

Management

Think

About

It



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.

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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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

June 2007



Thinking And Planning

**Ancient Chinese military strategist Sun Tzu once said:
“Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory.
Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat.”**

In your approach to management which way do you lean? Do you work hard to lay the groundwork and map out the objectives but hold back from deciding exactly how you're going to put plans into action. Or do you impatiently charge in with lots of actions without spending time on the creation of an overall game-plan? How can you achieve the balance that allows you plan properly without losing your momentum?

According to management guru Peter Drucker: “Thinking is very hard work and management fashions are a substitute for thinking.”

Do you tend to look to the latest management fashion as a rapid route to improvement in your business or do you hammer out your own solutions based on experience and hard thought-out analysis of your own problems?

**The Sloan Management Review from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology contains the following observation:
“Decision-makers have often laboured so long over a decision that they believe it needs no explanation. Those uninvolved in the decision may find it incomprehensible or even threatening.”**

Are you guilty of drifting into a world of your own when making a big decision. Regardless of how wise the decision might be, do you spend time anticipating how others without your knowledge of the situation might view it? Shouldn't every good decision come with a good communications plan?



Talking And Supporting

Legendary US president Theodore Roosevelt commented: “The best executive has the sense enough to pick good men, and the self-restraint enough to keep from meddling.”


Once you have appointed people to do a job how do you judge how much direct involvement you need to have in their work? How can you stand back far enough to empower them to take their own decisions but not so far that you can't rush in if something is starting to go seriously wrong?

In a recent survey of senior managers, HR Consultancy DDI said over half of respondents felt their promotion to their current job was unnecessarily stressful because their employers did not support them in the transition to the new role.

If you promote good people into more senior jobs do you just assume they are talented enough to 'hit the ground running' and simply get on with things? How can you give newly promoted people the confidence to ask for help rather than soldier on and risk mistakes or even burn out?

In the classic book ‘The Unwritten Laws of Business,’ US engineer and author WJ King wrote: “Every manager must know what goes on in his or her domain, but that does not mean keeping up with all minor details. Your involvement should never impede operations.”

What are your techniques for keeping abreast of how your team are getting on with work you have assigned to them? Are you confident you can get the information you need without frustrating, irritating or discouraging them?



A survey by retail trade union USDAW found that 62% of workers who became pregnant felt their boss behaved more negatively towards them as a result, and 25% felt marginalised or ignored.

As a manager are you ever guilty of consciously or unconsciously 'sidelining' a pregnant worker? Do you plan properly to ensure maternity leave works positively for the staff member involved and the business? Have you considered how you might make constructive use of new rules that allow you to keep in touch with employees who are on maternity leave?

Author and dramatist George Bernard Shaw commented: "The greatest problem with communication is the illusion that it has been accomplished."

When conveying a message to your team how do you ensure that what you want to communicate has actually been received and understood? Are you sometimes guilty of assuming that a quick team talk or a hasty round robin email fully achieves your communications objectives?

Medieval Italian courtier Nicolo Machiavelli once wrote: "There is nothing more difficult to arrange and more dangerous to carry through than change. The innovator makes enemies of all who prospered under the old order and only lukewarm support is forthcoming from those who would prosper under the new."

Given that change is inevitable, is it more important for a manager to reassure those who stand to lose or enthuse those who stand to gain? How do you decide which group is more important to your success?



Doing Better

Welsh Assembly Government figures indicate that weak basic skills, such as literacy and numeracy, in the workforce are costing employers around £588m a year. Small firms could be losing an average of £165,000 annually through related problems such as poor stock and quality control, lost orders and poor communication.


Would you know whether or not any of your staff had problems with basic skills? How would you go about assessing such a delicate situation and how would you handle it if you discovered that this was indeed an issue for some employees?

New research from the Chartered Management Institute found that 44% of managers in Wales frequently looked back and wished they'd developed more skills. Furthermore only 47% felt they were fully utilising the skills they'd already acquired.

Do you feel that you personally, or managers in your organisation, are acquiring the right skills and achieving true potential or do you share the lack of fulfillment demonstrated in this survey? How can you make an objective assessment of this and, if you are falling short, how could you start to put it right tomorrow?

According to the Good Boss Report 2005-06 nearly a quarter of managers are rated bad or dreadful by their staff and only 4% of staff would give their boss full marks. However, nearly half of workers say it's not the bosses' fault. In their view, their bosses are either poorly trained or badly managed by their own superiors.

