

Managing People

Management is ... getting things done *through people*.

As managers we have to make sure that services are provided by getting the best out of our staff, but at the same time we need to consider the needs of the people who are our staff and colleagues. We need to get the best out of our staff, to their advantage, to our clients' advantage and to our organisation's advantage.

There is thus a balance to be reached between focusing on tasks and focusing on people. The important thing to recognise is that both the job and the people who do the job are important.



Understanding People

Introduction

The people you manage are a source of many different talents, perspectives and styles. This diversity can improve the quality of services and add to the richness of working life. The fact that people are so different should be seen as a reality to be welcomed, not as a difficulty to be overcome.

In order to get the best out of our staff and to have productive relationships with our colleagues and seniors, we need to accept their diversity and try to understand why people behave the way they do.

DIFFERING REALITIES

You have probably had many experiences of working with people where you could not understand why they said something, or why they behaved in a particular way. This task aims to sensitise you to the fact that there are always reasons underneath the things that people say and do.

TASK 1 - Reflecting on behaviour

Think of a few situations where you had difficulty in understanding the behaviour of staff members. Try to think of all the possible reasons which may have contributed to their behaviour. Think about the *whole person* not just the *worker*.

FEEDBACK

Most of the things that people do and say (however strange or unacceptable they may seem), can be explained if you are prepared to try and understand what lies behind them. Explaining unusual behaviour is sometimes mistakenly seen as a way of defending the behaviour. However, explaining something is not the same as agreeing with it. The value of trying to find possible explanations for behaviour is that it can help you to cope with different forms of behaviour among the people with whom you must work.

Perhaps one of the worst things a manager can do is to regard people as being stupid or difficult, simply because they do not see things in the same way as you do. You may also mistakenly assume that disagreeable behaviour is a personal attack on you, while in fact there are other reasons behind the behaviour.

An important step towards understanding people is to recognise that we each have our own view of reality and that other realities do exist. Exploring other people's views enriches our view of a situation. But first we need to understand why people have different views of reality.

Questioning the way you see *reality*

The way in which you perceive *reality* is called your point of view or your perspective. The way you see things is the source of the way you think and the way you behave. If you are not conscious of how you see things, you are unlikely to recognise that others see things differently.

DIFFERING VALUES

Our values are our sense of the way things should be. Values are "... the underlying drives which influence the attitudes and behavioral patterns of individuals, groups and even organizations." (Kakabadse et al, 1987) Values give people their sense of right and wrong.

It is helpful to categorise values into three sets: individual, professional and group values.

Individual values

Each of us has ideas about what is right or wrong, what is good or bad. These ideas develop over time and form our personal value base. Although many of our values can be traced back to childhood, they do not necessarily stay constant; circumstances and personal choices can change them. Also, different people attach different relative importance to particular values, for example, equality and honesty.

Professional or occupational values

There are many professional and occupational groups within health and social care, each with recognisable sets of values. Some of these are expressed through codes of ethics, for example, the Hippocratic Oath.

Group/team values

Most of us have to work within at least one group or team to do our job. A group will usually have some shared ideas on what is right for the group. Organisational values are an example of group values.

Understanding people's values is particularly important for managers, because they often have the difficult task of working with different sets of values at the same time. They have to accommodate the values of those working above, below, alongside and within their team, as well as their own values. Conflicting sets of values can lead to difficulties. (Adapted from MESOL, 2000: 10)

TASK 3 – Analysing how values operate in the workplace

Think of recent conflict situations in your workplace. Could differences in the participants' values have played a role in the disagreements? If so, were individual, professional or group values at play?

FEEDBACK

An example of conflicting sets of professional values is the different ways in which some health care providers and public health professionals view the use of resources. The values of the public health group focus on the health of the community as a whole, while the health care providers are concerned with the well-being of individual patients. Neither group is wrong. They merely have different ideas of the way things should be done.

Conflict of values is probably one of the most difficult issues a manager may have to face. Often there are no easy solutions but the first step remains to try and understand the reasons underlying the behaviour of the parties involved.

As a manager, you will have to gain the co-operation of people with different perspectives and different sets of values in order to achieve the objectives of your job. Getting people to work towards common objectives is at the heart of the manager's role. This leads us to the next issue: that people have personal goals which may differ from organisational or project objectives and goals.

DIFFERING GOALS

“... Managers often fall into the trap of assuming that everyone is working (or should be working) towards the same goals - the goals of the organisation. A lot of managerial decisions take it for granted that the people who will implement them will co-operate willingly to achieve the organisation's collective goals. But often the real reasons why people co-operate have nothing to do with achieving the organisation's goals and everything to do with achieving their own goals. Fortunately, in many cases the two are not incompatible. Indeed, it has been suggested that effective management of people is about ensuring that personal, team and organisational goals match, so that all can be achieved simultaneously ...”

If you manage people, you need to know something about the goals that people want to achieve: this is part of what motivates them to work. We will address the issue of motivation in detail in a later session. It is also very important that all staff who work with you have a very clear understanding of the goals and objectives of the project or section in which they work: sometimes they seem so obvious that you may forget to reinforce them amongst the staff. In the previous sections we saw that the behaviour of people is influenced by their perspectives, values and goals. In order to understand people, we need to be aware of this. But this is not enough: we also have to listen to people.

SEEKING TO UNDERSTAND

Dealing with other people's different views of reality is an important part of a manager's function. It often requires careful listening, as well as a particular attitude to the other person's reality while you listen. It requires you to hold your judgement and your opinion and that you seek first to understand, then to be understood. This is called empathic communication

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we explored some issues around understanding people. We looked at the factors which influence the way people think and behave: their perspectives, values and goals. We also looked at the art of empathic listening.

Being aware of the ways in which people differ and trying to understand staff members and colleagues through listening to them carefully, are two very important aspects of management. They can contribute significantly towards getting work done and maintaining harmony in the workplace. But, given the different realities, values and goals to be found in any group of people, it is inevitable that there will be some conflict.