



CUTTINGS...

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Compiled and edited by Geof Cox

Future festive greetings along with this December issue of Cuttings.

The past few months have been 'interesting' and somewhat worrying for our futures, and one of the recent reports that has come across my desk mirrors some of the analysis behind the Brexit and US President results by highlighting the lack of trust that exists in business leaders. There are a few remedies suggested - including one that is proven to work - getting out from the ivory tower that is the business leader's abode and talking directly to people. Perhaps our political leaders need to do more of this as well in order to engage properly with their electorates and rebuild trust.

As usual, if you would like a downloadable pdf of this edition, it is published on my website, along with copies of all past editions, click [here](#).

Enjoy the seasonal celebrations, whatever they are for you, and a successful 2017...

Enjoy,

Geof Cox

In this edition

Middle Managers and Trust - a report from the CMI on the low level of trust in leadership.

Managing by Wandering Around - pioneered in Hewlett-Packard, MBWA is especially relevant today

Innovation - the Atlassian way - lessons and ideas from the Australian software company

Plus details of **Public Courses** (including a new date in April), **Book Sales**, and **Snippets** to further provoke your thinking and reflection..

Middle Managers and Trust

The Chartered Management Institute's latest research shows that although the task of creating a trusting environment and workplace culture falls to middle managers, there are many senior leadership teams who fail to recognise this.

Trust is vital to business success but trust in leadership by middle managers is poor. In their survey, CMI found that trust is believed to be critical to organisational performance by 85% of middle managers and 88% of senior leaders. But only 36% of middle managers say they trust their leaders to a great extent, just 53% believe they can trust what their organisation tells them, and only 57% say their immediate boss trusts the leadership team.

Management style and poor communication are key factors affecting trust. Middle managers doubt the integrity of senior leaders, and don't feel that their role is valued or supported.

- Only 37% of middle managers agree that their leadership team is transparent in their decisions and actions
- 41% of middle managers describe the management style in their organisation as bureaucratic and 35% describe it as authoritarian

Snippets

A collection of thought provokers and quotations...

"The greatest problem with communication is the illusion it's taken place."

George Bernard Shaw

"A pat on the back can often motivate more than currency!"

Abhishek Ratna

"To teach is to learn twice."

Joseph Joubert

"Laughter is the sun that drives winter from the human face."

Victor Hugo

"Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is a mystery. And today? Today is a gift. That's why we call it the present."

Babatunde Olatunji

- Less than half (48%) believe that their leadership team makes communication with line managers a priority and only 31% feel very confident in communicating company information
- A mere 9% report that they are always asked for input or feedback on the information with which they are provided, and two out of three report a lack of information from the top of the business

Middle managers want their leaders to show a human face. They want stronger, better communicators and they value openness and honesty the most. They want opportunities to feedback and challenge. There is a powerful desire for openness – the single most important driver of trust – and to understand the motivations and reasons for the actions of their leaders.

The top five behaviours that middle managers want to see their business leaders demonstrate more often are:

- To reveal their thinking about important issues
- To admit their mistakes
- To encourage people to raise issues
- To be inspired about the ambition and strategy of the business
- To act consistently with the company's values

More than half of middle managers said that they had two or fewer meaningful interactions with their business leader over the past 12 months, including over a fifth (21%) who had none at all. And even if they are seen, some leaders do not engage. One respondent to the survey noted, "a senior leader arrived on site, declared himself available for a chat with anyone who wanted to speak and then embarked on a conference call for three hours prior to leaving site." Others have an open door that no-one dares to use.

Being visible and engaging works. Middle managers who say that they see their business leader "often or very often" are much more likely to describe their organisation as "trusting", "empowering" and "innovative". Those who rarely or never see their business leaders are more likely to describe the management style of their organisation as "secretive" or "suspicious." And the latter comment even rings true for some leaders who sit in the same open-plan office!

TOP FIVE PRACTICAL TAKEAWAYS FOR SENIOR LEADERS

1. Prioritise communication

Target peoples' hearts as well as their minds by defining how they too can play a part in the future of the organisation and by making communications personally relevant to the audience.

