparing for dangers such as these in a small-medium sized organisation (SME), however; clear policies which spell out what can and should be done will usually prevent "knee-jerk" reactions under pressure when such occasions arise. It is important to note that discrimination does not have to be racial; it can also be on grounds of age, gender and disability as well. In fact, most of the cases brought in the UIK are probably not racial but based on age or gender.

The **stress debate** is interesting in that a relationship between pressure and performance is proposed in which (p. 355) low levels of pressure and performance can cause as much stress ("rust-out") as high levels of pressure – associated with drops in performance ("burn-out"). The ideal state (eustress) is an optimum level of stress associated with high performance and average pressure. This is a good theory because it seems intuitively accurate – but how can we apply this? Managers need an understanding of the optimum performance level but need to interpret this from individuals' reactions to the job, since each individual will respond differently to pressure. An organisation without employee support mechanisms (advice line, EAP, health screening, social networking etc) is unlikely to pick up serious stress problems before distress is caused.

Chapter 7 in Beardwell, Holden and Claydon also refers to equality and diversity under the ethics heading. In discussing discrimination, Noon – the author of this chapter – introduces the idea (based on Healy (1993) and Kirton and Greene (2000)) of a **hierarchy of organisations in relation to equality of opportunity:**

- The negative organisation (has no equal opportunities policy, doesn't claim to be an equal opportunities employer, may not comply with the law)
- The minimalist organisation (claims to be an equal opportunities employer but has no written policy or procedure, reactive to cases of discrimination)
- The compliant organisation (has a policy and procedures and initiatives to comply with some aspects of good practice recommendations)
- The proactive organisation (has a policy and procedures and initiatives, monitors outcomes of initiatives, promotes equality using good practice guidelines, improves the way discrimination is dealt with proactively).

Stop and Think

Where is your organisation on this scale?

Finally a quotation from this chapter (p. 245) said to be from former US President Lyndon Johnson at the time of the introduction of race legislation in 1965 (note this is significantly earlier than in the UK). This is also quoted in Noon and Blyton 2002 (p. 278).

> "Imagine a hundred yard dash in which one of the two runners has his legs shackled together. He has progressed 10 yards, while the unshackled runner has gone 50 yards. At that point the judges decide that the race is unfair. How do they rectify the situation? Do they merely remove the shackles and allow the race to proceed? Then they could say that "equal opportunity" now prevailed. But one of the runners would still be forty yards ahead of the other. Would it not be the better part of justice to allow the previously shackled runner to make up the forty yard gap; or to start the race all over again?"

How can you relate this to equality and ethics in the workplace? Organisations need to be comfortable with:-

- Codes of practice and codes of conduct (examples, value etc.),
- influencing, ethical principles such as consistency, reasonableness etc.,
- rights of employers vs rights of employees,
- Human Rights Act 1998,
- stress debate,
- hierarchy of organisations in relation to equality of opportunity

A couple of case studies might help to illustrate this complex world which is still coming to terms with a new set of principles and how they need to be applied.

Making it work 1

The Mersey Regional Ambulance Service NHS Trust

This trust has 1,100 employees in a number of sites. In 2001 ACAS was called in over issues of bullying and harassment. In discussions with both managers and unions, it became apparent that the policy on bullying was not working properly.

A series of workshops was held attended by most employees who helped to identify the key issues and the shortcomings of the current policy. A joint working party was then set up and established a new policy covering these issues and entitled "Dignity at Work". This was followed by managerial approval and a strategy for raising awareness of the new policy throughout the trust. This included seminars for all senior managers and union leaders.

A new position – that of Fair Treatment Advisers – was established and a suitable incumbent recruited. Ten were appointed to educate staff about the new procedures, providing help and support to cope with issues around bullying and harassment. Further training sessions were held for nearly 100 managers and these have since been rolled out to most staff throughout the trust. A leaflet was produced outlining the new procedures and space given to the new initiative in the staff newsletter.

Outcomes

The trust believes that behaviour has changed significantly as a result of Dignity at Work. The project was evaluated in 2003 and it was found that any employees who had previously complained of bullying were now empowered to address the issues internally – with the option of involving a colleague – by informally facing the source of the problem, explaining the effect of the behaviour and requesting that it be changed. In some cases, managers were asked to set up meetings with all those concerned to thrash out the issues. It was felt that in the past few managers had much understanding of the impact that bullying behaviour could have at work and that the new policy had raised issues like this to the surface.

Another outcome was that employees were more willing to report incidents without fear of repercussion. Consequently, many grievances are now being raised which would probably not have surfaced in the past because the culture in the trust is now to be open about such issues. Because of the focus on early intervention, one manager described how "much pain has been removed from the problem". Advisers reported that staff are now generally more aware of their impact on others and were highly receptive to the new policy. Mangers believe that advisers are now acting as a temperature gauge of staff opinion and morale which are strongly linked to dignity issues.

A further survey late in 2003 showed that the trust was then in the top 20% of organisations in respect of staff satisfaction on issues around bullying and harassment. The revised policy has also played a pivotal role in reinforcing a new culture of openness and receptivity to different viewpoints that managers are trying to engender.

(taken from ACAS, Tackling Bullying and Harassment, ACAS.org.uk)

And one to balance it from the private sector

Pataks

Pataks is a manufactures and suppliers of various Indian food ingredients including pickles, stir-fry sauces, chutneys and curry pastes. It was founded by the present owner's father in the 1950s and has grown from a small business working from a tiny kitchen n North London to a £50m multi-national business.

Currently there are five sites throughout the UK with about 750 staff in total. Ironically, most staff are white, especially in Wigan, the site of the head office, where there is perceived to be a low level of ethnic employees. Both morale and working conditions are generally regarded as good with an open door policy encouraging all employees to air issues at any time. There is also a policy of regular communication at all levels.

However, discipline and grievance was an area in which it was thought desirable to involve ACAS, particularly as there was no practical training for managers in this field in 2003 when ACAS was called in. The aim was to provide training in best disciplinary practice for all managers since any lacked the confidence to tackle such issues and since there were no very clear guidelines to help them. Many had simply passed problems straight to HR without making enough attempt to solve them first. So, persuading managers to take more responsibility themselves was one of the outcomes of the project.

