Linking Leadership

By Dr. Dick McCann

Margerison–McCann

TEAM MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS ®

Contents

Copyright

Preface

This e-book is part of a series that describes the concepts forming the core of Team Management Systems (TMS) technology. In this e-book I look at Leadership, with a particular emphasis on leading teams. Some years ago Charles Margerison and I described the notion of Linking and how important it is to the functioning of successful teams. In this e-book I have developed the idea into a full range leadership model known as the *Linking Leader*.

The Linking Leader Model describes three levels of Linking – People Linking, Task Linking and Leadership Linking.

At the first level of Linking are the People Linking Skills. They create the atmosphere in which the team works, by promoting harmony and trust. These skills are the responsibility of all team members because they establish optimal relationships among team members (horizontal Linking) and with higher-level management (vertical Linking).

At the second level are the Task Linking Skills that focus on the relationships among team tasks. These skills apply more to the senior team members and team leader(s) who are accountable and responsible for outputs.

The third level of the Linking Leader Model describes Leadership Linking Skills, which highlight processes that influence followers to go beyond their self-interest and give extra effort for the benefit of the business unit or organisation.

When all three levels are successfully implemented, a *Linking Leader* is created.

Dick McCann
Author

What is leadership?

I like simple definitions, and for me the best definition of leadership is 'the successful implementation of a set of behaviours, arising out of skills, that causes people to become willing followers'.

Popular leadership theories have been developed based on the identification of two behavioural sets – Supportive and Directive. Leadership models such as those developed by Hersey and Blanchard (Hersey, Blanchard and Johnson, 2000) have been very successful in identifying appropriate leadership styles based upon these two vectors. The idea is that most people will respond to a leadership style that has various combinations of supportive and directive behaviours, depending on the situation they are in. A leader would then use the most appropriate style to suit the requirements of the follower.

More recently, leadership theories have moved towards identifying a complementary set of behaviours that look at leadership from a different approach. One such theory is that proposed by Bass and Avolio (1994). In their model they defined the idea of Transactional Leadership, which is based upon established theories of social exchange, such as that of contingent reward: *"If you do this for me/us, I/we will do this for you."* The transaction can range from the 'hard' such as money, to the 'soft', such as personal recognition or privileges.

Beyond transactional leadership, Bass and Avolio define Transformational Leadership, which brings in the skills of influencing where followers are prepared to go beyond their self-interest for the sake of the team or the organisation as a whole.

My view on leadership is that it is primarily about relationships. Excellent leaders monitor and develop relationships among their followers and ensure that this emphasis is rolled down from their direct reports to the bottom-most layers of the organisation. For me leadership is about Linking – a set of behaviours arising out of acquired skills that encourage the coordination and integration of followers, thereby creating a unified team that knows where it is going and how to get there.

Figure 1.   Margerison-McCann Team Management Wheel

Linking Skills

The idea of Linking came from the research carried out by Dr Charles Margerison and myself when we developed the Team Management Wheel (Margerison and McCann, 1995). At the centre of this model is the role of the Linker, which describes the responsibility everyone in a team has to ensure that relationships are established and developed.

The Linker circle can be 'exploded' into a full range leadership model that describes three levels of Linking that should be practiced, to varying degrees, by everyone in the organisation.

At the first level of Linking are the skills arranged around the outside of the model. These are the People Linking Skills:

- Active Listening
- Communication
- Team Relationships
- Problem Solving and Counselling
- Participative Decision Making
- Interface Management

They are six in number – the symbol in the Tao for heaven. They create the atmosphere in a team, by promoting harmony and trust. All team members have a responsibility to implement this level of leadership; sometimes I call it 'universal linking'. It is the first step on the ladder to the higher levels of leadership.

Figure 2.   Linking Leader Model
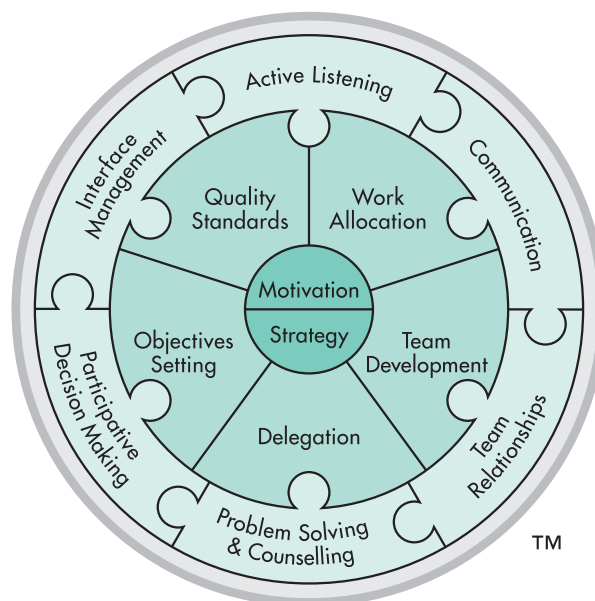
Inside the People Linking Skills are the Task Linking Skills. These skills equate to the number 5 in the Tao – the symbol for the earth. They create a solid core or foundation that the team relies on. They promote confidence and stability.

- Work Allocation
- Team Development
- Delegation
- Objectives Setting
- Quality Standards

These skills tend to apply more to people on the second rung of the leadership ladder – those in more senior positions within a team, responsible for guiding others. This guiding may be done in either a supportive or directive way but must not violate the first level of People Linking Skills. The challenge is to find the balance where the six People Linking Skills and Five Task Linking Skills can coexist.

At the core of the Linking Skills Wheel are the two Leadership Linking Skills of Motivation and Strategy. 'Two' is a number representing the divine – the two-fold power of creation and destruction, personified in the god Shiva. It reminds us that leaders have the power to create or destroy.

Leadership Linking is the third step on the leadership ladder and applies to leaders that have organisational responsibility for strategy. They need to implement these two skills along with those of the People and Task Linking Skills to achieve the status of the Linker Leader, where the probability of 'creation' outweighs that of 'destruction'.

The term Linking Leader is used to describe someone who is effective at implementing all three levels described in the Linking Leader Model.

People Linking Skills

The People Linking Skills are arranged around the outside of the model.

Figure 3.   People Linking Skills
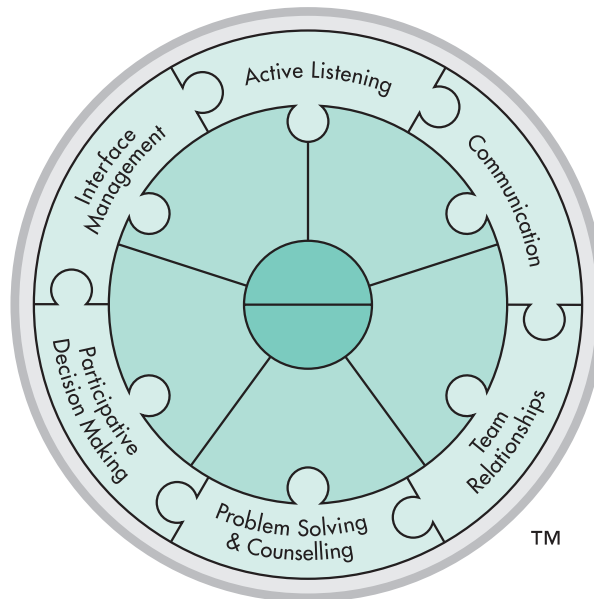
Active Listening

Case Study: Parallel conversations

Recently I was at a party. I had gathered up a drink and was quietly standing in a corner watching three people in conversation. Actually only two were talking; poor old Jim was wedged between Debbie and Barbara and was making some effort to communicate with them.

Jim was a good friend of mine – a man of few words but very knowledgeable, witty and interesting to talk to. Barbara and Debbie were also friends – both gregarious and outspoken. I craned my neck forwards and overheard the following conversation:

Barbara:	We're so pleased with Michael. He's just done so well this year. He was doing five final year subjects and he got straight 'A's' in them all. He's been accepted to do medicine – just think, a doctor in the family!
Jim:	Has he…?
Debbie:	Yes Judy has done so well this year too – she's in Architecture at the University, you know, and the Professor of Design said that her thesis was the best he'd seen in all his years of teaching. We're hoping she might get a University Medal.
Jim:	Has she…?
Barbara:	Michael's done so well that we've promised him a car to make it easier for him to get to college – the bus service from our area is so irregular but we didn't want him to move into University Hall – we would miss him so much if he wasn't around.
Debbie:	Judy won't be around much either for the next few months. We've paid for a trip to Italy – for her to look at Italian architecture and to really have a good rest before she starts work.
Jim:	Where in Italy….?
Barbara:	Michael went to Italy with the school this year during summer. He had a marvellous time…..

