

Leaders and alignment: lessons from Chelsea and Formula 1?

October Monthly Meeting: Wednesday 17 October 2007

REMINDER:

NEW VENUE IN LEEDS

We shall be meeting at The White House, Wetherby Road, Roundhay, Leeds

SEE WEB SITE FOR DETAILS

NEW EARLIER TIME

I'll be in the bar from 6.30 p.m.

The onward march of managerialism.

At the next meeting, I'd like to have a chat about how managerial approaches to achievement, e.g. performance appraisal, performance management, are now being adopted by organisations that have never seen themselves as businesses but as membership organisations, e.g. political parties, churches.

Is this a good thing? I think not.

Come and disagree!

At the September Monthly meeting we had a discussion about the extraordinary performance that leaders are able to bring out from their people in certain situations. The clear levels of almost devotion to Mourinho by the Chelsea players or the intensity of commitment on race weekend in Formula 1 would be two examples.

From a Personal Job Alignment point of view there seemed to be two aspects in play here. The first was that unless you as an individual were aligned with the work (you, your role and the cul-

ture) then there was little, if any, chance of your being part of the team in the first place. The second was the nature of the relationship between the leader and the led. Here was a high degree of connection between what was required for success and tapping into the aspirations and capabilities of their people.

What can we learn from this about our, perhaps more mundane, relationships at work?

This discussion prompted the article on the next page.

Why would anyone turn up for their job if they had won on the lottery?

In the Guardian Work Supplement (22.09.07) there was an article with this heading that started with the apparently obvious observation that many of us winning big on the lottery would have one objective: never work again.

However, "when Camelot polled 100 of its lottery millionaires, the results threw up a few surprises. Of those working before their win, a third chose to go on working, with half on them remaining full time. And of the two thirds who have ceased the daily grind, half admitted to missing work." The article concluded that, "The call to duty is a powerful incentive to stay at work when your living does not depend on it."

I'm not surprised about the results of the poll. But I would offer a different explanation, more related to the value of work in giving us energy and meaning. You may remember the story of Jane and Steve in the February Newsletter, where the reality of a dream of not working turned sour. To quote from that story, It would seem that Jane and Steve had confused work with drudge. That is, work is the means by which we get the 'good things in life'. However, as it turned out, the good things in life were not enough to sustain them. They were not getting the energy they needed from this life of leisure. They both returned to the world of work.

The security of the money—that would be nice—should not be confused with the value we get from work.

Our relationships with others at work: being inspirational

When we think about our internal relationships at work there are two dimensions that we need to consider. There are relationships with colleagues (which were discussed in the April 2007 Newsletter) and hierarchical relationships with our bosses and subordinates. There are, of course, relationships with customers and suppliers too, but it's this hierarchical relationship I want to concentrate on here.

We know from much research that the relationship with one's boss is crucial in whether we enjoy our work and what we get out of it. Indeed it is in this relationship above others that we feel the need to be treated as a person. If this relationship is to be as successful as it can be, what is the nature of the relationship with respect to the job roles of you and your boss? I'm not writing here about just getting on as people. That is to be welcomed but it isn't enough. Unfortunately, getting on as people can get in the way of a proper managerial relationship if it is not coupled with a mutual understanding of the responsibilities of both parties in that relationship.

Another introductory comment – I am writing here about line management relationships, where you and your boss or subordinate have separate roles to fulfil, as opposed to assistant roles, where the assistant's job is to help you do your job, e.g. a staff officer in the Army or a PA to a senior executive.

My contention is that if we are to get the inspirational type of leadership we seek, then we must relate to one another as people. This may seem obvious but what does this mean for the managerial relationship in practice?

Often this relationship is now described in terms of emotional intelligence and I've used the common 6 leadership styles in development encounters to help people see how different styles are needed in different situations. The styles, you'll have come across them before, are characterised by researchers from Hay/McBer as Coercive; Authoritative; Affiliative; Democratic; Pace-setting; Coaching.

However, from the perspective of treating people as persons we are on the look out to avoid this emotional intelligence as being just another form of, more sensitively perhaps, using people instrumentally. "If I relate to you in a democratic mode, then that's most likely to get you where I need you."

So, what do we need to do? It helps to understand the nature of the relationship within which any style might become appropriate. In essence the boss/subordinate relationship needs to be about dialogue: dialogue where you hear me and I hear you.

This raises two further questions. First, what is the relational prerequisite for dialogue? Second, what's the dialogue to be about?

If we are to have dialogue as persons we need to be open to one another as persons. Confucius called this practising 'human open heartedness' (Ren in Chinese.) It is a dialogue that is founded in mutual respect and grounded in dealing with reality. It's about seeing who we are and what our situation really is. This is an essential platform for dialogue, if that dialogue is to be fruitful and fulfilling. That's not to say that it is easy to achieve for most of us. In fact, dealing with reality can be one of the most challenging things to do.

