



**The following is an extract from the facilitator’s book “The Psychological Manager; improve your performance conversations” (2012); Lulu Press**

### **Biography**

Peter Storr is a Chartered Psychologist with 30 years of organisational experience. He has led both large and small teams in the private and public sectors and has many years’ experience as a management coach. Peter has worked as both an external management consultant and an internal Occupational Psychology consultant at the BBC. Most recently he was strategic Head of Organisation Development at a London-based Russell Group university. His expertise is centred on management and leadership; helping managers to lead and manage individuals and teams, designing and running managerial assessment and development centres, coaching and coaching training, group facilitation and designing management development programmes. He is married, lives in Berkshire and would like to grow chickens when he is older.

Peter runs his own consultancy, dealing with all aspects of management and team development, assessment and management development project work. He can be contacted at [thepsychologicalmanager@gmail.com](mailto:thepsychologicalmanager@gmail.com). Let him know what you think of this book, or just say hello.



## Preface

We have all met some pretty rubbish managers of people in our time. Unusual way to start a book I grant you, but it is true. I believe passionately about the importance and value of role-modelling - setting an example of what behaviours we wish to see around us by doing them ourselves – and I have seen (and hopefully been able to honour by copying) some great management behaviours. However, I have probably learnt more from seeing it done really, really badly, and then resolving to do the opposite.

I could go on for a long time about the lack of consistency, vision or ambition in those “inverse role models”, but it strikes me that most of the poor management practice I have been subjected to or observed as a consultant can be condensed to two main things. Firstly, amongst the worst people managers I have come across are those who treat managing people as something to do if they have time once the day job is done. The trouble is that the day job never gets done, and so neither does the people management. The inevitable result is that people are left floundering by an absent manager who has little sense of direction or cohesion. Secondly, when it comes to managing people, it appears to me that most managers seem reticent to have real, honest *conversations* with their staff. It is as if they have told themselves that the people working for them are not actually human, but merely people-shaped resources that happen to have a job description.

This book, then, is concerned with these two things. One is an attitude; seeing managing people as an important part of your job (which, incidentally, if you do it properly will repay any time and effort you have put into it); the other is a set of skills – the *art* and *science* of conversation. Behind any set of skills is some background knowledge, and in this book I have attempted to summarise some of the relevant psychological theories to enable you, with practice, to become a Psychological Manager – one who uses a knowledge of psychology to make them a better manager of people. Learn what the magician knows and it is no longer magic.

When writing this book I have been influenced by three sources; firstly, the theoretical viewpoints from my own studies as an Occupational Psychologist and subsequent reading and continuing professional development; secondly, my work as a designer, trainer, facilitator and coach of and on management development programmes; and thirdly, my own experiences as a manager and of being managed. Added together, these three lines of experience have led me to believe that I have a pretty clear idea of what managing people should be about.

The first section of this book is concerned with you. There is no point expecting your staff to be self-aware, respond to feedback and have a focus on development if you are not doing it too. This section, albeit brief, forms a backdrop to the other two sections and is, I believe, a necessary precursor. It will look at *why* you should focus on your own development, how to determine *what* to develop, and give some initial ideas as to the *how*. The second section is concerned with your relationship and



interactions with the individuals you manage. It will give a brief summary of some key psychological research and theories that can inform your management practice and will help you have real conversations with those you manage around their performance and development. The third section is concerned with the team as a whole; again, looking at key research and giving a step by step road-map to building that high-performing team.

This is not a book, then, that will help you manage your budget, map your stakeholders or work within health and safety or employment law. This is not a book that is adding to the vast highfalutin body of literature on leadership, because, quite frankly, there are too many as it is. This is a book that will simply help you to have structured, meaningful and insightful conversations with your staff. It is the part of management that is usually done badly, and it is the part of management that can make a huge difference to your success as a manager. And from my own experience of the management development programmes I facilitate, it is the part that new managers need the most help with. By understanding and practicing the tools, techniques and attitudes posited in this book, by being a Psychological Manager, you will have the potential to be a truly excellent manager of people.

This is a book, however, written by a Psychologist with psychology at its core, but it is not meant for other Psychologists<sup>1</sup>. It is meant for managers who want to know how to interact with their staff in a more constructive, focused and *human* way. Many of us strive to understand others' motivations and personality foibles, and as a manager it is our job to do so. As I said above, a basic knowledge of psychological theory has helped my own management practice; making this "back catalogue" of knowledge accessible and practical for busy managers is the main thrust of this book.

Before we launch into the journey itself, let's take a step back. Understanding the history and "journey" of psychological thought (or *paradigms*) has helped me to navigate a route map through the major theories – especially when it comes to the world of individual differences (Chapter 2). These paradigms were ways of looking at the world – what were perceived at the time as fundamental truths and what linked the great thoughts of the time together. What is interesting is that they are all still very much current and in use in various guises. So no paradigm is any more "right" than any of the others. To illustrate, let's take the example of an individual entering therapy to deal with a particular stressful life event. Freudian psychoanalytic therapy would look back in time to unresolved childhood stages and anxieties<sup>2</sup>, the various defence mechanisms that have arisen as a consequence and, in some cases, why and how you drew (unconsciously) that life event to you in the first place. Humanistic therapy would focus more on our freedom to choose our responses to life's pressures (instead of them being channelled by drives and motives of which we are unaware) and that, with empathic understanding by the therapist, we will find our

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<sup>1</sup> Although bizarrely, in my experience many Psychologists are rubbish managers, despite knowing better. Never buy a plumber's house . . .

<sup>2</sup> If it's not one thing, it's a mother.



own individual way through our problems through acceptance of our own responsibilities. Finally, Cognitive behavioural therapy would look at our perceptions and thought processes about the event itself; whilst we cannot change the fact that the event happened, it occurred in the past and we can change how we think about it in the here and now - often by the challenging of irrational beliefs that we may hold (such as “I can never cope with traumas like these”).

All of these approaches have merit, have been shown to have successful outcomes (not without some sceptical challenges, however) and may even be combined in a more eclectic approach to therapy. Some conditions may be synonymous with a particular form of therapy (phobias with cognitive behavioural approaches, for example) but by and large, they are all equally valid<sup>3</sup>.

Approaches to therapy are obviously only one manifestation of the sequence of paradigm shifts (the other main one we will be looking at later is the world of motivation theory) but they appear to symbolise the essence of each one. The sequence also gives the appearance at least of each one being an antidote to the preceding one. Whilst this is not technically correct – and many were “out there” concurrently – it could be argued that it is still a useful way of thinking about them.

### *The Psychodynamic approach*

Many writers believe that the “science” of psychology starts with Freud and his book “The Interpretation of Dreams (1899). In it, he introduces the concepts of the unconscious and the Oedipus complex and blends literary with psychological analysis. To Freud and the later psychodynamic psychologists (the name given to this school of thought), we are ruled by our unconscious motives and (often sexual) drives which means we cannot give an account of them – they have to be analysed and interpreted through analysis. The focus is very much on the past – on the negative thoughts and feelings we are defending against through defence mechanisms such as repression and projection, and their effects on present anxiety states and other disorders. Other later writers in this paradigm (Carl Jung, for example) reduce the emphasis on the sexual element but the essence of the unconscious shaping our lives remains.

One of the major problems with this paradigm is that most of the central tenets are un-testable – as soon as you attempt to prove they do not exist, you can be accused of repressing or denying them! These processes cannot be independently observed, and can only be interpreted by fully trained psychoanalysts – hardly the most unbiased group of people after undergoing at least five years of training. The impact, however, was and is still huge. The science of psychology was born, but to one group of writers and theorists it wasn’t quite scientific enough. The Behaviourist school sought to change all that.

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<sup>3</sup> Some writers have drawn parallels with religion; there are many different types, but all attempting to address similar issues. I guess psychology has started fewer wars though.



### *The Behaviourist approach*

If what defined the Psychodynamic school was introspection and subjective interpretation, what defined the Behaviourists was scientific rigour and objective experimentation<sup>4</sup>. John Watson was pretty much a contemporary of Freud, but their approaches were polar opposites. The essence of behaviourism is that our behaviour is learned through reinforcement – we do what we have been encouraged to do and what our environment rewards us for doing; our environment gives us a stimulus, we respond accordingly depending on our past history of that stimulus. The concept of the “autonomous man” is utterly rejected; we are the product of our environmental reinforcements. What is unknown and un-testable – and therefore not the remit of scientific endeavour – is what is in-between the stimulus and response, such as physiology, thoughts and feelings. The study of behaviour, then, according to the major theorists in this area (Watson, B.F. Skinner and Edward Thorndike) should be a natural science, akin to biology or physics, without the need for hypothetical inner states of mind complicating matters.

When we train a dog, we are using the core tools (reinforcement and punishment) of Skinner’s concept of operant conditioning. The same is true when we “train” a child into positive behaviour by rewarding it or punishing bad behaviour. For more complex levels of human functioning, the Behaviourist approach to many was found wanting, and it was the messy bit in-between the stimulus and response (thoughts, perceptions and feelings) that was deemed worthy of study once we got half-way through the twentieth century.

### *The Cognitive approach*

The whole point and focus of the Cognitive approach was indeed this internal world of mental processes. Ignoring the bit in the middle between a stimulus and our subsequent actions oversimplified the complex nature of the human condition. Like the Behaviourists though, the Cognitive theorists tended to reject the un-scientific approach of the Psychodynamic school and embraced the scientific method, but unlike them they saw the internal processes that you may not be able to physically observe but were there anyway as fair game for study. It is no coincidence that this period (the 1950s and 60s) also saw the rise of the early computers; many analogies were drawn between our internal mental processes and with the internal computational processes of the computer.

Cognitive researchers (early ones included Noam Chomsky, Donald Broadbent and Frederic Bartlett but there are plenty still around) focus on the inner world of perception – for example, whether we built up a representation of our world from the data (bottom-up processing) or apply existing models to data (top-down) to make sense of it. They look at the different forms of memory and attention; linguistics and language acquisition and thinking processes such as logic and judgement. What we think and perceive affects how we feel, so cognitive

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<sup>4</sup> Although it was mainly with pigeons and rats. And Pavlov’s dogs if you go back far enough.



approaches to therapy centre around changing our thoughts and perceptions of a past or present issue to modify our current feelings.

### *The Humanist approach*

At the same time as the Cognitive scientists were formulating their early theories, another school of thought was challenging the “controlled by our unconscious child-like desires” approach of the Psychodynamic theorists and the simplistic mechanism of learned behaviour of the Behaviourists. The Humanists drew on the field of existentialist thought (Kierkegaard, Nietzsche) and eastern philosophy, taking a more holistic view of the human condition. The early proponents such as Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers argued that psychology should focus on what it means to be human; our self-image, our dreams and ideals, and our individuality – our internal frame of reference. Theirs is a far more rosy view of human nature in that we are essentially free, responsible human beings who strive to become the best people we are capable of being through our own choices. Human nature is constructive, forward-moving, realistic and trustworthy. Research and the experimental method featured heavily, but in a more qualitative, as opposed to quantitative way; a phenomenological methodology that seeks to understand an individual’s subjective experience of the world.

Many coaching and therapeutic models<sup>5</sup> are based on the client-centred approach developed by Rogers, and the movement as a whole is largely responsible for the plethora of self-help books in your local bookshop. The key essence of all of these models is that we are in control of our own destiny, and through self-awareness we can discover what we are in control over and identify our own solutions to our problems in order to self actualise<sup>6</sup> into a fully-functioning human being.

### *The Psychobiological approach*

Whilst this is less of a paradigm or coherent school of thought than the others, it is where modern research techniques are adding the most new knowledge about how we operate. This is the study of nerve cells, of brain circuits and neurotransmitters and genetic components of behaviour. The principle is not new; William James in the nineteenth century extolled the virtues of understanding biological structures as a way of understanding our behaviour. What is new is the world of Electroencephalography (EEG), magnetoencephalography (MEG) and functional Magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) scanning capabilities. These techniques can measure precise blood flow and electrical activity in specific parts of the brain that may be being used for particular activities or under certain circumstances or disorders. They have applications for research into consciousness, memory and decision making, perception and emotion as well as when it is all going wrong – Parkinson’s, Alzheimer’s, Autism and anxiety. This research has started to infiltrate

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<sup>5</sup> The GROW model of coaching we will be exploring in Chapter 2 is largely derived from Rogerian principles.

<sup>6</sup> The actualising tendency is life’s master motive, according to the Humanists.



the world of business writing – we now can see what is happening to our limbic system when we get insights, when we are being coached, and when we are working in teams; we can see the mirroring of electrical impulses when we unconsciously share emotions and we see the effects on our hormone levels when we receive positive feedback and social acceptance.

### *The Positive Psychology approach*

Finally, let's go back to another paradigm shift, albeit not one universally accepted. However, it is one that is currently gaining ground in the world of work and is one that resonates with the ideals behind this book. You will remember that the Humanists took a rather more positive view of the human condition and suggested that we are all striving to be the best we can be. The Positive Psychology movement goes back to this idea<sup>7</sup> to suggest that psychology should also be about nurturing talent, promoting happiness and to make life more fulfilling. Two writers stand out – Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, who promotes the concept of flow (when we are at our best, being absorbed in the moment with just the right amount of challenge) and Martin Seligman. Seligman was famous for electrocuting dogs in the 1960s<sup>8</sup> but in the late 1990s was suggesting that psychology was preoccupied with mental illness, and if it chose it had rather a lot to offer the world in terms of happiness and fulfilment.

A recent discovery about happiness may illustrate the point (aided by the Psychobiological approach mentioned earlier in that we can now see this happening). When we think about a scenario, we default to the strongest, most reinforced neural pathway. If this is a pessimistic one, it gets reinforced again, and over time becomes our normal way of thinking. In our discussion in Chapter 3 about the Six Thinking Hats© technique of facilitation, we talk about the dangers of habitually wearing the black hat – seeing every situation as negative and tending to look at why something can't be done. However, just as Seligman found that we can learn optimism, we can train ourselves to take the positive view and, with time and practice and reinforcement, the positive pathway becomes the default one. Hence the saying "lucky people get lucky" – they don't, but they just notice it more and take advantage of it<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Also the focus of the Enlightenment and before that the Ancient Greeks. It is not a new idea.

<sup>8</sup> This may need some context. I don't think he was doing it just for fun. He found that if he provided a way of stopping the electric shock – say, by pressing a lever – the dogs soon learned this and stopped it. If the lever didn't work, the dogs soon learned that they could not control the shocks and, basically, gave up and lay there being zapped. Not surprisingly they exhibited signs of depression, which Seligman suggested was caused by the concept of *learned helplessness*. This is still a well respected explanation of some depressive states – we need to have the perception of control to function healthily. Of course, if we can learn to be helpless, we can learn to be optimistic too – and this is where Positive Psychology comes in.

<sup>9</sup> The BBC (February 2011) reported on some tentative research that found that our expectations of whether painkillers work affected the outcome – if we didn't expect them to have an effect, they didn't. If patients expected them to work, different parts of the brain lit up and the drugs had more of an effect.