If your performance were to be criticised by those under you, would you know how to put things right? For example would you be able to pinpoint and acknowledge the skill gaps causing the problem and know what training you might need? Alternatively would you be willing or able, if necessary, to address the deficiencies in the way your line manager handles you?



The late South African novelist and literary editor, William Plomer, observed that “creativity is the power to connect the seemingly unconnected.”

Do you believe creativity is important or even essential for management and leadership? Is it simply a gift, or a skill most people can learn? If it's a skill, how can you nurture it in yourself and your team?

Renowned business strategist Peter Drucker once observed that checking the results of a decision against expectations shows executives what their strengths are, where they need to improve and where they lack knowledge and information

As a manager do you genuinely follow through and compare outcomes against original expectations or do you find it more comfortable just to make a post-event assessment on whether the results achieved were acceptable and satisfactory? Is this really helping you to learn and move forward?

Legendary American salesman Jo Girand, who holds the Guinness World Record for selling 13,001 cars from a dealership in Detroit over a seven-year period, said his secret was always to like, or even ‘love,’ the customer.

Some clients and regular customers can be demanding, but do you get into a position where you actually dislike them and simply put on a front in order to retain their business. Won't they see through this eventually and wouldn't it be more sustainable to follow Girand's example and work harder at finding reasons to like them?

Robert Hogan, a former professor of Psychology at the University of Tulsa in Oklahoma, commented that: “Most high achievers have something eating at them. They have an usual combination of steely self-confidence and running scared.”


Does fear of failure play a significant part in your motivation as a manager? Is it something that bothers you or robs you of job satisfaction? Shouldn't you just accept that this driver is common to most managers and perhaps find a way to turn it to your advantage?

A quote in the Director Magazine states that: “People are at their best when they feel good about themselves, so the role of manager is to help people feel good.”

While the feel-good factor is clearly important, how do you as a manager succeed in nurturing your staff's confidence without allowing it to turn into complacency?

Human resource consultancy DDI Europe found in a survey that, for 31% of French company bosses, public recognition of their talents and contribution is the main motivating fact that spurs them to want to succeed in their jobs. By contrast only 2% of British company managers felt public recognition was a key motivator for them.

How well do you understand the drivers that push you to succeed as a manager? Could you use these motivators to give yourself greater focus and enable you to achieve more in your managerial role?



According to business author Jo Owen in ‘Management Laid Bare,’ staff won’t be enthusiastic about a project unless managers display their enthusiasm for it and, if managers can’t find a way to be positive about the task, then they are probably pursuing the wrong course of action.

Do you sometimes lack appetite for particular projects? If so, do you betray this emotion to your team or do you find a way to feel and look enthusiastic in order to motivate your people?

In a survey by the Chartered Institute of Management, six out of ten managers said they believed enjoying work was essential for success. However only six out of a hundred believed their employers shared that view.

To what extent do you make enjoying work a priority in your organisation? If you do regard this as important how do you communicate that view to your managers and staff?

According to the recruitment firm Jobsite, 62% of workers think seriously while on holidays about changing job when they return. Many actually follow through on this.

While this may be a blessing for employers in many cases, firms can lose good staff purely through post-holiday blues. How do you bolster people’s morale in the difficult few days after they return from the beach to the desk?

Two premiership football clubs watched helplessly last summer as star players recovering from injury took big risks playing for England in the World Cup. One was then out of action for six months.

Do you know what physical risks your key staff are taking outside the office? Can you control those risks or how would you cope if you lost a key person suddenly through injury or worse?

A survey by the insurance firm 'More Than Business' found that a large proportion of British workers put their jobs before their health. In fact 44% of them admitted cancelling a doctor's appointment because of job commitments.

As a manager do you directly or indirectly pressurise staff into compromising their health in order to deliver work targets – perhaps by allowing or encouraging them to stay on at work after they've complained of feeling unwell? Have you considered the potentially damaging long-term impact this 'soldiering-on' culture might have on the business?

It's reported that World Cup fever is threatening an upsurge in absenteeism this summer. Lisa Fowlie, president elect of the Institute of Occupational Health and Safety is recommending that employers give staff time off to watch matches, if possible, because it will boost morale and lower workplace stress.

