



## “WHAT’S PAST IS PROLOGUE” \*

*For many organisations, the past and its legacies can be a clunking great imperial measurement spanner in the works of progress. Leaders continue to ply tried-and-trusted, outdated management practices that undermine success and limit potential and opportunity.*

*Having to battle old school mindsets, based on the belief that structure and control are keys to enabling performance, is a frustrating and demoralising state-of-affairs, while watching competitors warp-speed to another dimension compounds despair.*



ARTICLE BY KAREN GATELY, FOUNDER - CORPORATE DOJO

A great deal has changed in line management theory and practice since the mid-19th century industrial revolution, but still fundamental principles from that era persist in their dominance today. At a time when massive corporations, with thousands of employees were formed, so too was keen focus on driving results through predictability and consistency. Managers were taught to focus on planning and delegation to subordinates. In the early-20th century, most companies operated like dictatorships where managers assigned work and employees were expected to do what they were told and those managers had almost no contact with workers. Frederick Winslow Taylor, mechanical engineer and author of *The Principles of Scientific Management* (1901) argued this disconnect between managers and employees led to unproductive workers, and advocated for ‘fair pay for a fair days work’. Taylor’s theories influenced a shift in management focus from ‘command’, to ‘command and control’. Scientific methods aimed at controlling how people worked and thereby enabling production to be as efficient as possible became priority. While Taylor promoted greater focus on human engagement, teamwork and coaching, the dominant influence of his work is reflected in the commonly-held belief today that ‘what you measure you manage’. Further on in time, Henri Fayol’s *Administrative Management Theory*, influenced organisations to drive employee output through organisational structure. Meanwhile, Max Weber’s *Bureaucratic Management Theory* created chains of command and direct report management. Standardisation of processes, job descriptions, performance plans and appraisal were all born in an era when science and mathematics were dominating management thinking.

Well into what has been termed, the Fourth Industrial Revolution, many of the early management theories continue to influence, if not dominate, how managers go about their jobs today. In a rapidly changing business world, these beliefs and approaches need to be seriously challenged. While stability, predictability and consistency remain important, how they are achieved needs to be transformed, if organisations are to compete for talent and opportunity. Klaus Schwab, Founder and Executive Chairman of the

World Economic Forum believes; “the inherent opportunities for economic prosperity, societal progress and individual flourishing in this new world of work are enormous. Yet this depends crucially on the ability of all concerned stakeholders to instigate reform in education and training systems, labour market policies, business approaches to developing skills, employment arrangements and existing social contracts”.

The landscape for line managers is transitioning. Traditionally relied upon ‘lines of sight’ between a manager and their team are rapidly eroding. With a growing number of mobile and remote workers making up the workforce, many line managers are struggling to influence productivity, engagement and the development of the people on their team. Add to that the growing complexities of managing itinerant contractors, and it’s not surprising that many managers report feeling overwhelmed by the challenges of their role. According to the World Economic Forum’s *The Future of Jobs* report (2018) 38 percent of businesses surveyed “expect to extend their

ways of overcoming this has become mission critical for many leaders and HR teams. There are many key considerations in planning for what the shifting nature of employment will bring: Do we need to change the way people are engaged? Do HR policies and practices need to shift, so managers are able to create a culture underpinned by trust and personal accountability? How will effective chain of command be achieved within a meritocratic culture and agile workforce model? How will flexibility and agility be achieved while maintaining a semblance of order and clear accountability? While the future is uncertain, as PWC’s report on *Managing Tomorrow’s People* points out, we can be assured of three things: Business models will continue to evolve, people management will continue to be among the biggest business challenges, and the role of HR will need to change if we are to meet the shifting needs of the organisations we serve. Technology, of course, will also continue to be a volatile accelerant, forcing change which will further impact the role of managers in ways yet unknown.

learning, to equip people and teams with the skills needed to take advantage of new opportunities and keep up with the virtuous cycle between new technologies and the need to upskill. Essentially, a line manager’s job is to create business outcomes, to the highest possible standard, through the talent and energy of people. Integrity, authenticity, openness, compassion, humility and courage are the character traits most likely to enable any line manager to earn the trust of their team. Inspiring engagement, providing effective guidance as well as coaching people to grow and improve are steadily becoming the non-negotiable capabilities of a line manager. To be good at the job, people must possess the desire to coach people. Selecting line managers who have both the desire and potential to learn, to bring the best out of people, is critical to any organisation’s management development strategy. Long gone are the days when organisations can reliably hire the most technically qualified person for a line management job, nor can businesses afford to put anyone into this pivotal role without the development support they need.

LONG GONE ARE THE DAYS WHEN ORGANISATIONS CAN RELIABLY HIRE THE MOST TECHNICALLY QUALIFIED PERSON FOR A LINE MANAGEMENT JOB, NOR CAN BUSINESSES AFFORD TO PUT ANYONE INTO THIS PIVOTAL ROLE, WITHOUT THE DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT THEY NEED

workforce to new productivity-enhancing roles.” Increased use of contractors doing specialised work and flexible work practices such as remote staffing and decentralisation of operations were key strategies reported. A standout statement was: “Respondents expect increased job creation in project-based, temporary and freelancing roles, pointing to structural labour market transformations in terms of contractual arrangements and employment relations as well as occupational profiles”. The challenge now is to respond to this shifting landscape and redefine the role of line management. Enabling quality outcomes through people, when ‘in the office face time’, performance appraisals, job descriptions, organisational hierarchy and repeatable process, are no longer enough, and finding

Building management teams with the capability and behaviours needed to lead the workforce of the future, starts at the top. Like any other outcome HR is striving to achieve, having the most senior people on board is critical. It’s about engaging in robust conversations about the role of managers now and into the future and coaching senior leaders to look over the horizon and let go of outdated modes of management control and influence. Challenging conventional wisdom and shifting mindsets is a critical role and framing human capital investment as an asset, rather than a liability, is an essential starting point. The reality is, in the cut and thrust and turmoil, peers in the leadership team may need to be reminded, with qualitative information, of the need to keep investing in

The line manager of the future needs to be an influential leader of people, whether they be working full time, part time, in the office, off site, over many years or for short periods of time. Many line managers however struggle to effectively manage performance or develop talent, particularly when they are not in a position to directly observe or supervise. Leaders at all stages of their careers battle to move past direct observation and measurement to appraise performance and potential. The reality is being a great line manager, regardless of how people on the team work, can only be achieved through strong relationships based on trust and respect. Researchers are turning their minds to trust-based versus control-based modes of management, with many exploring whether or not these approaches go hand-in-hand or not - does control erode trust and does trust diminish the need for control? Despite these questions remaining largely unanswered, it’s safe to suggest that finding the balance is key to managing the workforce of the future. ●

\*William Shakespeare - The Tempest (Act 2, Scene I)

FOR FURTHER INFO  
WWW.CORPORATEDOJO.COM