And so the conversation went on. Poor Jim, I thought, at least he is listening and trying to engage in sequential conversation. Barbara and Debbie continued with their 'parallel' conversation, neither one at all interested in what the other was saying. 'Ships that pass in the night', I mused to myself.

After many years of working with managers in the private and public sector I am convinced that the skill of active listening is one of the most important leadership skills. As one manager said to me, *"I'm CEO of this organisation and responsible for engineers, accountants, biochemists, physicists and a host of other professions. Most of the time I can barely understand what they are talking about. But I've learned to listen carefully, to seek clarification and to summarise my understanding of what they're saying. Then I can incorporate their views in my decision-making."*

In the early 1980s the Sperry Corporation commissioned some research into listening as a business skill. They came to the conclusion that, despite its being the communication skill that is most used in business; it is the one to which least attention is paid by managers and leaders. Sperry's tests showed that immediately after listening to a ten-minute oral presentation, the average listener has heard, understood, evaluated and retained approximately one-half of what was said. Within 48 hours, the level of retention has dropped by another 50%. In other words, on a good day we are likely to comprehend and retain only about one-quarter of what has been said!

In my experience, many people are poor listeners. They do not understand the importance of focusing total awareness on what the other person is saying. Often they have several important projects underway simultaneously, and their minds are constantly racing from one project to the other.

To help explain the problem they have, it is useful to understand the 'Word Channel' model. The way we process auditory information can be divided into external word channels (W_e) and internal word channels (W_i):

$$\textit{Auditory Attention}$$
$$W_e \text{————————} W_i$$

Some people are naturally able to focus their awareness, without interruption, on words coming to them from external sources (W_e). In other words they are naturally good listeners. Other people try to do this but their internal word channel (W_i) takes over and they complete the other person's sentence in their head and then run an internal dialog (talk to themselves) as they think about the solution. When the other person pauses to draw breath, they are likely to take the opportunity to 'butt in' and verbalise their opinion. Their preference is to activate the internal word channel rather than the external one.

The problem is that the internal and external word channels are at the opposite ends of a continuum. When one is active, the other is likely to be attenuated or even switched off. People with a preference for the Wi channel have difficulty in activating their We channel and therefore they become swamped by their internal dialog. In other words it is very difficult to listen closely to what someone else is saying if you are constantly talking to yourself!

So the secret of listening is to clear your mind of all internal dialog and focus your attention on what the other person is saying.

You will notice when other people are not listening to you by watching their eyes. If their eyes 'glaze over' it is a signal that their internal word channel (or visual channel) has taken over and their attention is elsewhere. Physiologically the pupils dilate slightly and the focus goes to 'infinity' as the eye muscles relax. Whenever you notice this phenomenon, you must act to alter the pattern of non-listening that is about to occur. Almost anything you do that is different from what you have been doing will have a positive effect and bring their attention back to you. The pattern interruption can be elegant, such as pausing or asking a question, or it can be more overt, such as, 'Perhaps we should summarise what I've just said.' So if someone is not listening to you, don't blame them entirely. Control is with you, as you can make them listen to you by skilful use of pattern interruption.

There is a relationship between the word channel and the Team Management Wheel ('Comparative Studies: Linking Skills and Work Preferences', *Team Management Systems Research Manual 5th Edition*, 2018). It runs approximately from the Reporter-Adviser and Upholder-Maintainer sectors across to the Assessor-Developer and Thruster-Organiser sectors. Reporter-Adviser and Upholder-Maintainer preferences are associated with great attention to the external word channel. These people are interested in what others have to say and have quite long auditory attention spans. Assessor-Developer and Thruster-Organiser preferences, on the other hand, seem to be more associated with the internal word channel. They start listening to what is being said but then their internal dialog takes over and while they are talking internally, they lose data from external sources.

However active listening is more than just taking in words. It is also about indicating to the other person that you have received and understood what they have said. Techniques such as seeking clarification, summarising, and two-way discussion are all a part of the process of active listening. It doesn't mean that you have to agree with the other person; rather that you have heard and understood their message. In this way misunderstandings are avoided.

Communication

Case Study: Bright ideas

Chris: Have you got a minute? It's about a new idea I've got.

Pat: Well, not really. I'm very busy. Can't you send me an email?

Chris: It won't take long.

Pat: Oh, OK, what's it about?

Chris: I've got this great idea about how we can increase our sales. You know the new micro-scanner we are marketing? Well, I reckon we could use it as a metal detector.

Pat: Oh, no, not another one of your bright ideas.

Chris: This micro-scanner is so small it would be ideal for use in security areas. Just think how great it would be to be able to detect metal without having those huge bulky scanning machines. It would make security much more efficient, as the micro-scanners are so wide ranging for their size.

Pat: How much will it cost?

Chris: We would just have to design a simple holder for either personal use, like the customs people in airports, or for mounting on walls and doorways.

Pat: I mean how much would it cost us to develop?

Chris: Oh, I don't know but it wouldn't be much.

Pat: Look, that's the trouble with you, Chris, this is the third 'bright idea' you've told me about since you started. I'm not really interested. We're in a highly competitive market and quite frankly it is hard work maintaining our market share. Our prime concern must be to hang on to what we've got. We really must keep an eye on all costs and monitor every single lead we have.

Chris: Yes, but………

Pat: And while you're here, I'm not happy about the records you're keeping. I need to see a daily list of each contact made, with comments and follow-up details. Your team is far too slack.

Chris: Look, if we did that we'd have no time to develop new leads. I haven't increased the sales by 10% this year by filling in bloody forms all day. I'm out meeting new customers; in fact that was how I came up with this idea. I know it would be a winner.

Pat: Don't get off the subject! I want to see a detailed list by 5:00pm

---

Both Chris and Pat have clearly failed to understand difference and value diversity. Each one has a different set of work preferences and neither has made any attempt to make allowance for the other. Both need to use the concept of 'Pacing' where they modify the way they interact with each other so that differences are reduced and alignment increased.

In terms of the Team Management Wheel, Pat probably has Controller-Inspector preferences and does not like being interrupted without an appointment. More than likely he would prefer to communicate in writing or by e-mail. Chris should perhaps have sent Pat a note prior to the meeting outlining his proposal, recognising that Controller-Inspectors like to digest information before making comments on it.

Pat also used poor Pacing Skills by not recognising that Chris needed to talk the idea through with someone. By pouring cold water on the idea too early Chris could become disillusioned and possibly leave the organisation. Chris is likely to have preferences in the Creator-Innovator part of the Team Management Wheel and Pat should know that many of his ideas are likely to be impracticable, but occasionally there could be a 'winner'. That is why linking Chris to someone else in the organisation, perhaps an Assessor-Developer, might be a clever strategy. Someone with Assessor-Developer preferences might help Chris to assess whether his ideas might work in practice.

Recognising that people are different and that different communication processes are necessary with different people is one of the key communication skills of the Linking Leader. When I was at school I was taught the Golden Rule – *Do unto others as they would do to you*. In communication this is the wrong approach. If you have a role preference as a Thruster-Organiser then you will like people to communicate with you in the language of the Thruster-Organiser. However if you communicate to everyone in Thruster-Organiser mode then you will be 'pacing' only when the other person is a Thruster-Organiser. It is better to follow the Platinum Rule: *Do unto others as they would be done to*!

Pacing means getting alongside the other person rather than meeting them 'head on'. With skill, Pacing can be done very quickly and once the 'pace' is established then the conversation can move into a free exchange of information. Some of the different Pacing approaches are summarised below, for four of the Team Management Profile role preferences.