In your workplace would such a move amount to making a virtue of necessity and generate valuable goodwill or would it be seen as a sign of weakness that would open the floodgates for further "sports absences?" If you do allow people time off to watch a match, should you insist they take an entire day's annual leave or would that cause damaging resentment?

According to the Centre for Economic and Business Research, City of London financial workers are set to receive bonuses averaging £23,000 this year. However some of them could get as much as £1 million in additional payments.

Your employees may not be in the big city league, but how do you handle the issue of different merit payments for different people? How can you ensure that staff are totally discreet about the rewards they receive, to avoid damaging jealousies among colleagues? Or should the whole salary and bonus system be open and transparent in any case?

US publisher Malcolm Forbes once said: “It’s unfortunate we can’t buy executives for what they are worth and sell them for what they think they are worth.”

How do you handle a valuable operator on your team whose salary demands have become excessive? Do you give in and risk similar demands from others, offer them a self-funding bonus scheme linked to additional revenue generated or just let them go and hope a cost-effective replacement can be found quickly?



Relationships

Leading business coach Miranda Kennett observed that managers go wrong when they try to curry favour with staff, especially those with whom they were friendly before their promotion to an executive role.


Have you ever struggled to create a new kind of relationship with those who were your peers but are now under your authority? How can you keep a professional distance and maintain both impartiality and credibility without losing the goodwill you need to do your job and perhaps causing offence?

Research by YouGov for management training company, Intuit, found that one in ten small business owners admitted being more passionate about their business than they are about their life's partner.

Do you think this might be an under-estimate and that many more managers suffer from this syndrome? Have you ever slipped into this state of mind? Does such single-minded devotion lead to more or less effective management?

Respected American professor of management Dr Gerald Graham wrote: "Politics will always be part of organisations as long as people are involved, but organisations over-run with politics will sooner or later take their place among the also-rans."

How well do you control office politics in your company? As a manager how do you ensure your decisions are based on the true merits of each case and not on your relationships with individuals who may be jockeying for position and seeking to influence or manipulate you?



In a new publication, business author Nigel Rees highlights the confusion caused by what he describes as "job title enhancement," giving the example of the Safeway shelf-stacker being termed an "ambient replenishment assistant."

Are job titles clear in your team? Do they describe what each person does and clarify levels of seniority and lines of responsibility or do they create a fog of confusion, envy, uncertainty and, in some cases, conflict between colleagues?

Jeremy Bullmore, author of 'Another Bad Day at the Office' warns against the danger posed to the boss' authority by an employee who enjoys great popularity among colleagues but fails to perform at his or her job.


Are you even-handed in dealing with all staff who under-perform or are you more reluctant to confront well-liked individuals for fear that you'll alienate their 'friends' on the staff and destabilize the team? Might this not risk even greater trouble for you if others reprimanded feel that you've applied double standards?

According to a survey by business software specialists, Mamut, more than half of firms with under 20 employees suffer from late payment of invoices and, among small manufacturing firms, the figure rises to 75%.

How robust is your credit control? If you're a small firm, are you lenient with regular customers who are slow payers because you fear the consequences of upsetting them? Have you taken any advice on how to speed up payment while maintaining these relationships?

A survey of 250 firms by the Employment Law Advisory Services revealed that nearly half of managers in small and medium sized companies do not insist on seeing a CV from job candidates and would rather rely on word of mouth recommendations?

Personal recommendations can be very valuable, particularly if they come from a trusted source. However, if you are among the managers who side-step the CV evaluation process, can you be sure you have fully appraised the candidate concerned and that you haven't been lulled into a false sense of security by your friend or associate's general high opinion of the individual. Furthermore, without comparing CVs, can you be sure you haven't missed someone even better qualified, or indeed haven't left yourself open to later claims that you'd been unfair?




Like the Prime Minister many business owners and managers know exactly when they will step down from their current job, through retirement or a strategic decision to move on.

Does it help to signal your intention to sub-ordinates well in advance, to aid an orderly transition or can this cause a period of paralysis when the department or organisation will lack any real authority or long term direction? Should you wait until a successor has been lined up before making any announcements?

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development reports that 85% of organisations have recruitment difficulties. In particular they are struggling to find people with specialist skills or relevant experience. As a result many are having to make compromises in their selections.

