

Why Being A Christ-like Manager Makes Sense

Management can be regarded as the process whereby a person is given responsibility for helping a group achieve a common goal with regard to and respect for each individual in the group. The corollary explanation is that a manager has the authority to prioritise the choices of preference on behalf of the individuals within a group that is moving towards a predetermined preferred future.

In either case, the manager who is considered successful will be the one who achieves well in this balancing act. The corporate level will be pleased that he/she has managed to achieve the desired goals. The individuals within the group will be pleased that they were part of this goal achievement. Thus, the manager has achieved some form of workable solution to one of the fundamental paradoxes of life – achieving constructive compromise in the face of the inherent tension between the needs of the individual and the demands of the group.

Community psychologists have labelled this core compromise as the tension of the One versus the Many. It speaks to the heart of the relational nature of distinctly human existence. This assumes that each person is uniquely made, with a need to be known individually. Yet the only way that this can be achieved is with other people, who in turn need to be uniquely known. Such a paradox can be resolved through relationships that move the One versus the Many to a situation of the One And the Many. This latter position reflects a relationship of complementarity rather than competition. However, degrees of tension can dominate the One/Many paradox, such that genuine complementarity is rarely achieved well.

In these common instances, the manager regularly makes two mistakes. The first is that the manager uses control mechanisms that thwart expressions of individual need, are task focussed and holds people accountable to the letter of the law. Such management systems have been given many names. I think that the concept of being a *legalist* suffices. It indicates that although there is a proper place for order and justice, the use of it has gone to the extreme. It means that a language of 'us/them' normally develops, along the bourgeois/proletariat nuances of classical Marxist analysis. That is, the group's goals override the individual's needs to a deep level, such that individuals grieve the loss of appropriate human sensitivity.

The other common mistake that managers make is to bend to the loudest emotion-based grievances of their people, such that common goals are constantly re-defined, or achieved within a greatly protracted time line, or achieved with much decreased effectiveness. In this scenario, people politics dominate, and individuals only feel safe if they are part of an in-group. Becoming and staying a member of this group becomes the focus of their energies, rather than any over-arching goal for the whole group. The 'us/them' language again ensues, between each and within each level of responsibility.

H. G. Wells, in his shorter history of the world, noted these competitive patterns as being the common ways of social relationships, in different political forms, around the world. This non-Christian author interestingly pointed to one person who made the most profound difference to this One/Many tension. The person was Jesus of Nazareth. An article in the Journal of Community Psychology in 1992 also noted that it has only

been the Judeo-Christian tradition that has enabled groups and societies to build people systems that avoided mechanistic (legalistic) relationships, and suffocating organistic (emotions based political) relationships.

Why is it that Jesus of Nazareth's teachings can be seen to help in this process of managing the tension between the One versus the Many? I would suggest that subsequent to and because of the teachings of Jesus, the notion of respect for each and every individual has systematically progressed throughout the world. This recognition of each person being of equal worth (but not equal in function, skills or responsibility) was not a form of rampant individualism. It was a manifestation of recognising that human nature was more than that of the animal kingdom, and that this nature was related to transcendence (spirituality). Norms for behaviour therefore transcended particular situations, especially the foundational one of respect. Thus, not only was the individual to be respected, but this respect was to be defined in terms of a moral community good that was also transcendent. That is, this good was to be recognised despite the circumstances of any individual or group.

Therefore, individuals were to be treated equally, without exception, with respect to natural law (a disclosed law from a relational Creator). The basis of the respect (the caring) and the common good was greater than the sum of the parts. In this way, the needs of the individual could be heard within a system that had a definite point of reference beyond itself and its vagaries.

It is this type of thinking that has allowed Western justice and welfare systems to develop, because such things as murder and abuse could be defined as wrong across situations. Similarly, the manager who wishes to be able to have an environment that can have the strength to respect each individual and his/her needs must also have a social order that operates on more than the social consensus of the group at that time. Respect and care can therefore be both present – the individual respect would be clearly practised in the established roles and responsibilities of the daily routines; and the sense of order would be applied through the principles and policies for all of the operations.

Without this balance, the work place will revolve around the people politics of relativised and situational ethics, or the people politics of insensitive control mechanisms. One is rampant individualism and emotion. The other is suffocating collectivism. Jesus understood the basis of human nature and community, where community is understood as persons-in-relationship. Managers can be much more astute in their roles if they are more understanding of the complementarity between the One and the Many that Jesus taught and lived.

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August 2003

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