Figure 4.   Pacing 'do's' and 'don'ts' for Team Management Profile role preferences

Role preferences	Do's	Don'ts
Reporter-Adviser	• Be flexible • Develop personal relationships • Be cooperative • Give personal thanks • Allow them to express their concerns	• Don't put facts before feelings • Don't move too fast • Don't be insincere
Explorer-Promoter	• Explore ideas • Allow them to talk • Recognise their contributions in public • Concentrate on the future • Be enthusiastic • Record important agreements in writing • Be flexible	• Don't talk about details • Don't take issue with their opinions unless they persist • Don't dwell on the past
Thruster-Organiser	• Be work focused • Be factual • Be goal-oriented • Give incentives to perform • Be punctual • Make things happen • Summarise regularly	• Don't attack personally but focus on the facts surrounding disagreements • Don't be ambiguous • Don't get off the subject
Controller-Inspector	• Use memos or e-mail to communicate • Send written information before any meetings • Slow down your pace • Take time to understand them • Talk about details • Think before you speak	• Don't 'drop in' unexpectedly • Don't surprise them • Don't rush them • Don't concentrate on the future at the expense of the past

Pacing Skills can also be used for the other levels in the Workplace Behaviour Pyramid (refer E-book: *The Workplace Behaviour Pyramid*, McCann 2020). Examples of some of the Pacing Skills to apply to the Risk-Orientation level are shown below.

Figure 5. Pacing Skills for the Risk-Orientation scale

Pacing the high QO$_2$™ person	
Do's	Don'ts
• Be initially supportive and listen • Try to sound positive about their ideas even if you disagree • Focus on the good part of their proposal before you explain what the difficulties are • Encourage them to describe the changes that might need to be made to implement their ideas, then point out any obstacles that might arise • Be prepared for their ideas to be unrealistic but look for the 'kernel' of a good idea	• Don't tell them why their ideas won't work; help them to see this themselves • Don't dwell on the past • Don't criticise them personally • Don't appear negative or lacking in enthusiasm

Pacing the low QO$_2$™ person	
Do's	Don'ts
• Expect them to be initially negative so be prepared to explain why your ideas will work • Be prepared for them to be resistant to change • Ask them to help you examine all the things that could go wrong • Accept that their 'devil's advocate' position might be of value to you • Understand that you may need to work hard to change their mind	• Don't focus excessively on the future; show them how your proposals link to the present and the past • Don't be over-excited until you are sure they can see the opportunities as you do • Don't react negatively when they tell you what the pitfalls are • Don't appear over-optimistic

Team Relationships

> ## *Case Study: Tearing down relationships*
>
> **Marc:** Lena! Can you spare me a minute?
>
> **Lena:** Sure!
>
> **Marc:** I've been offered the opportunity to quote for some consulting work in the IT company across the road. You know Steve that I have lunch with? Well, he put our name forward.
>
> **Lena:** Great, but we don't do those kinds of jobs as a rule.
>
> **Marc:** I know that's why I wanted to chat to you about it. There's no point in talking to Graeme – he'll need three million pages of detail before he'll even think about it. If you go to Val, she gives you fifty reasons why it won't work. Joe wants to turn it into something completely different. It's a nightmare getting anything done in this place.
>
> **Lena:** Yes, I know what you mean but you'll have to ask Graeme. You can't just do it and worry about it later. Without his approval it can't go ahead anyway.
>
> **Marc:** You're just as bad as the rest of them. Everything takes so much effort because nobody else can see the benefits like I can. I thought if there were two of us we could push the quote through.
>
> **Lena:** It'll never change – Graeme won't bow to pressure like that. At least you know what everyone's like – it's no surprise.
>
> **Marc:** Thanks for nothing!
>
> **Lena:** My pleasure!

This dialog mirrors many in offices around the world. Marc knows the different ways his colleagues prefer to work but he doesn't use his knowledge to the best advantage. Instead of building relationships, he prefers to tear them down by undermining authority and lobbying behind the scenes. Marc thinks all his ideas and opportunities should be snapped up immediately. He never considers for a moment that deriding his colleagues to others is destructive for the team.

Good team relationships are essential if a team is to become high-performing. When there is a lack of respect, understanding and trust in a team, then there is no real team – only a collection of employees.

Diversity of inputs comes from a team that is balanced in terms of work preferences. The Creator-Innovator usually sees problems and opportunities in a different way to the Concluder-Producer who may well have a different viewpoint from the Assessor-Developer. Out of this diversity the best solution can be developed, but only if harmonious team relationships are maintained. When there is diversity, then everyone has to work hard to develop mutual respect, understanding and trust. Individual differences must be valued.

If team members understand the special skills and contributions that each person brings to a job, they are much more likely to develop respect for one another. While Controller-Inspectors may criticise an Explorer-Promoter for being impulsive, noisy and vague, when they understand that all the Types of Work functions must be covered by the team, they should start to value the Explorer-Promoter's contribution. Recognising and celebrating people's strengths can help foster good team relationships.

Team relationships will also be difficult when 'Pollyanna' team members interact with 'Eeyores'. The Risk-Orientation Model helps people understand why opportunities and obstacles must be in balance for the risk/return ratio to be in the right range. Listening to and appreciating the diversity in approach to risk can lead to better team relationships.

As far as the Window on Work Values is concerned (refer e-book: *Window on Work Values*, McCann (2020), differing value types can have a profound effect on team relationships. Where team members hold strongly opposing values then many difficulties will arise. In general, people are more accommodating in adjusting for diversity of preferences and risk but for difference in values, conflict is more likely. The Linking Leader must fully understand each team member's workplace behaviour profile so that discussions and decisions can be crafted to preserve team relationships.

Problem Solving and Counselling

Case Study: No deal

Jon sighed as another member of staff approached his office. This open-door policy that the MD insisted on was a nuisance. Someone was in and out of his office all day interrupting his train of thought. He put on his smile as she entered, asking her to sit down.

Noori wanted him to sort out a delivery schedule problem that kept occurring. She had mentioned it on many occasions, but it was getting worse. The manager of dispatch was insisting that it was their problem, not his.

Jon listened to Noori and asked her to leave the file, promising to deal with it later, as he had more pressing tasks. She tried to ask him for a specific time but he refused to commit himself. Reluctantly Noori left his office and as she turned away, he tossed the file into the far basket on his desk, where all the trivia waited for attention. He was unaware that the whole office knew about his 'black hole' as they named it.

His phone rang immediately; it was a staff member who was on sick leave. Des rang regularly because he was unlikely to return to work for another six weeks and he was worried the office couldn't run without him. Jon was irritated by Des and would give him one-word answers and put the phone down as quickly as possible.

Team members need to learn how to be available and responsive when other team members have a problem. Being responsive means showing a sincere interest in individuals and their problems. It means that you are willing to listen and offer advice if asked, or give guidance when needed. Sometimes just listening and showing that you care is all that is needed.

The importance of not just being available (like Jon) but also responsive is shown by the many nicknames in use to describe managers who are poor at individual problem-solving and counselling.

- **The Mirror Manager:** I'll look into it
- **The Footballer Manager:** I'll kick it around
- **The Boomerang Manager:** I'll get back to you
- **The Boat Captain Manager:** I'll take that on board

Such throwaway comments often indicate that the 'utterer' has no intention of 'looking into it' or 'getting back'. The very existence of these nicknames shows how important it is to team members that their leaders become accomplished at dealing with problem issues.

Good Linking Leaders develop a 'counselling technique' when dealing on a one-to-one basis with team members. They use a combination of Pacing and Inquiring techniques to get at the heart of the presenting problem. Without discovering the root cause of any problem it is difficult to come up with an adequate solution. Some people like to be asked direct questions (Specific Inquiry) whereas others prefer more 'open ended' questions (General Inquiry). Some people like to concentrate on the facts whereas others like to talk about their feelings. It is important to know when and how to use the various modes of Inquiry that are possible. These modes are summarised below.

	Specific Inquiry	General Inquiry
Facts		
Feelings		

Some examples for each quadrant are:

Specific Fact:	How much will it cost? Will it work?
Specific Feeling:	Are you annoyed? Do you feel confident about this?
General Fact:	Tell me what you think
General Feeling:	How do you feel about this?

A good inquirer will mix up all Inquiry modes to discover the important details of a problem. Too many specific questions may break any 'pace' that is established but a skilled problem-solver will quickly notice this, re-establish the pace and move to one of the other modes.

