# Leadership Development using Team Management Systems

## By Anne Paterson

## Introduction

The General Manager of a large manufacturing organization initially engaged our organization to provide consulting support for a number of tactical HR projects. During our first meeting, he expressed his frustration with members of his management team who had not completed the specific tasks he had requested. He was unable to explain their lack of delivery and follow-through but it was obvious that these were not isolated incidents.

In observing the GM interact with his managers, there were signs of pent-up frustration and anger on both sides. The managers appeared jaded and lacked any enthusiasm for the projects he had commissioned. Morale was definitely low among the management team and there was an unhealthy atmosphere of cynicism and negativity within the organization generally, and in particular, in the divisional office where the GM was located.

As my client was keen to provide HR assistance to his direct reports, I suggested that I meet with each of the management team on a one-to-one basis to assess their HR requirements. Not surprisingly, they used this time mainly to talk about the problems they faced with their GM boss and to describe the impact his actions were having on the rest of the organization.

## Diagnosing the issues

During interviews with each of the management team members, similar issues were raised and common themes began to appear quickly. These 'presenting problems' were described variously as the GM's: -

- High control needs
- Lack of respect for the people around him (impatience, swearing)
- Tendency to exaggerate and self-promote
- Insensitive communication style – criticizing other managers openly to their peers
- Need for action and his practice of putting continual pressure on the organization to handle new priorities
- Unwillingness to trust his management team

And organizationally, there was: -

- A perceived lack of business processes and disciplines
- Inefficient planning resulting in reactive management and constant fire-fighting

On the positive side, the managers and other staff were quick to praise the GM for his ability to: -

- Bring in new ideas and ways of thinking
- Be decisive
- Demonstrate persistence and deal with blockages
- Give effective presentations
- Deliver the things he focused on
- Sell anything to anyone
- Be forward thinking and embrace change

### Passionate and progressive

He was perceived as passionate about the business and his managers believed he deserved credit for returning the organization to profitability in a very competitive business environment. He readily challenged the way things were run and encouraged others to do the same. In coming to the role, he had inherited an organization that was unprofitable, had high costs and was complacent about its position in the market. The management team members were self-interested and there were examples of misconduct and corruption. In 18 months, the new GM had achieved a great deal and was very comfortable publicizing the progress he and his team had made.

*Focus on marketing and promoting successes*

The style adopted to deal with the crisis facing the business during that time was autocratic and directive. Control was centralized and there were fewer opportunities for discretionary spending at a local level. Much more effort was going into marketing and developing new products than had ever been the case before.  The GM who was particularly comfortable in these areas led this effort.  Many of the ideas and products he encouraged were harnessed to the benefit of the rest of the organization, and the GM took particular pride in these achievements.  Such an approach and personal style was very much at odds with the majority of the management team and the industry itself.  Many of the managers regarded the GM's efforts at self-publicity with disdain and were very uncomfortable with the way he promoted his business achievements to the other divisions and head office.  The team did not share the same view of the success of all the projects he was promoting, as they knew that much had still to be done to finish these off.  This caused further tension and concern that their record of 'achievements' would mean they would attract more work from head office.

# Agreeing the approach

The situation appeared to be quite serious – at both an individual and organizational level.  Several of the managers seemed physically and emotionally drained and there was a great deal of frustration and anger directed at the GM.  The Finance Manager, in particular, was extremely cynical and withdrawn and appeared genuinely defeated by his boss' style.  Some of the management team were responding to the GM's constant requests for urgent action with attempts to undermine him, and a number of individuals had formed themselves into small groups to support each other.  Many were poised to take the next step and go to the GM's boss in desperation to request his intervention.

During my discussions with each of the managers I obtained their agreement that I would feed back only general themes and perceptions to the GM from my meetings without identifying the individual managers' comments.  When I did this, my GM client was genuinely surprised at the information and extremely concerned.  He reflected on the feedback and requested assistance in resolving some of the climate issues that had been highlighted.  He advised me that he was very committed to learning from this experience for the future, and looked upon this is as an opportunity to develop and refine his management style.  This was a very positive start to the process that followed.