2. Hold bespoke events for middle managers

Take more time to talk to their middle managers, face to face, in both a formal and informal way with time to make sure two-way debate happens.

3. Utilise the power of MBWA

The importance of MBWA – management by walking around – is still

"A good listener is not only popular everywhere, but after a while he gets to know something."

Wilson Mizner

"It is not the mountain we conquer, but ourselves."

Edmund Hillary

"This time, like all times, is a very good one, if we know what to do with it."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

"Be like the fountain that overflows, not like the cistern that merely contains."

Paulo Coelho

"There is no small act of kindness. Every compassionate act makes large the world."

Mary Anne Radmacher

"The person who has lived the most is not the one who has lived the longest, but the one with the richest experiences."

Jean-Jacques Rousseau

"The morale of an organization is not built from the bottom up; it filters from the top down."

Peter B. Kyne

"Obstacles are those frightful things you see when you take your mind off your goals."

Henry Ford

"If you think you're too small to have an impact, try going to bed with a mosquito in the room."

Anita Roddick

"The place to improve the world is first in one's own heart and head and hands, and then work outward from there."

Robert M. Pirsig

"Forgiveness does not change the past, but it does enlarge the future."

high. For the middle manager, even one meaningful face to face interaction with a senior leader is incredibly valuable.

4. Measure trust

Trust is crucial in business and therefore an important metric. Use staff surveys to measure and monitor the trust in managers at all levels.

5. Utilise communication technologies

Face to face interactions is challenging for leaders in larger companies or those that are geographically dispersed. Using technologies such as focus groups, intranet surveys, video blogs, roadshows and planned communication can overcome some of these challenges.

USEFUL LINKS

[Click here](#) to read the complete report 'The Middle Manager Lifeline' by the Chartered Management Institute and Top Banana.

New Directions offer workshops and consultancy on building better relationships and strategic communication, including high participation events. For more information [Click here](#).

Paul Boese

A friend is a person with whom I may be sincere. Before him I may think aloud."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

"We don't see things as they are, we see things as we are."

Anaïs Nin

"Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow."

Albert Einstein

"Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow has not yet come. We have only today. Let us begin."

Mother Teresa

Managing by Wandering Around

Management by Wandering Around (MBWA) was mentioned in the CMI report from the previous article. It is worthy of a refresher, especially in the context of remote teams.

At its simplest. MBWA is about not sitting behind your desk (or screen) and issuing instructions, it is about getting out to where the real work is done and connecting with your team. William Hewlett and David Packard, founders of Hewlett Packard, famously pioneered this approach and it quickly became a key initiative of the 1980s.

MBWA might imply an aimless meander around the office, getting in the way and interfering. It has sometimes been dubbed Mismanaging by Wandering Aimlessly. It is not as interpreted by the pointy haired boss in Dilbert. Though I do remember one director who got to hear of the idea, and sent a memo to us all in the head office "I am practicing MBWA and I will be wandering on the 6th floor on Tuesday and will meet you in room 14."



Instead, MBWA a deliberate and genuine strategy for engaging with the people and processes. As highlighted in the previous article, it is an activity that builds trust by being approachable and demonstrating that

Innovation - the Atlassian way

Another theme that has been a regular feature of my workshops for some time has been employee engagement. A favourite example from Dan Pink in his book *Drive*, is of the Australian software firm Atlassian who deliver engagement through allowing autonomy. Their practices have also been written about recently in the context of their innovation culture.

ShipIt Days, the autonomy idea championed by Dan Pink is also an innovation generator. Once a quarter all employees get twenty-four hours of total freedom to work on what they want and build something to present to their peers. They used to be called FedEx Days because they delivered new innovations in 24 hours, but Federal Express objected!

During these 24 hour hack-a-thons everyone is invited to drop what they're doing and do something that they want to do. Bugs are fixed, ideas researched, new products built and demonstrated. Just like any innovation process not all projects actually make it to market. But some do, including the JIRA Service Desk, which is now

you are interested. That is, so long as it is not viewed as interfering or micromanaging. You don't want to behave like another director who turned up unannounced at 6.00am at a distribution location and provoked a walk out by asking all the drivers 'what are you doing today'. He discovered that despite his positive intent to engage, his impact was felt differently.