For our purposes then, the Positive psychology movement focuses on individuality and capacity for self-actualisation and change (as in the Humanists) and the identification of, and capitalising on, the strengths we have as individuals to aid confidence and optimal functioning. It has been written about extensively in the Organisational Development literature (see Chapter 3 again regarding *Appreciative Enquiry* as a facilitation technique) and in such concepts as authenticity in leadership and strengths-based coaching.

Whilst I have attempted to give a very short potted history of the journey psychology has made in the last one hundred years, I am painfully aware of what I have had to leave out. But it is time to move on to explaining the structure of this book.

The first Chapter *Building You* is about your own managerial journey. You need the attitude as well as the skills, so we will look at why you need to focus on your development as a manager – factors that are both internal to you and as a result of the changing world around us. We will look at developing your self-awareness so you can determine what it is you could be focusing your development on, and finally look at how you can determine what learning activities will be most beneficial.

The second Chapter *Building Skill, Dealing with Will* turns the focus onto the individuals within your team. We will explore the world of individual differences in terms of intellect, personality, beliefs, attitudes, motivation and knowledge, and how these impact on your assessment of the Skill/Will matrix – a way of determining the style of management that would be most beneficial for a particular individual at a particular time. We will then move on to some of the key conversational skills of performance management – goal setting, giving feedback and coaching, and finally look at how to motivate the individuals in your team.

I wrote this book in response to questions, concerns and the lack of confidence many of us have when having those sometimes difficult performance- and development-based conversations with our staff. I believe that psychology has something to say about this. I hope that you find it useful.

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## Chapter One: Building You

### The “why” of development

In the Preface, it was mentioned that one of the most important attributes to have when you manage people is the attitude that it is a fundamental part of your job. What we will be asserting in later sections is that, to a large extent, once you manage a team of people it *is* your job. The skill bit comes later, and probably won't come at all if the attitude isn't there.

There is another side to the same attitude coin. To be a Psychological Manager, you also need the attitude that your own development is as important as the development of those you manage. There is no point (and it will come across as hypocritical) if you extol the virtues of feedback, coaching and motivation without applying it to yourself too. You deserve it and it is necessary; hence this brief but important section.

There is a third side to this coin<sup>10</sup>. In his book “Teaching smart people how to learn”, Chris Argyris argues that bright, successful people (let's assume that is you) are so used to having to be high performing all the time that it results in a natural defensiveness about acknowledging development needs – even to themselves - to avoid threat or feelings of vulnerability. This defensiveness in turn leads to a closed-loop reasoning, where views from outside (i.e. other people) are ignored, rejected or denied. Add to this high aspirations and the result is, in his words, *brittle despondency*.

There are two ways out of this defensive quagmire. Clever people are usually analytical, strategic and critical. Argyris suggests that these qualities, when applied to their own development – focusing on data, formulating a strategic plan and being constructively critical of the results – are just what are needed to avoid the quicksand into despondency. In addition, and we have made this same point earlier, managers need to role-model this behaviour to those below them in the hierarchy if they are going to expect everyone else to do it too.

So, why should we focus on our own development?<sup>11</sup> Firstly, and perhaps most simply, if you don't, no-one else will. The concept of *career* has changed fundamentally in the last twenty or thirty years. The job-for-life idea has well and truly gone, and therefore so has the idea of security in your employer. This has had to be replaced with security in your *employability* which naturally involves continuous learning and skills development<sup>12</sup>. This is both scary and empowering. In the Positive Psychology tradition, it puts us and our own individuality and strengths

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<sup>10</sup> Call it the edge if you are going to be pedantic about it.

<sup>11</sup> Seeing it written down like that makes the answer seem obvious, but I am asked it time and time again on management courses and, by and large, people don't.

<sup>12</sup> When I joined a well-known bank in the 1980s, I was told, proudly, that I would never have to think about my career again. It would all be done for me “if you keep your nose clean”. I never found out what they meant.



in charge of our own career trajectory – whatever that looks like. People now work for many organisations instead of one or two, and there are often multiple, diverse ways to reach the same point on the ladder. How you get there is up to you.

This puts us in charge of our own destiny, with the responsibility firmly rooted on us to develop a portfolio of transferable skills to take from one employer to another. Charles Handy<sup>13</sup> has written extensively on this concept of the portfolio career – we build up our personal skills portfolio like an artist or a model would to show prospective clients. We are essentially saying to that potential employer “this is who I am and these are the skills I bring with me if you employ me”. Building that portfolio becomes our responsibility, and what it looks like depends on where you want to end up. Our CV probably looks quite different these days; instead of a list of duties we have performed in our various roles, it becomes a description of competencies or skill-sets that have helped us achieve our goals, and how they have added value to the organisations we have worked for. According to “The 2020 Workplace”<sup>14</sup> we will be hired and promoted based on our reputation – the brand we have built up through your portfolio of skills and social networks.

Secondly, technological and economic changes mean that even if we stay in the same role for a while, it will need to evolve to meet the new challenges or ways of working. Most leadership literature talks about the new skills required of leaders – the ability to manage innovation, ambiguity, constant change and complexity. Change and uncertainty are the new steady and reliable! As an example, the role and resulting expectations of the line manager currently needs to change with the rise of the virtual team and remote working, as explored in Chapter 3<sup>15</sup>. Even the concept of “Department” within an organisation is taking a bashing, with cross-functional temporary work-teams that do a specific job then disband becoming more commonplace. This calls on different skills (innovation, collaboration, flexibility) than we have previously been used to. We need to remain current and change with (and shape) the changing workplace by developing these core competencies.

Thirdly, we have the concept of the Peter Principle<sup>16</sup>. It was originally meant to be a tongue-in-cheek expose on incompetence, but with regard to management skills it has an element of truth to it. The principle states that an individual in an organisation will rise to his or her level of incompetence – you do a good job, so you get promoted etc. until you are promoted to a job you can no longer do – and historically (the book was written in the 1960s) you just stayed there. Being rubbish. Workplaces were full therefore of incompetent people who *used* to be good.

The classic example is of the excellent teacher or academic who is so good that they end up managing a department (badly) and not doing any teaching, or the IT worker who has spend their formative years on the world wide web hacking into websites

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<sup>13</sup> *The Empty Raincoat* and many others.

<sup>14</sup> *The 2020 Workplace* by Jeanne C. Meister and Karie Willyerd

<sup>15</sup> Confusingly, there is also a movement to reduce the reliance on technology and get people actually talking to each other instead of a mobile device. . .

<sup>16</sup> No relation.



and then get a job designing websites, doing so well in it that they end up leading the team of website designers - with no managerial experience, training or even desire to do so. The “incompetence”, then, is not necessarily the result of the job being more difficult, but rather the fact that it is different – and it is often the management bit that is the different bit<sup>17</sup>. The way to avoid it happening to you, of course, is to ensure that your development focuses on the managerial part of your job at least as much as any technical development needs.

The stumbling block to all this is often around the fundamental, perhaps most basic psychological bringer of anxiety; loss. Let me explain what I mean by referring to the concept of the Leadership Pipeline<sup>18</sup>. When we start work, we are usually on pipeline (pathway) one – we manage ourselves and our workload. We focus on developing our job-related technical skills and concentrate on our own results. We then, just like in the description of the Peter Principle above, get promoted based on that past history. This is *passage* one – the journey from managing ourselves to managing others. Charan et al suggest that this is where many people start to fail, as we naturally want to continue to do what made us successful. We find it hard to let go of the day job and concentrate on managing people and so do not make the mind-set shift. The bits that get missed are typically setting goals with others, motivating, coaching and managing performance and development. So there are two things at play here – skills acquisition, (the focus of this book) and dealing with the loss of what made you successful in the first place. And when our loss buttons are pressed, we react to it in the same way as we would a threat – fight or flight (or a large dose of denial) but rarely with enthusiasm and gusto!

The trick is to value this new type of work as much as what got you there; to treat management skills and attitudes as essential for your own development and future success. And as this “challenge of the passages” continues up the hierarchy – from managing others to managing managers right up to CEO where you manage everything<sup>19</sup>, it is always going to be work in progress.

One of the common limiting factors is that we often ignore our value systems when deciding what and how to develop or even when shaping our careers. They are simple questions but complicated answers; what are your critical values? Where do you want to be in five years? What is most important to you in your career? What would success in your career look like? What would it feel like? What essential parts of “you” do you bring to work? These are extremely useful questions to think about to get in touch with what you really want from your career. Good leaders are “up to something” to quote Steve Radcliffe, an experienced leadership coach. Leading is about working out what you want to see in the future, where you want to be and what you want as your legacy – and you can’t effectively do that without tapping

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<sup>17</sup> This is similar to the Dilbert Principle, after the cartoon character, which suggests that incompetent people are promoted to management to prevent them doing any further damage on the shop floor.

<sup>18</sup> The Leadership Pipeline (2001) by Ram Charan, Stephen Drotter and James Noel.

<sup>19</sup> The ones who get it right, according to Charan et al demonstrate three achievements; defining and assigning the work to be done, enabling it to happen by giving feedback, coaching and providing resources, and building relationships to generate open dialogue and an atmosphere of trust.



into your belief and value systems. And if you believe that future is inevitable, it is more likely to happen.

Some career coaches separate out three components when working with their clients when helping them to focus their development and energy. This is based on the Intelligent Careers model<sup>20</sup> ;

- knowing *why*; getting in touch with your values, motivations and beliefs in relation to work
- knowing *how*; becoming aware of the skills, knowledge and other qualities that you already have
- knowing *whom*; embracing the power of networks

and is used to empower us to see the choices we have, to understand our own sense of purpose and what we need to do to get there.

Of course, what is also needed as much as getting in touch with our own value systems is a healthy dose of self awareness. This covers everything from being aware of your own strengths and weaknesses, to how you learn best and in what scenarios, to your own emotional resilience and what it is that pushes your buttons, as it were. Improving self awareness is usually at the front end of most management development programmes which may include 360 degree feedback (see Chapter 2), coaching, psychometric assessment and review of preferences, strengths analysis and competency/skills audits. It is one of the core constituents of emotional intelligence models and to many it is the cornerstone of the concept.

It is worth saying a few words on the emotional intelligence topic, as it is frequently used as an over-arching principle or framework on management development programmes. The development of your own emotional intelligence is the element that could have the biggest impact on your success as a people manager as it contains so many key relational concepts.

There have been many attempts over the last eighty years or so to expand the definition of intelligence (see Chapter 2 for a fuller exploration of intellect) to include more social intelligences; perhaps the most often cited is Howard Gardner's work on multiple intelligence<sup>21</sup>. His model included interpersonal intelligence (being able to read others' emotions and motivations) and intrapersonal intelligence (self-awareness) because the existing definitions did not adequately explain cognitive functioning in the real world.

There is much fierce debate as to what emotional intelligence actually is, with some theorists arguing that it is a cognitive ability (with associated "tests" treating it as if it

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<sup>20</sup> Arthur, Claman and DeFillippi (1995).

<sup>21</sup> *Frames of Mind* (1983).



were an ability-based IQ test<sup>22</sup>) and others suggesting it is more like a set of personality traits (made popular by writers such as Daniel Goleman). The essence of the concept, however, can pretty much be distilled down to some core constructs, regardless of how they are measured:

- self-awareness; to be able to recognize your own emotions and why you are feeling them. You realize the link between those feelings and your subsequent behaviour and performance and recognize their impact on yourself and others
- self-control; to be able to control those emotions and associated impulses.<sup>23</sup> You are able to stay positive and composed in stressful situations and remain calm and focused
- social awareness; the ability to read and deal appropriately with the emotions of others. You are able to show sensitivity and understanding of others' perspectives – real empathic understanding.

You will notice that being nice and fluffy just doesn't cut it. Being emotionally intelligent may involve being challenging and confronting if that is the most appropriate course of action. It is also not about venting your emotions at every opportunity<sup>24</sup>. It is about managing your emotions intelligently – to achieve the outcome you desire or the situation warrants.

Structurally, the key part of the brain associated with regulating emotions is the limbic system, which includes the amygdala. This appears to be where we store emotional memories, an evolutionary survival trick that helped us shortcut the thinking process when faced with something scary (such as a sabre-toothed cat, for example). Under those circumstances, the ability to react immediately without passing the data through the cortex (the "thinking" part of the brain) meant that we survived<sup>25</sup>. Today's sabre-toothed cat, however, is an email from the boss, or an angry customer –the problem is, we are running on hundred thousand year-old

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<sup>22</sup> Such as the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT)

<sup>23</sup> This one was pretty much the starting point for writers like Goleman. Walter Mischel, a psychologist at Stanford in the early 1970s performed what later became known as the *marshmallow experiment*. He gave 4 year-old children a marshmallow, saying that if they could resist temptation for 15 minutes and not eat it immediately, they could have two. About a third of the children could do it, the concept becoming known as deferred gratification. This ability to defer gratification in follow-up studies was correlated with higher SATs scores, better health and higher incomes as adults. Goleman calls this ability to delay immediate gratification as one of the most fundamental psychological skills, being at the root of emotional self-control. He also suggests that this is learned behaviour and developable – something to bear in mind when your four year-old screams blue murder in the supermarket for a sweet. By putting up with it and giving a sweet when it is more appropriate, you are teaching them delayed gratification and saving them from prison.

<sup>24</sup> We have all met people who are inappropriate with their emotional outbursts and then try to justify them by claiming they are just healthily expressing how they are feeling. It may be healthy for them, but not necessarily for other people or, most importantly for emotional intelligence theory, the situation at hand.

<sup>25</sup> As opposed to standing there thinking "Ooo, I wonder what this big orangy-coloured thing with big teeth is?"



hardware, so it presses the same buttons. The ability to over-ride the impulse, and react appropriately to the situation, is the emotional intelligence link back to the deferred gratification concept<sup>26</sup>. If we don't or can't, this is known as an emotional hijacking.

So, what does all this mean for you, the Psychological Manager? If you take the three fundamental constructs of emotional intelligence described above, it is not hard to see how they could map onto the vast majority of management competency frameworks. Self-awareness relates to issues of confidence and authenticity; self-control to achievement, trustworthiness and credibility; social awareness to relationship management, empathic understanding of colleagues and clients, influencing and persuasion skills, managing conflict and networking/building relationships. In "The New leaders", Goleman argues that leadership is a relational concept, working through the power of finely tuned emotions – what he calls *resonant* leadership. We are judged as managers by our deliverables and goal-achievement, but also by our ability to handle ourselves, our relationships and our ability to get the most out of the people who report to us. And as our emotions are contagious – especially so as a manager – how you handle your emotions is closely observed and "caught" by those around you.

The implication is that working on this part of your development will have a big impact on your abilities as a manager. Being aware of your own interpersonal style and skill-levels, and focusing development on them will pay at least as many dividends as improving your budgetary or project management nous. The specific *conversational* skills concerned are the focus of this book; techniques for becoming more self-aware are the subject of the next section.

