



We need a ‘New World People Manager’

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The etymology of the word ‘Manager’ by ‘Etymonline’ is:

*1560s, "to handle, train, or direct" (a horse), from the now-obsolete noun manage "the handling or training of a horse; horsemanship" (see manege, which is a modern revival of it), from Old French manège "horsemanship," from Italian maneggio, from maneggiare "to handle, touch," especially "to control a horse," which ultimately from Latin noun manus "hand" (from PIE root *man- (2) "hand").*

Managers in the modern corporate world never handled horses but are called managers. And hopefully, none of them treated or treat humans as horses. The modern manager (from the 1950s to 2020, seventy years, whew! A very long time) was in a continuous evolution phase. Employees promoted as managers wanted to quickly become leaders. Being called a manager is socially not so great. Comedies like, “The Office” never helped - they further maligned and desecrated the image to a laughable, bumbling, sneering and almost being the most hated person in the corporate world.

The technology companies wanted to get rid of this position and no true engineer ever wants to be called a manager. Google founders did not believe in managers - they eliminated the position in 2002 and experimented with flat structures ([HBR, How Google sold its engineers on management, 2013](#)), ultimately commissioning research on whether a manager adds any value to the team and whether Google should have this position. Project Oxygen, commissioned in 2008, identified eight behaviours which were common amongst the high-performing manager. Managers were identified as a crucial link to driving performance for a team. Managers also came out as a critical component for building and running a high-performing team. You can further read about it [here](#). The eight behaviours have since then been updated to ten behaviours (updating two of them as well as adding ‘Collaborates’ and ‘Is a strong decision maker’). I will share more about collaboration (one of the critical managerial behaviours) in my subsequent articles. It remains an undervalued and the most underdeveloped skill for managers and leaders.

In my past two years of research on the topic of New World Manager, I believe the job and the title have a whole new flavour. Post-2021, the current meaning is obsolete:
someone whose job is to control or organize someone or something, esp. a business
(Cambridge American dictionary)

When you look at the title ‘Manager’ and the job from post Covid19 lens, four essential dimensions emerge – Purpose, Performance, Connection and Innovation. I will be discussing all of them in detail and the sweet spots among them in a series of articles on my LinkedIn page and our website – www.saltodeefe.com.

But before that, let me shed some light on the 3 seismic shifts happening right now on the way organisations look at their employees and what employees are supposed to do differently in the workplace. Let us first understand these –



The first shift. Human beings cannot be treated as or called a resource. The term ‘human resource’ itself should be changed. In its place, we can use ‘human capital’, ‘people operations’, ‘people excellence’ or any other term. We can no longer afford to term human beings as resources. The pandemic taught us that when the screens are flat and all the windows are of the same size on your zoom call, we are, first and foremost, human. Humans have needs, emotions, feelings and a desire to feel connected to one another. Covid19 flattened the corporate world like never before - it became as flat as your computer screen. During Covid19, all of us needed space to share our individuality, feel connected and be relevant. Many of us did not want to be visible on the screen - either we did not have a separate room for ourselves, or our background did not look as pretty or there were other members in the room (other people, pets, and partners). We discovered that people can work from anywhere as long as they feel a connection with their managers, leaders and organization besides their peers. All of us still feel a strong need to be connected. We have discovered more of ourselves, learnt to be more expressive and want to be recognized as human beings. We want to play a part in building something meaningful instead of just being a cog in the wheel.

The second shift. Workplaces do not need supervisors, workplaces need coaches. Coaches bring out the best in their people. They constantly work with people to build them to be better than their current selves. Coaches are not threatened by team members (and others) nor do they devalue others. They explore ways to lift people up and help others shine. They constantly provide meaningful feedforward to smoothen the coachees’ flaws and polish their strengths. Coaches are not worried about their own glory; they look at the coachees’ success

and glow in their light. Managers and supervisors need to learn coaching skills as essential skills to do their jobs. Coaching skills do not come naturally to all of us. In the 1990s, in a highly popular course, ‘Situational leadership’, American managers learnt the art of directing, delegating, coaching and participating. Many managers learnt coaching skills but often forgot them since the opportunity to apply these skills was limited and was not valued enough. To be a successful manager and leader in the current corporate world, the shift in managerial behaviour has to be overwhelmingly towards a coaching style. Gen Z and millennials have been brought up by their parents with a light touch and a lot of coaching. So, when they see a different behaviour at the workplace, they cancel that workplace quickly. The result is early attrition and the Great Resignation. Employees are not only demanding coaches at the workplace but are leaving companies and leaders swiftly when they see a different style. In the new workplace, coaching is an essential skill to be able to engage with your team(s). It requires deep listening, giving space to experiment, lots of recognition and the art of feedforward.

The third fundamental shift. When dealing with the constant VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous), BANI (Brittle, Anxious, Non-Linear, Incomprehensible) or TUNA (Turbulent, Uncertain, Novel and Ambiguous) world, a leader has to constantly innovate to deliver outcomes. Irrespective of the circumstances of the outer world, the organisation has to consistently deliver the chosen customer promise. The customer is constantly looking at organisations to fulfil their promises – hospitals to provide care even if their doctors and nurses are suffering from Covid19, garbage collection to happen daily without fail (whether it be war or pandemic), the bandwidth to connect real-time with office and family, to get entertained in the boring lockdowns, food of choice to get delivered at home and many other such services. All managers and leaders have to cater to such needs of their customers. Managers have to shift their paradigm from efficiency and productivity (largely taken over by AI and computers) to innovating with their team members to deliver outcomes, thereby delighting customers with every transaction.

We have seen tweets destroying the reputation and quarterly results quite often ([United breaks Guitars](#)) or even employees getting fired on tweets. Managers need to focus on human vectors which were never on the radar before the pandemic, including ex-employees, using social media to ruin their reputation and company brands. Managers have to keep on sharpening their skills to constantly deliver to the ever-escalating customer promise. They have to constantly innovate with their teams for solutions. Productivity and efficiency are internal measures while outcomes and innovation consistently deliver to customer needs. The shift in this paradigm is not natural and has to be driven consistently and rhythmically by organizations.

I believe that these three seismic shifts will start distinguishing the New-World people managers from the Old-World ones. The good news is that these skills are learnable and can be honed in a short time. I hope that the New World People Manager(s) truly changes the workplace and the work order.

About the Author:

Rajan Kalia is the Co-Founder of Salto Dee Fe Consulting. He brings a rich experience of over 28 years in HR. Rajan currently consults, advises, coaches and innovates in the area of Human Resources and is a business enabler. He created Karma Notes, a one minute feedback mobile application and RF4, an employee retention tool. Rajan also serves on the corporate advisory board for various organizations. He is also a moderator for Harvard Business Press, Stanford Seed, and a coach with DDI, India. Prior to Salto Dee Fe, he has worked with organizations like Ballarpur Industries, Eicher, Coca Cola, Max Life Insurance. He last served as the Director HR for Max New York Life Insurance.

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