

*Freerangin' on ----- 'Human-ising People Management'*

**'The human approach to 'people management' gives better results and outcomes in the longer-run ----- ?'**

*Mike Robin*

In one of today's UK national papers, paramedics are being accused of killing people if they go on strike – emotional blackmail is alive and 'well' - ? One paramedic, 'R', working in the UK midlands, states :

*'working conditions are not good, with management exhibiting little respect or trust in staff. It's as if they want 'to get' you, to try to find things thy can 'hit' you with. A month or two back, I was late into work by twenty minutes due to icy road conditions and accident hold-up. Next minute, I found myself sitting in a disciplinary meeting, getting a verbal warning'.*

The quality of mercy, it seems, maybe isn't exactly being strained by modern management 'punitive' approaches, which can at times seem to be more focused on 'hitting' people and 'keeping them down'. Why are paramedics mooting going on strike, for instance? Have their pension arrangements been disadvantaged, as many seem to have been, or have their work arrangements been pressurised, as again many seem to have been, even to the extent of some employees committing suicide - ? Or is it that the 'hit' system of people management is just inherently disrespectful - ? Is any system that seems intent on 'hitting' people and disrespecting them, together with a 'no-trust approach', going to 'deliver the goods' sustainably, over time? (many of the paramedic colleagues of R are apparently seeking to leave. A recent UK report (Feb. '15) indicated that many UK headteachers are seeking to leave due to stress and pressures from 'over' inspections -part of a 'hit, high control' system - ?).

The 'control and exploit' system, as it's been called, of people management, has though, been around for quite awhile. It's not really that long ago that mill owners and mine owners in the UK for instance, had the reputation of working people hard, over long hours with low pay and very poor working conditions, to just mainly their own benefit, they having 'all the power' at the time . The idea of exploiting fellow humans and thereby giving them 'unpleasant' lives would be anathema to many good-hearted, reliable and responsible souls, but plainly some have no problems with such an approach, and particularly maybe when the the main culture thrust is of the 'control and exploit' 'the market decides' variety - ?

And there again, in a culture that appears to focus heavily on 'individual gain', it may not be too much of a surprise if 'fellow feeling' is a noted casualty - ? Would that mean, though, that over time, a less cohesive and a more 'heartless' society could/would be the

result - ? (some latest (Dec. '15) research results suggests though that people aren't 'solely selfish' - ? )

### ***Rights under threat ----- ?***

Due to some with social consciences, and also brave workers themselves fighting for rights, working conditions for people improved over the last hundred years. How many brave and honourable people have put their shoulders to this wheel, and including quite a few fighting for freedom losing their own lives ? And yet in modern times, the clock could be seen to be turning back -? Some employees are having trouble, for instance, in organising themselves protectively i.e. into a union, some are experiencing continuous pressure in the workplace (hence employee suicides - ?), some are apparently experiencing Draconian working conditions (one major retail chain reportedly introduced 'anytime' body searches of staff), some have experienced disadvantaged working conditions (eg. having to re-apply for their own jobs), and there seems to have been an 'undercurrent' move to undermine peoples' security eg, the introduction of zero hours contracts.

The 'control and exploit' approach appears to have risen more into prominence in line with the rise of 'large' – large companies for instance, using their power to 'muscle' people - simple bullying really - ? Some have warned that there could be real danger to democracy, with the longer-term result that a 'Brave New ('power') World' of the Aldous Huxley variety could manifest, with then the so-called 'ordinary' citizens in some sort of 'slave-type' existence, with very little in the way of individual rights - ? ( and human rights has recently(2015) been under threat in the UK). One writer warned recently, for instance, of the dangers of 'sleepwalking' into such an 'autocratic' power situation.

### ***'Resistance is futile ----- ?'***

If people object and/or resist, 'control management' effects, then more 'strong-arm' tactics can deem to be justified. Such 'power management' styles have of course existed over the decades. Besides the inequality of power as depicted in the case of the mill and mine owners, there was then the introduction of the 'production line' , introducing boring and repetitive work processes , the mind-numbing effect of which then tended to render work 'meaningless' (see J.A. C Brown, 'The Psychology of Industry'). Apparently one of the 'innovators' of the production line, Henry Ford, argued it was good for people, facilitating 'high achievement' – sadly not a claim that necessarily seemed to work too well for people in practice (eg, the 'long hours of mind-numbing boring work' syndrome).