# Addressing the issues

From my research, it was obvious that there were some problems with specific behaviors the GM was demonstrating.  These appeared to be causing the managers to act in dysfunctional ways much of the time and the impact was now being felt throughout the business.

I identified a need for some immediate changes in specific areas of behavior, while we considered a number of options to deal with the problems as a management team.

*Immediate actions*

The GM was not aware of how he impacted other people in the management team.  His need for immediate action meant a disruption to their work schedules.  He did not consider anyone else's priorities when allocating tasks and labeled everything important and urgent.  In practice, when the results were delivered, he had usually changed the requirements (but not communicated these), allocated the same task to several people or had decided that something else was now his priority.

To deal with this behavior, the managers were adopting their own coping mechanisms.  This usually meant not doing anything until it became extremely urgent and there was some guarantee the results would actually be required!!  As a result, fire-fighting was the norm for the organization and planning was non-existent.  Everyone was living on the edge and tempers were being strained on a daily basis. Individuals promoted to the GM office location were finding reasons not to take up their roles, as they knew they would be constantly interrupted with another urgent request or a new 'bright idea'.

*Recommendation*

I recommended implementing processes to ensure work was being allocated in a more effective way and managers could have some say in establishing realistic time scales for delivery.  These included checking the managers' priorities before allocating tasks, noting who the task had been given to and following up at specific checkpoints.

These short-term immediate actions took the pressure off while we considered other options to improve individual and team working.

I suggested using Linking Skills or Upward Feedback® (now 360 Facilitated®) questionnaires to obtain feedback direct from the managers to increase the GM's self-awareness. These tools would also encourage all the team members to be involved in developing team solutions. In addition, I recommended that the team members each complete a Team Management Profile Questionnaire (TMPQ) to help each other understand the different preferences in the team and identify how people could work better together.

My client chose the Upward Feedback® instrument and agreed to involve the whole team in a Team Management session.

## Using Team Management Profiles

The Upward Feedback® results are debriefed on a one-to-one basis and the manager prepares his comments and questions to present to the team. A facilitated discussion then takes place with the manager absent, followed by an action-planning session with the whole team. To help managers assimilate the feedback and understand how their behaviors may have contributed to the team's perceptions, I often use the results of their Team Management Profile to provide greater insight into themselves. As this is written in positive language and the content resonates so much with the managers, it supports them in dealing with the feedback.

In the GM's case, he quickly identified with his Team Management Profile and we examined how his preferences might be translating themselves into the behaviors his team were observing. He had a score of *E15 C9 A16 S15* with his major preference being Assessor-Developer and related preferences of Explorer-Promoter and Thruster-Organizer. It was quite clear that his preferences for extroversion, creative information-gathering, analytical decision-making and structured organization were strong and would be quite different from many of his colleagues in the management team.

As a result of reading the Team Management Profile and reflecting on it during the Upward Feedback® debrief, the GM was able to come to the subsequent team action-planning session with some real insight into his preferences and behaviors. He was much more aware of the impact of these on others and how his preferences were influencing his management style. He shared some of his insights with his management team and by doing so, increased the level of openness and trust within the team. He also gave some of his main critics in the team some hope that he was willing to listen to feedback and to change his behavior as a result.

### The Team Management session

A Team Management training session was run about a week later with the GM and his team to improve their understanding of each other and to help them value the differences within the team.

The role preferences for each jobholder can be seen in Figure 1.

### Learning from the Profiles

It was immediately clear from the Profiles where the problems were likely to come from. There was no-one with a preference of Reporter-Adviser or Upholder-Maintainer and gathering information to make informed decisions or maintaining systems and processes were not highly valued activities from the team's perspective.

The Finance Manager and Administration Assistant shared the same Profile and set up their own systems and processes for managing their workloads. The rest of their colleagues often ignored these systems.

Although the GM and his Administration Assistant shared a preference for being organized and structured in their approach, the communication between them left much to be desired. He would continually seek out people to share ideas with and often changed his mind as a result of speaking to them. This left her in the dark and unable to manage the communication to others in the team. As a result, she often appeared disorganized when she was not.