If under pressure, would you risk filling a key vacancy with someone who wasn't fully equipped for the job? If so, how would you manage the risk involved and how would you ensure the chosen candidate had the potential to grow into the role?



Business authors Gordon Bell and Heidi Mason wrote in their book *The Care and Nurture of Intrapreneurs*: “Silicon Valley has developed a ‘genius’ business model. You find a genius and build a business around them.”

Is it ever wise to structure a team, department or company around a single individual of exceptional ability, even if this opens up a major business opportunity? If you did this, what steps would you take to guarantee the individual's loyalty, or how would you cope if they decided to leave?

It is estimated that 345,000 people from eastern Europe have settled in the UK since enlargement of the EU three years ago. Many sectors of the economy now employ these newcomers.

As a manager are you fully equipped to handle the cultural, linguistic and practical issues that may well arise as you seek to integrate such workers into your staff? Can you or could you manage their relationship with other members of staff and could you optimize their contribution to the business?



Rules

British Airways caused a storm by suspending a check-in clerk who refused to cover up a silver cross she was wearing around her neck. The company argued that their uniform code excluded the display of any emblems and there could be no exceptions to this rule.

Do you have a policy on which emblems or badges of affiliation your staff can or can't wear to work. If not, how would you handle a situation if someone wore a religious or other symbol that caused tension or conflict with colleagues?

While staff traditionally complain that their workplace is riddled with petty rules and regulations, a survey from online recruitment agency TipTopJob.com found nearly 60% of UK workers actually agreed with the rules imposed by their bosses.

Are you tempted to bend your own rules on occasion in order to keep the peace in your workplace or do you believe that rules are made for the good of everyone and making exceptions only weakens your position and encourages staff to take advantage of you?



Youth And Age

A survey by the Institute of Leadership and Management found that 40% of young people did not get along well with their line manager and 52% felt their manager was not helping them to progress.


How well do you relate to the young people in your organization? Do you regard them as 'rookies' who are there to listen, learn and do as they are told, or do you make a particular effort to understand their perspectives and aspirations?

The Employers Age Forum believes that claims under new age discrimination legislation could cost businesses £193m over the next year, suggesting that some firms will be less diligent than others in observing the letter and the spirit of the new rules.

Given that there are now more 55-64 year olds than 16-24 year olds in the UK population, do you regard the new age rules as a practical step that will ultimately benefit business or as an unnecessary and restrictive piece of political correctness?

With new age discrimination legislation now in force, a survey by the London School of Economics found a majority of 30-50 year olds in the UK workforce regard 'ageism' as more socially acceptable than other forms of prejudice.

Does an underlying ageist culture exist in your workplace? Could it be that "traditional" teasing in the office or on the shopfloor about a colleague's advancing years may in future land your business in trouble with the law? What are your plans to avoid this?



Britain is now ahead of Europe in retaining older workers. If the US trend is matched, one in eight over- 65s will soon be active in the workforce.

Have you considered the implication of this for you? For example will older managers stay on and block the path of new blood? How might you continue using older managers' skills while moving younger people into their jobs?

There was a time when the majority of the workforce would have been white and male. Virtually all would have been able-bodied and a very high proportion aged under 45. Within four years only a fifth of the working population will fit that description, according to Government figures.

If the bulk of the workforce is going to be either female, ethnic, disabled or older aged, are you ready for such a mix. Do your policies and procedures meet the needs of these groups? Are you waiting until you have to change before you make your move, or are you already laying the groundwork for diversity?

The old bar-room maxim is that people can discuss whatever they like as long as it doesn't involve religion or politics.


Should a similar rule apply in the workplace or can the sharing of deeply-held views among colleagues, in an atmosphere of mutual respect, create a more stimulating professional environment. Could you moderate such discussions or are the risks of fall out too high?

A recent survey of over 300 UK senior managers and directors found that 36% accepted swearing as part of the workplace culture.

Is this an issue for you? If you allowed swearing, could you control when, where and with whom it is acceptable? If you banned it altogether could you define it sufficiently to enforce the ban? Is this a minefield best left alone?

“It's not what I say, it's what you hear that matters” said international human resources consultant Stephen Young when describing “micro-inequities,” the many subtle non-verbal signals managers give staff, that can make them feel under-valued or even unwelcome in the company.

