

Management challenges - what is in the air?

By Pirjo Vuokko

What kind of management is needed today and tomorrow? This question is present all the time in my job. Our unit TSE exe designs and produces development programmes, e.g. the executive MBA programme for private and public sector organisations, and the participants in our courses are middle to top level managers. When developing these managers and through it their organisations, we have to consider what is needed today and what is needed in the future.

There are, in fact, a lot of different issues in the air. I have selected here five of them, i.e. communication and decision-making skills, tolerance and the power of diversity, innovativeness, future-orientation and visionary skills, as well as self-leadership. Each of these five are analysed below.

The three c's of management are said to be communication, communication - and communication. Furthermore, it is stated that in the future the rhetoric skills will be highly emphasized as the essential features of a manager. Good rhetorics are needed especially in relationships between both internal and external stakeholders. Last year there was in the Harvard Business Review an article titled 'Five messages leaders must manage'. These five messages are the following: organisational chart, its changes and their impact on employees' work; organisational culture and its elements; financial results and the connections between the results and employees' behaviour; the leader's sense of his/her role as an asker of right questions and not as an "answer man"; time not as a threat but as a resource among others; and corporate culture that encourages performance. In addition, the decision-making skills are emphasised more and more. A manager has the power to make decisions but also the responsibility for the decisions made. This responsibility means the ability and motivation to communicate and implement the decisions. A good decision executed quickly beats a brilliant decision implemented slowly.

Secondly, tolerance is important. Richard Florida, the person who has talked a lot about the creative class and its importance to national success, states that the essential conditions for success are our capacity to employ technologies, the importance of and support for highly skilled people, and tolerance. Nowadays, we already face the challenge of tolerance when working in multicultural or virtual teams that might include people with highly different ways of saying and doing things. And, in the future, the challenge for us is, for example, how we accept elderly people or immigrants as our equal colleagues or even as the vitally important resource in our organisations. Diversity can be regarded as a threat or as an opportunity. It is the manager's job to regard it as an opportunity and make his/her own staff

to see it in the same way. The trust between people does not necessarily mean that they are alike each another. It means that they understand each another.

Innovativeness is perhaps the most often mentioned element of a successful organisation. But usually we mean by it in this connection the function of R&D, i.e. innovativeness that helps to create new products, services or ways of producing these. In addition to these, management innovations are important: how to create new ways to organize, lead, coordinate, or motivate. And to combine these two; how to create an organisational climate that supports and nurtures innovativeness, questioning, and ability and motivation to see far from where we are now?

This brings us to the fourth issue: future-orientation and visionary skills. Jack Welsh, former president of General Electric, says in a recent interview that the most difficult feature of and a challenge for a manager is the competence to see the future. This presupposes an ability to listen with highly responsive ears and to smell with a sensitive nose. But it also presupposes that the organisation accepts that there are different scenarios and is ready to make its own future.

Finally, what I wish to present here is the importance of leadership and self-leadership as its one essential element. Knowing yourself helps you to understand others. What do you see in the mirror? In our programmes, for example, we use both peer mentoring and senior mentoring as methods to develop people's leadership skills through developing their self-leadership skills.

In fact, management today or in the future has the same elements. That is so because management is about getting things done. This is the eternal challenge. But the world changes and we face new situations all the time; that brings us to the challenge of flexibility. Are you sensitive toward each individual situation and do you have in your tool kit more than just a tool. A good manager needs a rich tool kit and, in addition, a motivation, ability and opportunity to select and use them all depending on the situation, problem and challenge faced.

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