

*Management-*

*Think*

*About it*

*Again*



Cyngor Rheolaeth Cymru  
Wales Management Council



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The Wales Management Council is an employer-led body, funded by the Welsh Assembly Government to promote the development of managers in the private, public and voluntary sectors in Wales.

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The Wales Management Council aims to inspire, motivate and drive change in the perception, delivery, take-up and funding of management and leadership development in Wales.

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For more information about the work of the Wales Management Council, please visit our website [www.walesmanagementcouncil.org.uk](http://www.walesmanagementcouncil.org.uk).



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
Welsh Assembly Government

## *Introduction*

Wales Management Council works with partners within and beyond Wales to promote better management performance at all levels in the economy.

As part of that task we encourage managers to consider how they can expand their own capabilities and become better at what they do.

Each month on our website we publish a monthly digest of ideas, comments and suggestions to help managers think about the practical challenges that they face, every day.

This annual collection brings together a selection of these ideas from the last twelve months.

We don't pretend to have all the answers, but we hope these questions promote thinking that is helpful.

If you have any views on any of the issues raised, please let us know. Our contact details are on the opposite page.

Wales Management Council

July 2006

## Vision

**As songwriters Rodgers and Hammerstein reminded us many years ago: “If we don’t have a dream how can we have a dream come true?”**

In your daily endeavours are you clear what your long term goal for the business really is? If you do have that dream how can you ensure you communicate it regularly and effectively to your team?

**Former Soviet leader Michail Gorbachev once said: “If what you have done yesterday still looks big to you, then you have not done much today”.**

Most managers draw strength and encouragement from past achievements. Is it wrong to bask a little in these previous triumphs or does that diminish our drive to keep on delivering for today and tomorrow?

**Legendary Brazilian football star Pele once remarked that a good player always knows where the ball is at any given time, but a great player knows where the ball is going to be.**

Do you know where your products, your markets or your own staff are going to be in six months or a year’s time?

## Strategy

**Lloyd George once said: “Do not be afraid to take a big step when one is indicated. You cannot cross a chasm in two small steps.”**

As a manager would you be able to judge when radical change was needed in your team or organisation? Have you ever backed away from a ‘Big Bang’ approach to change in favour of a more gradual stepping-stone strategy? Did it pay off or did it cause more problems than it solved?

**French 19th century philosopher Emile Chartier once wrote: “There’s nothing more dangerous than an idea, when it’s the only one you have”.**

For many people, big ideas are hard enough to come by and are cherished and nurtured when they do occur. However, as a manager, have you ever been guilty of being too precious about your big idea and batting away alternatives that appear to conflict with your vision? How do you take others’ ‘better’ ideas on board without compromising your position as leader?

**The respected Harvard Business Review noted recently how “strategists” love to use analogies to describe or analyse business scenarios and seldom look for reasons why a particular comparison might not be legitimate.**

Do you tend to base your decisions on a set of handy analogies that simplify your business world? If so when was the last time you stopped to question how accurate these parallels really are??

## Leadership

**According to a recent Harvard Review article, leaders who are almost painfully humble can often be the ones who can catapult a company from merely being good to being great. They are often the possessors of a steely resolve and a fearless disposition.**

In looking to promote people in your organisation have you ever overlooked people who lack the obvious charisma of leadership when in fact they may be able to achieve quietly what their louder colleagues fail to achieve?

**In a recent poll of candidates for the Leading Wales awards, 'inspirational' was the term most frequently associated with good leadership. However in the same poll only one or two respondents felt 'charisma' and 'dynamism' were important attributes for a leader to possess.**

Are these responses contradictory? If charisma and dynamism are not essential, then what are the personal and behavioural qualities a leader needs in order to be 'inspirational' for his or her staff?

**Lord Stevenson, Chairman of finance giants HBOS said that leaders aren't inherently good people and they're certainly not heroic. He argued that most leaders are actually driven by feelings of inadequacy and insecurity.**

Do you as a manager ever stop to question what really motivates you to succeed in the job you do? Is it helpful to know what your drivers are or does it even matter at all, as long as you get the right result for the business?