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### ***'Trust a fragile plant ----- ?'***

The 'non-trust' 'control' approach to people management has been labelled the 'theory X' style, in which the supposition is that people are inherently lazy, feckless and irresponsible

and therefore need 'the stick' (and/or 'the carrot') to get them to work. The researcher in question (Douglas McGregor) challenged the theory X tenets, arguing that internal natural motivation in a human is a natural state (i.e. to meet natural/normal needs) and if people are exhibiting negative response traits, it could be because of negative workplace factors such as exploitation, boring, repetitive work, lack of human recognition, poor management and so forth.

Does, though, the 'theory X' non-trust treatment really 'work', or do people deep down resent such an approach, a resentment that can be 'overt' - direct resistance, for instance, or 'subvert' - resistance by stealth, such as not putting full energies into work, not putting full 'care' into work, not accepting responsibility in the workplace - ?

How, for instance, does the individual (a 'freeranger' -?) who is internally motivated to do good work (who some like McGregor argue is the natural 'unbarrier-ed' human state), feel about management approaches which make the assumption that she/he has to be bribed or co-erced into making work efforts - ? One traditional section of the British public always traditionally accorded the self-responsibility, self-motivated status were the professional classes, but no longer it seems, with them seemingly receiving as much 'control and exploit' management as any others - ?

*'Minimum wage, so minimum effort is my motto'* is how one person on TV put it, presumably not reacting positively to being valued at 'minimum' level - ? It's perhaps not the most enhancing and/or encouraging to be valued at such a low level ---- ?

### ***'Zero trust ----'***

Why can people no longer be trusted, or is it more a reflection that the 'controlling classes' can't, or for their own reasons, don't want to trust people - ? Systems can presumably be 'self-fuelling' - the more a non-trust policy is pursued, the more a low/non trust culture is likely to emerge - ? Some who don't want to follow the trust route may, for instance, not have sufficient 'inner strength' to be able to trust, and see their charges as something of a threat - ? Others may want to coerce, manipulate and/or exploit people to their own ends, so a 'trust' approach would be an unlikely approach - ? Some work set-ups may well promote a degree of antagonism in the first place - ? (eg. skilled, experienced staff having to 'clock on' (i.e. 'non-trust), whilst junior office staff don't have to clock on (also an example of imbalanced relativities causing problems)).

The other side of the coin, for instance, is the evidence from Denmark, officially the 'happiest' society in the world where people have the highest 'content' rating, and a society which apparently places 'trust' as its most important feature.

Others, as McGregor described -and maybe this is a quite commonly held view? - might hold that people can't be trusted as they are naturally lazy, feckless and irresponsible, so coercion and/or bribery are the relevant tools to use (*the more people are 'untrusted', though, the more they might exhibit negative work attitudes - ?*). McGregor

questioned the validity of such a view as a generalisation, arguing that as people were 'need satisfying' organisms, they should in theory be self inner-motivated and that if they weren't, they might have been negatively conditioned in the workplace by factors such as poor working conditions, style of management, over high work expectations, poor reward.

### ***'Trust, though, is alive and well ----- ?'***

There is further practical evidence which tends (as above) to support McGregor's findings in that, for instance, as before, the factor rated highest in the happiest/most contented world society (Denmark) was trust itself. Research by this author amongst 'effective rural staff managers also found that nearly 90% of them operated in the high-trust mode, which McGregor labelled the 'theory Y' style – an inclusive, high trust, participative approach to managing people that also aimed to facilitate conditions conducive to the full operation of peoples' inner motivation' drives – a type of high-trust 'partnership management' approach. One fruit processing factory owner in the US has done away with manager tiers of staff, trusting the actual workers to run the job themselves – and apparently successfully.