ACAS set up a training programme, mainly through half day workshops. 36 managers were trained as well as the HR and union staff in the following key areas:-

1. the reasons for discipline; why it is a requirement and how it can be used as a positive way of setting standards
2. best practice; correct procedures for handling discipline and grievance situations
3. work in delegate groups to play through similar situations from other organisations so that managers cold learn from benchmarking
4. guidance on handling awkward or difficult situations; viewing from an objective standpoint, avoiding conflict and personality clashes.

Feedback from these sessions was positive and the newly created environment seemed to be more suited to solve difficult situations productively. A few changes were made to the codes of practice at ACAS's behest arising out of problems which had been flagged up during the training.

Outcomes

Since the training, not only has a more constructive culture been created but there are tangible measures of success. Absenteeism has dropped and morale has improved even further. A subsequent survey showed that people felt "they were being treated more fairly" and were happier coming to work.

(adapted from ACAS Improving discipline and grievance procedures at Pataks. ACAS.org.uk)

3 New Technologies In The Workplace

3.1 Introduction

It is clear that the manager's life has been revolutionised by new technology over the past decade or so. Facilities which were simply undreamt of a few years ago are now taken for granted in the life of most commercial and non-commercial organisations.

There are many forms of new technology but most can be expressed as being off-shoots of IT – that is, information technology, which is, in its strictest sense, the science of collecting, storing, processing and transmitting information.

It is sometimes called ICT – Information and Communication Technology – which has largely emerged over the last 20 years. This is important because it includes aspects that have become so familiar to most managers – the internet, intranets, computer aided design and manufacture, automated teller machines, biotechnology, telecommunications, robotics and many other, related systems.

We will explore some of these main areas and try to evaluate the contribution that each is making to the managerial workplace. Since this is not a technical manual, we will not concern ourselves unduly with how they work, rather with what they can do to ease the lot of the manager.

Chapter content

Briefly, we will explore:-

- Microelectronics
- Computing
- Telecommunications
- Transportation
- Energy supply
- Medicine
- Robotics
- Electronic communications

And we will also try to explore the impact that technology of various sorts has made on organisations.

Organisational research across a range of bodies has shown that technology can influence peoples' behaviour in work settings in many ways including for example:-

- influencing the design of each employee's pattern of work especially the skills which are exercised, the organisation and control of work
- it affects the nature of social interactions
- it can also influence the pace and intensity of work

Stop and Think

To make the best use of technology we must support and develop the effectiveness of organisations rather than adapt business activities to the technology. How can we go about making the best use of technology? Is technology becoming too much our master rather than our servant?

3.2 Microelectronics

The power of microelectronics is relentlessly increasing computing capacity. Greater miniaturization, further specialisation and the ever decreasing price of powerful chips has made it possible to revolutionise many everyday machines, such as household goods, cars, TV sets, dishwashers, microwaves and virtually all office equipment. Speed, low cost and reliability have become the key aspects of new technology.

Many of the latest products on the market originate in low labour cost countries such as China where, although innovation may still lag behind more developed nations, the ability to copy and produce at extremely low prices has created a very sharp competitive edge. The Audi A6, for example, boasts that it contains more technology than that employed to first put man on the moon and there is no sign yet of a stalling of this technological surge of progress.

It is possible, however, that increased democracy and human rights issues in some emerging nations – China, Eastern Europe and much of SE Asia – will reduce their current edge and create a more even playing field in future years. No political regime lasts for ever.

3.3 Computing

The computer is now such a normal part of everyday life that it is difficult to remember what we did before it was widely accessible. Yet this was not so long ago. Even in the mid-1980s, computers were the exception rather than the rule and the great wave of development and democratisation did not really take off until the 1990s.

From the first computers weighing almost 30 tons to the lightweight, slim line microcomputer technology of today, the computer has pursued a relentless developmental path, probably exceeding anything previously seen in the history of civilisation.

Now, microcomputers operate in networks, with hand-helds and laptops adding extra flexibility. They have extraordinary versatility – most of us probably use very little more than 1% or 2% of the processing power of our laptops. The key to this development was the shift from centralised, data storage and processing to one based on networked, interactive computer power sharing.

This has brought many social, economic and managerial implications; many employees now work partly from home for instance, (tele-working) enabled by modems and other computer peripherals which can be linked in to the workplace, thereby losing none of the efficiency (often, quite the opposite) but allowing more freedom of choice for employees.

Some people view computers with fear and suspicion; in truth, the best way to regard them is as a clever tool which can materially assist in achieving a number of business and organisational goals that might otherwise be impossible. Most of us do not need to know how they work, any more than we need to know, say, how a ball point pen works. What we do need to have some idea of is how they can help us to achieve what we want to achieve. In this respect they become just a very clever pen and a great deal more besides.

Making it happen

They do have unsuspected consequences, however. In the early days of computerising offices, a large and very successful advertising agency in London wanted to install computers at every desk to allow all its employees (about 130) to communicate with each other and with clients and suppliers more easily. They were duly installed and everyone received a modicum of training to know, at least, how to switch them on.

After about three weeks, it was noticed that many of the female employees had not made any attempt to use them or even to access their capacity. It soon became clear that most women working in the agency were extremely image conscious and believed that, if a man saw them with a computer switched on, they would be asked to do some typing, even though they were managers and directors. Old habits (and prejudices), it seems, die hard.

3.4 Telecommunications

If anything, this has been the scene of more progress than in any other walk of life. Mobile phones, interactive TV sets, a plethora of entertainment and information systems and a relentless marketing approach to the latest piece of technology has made former entertainment and communications systems, all but obsolete and unrecognisable in a few short years. This must be the biggest single communications step since Caxton developed the printing press in the 1480s.

Fibre optics, cable and laser transmission technology has revolutionised the whole spectrum of telecommunications, allowing for broadband and wireless internet access and a whole raft of affordable by-products whose very existence would have seemed a science fiction dream only a few years ago. Mobile technology and social software, using computer power to route messages, information and images, now provides the basis for ubiquitous computing and interactive electronic communication. How did we manage to live before it all came about?