### **Self-awareness<sup>27</sup>**

The previous section mentioned that self-awareness is perhaps the key construct in the myriad of theories relating to emotional intelligence, and it is usually the starting point in any development journey. This involves understanding where you are now, thinking about where you want to get to and working out a development plan – which may include capitalising on strengths, rather than merely developing weak points – to get there. People with strong self awareness are realistic and honest about those strengths and weaknesses and understand – and usually act on - their

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<sup>26</sup> Recent research has shown a link with a poorly-functioning amygdala and criminality, and it is not hard to understand what is going on here. If someone cannot resist impulse or delay gratification, then stealing or reacting violently may become the default behaviour. Stephen Fry in his autobiographical *The Fry Chronicles* puts this far better than I could; "I was a natural criminal because I lacked just that ability to resist temptation or to defer pleasure for one single second. Whatever guard there is on duty in the minds and moral make-up of the majority had always been absent from his post in my mental barracks." (p28). A BBC Horizon programme (September 2011) explored the link between a poorly functioning amygdala, the MAOA gene (or lack of it) and psychopathy (interestingly, four times more prevalent in the boardroom as in the general population . . .)

<sup>27</sup> We are not so much concerned with Descartes' cogito ergo sum (I think, therefore I am) of whether you exist or not, but with what you choose to exist to do. For the purposes of this book, you exist.



principles. The best have habituated the practice of periodic quiet reflection to get in touch with both aspirations and current reality. One book used extensively on management development programmes (*“Why should anyone be led by you?”*<sup>28</sup>) devotes the first two chapters to these concepts; *Being yourself – more - with skill*, and *Know and show yourself – enough*.

Let me digress on a small point here. There is a concept in the world of organisational development (which may include teambuilding, coaching and counselling and organisational culture diagnostic work) of “self as instrument”. Writers and practitioners alike in this field<sup>29</sup> stress the importance of anyone in a helping profession paying attention to themselves – not only their own development but also in understanding our own reactions to change and ambiguity, control mechanisms and needs, and our need for approval or otherwise in order to accurately diagnose those needs in others and to successfully intervene<sup>30</sup>.

Obviously, we are not talking of becoming Organisational Development consultants or therapists here, but the same principle is true of being a manager. In a way, it can be conceptualised as a helping profession. If you are having conversations about motivation, having structured coaching-style conversations and noticing the psychological effects being in a team has on its members (which you will be by the end of this book) then understanding your own drivers, strengths, styles and foibles will enable you to temporarily put them to one side and increase your ability to be objective. That of which we are unaware controls us!

How do we become more self aware, then? Undergoing five years of psychoanalytic training should do it, but that is rather extreme (unless you want to become a therapist, of course). Having a coach is perhaps the workplace equivalent and it can be extremely useful in this regard, but this option is not necessarily available to all of us.

If you have any (and dependent on the skill of your own manager) then your last few appraisals may reveal something if you look at them in sequence. What are the common themes? What do they say about your interpersonal or working style? What are your strengths and weaknesses? Could you use the data to help build up a SWOT analysis relating to your own development? Think about the following:

- *strengths*; what do you do well? What evidence do you have? What personal qualities do you bring to your management? What are you most proud of about you?
- *Weaknesses*; what could you be better at? What don't you handle well? When do you get frustrated? What causes it? What evidence do you have?

<sup>28</sup> Rob Goffee and Gareth Jones, *Why should anyone be led by you?* (2006).

<sup>29</sup> Mee-Yan Cheung-Judge and Linda Holbeche, *Organisation Development* (2011).

<sup>30</sup> Many Psychoanalysts in the Freudian tradition argue that they have had so much therapeutic analysis themselves during their qualifications that anything they feel or notice is pure projection from their client. There are many that debate the accuracy (or possibility) of this, however.



- *Opportunities*; What factors external to your own skills and qualities have a positive impact on your management? How can you capitalise on the strengths identified above even further?
- *Threats*; What factors external to you might get in the way? What are the things that may hold you back? What do you have to be wary of in your environment?

You could also consider doing a structured review of your managerial competencies. If you work somewhere without a managerial competency framework, then you could either make one up, go back to your job description or merely list the qualities and skills needed to do your job; for example;

- handling conflict
- having difficult conversations
- giving feedback
- coaching others

and then rating yourself between 1 (priority for development) and 5 (excellent performance). At the same time, you could review how important these skills are for your current role and see how this informs your development priorities.

Your organisation may be able to arrange some psychometric questionnaires for you as a way of understanding your personality preferences (see Chapter 3 relating to the MBTI© and others) or motivational drivers. We discuss many options for you to use with your own team in this book; you need to be prepared to go through the same journey of understanding yourself.

Finally, you may be able to arrange some feedback from those around you. This could range from merely asking a handful of people who know how you work to give you some evidence-based feedback, to undertaking a full 360 degree feedback process (this system is described in some depth under *Feedback* in Chapter 2, but essentially is a way of getting structured feedback from a variety of sources split into categories – say, your boss, direct reports, peers, customers etc)<sup>31</sup>.

In the first section of this chapter, we looked at the *why* of development; this second section looked at determining the *what*. Finally, let's turn our attention to the *how*.

### **Building You**

It is amazing how many of us, when deciding on how to address our development needs, automatically default to booking ourselves on a training course or making a

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<sup>31</sup> It is important to remember that any form of feedback is about perception, which may or may not reflect reality. It is still useful data, however – you can change how people perceive you if you are aware of the impact you are having on them. Try not to get defensive (*how very dare you*), judgmental (*well, he would say that, wouldn't he*) or make excuses. Just accept it as data; what you choose to do with it is up to you.



request to our managers to do so. Not that there is anything wrong with training courses of course, but my point is that there are many ways to address a development need, so save the training budget for targeted training interventions and think creatively about other development options<sup>32</sup>.

Consider these options:

- Project work; can you get assigned on a project which will both tap into an area of expertise but also stretch you? You could try taking a different role from your usual one, and when reviewing the project consider both the end result (content) and how you all got there as well as what you learnt about yourself and group work (process)
- Temporary secondment/job swap; some organisations have extensive schemes relating to this. The benefits are large (cross-boundary awareness and networking, organisational understanding) but the costs organisationally may be high if done properly. Again, make the learning explicit by doing a thorough review of content *and* process
- Coaching; as we will discuss in the next Chapter, both being coached and being a coach are learning interventions for both parties. Coaching in a group setting are often referred to as *action learning sets* and can be of enormous benefits for all concerned (I often incorporate them as a key learning intervention into management development programmes)
- Reading, watching films and documentaries. Being part of (or setting up) an informal work-focused book club where ideas relating to the book are discussed can be both fun and informative – and could form the basis of the action learning sets mentioned above
- Presenting; presenting to others about a topic is not only working on your (transferable) presentation and public speaking skills, but going into depth on a subject you previously knew little about may get the creative juices flowing. And we teach best what we most need to learn.

Not all options appeal equally to all. Understanding your own learning style has an influence on how you take in information and what you are naturally drawn to. Some people prefer to read, for example, whereas others prefer the face-to-face contact of a training course or discussion group.

Peter Honey and Alan Mumford<sup>33</sup> developed a useful model of learning styles in the 1970s which has been used extensively in the business community. Their model has two components; an evolution of an earlier experiential model (Kolb's learning model) of a learning intervention, and the styles individuals typically are drawn to. The stages of an effective learning intervention are:

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<sup>32</sup> This chapter is focused on you, but the same principles apply when having development conversations with your staff, of course. More in the next Chapter. . .

<sup>33</sup> Manual of Learning Styles (1982). You can complete the associated questionnaire on their website; [www.peterhoney.com](http://www.peterhoney.com) for a small charge.



- having a learning experience
- reviewing that experience
- drawing conclusions from it
- planning consequences or next steps

Try to get into the habit of following this model whenever you undertake a learning intervention. If nothing else, it makes filling in your next appraisal documentation so much easier!

According to Honey and Mumford, our learning preferences have an often hidden but powerful impact on what we learn and the way we do it. Understanding your own learnt preferences can help you choose learning interventions that are more targeted to your preferences – although there is something to be said for going outside your comfort zone and trying out the other styles occasionally to, as Peter Honey puts it, expand your bandwidth. These typical learning styles are:

- *Activist*; people who like to involve themselves fully in new experiences and being happy to just do it! They enjoy the challenge of being thrown in at the deep end and will often think about the consequences later. They often learn through trial and error. Activists would learn best through chairing meetings and doing presentations, role-playing and trying things out for themselves; they may not be drawn to lecture-based material or reading
- *Reflector*; people who like to be told what to do and be thoroughly briefed before trying it out for themselves. They like to analyse methodically, collecting data and thinking things through before coming to conclusions. Reflectors learn best through being “taught”; they are unlikely to warm to activity-based learning or role-play situations
- *Theorist*; people who like complex theories about why things work, preferring a clear purpose and interesting, challenging goals. They like to be intellectually stimulated and may require some convincing before accepting the learning. They prefer a logical, consistent approach and don’t respond well to poorly-briefed activities or some experiential, emotional interventions, being uncomfortable with subjectivity
- *Pragmatist*; people who like to observe and watch demonstrations about how something is done before trying it themselves. They are practical, down-to-earth and want a clear link between the learning intervention and what they can actually do with it in the real world. They are usually happy to try things out for themselves but would want clear guidelines or a practice run first.

Another model often used is taken from the world of neuro-linguistic programming (NLP). This is a body of theoretical and practical work that is primarily concerned with the link between our behaviour and our representations of the world – how we



think and feel. *Representational Systems* is an NLP model that is concerned with our processing of information and suggests that we have a preference for the sort of information we primarily attend to. There are five senses, three of which tend to become sensory-based preferences; we use all three but it is likely that one or two will dominate and become our mental strategy for dealing with data. Some people have a *visual* preference; they store memories as pictures, usually have good spatial awareness and use a lot of visual words (“I see what you mean”, “let me paint you a picture”, etc). Some believe<sup>34</sup> that visual people commonly look up and to the right when imagining images, and up and to the left when remembering images. Other people have an *auditory* preference; instead of images they store sounds or dialogue, and use auditory words (“I hear what you are saying”, “that resonates with me”). They look on the level and to the right when imagining and the left when recalling data. Finally, some people have a *kinaesthetic* preference; they store sensations and emotions and use associated words (“I feel that you are right”, “I am in touch with what you are saying”). They tend to look down and to the right when imagining, and down and to the left when recalling.

Of course, we use all of these at various points, and they are unlikely to be in our conscious awareness. It also does not particularly matter which one or ones is/are your preference(s). Understanding the model and seeing what makes sense (I have just given away my own visual preference) means you may be able to tailor your learning activities accordingly.

In this first chapter, we have looked at the *why* of development, the *what* and now some ideas as to the *how*. Use this information and understanding to start thinking of your own development plan; when you have finished this book you may wish to add to it (and certainly use it as part of your managerial learning log). I mentioned in the preface that I had learned a lot from other managers – both good and bad. After reading this book, you may wish to choose a role model you admire from whom you can learn. What qualities do they have? What belief systems? What are their motivational drivers? Ask yourself “what would they do in this situation”? What aspects of them can you borrow? There is nothing that any manager of people can do that you can’t – it may just take a bit of knowledge and then meaningful, focused practice so it becomes locked into your basal ganglia – the part of the brain that is automatic and beyond conscious awareness; where we have “unconscious competence”. This focused, conscious practice concept is important and is what makes the difference between “length of time in post” and “growing in the job”. If we do not actively engage our practice muscles, get out of our comfort zone, forget our limiting beliefs and review specifically and systematically what we have learnt, we just stand still. Make these opportunities happen!

Many of the skills of performance- and development- based conversations we are about to go through – and the underpinning psychological research of which I have briefly described – can be applied to yourself and your own development just as

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<sup>34</sup> Apparently, enough sales people believe in this that it is often used in sales training.



effectively as to your team. It may take ten thousand hours of conscious, focused practice over ten years to become world-class<sup>35</sup>, but no-one is asking for perfection. *Good* will do, and you can do that in a matter of months. Besides, you have probably had at least twenty years' experience in having conversations already. The next two chapters are about structuring them so you get optimum performance out of your team.

### **The Psychological Manager:**

- has the attitude that people management is a fundamental part of the job and reflects this attitude in the amount of time and effort spent doing it
- accepts that his or her own development managerially is just as important as his or her team's, and accepts that being seen to be doing this is role-modelling great behaviour
- thinks about their own skills portfolio and what needs to be added to get them to where they want to be
- is able to deal flexibly with change and uncertainty, acknowledging that collaboration, innovation and dealing with ambiguity are increasingly important skills to have
- is prepared to let go of elements of the day job to allow their team to develop through delegation and then is prepared to spend time coaching them
- is in touch with their own value systems, motivations and beliefs and is aware of the impact these have on future direction
- is aware of their own strengths and weaknesses, how they learn and their typical interpersonal styles and actively seeks feedback on these areas
- understands the theory and practice of emotional intelligence; recognises and controls their own emotions and recognises and deals appropriately with the emotions of others to achieve a desired outcome
- recognises that emotions are contagious, and a manager's emotions especially so
- creatively expands the definition of a development intervention to go beyond training. This may include project work, stretch assignments, secondments, coaching, becoming a coach, reading and presenting to others – reviewing all learning interventions accordingly

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<sup>35</sup> According to Matthew Syed (“Bounce; the myth of talent and the power of practice”) and Malcolm Gladwell (“Outliers; the story of success”).



## Chapter 2: Building Skill, Dealing with Will

### Introduction

The last chapter focused pretty much exclusively on you. The basic premise was that there is no point in demanding high performance and a focus on development in those that report into you if you are not role-modelling those behaviours – if only to avoid the accusations of hypocrisy! We also alluded to the fact that most of us could add the most value from our development attentions if we focused them on what most managers appear to be less than proficient at; quality conversations. This next Chapter is concerned with the *when*, the *why* and the *how*; when should you be having quality conversations, for what reason and what enhanced conversational skills do you need to develop to become a Psychological Manager.

When managing the performance and development<sup>36</sup> of the staff you are responsible for, a useful framework to base your quality conversations on is the skill/will matrix. Using this framework, you can assess and help build the skills of your staff to achieve the goals you are all working towards, and assess and build the will, or motivation, of your staff to perform at their best.

The framework is extremely simple. We can conceptualise whether someone is or isn't performing on a task (or is likely to in the future) by separating out their capability on the task, and their motivation to do it. There are therefore four possible scenarios:

- both a low current ability to perform the task and a low desire to do so
- a low current ability to perform the task but motivated and willing
- a high level of skill or potential to perform the task but unwilling
- a high level of skill or potential and motivated and willing to do so

The approach you take when managing the performance and development of the individuals in your team will and should vary depending on where those individuals are in the above framework to perform a task or achieve a goal. The skills they have will depend on past experience, training and development activities undertaken in the past and an understanding of the task or role expected<sup>37</sup>. Whether they are motivated to perform is rather more complex and will depend on a variety of factors, both personal to the individual and relating to the job or situation itself. Separating these two factors will help you to decide on the most effective approach to the conversations you should be having. This is the essence of the Situational Leadership© model<sup>38</sup>; vary your style of management according to the person and situation you have in front of you.

