

Management change: how to become a great leader



BY SARAH BEGG

Discover the difference between good and bad management and some simple strategies to improve your leadership.

You may be intrigued to learn that management style can have a surprisingly large impact on business outcomes. Poor management encourages poor performance – good management can garner outstanding results.

Kevin Dwyer, Founder and Director of Change Factory, has helped a range of companies to implement strategies that will drive desired outcomes. Throughout the last 30 years of his career, Kevin has witnessed a full range of management styles from the most successful through to the completely ineffective.

“There is a wide range of researched and published management-style models, most of them concerned with the degree of autocracy or democracy involved,” Kevin notes. “I have never found any of the models to be true for any one person. Most people use different levels of autocracy and democracy in different situations. For example, with new, inexperienced staff, a manager may be more autocratic; with experienced staff, more democratic. In tense situations, such as a major safety incident, the most democratic managers may become autocratic.”

Kevin identifies a range of categories he has observed as being the most common

management styles. He claims most managers fall into one of the following categories:

Process-driven: “These managers care about process more than outcome and have a belief that if the process is right, the outcome is guaranteed. The benefit of this style of management is that there is clarity around common tasks, and the opportunity exists for continuous improvement in performance. These managers’ results are tied closely to the effectiveness of the company’s continuous improvement processes. The problem, however, is only a few companies in the world have managed to embed continuous improvement into their processes.”

Outcome-driven: “An outcome-driven manager believes that as long as they concentrate on the outcomes, people will find a way to achieve them. I have seen managers poorly implementing management by objectives, who have set targets in a cooperative manner, and then left their subordinates and colleagues to their own without ensuring they have the data, skills, knowledge, behaviour, authority and resources required to achieve the goals. It was bizarre, and demonstrates the extreme failure of this style of management.”

Equity-driven: “First and foremost concerned about equity within their team, these managers believe everyone has to be treated fairly and equally. While in the beginning these managers create a sense of team spirit, it dies quickly when people’s expectations of what fairness and equity are differ from the manager’s.”

Professionally driven: “These managers are driven by understanding what makes their team, and the individuals in it, tick. They are also driven by understanding what tasks and tactics will contribute to executing a specific strategy to achieve a favourable goal. These managers understand there are times to be democratic and times to be autocratic, times to concentrate on process and times to concentrate on outcome. They judge equity against contribution to the goal.”

Kevin goes on to point out that another way of examining different management styles is to look at types of leadership. “I use Peter Drucker’s definition to differentiate managers and leaders: ‘Leaders do the right things; managers do things right’,” he explains. “In my experience, there are three basic leadership styles: from the front, from the back, and collegiate. ‘From the front’ leaders lead by example, providing a strong direction to their team on what the right thing to do is. To be successful, these leaders must be very



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competent about the business they are in. 'From the back' leaders help their people understand the goal and facilitate their teams by ensuring the resources, team composition, and know-how to achieve the goals are available. 'Collegiate' leaders seek advice from all interested stakeholders before making decisions in the interests of reaching the goal and keeping in balance the often-competing needs of stakeholders. Collegiate leaders do not pass over accountability for decision-making to others."

Many managers in charge of unproductive teams may find they are unwittingly committing a few fundamental mistakes. Through Kevin's analysis of different management styles, he has recognised a number of the most common errors. "One common mistake made by leaders is micromanagement," he says. "Micromanagement is not just about picking on detail which sometimes seems to be irrelevant; it is about not allowing subordinates to practise their skills and learn to improve them by making errors."

Another common mistake Kevin often encounters is when people mistake collegiate leadership for management-by-committee or 'laissez-faire' leadership style. However, the most significant mistake

committed by managers, according to Kevin, is incongruence. "Incongruence means leaders who say one thing and behave another way," he explains. "Another example is leaders who say something with their words and say another with their tone and pace of voice or their body language. I have seen a leader say safety was the most important topic, and insist that safety be the first issue discussed in all meetings, then go swimming off a yacht in an intoxicated state at a company function night in Sydney Harbour. The same leader then proceeded to lecture a subordinate on an unsafe act the subordinate committed the following week back in the office. This kind of incongruence destroys trust in leaders overnight."