## Planning

**Scientist and philosopher Leonardo Da Vinci argued that “simplicity is the ultimate sophistication.”**

Isn't this an easy way out for those with a natural aversion to complex management theory, or is it true that simple solutions often provide the answer to the most intricate and intractable problems in the workplace?

**Simon Calkin, Management Editor of the Observer newspaper warns against putting too much faith in annual plans. He says “Business no more obeys 12-month cycles than life does.”**

If your annual plan was going off the rails would you be willing, as Calkin suggests, to tear it up and start again or would you persevere with it because plans are needed to keep things in order?

**Strategic thinking and planning are greatly emphasised in modern management and leadership, but Royal Mail Chairman and ex Wal-Mart Europe CEO, Allan Leighton, reckons success is 70% to do with execution. It's a view strongly endorsed by former IBM Chairman Lou Gerstner.**

Given that you won't want to micro-manage and suffocate your team, what methods do you employ to ensure that your best laid plans are being executed effectively?

## Motivation

A new survey by global professional services firm Towers Perrin found that, in the average British company, only 12% of workers would “go the extra mile” for their bosses and that 23% of them were “actively disengaged” from their jobs.

Do you as a manager command greater commitment than that from your staff? How do you spot disaffection emerging among staff members and prevent your people from becoming disillusioned and ultimately disengaged?

**Different people appreciate different kinds of reward for a job well done. Some crave formal recognition in front of their peers, others prefer time off with their families, while for others only cash bonuses will make an impact and motivate them for the future.**

As a manager do you understand which rewards mean most to which people in your team? Is it realistic to operate a system of tailor-made rewards without causing resentment among others?

**Mike Brearley, the former England cricket captain, turned psychoanalyst, once said that leading a team was a bit like gardening, where some plants need fertilizing while others need pruning.**

Do you know your team well enough to recognise which members need mainly encouragement in order to optimise their performance and which need to be brought into line occasionally in order to keep them focused on the job?

**When Psychologist Martin H Fischer argued that “Knowledge is the process of piling up facts, while wisdom lies in their simplification”, he echoed Leonardo Da Vinci’s famous assertion that “simplicity is the ultimate sophistication.”**

As a manager how much information do you store in your head and how much of it can you simplify and use in your business? Do you sometimes confuse yourself and others with complexity when the wisest route would be to keep it simple?

**e-mail can allow all requests and issues to land directly on the desk of the top person in the organisation. Because it all looks urgent and no one fancies an e-mail backlog, it’s perfectly possible to spend most of the day simply dealing with the contents of your Inbox.**

Do you have a system which puts you in the driving seat when it comes to e-mails or is your daily agenda led by the latest electronic missive to pop up on your screen? How can you dictate when and how to respond without alienating your correspondents?

**The great eighteenth century man of letters, Dr Samuel Johnson, once observed: “What is written without effort is, in general, read without pleasure.”**

Do you ensure your staff appreciate the power of the written word and use it effectively as a tool of their trade, especially in this age of rapid fire communication via e-mail? On the other hand do they simply take it for granted, wasting opportunities through carelessly constructed text that fails to communicate its full meaning?

## Training

**An anonymous sage once pointed out that the Ark was built by amateurs while the Titanic was built by professionals.**

While we all should strive for professionalism in our business affairs, does that mean the opinions of those with the formal qualifications in your team are automatically right? Do you listen to the views of others, who may lack formal training in the field concerned but may nevertheless offer valuable advice and insight?

**A recent survey revealed that, although two thirds of Welsh businesses provide some formal management development, many of these concentrate their investment on fewer than half of the management team.**

Given that your training budget is probably limited, do you regard it as better to invest in the most promising and highest performing managers than to spread the training across all managers on your team?

**Research in Wales shows that smaller firms are the ones least likely to invest in training their managers. Many tend to argue that they have little incentive to do so because they see little real return whenever they do make such an investment.**

Who's fault is this? If you have invested in training for your managers in the past did you set specific objectives beforehand and measure afterwards whether or not those objectives had been met?