3.5 Transportation

Real benefits accrue from using microchips and computers in transport systems. Traffic flows can be regulated, allowing for fewer traffic jams (in theory) and flight handling at airports is mostly now controlled by computer, with human back-up for safety reasons. Similarly, railway signalling and port navigation are both computer-controlled in many parts of the world.

The internal combustion engine, having reigned unopposed for over a century, is now facing real challenges from developing technology. Electric cars are not new but the technological development of minimising the battery weight – the big drawback to electric cars for three decades – is gradually making real progress. Similarly, dual-fuel cars are now coming on to the market, although in small numbers and at high prices, although the extent of their genuine contribution to the environment is still doubtful. Satellite navigation –or "sat-nav" – is a regular option on most cars and can help to direct the driver through unfamiliar territory. Many train services in the UK rely on satellites to open doors at railway stations – an apparently unnecessary complication which has led to doors not opening at all on some stations when passengers wanted to alight – and has not helped the already tarnished reputation of the train operating companies either. Perhaps most significantly all these areas seem to offer unlimited opportunities for unethical governments to load yet more stealth taxes on to an already over-taxed population

It would seem that technology is in danger of being used everywhere, whether it is appropriate and reliable or not – and that is the main drawback. Like fire, technology is a very good servant but a very bad master. If we overuse it, or use it in inappropriate applications, it may well contribute more damage than good to modern living, Certainly there is a strong movement to suggest that advances in, say, air travel are not always positive because of the contribution jet engines make to global pollution.

On the other hand once people have become accustomed to aspects of life such as relatively cheap air travel, no government with any sense of self preservation (and all governments have that built-in) would attempt to forcibly take away that privilege without fearing a backlash at the polls.

3.6 Energy supply

Increasing use is being made of more natural than technological sources of energy. While gas, electricity and coal have supplied our energy needs since the Industrial Revolution about 200 years ago, and are still the main sources of energy along with nuclear power, more pressure on the earth's fragile climate systems and ecology is forcing research scientists to search for less environmentally damaging sources.

While wave and solar research are still in their infancy – and have not yet produced an alternative system with the potential to provide enough power for use by the majority of humanity – wind power is becoming more common, even on a private scale. Wind turbines can be bought for about £1,500 (2007 prices) in UK superstores and are supposed to have a payback period of less than three years while minimising the damage to the environment. Using them does, however, require a complete check and revalidation of all electrical appliances in the home – and that is likely to cost far more than the anticipated savings, in the short term at least

One curious feature of wind power is that many of the people who first clamoured for alternative energy sources to be developed now appear to be implacably opposed to new wind farms.

So the debates continue with no clear outcome as yet. One thing is clear, however; that mankind must take action against further despoiling of the planet before long. Agreed accords emerging from international talks – such as the Kyoto Agreement – may be a step in the right direction but may not deliver the necessary actions if global warming and long term environmental damage is to be avoided, as the disappointingly unclear Copenhagen conference proved in late 2009.

One of most rampant problems seems to be the rapid emergence as industrial nations of Asian giants. Even if the western world were to dramatically change its energy sources and clean up the atmosphere, the result may be negligible because of the vast environmental damage being created in Asia. Tellingly, China was blamed by many western delegates for the lack of progress at Copenhagen, although whether this was smoke screen, time alone may tell.

3.7 Medicine

If technology has assisted in energy supply and other areas of modern day living, it has revolutionised medicine. Or, rather, it is in the process of revolutionising medicine because the major developments are occurring almost daily.

Key to this is the development of medical information systems. Apart from the disastrous NHS computer service – which has, allegedly, already cost well over £700m without yet functioning properly – most medical services are now administered by a computerised system of some sort. Mostly, these work well in that they allow medical staff to recall patient records rapidly and electronically.

Putting it into practice

There has, however, been a political row in the UK over the past few years about where the systems should operate. The Dental Records Office, for instance, located in Eastbourne, keeps the dental records of most of the UK's 60 million-odd people. Ten years ago it employed about 2,400 staff in Eastbourne, making it one of the larger employers in this essentially retirement and holiday seaside town.

However, the outsourcing of most of the data processing work to Sri Lanka over about eight years in the 1990s has left the employment level in Eastbourne at only a few hundred. There may be a cost saving in having exported an essentially routine task to a country where wage levels are a fraction of those in the UK, but the cost in higher British and regional unemployment could well outweigh this advantage.

This is symptomatic of a trend that has seen many thousands of jobs exported from the UK over the past ten years or so. While essentially a political rather than a managerial issue, it clearly has managerial implications. For managers who are charged with saving cost, it is an easy option. For those who are involved in assisting regional development, it is a disaster. To a certain extent, it is a straight choice between the devil you know and the devil you don't know. Facilities in certain overseas countries might be much cheaper than in the UK but they are also quite likely to be less efficient and to have quality issues with carrying out the work.

Many banks and finance houses, for example have exported aspects such as call centres to India, specifically to Mumbai. In fact, Mumbai has been such a popular destination for call centres that it has virtually reached bursting point and has started to sub-contract several service industries to even cheaper states in SE Asia, notably Vietnam and Thailand, not always with the knowledge – let alone the approval – of the UK client. Results have been mixed at best with some banks now re-establishing such facilities in the UK, usually in areas of less expensive wage levels such as Scotland, Northern Ireland and the North of England. The future may hold further developments along these lines, although the picture is complicated by the immense influx of cheap labour from Eastern Europe in the past few years.

3.8 Robotics

Robotics have had a major effect on manufacturing industry since the late 1970s. Pioneered originally by the then-BL Cars (the Metro investment in 1979–80 cost about £280m of which half went towards a revolutionary robotics assembly system for the car's body shell) robotics have now taken over many tasks formerly undertaken by hand. Automated warehouses with automatic stock picking facilities are common and highly efficient – unless they go wrong. They replace tedious and, sometimes dangerous jobs, thereby allowing both lower staff levels and freeing up staff to work on more interesting and challenging tasks.