Participative Decision Making

> ### Case Study: Too many meetings?
>
> **Amir:** I'm sorry I can't help at the moment. I've got a meeting to attend.
>
> **Imran:** What, another one? You've had three this week!
>
> **Amir:** I know - don't remind me!
>
> **Imran:** Do you need that many?
>
> **Amir:** Well, Audrey reckons we do. She insists we all attend and agree on procedures.
>
> **Imran:** What's this one on?
>
> **Amir:** Software and a new printer.
>
> **Imran:** That should be fun. I didn't know you knew anything about them.
>
> **Amir:** I don't and I don't care really – I don't need to know anything about computers in the tooling shed. However I guess it is part of being a manager even if it is a waste of time.

Audrey is the factory CEO and likes to be seen to involve all the managers in the decision-making processes. She likes to make them feel an integral part of the general administration as well as having ownership of the direction the company takes. However the question arises: Does she have too many meetings? What is the right balance for a team leader in involving her team in participative decision-making?

Team members need to be involved in decision-making on key issues so that there is joint ownership of solutions and commitment to their implementation. However, the decision-making process needs to be clearly defined. If every team member participates in all decisions, then the team may well spend all its time in meetings. On the other hand, if decisions are made only by individuals then there is little ownership of the 'solutions' and the necessary action may not be implemented. The 'trick' to good participative decision-making is to define the 'key' areas on which team members would like to be consulted. The best way to do this is to review the decision-making process as a team and ask everyone what areas they feel strongly about.

The first step towards establishing guidelines for decision-making is to revisit all the roles and responsibilities of each team member. Each person's role in the team should be discussed and limits and boundaries set for the decisions that person can make by themselves. After this process all other decisions become the responsibility of the team. For this process to work well, it must be accompanied by a system of sharing information regularly. All team members may not want to be involved actively in a particular decision, but it is essential to good Linking for each member to know of the decision. There are a number of ways that this can be carried out efficiently, such as:

- Short written reports for circulation
- Short items on meeting agendas
- E-mail messages
- Five-minute stand-ups

There is a useful formula to describe team decision-making:

$$ED = Q \times A$$

Where ED is the effectiveness of the decision

Q is the quality of the solution

A is the acceptance of the solution

You can have the finest solution ready to use but if the acceptance by the whole team is low then its effectiveness will be poor. On occasions, it may well be better to use a lower quality solution that has a wide acceptance among team members. This will result in a much higher value for the effectiveness of the decision.

Interface Management

<div style="border:1px solid">

Case Study: Without-a-link

"Look, I don't care what technical services thinks. This is customer services and they know nothing about it. If they can't keep up, it's not my problem!"

Li Min stormed out of the director's office and returned to her desk. How she hated that arrogant Phil Scott airing his views about how customer services should relay information to the rest of the company.

He'd be better improving product repair response time rather than interfering with her team. If they can't provide a technical solution to what she promised a customer then it's their problem.

Li Min was proud of her team and they all worked well together. They had regular meetings and a ten-minute update session every morning before work. There was nothing they didn't know about. They had a whiteboard for recording problems and assigned prompt actions so that customers would be dealt with quickly.

</div>

Interface Management is a term used to describe the process of managing the links between team members and from the team itself to other teams or key stakeholders. There are two important aspects of Interface Management - external Linking and internal Linking.

External Linking

Li Min probably has ensured that her team has good internal Linking but it is in external Linking that she has problems. No team can be fully effective unless it links to people outside the team. The success of any one team will invariably depend on other teams within the organisation, on senior management, on relationships with customers and even suppliers and competitors. External Linking is about being proactive with these people to ensure they understand what you are doing and what you need from them. Clearly Li Min needs to review how strong the links are from her team to the key stakeholders impacting the success of her team. Responsibility for links to all of these stakeholders should be divided among team members, perhaps with Li Min taking on the more important links.

A team needs to be well linked internally if it is to perform effectively. There needs to be high levels of interaction and communication, if your team is to function well. Each person needs to know what the others are doing. Therefore, it is important to establish good information flows. Some teams have daily 'five-minute meetings' just so everyone knows what is going on.

Internal Linking can be represented visually by the following diagram.
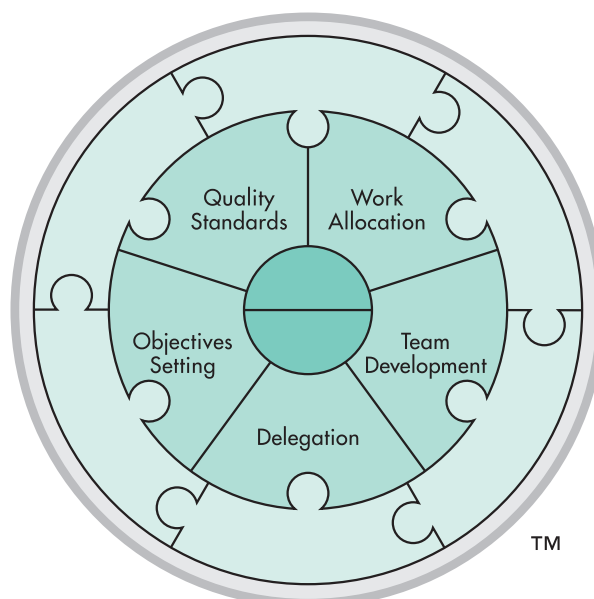
Figure 6.   Internal Linking

— Strong linking
— Moderate linking
— Some linking
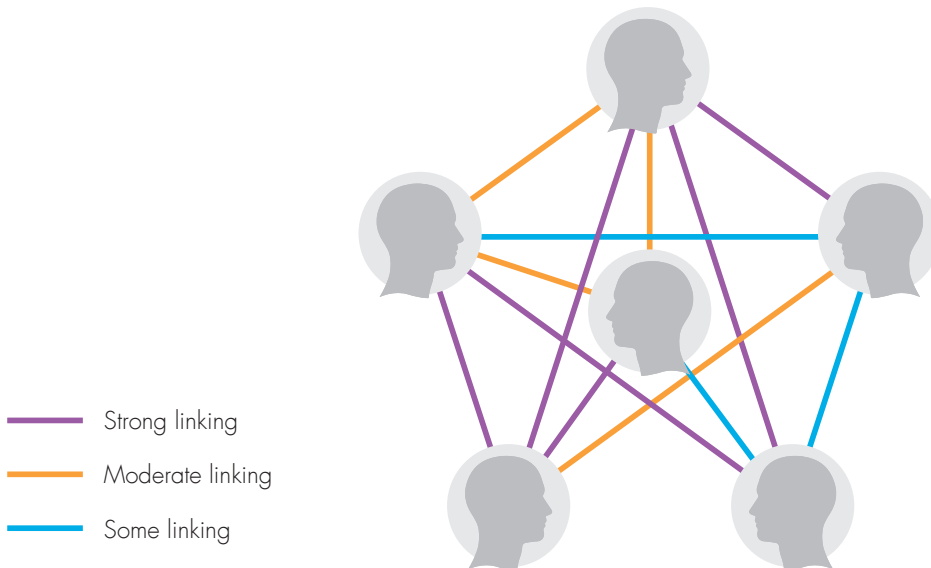
A robust team is one where everyone is well linked to other team members as shown above.

Task Linking Skills

There are five core Task Linking Skills that need to guide the workplace behaviour of the leader and the more senior members of successful teams.

Figure 7.   Task Linking Skills Model

Team Development

Case Study: The wrong paint

A firm of Industrial painters was tendering for work, painting a small road bridge in Northern Victoria, Australia. The company was expanding and keen to take on new work. Recently they had put in proposals for so many tenders that they now had a quick, efficient costing system.

Peter Dixon and his senior management team prided themselves on their organising systems and their ability to deliver jobs on time and to budget.

They looked at the age and specifications of the bridge briefly and prepared their tender. This bridge was similar to many others they had painted over the years but competition was now stiff. They put in their tender based on a revolutionary new paint from the USA which was designed to adhere to metal through extremes of temperature – ideal for this bridge as it needed to withstand minus degrees Celsius in the winter and over 45 degrees in the summer.