## Teamwork

**Three quarters of UK managers and more than eight out of ten staff told a recent Investors in People survey that they had colleagues who didn't pull their weight.**

As a manager do you ever find yourself overloading hard-working staff to avoid being let down by lazy or unreliable members of the team? Could you be risking the loss of your best players and being left with the underperformers?

**Top corporate culture specialist Richard Barrett argues that team building exercises can't work properly unless each member of the team first undergoes what he calls "personal alignment" exercises to bring his or her behaviour into line with their own values and beliefs.**

Do you agree that this is necessary or could it be that the dynamics of team building will prompt individuals in the company to address their own personal inconsistencies anyway?

**According to the latest issue of The Edge, journal of the Institute of Leadership and Management, the impact of a manager's performance is felt most acutely in work units of less than ten people. In these situations the individual team member benefits most from the skills.**

If this is true, have those running small teams in your organisation been equipped with the skills to perform such crucial roles? Do you invest enough in their development or do more senior managers account for the lion's share of training budgets?

## Behaviour

**A recent survey by the Guardian newspaper found that 40% of human resource managers had witnessed drunken members of staff telling their line managers what they thought of them during the office Christmas party.**

Have you made clear to staff in your company or department where you draw the line between high spirits and bad behaviour and are you clear what action you're prepared to take with transgressors?

**Most of us like to think that we'd be completely fair in handling disciplinary issues irrespective of who was in the frame for a misdemeanour or more serious offence.**

However, if you decided to have a crackdown on small-scale dishonesty, are you sure you'd be as tough on your best-performing worker who'd made a personal call overseas or pocketed some company pens, as you would be on one of the weaker members of the team, who is perhaps more dispensable?

**Legendary ballerina Dame Margot Fonteyn once commented that taking one's job seriously was essential but taking oneself seriously was disastrous.**

Is your personal dignity more important to you than good relationships with your team? Are you able to handle humour in the workplace and accept some good natured teasing, or do you keep a stern countenance, concerned that levity could lead to a loss of your authority?

## Self-Awareness

**A recent survey by human resource consultancy DDI Europe found that 95% of British managers were content to have their decisions challenged, compared with only 52% of Germans and 29% of French managers.**

Do you believe the British respondents to the survey were being entirely honest in their answers? How do you feel about having your decisions challenged and, if you are happy about it, how do you ensure this practice doesn't undermine your authority and credibility?

**Business psychologist Jon Stokes warns against the dangerous impact rapid managerial promotion can have on certain individuals' egos – a syndrome he describes as “acquired situational narcissism”. He said “Becoming chief executive, for example, can completely go to your head. When you're in a position of power you can surround yourself with people who never disagree with you.”**

How do you do a reality check to ensure you don't become victim to this syndrome? Have you got someone that you trust to bring you back to earth if you get carried away with your elevated position in the organisation?

**A new Investors in People survey found that less than one in five Welsh workers regarded their boss as being valuable to the organisation and only one third viewed their boss as a good role model.**

How do you know what your staff think of you, and what are you going to do about it?

In a recent article entitled “Creating New Markets Through Service Innovation”, **Management Today** magazine noted how market research led Starbucks coffee houses to install round rather than rectangular tables because these made lone customers feel less lonely, while having their drink.

Must innovations be complicated or radical, or should you instead be looking for simple and subtle improvements like the round-table solution that could transform the way customers experience your service?

**Business author Jay Conrad Levinson argues that “Marketing is not an event but a process. It has a beginning, a middle but never an end, because it’s a process. You improve it, perfect it, change it, even pause it but you never stop it completely”.**

Do you agree that your marketing should be a never-ending process, a fire to which you keep adding fuel or should it be a specific plan with a finite life, which is implemented, evaluated and drawn to a close before a new strategy is devised?

**American business author Jim Rohn maintained that “effective communication is 20% what you know and 80% how you feel about what they know.”**

How confident are you that the way your business communicates gives people a genuine feeling for what you have to offer, rather than simply a factual knowledge of your product or service?