They are particularly good for repetitive tasks which can result in human injury – such as Repetitive Strain Syndrome, often caused by people repeating the same manual task many times a day – and will carry out every task to an equally high level of quality, thereby removing the uncertainty of human variations in the task. Although not initially cheap, they often have a fairly short payback period because of the enhanced quality levels and the ability they give organisations to shed jobs.

One key outcome of this technological revolution has been the impact it has had – and is still having – on organisational structure. Many organisational changes have been aimed at redefining employment practices, for instance, introducing lean production systems which needed fewer employees, perhaps with new and different skills to traditional employees. They have saved labour, although this is a two-edged sword in that the creation of new jobs through new technology to replace the dispossessed jobs has slowed down markedly over the past five years. The initial result has been to eliminate some jobs, automating others and de-layering management structures to cope with a new and leaner production system.

That at least is the case in the private sector, but the public sector has, on the whole, been eager to employ even more people over the past ten years. Civil service numbers have grown to nearly two million compared with about 600,000 in the mid 1980s. While manufacturing and, to a lesser extent, service industries were thriving, this was just about affordable, but, when the latest recession arrived in 2008, the bill for the inflated public sector has become very difficult (some would say impossible) to meet from private sector earnings.

Stop and Think

How does your organisation view and use new technology? Has it contributed to job losses or has it actually created new jobs? Could you do your own job without the aid of computers or other new technology processes?

3.9 Communications technology

Unquestionably, however, the really big revolution for most managers has been in the communications sector. Advances in areas such as telephony, computing, electronic mail and audio and video conferencing have really changed the look of the office as well as its ability to handle workloads.

Most, if not all, offices are now equipped with all the trappings of the ICT era – voice mail, PCs for all staff, email, mobiles, intranet, wifi, internet-access, on-line sourcing and recruitment. Such equipment has steadily become cheaper, easier to access and use and of better quality to give more reliability. Global competition has often triggered this investment which is increasingly seen as essential if an organisation is to keep or establish competitiveness in its field.

At the same time, a new profession – that of computer technologists – has been formed out of this revolution and this has created additional overheads for many organisations – although overheads which, in most cases fully pay for themselves rapidly. However, these technicians were unknown a few years ago while now they are usually seen as essential to the continued workings of even conventional organisations.

Problems can arise however, when technicians are deemed responsible for various areas that used to be – or ought to be – the preserve of trained managers. In some organisations, for example, technicians virtually control internal communications because, by default they are the only people who know which buttons to press to send the message. Clearly this has its downside. The decision about what to communicate, when and how is not one which a technician should readily take because he/she is unlikely to know the bigger picture which will guide this process. On the other hand, if nobody else knows what to do, there is not much option. In truth, we can all be sufficiently conversant with mainstream communications technology to avoid this type of anomaly – and that is a desirable outcome, if one which is taking some time to achieve.

This is not the place to give lessons about using computers for any purpose; there are plenty of specialised training resources which will do that. But it is increasingly necessary for anyone at almost any level in an organisation to know their way around a few computer software programs reasonably well:-

- Word processing– for basic communication in the form of letters, emails and reports;
- Spreadsheets – to be able to express financial or statistical information clearly
- Presentation software to be able to put together a professional looking presentation to communicate effectively.
- Database software – to store, convert and retrieve data about products, processes, customers and staff

Increasingly, these skills are being required and taught in both Further and Higher Education, although not as often in the very place where they might usefully be taught, which is in school. However, since the functional adult illiteracy rate in the UK is around 25%, (actually 24.7%, according to the UN survey carried out in 2000) perhaps it is asking too much of schools to be able to embrace new technology as well as traditional skills.

Stop and Think

Are there technological processes in your organisation about which you know too little to be able to operate them? How could you find out how to acquire a working knowledge of such technology?

3.10 E-mail use

Conventional training skills have not traditionally included using email properly, which is one of today's most important methods of communication in the work place. So, here is a recently created guide to email use with some tips about what to do and what not to do.

Notes for Internet writing

Cyberwriting – a term often used for emails and websites – a cross between a phone conversation and a letter

It has its own language shorthand – e.g. LOL (Laughing Out Loud). Some terms and signs include:-

importance

emphasis

SHOUTING

But…is this style really appropriate for the target audience?

Never write or send anything you would not be happy to see in a newspaper; lack of security means there is no hope of confidentiality.

Do not write/send anything abusive, threatening or harrowing – the laws about conventional libel, slander and so on all apply to electronic communications as well.

Be careful about humour – without your face/voice to back it up it can be misinterpreted. One person's joke is often another person's insult, especially in this day and age.

Remember also that laws on copyright, defamation, discrimination and libel apply to the internet.

Keep everything brief.

Page layouts should be:-

- Short paragraphs
- Lines less than 75 characters
- Messages/texts less than 25 lines
- Plain text
- Replace gestures and intonations – e.g. smileys, asterisks etc
- Use plenty of white space & creative punctuation

Be aware of what cues readers will use to form an impression of you – e.g. Grammar, punctuation, spelling, layout, formality, domain name etc all really matter despite the informality of the message system.

Above all, never send an email unless you are happy that it will not cause offence. Many do and are not stopped at source. There is no post room where an unwisely worded letter can be recalled and amended by the writer before it is committed to the postal service. The old adage of sleeping on a problem is very apt for emails – we have all sent emails which have rebounded on us and then regretted it afterwards, once it is too late to repair the damage. For most email usage, simply develop the habit of re-reading before sending.

The main aspect of technology which we need to cope with is that it is changing many accepted norms and practices. So, our last chapter will be on Change Management – a much discussed but often elusive skill – in the hope that it will point the way to some future considerations.

In summary, it can be seen that technology can have a major impact on the ways in which we live our working lives and upon aspects of management such as job satisfaction. While use of new technology may advance job skills, experiences will also be profoundly affected by the social interactivity enabled by technology and also by the intensity of work. Technical change and the way technology is being used is a major feature of the increasingly intense modern work patterns.

