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articles

TOTAL EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT: IS IT POSSIBLE?



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By Carlo Scodanibbio for The Times of Malta

Entrepreneurs, Managers, wouldn't you like your people to be: responsible – accountable – serious – efficient - dedicated to their work - cost-conscious - committed to quality - actively participating in improving your business processes..... in a nutshell: wouldn't you like your people to "perform"? Yes, you surely would. Every manager worth the title, at any level, would very much like to have collaborators acting, thinking and performing well, a sort of "replica" of himself or herself.....

However, in spite of such basic aim, very few managers succeed in the purpose. Actually, the majority of managers believes that getting "performing" people is almost impossible. The majority of managers, when something goes wrong, still uses the universally recognised excuse "...with 'these' people, what do you expect?.....". Rather tragic.

Yet, it is possible to have or create fully performing industrial people!
BUT: there are just a few 'conditions' to be respected and something else to be understood.

One of the conditions is that managers must be well aware of the implications of the change, the change that took place in the industrial (and not only) world several years ago, and must manage the change accordingly. If a manager, today, is not a 'change' manager, he or she won't get very far with results. Normally, when I begin a Total Employee Involvement course, I ask my delegates what they expect from it. Possibly, the best answer I ever received was recently in India, by a top-level manager: "I am here to see if I can learn and improve ways of changing myself – if I can do that, it will be easy to change others, including my people....". Fantastic answer!

Another condition is to be prepared to scrap the 'formula'. What is the formula? It's the recipe to success, the past success. Every good enterprise was sooner or later successful; like every manager was - at a certain point in his/her career - successful (otherwise he/she would have not become a manager....).
The 'formula' is that cocktail of ingredients that made the success: the ways to do things and the ways to do not – the what can be done and what cannot – the 'taboos' and the 'holy cows' – the rules and policies to be respected – the institutionalised values and principles - the procedures to be followed – etc. Every enterprise has a 'formula' and every manager has one.

Some are simple formulas, some are very heavy, sclerotic ones. But every formula is a braking force when it comes to 'change', to the extent that some enterprises prefer to die rather than scrapping the formula, and some managers stick with all their strength to it until it's too late....

According to their formula, managers label their people: it doesn't take long to a manager to appraise a collaborator and assess his/her merit. Once the assessment is made - on the basis of the manager's past experience and of the consolidated 'formula' - a collaborator gets 'labelled' (good – excellent – not-so-good – useless – etc.). That's it. By one of the famous Peter's Principles, every collaborator with a low-score label will remain a low-score collaborator. In extreme circumstances, even for the rest of his life

And there are a couple more conditions.....
But there is also something very important to understand.
In industry (never mind what industrial sector) we find a few (4, to be correct) main models of Organisational Structures and an infinite number of hybrid combinations. Well, only 2 out of 4 models allow people (and therefore the enterprise) to perform better and better. The other 2 simply don't. Unfortunately, most industrial, commercial and business organisations in this world 'fall' somehow within the 2 models that just do not allow people growth and better performance!
Entrepreneurs and managers simply don't know about it – and even if they do, they don't realise anyhow the entity of the drawback and the impact of belonging to an inadequate 'model' - the strongest 'braking force'!

Yet, they 'push': push for change, push for better results, push for better performance and improvement..... but, generally, that's like pushing too fast a petrol-engine-driven lawn-mower through thick lawn maybe neglected for too long after heavy rain.... the poor lawn-mower engine will just stall. In the past, the strategy was to replace the petrol engine with a more powerful one - which worked for a while, until the lawn became thicker and tickier, taller and taller (heavy rain...).
Today, we realise that we cannot keep increasing the engine horse-power indefinitely: it will simply not work! Sooner or later the lawn will become a jungle – there is no lawn-mower that can cut through that.....

We have to go for a totally different "cutting style"!

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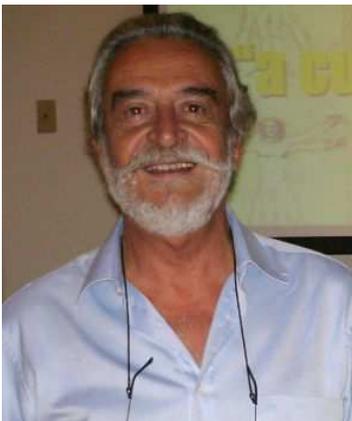
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The conclusion is that entrepreneurs and managers need to start thinking differently if they want to cope with a rapidly changing environment and succeed in it. When all (or most of) the braking forces will be removed, not only people will begin performing better and better: the entire enterprise will perform better!

“Totally Involved” employees is not at all a myth. There are enterprises (not many, yet - unfortunately) in which: ‘change’ is managed adequately on a daily basis, so that the motto becomes “it’s not so important what you know, is more important what you can learn” – ‘formulas’ and other braking forces have been minimised –

the Organisational Structure has gradually been flattened and modified to be fit for higher level of people and enterprise’s performance – managers have become ‘coaches’ – people have been ‘empowered’ (integral transmission of responsibilities), not simply ‘delegated’ (‘evaporation’ of responsibilities) – improvement actually takes place in a continuous and systematic fashion – people are involved, committed, dedicated, enjoying what they do - and people, at all levels, are not only ‘doers’, but also and primarily ‘thinkers’.

These enterprises are called **Lean Enterprises**.



Carlo Scodanibbio, born in Macerata (Italy) in 1944, holds an Italian doctor degree in Electrical Engineering (Politecnico di Milano - 1970).

He has over 49 years of experience in Plant Engineering, Project Engineering and Project Management, as well as Industrial Engineering and Operations Management.

Free-lance Consultant since 1979, he has worked in a wide spectrum of companies and industries in many countries (Southern Africa - Italy - Cape Verde - Romania - Malta - Cyprus - Lebanon - Mauritius - Malaysia - Kenya - India - Saudi Arabia), and operates as an Independent Professional Consultant and Human Resources Trainer to industry.

His area of intervention is: World Class Performance for Small and Medium Enterprises in the Project, Manufacturing, and Service sectors.

His favourite area of action is: the "lean" area.

He has co-operated, inter-alia, with the Cyprus Chamber of Commerce, the Cyprus Productivity Centre, the Malta Federation of Industry, the Mauritius Employers' Federation, the Romanian Paper Industry Association, the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation and the University of Cape Town.

His courses and seminars, conducted in English, Italian and French, have been attended by well over 20.000 Entrepreneurs, Managers, Supervisors and Workers. They feature a very high level of interaction, and are rich in simulations, exercising and real case studies. The approach is invariably "hands-on" and addressed to immediate, practical application.

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