Both the Finance Manager and the Administration Assistant had a strong preference for completing tasks and seeing them through to the end. The GM's approach was particularly frustrating to them as they

were bombarded with the latest new idea before the current ones had been completed.  The Finance Manager advised he had 38 unfinished items on his list of ongoing tasks and projects (he was the only one keeping such a list!!) and explained that these were added to daily by the GM as he walked into his office next door and talked about his latest idea!!

**Figure 1.       Role preference distribution of jobholders**

| Major role and net scores | Related roles | Job title |
| --- | --- | --- |
| *Concluder-Producer*<br>I4 P3 A11 S11 | Thruster-Organizer<br>Assessor-Developer | Production Manager |
| *Creator-Innovator*<br>I14 P/C 0 A26 F17 | Controller-Inspector<br>Explorer-Promoter | Research Manager |
| *Thruster-Organizer*<br>E18 P1 A1 S14 | Assessor-Developer<br>Concluder-Producer | Marketing Manager |
| *Creator-Innovator*<br>I13 C1 A23 F4 | Controller-Inspector<br>Thruster-Organizer | IT Manager |
| *Concluder-Producer*<br>I18 P9 A18 S13 | Thruster-Organizer<br>Controller-Inspector | Administration Assistant |
| *Assessor-Developer*<br>E11 C3 A30 S2 | Explorer-Promoter<br>Thruster-Organizer | New Business Development Manager |
| *Thruster-Organizer*<br>E13 P19 A16 S4 | Assessor-Developer<br>Concluder-Producer | Sales Manager |
| *Concluder-Producer*<br>I11 P5 A15 S13 | Thruster-Organizer<br>Controller-Inspector | Finance Manager |
| *Assessor-Developer*<br>E3 C12 A24 S4 | Thruster-Organizer<br>Explorer-Promoter | Market Development Manager |
| *Assessor-Developer*<br>E15 C9 A16 S15 | Explorer-Promoter<br>Thruster-Organizer | General Manager |

We explored the Profiles in some depth and there was increasing understanding about why these problems existed.  Those who were in close proximity to the GM were the targets for a very extroverted individual.  He wanted to talk things through with people immediately he had an idea or thought, and regularly interrupted his more introverted colleagues to do so.  Not realizing he was just thinking things through informally and out loud, the introverts added the idea to the growing task list or proceeded to get on with it.  By the time the task was complete, the GM had changed his requirements through discussion with others or had forgotten he had commissioned it in the first place.  This behavior was particularly frustrating for the Concluder-Producers and they were showing visible signs of physical exhaustion and low morale.

## Tackling the team issues

One of the major issues for the team was lack of trust.  They did not believe the GM trusted them and they gave their perceptions of incidents where he had appeared untrustworthy.  In examining these views further, they appeared to stem from the GM's preference for Promoting and his tendency to be a natural salesperson.  He was able to persuade people and was a natural self-publicist.  To make his point and sell or promote his idea, he admitted to using exaggeration for effect.  This was perceived as lies and deceit by others, especially those with a preference for practical decision-making where the facts were the facts.  This was also not the usual behavior for a production and manufacturing environment, and was not respected within the culture.

For a team with numerous new projects and ideas to complete, there was a need to stabilize and follow issues through to the end.  The results of their GM's promotional activities, however, often resulted in their business being used as the pilot for new corporate initiatives and trail-blazing projects.  This put further pressure on the management team and incurred the wrath of other teams in the organization who proved unwilling to be helpful to these 'tall poppies'.

### Action-planning

The team members identified individually that they were well suited to their positions and agreed their Profiles were very accurate.  The team identified specific gaps in the Advising area, and agreed to focus attention there.  Their main issue, however, remained the one of how to handle their boss in a way which encouraged his creative approach and at the same time allowed them to see tasks and projects through to conclusion.  The people most frustrated by the GM's approach were those with a preference for practical decision-making and the Concluder-Producers.  The introverted managers also experienced problems in communicating and complained that the GM thought things through quickly in conversations

and was able to express himself so well.  This often left them with no time to say what they wanted and their ability to influence him was diminished.

