

Preface

They say that you should never kick off by insulting your reader. And yet, if we point out that less than 20% of all managers have the necessary competence to manage the people that work for them, we risk just that. But, get over it! The very fact that you've opened this book is to be applauded. It means that you're interested enough in the subject to put in energy to learn the fascinating science that is people-management.

We were active as people managers, running departments in multi-nationals, large firms and quangos and running small-to-medium-sized-enterprises in the period from about 1985 to 2012 – over 30 years each. During that time, we repeatedly sought help. We reached out to supposedly high competence consultants. We sought experienced firms to which we might sub-contract various tasks. But generally, there was a gulf between what we were being taught in management studies at university and the management support available in the market. This gulf is well recognised – academics say that management practice is typically about 30 years behind academic thinking and research.

So, we did without support and went on to build our own competence and experience. Now we are management consultants, working with SME managers to get the best from their people.

We believe that we were fortunate. Sue started her career with Ciba-Geigy and benefitted from its management training schemes. John started with Philips and was sent on a raft of local and international courses. In those days, management training was not optional. All managers in those firms were trained. And since then, we've enthusiastically embraced continuous personal development.

Now, let's turn to this book.

Because Your People Matter is specifically written for the manager of an SME. As we've written, we've held in our minds us as department heads and company managers. We've designed the content by asking, "What is it that we needed to be able to do, to know and to understand when we were managing teams of people?"

We believe that understanding is key. Understanding trumps 'best practice'. Each manager will develop his or her own style, tools, models and approaches. Each will build their own best practice. That's as it should be because people-management is context specific. Managing soldiers in the battlespace is very different from managing operatives on a production line. So, in *Because Your People Matter*, we aim to give knowledge and understanding. It's not a prescriptive 'how to'. You will need to interpret what we say and apply it to your own environment. But be clear: understanding leads to application, while blind application without understanding is foolish and risky.

People-management is dyadic. There are two players – you, as manager, and your employee. Of course, there are a host of others, but they are third parties. They represent noise around the two of you. You and your employee are, for that moment when it matters, in a bubble. As a result of that close relationship, management is a 'contact sport'. And if you're not prepared to get up close and personal, don't sign up to manage people – leave that to others who like working with and getting the best from people.

We are both positivists and as a result *Because Your People Matter* is written from the positivist perspective. Of course, we recognise the other paradigms of psychology that challenge positivism. As positivists, we seek to explain and predict what happens in managing people by searching for dependencies and causal relationships between constituent elements of management science. The job someone does, for example, is one of their primary motivators. And without motivation, there's no performance. But just because someone can perform does not mean that the desired outcomes will be achieved. There are many mediators and moderators. In this structure of inputs, outputs, mediators and moderators, we follow the approach of the natural sciences.

We respect those who adopt the other paradigms: interpretivists who aim to understand the meaning behind management and the dyadic relationship; critics who retort, "Ah yes, but things are not that simple... There are other explanations to be discovered"; and realists who like to remain grounded in what's observed without speculation. For us, positivism matters because that lens, over all others, encourages the application of management science by managers and shifts it from academia to real firms.

You'll find that we like diagrams. John trained and worked for many years as an engineer and engineering manager. He learned systems theory and has the desire to express himself using pictures, symbols and lines. He also learned to work in the conceptual domain. As with engineering, one must generalise in management science in order to understand and be able to apply concepts from research to managers' practical problems and opportunities. Diagrams allow causality and influence to be simply captured. We recognise psychologists' and other social scientists' reluctance to suggest that one thing 'causes' another. We accept that there are often too many variables and relationships are often moderate and even weak but unfortunately, unless managers are able to work with causality and influence, science will never be useful.

As with engineering, there are several central models. There's the feed-forward model suggesting that if the manager does this, that will happen. And there's the feedback model that allows the manager to sense outcomes

and change inputs and other variables in search of optimum result. In all modelling we accept that there are huge numbers of variables and many, many unknowns. Management is not simple and much can go wrong. Since both the central models and some of the central ideas are common to several chapters, you will find themes repeated throughout the book. We do this to avoid you having to refer back to previous chapters, thereby making reading easier. This repetition also means that each chapter stands alone.

While mentioning models, we must emphasise that we favour models over theory. Theory is built by researchers who come by way of analysis to establish relationships between variables or to infer meaning from situations. An example would be the needs theory of motivation that suggests that employees will strive until their specific needs are achieved. We acknowledge such theory but prefer to encapsulate this with other theories to provide a useful model.

We must recognise that this book would contain nothing but unsupported exhortation if it were not for the thousands of academics in management science who, over the past 100 years or so, have reported on their work. And yet, this work is in itself not enough. Academia is replete with islands of ideas. Without apology we provide bridges between such islands. We build continents. We link numerous theories and empirical evidence from workers such as Hackman and Oldham, Kehr, Bandura and Motowidlo to yield what we consider to be models that managers can use day to day. In an effort to maintain flow and readability, we don't individually reference each academic and their work but instead provide a general reading list that has influenced us. Our models are therefore based on sound science from our multiple studies at Masters level in technology, economics, sociology, psychology and law and from decades of reference to quality texts and academic papers.

Now, we also acknowledge that we all live in an Internet-connected world with copious sharing and reference to material on the World Wide Web. It's universally acknowledged that what's on the Web and what you hear on social media is unlikely to be of quality, and yet most managers will treat what they find as Gospel. We urge managers to read *Because Your People Matter* before browsing. Treat this book as a starting point for your Web search – use it as a source of keywords and phrases as input, and models by which you might evaluate the myth and pseudo-science that you'll find online. In the end though, we want *Because Your People Matter* to be used, bookmarked, scribbled over and added to as your management learning progresses.

Right now, only 20% of managers are trained in management science, but we hope that by using this book, you'll come to regard yourself as one of those few. We hope that the term 'accidental manager', as someone thrust into management without preparation, will not apply to you.

All authors adopt a position for their arguments. Ours is simple. You, as manager, have accepted responsibility for the actions of others. In *Because Your People Matter* we're battling for you, but we do expect you to respond by treating well those for whom you are responsible. Expect a lot from them, but, equally, invest in them.

John Berry and Sue Berry
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