Their tender was accepted and they organised their crews to complete the work. When the first crew arrived they discovered that much of the bridge was made of the original wooden beams for which the metal paint was useless. The reconstructed parts of the bridge were metal. On closer examination of the specification, they could see that the wooden sections were marked – they managed to complete the job within the time specified but the mistake cost them most of their profit.

Peter's team was excellent at the Organising, Producing and Inspecting parts of the Types of Work Wheel but he had never paid much attention to the Advising, Innovating and Promoting sectors. Not surprising, as most of the team were chosen for their Thruster-Organiser and Concluder-Producer preferences – more or less clones of Peter himself.

To be a Linking Leader it is important to put effort into developing your team so that all eight Types of Work functions are performed well. A leadership priorities checklist will help do this.

- What information is needed?
- Is this the best way of doing it?
- Who are the stakeholders we need to influence?
- Is this what the stakeholders want?
- Are we well enough organised?
- Are our products/services clearly defined in terms of outputs and outcomes?
- What details need checking?
- Are we maintaining our standards?

Where teams have an imbalance in terms of role preferences there is a good chance that some of these checklist activities may have a low priority or even be neglected. If this is the case, then the team needs to plan ways of developing skills in areas that are not preferences.

Coloured Meetings

When sunlight is passed through a prism, the white light disperses into the colours of the spectrum: from red through orange, yellow, green and blue to violet. This physics theory was adapted to the Team Management Wheel, where the colours of the Wheel meet in the white Linking centre. The team role preferences complement one another and together make a 'whole' team. Working and Linking well together unites the colours into white light.
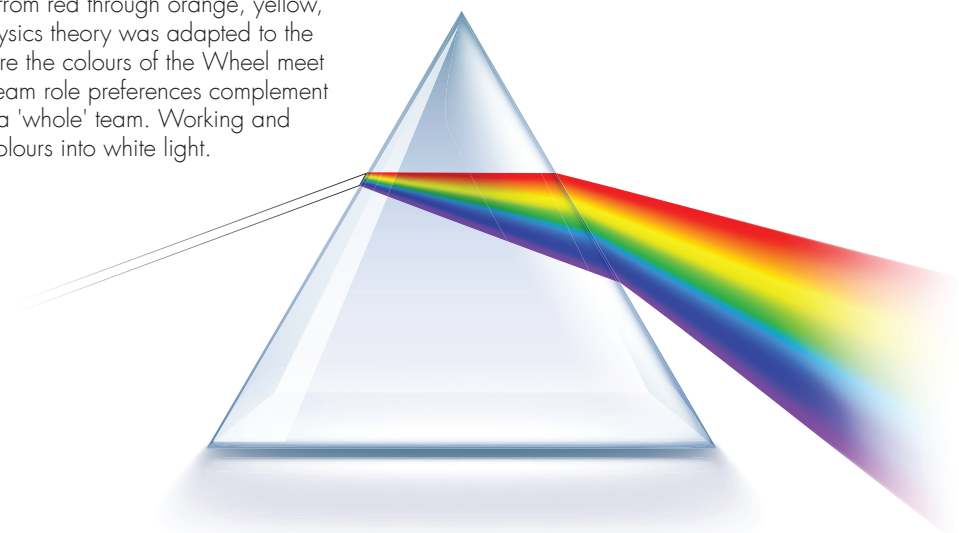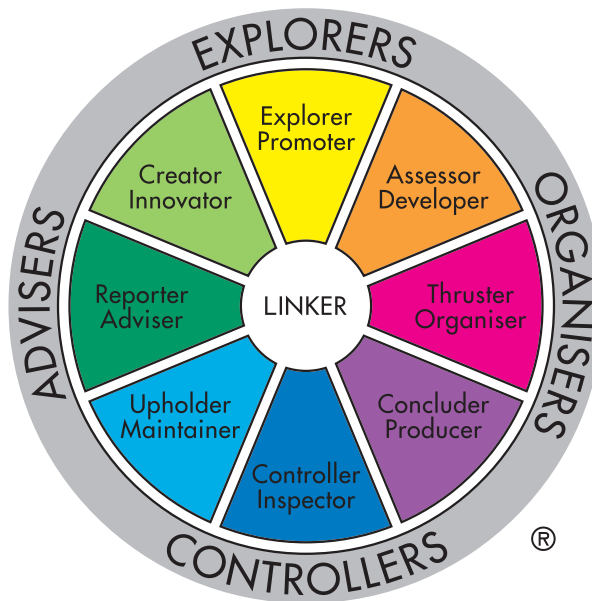
Figure 8.   Margerison-McCann Team Management Wheel

The four main colours are:		
Fresh Green		The beginning of life is a process of learning and gathering information. Green is the colour of new growth in plants. Green was chosen to represent the areas of the Team Management Wheel that focus on new ideas and information.
Bright Yellow		The yellow sun gives life to the earth and nourishes life in general. How much better we feel on a bright sunny day. Yellow was chosen to represent the promoting aspects of teamwork.
Warm Red		Red is the colour of action, warmth, and emotions. The warm red colour was chosen to represent the sectors of the Team Management Wheel where action takes place and heat is generated from movement.
Deep Blue		After the activity comes the cooling off period. Blue is the colour of cool, clear thinking which represents the control and detail of the Wheel, the period for reflection and checking that all the outcomes have been met. Deep blue is the colour of the depths of the ocean.

The colours of the Team Management Wheel and the TMS concepts can be used to run effective meetings. Often when teams have work preferences in one particular area of the Wheel, they tend to give other areas of the Wheel less attention, which can lead to problems.

Green meetings

These meetings concentrate on gathering information and thinking about new ideas and new ways of doing things. They are not meetings for decisions; they are held purely to investigate the possibilities. Many people in the Adviser and Explorer parts of the Team Management Wheel really enjoy green meetings. If a team consists of people with these work preferences only, then they have to make a concerted effort to make some action plans during the meeting and put them into place.

Yellow meetings

Yellow meetings focus on promoting the ideas both within the organisation and to external customers. Often to make a project work, teams have to sell their ideas to others in order to obtain the people and resources to carry them out. Communicating ideas is an important part of the team focus if it is to continually deliver what people want.

Red meetings

Red meetings move into the developing and organising of ideas. The development of ideas needs attention to ensure that practical products are delivered within the budget constraints. Ideas that end up costing too much or not delivering the expected outcome can waste time, money and effort.

Once the idea is fully developed then people and resources need to be organised to deliver results. People with preferences in the Organiser sectors of the Team Management Wheel enjoy these meetings as they can make decisions and get some action going. Establishing goals and schedules will ensure that the outcomes are delivered.

Blue meetings

These meetings focus on time to reflect on the progress and evaluate the processes used. Often this meeting can be overlooked and teams who neglect the time needed to assess the project tend to miss the areas that could be improved.

Taking time to check the details and audit the project will go a long way to keeping your customers satisfied and your team effective.

Case study

The case study below shows that even if a team is unbalanced in terms of role preferences, it can become a high-performing one, provided the Task Linking Skill of Team Development is implemented. In this case the team preferred action and quick decisions but compensated by allocating time for innovation and reflection.

Case Study: An action-packed team

The directors of a large industrial contracting organisation requested help as they were having problems with their decision-making process.

This company was a family business that had grown rapidly and now had five directors. They had built up a reputation for being efficient project managers. Their contracts were invariably completed to time and within budget. This reputation won them many large contracts even when their tender had been higher.

The problem

After two years, they began to experience problems. They were securing contracts that they would implement as usual but the costs were increasing unexpectedly and the jobs took longer than planned. Their reputation was becoming tarnished and they wanted to reverse this before any more damage was done. The five directors completed a Team Management Profile Questionnaire and the results were given to them during their monthly meeting. They were introduced to the concepts of TMS and when they received their Team Management Profiles, the reason for their problems became apparent. All five directors were Thruster-Organisers.

Their strength in the Organising part of the Wheel was good and was the reason that their project management skills were so highly praised. However, this meant that the Advising part of the Wheel was not receiving as much attention as was necessary.

Gathering information is an important part of the decision-making process. As none of the directors had a preference for this area of the Wheel, problems started to occur. All the directors had strong preferences for organising, so they preferred to get into action rather than gather more information.