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<sup>36</sup> The underlying premise of this book is that the two are inseparable. Like Sunday mornings and a cafetierre of rich-roast coffee.

<sup>37</sup> Note that this has little to do with mere length of time in the job . . .

<sup>38</sup> The One Minute Manager series by Ken Blanchard and others.



This part of the book will consider these two elements (and the particular skills involved) in turn and will then put it all together again in a way that you can practically use. Before we embark on this journey of two halves, it is useful to clarify in what ways individuals differ and the impact this understanding of difference has on our approach to management.

### **We are all the same. But different.**

In addition to the (usually) obvious ways in which people differ from each other, such as age, sex, race and culture for example<sup>39</sup>, we also vary in some key psychological constructs which are less immediately discernable<sup>40</sup>. The full list of these variables is probably infinite, but psychologists have tended to collapse them into four categories. A brief overview of these categories is useful for the simple reason that, with some of them, you as manager can have a real impact.

#### Intelligence

The first of these is *intelligence*, and there is pretty much nothing you can do about this one. This is usually thought of as our capacity for logic and abstract thought, understanding, reasoning and problem solving; however, if you got fifty psychologists together in a room<sup>41</sup> you would get at least that many definitions, probably more<sup>42</sup>.

The measurement of intelligence as a scientific pursuit started with Charles Darwin's cousin Francis Galton; he measured reaction times to thinking tasks, which was fair enough, and measured people's heads, which wasn't. Many early theories (Spearman, Burt and Vernon amongst others) agreed with the premise of a general factor of intelligence that affected most areas of functioning (called *g*) whereas others suggested there was less of a correlation between all the components - which included verbal and numerical reasoning, memory, spatial ability and inductive reasoning (Thurstone's Primary Mental Abilities, 1938). Later theories, helped by advances in neuroscience, have tended to stress the complexity of multiple intelligences which are largely independent of each other whilst reacting together when required. Howard Gardner (1983) posited the existence of seven intelligences; linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily kinaesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal. Gardner is often credited with opening the door to the emotional intelligence concepts described earlier in this book.

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<sup>39</sup> Which usually have nothing to do with variations in job performance. . .

<sup>40</sup> Which do. . .

<sup>41</sup> Don't try this at home.

<sup>42</sup> More as some like to argue with themselves.



Most of the last 100 years or so of research into the world of intelligence has been focused on its measurement, leading to the widely used concept of Intelligence Quotient (IQ) measured through psychometric testing. This is not without its critics, with many asserting that IQ tests measure what IQ tests measure (which may or may not be same as intelligence), but the concept has certainly stuck. All IQ tests are standardised during design to provide a normal distribution (the bell-shaped curve) with a mean of 100. Therefore, that means 50% of a population will have an IQ of less than this; 50% an IQ of more. Psychometric tests conform to a set of standards of reliability (consistency over time and internally within the questions themselves) and validity (whether they measure what they say they measure).

IQ tends to be an amalgam of verbal, numerical and abstract reasoning, together with spatial awareness – the much maligned 11+ in the British schooling system was/is effectively an IQ test. In the workplace, however, any measurement tends to be split out to reflect the requirements of the job. They are widely used for recruitment and selection purposes (numerical reasoning tests for accountancy jobs, for example) but rather less for development reasons. The reason for this is somewhat contentious, to grossly underestimate the depth of feeling this issue – whether intelligence is innate and inherited, or a result of experiences and environment after conception. The argument has an impact on development because if we accept that intelligence is largely a result of our genetic inheritance then there is not much you can do to develop it.

The pendulum between nature and nurture has swung pretty consistently over the last 100 years, often aided by the use of studies into identical twins that have been brought up apart. This has also been reflected politically, with some writers arguing that the political right lean more towards nature<sup>43</sup> and the left more inclined towards nurture<sup>44</sup>. This pendulum has gone pretty much from 80:20 to 20:80, and somewhat conveniently the heritability factor seems now to be stuck in the middle. Moreover, many argue that it is the interaction of the two that is actually the point.

However the heritability cake is divided, environmental factors have an influence on our intelligence at least up until puberty. These factors include levels of individual attention and encouragement from parents and/or significant others, general family atmosphere, resources such as books and even diet; in article published by Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health in 2011, Kate Northstone argued that, when confounding variables were taken out of the equation, a diet rich in processed foods at the age of 3 was associated with a correspondingly lower IQ at the age of 8; for every (positive) point of increase on the dietary pattern score, there was a 1.2 point increase in IQ.

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<sup>43</sup>“ So let’s use this IQ test to identify who goes to Grammar school so they are not held back by the undevelopable” (I may be taking some artistic licence here. . . )

<sup>44</sup>“Let’s put everyone together and stream them so they can move upstream if they work hard and downstream if they don’t. . .”



What most researchers tend to agree on is that by puberty, our intelligence in the stricter definitions of the term tends to be pretty fixed, perhaps going down a tad after 35 or so. It is useful to think of this as the hardware – we can choose to run more up-to-date software on it but the essential physical computer is there. As it was asserted at the beginning of this section, there is little you as manager can do to help your staff develop in their basic IQ (although with concerted practice we can get better at using what we've got, however). As far as Building Skill goes, you would be far better off concentrating on the other dimensions of individual differences to enable the more “fixed” intelligence of your staff to be used at its optimum.

## Personality

The second of these categories is *Personality*. This has also kept a lot of psychologists very busy for many years, and for those of us who prefer certainty and clarity over ambiguity and open-endedness (itself a personality characteristic – see the section on the Myers Briggs Personality Indicator© in the chapter on Building Your Team) the plethora of models and theories can be very frustrating. A few of them are detailed here for your interest, but most of them are not of much practical use to the average manager until we get the psychometric approach. One distinction we will draw, however, is between *idiographic* and *nomothetic* approaches, as they conveniently divide the plethora of theories into these two categories. Idiographic theories are based on what makes us different from everyone else; the sum total of our experiences and background (including genetic makeup) makes us unique. We will start by revisiting a few of these schools of thought; psychoanalytic, behaviourist, cognitive and humanist. We will then look at the nomothetic approaches. These approaches are more concerned with identifying the dimensions of personality that we all have, but in which we vary in terms of amount. These approaches led to the world of psychometric testing, used widely in organisations for selection, development and teambuilding purposes.

First of all, a somewhat obvious myth-buster. We do not have “a lot of personality” or “no personality” as such (these are often simplistic and judgmental evaluations of extraversion/introversion). Instead, we vary in our personal and interpersonal style along certain dimensions (in most theories, types or traits) when compared to others.

In the Preface, we explored the various paradigms that psychology has gone through since its inception as a science. The history of personality theory and research is part of the same play, with many of the same actors involved. For example, if we ignore Hippocrates' four humours (our illnesses and personality characteristics are created by an imbalance of four substances – blood, yellow bile, black bile and phlegm – an excess of phlegm makes us phlegmatic, for example) which seemed to be the predominant theory for at least two and a half thousand years, then it pretty much starts with Freud and the psychoanalytic school.



A full explanation of how Freud claimed our personalities develop is beyond the scope of this book<sup>45</sup>, but many readers will be aware of the stages of development he suggested children go through on their way to adulthood (oral, anal, phallic, latency and genital) and how we can get fixated at any of these stages if we fail to overcome the problems associated with them. Fixation causes us to hang onto some of the characteristics of the particular stage; for example, a fixation at the oral stage may result in smoking or gluttony.

He also posited a structure of the personality. Each of the three components have their own function, and when working healthily have a system of checks and balances to produce well-balanced, adult behaviour<sup>46</sup>. The psychological constructs (not physical entities) are as follows:

- the id; primitive, irrational and instinctual and operates according to the pleasure principle in that it is motivated to seek pleasure and avoid the tension of psychological pain. It is free from any inhibitions and does not recognise such concepts as fear or anxiety. This is our inner child, and once we learn as a child that we need to delay gratification<sup>47</sup> as there is an external world out there that we need to adapt to, the next construct develops. . .
- the ego; the part that operates according to the reality principle in that it takes account of the real world's constraints. It tries to satisfy the demands of the id but in an appropriate, adult way and to do this has to learn cognitive strategies, such as thinking, learning, deciding and memorizing
- the superego; this develops later (Freud argued at around age 5) and constitutes our sense of right and wrong – a sort of conscience – derived from our increasing socialisation and understanding of the rules and norms of society and is greatly affected by our experience of parenting and culture. It is said to be fully developed when we replace parental control with self-control.

These three parts of our personality are continually in conflict; when these conflicts are unresolved they find expression through our dreams and neurotic symptoms such as anxiety attacks, irrational fears or physical symptoms such as paralysis. To try to mitigate the effects of these and other anxieties we develop defence mechanisms, many of which have transferred to common parlance. Short-term use of these defenses is healthy; it is when we rely on them constantly or for long periods that, to be psychologically healthy, we need to avoid. Examples are repression, denial and projection; these are now widely regarded as “truisms”, as we see them every day. For example, repression and denial are accepted parts of the change curve; with projection we notice in others what we don't like to admit to in ourselves, so we “project” those characteristics or feelings onto others.

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<sup>45</sup> Or perhaps I am just repressing it. Second Freudian joke.

<sup>46</sup> These concepts can be used practically in conversations using the Transactional Analysis model

<sup>47</sup> See the earlier discussion on Emotional Intelligence.



With the exception of understanding and learning to notice these defense mechanisms, most applications of Freudian theory tend to belong in the world of therapy, rather than management or coaching. The psychodynamic approach tends to involve going back to the past (usually childhood) to help address problems in the present, and the role of unconscious desires and forces that may be having an impact on behaviour<sup>48</sup>.

A certain post-Freudian has found favour with the business world however; Carl Jung. A former Freudian disciple<sup>49</sup>, he took psychoanalytic theory in a new direction, calling the personality the *psyche* and viewing it as made up of our consciousness, our personal unconscious and the collective unconscious (its contents being ancestral and racial memories handed down through heredity and known as archetypes<sup>50</sup>). The part of the mind that we are aware of is the consciousness and how we experience the world through this consciousness is the backbone of the MBTI<sup>©</sup><sup>51</sup>. This is described in the chapter on teams; it is now probably the world's most popular personality questionnaire and is used extensively in coaching and teambuilding. It is a *type* approach, as opposed to a *trait* approach, as described below.

The common theme with the psychoanalytic models is that much of what shapes our personalities and subsequent behaviour is unknown to us and deeply rooted in childhood experience. As such, with the exception of the MBTI<sup>©</sup> and the Tavistock Institute which specialises in this school of thought, their transferability to the workplace is limited. I did however come across one organisation in Australia when I was doing psychometric training there that used the Rorschach Test as part of its selection methodology. This is the famous “inkblot” test and is known as a projective test as the participant “projects” his or her descriptions of and responses to an ambiguous shape. Interpretation is highly skilled, arguably subjective and unreliable, and whilst there is limited evidence for it in a clinical setting, using it as part of your recruitment and selection strategy is not recommended<sup>52</sup>.

At the same time as Freud was developing his theories of personality, the Behaviourists such as John Watson and B.F. Skinner were taking a more scientific approach. They felt that the introspective theorizing of Freud et al was too subjective and un-testable and therefore had little value in the new “science” of psychology. The central claim, influenced at least initially by the pioneering work of Pavlov at the turn of the century, was that much of our behaviour is learned; we start from a “tabula rasa”, or blank slate, and through learning we acquire our knowledge, attitudes, insights and personality.

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<sup>48</sup> Just don't go there, basically.

<sup>49</sup> “Sigmund, old fellow – not everything is about sex, you know. . .”

<sup>50</sup> Such as God, characters in fairy stories, the Hero etc.

<sup>51</sup> The Myers Briggs Type Indicator<sup>©</sup>.

<sup>52</sup> And would only tell you things you didn't want to know in any event.



Pavlov discovered that if you presented an unconnected stimulus to a dog, such as the ringing of a bell, at the same time as food then eventually the dog would start salivating at the sound of the bell alone. The bell had become a conditioned stimulus; the new relationship became known as a conditioned reflex and the process was called classical conditioning.

Watson argued that we learned through a process called positive reinforcement. We respond to a particular stimulus, and if there are positive consequences resulting from our response we do it again. If the outcome is not so favourable, we don't – or at least adjust our behaviour accordingly. Watson took Pavlov's concept of classical conditioning and applied it in a well known case<sup>53</sup> to a one year old child. Albert showed no fear of rats before the experiment; after being subjected to frightening loud noises at the same time as being shown a tame rat, he then displayed all the classic fear responses when shown the rat without the noise. He then generalised this fear to all things with fur, such as coats and even Watson's hair. It only took seven times.

His work was expanded on and refined by Skinner who became one of the most influential psychologists of the twentieth century. To him, the very concept of free will takes a battering; our behaviour is completely determined by the history of our conditioning experiences. There is no "inner self" that freely chooses how to respond to stimuli. We react to events in predictable ways – in ways no different from the rats and pigeons he used in his experiments<sup>54</sup>. Any talk of values or concepts of good or bad is really concerned with the positive or negative reinforcing effects of stimuli, nothing more. Things are only good if they ultimately aid survival, because we have learned that it is so. In the section concerned with motivation, a parallel will be drawn with the "carrot and stick" approach to management – again, positive or negative reinforcers as ways to shape behaviour. To the Behaviourists, what is actually going on in people's heads is unknowable and largely irrelevant – or at least not fit for study.

The Cognitive school took a very different approach. They argued that the basic stimulus → response premise was too simplistic and that learning does not take place in such a vacuum. Information will be perceived, evaluated and decisions made on the basis of it with the additional context of prior knowledge and beliefs. Logic and rationality are at the heart of many of the cognitive theories, and the questioning and challenging of beliefs, thought processes and perceptions are at the heart of many associated therapeutic models<sup>55</sup>.

One of the most important of these theories was developed by George Kelly. His take on personality is that we are all natural thinkers, scientists even; attempting to

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<sup>53</sup> "Little Albert" (1920). Because of those pesky ethics people, you would never get away with this these days.

<sup>54</sup> Many readers will have heard of the "Skinner box" where semi-starved animals are conditioned to press levers to get food; at first by accident, then by learning through repetition and reinforcement.

<sup>55</sup> Such as Rational-Emotive Therapy and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT – the sort you tend to get on the NHS).



understand the world we live in by interpreting it according to our unique hypotheses and understandings. These hypotheses are continually tested, amended as necessary and our actions subsequently derive from them. They build up into a way of looking at the world – what Kelly called a personal construct.

We are not passive reactors to stimuli, according to Kelly. We are active in building our own individual concept of reality – a philosophical position known as constructive alternativism<sup>56</sup>. Our realities are personal, idiosyncratic and based on our interpretation of our experiences in the world. Our personality, then, is this unique personal construct system. There is more free will here – we can choose to review and alter our constructs – but only if we are aware of them. His therapeutic approach was based on enabling people to become aware of their personal constructs through a method known as the repertory grid.