Remote MBWA

If it's difficult to get the right balance in a face to face environment, and it is harder still in remote teams. So how can you practice it when it is not just a case of getting up from behind your desk? As with a face to face team, you need to wander but not interrupt.

The remote environment is more formal, as there is little opportunity to drop by for a chat. So MBWA is even more important - a high touch activity to counteract the high tech nature of a lot of remote interactions.

MBWA works best as a continual stream of one-on-one conversations with employees. Try picking up the phone instead of sending the email. It may take a little longer, but you are making a more personal contact, and there is an opportunity to discuss other things. Is it worth convening a quick conference call? One plant manager in Finland reported that by doing this she not only covered the specific topic that would have been the subject of the email, but found it was an opportunity to discuss and solve other issues that the team were dealing with. She also reported a significant improvement in relationships with her team in a very short space of time.

Plan for a bit of MBWA on your own calendar every day: "The more often you do it, the more beneficial it is." Include everybody. Try to spend roughly the same amount of time - over the long run - with each person who reports to you. If you are in the same location as a team member, make the time for a face-to-face chat when you are there. Ask for suggestions, and recognise good ideas. Use it as an opportunity to give feedback on what's going right and a mini-coaching opportunity to reinforce goals and objectives.

In the remote environment, it is easy to feel isolated and ignored, so it may be necessary to wander more often than in a face to face environment. But be careful of overdoing the contact - as remote contacts tend to be more formal it could be construed as checking up. So check what is a good frequency and when it is a good time for your team members. Some will feel left out if they don't have daily contact, for others this is too much.

Key Points

MBWA is still an effective and practical way to keep up with what's happening and build relationships. This will pay off significantly with the ideas that you'll gather and the trust that you'll build. It's also a great way to keep the company's vision alive. It's easy and economical, and is as vital in the remote working environment as in the office.

USEFUL LINKS

one of Atlassian's biggest selling products. More importantly, everyone has the freedom to contribute and to have the autonomy to do what motivates them most.

Atlassian also use Google's well-known strategy of allowing employees to spend 20% of their time to spend on personal projects. Originating in an idea at 3M where researchers could spend unused budget on their own ideas, which launched products like PostIt™, this also fosters autonomy and delivers more innovation than centralised R&D programmes. Atlassian allows this 20% time to be applied flexibly, so one team, for example, takes a full week out of every five in order to concentrate on meatier projects.

Atlassian 2000 employees are split into small teams, in order to avoid silo working, and they recruit specifically for the ability to collaborate and work in teams. Their experience has identified why some teams are more successful than others which led them to the concept of "team health" and a codified set of principles. These principles, called "plays," allow each team to check their operational effectiveness in a range of areas and take corrective action in a preventative, rather than reactive, way.

Atlassian have now released these "plays" to the public via their website, with instructions on how to use them. They have also exported their ShipIt idea to other companies, and can even provide facilitators to help embed the process for you.

Atlassian's success is built on a culture of innovation and engagement through their ShipIt Days, 20% time and team structure. They allow for high levels of autonomy and the opportunity for people to work on what inspires them.

USEFUL LINKS

[Click here](#) to read an article in

New Directions offer workshops, webinars and consultancy on remote team working and leadership which includes using MBWA. For more information [Click here](#).

Forbes

[Click here](#) to go Atlasssian's Team Playbook

[Click here](#) for information on New Directions offers in this field

Public Courses 2017

New Directions runs a small number of public training programmes in association with partners. 2016 dates are below.

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Kuala Lumpur [3-7 April](#) **NEW DATE**

Kuala Lumpur [24-28 October](#)

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Cuttings

Cuttings is a bi-monthly collection of ideas and comments published elsewhere which have attracted my attention over the past couple of months. It is designed for readers who are interested in individual, organisation and management development and is free. It has been published continuously for more than 20 years by *New Directions*, an international network of consultants and trainers who work together to learn, research, design and provide consulting and training in individual, management, and organisation development.

USEFUL LINKS

[Past issues of Cuttings](#)

[New Directions website](#)

[Getting Results Without Authority](#)

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