

Reinventing Management; Transforming the Way We Manage, Communicate, Structure Organisations

The use of 'social media' played a huge role in the recent overthrow of Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak, a historical undertaking that was conceptualised and implemented within a matter of weeks. Increasingly, the same technology is being used to comment on customer experiences across a broad range of industries and demographics. Justified or not, social commentary via Twitter, Facebook and the like, especially from celebrities and people of influence, has the potential to literally topple a bureaucracy, even those that have been in place for many years.

Ironically, many corporations are structured to increase, rather than decrease their exposure to customer based social commentary, as well as the opinions of employees and other stakeholders that may have a direct or indirect link to the business. The problem for the responsible manager is that the typical corporation was designed as a bureaucracy and as such, was established to operate in a world where employees were expected to behave like machines, i.e. carry out well defined tasks and duties, within a given time frame all day, every day. Customers too were also expected to be compliant; as Henry Ford said, "You can have any colour you like, as long as it is black". In a world of free choice, customer power and instant 'outings', corporations are learning at an increasingly rapid rate that the way they manage must change.

The command and control nature of a bureaucracy is not the only characteristic of the corporation that is out of step with the needs of the modern manager. In stringent economic environments especially, permission is often needed to do anything that is not strictly a part of an individual's position description. This requirement is hardly conducive to creativity, innovation and the enabling of a spirit of entrepreneurship. Similarly, learning has been shown to be optimised when undertaken in groups and in collaboration across a mix of functions. Learning feeds creativity and innovation, so in the environment of a rigid bureaucracy where experimentation and collaboration is actively discouraged, it is unlikely that the corporation's next 'great idea' will be just around the corner. Ultimately, optimal organisational results are obtained from highly motivated individuals. Functional silos and geographic distances in bureaucracies act as natural barriers to open and motivational communications, but a lack of effective communication; top to bottom is also problematic. Worse still is use of communication mediums that are highly impersonal (sms, email) and can often serve to de-motivate employees rather than excite them.

Quite literally, a reinvention of management is required, i.e. a change in the way we manage, communicate and structure business entities today, but it will take time. While a noticeable change in the way business operates has commenced, we still have a long way to go. An emphasis on social responsibility reporting by Corporations and a renewed emphasis on customer focus is now common place. What is needed though is an integrated approach to change, not a drawn out recognition that customers and society at large are important. Rather than a focus on the customer to improve short term revenue for example, managers must believe in and be committed to a customer and employee focus that engenders long term relationships; ones that motivate employees sufficiently to build meaningful customer relationships that ensures they will want to return time and time again.

Recognition of the need for the reinvention of management is an emerging phenomenon and has increased in profile since the onset of the Global Financial Crisis which some commentators attribute to a gross failure of management. High standing academics such as Gary Hamel have proposed a reinvention of management that starts in the corporation itself, with further changes expected to emerge from within. We agree with Hamel and suggest that because change in managerial behaviour starts with the individual, principles of a reinvented form of management can be taught. The trick however is not to preach change from on high, but to proceed through the conduct of challenging, facilitated programs where managers are encouraged to learn from each other. In this case, the broader and deeper the experiences and perspectives of the group in which the learning takes place, the better. It doesn't stop there though; it is essential that the newly 'enlightened' managers take their enthusiasm and knowledge back to their organisations and share their learning's within. From here, the reinvention of management will evolve over time.