To understand someone’s personality therefore is to understand their personal constructs. These are like lenses that we view the world through, putting a particular spin on that world depending on what lenses we are using. These constructs are often depicted as opposing (to the individual) pairs, such as intelligent vs stupid, friendly vs hostile, affluent vs poor, truth vs Government<sup>57</sup>. They enable us to put order and predictability onto the world; living without these filters would be chaotic as we would be awash with both data and a sense of unpredictability. Our own individual construct system determines what we pay attention to, our beliefs and value systems and ultimately our behaviour.

As mentioned above, the repertory grid was originally devised to determine an individual’s personal constructs. After selecting a group of roles (significant others such as friends, colleagues, people you admire, yourself) the individual was asked to select three at random and determine in what way two of them were similar to each other but different from the third. By continually repeating the process, a pattern of constructs would emerge. This technique has been borrowed by organisations as a market research tool, in determining training needs and in performing job analyses.

Finally, no trawl through personality theory would be complete without mentioning the Humanist approaches. Two names stand out; the work of Abraham Maslow, whose hierarchy of needs will be considered in the section on motivation theory, and Carl Rogers’ “Self” theory.

It is hard not to get a bit depressed when reviewing the history of personality theories. We start off with everything being hidden and a product of basic urges (Freud), through being a stimulus/response machine with no more “personality” than a rat in a Skinner box<sup>58</sup> and at last, with the cognitive theories, a thinking if not always knowing or emotional creature. With the humanist schools of thought, and

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<sup>56</sup> Aristotle said that “A is A”. Only in Greek. But constructive alternativism would say that “A is what we construe, or construct, as A”.

<sup>57</sup> OK, I made this last one up.

<sup>58</sup> Perhaps not the most unbiased sentence I have ever written.



most particularly the work of Rogers, the “human” comes back into being, erm, human.

Rogers was a phenomenologist. He believed that all of us live in our own changing, subjective world which includes our experiences, emotions and beliefs about ourselves and the world. This is our reality; no more or less valid than anyone else’s, but unique to us, and a portion of this reality defines the concept of “I” or “me”. Rogers called this the *perceived self*, and it has an impact on how we behave in the world. The only way of understanding another person’s subjective view of the world (and the resulting behaviours) is to get into their frame of reference; the ultimate goal of therapy and the result of a truly empathic relationship. He believed that a way of achieving empathy is to demonstrate *unconditional positive regard*, thereby fulfilling a basic human need.

This is the acceptance of an individual’s worth without judgment; what a child craves from its parents<sup>59</sup>. Rogers believed that many psychological disorders are created when we attempt to gain positive regard from others by living our lives the way those others want us to. This perceived self (the “I” we believe ourselves to be) can be contrasted with the *ideal self* – our perception of who we would like (or ought) to be. Psychological health occurs when our perceived self and our ideal self are congruent (either the same or compatible); in other words, we are giving ourselves unconditional positive regard.

When we look at Maslow’s hierarchy of needs later on, you will notice that the ultimate motivating force is the need for self-actualisation; the process of being who we are most capable of being. This positive, humanistic concept is at the core of Rogers’ theory too. We are born with an actualising tendency; to become a fully functioning individual with a drive towards psychological and physical health (he called it living the good life) to reach our full potential. Where he differs from Maslow is that Maslow posited a hierarchy, with self actualisation at the top (as we shall see, passing through physical and social needs along the way), whereas Rogers suggests this is the *only* motivating force; everything else is part of this ultimate aim of optimal development. A fully functioning person:

- is open to experience,
- lives fully in each and every moment
- does what feels right
- is free to live their life in the way they see fit
- is naturally creative

Rogers does not accept, unlike Freud, that behaviour is necessarily a result of past events. He prefers to think of it as a “here and now” response to our perception of the reality of the world around us. He did, however, agree with Freud’s concept of the defense mechanism, at least in that we can use denial processes by refusing to

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<sup>59</sup> Parents who say “I will love you *if* you tidy your room” are not demonstrating unconditional positive regard.



recognise anything that threatens our self-concept, and selectively distort or rationalise perceptions until they have a better fit with our self-concept.

The main applications of Rogers' work are in education<sup>60</sup> and therapy, although many coaches and facilitators will borrow heavily from the rapport building, empathic and person-centered approach to interventions.

So far, we have looked at some key idiographic theories of personality. Our experiences have made us unique, and we can only understand and predict the complexities of human behaviour one person at a time. As far as the workplace is concerned, this is great if you have a department therapist. The nomothetic approach is arguably more scientific in that they are more concerned with dimensions of personality that we all have to a greater or lesser extent; these approaches therefore have the sheer weight of numbers on their side. They also allow us to compare individuals against set criteria (and each other), and for this reason have resulted in the world of psychometric profiling; an approach used extensively in recruitment and selection as well as training, development and teambuilding.

The nomothetic approach tends to make use of the concept of traits when referring to dimensions of personality. Traits are those aspects of personality that we all have, to a greater or lesser extent. When psychometric tests are designed along the theoretical frameworks laid down by the great trait theorists (Eysenck, Cattell), they are structured so that each trait is normally distributed along the classic bell-curve; individuals assessing themselves through these questionnaires will be compared to a large sample of people who have taken the test before (a norm group) and so will see where they stand on the normal distribution curve. An example would be the trait *Dominance*; at the right hand side of the bell curve we have the Dominant end and at the left we have the Submissive end, with most people being in the middle. Your score determines where on that curve you see yourself compared to the comparison group (usually General Population, UK Managers and Professionals, or Graduates).

But we are getting ahead of ourselves. The main difference between the approaches these trait theorists and the theorists we have already examined above is that the latter do not tend to have a particular theoretical base to then try to "prove" during clinical and experimental research. In this sense, they are effectively data-driven approaches, as opposed to theory driven. This is usually performed through the statistical technique known as factor analysis<sup>61</sup>.

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<sup>60</sup> The Robin Williams film "Dead Poets Society" has many Rogerian references and themes in that as a new teacher in a traditional school he tries to get away from the jug and mug approach of pouring knowledge into empty vessels, and instead teaches them how to free their minds in a "fully functioning" way. Doesn't end particularly well, now I come to think about it.

<sup>61</sup> This is a bit like putting a load of data into a centrifuge, spinning it and seeing what lumps or clusters come out. It is a way of statistically uncovering any hidden structure or relationships (correlations) behind the data. These clusters end up being labelled as traits. No theory is involved; what comes out of the analysis determines the trait model, and it can be carved up in many different ways.



A trait, then, is generally thought of as a relatively stable pattern of behaviour or other aspect of personality. Gordon Allport, one of the original protagonists of this approach, called them dispositions<sup>62</sup>. Whilst the principles behind the various trait theorists remain the same, arguably the main contentious issue has been the number of traits that adequately describe human behaviour. Hans Eysenck contended that this number could be reduced down to three; extraversion, neuroticism and psychoticism.

The extravert/introvert distinction had previously been identified by Jung, but where Jung talked about it in terms of whether we are getting our energy from the external world or internal resources<sup>63</sup>, Eysenck referred more to sociability, risk taking and impulsiveness (Extravert) or quiet, serious, restrained and reserved (Introvert). Neuroticism was about emotional stability (or not), suggesting that neurotic individuals were typically anxious, irritable and worrying; highly stable individuals on the other hand were calm, controlled and more restrained in their emotional responses. Psychoticism was added later, and referred to the tendency towards lacking empathy, being insensitive or even hostile. This last trait, he argued, was not normally distributed like the other two; in other words, most people are at the non-psychotic end of the normal distribution curve<sup>64</sup>.

Eysenck contended that there were biological and genetic components to personality<sup>65</sup>; to him, extraversion was primarily caused by reduced baseline cortical arousal levels (so extraverted individuals are continually seeking stimulation whereas introverts have quite enough of it already) and neuroticism was largely hereditary.

Questionnaires based on Eysenck's work<sup>66</sup> tend to be used more for research purposes than occupational ones, but he does remain one of the most cited theorists in the history of psychology. He was in almost constant battle with our next trait theorist Raymond Cattell over the number of traits that personality could be usefully broken down to, but their similarities vastly outweighed their differences. It just depended on how you cut the personality cake.

Cattell's great drive was to make psychology (and the study of intelligence and personality in particular) a real science to break away from the verbal theorizing of Freud et al; if something exists, it can be measured. He was instrumental in developing the factor analysis techniques described above and through his research developed a multi-level model of personality traits that has stood the test of time (and of tests – his model is often used as the starting point for personality questionnaires).

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<sup>62</sup> He is also responsible for the concept of the idiographic /nomothetic distinction.

<sup>63</sup> See the section on the MBTI©.

<sup>64</sup> Although you may be unsurprised to know that there appears to be an over-representation of high Psychoticism scores within the prison population (see note on the BBC Horizon programme of September 2011).

<sup>65</sup> He had rather robust views on the variations of IQ scores of various races, too.

<sup>66</sup> The Eysenck Personality Inventory (EPI) and Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ).



Through his analysis (using everyday life behaviours, data from experimental situations and questionnaire data) he came up with 16 fundamental factors (he called them primary factors) underlying human personality, each with its own associated set of behaviours. These factors remain relatively stable over time, although they could be temporarily affected by mood state. He named them after the letters of the alphabet to avoid any preconceptions associated with existing terms, and developed one of the world's most widely used personality questionnaires – the 16PF™ – to measure them. This questionnaire is used for a variety of purposes; selection, development, coaching and counselling and in clinical settings<sup>67</sup>.

On the 16PF™, each trait or factor is normally distributed (an individual's score can be mapped onto the bell-shaped curve) with separate descriptions for left-hand and right-hand positions, and with most of the population falling in the middle. Examples would be:

Factor A: *Warmth*, with the left hand position referring to a tendency to be reserved, cool and detached, and right-hand positions as outgoing and warmhearted.

Factor C: *Emotional Stability*, with the left hand position referring to emotional instability and being easily upset, and the right-hand as more emotionally stable, calm and mature.

An individual's scores on each of the 16 factors (and also occupational groups such as solicitors, IT workers and nurses) can therefore be visually represented as a profile for ease of interpretation. This approach is also used by subsequent questionnaires such as SHL's Occupational Personality Questionnaire (OPQ32r<sup>68</sup>); again, widely used in industry for both selection and development purposes.

When Cattell factor analysed these 16 factors, he found that they could be collapsed down to five second-order, or *global*, factors; each one of these five were made up of four or five primary factors that tended to go together in the real world. As an example, an individual's score on the global factor *Extraversion* is made up of their scores on five primary factors: Warmth, Vigilance, Social Boldness, Privatness and Self-reliance. If each of these scores is high, the result will be a high score on Extraversion.

These five global factors are important. The vast majority of research and cross-validation with other personality questionnaires suggests that personality has these five over-arching domains, now known in personality theory as the Big Five. This is heartening for the practitioner; we can be as confident as we can be that we are

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<sup>67</sup> My first proper job as an Occupational Psychologist was with the 16PF™ publishers for the UK version of the questionnaire and I spent my four years there training people to be qualified to use it. Somewhat coincidentally (I assume) Cattell died on the day I joined.

<sup>68</sup> Guess how many traits this one measures. . .



using a model that is empirically driven from a variety of sources<sup>69</sup>. These Big Five are known by the acronym **OCEAN**:

- **Openness**; appreciation for variety, creativity, culture, independence
- **Conscientiousness**; self-discipline, responsibility, planned rather than spontaneous
- **Extraversion**; outgoing, energetic, seeks company, sociable
- **Agreeableness**; good-natured, friendly and compassionate, cooperative
- **Neuroticism**; sensitive, nervous, experiences strong emotions, less emotionally stable

You will have noticed that both Cattell's and Eysenck's work are reflected here. As mentioned, the 16PF™ and EPQ measure all or some of the Big Five; the OPQ32r can be used to give an assessment of them and the NEO Personality Inventory is a specific measure of them<sup>70</sup>. All five factors are said to derive from both nature and nurture, all conveniently approximating a 50:50 split.

So, there we have it. A brief and most definitely not exhaustive look at the world of personality theory. The question that now arises is what, if anything, has this to do with Building Skill?

When we as managers have our performance or development-based conversations with our staff, we do not usually have these personality models in our head to aid us. Instead, we use our implicit theories; our own subjective assumptions and stereotypes about how people are and how they work (and as we shall see in the next section, on what motivates them). In essence, we take cognitive shortcuts and give them labels – an approach not dissimilar to the trait approach but with one major difference – they do not involve any semblance of science or objectivity. They are made up of our attitudes, social and cultural beliefs and our life experiences; as such, we are often wrong, or at least biased. Our implicit beliefs affect what we notice; we selectively attend and distort, which has the result of reinforcing our beliefs.

Social psychologists call this the *fundamental attribution error*. We place greater emphasis on (made up) personality variables when looking for explanations of human behaviour than on situational variables<sup>71</sup>. It takes greater effort to consider all the possible situational scenarios that may have had an impact on people's behaviour, so we put it down to being something about them instead. Add to this our own emotional state at the time and our preference for consistency when categorising people and events, and we have a pretty good recipe for getting it wrong. Managers cannot be expected to be experts in personality theory, so

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<sup>69</sup> “The “Big Five” has become a widely accepted template for understanding the structure of human personality”; *Arnold and Randall et al, p116*.

<sup>70</sup> Costa and McCrae (1985).

<sup>71</sup> We tend to do the opposite with our own behaviour, however.



avoiding the automatic stereotyping of people and behaviours has to be a good move. As we shall see, taking more of a coaching approach to these conversations helps us to take a step back from wading in with our own, often flawed, perspectives.

This is not to say that personality is an irrelevance to the manager. Having an awareness of the dimensions of Jungian typology via the MBTI<sup>©</sup> is a path many managers follow during teambuilding events which can add value to one-to-one conversations too. Many organisations use the concept of traits - psychometric profiling - during the recruitment and selection stage and use this to inform their subsequent conversations and management style. It is important to remember that all such methods and tools are best used as the starting point for conversations and need to be fully understood by the parties concerned – most of them require rigorous training before use and as such, this work is often carried out either by external consultants or internal experts within HR or Recruitment departments.

### Beliefs, Attitudes and Knowledge

This third area of individual differences, often grouped together in the field of *epistemology*, are related but distinct concepts. Beliefs are often thought of as more of a philosophical concept, but psychologists have had a lot to say on the matter too, especially when it comes to the effect belief has on behaviour.

It sounds obvious, but most of our beliefs come from our upbringing. We internalise the culture around us – which includes religion, social class, educational opportunities and circumstances, parental values and the like. Many of us cling onto these without question, but as Rogers would argue (see above), fully functioning individuals would be continually questioning and searching for “truth”.

