Behavioural Digest

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Workshop:
Building a Post-Lockdown Culture
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Imagine
By Rachel Edwards

Imagining the future, certainly if you are an optimist, can be an enjoyable pastime. Thinking about how things will be and anticipating something to look forward to is a great way to spend a few minutes.

Thinking about the future and perhaps an improved, better or even idealised version of ourselves, our home lives or work lives, is attractive and fun because we're thinking about the results of our labours, not the actual things we'd have to do to achieve these things. Actually doing the daily tasks or actions that would lead to something different in our future is often a different proposition entirely. Sustaining a change in daily behaviours is a hard thing to do; behaviours form into habits over time because they work for us in some way. Behaviourally speaking that means they deliver to us a reinforcing outcome and trading off immediate reinforcement for an improved future isn't always an attractive prospect right there in the moment.

However far away the imagined future is; a week, a month, a year, unless the daily behaviours we perform right now will deliver us that future, unless we do something different today, tomorrow and moving forwards, the future will remain exactly as far away from us as it is today. Carpe diem!

True Self
By Garry Sanderson

Howard's article in the May digest, "Interesting Yes, But Useful Too?" discussed the use of psychometric models that categorise people into "stereotypes" based on their responses to questionnaires. As someone who has been put through pretty much every model out there, Howard's article caused me to reflect on what I have got out of them.

These tools help us to create attractively simple narratives that are much easier to grasp than real world complexity. Daniel Kahneman explains that "our minds are machines for jumping to conclusions", always seeking to create a coherent narrative from very little information. In my personal experience some of these narratives have proved to be relevant and stable over time; for example, I have always had a strong introvert tendency. However, other stories have been much more fleeting and even contradictory - I have at times been characterised as 'strategic / big picture' and at other times 'focused on the details'.

The output from the tools has often created a usefully rich conversation, helping me to understand others' preferences and styles and vice versa. However, the danger is that the labels created by these tools can 'stick', reinforcing simplified or inaccurate stories that become limiting stereotypes. Howard commented that it is "likely that people's preferences will only come to the surface in workplace environments where people can express them". It is a sad fact that many people must suppress who they are to 'fit in' to workplace environments. This is exactly the opposite to bringing your 'true self' to an organisation or team in which you feel you belong.

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..To Spite Your Face
By Dave Lees

When budgets roll by and new growth/profit is demanded, or when times look like they might get hard at some time in the future, folks at head office have been known to put the squeeze on - training budgets get cut, talk of utilisation increases, people are told to "do more with less." What's the downstream impact?

If the training that was being provided were effective, stopping it means that moving forward the staff will be less skilled, less effective. If people are focusing on utilisation, they are focusing on results that have already happened, rather than the behaviours that produce the future utilisation. Asking people to do more work infers that they have free time to spare already, which they could now be using to do more. Engagement drops and the grind takes over, making the staff less motivated and less effective.

It's not hard to see the deleterious impact that these kinds of trickle-down messages have, so why does it keep happening? If bosses in organisations treat that organisation like a machine, you could see that cutting budgets and squeezing more out of less might make sense, at least in the short term. However, organisations are not like machines, they are like gardens. If you squeeze the nutrients out of the system, you get less growth, not more. To get the best out of a garden requires a knowledge of how to create the right environment for things to flourish and be successful.

Maybe it's a case of thinking of what can be put into the system to generate growth, rather than what to take out?

Courses in Lockdown
By Joanne Benjamin

It's well over a year now since we moved our courses to Zoom. Travel expense and the time spent travelling has evaporated. We do get to see people's faces on the screen, but they are much smaller and less dynamic than in real life. We can poll questions in real time and move people into break-out rooms to keep the dynamic going; we feel that we have used all available technology and behavioural techniques to produce good courses.

Despite all the benefits, online courses means that the attendees don't get to know us as well, and we don't get to know them as well either. Doing 'in person' courses means that the attendees quickly learn who you are and you them. If you are in the room, you can say something, watch people's facial expressions and adjust your repertoire accordingly, creating a safe environment for you and for them. Zoom gives much less opportunity to watch the micro responses to the things you say, which means the course goes forward without a detailed development of relationships.

Our ability to 'misread' someone's behaviour is heightened and our 'normal' responses have now been softened because of this lack of relationship. It's not the end of the world but it is an unfortunate downstream effect of working online. It begs the question: What is happening to all those other relationships in the virtual workplaces out there?

Empowering Without Delegation
By Howard Lees

When managers allot detailed tasks and then monitor progress, this leaves little opportunity to praise creativity as the subordinates are working under their manager's specific instructions. The chance of these managers delivering praise for discretionary effort is therefore low as nothing discretionary is allowed.

Leaders should be creating the conditions for others to succeed. Encouraging intent is all very well but in this world of management, leaders must delegate specific powers in order for people to be free to make decisions and spend money.

People hear lines like "you are empowered" but often stumble on what exactly has been delegated to them. Delegated powers must be explicit in order to get momentum going. Once that has been bedded in then everyone can relax. Leaders can now encourage their people to take responsibility and praise discretion whenever they observe it. Over time, this creates a positive workplace for everyone.

Shades of BMT

- With some people, the words they say might not land but they telegraph their intent anyway.
- In your business can you name one pinpointed thing that you are better at now than you were this time last month?
- People that attempt to take the direct route to perfection miss out on the enriching journey of the learning process, the ups and downs of experimentation.
- When learning new skills, many folks end up so frustrated that they just give up, like everyone else that blithely attempted to learn the violin!