## Opportunities

It's estimated that after just three opening moves by a chess player more than nine million positions become possible on the board.

How do you, as a manager, ensure that you evaluate all of the options open to you before making important strategic decisions?

According to a recent issue of the Harvard Business Review, the opportunities available to businesses are deeply influenced by six key factors which vary in importance at different times and in different circumstances. These are – demographics, technology, social conventions, government intentions, labour and global events.

Would you know which of these factors is influencing your markets most at present, or are you confident that you're getting the briefing needed on such issues to enable you to move early and grasp an emerging opportunity?

Marketing strategists Al Ries and Jack Trout maintain that businesses should aim for market leadership, even if that means creating “a new category in which you can be first”. This is endorsed by business authors Michael Treacy & Fred Wiersema who caution against dabbling in several markets rather than picking one in which to dominate.

In your marketing strategy are you just one of a number of providers with a similar offering or have you identified a market in which you are or can become number one?

## Culture

**Richard Branson argues that a company's first priority should be its own staff, as a well-motivated staff will ensure customer satisfaction and ultimately shareholder contentment.**

Do you agree with this order of priority? Could such a view potentially conflict with the philosophy that the 'customer is king'?

**In a new survey from Human Resources magazine and flexible working specialists Flexexecutive, only 31% of the sample agreed that their senior managers were good role models for work-life balance.**

As a manager what attitude towards work-life balance does your pattern of activity project to your staff? Do you believe that by working long hours and sacrificing family life you are motivating your staff or could you be causing them to despair?

**A survey by recruitment experts Reed found that more than half of British workers take less than their full holiday entitlement, with many fearing that time away from the office will damage their position in the company.**

As a manager you're probably stressed by the fact that you've got extra gaps to fill during this holiday season. Do you betray your feelings or do you make a conscious effort to ensure your staff don't feel guilty about taking a couple of weeks break?

## People

**According to a recent Office Angels poll one third of workers have considered leaving their jobs because of colleagues' irritating habits**

You may know how you as a manager get on with each member of your staff but how much do you know about their relationships with each other? How can you gain an insight into this and how can you diffuse any simmering problems without exacerbating them and disrupting the team?

**A new survey of the UK's middle managers by Management Today magazine found that only one in twelve of them expected to be in the same job in five years time and only one in four even expected to be working for the same organisation as they are today.**

Perhaps such large-scale turnover is inevitable among an upwardly mobile and ambitious section of the workforce. However what is your strategy for ensuring that the middle managers who do stay are those of greatest value to your business?

**Leigh Clifford, Chief Executive of international mining conglomerate Rio Tinto remarked recently that senior managers shouldn't be afraid to give younger people the chance to 'have a go', but they should accept that they will make mistakes and be ready to support them.**

How good are you at letting more junior staff undertake new challenges that stretch their abilities, in order to grow in experience and confidence? How do you manage the risks involved, given that there will inevitably be some foul ups along the way?

## Negatives

**Andy Grove, former chief executive of microchip giants Intel, highlighted the important role of an 'enemy' in keeping everyone in the company on their toes. He summed this up in the title of his autobiography: "Only the Paranoid Survive".**

Is he overstating the case? Do you need to focus your staff's minds on an 'enemy' in order to achieve your best performance? Does the 'enemy' need to be a competitor or can it be something less tangible such as 'carelessness' or 'waste' in your own organisation?

**According to Keith Grint, reader in organisational behaviour at Oxford University, the most important people in the company are the "constructive dissenters" who are prepared to tell leaders when they are wrong.**

How do you view the "no-men" in your organisation? Do you find yourself drawn into wasteful conflict with them or do you harness their energy and insight where appropriate to improve your management performance?

**Moaners on the staff are a problem for 82% of employers and in nine out of ten cases it's the line manager who has to bear the brunt of persistent complaints according to a new Personnel Today survey. However the same survey indicates that most company bosses lack confidence in these line managers to deal effectively with the situation.**

Are you confident that you or your line managers can deal effectively with moaners and turn their negative influence to something more positive?

