

## **Article 11 – Teamwork guarantees success – or does it?**

On holiday in the Kimberley recently, one of our fellow travellers on our 4 X 4 tour was a retired RAAF fighter pilot and his wife. Apart from the fascinating hours spent talking about planes and flying with someone who had been there and done that, we also talked about leadership and teamwork and particularly the differences between the public and private sectors. Stewart had been on the procurement team evaluating the FA 18 as the next generation fighter for the RAAF and was in regular contact with a great variety of component manufacturers for avionics upgrades and the like.

Not surprisingly, he felt that teamwork and leadership were both of a much higher order in the RAAF than in the public sector. This is understandable, given that these two qualities are such key ingredients in its effectiveness as an armed service. But the observation set me thinking about management in the private and public sectors and the changes that have taken place in the last decade or two.

First, the private sector.

I came across a quote the other day from the founder of a billion dollar company. “If you could get all the people in an organisation rowing in the same direction, you could dominate any industry, in any market, against any competition, at any time.”

As much as I subscribe to the values and benefits of teamwork, this statement overlooks three other variables that have a much greater impact on the viability of an organisation.

The first of these is good business management. In this world of ever accelerating change, the quickest way to stuff up an organisation is to make poor strategic decisions. A classic example might be Bob Ansett’s Budget. Here was a company that was ahead of its time in its emphasis on teamwork and customer service, but failure to maintain the currency of its business strategies brought it undone.

The second is simply management incompetence. HIH, Onetel – enough said.

The third is a dramatic change in an environmental factor over which the company has no control. The decision by Kodak to close its Coburg site is an unfortunate example. In the face of the trend towards digital cameras, Kodak can no longer sustain production of photographic film in Australia.

Despite the above examples, there is no doubt in my mind that the general standard of business management is much higher than the standard of people management. Keeping on top of the business, making the right tactical and strategic decisions is so demanding that precious little time is left to devote to the motivation and quality of work life experienced by employees further down the management hierarchy. The reality is that people get promoted because

of their apparent ability to manage a business; they do not get promoted because of their leadership qualities. So whilst there might be a greater awareness of the benefits of teamwork, in practice its creation is submerged under the weight of business management issues.

Having said that, any company that makes the right business decisions *and* fosters a sense of teamwork among all its employees will have a huge competitive advantage.

One of the trends over the last twenty years or so is a convergence between the public and the private sectors. Governments have increasingly looked to the private sector to instil private sector notions of efficiency and productivity among public sector organisations. And the people that have been recruited have been hired for their ability to manage business rather than lead people. Hospitals, for example, work with performance indicators that are quantitative rather than qualitative and appear to have more in common with manufacturing than with quality of patient care. I am reminded of a story about a Harvard business professor who asked his students to define what hospitals did. "They cure the sick", was the response. The professor replied. "Hospitals don't cure people, doctors do. The good hospital creates the environment in which the best doctors want to work". How many good hospitals do we have?

No one would surely question the need for greater efficiency in the public sector. Yet the apparent obsession with quantitative key performance indicators seems to have obscured the fact that the public sector provides services - and it's people who provide those services - to other people.

It comes down to a question of balance and at the moment the pendulum in both the public and private sectors has swung too far towards business management. Any organisation, whether in the public or private sector, that redresses that balance and manages to achieve excellence in both business and people management will be amazed at the results.

The organisation's people more than ever are the source of competitive advantage or matchless service – providing of course that management is steering the ship in the right direction.

**Graham Haines**  
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