So, I'm all geared up, I'm open and so is my counterpart. What is the dialogue about?

I'm assuming that roles and responsibilities are clear here. I know only too well that this is not always a safe assumption and we may have a look at the moral imperative for clarity about roles and responsibilities on another occasion!

No apology if this sounds a bit spiritual. Alignment can't really be compartmentalised either. Michael Nazir-Ali, a C of E Bishop, wrote that we should accept "the possibility of the other's self-description as a question to us, not as an answer to confirm our theory." The Christian equivalent of Ren is, of course, love.

We are after another form of alignment here (so it helps if Personal Job Alignment is already in place.) We are attempting to achieve agreement about what is to be done (organisations being purposive, let's not forget, and action being what we are after) in such a way that there is alignment between your responsibilities and that of your boss/subordinate. To get this agreement about action (objective setting, in the jargon) requires *dialogue* between you and your boss/subordinate where the focus for the dialogue alternates between

The context from the boss's perspective, i.e. current policies or corporate objectives that set the framework to be met – what he/she has to achieve in their role, and

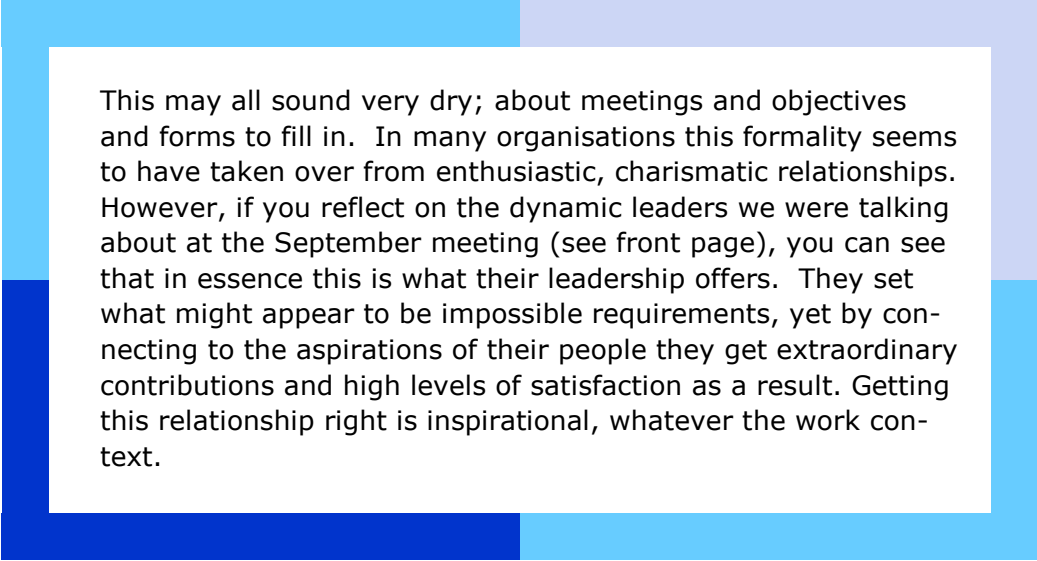
The possible ways in which the subordinate in their role can contribute to that context, i.e. actions or programmes proposed to meet the framework.

Dialogue needs to continue until these two fit together and alignment is reached. To put it another way, there must be discussion about how realistic objectives are within corporate requirements that need to be believable. This applies to all line management relationships no matter how high or low in the hierarchy.

Getting this dialogue right won't solve all problems and it might highlight ones you may wish to avoid, e.g. the corporate requirement to cut costs cannot be achieved without reduction in staff and that's not allowed. It's not that uncommon for managers to know only too well that what they are asking of their subordinates is impossible. But if we are to take up the challenge of having relationships where we treat one another as persons then we need to face up to this challenge.

Of course, you may be a subordinate with a boss lacking in any of these values. Perhaps it's time to review the Seeing The Culture section of Personal Job Alignment.

Thoughts?



This may all sound very dry; about meetings and objectives and forms to fill in. In many organisations this formality seems to have taken over from enthusiastic, charismatic relationships. However, if you reflect on the dynamic leaders we were talking about at the September meeting (see front page), you can see that in essence this is what their leadership offers. They set what might appear to be impossible requirements, yet by connecting to the aspirations of their people they get extraordinary contributions and high levels of satisfaction as a result. Getting this relationship right is inspirational, whatever the work context.

PS, the importance of this relationship was brought home to me yet again recently when discussing a leadership programme with a client. They characterised their managers as not seeing their role to be about managing/relating to their staff but to allocate tasks etc. Not surprisingly, alignment is not high.