3.11 The Network Society

The basis of the network society consists of:-

- Information is the new raw material. Technologies act on information rather than the other way around
- Pervasiveness of the effects of new technology. Most processes of our individual and collective existence are directly shaped by new technology.
- Networking logic. Using new ICTs the network can be implemented in all kinds of processes and organisations.
- Flexible IT. This mainly affects the configuration of organisations through IT. For instance, overseas subsidiaries and global partners can be contacted and communicated with much more easily and quickly than before. This can be a liberating process but it can also be repressive. Sometimes only a personal visit is still the only way to really establish what is happening in these overseas areas.
- Converging technologies into an integrated system. Old, separate technologies become indistinguishable so most technologies are now being integrated into information systems.

Remote working

Justifying e-operations

Some recent developments including e-learning and e-communications, have started to revolutionise the way in which many organisations work. While there are – and will probably continue to be – a number of Luddites who resist attempts to integrate them into the Network society, there are a number of compelling reasons to join in. These include:-

- Developing a global workforce. Similar messages can be sent to all employees within a few seconds, reducing the probability of misinterpretation and speeding up sometimes complex communications. American Express is one example of an organisation which has put this new technology to very effective use over the past decade and is continuing to do so.
- Responding to shorter product development cycles. Manufacturing cycles continue to shrink and this places even more pressure on competitors. It is now standard practice to replace a car every four-five years rather than to leave a model in production for nearly ten years as used to happen only a decade or so ago. Only global design and communications technology can ensure that this happens, as the Japanese and Korean manufacturers are continually proving
- Managing flat organisations. Leaner, flatter organisations often require faster communications to keep everyone up to date. Modern ICT, including e-learning and search engine abilities can develop foundation skills, provide just-in-time solutions and access to globally distributed centres of expertise, hone more advance skills, assist in coaching and mentoring and reach instantly accessible knowledge management systems.

- Adjusting to employees' needs. New working arrangements are often only possible through using ICT to the full. Teleworking, virtual offices and flexitible contracts are now the norm rather than the exception and, although there is a school of thought which believes that these developments have materially hampered efficient working, the prevailing opinion is that, if properly managed, this kind of work can be just as competitive as the more traditional kinds. Neither case is yet proven but, as employees demand more flexibility in working time and conditions and as the flood of part-time workers expands yet further, it is likely that this pattern will either increase or remain at least static for some time to come.
- Enabling a contingent workforce. Employees such as temporary workers, consultants and self-employed contractors has grown substantially in recent years. Web-based communications provide am affordable and effective way of keeping in touch with and informing and developing these people
- Retaining valuable workers. Access to distance learning qualifications is now becoming widespread and flexible technology enables an improving work-life balance
- Increasing productivity and profitability. Acquisition of skills by employees represents an organisation's ability to compete in a cut-throat global market place. Using modern technology, employees can deal with complex tasks more quickly and effectively, faster and with fewer errors.

Strategic reasons for adopting e-communications and e-learning are more likely to carry weight if they assist other business goals. But tactical reasons are sometimes easier to understand, especially by more junior managers. Here are seven of the more obvious:-

1. Reducing travel and related costs (e.g. accommodation)
2. Enabling learning and communication at any time and any place. (sometimes called asynchronous e-communication, as in the use of discussion boards)
3. Providing just-in-time information
4. Leveraging the existing infrastructure. (E-learning in particular can make better and extended use of existing technology if an organisation has already invested in such tools as a corporate intranet, dial-in access and PCs for staff.
5. Enabling delivery (of communications) independent of a platform. Mot communications programmes that an organisation would use are accessible from Macs, PCs and many other systems.
6. Providing tools for tracking and record keeping.
7. Making updates of information easier. Modern systems do not need CD-ROMs, printed manuals or updated videos.

3.12 Tele-working

Tele-working allows employees to spend an agreed part of their time at a location remote from the office. There are four main categories:-

1. Traditional mobile workers – such as sales reps and delivery drivers
2. Managers and others who spend an agreed two/three days a week at home in contact with the office by computers
3. Specialists and support staff who carry out a range of duties from home or other remote locations. IT workers are often in this category
4. Telecottagers who operate from local centres with computer linkages and telecommunications links

Clearly, there are advantages for both parties here. Office space and equipment can be saved by the organisation while the employee can, for example look after dependents more easily from home. Productivity can be improved because office politics are unlikely to creep into the home – although gossip often will. Time and money spent commuting is reduced greatly – and health can often benefit as a result. Consequently, absenteeism and staff turnover can also be reduced.

However, there are also some disadvantages. Performance can be difficult to manage remotely. Providing suitable technology can be expensive for the organisation. Some employees may feel socially isolated – but that is their choice. Career development and training may also suffer and there can be health and safety issues with working at home. Organisation's insurance policies may not cover employees working from their own homes and there are a few other factors which are worth considering:-

- Changes to a contract of employment may have to be agreed.
- Employees must be self-motivated, determined, self-disciplined and capable of working with little or no supervision.
- Employees' homes (and atmosphere) must be suitable for working
- Health and safety issues might have to be considered.
- Any property used by the employee but owned by the organisation must be secure, safe and insured.
- Any computer work must be authorised with a reliable password or other code system to prevent misuse.
- Any restrictions to working times must be agreed in advance.
- The organisation may wish to consider giving the employee a contribution to lighting and heating costs – although this is rare in the UK at the time of writing
- The employee may have to inform the landlord (in a rented property) insurance companies, mortgage lenders, the local authority and the Inland Revenue and some costs may rise as a result of this.
- Arrangements may have to be made for effective management, target setting and meeting, regular contact, appraisals and access to training.

So, overall, there are undoubted benefits but also some potential pitfalls.

4 Change Management

4.1 Introduction

If there is one thing upon which a manager can depend, it is that change will happen frequently and, often, unexpectedly. The one constant in most managers' lives is that, when arriving at the office in the morning, something will have changed since they left it the previous evening. The change might be subtle and, at first, hard to perceive or define or it might be radical (an unexpected takeover, for example) and something that requires immediate action.

There has been much managerial and academic energy expended upon change, especially in the last 15 years. Hughes (2006) believes that change management as a practice, only really began around 1990 so most of the literature and wisdom is pretty much contemporary.