To what extent are you aware of your own non-verbal communication. Are you confident you are not inadvertently giving off “negative vibes” that might drive away potential star players?



The current issue of Management Today magazine comes down strongly against business jargon, saying: “The liberal employment of phrases such as ‘on the runway,’ ‘blue sky thinking,’ and ‘heads up,’ suggest that the speakers don’t have an original thought in their heads.”

Is this unduly harsh? Aren’t such terms simply part of a modern dialect which has developed to capture key business concepts? Or are they used to as a lazy substitute for real thinking? Would you be better off if you squeezed them out of your office vocabulary altogether? Ever tried to invent replacement phrases for common clichés?

In a recent survey by corporate rescue and recovery firm, Begbies Traynor, 75% of employees claimed that workplace manners had declined, and 80% of these blamed new technology. Many complained in particular that colleagues ‘fiddled’ with mobile phones and Blackberries instead of paying attention to conversations.

How important are good manners to you in your business dealings? Do your staff understand what you regard as acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and what do you do to ensure they treat each other with respect?



George Bernard Shaw said "The reasonable man tries to adapt himself to the world. The unreasonable man persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable man."

How reasonable a manager are you? Do you focus on making profit by adapting yourself to the status quo of your organisation, your market or the resources and technology available to you? On the other hand do you rebel against the environment in which you find yourself or your business and try to force change that potentially makes things either easier or more profitable?



Strengths And Weaknesses

According to business author Richard Templar in “The Rules of Management,” managers don’t need to be able to do individual team members’ jobs, any more than they need to be able to bite burglars in order to understand what a guard dog does.


Do you waste time trying to learn too much about the roles of individual staff on your team when you should focus more on how to motivate those team members to do the best job possible? How can you judge whether you’ve got enough information about each role in order to stay in control of the team?

A disputed decision by a female assistant football referee recently caused a storm of controversy among those who questioned her suitability to oversee a top level men’s match, given that, as a women, she had never actually experienced playing the game in that environment.

Do you regard it as essential to have done a particular job in order to be able to manage others to do that same job, or should we all be able to learn core management skills and apply them effectively in any one of a number of work environments?

In times of impending change, businesses tend to undertake a SWOT analysis, examining Strengths, Weaknesses Opportunities and Threats. However the findings are often left on the shelf and the process treated as merely an academic exercise.

What do you regard are your company’s most serious weakness? Is it the same weakness you had a year or two years ago? What could you do quickly to lessen the risk it poses to your survival and prosperity and how might you eliminate it in the longer term?



Howard Lester, chairman of mail order giant, Williams-Sonoma, explained in his on-line video contribution to the '50 Lessons' series, that others on his management team were far better in key areas of the company's business than he could ever be. He says he learned to focus strongly on what he did best and found others to major in those areas in which he was weaker.

Do you sometimes fall into the trap of believing you, as the boss, need to be the best all-rounder in the organisation. Do you find it hard to acknowledge that, in certain vital areas of your business members of your staff will be better than you? Do you give them free reign to apply their talent or sub-consciously compete with them?

According to international business author Charles Handy interviewed in Director magazine, firms should seek to give staff more discretion in how they do their jobs and measure outcomes rather than processes.

Would this work in your business? Could you allow such flexibility without generating chaos or could you discriminate and apply such an approach only to those you feel would respond positively?

The EU is clamping down further on the long hours culture with a directive demanding that managers sign official agreements if they are going to work more than 48 hours a week. Against this background experienced international businesswoman and writer, Margaret Hefferan, wrote recently: “long hours are probably the single biggest hallmark of incompetence in a manager.”

Is she right in your case? Are your hours a reflection of a genuinely heavy workload or just a lack of organisation? If you were forced to do your current job in no more than 48-hours a week, how long would you survive in the post?

Author Wayne W Dyer once described procrastination as “the thief of time”.

Which management challenges have you been putting off lately - dealing with an awkward member of staff; making a valuable new contact or axing an unprofitable service, perhaps? Have you considered the impact of these delays on your reputation and your business and or have you explored how to break this damaging habit?

A new survey by SKY TV found that the average worker spends 150 hours a year in meetings, and 89% admit to thinking about things other than work during the proceedings. In fact the average attention span at meetings was found to be only 23 minutes.

Would this information make you reconsider how you structure meetings, to ensure the sessions you organise maximise work focus and minimise daydreaming?