

HARMONY IN THE WORKPLACE?



When I first started writing this short paper, my working title was “Teams, Team Members and Inter-Team Relationships”. It didn’t take me long to realise that this lacked the necessary “zing”. So I started hunting for other ways to describe what I’m talking about. As you’ll see as you read on, my aim is to describe the importance of:

- having a good understanding of what the job is and does;
- having the right person in each job;
- having the right balance of people in each work group; and,
- having each work group contribute cooperatively and collaboratively to organisational goals.

Each of these is self-evidently critical to organisational success (or at least I hope they are). But in reality, virtually every organisation that I have encountered, whether in public, private or not-for-profit sectors, fails consistently in each of these dimensions.

Hunting through the thesaurus for some word(s) that better describe the focus of this piece, I stumbled on “harmony”. “Harmony in the Workplace” sounds to me exactly what it is we’re all seeking. But I’m not talking “harmony”, in the usual sense that everyone in the workplace likes, and works amicably with and beside, each other. Rather, “harmony”, in the musical sense, where each individual and group plays their own particular musical strain, which, when blended with the sounds made by every other individual and group, yields an outcome much more profound, exciting and satisfying, than any part taken on its own. If you will, think Tchaikovsky’s “1812 Overture”, maybe Simon and Garfunkel’s “Scarborough Fair”, or perhaps Guy Sebastian’s “Like a Drum” (it’s okay, you can add your own musical choice here, but hopefully you get my point)!

OK, this is a long-winded introduction to a paper which is – surprise, surprise – intended to interest you, and have you invest some money, in strategies intended to achieve that “Harmony in the Workplace” thing!

One of the triggers for this article was another paper I read recently which, to over-simplify, suggested that organisations which rely on Myer-Briggs (or Myer-Briggs Type Inventories – MBTI) have got the game wrong. In short, it argued that people are social animals. To try to pigeon-hole them and get them to work in a way that is based on their “MBTI type”, defined by four letters, is simplistic and a recipe for failure.

I agree with the basic premise of the paper, but not the direction they lead us in. While I’m not personally a huge fan of Myer-Briggs, it has its place, like most of the many stand-alone or derivative “personality type” tools. However (and here’s the first pitch), such tools are indeed recipes for failure if you make some of the common assumptions in using them.

Our approach to “Harmony in the Workplace” – as I’ve defined it above – includes the use of appropriate personality instruments (including our own preferred tool, the BelBin Team Role system) but it seeks to do so in a way that covers each of the key organisational bases in an organisation, and does so in a way that avoids the “one size fits all” and “right today, right tomorrow” fallacies.

Specifically, “Harmony in the Workplace” is dependent on a string of challenging considerations which, for most of us, are almost impossible to get right all the time. Indeed for many, research is compelling that **in almost every case, we get a sub-optimum result!**

I'm talking about:

Understanding and defining the job role

So often we create jobs to do we “think” we need done. Even if we get it right initially, the job changes. If we can't get it right, how can we expect the new hire to do so?

Recruiting the right person for the job

You need several libraries to hold the collective “wisdom” of the best way to recruit staff. And more often than not, the outcome is a compromise – usually disappointing in at least some respects, and a downright failure in others.

Ensuring the proper balance among, and the proper “synergies” between the people in the work group or team

“Team work” is something that trips lightly from our lips, but few of us understand what that really means. Even fewer know how to achieve it in practice.

Ensuring the same balance and synergy between the many and varied “teams” within your organisation

How do your teams deal with one another? Are they competitive? Mutually supportive? Passive? Aggressive? Many of the same considerations relevant to individuals within a team, and the mix of individuals, apply just as – and sometimes even more – critically, to the teams within your organisation.

None of these issues is easy, and indeed none can be fixed overnight with quick and easy panaceas and management consultants selling “flavour of the month” solutions.

But there are tools and approaches which you won't necessarily read about in every management newsletter.

COMPLIMENTARY BREAKFAST WORKSHOPS

We'll be exploring these at our series of “Harmony in the Workplace” complimentary Breakfast Workshops. Not only will we be aiming to identify for you the problems and pitfalls, but we'll show you some of the practical strategies that can be used to move more towards a “Harmonious” workplace. And we'll give you the chance to get “hands on” with some of the tools that we use.

Our Breakfast Workshops will be held over coming weeks in:

Canberra
Melbourne
Sydney

We expect to schedule similar workshops in other capitals later in the year.

For dates and other details of coming Breakfast Workshops, and to register attendance for you and your colleagues call or email us here:

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