One issue which always needs to be resolved is that of responsibility for change. The manager arriving at the office will not always be part of the change design team; if so, it can be an uncomfortable process to undergo. One can design change, champion it, communicate it, ignore it or resist it but one has to cope with it somehow. Much of the conventional wisdom about change, for instance, believes that resistance is wrong, whereas, in fact, it can be both beneficial and constructive as Waddell and others have shown.

We will briefly examine some of the more accepted schools of thought concerning change management, identify the key change models and question whether we can ever influence change if we did not think of it first.

Chapter Contents:-

- Change Models – especially Lewin
- Resisting change
- Forecasting resistance and working with it

4.2 Change models

The grand old man of change management is Kurt Lewin, who was proposing models to meet apparent difficulties half a century ago. As with many other thinkers, his views have not been challenged seriously since and his model of change is still seen by many to be fundamental to many change processes, whether deliberately or otherwise.

Perhaps Lewin's continuing popularity has something to do with the analogies he drew for the change process. His abiding image is that grappling with change is similar to coping with an iceberg in which an organisation has been solidly frozen.

His parallel is interesting, An organisation, according to Lewin, closely resembles an iceberg; all the component parts are in there somewhere but are impossible to re-arrange because thy are frozen solidly deep in the ice. In order to get at the different parts, therefore, it is necessary to melt the iceberg. This being a managerial analogy, however, the concept of melting was, perhaps, seen as being a bit too humdrum so Lewin changed it to "unfreezing".

So, the iceberg is unfrozen, the parts are re-arranged until they seem to be in the new, best order and then, to allow the organisation to function again, the ice is refrozen. Like so many good managerial models, Lewin's benefits from simplicity. There is little that can go wrong with this, except perhaps that the iceberg takes a very long time to unfreeze or that the component parts are not always apparent once it has been unfrozen. Lewin has a way out of these slight difficulties; if the iceberg refuses to melt, a catalyst is needed, of which more later. If the change managers have not yet worked out how to re-arrange the components, then the unfreezing is put off until they have.

The catalyst issue creates the first, real difficulty with Lewin. Catalysts, by definition, are not easy to control; they tend to happen when people, especially managers, least expect them. So this catalyst may not be very pleasant. It must act in a way which will shock an organisation out of its comfort zone, out of its stability and out of its complacency. Consequently it is often a highly negative event – a rapidly falling set of sales figures, for example or a looming financial disaster, even a credible threat to the future of the organisation. These are not pleasant issues or issues which are easy to fake.

Some change managers, therefore, must be alert for signs of a catalyst such as these and be able to use them to leverage change in the organisation. But, if the catalyst does not arise of its own volition, what then? Then, according to not only Lewin but many more change writers, the catalyst might have to be deliberately provoked.

This might sound rather Machiavellian but it does have a few good precedents. The argument goes that, unless the status quo is materially threatened, most people will do a good deal to avoid having to change too much. The problem with change is that it is nearly always uncomfortable for some.

Stop and Think

Just think back to the last time you moved house; what was it like? It probably involved a good deal of short term upheaval, upset, unfamiliarity and perhaps even distress. But there was a positive outcome, was there not? A move to a better house, in a nicer area or with more accommodation?

That is a key principle of change, that some pain may have to be undergone in order to achieve a better outcome.

Putting it into practice – the Russian Revolution of 1917.

It would be unfair to a real live organisation to single it out for notoriety by depicting, deconstructing and mercilessly analysing every last aspect of its change programme. Almost every organisation which has ever changed has made errors of judgment somewhere along the line and it would be invidious to broadcast them for ridicule here. So, let us take an example from modern history which also happens to almost perfectly illustrate the principle.

In the First World War, the position of the Romanov Empire in Russia was particularly precarious. Still hidebound by centuries of tradition, it had barely passed beyond the Middle Ages compared to its more modern Western European neighbours. Serfdom, extinct in most of Europe since the Renaissance, had only been abolished in living memory – as recently as 1860. The economy was predominantly agrarian, the inhabitants predominantly peasant and the culture one of stoical acceptance of a traditional, if not always comfortable lifestyle.

There were many factors which contributed to this acceptance; a firm conviction that the Imperial Family was the natural head of state, a deeply felt, orthodox Christianity, poor communications which hampered any attempt at organising resistance and, above all, an apathy which meant that, unless life became intolerably worse, the current status quo was probably going to be retained.

Against this unpromising background arose one of the political giants of the twentieth century – Lenin. He had been snapping a the heels of the Russian ruling class system for at least 15 years by 1917 but conditions had never really been favourable for major change. There had been a minor revolution in 1905 but the Tsar, not quite as dim as some historians have made out, granted a limited number of reforms and was able to stave off further agitation by the promise of more reform in due course – what he meant by this, in other words, was probably that more reform could occur after his reign.

Lenin was largely impotent against this massive inertia. By and large, Russian people had enough to eat and (more importantly) drink and that was, in many cases, the limit of their worldly ambition. Lenin himself was exiled in Switzerland, not even in a position to deeply affect thinking in his home country. What Lenin badly needed was a catalyst.

The First World War provided such a catalyst, although even Lenin might have baulked at having to cause such a conflict to achieve his ends. Allied with Britain and France, Russia committed vast numbers of troops to its own Western front, fighting a combination of German and Austrian forces. But numbers was the only chief advantage held by the Russian army. It was poorly equipped and even more poorly led. Contemporary accounts describe how there were not enough rifles for all the infantry so that, those in the second rank had to wait for a soldier in the first rank to be killed or badly wounded to equip himself with a rifle. Even then, there was insufficient ammunition and much fighting was still being done on horseback using cavalry sabers, as in the Napoleonic wars of a century earlier.

Against this was a highly efficient, well equipped and well-officered German army, run on Prussian lines. It had the latest deadly Maxim machine guns, it had order and discipline and it had proper clothing and equipment. In the bitter Russian winter, some of the frontline Imperial troops did not even have adequate greatcoats to keep out the cold. The outcome was never really in doubt. After over two years of largely fruitless efforts, the Russian army was on the brink of collapse.