As a result of the Upward Feedback® and Team Management sessions, the managers and GM were able to see why many of the problems were occurring and agreed an action plan to ensure that they tackled these as a team.  Together, they developed the following action points: –

- The team would provide good quality information to the GM and respond when required
- The managers would research competitors and set up a competitor database
- The GM would flag to individuals when he was sounding out new ideas and signal clearly when he was assigning tasks
- The current list of outstanding tasks and projects would be completed
- The Finance Manager would share his project-planning processes and tracking matrix with the other managers
- The GM agreed to promote his team less to his boss and the other divisions, and to refrain from using exaggerations to make a point
- Systems were established with the Administration Assistant to support the management team and improve communication between them
- They all agreed to plan better
- The GM agreed to check people's priorities as a matter of course before allocating further work
- Agendas would be circulated before meetings to allow everyone to prepare better and in particular, allow the more introverted individuals to contribute more effectively

## Other factors

Early on in the process, another factor became apparent and its influence on the problems was identified.  The GM's wife completed a Team Management Profile Questionnaire.  He had often talked about sharing his work issues with his wife and they were both at a loss as to why his style was leading to problems within the management team.  Her Profile was processed and the resulting major and related preferences with her net score are shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2.        Role preference of GM's wife**

| Major role and net scores | Related roles |
|---|---|
| *Assessor-Developer* | Thruster-Organizer |
| E1 C10 A21 S5 | Explorer-Promoter |

One of the problems we identified was that she was encouraging his new ideas and supporting their introduction into the organization.  She was certainly not giving much thought to the practical implementation of these and was not aware that many of the previous ones had never been followed through to completion.  Together, they were a good example of the 'group think' mentality and reinforced each other's views without challenge.  She was also reinforcing and sharing his sense of frustration when his requests for action were not met quickly by his management team, and encouraging him to show his displeasure.

I recommended they seek an immediate divorce (I thought the Thruster-Organizer in him would appreciate a call to action)!!  Eventually I conceded, however, that they might be able to avoid such a serious measure if they were aware of the potential problems caused by their similar Profiles and balanced their preferences with some facts from his staff about what was being done and their workload.

## Sustaining the changes

Following the Team Management session, the GM had his assistant type up a list of each manager's preferences along with the dot points from the Pacing Skills slides.  He had this information laminated and distributed to his team to remind them of the diversity within the group and the most appropriate ways of communicating with each other.  He kept his copy close with him in the office along with a list of the behaviors he wanted to avoid.  In times of stress, when he was tempted to revert to type, he would refer to these for guidance.

The GM asked me to run an Upward Feedback® session a year later.  The team had changed to some degree but the majority of people were still the same team members as we had worked with previously.  The results were impressive and showed huge changes in their satisfaction levels against all the management behaviors.  There was even one written comment – *"He has changed a great deal over the*

*past 12 months and is a much better manager for it."* The team's performance improved dramatically and the business continued to grow more profitable.

My client has recently left the organization and is continuing to focus on his personal development in his new company where he has just been promoted. He credits a great deal of his success to the work we did together. He did not take my advice on his relationship, however, and remains married to the same person!!!

It is interesting to note that the organization appointed a temporary successor from the management team to the GM position and he had the same 3 preferences as my client.

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Before founding Results Through People in 1994, Anne worked with British Airways providing an internal HR consultancy service to BA's European operation and later, as Head of Human Resources, she managed a team providing a range of HR advice and support services to a number of work units.

Anne has worked with senior executives, managers and team members in a wide range of industries and organizations to improve performance at both an individual and team level. She is a Master Trainer of Team Management Systems (TMS) and uses a number of TMS instruments to increase self-awareness and develop more effective team relationships.

As a consultant, Anne has worked with a wide range of clients in the telecommunications, transport, services, financial, IT, local government and manufacturing sectors on a range of issues. Clients include Alcon International, American Express, AHRI (Australian Human Resources Institute,) BT Financial, Carl Zeiss, Cuscal (Credit Unions), Department of Communities, Department of Education and Employment, HATCH Engineering, Queensland Treasury, Red Cross, Stockland, Telstra, and 3M.