## Technology

**According to the latest Harvard Review:**  
“Technology in the new century will most likely become the domain of managers and leaders rather than entrepreneurs, and their ability to harness its power and capitalise on the latent opportunity of the Internet will set them apart from their peers.”

Have you been guilty of just using computers and the Internet to perform basic tasks and failing to explore what else these can do to make you a more effective manager? Are you allowing your more IT literate staff and “geeks” in competitor companies to steal a march on you?

**According to the American Management Association,** three quarters of large companies monitor employee email and more than half retain and review their staff's computer files.

How do you feel about checking up on your staff in this way? If you do monitor staff communications, is it better to be discreet in order to catch people abusing the system or warn them upfront in the hope of discouraging such practices in the first place?

**According to international computer software specialists Symantec,** there are 5.7 million “phishing” emails sent every day worldwide designed to capture financial information with which to commit fraud.

How well briefed are you on the threat to your business from Internet scams and are you confident your company policies and procedures will prevent you becoming a victim of e-crime, whether from internal or external sources?

## *Doing it*

**Those who can juggle several tasks simultaneously are often praised for their versatility, particularly in the modern work environment where fresh demands are emerging every few minutes via our information and communications technology. However Michigan University psychologist David Meyer warns that those who switch back and forth between tasks take 50% more time to do them than if they focused on one at a time.**

As a manager how do you cope with the multiplicity of tasks required of you in the course of a day? Is it possible that you have lost the ability to focus and have fallen victim to what some experts now term “information fatigue”?

**Jonathan Gosling and Henry Mintzberg of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology say management is “neither a profession nor a science but a practice that has to be appreciated through experience, in context”.**

Do you agree with this and if so how can young managers or leaders accelerate their learning pathway towards excellence?

**Networking through clubs, societies and associations is regarded as a great way to win new business, as it helps to get closer to potential costumers and win their trust.**

You'll probably agree with that. But are you also making the most of networking as a learning opportunity and using it systematically to discover how other managers deal with the kind of issues you face in your business?

## Advice

**A new Venture Wales survey has discovered that more than two thirds of Welsh entrepreneurs would rather embark on an enterprise with friends than with family members.**

Do you believe family bonds form the basis of a stable company or can such relationships get in the way of good business? Should your business partner always be chosen for professional reasons only, leaving aside kinship or friendship altogether? Who do you trust to give you the best advice?

**A recent article in the Harvard Business Review stated that unhealthy companies suffer from either too much control from the top or not enough**

Getting the balance of contact just right is one of the huge challenges of management. If things are going badly for the firm do you have people you can trust to give you unbiased advice on whether your hand on the tiller is too heavy or too light?

**The past two decades have seen a mushrooming of management consultancy, which is now a £115m a year global industry. But former consultant and author David Craig claims that 60% of consultancy work is wasted because it is never implemented or was never needed in the first place.**

Do you agree? What would you regard as the circumstances in which calling for help from a consultant is justified? What test would you use to check whether the consultant is really needed or whether you are simply shirking a difficult or unpleasant management job?

## Moving on

Some observers suggest there is an optimum period to spend in any management position and staying beyond that time risks putting you in a comfort zone where you might stagnate.

Do you accept this theory? Is it always necessary to change jobs in order to progress? How long on average have you spent in each post you have held and what, in your opinion, are the signs that it may be time to move on?

Staff turnover can be an expensive business. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development estimates that recruitment costs alone average £4,625 per replacement worker. On top of that there is the disruption caused by the departure of a member of the team and the cost of keeping clients and customers happy while you get a new person up to speed.

Does this mean however that low turnover of personnel is necessarily a good thing? Are those who stay with you for many years actually strengthening the business or are they simply languishing in their comfort zone? How can you tell and what would you do about it if you found they were?

**Jean-Pierre Garnier**, chief executive of pharmaceutical giants **Glaxo-SmithKline**, stated recently that people who have only known success do not make the best leaders.

In picking leaders for your teams do you judge people purely by their achievements or do you make an effort to analyse how individuals reacted when they failed to achieve? Could the nature of that reaction say more about their leadership potential than the specific successes they had attained?