The solution

Once they were aware of this and the implications, they resolved to pay attention to the Advising area of the Wheel. With the help of the Types of Work Wheel they began to structure their meetings to pay more attention to the other work functions.

🟢 **Green meetings**

They started off by having a 'green' meeting that concentrated on the Advising and Innovating work functions. In this meeting they decided on what information was needed, who would gather it and from where they would get it. Once this information was gathered they looked at different and new ways of doing things rather than continuing as they had always done.

🟡 **Yellow meetings**

From here, they would concentrate on 'yellow' meetings. The directors contacted their customers, clients and new prospects to promote their ideas and make sure that these new services were acceptable. Feedback from the customers was incorporated into the plans and the project moved to a development stage.

🔴 **Red meetings**

Of course, they enjoyed their 'red' meetings the best as they could plan their projects and organise the people and resources to put the ideas into action. Producing was the next area of focus and this was again an area that they preferred. Producing the project was one of their strengths and they would all enjoy seeing the outputs.

🔵 **Blue meetings:**

The 'blue' meetings were again out of their preference area but they realised the value of revisiting the project and seeing if everything went to plan. This was time for reflection on the process they had used and to make sure that their high standards had been maintained. It took a few months for the directors to settle into the habit of always auditing the eight Types of Work functions but the time spent in those meetings paid dividends down the track. The company regained its reputation for high standards of effectiveness and efficiency and gained extra recognition for always being innovative.had been maintained. It took a few months for the directors to settle into the habit of always auditing the eight Types of Work functions but the time spent in those meetings paid dividends down the track. The company regained its reputation for high standards of effectiveness and efficiency and gained extra recognition for always being innovative.

Delegation

Delegation is a process of ensuring that people have the skills to carry out tasks before the task is delegated. The responsibility is with the manager to ensure that sufficient training and coaching are given to all team members, to handle delegated tasks. Tasks are not something to be tossed around the team until someone does it right.

This Linking Skill is important for leaders of teams or team members who have staff reporting to them. For self-organised teams it is less important and the relevant issues can be dealt with under the Linking Skill of Work Allocation. All managers and supervisors understand the need to delegate but very few realise that it is a process that has to be developed by constant interaction between the various parties. In mature teams delegation may not even be necessary. Tasks are more likely to be negotiated between the supervisors and their team members, with everyone recognising that certain tasks have to be done, and that the most favourable distribution of assignments is for the benefit of all.

Delegation is a process that starts from the moment someone joins your team. The five-step process is represented below:

Figure 9.   The delegation process
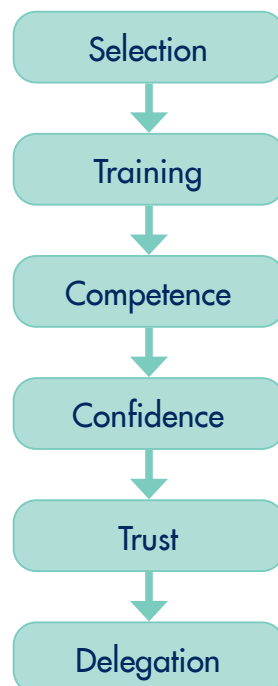
Working from the bottom upwards you will see that we delegate tasks to those whom we trust will do the job according to our standards. Continuing up the 'ladder', we trust people only when we have confidence in their skills, knowledge and abilities. We develop this confidence by observing and allowing others to demonstrate their competence. Finally people will be willing and able to show their level of competence if we are working with them and ensuring that they receive the proper training and support. At all levels in the organisation, training should be the first critical activity as soon as someone is selected; their training should be specifically linked to the needs of both the team and the organisation.

Objectives Setting

Case Study: Market followers

The CEO of a small interior-design company was concerned when sales began to plateau. The company had increased sales in every one of its last ten years and then in the eleventh year, there was no increase, just a small decrease. The CEO had relied upon market trends for his direction. He followed the trends rather than made them and the company had been successful until recently.

He called an extraordinary meeting of all the staff. He was surprised when he discovered that no-one had much of an idea where the company was heading. They knew the sales figures and the budget, to which they adhered each month, but there was no long-term plan in place. The marketing team felt stale and had no idea what to offer the customers for the future.

Objectives setting is vital if the company is going to move forward. There has to be a long-term plan even if it needs to be revised as unanticipated changes in the industry occur. With interior design, the fashions change yearly and certain colours dominate for a few seasons before being replaced.

Demographic changes can forecast the mix of dwelling types. For example, it may be possible to predict an upsurge in apartment living. If this were the case then objectives set around obtaining contracts to furnish display apartments could be a lucrative target.

Teams without clear objectives will fail. In many years of consulting work, I have found that teams with clear goals that are delivered take pride in their work. Delivering what is expected of you does wonders for team morale and motivation. By concentrating on the outputs and outcomes, the energy of the team can be focused on results. Teams where the 'goal posts' are constantly changing are usually low performing. Team members may work hard but their efforts are spread in all different directions.

Some teams concentrate on the 'inputs' rather than the 'outputs'. They focus on the resources they need, the information they must gather, planning, and new ideas and so on. While these are important, teams cannot 'win' unless they deliver 'outputs'. Some teams confuse the ends with the means required to achieve those ends.

Therefore, it is important for all team members to regularly review their outputs. In short, you need to know what has to be done, by when, by whom, and within what specific guidelines. Once these are clearly defined then the resources required can be identified - the people, the money, the equipment.

Outputs should clearly focus on what the customer or client of the team wants. The best way of knowing this is to ask the client. This can be done informally by asking or formally through the use of feedback surveys. The whole basis of continuous improvement is to deliver high quality, high performance results.

When setting objectives, it is important to involve team members in formulating the key result areas (sometimes known as KRA's) or key performance indicators (KPI's). Such indicators fall into two general classes - output indicators and effectiveness indicators. Output indicators refer to the delivery of the results whereas effectiveness indicators relate to the outcomes achieved. Often people measure their results only by output indicators - 'it has been done efficiently' - and they forget the effectiveness indicator, which measures whether or not they have been doing the right thing in the first place.

Whatever the focus, there needs to be a set of objectives covering a range of time periods, and not just a monthly target based on what has happened in the past.

Quality Standards

> ### *Case Study: Booking the system*
>
> **Abi:** Why did it take us three weeks to get the book sent to Mr. Whitmore? We promise 48 hours on the order forms.
>
> **Duncan:** There weren't any copies on the shelf so it had to be ordered in.
>
> **Abi:** Why were there none on the shelves? Don't we reorder when we get to the last twenty or something?
>
> **Duncan:** Don't know. Anyway, I don't do the reordering I just make sure the boxes are packed and go to the correct address.
>
> **Abi:** Who does the ordering?
>
> **Duncan:** Not sure really. I think it's all done on computer. Doesn't the computer do it automatically?
>
> The organisation where this happened was amazed that the inventory and ordering systems were not working as they should. The software was set up so that books dispatched automatically were linked to the ordering system and the continuous inventory monitoring. The monitoring was set up to show a warning when stores were getting low. However the new stock was not being regularly entered into the system and so the reports were not accurate. For this reason a visual check of stock was carried out when someone remembered but it was not a scheduled task.
>
> Performance had slowly declined over a period but it wasn't until lots of complaints poured in that the system was properly implemented.

All teams should strive for quality in everything they do. Quality is a key to organisational success and makes the difference between successful and unsuccessful organisations.

Quality standards in teamwork mean having standards and procedures that everyone must follow. These standards are those that meet the expectations of the client.

As a Linking Leader you need to set the tone for 'quality' within the team. This means establishing high standards for the tasks you carry out and setting an example for others to follow. It also means focusing on clients' detailed needs and helping team members to learn from their mistakes as they constantly strive to do better. Together, quality standards and objectives setting are the cornerstones of the continuous improvement process.

Work Allocation

Work Allocation as a Linking Skill means assigning tasks to team members according to competencies and preferences. Sometimes people can be competent in an assigned task that is not their preference. For example, it is quite possible for an Explorer-Promoter to be competent in Inspecting tasks, such as auditing or quality control. However, if it is not their preference then they may lose interest and possibly become de-motivated.