Underfed, ill-equipped and badly led (many of the higher ranking officers were drawn from the Imperial family or its nearest scions) the Russians were no match for the German and Austrian troops. Late in 1916, Russian losses, probably impossible ever to verify, were believed to be at least four million men and, possibly, as high as seven million. Crops were being left to rot, (most of the troops were conscripts who, in their normal lives were farm labourers) many people were starving, no new territory had been acquired – indeed some had been lost – and there was serious civil unrest even in the far–off cities of Moscow and St Petersburg.

This background provided Lenin with his catalyst. Even the stoical Russian peasant belief in the sanctity of the Tsar had, in their eyes, been shaken by the deaths of so many men in such a fruitless cause. Such protests as there had been in the centre of St Petersburg had been brutally suppressed by the Cossack cavalry who were acting on the orders of the Cheka, the Imperial secret police. If only Lenin could reach Moscow or St Petersburg he thought he could effect revolution. Germany, hard pressed on the Western front and keen to negate one of the major theatres of the war in its favour, sued for peace – but with Lenin rather than the Tsar.

Lenin agreed to cease hostilities if he could be transported to Russia and given a free hand to prosecute his revolution. Germany sent him by a sealed train “like a bacillus” from Switzerland to Russia. The train was sealed because the fear of Lenin’s brand of Bolshevik Communism was equally strong in Germany and the Kaiser had no wish to share the impending fate of his cousin, Tsar Nicholas II. Once in Russia, Lenin was able to seize power, declare peace with Germany and transform the nation into the world’s first Communist state.

The point behind this is that Lenin needed a catalyst to shake the Russian people out of their apathy – and the War provided possibly the best catalyst for change in recent history. Without the War his job would have been much harder and, possibly impossible. Although historians disagree on some aspects of the Russian Revolution, this is one aspect on which most agree; the First World War with its human and political disasters, was absolutely necessary if Lenin was to change Russian society – political, economic and military – for ever.

So in politics, as in organisations, which are, in the final analysis, largely a microcosm of politics. Heaven forbid that an organisation could find itself in a state even half as bad as that of Imperial Russia in 1916, but some organisations find themselves in very difficult circumstances from time to time and, when they do, change usually occurs, although not always soon enough or radically enough to save the organisation.

4.3 Resistance to change

Resistance is often regarded as the villain of the piece in change management. "How could anyone be so disruptive and self-centred?" is the usual question posed. In truth, however, resistance is not always negative; it can have a beneficial effect and it can serve to clarify thoughts and issues which have become murky in the muddied waters of the change process.

Resistance occurs because change inevitably creates uncertainties among many involved in the change process. This uncertainty can often directly affect aspects of life which nobody wants to lose – job security, seniority, the chances of advancement, the criteria used to assess success, even a safe pension. Consequently, and unsurprisingly, resistance surfaces whenever a change is proposed about which employees or other stakeholders are suspicious.

The pattern is often similar in that there are a few common ways in which change is resisted. Typically, change is proposed by some elements of management, with or without the assent of their peers. Communication of change is often poor and a dismayed workforce reacts – or overreacts – with horror and despair over what they often see as being a treasonable act against their employed security and personal safety. This can be described in a few common factors which, seen from an unwilling employee's view are often:-

1. There will be economic disadvantages to my job – I either won't earn as much as I did before or the possibility of earning overtime or bonus will be materially reduced. Therefore I will be less well off – and I have a mortgage/rent to service.
2. I may not be able to cope with the new demands which my employer will make of me. This is particularly common among people who have seen a proportion of their jobs computerised; many people would still prefer not to work with computers which they regard with suspicion and, sometimes hatred. Although there may be an age profile issue here as well (many people in their fifties, for example, are resistant to changing to a computer system because they fear that they may not be able to cope with it) it is also a product of a more rigid and less flexible (and, in comes cases, a less well educated) workforce than would ideally be the case.
3. This is an inconvenience that I could well do without. Even if I realise the value of the change process (a dubious event in itself) I will be seriously inconvenienced by these new proposals and, anyway, nobody asked my opinion of the new ideas. Do I not have a right to input into the future of my own job?

4. This is only changing because he/she wants it to change. There is no intrinsic merit in this change, it is simply someone's else's ambition.
5. If this change goes through I will lose (money, status, comfort, security etc). Therefore I will try to stop it.

Stop and Think

Have you ever been involved against your will in a change at work? What did it feel like? How was it communicated to you? How did you respond?

If resistance is seen as the only way to bring about a halt to the change process, or is seen to be a way of influencing the change so that it impacts upon an employee to a lesser extent than might have been the case, then there are several ways of trying to resist change; here are some of the more commonly used:-

- Divert resources away from the change focus. So, if a good deal of capital is spent on a project which has long been agreed, it will leave less – and possibly insufficient – cash for the change process.
- Exploit inertia. This a very common method in the public sector and in the civil service particularly. There is always a good reason to put off actually taking the action that the change programme calls for – waiting for a report which has been commissioned, a bye-election or a full election, another public sector body taking the initiative first, an awaited review of operations and so on. This can be spun out for a considerable time until either the originators of the change have passed out of office (if elected) or until other circumstances make it unrealistic or simply until everyone has forgotten all about it.
- Establish – or re-write – the goals so that they are vague and complex. This could mean that only a handful of people in the organisation really understand what is needed and, if they are too busy doing something else. the change will not happen immediately, or in a short time or, even, at all.
- Involve so many representatives or experts that progress becomes bogged down and eventually stops altogether. This is a simple tactic and one which often has the weight of law or good practice behind it. If for example under new European directives, all major decisions have to be shared with a workforce before being adopted, this can be a process which could take a very long time, thus putting off the evil day when something has to actually happen. The longer it is put off, the more likely it is that circumstances will alter and that the originally envisaged change is no longer appropriate.