McGregor argued that a low trust, manipulative, controlling approach would engender resistance from people, either overt or subvert, and that in turn would prompt further control/authority measures, which in turn then called forth further resistances and so on, creating the ever-decreasing and tightening 'vicious' circle scenario. The way to avoid such a 'downward spiral', McGregor argued, was to practice the higher trust motivation style of people management known as 'theory Y' style. There is, though, a fairly obvious problem area in adopting a 'trust' management approach if a non-trust regime has been running – trust will be in short supply, and is unlikely to be 'insanantly available' - ? There is also presumably the potential limitation too that some work situations (eg, fast paced production lines) don't necessarily lend themselves too well to high trust relationships, workers having to be more in the 'automaton' mode - :

### ***Anti-trust factors -----***

The further factors that seem to link with the modern adoption of theory X control people management styles could well be the 'no responsibility' position the 'free market' culture brings ('the market decides'), along with a 'set' position that 'big has to be best', the notion that profits have to be 'maximised' and associated with a seeming adoption of 'Darwinism' ('the fittest survive, win'). The idea that human values then become redundant within 'the market decides' culture might well be somewhat alarming at least to some, and maybe especially given in the west the decline of one of the strongest 'value protection' agencies, i.e. organised religion - ?

Have though, some of the current trends and tenets been constructed on shaky foundations - ? The 'free market' would seem to be modelled on 'the perfect market', which needs though a basic condition of 'many buyers and sellers' to operate fully and correctly? Have too some economists' concepts been appropriated in the interests of

commercial life - ? Profit maximisation, for instance, could likely have started life as an economists' model to test various hypotheses, and hence represent an over - simplification, which then causes some limitations and problems in real life - ? One study of smaller rural businesses, for instance, found that multiple key objectives ( sixteen in all) existed for them and that the objective of 'profit maximisation' was the one which most conflicted with the attainment of the rest of them ( *examples*: having a good, long-term contented workforce, achieving environmental objectives, community contribution ).

Managers using their skills and experience, had to identify the current priority objectives for the business and then achieve a working balance of their achievement between them (and hence regular on-going priorities reviews are necessary). 'Profit maximisation' then was too narrowly defined to serve the business adequately as the main objective – the dimension as it were was too singular.

### ***'Single-track roads ----- ?'***

Another presupposition which appears to underscore modern-type 'control' culture tends to be the notion that 'big is best' and hence the advantages of 'economies of scale' tend to receive extensive promotion. 'Small' being somewhat anathemic to larger organisations, such a presupposition tends to translate into an automatic 'larging' process. Maybe too, being a part of 'big' tends to lead to outlooks not over sympathetic or respectful of 'small', then translating to treating people at 'lower' levels ( i.e. 'the small') in automatic superior, and authoritative styles, which by default de-recognise and therefore de-respect people, relegating their status to a too low a level - ?

Does such a 'largist' type of culture also provide a good example of 'over single-dimension-ness', with only economics (in the form of big profits) being the consideration, and therefore lack of amelioration by other factors such as humane and environmental factors - ? Some might well argue, for instance, that such single-dimensioned outlook which then ignores other important areas needed for 'balance', such as social, environmental and individual, for instance, could be a root cause of some of today's limitations and problems - ?

### ***'Greed is good ---- or not - ?'***

As activity 'in their own favour' had become the norm in the 'out-for-self' conditions of the materialistic free market culture, any government control was probably unlikely to happen, and in the event didn't happen, with the result that large organisations did develop , acting then as the 'large predators' in the now 'free-for-all' market 'jungle', and proceeding to organise, using their 'largist' power, conditions for their own benefit.

In terms of effects on people management, there has been reported quite a plethora of 'people control' activities by commercial organisations and government, from high authority management styles ( eg, anytime body searches), to low work security (eg zero

hours contracts, sometimes prohibiting any other work to be undertaken), to paying low, below the 'living wage' level, rates of pay, to discouragement of collective employee protection measures, and to imposition of new work contracts.