The world of Neuro Linguistic Programming<sup>72</sup> also has a lot to say about beliefs. To NLP practitioners, beliefs are the determinants of success or failure. We can choose to believe something that will help us, and we choose (although we may not be aware of that choosing process) to be bound negatively by them. To quote Richard Bach, “Argue for your limitations, and sure enough, they’re yours<sup>73</sup>”. Just as our staff will have beliefs about work, or themselves, or their profession that help or hinder them, so do we as managers – but we may also have beliefs about them, too. A useful belief to hold is one of “people are separate from their behaviours” – similar to the old adage “love the sinner, hate the sin”. In this way, we avoid stereotyping and demonizing them, and can help them work on and change any errant behaviour as opposed to trying to change them as a person – an ultimately futile task. Through powerful coaching-style conversations, we can help change their thinking about

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<sup>72</sup> The dark art of NLP. Used a lot in sales and some coaching interventions. Essentially it is a suite of tools and techniques focused on the link between emotions, thoughts and behaviour. It comes with a set of beliefs that practitioners should subscribe to – one of which being “A person’s behaviour is not the person”

<sup>73</sup> Richard Bach’s “Illusions” – a catalyst when I needed one when going from being a rubbish banker to a hopefully less bad student of psychology.



tasks which should lead to different results, or reinforce any behaviour we wish them to maintain. This may be about confidence-boosting; the Psychological Manager takes his or her pastoral duties seriously! Our beliefs about ourselves can affect the little voice we all have in our heads. Negative self-talk can have a huge impact on our confidence and a huge impact on performance. It's a vicious circle;

negative beliefs → negative thoughts → negative behaviours → negative outcomes  
→ reinforce negative beliefs → ad infinitum. . .

Another classic belief dimension – and one that leaks into personality theory – is the *locus of control* theory of Julian Rotter. This describes the extent to which we believe that we control events, or that they control us. Those with a high internal locus of control have the belief that events arise from their own actions as opposed to fate or the actions of others. This affects their behaviour in that they tend to influence others more readily, tend to assume they will be successful, and generally feel more able to own that success rather than put it down to chance. Rotter felt that the internal/external locus of control was a continuum (more like a trait) than a bipolar type – with the implication that small, incremental shifts may occur depending on the situation. The goal of coaching (and therapy for that matter) is often to increase an individual's internal locus of control, enabling them to own their actions and outcomes of behaviour and to feel less at the whim of others.

Attitudes are slightly different. These tend to be more specific than global beliefs; they tend to be concerned with a like or dislike of something in particular and usually emerge from our experiences – or more specifically, our thoughts and emotions about our experiences. The link with behaviour is complex as many other variables may come into play<sup>74</sup>. The classic example is smoking; we may hold an attitude that smoking is bad for us, yet we may still indulge. When there is such a disparity with an attitude and behaviour, we are motivated to attempt to reduce it by changing the attitude (smoking isn't really that bad for me), changing the behaviour (stopping or reducing smoking) or rationalising (reframing) the attitude or behaviour (they are only low tar; there is no history of lung disease in my family; the link with cancer is still unproven). This uncomfortable tension we feel when our attitudes (or indeed beliefs) and our behaviour are not congruent is called cognitive dissonance, a term made famous by Leon Festinger. It is at the heart of our sense of self; a way of rationalising the discrepancies between our actual self and ideal self (c.f. Carl Rogers, above)<sup>75</sup>.

There are individual differences in the typical strength of attitudes held, which may be down to personality variables, and in physiological responses (such as a rise in blood pressure) to those attitudes. Think about your own attitude towards, say, fox

<sup>74</sup> Pratkanis and Turner (1994) argue that the link is stronger when the object of the attitude is well-defined, the strength of the attitude is strong, there is knowledge behind the attitude and when it says something about your identity.

<sup>75</sup> It is also the origin of the phrase "Sour grapes" from "The Fox and the Grapes" fable by Aesop. In the story, when a fox can't reach a bunch of grapes he reduces the dissonance by surmising that they are probably sour. Not bad reasoning, for a fox.



hunting. How do you feel about it? What are your thoughts about it? How do your thoughts and feelings affect your behaviour in relation to it? It is a useful self-awareness exercise to analyse your attitudes like this; separating out the affective, cognitive and behavioural components. We have attitudes because they help us make sense of the world – a cognitive shortcut. They are also an important part of our self-identity and personal values, and can determine which social groups we chose to belong to.

Whilst they are slow to change, attitudes can also be modified by the art of persuasion; if the source of an argument is perceived as credible, trustworthy and expert, and the message itself is credible and well-argued, then attitude change is more likely. The effect is enhanced if both head and heart – cognition and emotion – are addressed. There is also a link with beliefs here. If we hold the belief that “we can choose our attitude” – an idea promoted in the book “Fish!” and can instill this in our staff, then we are making real change happen. The premise is that we may not have much of a choice about certain aspects of our role (apart from resigning, of course) but we do have a say in the way we approach the task; again, a reframing exercise.

On a larger scale, a whole organisation’s attitudes are often measured through staff surveys, typically looking at staff engagement, job satisfaction and organisational commitment.

## Knowledge

In some ways, this is the simplest and most obvious area of individual difference. So far, we have discussed individual differences in terms of our intellect, our style (personality) and our beliefs and attitudes. Knowledge is the total of the things we know and bring to the job, and the relevant experience we have – although it is important not to confuse the two<sup>76</sup>. In the classic definition of a job competency by Richard Boyatzis – the knowledge, skills and abilities to do your job well – knowledge is separated out from the skills and abilities which are also a function of personality styles and intellect. Knowledge is about things we know; abilities are about applying that knowledge to actually do something<sup>77</sup>. For the purposes of this discussion, then, knowledge is about the facts and experience that we bring to the table and apply using our intellect and our personality preferences.

In the workplace, acquiring knowledge is all too often equated with going on a training course, and whilst training is an important source of knowledge, it may not always be the most efficient or relevant one. When budgets are tight, other learning options need to be considered, such as: reading, identifying role models, preparing

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<sup>76</sup> One organisation I worked in wanted to scrap their Long Service awards, as it merely rewarded people sitting in the same organisation (or even job) for years and years, without showing the slightest ambition, development or gumption to move on. It was deemed too controversial to get rid of it, which was a shame as it would have given the powerful message that it is performance that was valued and rewarded, not just gluing your backside to the chair.

<sup>77</sup> Psychologists often refer to declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge.



presentations, internal secondments and attachments, stretch assignments and project work, action learning sets, chairing meetings, voluntary work. . . the list is endless. Chapter 1 explored these in more detail.

## Motivation

The study of motivation has been fair game for psychologists for years<sup>78</sup>, although by no means do they have a monopoly on it. It would be wonderful if all this research had provided the answer to what motivates people at work but, like most research, it tends to come up with “well, it varies. Basically.” The main problem (or beauty, depending on your point of view) is that we are all individuals, with different intellects, personalities, cultures, past histories and financial circumstances; what motivates one person is not the same as what motivates another. What becomes apparent as you delve into the world of motivation theory is that, as a manager, it is something that you have to actively do something with – it doesn’t just automatically happen if you pay someone a salary<sup>79</sup>.

To appreciate where we are now with understanding motivation, it is helpful to take a trip back in time and look at where it came from – a journey as much influenced by the psychological paradigms of the time as by the findings of the research. An exhaustive look at all the theories would be a book in its own right, so here we detail the most influential ones. Then, we will look at what you can actually do with this knowledge to help your management of people - the “will” of the “skill/will” matrix - and why it is important that you do so.

After Freud had spent his time arguing that what drives us is essentially unknown to us as we have either repressed or forgotten the experiences that have shaped us<sup>80</sup>, you will remember that the Behaviourists tried to simplify the equation. Internal processes didn’t matter, or at least couldn’t be studied; what was important (and measurable) was behaviour, a concept seized upon by Frederick Taylor in the first half of the twentieth century. Here are the roots of time and motion studies and business process re-engineering, borne out of the new production line technology at places like Ford. Before the industrial revolution, motivation was primarily all stick and no carrot – you performed in your job because you feared the consequences of not performing. This was rooted in a social relationship; with the rise of large scale industry, ways of increasing mass efficiency became more important and led to the rise of management philosophies.

Taylor pretty much started this movement off in what is known as the scientific management school. In his view, inefficiency was a management problem, not a worker problem; management’s job was to select the right people, train them to be efficient, and motivate them by wage incentive schemes. The prevailing view of the workers at the time was that they were lazy, dim, dishonest and only out for what

<sup>78</sup> Helped along, no doubt, by funding from the corporate world.

<sup>79</sup> But it usually doesn’t happen if you don’t, to badly misquote Herzberg (see later).

<sup>80</sup> Unless we pay for psychoanalysis five times a week.



they could get. Tasks were therefore broken down into repetitive, small, easily trainable chunks, and the workers were set quotas and paid a bonus if they met or exceeded them. The price they paid for undertaking dull work was that they knew the rules and the pay was (relatively) decent – and they had a small window of control over their earnings. The manager’s job was to break the job up, set the targets and control the flow because the workers wouldn’t have the intellect or interest to do it themselves<sup>81</sup>.

It was mentioned earlier that one psychological paradigm tends to “create” the next one in that subsequent ones are seen as the antidote. Motivational theories tend to fall into this pattern too. Whilst Taylor was heavily influenced by the behaviourists, by the 1940s and 50s theorists and researchers were busy trying to look into the “black box” that the Behaviourists said was either impossible or at least unscientific. Understanding these internal processes was now on the agenda, and one well-known theory was very influential in encouraging managers to think outside the (black) box.

Douglas McGregor’s concept of dividing managers (and an organisation’s prevailing culture) into those that subscribed to *Theory X* (similar to the scientific management belief; workers are lazy, will try to avoid work if they can and need to be closely supervised and coerced) and *Theory Y* (workers enjoy working, will seek responsibility and meaningful tasks and be to a large part self-managing) is one of the first models that looked at the worker as a “human resource” instead of something to be exploited. It is true that Theory X and Theory Y illustrate the two extremes, with most of us being somewhere in-between, but his thinking influenced a raft of motivation theories.

McGregor is describing the two extremes, but does he say which one is best?<sup>82</sup> By best, here we mean more motivating and therefore likely to lead to improved performance; ultimately, the point of work-based motivation theories. His argument is that Theory Y managers are more likely to generate an atmosphere of trust, growth and development – basic requirements for innovation and the fulfilling of potential. As such, it is hard to argue that his call for more of a Theory Y culture has not shaped human resource strategies today.

Running concurrently with these ideas (and McGregor was in fact influenced by him) were the early formulations of Abraham Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs theory. It is testament to his work that most people have at least heard of this, and whilst it is fair to say that motivation theory has moved on, his ideas still have mileage. Maslow’s focus is what the person brings to the table in terms of motivation, primarily in terms of his or her needs – what we want from our environment in order to have a motivating effect on our behaviour.

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<sup>81</sup> Depressing, isn’t it.

<sup>82</sup> Yes.



When we want something, or more accurately have a need for something (two very easily confused concepts!) it creates a sense of disquiet or dissonance. This unpleasant feeling motivates us to restore balance (homeostasis) by fulfilling the particular need. So, when our bodies have a need for fuel, we are motivated to eat and therefore restore balance by the unpleasant sensation of hunger. Once we are full, we are no longer motivated to perform that particular behaviour – in other words, a satisfied need is not a motivator.

This concept is at the heart of his theory. In addition, Maslow was a humanist, and as such believed in the ultimate worth and capacity for growth of individuals. This positive view of humanity, borne out of his experience as a clinical psychologist is what influenced McGregor's formulation of Theory Y. It also explains the order and nature of his hierarchy of needs; ultimately, we are motivated by our need for developing our true potential, and this final need – self-actualization – is very much a direction, not an end point.

Maslow's theory, then, states that we all have a set of needs that can be ordered into a hierarchy, or series of levels. As a lower-order need is satisfied, it ceases to become a motivator and our behaviour is then shaped by our desire to satisfy the needs at the next level. The first four levels were termed deficiency needs and must be satisfied before we can focus on our higher-order (self actualisation) needs. This concept has been heavily criticised as being rather ethnocentric and individualistic (societies with a strong collective bias, or those in poverty, would therefore be less likely to be focused on self-actualisation needs, and the evidence is simply not there to support these assertions).

These five levels (often depicted as a pyramid with the first one at the bottom) are:

**Physiological:** these ones are pretty obvious and basic – food, air, water, sleep, sex<sup>83</sup>. In terms of work based factors, this would equate to pay (to provide the food and water), pleasant working conditions and having access to refreshments.

**Safety:** when our physical needs are satisfied, our attention – or more accurately, our desire to achieve homeostasis – turns to needs concerned with safety and security. This may be about order, consistency, no alarms and no surprises. At work this may equate to safe (rather than merely pleasant) working conditions, benefits such as pensions or healthcare, job security and insurance policies.

**Social:** this is about our desire to belong and other emotional aspects such as friends and family, intimacy and acceptance into social groups. This could relate at work to working relationships with individual colleagues and management, and being part of a team. Latest neurological research would suggest that this is perhaps even more of a fundamental need than we first realised.

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<sup>83</sup> Although it could be argued that sex permeates all these levels, especially social and esteem needs.



**Esteem:** this represents our desire to be accepted by others, valued and respected by them and the recognition of our contributions. It also reflects our need for self-respect, not just that of others. At work, this need level may create the desire for a high status job or job title, gaining feedback and recognition for quality work and getting our opinions respected and listened to.

**Self-actualisation:** the one with no end point. This relates to our desire for growth and advancement, our need to express our creativity and our full potential – everything we are capable of being. To be addressing this need, we must have addressed – and in some way fulfilled – the other four levels. Maslow also argues that our genetic potential has a bearing on how this need may manifest. This need relates more to the whole person rather than the work-based one, but at work this may include challenge, achievement and development in the role, promotion through the ranks to become the best we can be in whatever we do. Characteristics of such self-actualising individuals include increased creativity, spontaneity, autonomy and detachment, a superior sense of reality and an increased identification with the human race.<sup>84</sup>

At first glance, this may all sound rather simple and reductionist. Maslow however did not claim that all of our lower-order needs had to be satisfied before we focus on our higher-order ones; he estimated that the average employee has 85% of their physiological needs satisfied at any one time, 70% of safety needs, 50% social needs, 40% esteem needs and 10% self-actualisation needs, although no data was collected to support these assertions. What may be more apparent, however, is that if we are faced with a life-changing situation such as redundancy or financial loss, then our focus of attention slips down the hierarchy until we satisfy our immediate physiological and safety needs again.<sup>85</sup>

One of the most important themes to emerge with Maslow's work is the start of the notion that pay is maybe not the motivator it was originally deemed to be. Yes, it helps satisfy our more basic needs in the hierarchy, paying for food, water and shelter/security needs, but has little impact on the higher-order needs. This idea only increases in prominence as we continue through the time-line of motivation theories.

Building on Maslow's work, Clayton Alderfer in the late 1960s condensed the five levels to three (existence, relatedness and growth – the ERG model) and suggested that we can be actively driven to satisfy our needs at all these levels simultaneously; an assertion that perhaps makes more intuitive and empirical sense.

The final need theory we will discuss is the Learned Needs theory developed in the 1950s and 60s by David McClelland. As the name suggest, this is slightly different as

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<sup>84</sup> Leclerc et al (1998) identify 15 characteristics of a self-actualising person including having positive self esteem, are aware of their feelings, are capable of intimate contact and commitment, feel free to express their emotions and take responsibility for their actions. You wouldn't want to meet one.