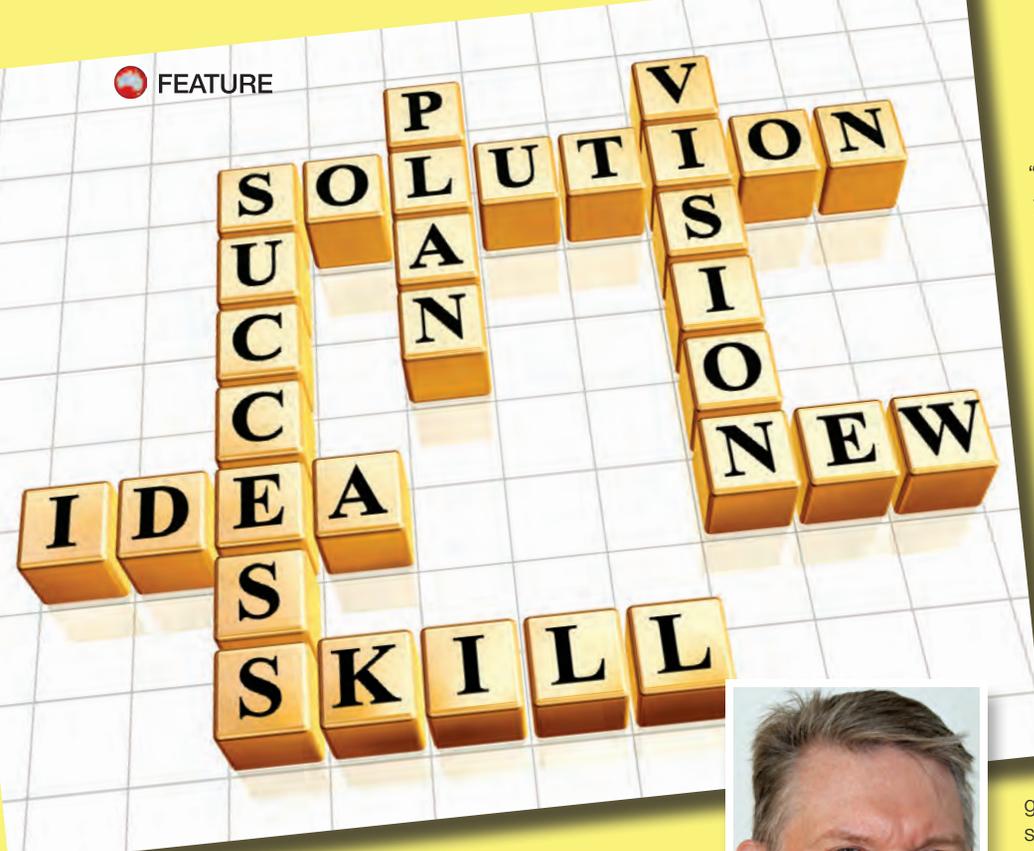
A final common failure Kevin has identified is managers who give preference to people who are in 'their own image'. "I recall one leader who was aggressive – not assertive, but aggressive – towards people on his team who disagreed with him. He had a particularly alpha-male approach to business and personal relationships, favouring the blokey world of 'mates' over reasoned discussion. Within six months, the transformation of his team was complete. Not only were there no dissenting voices; there was a chorus – a chorus parroting his

views. Strong leaders love and crave diversity of view. They seek different values, skills, knowledge and culture so that issues can be viewed from many different angles to find the best solution."

Identifying errors of management is one of the first steps to improving leadership strength, and while many companies may recognise they are making leadership mistakes, how to improve is often difficult to ascertain. By implementing high-quality management training, such as the training services offered by Change Factory, companies are able to train their managers to become the best possible leaders and lead their teams to greater heights. "While there are no defined qualities of great leaders, I have observed six things that great leaders do," reports Kevin. These include:

Be visionary: "All great leaders can imagine the world that they influence as a better place. They have what can be termed 'helicopter quality', i.e. they can see the overview from 10,000 feet as well as the detail from 20 feet, never losing sight of how the details aggregate to the overview."