Such a 'free market' emphasis on self-gain, allied with the heavy accent on size producing so many large organisations, then by default has presumably diminished the status of the 'small and unpowerful' - the individual, and small firms - as exemplified in the UK by the seemingly plentiful examples of the 'small', being exploited by the large (egs, small business treatment by banks, mis-selling of PPS insurance by banks to individuals, energy firms mis-quoting to individuals). One commentator stated that the UK government should have done more to protect the individual, suspecting it to have had too close a relationship with the business world -----

### ***'Corrupting power ---- ?'***

'Power corrupts' goes the saying, so the trend towards what Fritz Schumacher (of 'Small is Beautiful' renown) called 'giantism' back in the 1970's presumably has had in-built dangers all along and some of the limitations of the 'big is best' philosophy have been experienced by the 'small'. Should government in fact have the role equivalent to the conductor of an orchestra, keeping the 'loud and strong' elements to their position and place, and making way and space for the 'small and delicate', to then produce a result of 'harmonious beauty', a real 'sociological' achievement - ? 'Pie in the sky' some might say, but such harmonies do exist both in effective often possibly/probably smaller business concerns and in smaller national societies, as

exemplified by Denmark, identified as the world's happiest/most contented national society. It may well not be entirely coincidental that the Danes state that they place 'trust', implying respect for people, as their key working attribute, and that concerning their particular pie, the proof has been in the eating - ?

### ***'Defunct values ---- ?'***

Discarding values due to freemarket 'market decides' philosophy is seen by some as responsibility rejection, particularly maybe relevant given the waning (in the west) of traditional upholders of values such as as has been mentioned, organised religion. The concern is then that again particularly with also the embracing of the Darwinian notion of the 'strongest survive/thrive' and its associated non-compassionate trend (some are arguing for, for instance, a 'zero social safety net' position), that human civilisation is reversing and that a large predator 'jungle' situation is then emerging, complete with the 'law of the jungle' rather than any considered, civilised law of man - ?

Others might suggest, for instance, that the rejection of religion as a reaction to its paternalistic base, may have then 'thrown the baby out with the bathwater' by then moving focus away from 'higher' (eg. spiritualism) to 'lower' (eg. materialism) - ? The changes to

modern culture seem to have arrived within a non-questioning type of context , presumably encouraged by the all-encompassing 'entrepreneurial' mantra, even though the modern un-distribution of wealth position would seem to indicate otherwise - ?

### ***'Taking stock ----- ?'***

Maybe it's time to follow Schumacher's advice , to have a 'stop and think', especially about wider and longer consequences, and about man's role , particularly impactful as 'top dog' animal, on 'the scheme of things' - ?

Following, then, the McGregorian approach, the longer-term answer to the current situation would be to change tack from an over self-orientated culture and 'orchestrate' a culture which is more inclusive, more balanced and more capable of meeting a reasonable satisfaction of many/most of its members (and still retaining scope for individual endeavour and achievement -getting the 'individual/social' balance more sorted - ?). Would such a move then automatically bring about a more 'humane' approach to people management due to the inherent 'fair crack of the whip' tenets built into such a culture - ?

This would mean in effect that the top privileged and wealthy section then do not do so well , but the vast majority - the middle and so-called 'lower' classes, do quite a bit better. (interestingly, the Prime Minister of the UK is now (Feb. '15') calling for the same, calling on firms to give employees wage rises). MacGregor again, suggests that the way forward on this is to consciously adopt the Danish-type approach of 'we're all in this together' and apply the theory Y inclusive 'trust' management style, at the same time abandoning the exclusive theory X 'non-trust' approach.