- Dissipate energy on surveys, special meetings, data collection and anything else which will slow down the rate of change so that it may eventually be abandoned altogether. It is believed in some quarters that this was the prime method used to persuade the Blair government to abandon the Deputy Prime Minister's proposed referenda on regional governance, thereby rendering the whole initiative null and void – but not before it had consumed at least £65m of taxpayers' money. Bureaucracy can usually be trusted to evade, delay or cause the abandonment of change altogether.
- Reduce the change agent's (the change Champion's) credibility, often by spreading rumours, usually unfounded ones. While this descends to a rather unpleasant, personal level of attack on a change programme, it is by no means unknown and can be the source of a successful guerilla tactic. It is not likely that normal relationships with the change agent can be resumed after all the fuss has dies down, however.
- Keep quiet and hope that it all goes away. Surprisingly, it sometimes will, perhaps because other, more vocal opponents have already made their opposition known. There is also some (dubious) merit in being seen not to oppose a certain proposed action. For instance, in one local government body it is a matter of policy that, sometimes all staff are instructed to display NOR – No Obvious Reaction – to an idea put forward either by a councilor or by external consultants. This will probably not be found in the Induction booklet but it happens wholesale nevertheless.

4.4 Overcoming resistance

So, what can a change agent do to overcome such a barrage of opposition? According to Buchanan and Boddy (1992) which is still one of the key benchmarks for change managers, there are eight major actions:-

1. Establish a clear direction and objectives. This might sound simple but, in practice, some change managers are not very sure about what their objectives are; without this clarity, the change programme is very likely to fail.
2. Employ simple, phased programming. Again, too many change managers try to change too much all at once. People need time to get used to the concept of change, never mind the reality. So, a phased introduction of key but smaller changes is often better than trying to change the world all at once Not many people have succeeded in doing that.
3. Adopt a fixer-facilitator-negotiator role. This piece of management jargon comes down to some common sense. Fixing is putting something right, so a change manager first has to identify an aspect of the organisation which is not working very well. That should be quite easy. Then he/she has to suggest solutions (which will clearly involve change) and facilitate the introduction of such solutions, involving as many staff as seems appropriate. Finally, the change manager should be able to negotiate with affected staff on behalf of the new solutions to ensure as far as possible, their full and successful adoption. Then the change has happened.
4. Rely on face to face influence. Many changes will be rejected if contained in a report or other piece of paper or even (especially?) on a computer screen. As with any sales process, the key interaction is that between individuals which often takes place most successfully face to face. So, change managers need to be good salespeople; selling ideas is much harder than selling products.
5. Seek out and respond to resistance. Once confronted openly, resistance will often disappear, at least to all intents and purposes. However, the really hard resistance to combat is that kind which lurks below the surface but does not often emerge in public. So the change manager has to seek it out, bring it out into the open and confront it then. By doing so, it may be possible, to allay fears and to end the resistance. At least its worth a good shot.
6. Exploit a crisis. Rather as Lenin did in 1917. There is even a murky school of thought which is not averse to provoking a crisis in the first place, just to be able to solve it and change the organisation in the process. However, this is not recommended – unless there is no other option and you are confident that you can cover your tracks very well.
7. Co-opt support early by building coalitions. This is key; if the change is to succeed it will usually be necessary to ensure that most of the vocal and influential members of staff support it. Even if there has to be some kind of reward in it for them, it is often worth adopting this route mainly because it is unlikely that the change will be adopted otherwise. The staff involved then also become change champions and will probably try to ensure its successful assimilation.

8. Make efforts to co-opt the meaningful committee, task force or change team which genuinely carries weight with the employees and other key stakeholders. This is an extension of the previous aspect, based on the same principle of aligning allies as early as possible. As with number 7, the key grouping is likely to be the dominant coalition, that is the few people who really run the organisation. If these powerful allies can be persuaded that the successful route to the future lies with this particular change, then most of the other barriers will mysteriously fall.

4.5 Attributes of successful change agents

Consequently it can be seen that change agents – or change champions as they are sometimes known – need a set number of attributes if they are to succeed. Buchanan and Boddy again supply the conventional wisdom, although most other change writers back them up on this. Change agents need:-

- Sensitivity to top management perspectives, market conditions and key personnel; without any one of these, the change may not work.
- The ability to set very clear and attainable goals which might well take a major change process step by step.
- The vision to know when it is worth taking a risk and when it is not. This usually comes with experience rather than from a textbook.

- The ability to build successful teams no matter what the raw material is like. There is an analogy with successful football managers here; very few of them arrive at a club and find exactly the right blend of players; they have to recruit either from within the younger ranks or by transferring in players from other clubs. So it is with change managers.
- Good networking skills – so that they can observe how other organisations have tackled a similar problem, so that they can poach good change staff from elsewhere and so that they can keep a finger on the pulse of the external marketplace.
- Tolerance of uncertainty. Change managers may need to exist for quite some time in a very uncertain environment, never knowing quite who is for or against a change – for it will vary from week to week. Clearly, this is not a place for the fainthearted or those with significant self-doubts.
- Highly effective communication skills. This is an understatement. What is probably needed most often is a persuasiveness bordering on charisma, certainly, an ability to sell difficult solutions to suspicious staff. It is, in American parlance, rather like trying to get turkeys to vote for Christmas.

4.6 Getting commitment to change

Finally, how do we then achieve commitment to change? There are a number of approved ways suggested by the key change writers – Kotter, Lewin, Buchanan & Boddy, Hughes and so on. Drawn from all of these, here are the seven deadly virtues of change management:-

1. People usually support what they help to create – so ensure that as many staff as possible are involved in the change formulation process.
2. Agree the objectives and the strategic agenda by which these objectives will be achieved as widely as possible
3. Define success – what will a successful change process look like? – and fully support all those who are supporting this change programme.
4. Provide incentives – preferably including pay, promotion, enhanced development and training possibilities and increased responsibility, much as Herzberg would suggest
5. Communicate fully not just to all employees but to all stakeholders who could be affected – suppliers, partners, customers and so on
6. Work vigorously with groups and teams to enable them to achieve a shared success. Teams can achieve what individuals cannot and this includes genuine change
7. Ideally, allow time for one change to become embedded before embarking upon the next one; if that is not possible, at least accept that it takes time for change to become accepted and base a timetable on that reality.

Finally, as Churchill would have said, never, ever, ever give up.

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