Communicate: "Emotion, facts and symbols are the common communication tools of great leaders. They have passion for their vision, and communicate as much by tone ▶



“Strong leaders love and crave diversity of view.”

- Kevin Dwyer



and pace of voice, facial gestures, hand movements and posture as much as they do by words. They use facts, not hyperbole and throw-away lines, to justify their vision. They use potent symbols and allow their followers to see their own belief in the vision.”

Grow others: “Nothing gives great leaders more delight than to see others grow and even surpass their own abilities. Weak leaders leave nobody to take over when they move on. Weak leaders are too enamoured by the coercive power of leadership to allow others to assert themselves.”

Demand results: “Great leaders demand results from their subordinates. They accept failure as a means of learning. However, they do not accept the failure borne of low levels of willingness or constant low levels of capability.”

Practise risk management, not risk avoidance: “Great leaders understand and practise risk management. They determine the context in which risk should be analysed and evaluated, comprehending and insisting on the appropriate veracity of data required to evaluate risk. Consulting and communicating about risk is fundamental. They determine and take the actions required to accentuate positive risk and mitigate negative risks to an acceptable level. Risk-averse leaders do nothing, and

paralyse their subordinates’ innovative spirit.”

Reward results and progress: “Poor leaders allow success to have many fathers. Great leaders identify the sources of success and reward them. They reward team leaders for providing the environment that encourages innovation and success. Great leaders reward those who have progressed from low levels of a willingness-and-capability matrix, recognising that progress for them is equally demanding as outright success for others.”

While improving leadership can often be tricky, Kevin suggests a range of strategies that can help leaders improve their management style. “The first technique is for leaders to seek some feedback from their subordinates, peers and supervisors,” he notes. “This is best done by meetings in casual surroundings, off site and away from any of the trappings of the workplace which may be construed as symbols of power. If managers find people are not being candid, they already have an important piece of feedback; they are not trusted to accept less-than-positive comments. Another source of feedback is third parties outside the organisation, such as distributors, vendors, customers and regulators. Self-awareness is the first step to becoming not only a better manager, but a better leader.

“Another technique is to get away from your work environment and work with another group with a different culture and a different type of goal. For example, if you are in a company role, try some volunteer work in a not-for-profit organisation. Make observations about what you find challenging in your new environment. The observations may lead you to understand weaknesses that go unobserved in your workplace because the cultural environment is stable even if you change roles.

“Lastly, work out what it means to be professional in your role in terms of managing tasks and managing people. In some cases, to be professional will mean caring more about tasks, and in other cases it will mean caring more about people.

Finding out what is more important is a great insight into the right management style.”

Implementing one or all of these strategies is a great starting point for managers to discover how to become better leaders. For everyday improvement to basic leadership skills, Kevin recommends three targets to keep in mind. “The first piece of advice I can give to managers is to be authentic and be who you are,” he says. “I once had a subordinate who was the dux of his school and cricket captain, and went on to win a university prize. However, whenever he stepped up into his supervisor’s role, he made errors of judgement which did not sit with his intellectual ability. When questioned about what the process was that he followed to make decisions, he said he tried to think of what his supervisor would do. His error was trying to be someone he was not and making decisions not matching his capabilities as a leader to carry out.

“The second piece of advice is to be congruent in what you have others aspire to and what you say, both in the words used and your manner, and how you act and manage others. It is a difficult thing to do, but very necessary to be considered a great leader. Thirdly, mentor others; ask them questions to help them decide what they need to aspire to and do to achieve it. Share your experiences and theirs. Mentor well, and you will learn as much about yourself as you do about your mentee.”

With so much experience helping companies and managers to realise their full potential and change for the better, Kevin is well placed to train and mentor leaders. When the importance of having solid management is so evident, the question is: how effective is your leadership? 🎯

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