In the case study 'Fish out of water' Martin clearly has little preference for interacting with customers, preferring to focus on Producing and Inspecting work. When allocated Promoting and Developing work he clearly found it stressful. We have found that on average people seek a two-thirds overlap between their preferences and the work they are assigned. If they are spending two-thirds of their time on doing work they like, they are prepared to stretch outside their comfort zone to develop skills in new areas. However if the opposite is true – two-thirds of their time spent in work not matching their preferences – then there is a level of stress and discomfort. We all need to stretch ourselves but perhaps Jamila could have had a better result if she understood the key Task Linking Skill of Work Allocation.

Leadership Linking Skills

There are two skills at the centre of the Linking Leader Model, unique to team leaders. Without them leaders are unlikely to reach their full potential.

Figure 9.   Leadership Linking Model
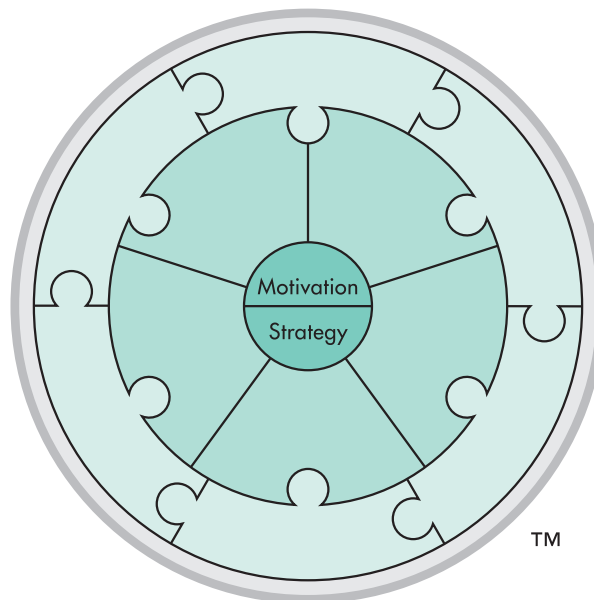
Motivation

Case Study: Harridan Hazel

Hazel Winchester owned a consultancy and had negotiated a merger with another company. This merger would bring a global focus to the organisation as the other company had many international clients whereas the Winchester Consultancy had mainly national clients. Hazel wanted to head up the new venture, citing her worldwide influential contacts on the 'Women in Business' speaking circuit.

Hazel outlined the plans to her staff. They were enthusiastic as it would mean travel for them and the challenge of overseas clients. The sales targets looked high but with two companies now merged, Hazel was convinced that the synergy would yield results.

In the merged organisation, Hazel was CEO and Eric and Oskar, directors of the other company reported to her. Eric and Oskar would sell consulting assignments to the contacts that Hazel passed onto them. Hazel's commitments to the speaking circuit meant she was often absent for long periods but she used the time to find prospective clients. Even when she was away she insisted on having the final decision on all contracts. This regularly slowed down the process, resulting in many abandoned contracts caused by her insistence on alterations.

Eric and Oskar thought that Hazel's vision of the future was very fuzzy. She seemed to refer all sorts of clients requiring services outside the expertise of the company. Rather than develop a niche in the market, Hazel simply reacted to anything and everything that came her way.

When she was in the office after hours, she would rummage through everyone's desks and read all the correspondence – leaving notes and comments on many files. Eric and Oskar objected strongly to her interference. She had to be a signatory on all payments over $10,000 which often meant delays in payment of important accounts when she was traveling. On her return she would berate the accountant for not being proactive in preparing checks before her departure – forgetting that she would never sign a check for which there was no invoice.

Any mistakes would be attributed directly and publicly to the person involved. She would advise the client to deal directly with her in future to ensure that their wishes were granted. In her absence Eric and Oskar would deal with their clients, but often she would overrule their decisions when she returned, apologising to the client for their incompetence.

Hazel refused to accept any responsibility when the figures were falling short of the targets set. She was adamant that her control on the decisions never restricted the growth of the business. She accused Eric and Oskar of not having the organisation's interests at heart. She inferred that the staff was equally to blame because they were complacent once a contract was won.

Within twelve months, there were few staff members remaining and the partnership was dissolved. Eric and Oskar managed to retain some of their own clients and began to rebuild their previously successful business. Hazel used the experience to lecture about how women should choose their business partners carefully and not expect men to share their values and standards.

Effective leaders articulate a compelling vision of the team's future. If people are to give of their best they need to have a clear picture of what lies ahead. In addition they need to be persuaded that this vision is worth pursuing and it is here that the Linking Leader has a real chance to motivate the team. Along with the vision there needs to be a set of clear goals that act as beacons to follow. A leader who focuses unwaveringly on these goals will inspire team members to give of their best. Nothing de-motivates people more than when the goals are constantly changing.

It is important for a Linking Leader to take a stand when controversial issues arise affecting the team. Team members need to know that someone is out there fighting for them and being an advocate for the team. If team members feel justifiably ill-treated by some issue or situation, then it is important for the leader to put the case strongly to senior people in the organisation. When team members feel there is someone standing up for them, sometimes in unpleasant circumstances, then they will be more willing to put in extra effort and respond to what the leader needs from them.

Effective leaders inspire team members to perform. This is particularly important when setbacks occur and people have become de-motivated. At these times it is important to understand how everyone is feeling and use the skills of leading to encourage team members to put the past behind them and look towards a prosperous future. People will give of their best when they have high hopes for the future and it is the Linking Leader's role to encourage and maintain this.

Leading

Leading is one of the most critical influencing skills – one that can transform the direction of a conversation or meeting if carried out with skill. It involves transmitting information in a way that 'leads' people towards possible solutions. Leading can be done overtly (simple leading) or in a subtle way (complex leading). Complex techniques for Leading involve the use of presuppositions, hypotheticals and also storytelling.

Presuppositions are statements that presuppose some situation (assume it is true) and then focus the conversation on action based on the assumption. It is a very effective way of getting people to focus on solutions that could be beneficial to them. An example of a simple presupposition is the statement:

"Are you going to travel to the meeting in your own car or by bus?"

This statement presupposes that there are only two choices, whereas there may be many other options. However the person making the statement wants to limit choice and tries to get the other person to focus on the more acceptable options.

Hypotheticals include phrases such as 'Just suppose that…' or 'If we were to…….' These statements temporarily accept a particular course of action and then the other person is led into considering what the implications might be. Very often this removes a barrier in their thinking and enables them to consider a range of possible options. The process of thinking very often clarifies what action should be taken, e.g."*Bill, just suppose that we were to go ahead with expanding our production by 20 percent – what would we have to do to cope with the output?*"

Storytelling is a powerful technique of Leading, often used in various religions to illustrate codes to live by. Skill is required to carefully formulate stories or use parables that contain information indirectly suggesting to the other person the best course of action. Stories incorporating 'embedded quotes' or 'analog marking' are particularly effective. For further information on this refer to McCann (1993), *How to Influence Others at Work*, or McCann and Stewart (1997), Aesops Management Fables.

Another aspect of Leading involves the selection of the correct communication channel by which to transmit information. For example, if you are trying to convince Creator-Innovators or Explorer-Promoters that a particular course of action is best then it is probably best to communicate in 'pictures'. This can be done by presenting simple visual diagrams to them, showing the relationships of all the variables. This helps stimulate their thought processes and enables them to visualise the solution you might be advocating.

If you are leading an Assessor-Developer or Thruster-Organiser towards possible solutions the information is probably best transmitted using either brief oral or written formats. This means that your words should be chosen carefully, the logic of what you are saying carefully thought through and based on facts.

Metaphors are also very effective in leading people to solutions. The best metaphors are selected to match to the other person's preferred channel of communication and therefore can be visual, auditory or based on feelings. Metaphors should be original, and carefully related to the solutions being proposed.

Strategy

Beavers

Beavers are industrious creatures, being undaunted by hard work. Their habitat is the river and its bank, and their lives are continually governed by floods and droughts. Survival depends upon their resolve to duty.

The rivers of North America are full of beavers. In one such river there lived many families whose territories had been established over several generations. Each adolescent male would seek out a new reach nearby and establish his home, hoping to attract a mate.