<sup>85</sup> When you are back-packing in far-off lands, the same thing happens. Where can I find food and shelter? And where's the toilet?



instead of our needs being intrinsic to us as part of the human condition, our needs are learned from experiences we have had in the culture that we live in and these experiences affect our perceptions of later events. When we acquire a particular need, we are predisposed to behave accordingly – and differently from those who don't have it.

He identified three major needs as being particularly important. He studied these needs by developing a projective test called the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT). A projective test is one where the individual projects their attitudes, thoughts, desires etc onto something ambiguous that can have many meanings – the classic example is the Rorschach Inkblot test. In the TAT, individuals were shown a series of pictures and asked to write a story about them. Some people tended to continually return to the theme of achievement (by writing a story about someone striving to meet a goal, for example); others about affiliation (their stories would concern needing to be with others) and others about influencing and dominating others – the need for power.

These three needs became abbreviated nAch, nAff, and nPow. Those with a need for achievement (nAch) tended to take personal responsibility for problems, preferring to solve them alone. They set difficult goals and had a strong desire to get feedback from others as to their success or failure on tasks. McClelland found that a high nAch was correlated with managerial success, and whilst usually emanating from childhood upbringing, could also be learned as an adult. Consequently, he developed training in entrepreneurship and suggested this was how the west could best help poorer countries.

Those with a high need for affiliation (nAff)<sup>86</sup> tend to display a desire for approval and friendship from others, and will look for opportunities at work to satisfy this need. They care about how people feel, value harmony and prefer group, rather than individual, work tasks, enjoying the feeling of being part of a team. They will therefore be motivated by supportive environments with opportunities for social interaction, and if these are provided it is likely to have a positive effect on work performance.

Finally, those with a strong need for power (nPow) have a drive to control the environment around them – which includes other people. They enjoy exercising control over others, will seek positions of leadership and influence and offer their own opinions more than most. With some, the concern is for personal power – dominance for the sake of dominance; for others, the concern is for social power, in which this need presents itself into more group or organisationally focused achievements that have wider benefits than merely ego. McClelland argued that this need for social power is perhaps the most important predictor of being successful as a leader.

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<sup>86</sup> Don't titter. I don't think it meant the same then.



So, our story so far is that we started off with the worldview that workers need to be coerced and that the answer to the motivation question is to control them by keeping the job simple and measurable, and reinforce good (profitable) behaviour with pay incentives (Taylor). We then moved on to an alternative model where managers subscribe to one of two opposing worldviews about human nature (McGregor). Theories then started to delve more deeply into what factors, either learned or innate, drive our motivation by way of need fulfilment; we reduce the nasty feeling of an unsatisfied need by being driven to satisfy it (Maslow, Alderfer, McClelland). These need theories help us to understand how individuals differ when faced with similar circumstances.

An alternative to looking at the person, of course, is looking at the job itself. By the 1960s, one researcher was making a name for himself in the world of job redesign – or more specifically, in how redesigning jobs can improve motivation itself; Frederick Herzberg. In a way, we have come full circle from Taylor – his position was that work should be as simple as possible to enable managers to control it (and not spend too much on the training budget) and use pay as the principle reward mechanism. Herzberg found that this was far too simple a premise, and distinguished between those factors that were intrinsic to the job itself (“motivating” factors) and those which were extrinsic to the job (“hygiene” factors).

Herzberg discovered through extensive research that satisfaction and dissatisfaction at work were caused by different things (as opposed to simply the opposite or absence of that thing). We are driven to satisfy our hygiene needs (salary, work environment, security, relationships with our fellow workers) because we would be unhappy without them, but preventing dissatisfaction in these areas does not lead to a state of satisfaction. In other words, once we have got them we are in a neutral state, not a motivated one. To be motivated above a baseline level we need satisfaction in factors that are more intrinsic to the job itself, such as achievement, recognition, responsibility, the work itself. Intrinsic motivation is emotional. The emotions of excitement, enjoyment and interest are personal to us and arguably within our control. Think back to when you were last operating at your very best (what some psychologists call in a state of *flow*) and the chances are these emotions were playing a leading role.

The implication for designing jobs is profound. If you merely want to prevent your staff being dissatisfied, focus on pay and reward. If you want motivated employees, and the resulting increase in performance, then you need to enrich the job itself. This means providing more scope for autonomy, accountability and responsibility as far as possible. It means creating truly empowered decision making processes. And it means enabling your staff through training, coaching and other support mechanisms to deliver.

To Taylor, then, money is a motivator; probably the most important one. To Herzberg, money will be a demotivator if it isn't satisfied, but once a baseline level is reached it will not motivate performance. A pay-rise or bonus may have a very short-



term effect on performance<sup>87</sup>; for longer term performance enhancement, enrich (not just enlarge) the job<sup>88</sup>.

A final strand of psychological theory and research into motivation is less to do with individual differences (Need theories) or aspects of the job itself as we have just explored, but one based around the factors that influence the *level* of motivation we demonstrate. In essence, this is largely concerned with the interaction between the internal “push” factors within the individual and the external “pull” factors of the job or wider environment. This interaction is a cognitive, or thought process; we make rational decisions about how we are going to balance the equation in terms of the exchanges we are prepared to make.

Indeed, the first of these theories is all about balance. In the 1960s, John Adams’ Equity Theory stated that employees are motivated to maintain equity, or a sense of fairness, between what they bring to the table at work (their inputs) and what they get out of it (the outcomes). Inputs are the time and effort we provide, our experience and qualifications, our loyalty, enthusiasm and commitment and any other contributions we can make to the exchange. The outcomes may include job security, salary and benefits, recognition, responsibility and sense of achievement as well as praise/thanks<sup>89</sup>. There are obvious links here with the concept of the psychological contract mentioned elsewhere. These inputs and outcomes will vary from individual to individual and we will all weight these items differently.

This is described as a cognitive theory because we are presumed to make rational choices based on our perceptions of fairness; both in terms of our own sense of justice in terms of our inputs and outcomes, but also in our perceptions of fairness compared to others. We are motivated to seek fair treatment; if we feel we are being treated less favourably when compared to others around us, we are motivated to restore equity, perhaps by reducing our inputs or demanding more outcomes. It can work the other way too; if we perceive that we are getting too much out of the deal compared to others, then our sense of guilt and shame will motivate us to seek balance by increasing our inputs<sup>90</sup>.

Because we are dealing with perceptions here, individuals’ concepts of what is fair will vary, as will the weighting of the various inputs and outcomes. Some may value flexibility of hours higher rather than level of pay, for example. These perceptions may not always be grounded in reality and a manager may have to help restore the sense of equity by helping people to change their perceptions (of the value of their inputs or those of others – or even the choice of the comparison) as well as actively address the levels of input/outcomes involved. Moreover, we now know that increasing our sense of fairness has an impact on levels of our “feel-good” chemicals – dopamine, serotonin and oxytocin.

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<sup>87</sup> Unless you are in a money-oriented job, like sales or banking. Or are a Premier League footballer.

<sup>88</sup> Rynes et al (2004) suggest that this link is underestimated, and that people are more motivated by pay than they want others to think.

<sup>89</sup> So a footballer may receive the outcome of £150,000 a week for the input of falling down a lot.

<sup>90</sup> More common than redressing it by asking for less pay. . .



Finally, there is a raft of theories loosely labelled Expectancy Theories, and it is worthwhile mentioning these as they have informed a great deal of motivational research. Most seem to originate in original work by Victor Vroom, yet again in the 1960s. Again, this is cognitively based and has similarities with the premise behind Equity Theory; namely, that our behavioural choices are underpinned by mental processes such as perception and the formation of attitudes, and are primarily motivated by our attempts to maximise pleasure and minimise pain.

In essence, we make these behavioural choices based on our belief that what we do will result in what we intended, and how much we wanted it in the first place. The relationship between these three beliefs; the emotional importance we place on the outcome (Valence), our perception of whether our efforts will lead to the desired outcome (Instrumentality) and the strength of our belief about whether the outcome is indeed possible (Expectancy) is what is often referred to as VIE Theory.

This belief-driven relationship has an impact on our behaviour. If we don't think that our efforts will result in desired behaviour, we will adjust our efforts accordingly. If we didn't want the outcome in the first place, it had no valence (or does not fit in our value-system) and is unlikely therefore to impact on behaviour positively. If we don't think we can successfully perform the task required, again our motivation to act is impeded.

According to Vroom, then, the VIE Theory (and its many subsequent iterations) explain why we make the behavioural choices we do. We choose the option with the most motivational force (MF) as it is most likely to cause us pleasure and least likely to cause us pain.<sup>91</sup> The implications for managers are simple. First, they need to tap into the emotional component of valence (understand their employee's value systems and work-based desires) to ensure that any rewards are actually wanted (ensure valence). Second, they need to ensure their employees have the capacity, capability and confidence to perform at the required level of performance (ensure expectancy). Third, they should ensure that there are clear links between high performance and reward and that those links are understood by the employees (ensure instrumentality).

In later years, Lyman Porter and Edward Lawler added the variables of actual ability (as opposed to beliefs about ability (expectancy) and role clarity (what they are actually there to do) into the mix; all the motivational effort in the world may not lead to much if there is a lack of ability to perform the job, or a misapprehension as to where it is appropriate to channel the effort.

So there we have it. A potted (and certainly not exhaustive) history of the psychological research into motivation. Where does this leave the practitioner – the manager who wants to use this body of work to inform his or her management

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<sup>91</sup> Therefore,  $MF = V \times I \times E$ .



practice? As we have seen, some of these theories focus on the internal drivers of the individual, some on the components of the job, and some on the interactions between (and belief systems concerning) the two. And this is important information. As we have seen elsewhere<sup>92</sup>, tapping into what we are good at and what fires us up has a positive impact on performance, culture/environment and staff turnover rates.

This section introduced the reader to the concept of the skill/will matrix, in which we asserted that when determining someone's likely performance on a task it was helpful to separate out their skill or potential, and their will to perform it. We then went on to outline the key ways in which individuals vary from each other. It will be obvious by now that the factors determining an individual's *skill* to perform a task is a function of their intelligence, personality preferences and their beliefs, attitudes and knowledge/experience; what determines their *will* is their motivation (with a dose of attitude thrown in). What you, as a Psychological Manager, can do with this information is the subject of the next two sections; Building Skill, and Dealing with Will.

### **Building Skill; Facilitating Performance and Development**

Imagine this scenario. You have had a meaty piece of work come in and you want to allocate it to a member of your team. You now understand the skill/will matrix and the theoretical world of individual differences – intellect, personality, beliefs, attitudes and knowledge, and motivation. Where do you go from here?

Somewhat obviously, the first step is to make a judgment. What is your current assessment of their skill (or potential) to perform this task? What support will they need? What, as Psychological Manager, is within your power?

Let's leave the will – motivation – to the next section. Here, we are concerned with determining and then building the skill. The best predictor of future job performance is (drum roll) past performance. What evidence do you have of their past performance on similar tasks? It will help to have a reasonably thorough understanding of what this piece of work will entail to enable you to break it down into its constituent parts. You can then look back for evidence (or transferable-skill evidence) that can help you make the judgment call. Looking for evidence (this *may* involve getting some feedback from others who may have insights into the individual's working practices) can help to dismiss any explicit or indeed unknown prejudices you may hold about that person and their own attempts at impression management. It also helps to be as specific as possible about the task itself.

After finding whatever evidence and other people's perspectives as deemed appropriate, then an honest conversation with the individual concerned would be

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<sup>92</sup> Strengths and the Positive Psychology movement



the next step; asking them about similar work they had done before and what level of support they felt they would need. Your assessment of current skill level will be an important determinant of your *initial* leadership style for this person on this task, as we shall see in the final section of this chapter when we put it all together. This leadership style will be based on a blend of a set of tools the Psychological Manager has at his or her disposal; to badly misquote Brian Clough<sup>93</sup>, I wouldn't say they are the best three management skills to have, but they are in a shortlist of three. . . "they" are goal setting, feedback and coaching. These will be addressed in Part Two.

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## Dealing with Will; the World of Motivation

The last section dealt with the *skill* part of the skill/will matrix. Whilst you as Psychological Manager are not responsible for building skill in your team - only the people concerned can have that responsibility - you *are* responsible for providing the environment of empowerment and encouragement (and resources) to facilitate that building of skill. It's a subtle difference. And, of course, you are responsible for identifying and taking into account the skill levels, both present and potential, in the people who report into you, as well as for dealing with any subsequent performance issues.

But skill is only half the story. Two people could have identical intellect, personality styles and preferences and knowledge, skills and experience, but very different levels of performance would result if one were motivated and the other were not. This section deals with the *will*; we have looked at the world of motivation in theoretical form, and this section explores what you as Psychological Manager can do about it. Before we do – a word on the psychological contract.

### The Psychological Contract

Much has been written about the psychological contract over the last fifty years or so<sup>94</sup>, but very little about what you as a manager need to know about it and, more importantly, how it impacts on your management of people<sup>95</sup>. Every writer appears to have their own definition, but most seem to come down to a few core essentials;

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<sup>93</sup> Brian Clough, for anyone either under 30 or who has no interest in football, was an English football manager (Derby County, Nottingham Forest) in the 1970s and 80s. He was played by Michael Sheen in the 2009 film "The Damned United" about his disastrous time at Leeds United. He is famous for his rather maverick approach to football management and his managerial quotes. My favourite four (in a shortlist of four) are:

"I wouldn't say I was the best manager in the business. But I was in the top one";

"We talk about it for 20 minutes and then we decide I was right";

"The river Trent is lovely; I know because I have walked on it for 18 years";

"Rome wasn't built in a day. But I wasn't on that particular job".

Priceless.

<sup>94</sup> I suggest you don't go and read it.

<sup>95</sup> That's why.



that a psychological contract, as distinct from the formal employment contract, is generally unwritten, subjective and ongoing, shaped by the organisation but held by individuals and comprises all the beliefs an individual holds about that organisation. Many of these beliefs are connected with a sense of equity or fairness, and as such can have a powerful impact of behaviour. These beliefs can change over time and will vary between individuals depending on their own backgrounds, motivations and aspirations.

As the psychological contract is by its very nature subjective, its contents will vary from individual to individual. One employee in your team may have the adequate provision of development opportunities as part of their unspoken contract; others may have promotional expectations as part of theirs and yet others may be more focused on concern for personal welfare and security of employment. The main point is that it is about exchange; the employee exchanges their labour and goodwill for a set of implicit expectations around such issues of promotion, development, respect and fairness.

You will notice one common theme that keeps cropping up here; this is all inside people's heads. Its implicit nature means that it is generally hidden, not written down anywhere and you may not know what an individual's psychological contract contained until it has been breached.

This happens all the time, apparently, because of all the factors that affect the employment relationship. Many will be accidental, intangible and be formed of a subjective evaluation of what has been promised (or what is expected) and what has actually transpired.

The implications of such a breach are that there will be an impact on feelings (anger, betrayal, sadness), thoughts (I'm not going to go the extra mile now; what is the point in being loyal) and, ultimately, actions (less effort, work to rule, active retaliation by taking more sick leave or leaving early). We are back to exchange theory again; a perceived breach of the psychological contract will be met with reduced effort to achieve balance in the exchange<sup>96</sup>.