### *Features of the 'theory Y 'people inclusive and friendly' management style -----*

To effect the potentially long-term productive 'theory Y' approach, managers need to;

- recognise their own power needs and be prepared to 'curb/limit' these
- respect employees as valid human beings with their own (rightful) set of needs
- aim to provide meaningful work situations
- be prepared to delegate authority and allow individual responsibility
- be prepared to allow employees their own self-protection
- embrace individual rights and 'the sanctity of the individual'
- involve employees in decision-making
- take employee grievances seriously
- share rewards on a 'fair' basis and a 'seen to be fair' basis

'Good partnerships' tend to last well and be 'long-term productive and viable', and probably the base tenet of such a situation lies within the phrase 'it takes two to tango' - ? The inclusive, 'partnership' approach to managing people is a proven approach which delivers long-term productivity and good levels of overall satisfaction to both employees

and employers (eg, study of 'long-term effective rural employers found that 90%+ used the inclusive, participative people management style. Some successful organisations have gone further, effectively creating 'manager-less' workplaces in which employees collectively organise and decision make on an on-going basis – not a system, though, that's maybe too effective at feeding 'manager power' - ?

Would, though, any such 'new' 'employee inclusive' approach need to go further, calling for a change of heart in terms of people in power, to recognise and respect people and their needs more, and to veer away from temptations to exploit their fellow man (as before, the 'out-for-self' culture may well likely have adversely affected 'fellow feeling' - ?) Such a change of direction – and Denmark would seem to offer a reasonable example on which to base it – would seemingly need to be led by a government which itself recognised the need to be all-encompassing, to take account of the needs of all sections of society, rather than aligning with any one particular section. Such a government would presumably need to play the role of the conductor and have as its key objective, the achievement of 'cultural harmony' - ? Setting such an over-arching objective In fact, may well be a necessary first step - ?

### ***'Humanisation ----- ?'***

How then could a more humane, compassionate and 'broader compass' situation ensue - ? Maybe the 'rough' , in terms of the limitations and problems of the 'small -self view' position, have to be experienced and 'reacted to', before the 'smooth' - will and drive for improvement, can happen - ? Some resistances to the excesses of the 'age of individual excess' do seem to be currently happening – recently (2015) the Governor of the Bank of England, for instance, counselled and reminded that the current economic problems and austerity conditions were a direct result of irresponsible and over self-orientated actions within the financial sector.

No doubt plenty of 'unsung' smaller organisations such as the rural businesses already referred to, practice 'humane and respectful' people management – an approach which is proven in terms of delivering the 'win:win; situation that's quite probably necessary for longer-term and sustainable stability and productivity, a situation which some might argue happens when people feel considered, cared for, and, as one of the motivation theorists, Fred. Herzberg used to say, 'both treated well and used well'. It may, though, take a bit of 'turning around', from, say, a no-trust 'control and exploit' position regarding 'people management' - ? 'Trust' could be likened to a susceptible plant – it needs a fair deal of cultivation to prosper but can be laid waste in an instant - ?

### ***'Wrong running -----?'***

*'It's no good running if on the wrong road', as the saying has it.*



The English clergy seem to agree, with the Church of England Archbishop and the collective Bishops recently issuing a recent 'statement of concern' :

*'Thatcher's market revolution emphasised individualism, consumerism and the importance of the corporate sector to the extent that the paradigm for all relationships became competitive individualism, consumption and the commercial contract, fragmenting social solidarities at many levels.'*

In other words, that could say that things have been arranged to suit one sector of society, that of business, to the detriment then of the rest of society, and particularly to its 'fabric', resulting potentially in a cold, untempered and dis-compassionate 'dog-eat-dog' 'wasteland' culture - ? Maybe those who've had concerns that '*The Brave New World*' is around the corner, have been right to be concerned - ? (such was also one of Robert Pirsig's themes in his renowned *Zen and the Art of Motor-cycle Maintenance* work)

### ***Onwards -----***

With wider-world problems seemingly building up, it may though, be just a little important that some of the base issues are faced and dealt with, that some of the high degree of self-interest of recent times gets damped-down, that the 'bigger' and longer-term view is taken, and that humans find an effective way forward, which could need to be one that delivers 'reasonable needs satisfaction' (as in Denmark) for all, rather than any 'excessive' satisfaction for the few - ? Maybe it would be good to start by setting the production of 'harmony in society' as an over-arching aim, to be followed up by the adoption of theory Y type inclusive, respectful and caring management methods of people, following the example of many smaller and multi-dimensional effective smaller businesses – the 'small' leading the way, demonstrating Schumacher's dictum : *small is beautiful* - ?