The families coexisted happily, each living separate lives. They were unaware of one another's daily activities, nor did they care. They kept to themselves, ensuring that their own section of river was as comfortable as they could make it. Daily, they gnawed at saplings and felled them, building and repairing the dam to create a deeper pond in which to live. Diligently they plugged the gaps in the dam wall, stemming the water flow to create a peaceful environment for their young. A deeper pond would increase their food supply.

Each family's world was confined to their part of the river. For them, nothing existed beyond. Otherwise they would be encroaching on the habitat of a relative. However, the families were not independent. The actions of one colony impacted another. Viewed from above it was easy to see how the hundreds of beaver colonies were affecting the flow of the river. It was developing a new course as dammed water flowed across the flat plains into virgin areas.

Oblivious to the impact of their natural instincts, the families 'beavered away', building and maintaining their dams. They could not see the 'big picture'. The practical results of their efforts focused on providing food and shelter only for themselves.

Often, a family moving in upstream would build a new dam, causing a downstream family to lose water and therefore look for a new home. The impact cascaded down the river as each colony reacted to the changed circumstances. Nobody ever bothered to ask the question, 'why'? Their instinct for survival was paramount in their minds.

Every year, during the wet season, heavy rains fell. Each beaver family would reinforce the dam to provide extra protection. Whenever the water level rose, they would build the dam wall a little higher, thereby retaining more and more water. When the floods came, every three years or so, the water pressure was too great and the dam walls broke, releasing a gush of water. Like dominos, the walls fell as the water rushed downstream.

Each breaking wall magnified the effect, increasing the thrust of the water as it gained momentum. Some beavers survived but many lost their homes and their young. In the lower reaches of the valley, the river burst its banks, flooding a nearby village and drowning animals and children in its wake.

So many organisations today are like beaver colonies. Each section or department gets on with its own business and no attempt is made to see the big picture. How often do we hear the words 'them' and 'us' uttered to describe sections of an organisation? It is almost as if the different parts of the organisation are in competition with one another, rather than pulling in the same direction. To some extent, the structure of organisations into various departments, each performing a specific function, has contributed to this. Accountants, engineers and marketers all speak a different language and like the beavers will go out of their way to protect their territory, rather than seeing how they can cooperate for the benefit of the whole organisation.

No section, branch or department can work in isolation. Organisations are systemic, part of a huge cybernetic system where outputs from one part become inputs to another. The challenge of modern management is to see this big picture and to understand the interactions of all the key elements comprising an organisation. The external environment is changing at such a rapid rate that we must continually monitor every aspect of work and adapt, so that the overall outcomes of the organisation are enhanced by the outputs of the individual parts.

The key to success in any cybernetic system is flexibility. The first law of cybernetics states that in anything that operates systemically, the elements of the system that have the greatest flexibility or adaptability are the ones that gain control. This law is sometimes known as the Law of Requisite Variety. It is the governing law for survival in nature where organic species that adapt to changes are the ones that survive.

In business, survival also depends on adaptability, which is only possible by thinking strategically - by seeing the 'big picture'. It requires a leader to stand back from the cut and thrust of daily life and examine the purpose of what they are doing. How do all the parts of the business interact to achieve the grand plan? What impact will external environmental issues have on my organisation? How can I plan to avoid a catastrophe?

For many people it is difficult to 'zoom out' and see the relationships between individual parts. Like the beavers, they work in their own 'box', never bothering to open the lid and admire the beauty and excitement of what lies beyond. It requires skill, experience and determination to do this.

In the *Fifth Discipline Fieldbook* (Senge et al, 1994), the authors describe the importance of systems thinking in a learning organisation. The concepts are based upon the techniques of systems dynamics that analyse how complex feedback processes can generate problematic patterns of behaviour within organisations and large-scale human systems. They present several systems archetypes that show how the best solutions are often those which are unrelated in time and space to the presenting problem.

Of particular interest is the Shifting the Burden archetype, which differentiates between the 'quick fix' and the underlying root cause of a problem. A good example from everyday life is the headache. The quick fix is an aspirin but this doesn't solve the long-term problem that could be any one of a number of defects in other parts of the body. A strategic thinker will spend time looking for the root cause whereas many people would simply opt for the obvious solution of 'more aspirin, more often'.

Linking Leader Profile

It is difficult for someone to assess their own Linking Skills. You may, for example, think of yourself as a poor listener, but if your colleagues have experienced many instances where you have listened attentively to what they have to say, they may consider you to be a good listener. On the other hand, they may feel you could improve your Linking Skills but have so far been reluctant to tell you.

The most accurate way to assess Linking Skills is to use a multi-rater approach where a number of respondents (including the self-rater) answer 78 items covering People Linking Skills, Task Linking Skills and Leadership Linking Skills. The results are then presented as satisfaction rates that measure how satisfied respondents are with the various Linking Skills. Results are reported in a comprehensive report covering narrative, graphic and quantitative feedback.

Please contact Team Management Systems for further information.

Conclusion

Leadership is primarily about relationships and this is best expressed through the idea of Linking. Linking is defined by a number of skills which when translated into workplace behaviour have a coordinating and integrating effect upon colleagues and followers.

The Linking Leader Model is a full range leadership model ideal for use in teams. It identifies three levels of Linking that have differential effects on outcomes such as satisfaction, effectiveness, outputs and extra effort. The model is cumulative in that the successful implementation of any level depends on the levels below also being effectively implemented.

At the first level of the model are the People Linking Skills, which need to be implemented by all team members to ensure that the people relationships are optimal, both among team members (horizontal Linking) and upwards with higher-level management (vertical Linking). These are the skills of:

- Active Listening
- Communication
- Team Relationships
- Problem Solving and Counselling
- Participative Decision Making
- Interface Management

At the second level of the Linking Leader Model are the Task Linking Skills, which focus on the relationships among tasks. These apply more to the senior team members and team leader(s) who are accountable and responsible for outputs. The behaviours here focus primarily on delivering outputs. They can be implemented in either a supportive way or a directive way.

- Work Allocation
- Team Development
- Delegation
- Objectives Setting
- Quality Standards

At the third level of the Linking Leader Model are the Leadership Linking Skills, which highlight processes that influence followers to go beyond their self-interest and give extra effort for the benefit of the business unit or organisation.

- Motivation
- Strategy

When all three levels are successfully implemented, a Linking Leader is created.

References

- **Improving Organizational Effectiveness through Transformational Leadership**, Bass, B.N. and Avolio, B.J., (1994), Sage, Thousand Oaks, California.

- **Management of Organisational Behaviour** (8th Ed), Hersey, P., Blanchard, K.H. and Johnson, D.E., (2000), Pearson Education, Prentice Hall, New Jersey.

- **Team Management: Practical New Approaches**, Margerison, C.J. and McCann, D.J., (1995), Management Books 2000, Chalford, Gloucestershire, UK.

- **How to Influence Others at Work**, McCann, D.J., (1993), Butterworth-Heinemann, Oxford.

- **The Workplace Behaviour Pyramid**, McCann, D.J., (2020), Team Management Systems, Brisbane, Australia.

- **Window on Work Values**, McCann, D.J., (2020), Team Management Systems, Brisbane, Australia.

- **Team Management Systems Research Manual** 5th Edition, McCann, D.J. and Mead, N.H.S. (Eds.), (2018), Institute of Team Management Studies, Brisbane, Australia.

- **Aesops Management Fables**, McCann, D.J. and Stewart, J.M., (1997), Butterworth-Heinemann, Oxford.

- **The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook**, Senge, P., Roberts, C., Ross, R., Smith, B. and Kleiner, A., (1994) Nicholas Brealey, London.

About the author

With a background in science, engineering, finance and organisational behaviour, Dick McCann has consulted widely for organisations such as BP and Hewlett Packard. He is co-author of Team Management: Practical New Approaches, with Charles Margerison; author of How to Influence Others at Work and The Workplace Wizard: The Definitive Guide to Working with Others; and co-author with Jan Stewart of Aesop's Management Fables. Dick is co-author and developer of the Team Management Systems concepts and products and also author of the QO$_2$™ Profile, Window on Work Values and Organisational Values Profiles and the Strategic Team Development Profile. Dick has been involved in TMS worldwide for over 30 years.

About Team Management Systems

Further information on Team Management Systems can be found online at www.TeamManagementSystems.com.

Team Management Systems
Margerison-McCann