Whilst this is all very interesting, what can you actually do with this? That last sentence is indicative, actually; in a survey, 90% of organisations said it was a useful concept, but only 36% of them actually used it.<sup>97</sup> The answers, like many of the concepts in this book, go back to good old fashioned conversations.

The more you can make the implicit explicit, the more both parties will benefit. Through regular, open and honest conversations, you can explore hitherto unspoken desires, aspirations and expectations and ensure that they are not breached by default because you didn't know about them and the employee hadn't crystallised

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<sup>96</sup> Actually, the research suggests that such a breach has a big impact on attitudes, but rather less on behaviour.

<sup>97</sup> Guest & Conway, 2002 (in Conway and Briner, 2005)



them. The sooner you can start doing this after selection, the better. Some organisations attempt to address this during Recruitment and Induction; in any event, start soon and ensure that this concept becomes a regular topic in your routine review meetings. Remember – a psychological contract is between an employee and the organisation, but on most practical levels when you are line manager, the organisation is you.

For this to have a positive effect (or at least avoid a negative one) then any promises you make as part of these discussions must be made genuinely and followed through. If there is one thing worse than breaching an aspect of the psychological contract that you weren't aware of, it's breaking one that you were.

One thing to avoid, however, is the tit-for-tat bargaining that can sometimes accompany this. A give-and-take relationship is healthy, and one that habitually descends into explicitly contracting some extra effort for a specific reward becomes prescriptive, inflexible and controlling.

### Motivation Conversations

It should be apparent that the psychological contract can have a big impact on motivation, and we have seen that it is not always explicit or known to all parties. How are you going to know what motivates the individuals whom you manage? Some specific ideas will be presented at the end of this chapter as usual, but for now, let's start with the obvious.

The answer, like so many answers in this book, comes down initially to one thing; quality conversations. If you want to know what drives someone, ask them. OK, it's not always as simple as that, but it's a good start. Through your one-to-one sessions, you should have started to gain an impression of what it is (either internal to them, or in the job itself) that keeps them motivated. The idea here is to start making this specific and tangible, as opposed to merely floating in the ether.

Somewhat inevitably, it is not always that easy. Some people may never have been asked the question before. One individual I managed in a public sector organisation was used to being told what to do (and how to do it), irrespective of that individual's experience, personality or indeed ability, not to mention any longer-term aspirations. My well meaning, but clumsy, attempts to try to understand how I could make the job more rewarding for her, or more suited to her style and experience, was met at first with suspicion, followed by gentle mirth<sup>98</sup> and eventually fear and frustration<sup>99</sup>.

So part of the answer here is about you creating the right environment, atmosphere and culture where these sorts of questions are asked, and meaningful answers routinely given. It takes time to build up the trust (in some places far more than

<sup>98</sup> “Yeah, we don't do this around here. You'll learn.”

<sup>99</sup> “Why won't you just tell me what you want me to do and leave my opinions out of it?”



others) but ultimately, it is one of the things that you have control over. It is where you can make a difference to the way people do their jobs. It was mentioned earlier that motivation is something you have to do something with, as a manager; it is a “doing” word, and most managers don’t.

Merely coming out with a “what motivates you” type question may not help you, however. Most of us don’t know – or at least, haven’t given it any structured thought. The question is too abstract without giving it a framework, and this is where modern Motivation Questionnaires come in; they get at these answers through the back door, as it were, and add a useful framework to the conversation. You don’t need to use the questionnaire approach, of course (you have to be a qualified user for some of them, in any event) but these questionnaires have distilled the above research into a framework of (usually between nine and eleven) motivating factors that typically float boats.

One such questionnaire and supporting motivation framework is the Blue Edge Motivation Questionnaire (BEM-Q ©<sup>100</sup>). The model they use assesses eleven factors that can either be motivators or demotivators (by their absence) at work. These are:

- Affiliation; a desire to work closely with other people, getting to know them and being at the centre of social events
- Recognition; a desire for acknowledgement for their efforts and receiving positive feedback from others
- Caring; a desire to nurture others in the work role and being seen as a “shoulder to cry on” by others
- Independence; a desire to work autonomously without the heavy involvement of superiors, valuing personal freedom
- Development; a desire for ongoing personal and professional development through training, coaching and other learning opportunities
- Responsibility; a desire to take positions of responsibility and influence over others, valuing the status associated with those more senior positions
- Achievement; a desire to set and achieve stretching goals, being recognised for achieving them
- Variety; a desire to do original, creative, interesting work, valuing work environments which encourage innovation
- Material; a desire to make money and achieve a good remunerative package
- Security; a desire to work in a secure and stable role and organisation; more likely than most to believe in the “job for life” model
- Environment; a desire to be happy and comfortable in the physical working environment

If you paid attention to the theory part of the previous chapter, you will recognise some key components of the theories espoused; *Affiliation* relates to Maslow’s concept of Social needs, *Security* with Safety needs, and *Material* with Herzberg’s

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<sup>100</sup> Other excellent motivation questionnaires are available. (*Legal Ed*).



*hygiene* factors, for example. The factors that Herzberg claimed enriched the job (as opposed to merely enlarge it) are there too – Independence, Responsibility, Variety and Recognition. Whilst the factors which motivate us are more transient than, say personality preferences, general themes do emerge, and identifying the top three motivating factors with your staff, and assessing the extent to which their current role meets these needs, is very useful information.

Once you know what they are (and if you don't go down the questionnaire route, you can always use the above as a structure for a conversation) then you can work with your team to ensure as far as you can that their job provides some scope for satisfying these needs – remember, this is letting you know when they are operating at their best. You may need to ask them to describe specific circumstances when they were particularly fired up and working at their best, and what it was that contributed to that feeling. It may also be useful to find out when they felt at their most demotivated and what that meant in terms of their work performance – and again, what it was about the circumstances that contributed to it. Another useful question may be “if you were your manager, what would you do to get the best out of you” . . .

If it turns out that an individual has a strong preference for Achievement, for example, then what can you do to ensure that they are actively involved in the setting of their own goals? What can you do to help make them stretching in the context of organisational needs? How can you ensure that they get adequate recognition for meeting those stretching goals? How can you link this with advancement opportunities?

Of course, not everything is within your gift<sup>101</sup>. A useful approach is to discuss the extent to which the job as it stands satisfies their top three motivating factors, and to get them to come up with suggestions for how the job may be enhanced accordingly. As manager, it is then your job to meet these ideas as far as you can whilst meeting your own requirements for that role. This may involve adjusting your management style accordingly; delegating more responsibility, allowing more autonomy in the way they perform tasks, using more coaching-style conversations and the like. By doing this, you are using the skill/will matrix at its best, and behaving like a true “Theory Y” subscribing manager. These conversations may also touch on the “when” of motivation, as opposed to the “what”. Being alerted to any perceptions of inequity, or of behavioural choices linked to expectations may help you to address them before they have a deleterious effect on performance.

All of this is at the heart of the Situational Leadership model because you are adjusting your style to tap into what makes the different individuals in your team perform at their optimum. You will have to take different approaches, at different times, with different people. You will have to ensure that you reward the behaviours - and performance - that you want, and that your team see the link between the

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<sup>101</sup> At the time of writing, not many managers can give many Security need assurances. . .



performance and the reward. And what motivation theory tells us is that for most people, most of the time, it's not about the money.

### **Building Skill, Dealing with Will: Reprise**

In the Introduction to this chapter, we introduced the concept of the skill/will matrix. We identified how individuals differ (intellect, personality, beliefs attitudes and knowledge, and motivation) and then went on to look at what we do with this information:

- Building Skill through Goal-setting, Feedback and Coaching
- Dealing with Will through understanding motivation and attitude

This final part is about *what* you do *when* – how you use your assessment of skill and will in a particular circumstance to determine your leadership style.

So, to recap: Situational Leadership<sup>©</sup> is about varying your style of management based on your judgment of an individual's skill and will to do a task. There are four possible scenarios:

- both a low current ability to perform the task and a low desire to do so
- a low current ability to perform the task but motivated and willing
- a high level of skill or potential to perform the task but unwilling
- a high level of skill or potential and motivated and willing to do so

Let's take these one at a time and identify what predominant style of leadership you should display to get the best performance out of the individual concerned.

#### Scenario 1: Low Skill, Low Will

First of all, nothing is going to happen without dealing with the motivation issue. The first stage therefore is to have a conversation about their wider aspirations if you haven't done so already, and how this particular task may tap into what typically motivates them. You may be able to adjust the task so that it meets these primary motivators; for example, if their need for affiliation/working with others is strong, can you encourage some joint working on aspects of it? If they are motivated by recognition then how could you build this in and make it publicly noted? You may wish to reiterate how important the piece of work (and therefore their performance) is towards meeting the goals and objectives of the team.

Secondly, once you have at least a modicum of buy-in (or at least agreement that they will take the work on) you can build on the skill. Initially, your approach in this



scenario would be a Directive one, clearly setting out the objectives of the piece of work, what is involved in it and any key stages and milestones. Clarity is the key here – make everything obvious, tangible and unambiguous. Make any goals SMART and make sure they know what excellent performance looks like.

As the work progresses, you would be taking a pretty hands-on style. You would be helping them to structure the task, set deadlines, make it clear what they should be reporting back to you on and by when, and building motivation by acknowledging successes, giving regular feedback and praising when appropriate. Performance would be regularly monitored and any problems or breaches of standards should be dealt with by providing instant feedback and reiteration of what performance standards are expected. Help them to identify any training or development needs that could improve their performance or knowledge.

It may be that this Directive style goes against your preferred or natural style of leadership. It is important to recognise that if the individual has low skill and (at least initially) low will to perform this task, then they will probably lack confidence in performing it and would not want to be left alone in any event. The more time and support you can give at the start of the process should pay dividends in skill improvement through your goal setting and feedback (and perhaps gentle and increasing forays into coaching) and through your feedback and praise, motivation and confidence should rise too. Eventually, and hopefully in subsequent tasks, you may be able to use a different style.

#### Scenario 2: Low Skill, High Will

In both scenarios 2 and 3, your coaching skills will need to come to the fore – albeit for different reasons. In scenario 2, the motivation element is not the problem, so if skill/experience is very low for a particular task, an initial Directive approach as in scenario 1 may be appropriate. It may well be, however, that you can drop this fairly quickly and take advantage of the high will by taking a coaching and guiding style. As with all coaching interventions, creating an atmosphere of trust – and one where mistakes are tolerated and viewed as learning experiences – is paramount. As confidence and skill levels rise through your initial “hand-holding”<sup>102</sup> you should be able to gradually let go of the control and put increasing responsibility for decisions on them<sup>103</sup>.

#### Scenario 3: High Skill, Low Will

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<sup>102</sup> Concentrating on the holy trinity of Goal-setting, Feedback and Coaching

<sup>103</sup> The One Minute Manager series by Ken Blanchard takes quite a “controlling” view of coaching in any event. It is sometimes a subtle distinction, but he puts coaching in the “Directive Behaviour” bracket which wouldn’t sit well with many coaches.



As mentioned above, this is primarily a coaching style of intervention but one that focuses on increasing motivation as opposed to working on skills. Your coaching approach will be addressing the reasons behind the low motivation, identifying any blockages to the realisation of performance potential that is already there and using your knowledge of motivation theory to find ways round these blockages. This is usually through a combination of working on the person (perhaps by looking at their perceptions of the task and helping them with reframing) and tailoring the task if that is possible so it better meets their motivational needs or preferences. It may well be the case that what you thought was a motivational issue is actually a confidence issue; if this turns out to be the case, encouraging small but increasing steps, giving plenty of feedback (searching for the opportunities to praise) and reinforcing this through the awareness and responsibility inducing coaching conversations you have should help. Firing them up and supporting them are the principle concepts here.

#### Scenario 4: High Skill, High Will.

It is very easy to assume that you don't have to do anything with this one, but don't fall into the trap of being the absent manager!<sup>104</sup> There is a fine line between giving highly able and motivated people the freedom and responsibilities to perform their tasks with minimal supervision and merely ignoring them and letting them get on with it. Feedback and praise is still essential for the maintenance of motivation – and using the strengths approach of identifying what it is they are doing well and how it can be translated into other aspects of work will not only maintain it; the resulting creativity may lead to fresh goals and challenges being met which were hitherto unthought-of.

Of course, it is far less likely that you will have to closely monitor the way in which the objectives are being met. Setting goals and objectives is no less important than with the other scenarios; you should be able however to allow far more freedom as to *how* the objectives are met. You may also be able to allow more risks too<sup>105</sup>. Your coaching, when it is needed, would be very much from the exploring options and realising potential/increasing creativity perspective and would be largely coachee-led.

When managing talented people like this, (or at least talented on this particular task) good delegation practice is important. Are you delegating both power *and* responsibility? What is in scope in terms of decision-making powers? Have you made it clear how it fits in with the bigger picture? Have you ensured there are enough resources available? And what level of reporting progress back needs to be agreed? If you make all this explicit up front during the Goal-setting conversation, it is easier for both of you.

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<sup>104</sup> Some managers believe that managing “talent” is harder than managing poor performers, often because there is the underlying feeling that they are after your job . . .

<sup>105</sup> But please, not if you are in the financial sector. We don't want *that* again.



So that's it. The Skill/Will matrix and what to do with it. It is likely that you are doing most of it intuitively already, but being more aware of the framework and the particular style you could use depending on the scenario you have in front of you can only be a good thing. Unless you are Brian Clough, of course.<sup>106</sup> The next chapter shifts the focus away from the individuals within your team, and onto the team itself.

### **The Psychological Manager:**

- role-models the behaviours they wish to see in others and creates a culture of conversation
- uses the skill/will matrix to firstly assess, then help to build the skill and the will of their staff
- varies their management style according to individual and situational need and is comfortable using all those styles
- is aware of how individuals differ; intelligence, personality, beliefs attitudes and knowledge, and motivation – and has a broad understanding of these concepts and the major theories involved
- takes a proactive approach to motivation, recognising that everybody is motivated by different things at different times
- helps their team members to define clear goals and objectives that are SMART and tap into the wider vision of the team, and have regular conversations about progress on those goals
- aligns performance goals with personal development goals to foster commitment and motivation
- sets up systems to facilitate the constructive, regular feedback against goals and behaviours with all his or her staff and creates and role-models a culture where this is the norm
- takes a coaching approach to their management practice, regularly practicing and honing their coaching skills and getting feedback on their coaching interventions
- is aware of the concept of the psychological contract and, as in more general motivational drivers, makes an effort to make it explicit

So, there it is. Part One of The Psychology of Managing People. Please join me for Part Two (not to mention Manager as Coach, Building a High Performing Team . . .). Thanks for reading!




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<sup>106</sup> My final Brian Clough quote; “They tell me people have always wondered how I did it. That fellow professionals and public alike have been fascinated and puzzled and intrigued by the Clough managerial methods and technique and would love to know my secret. I’ve got news for them. So would I.”

