

# The Fifth Dimension of Management: Make it Personal

In recent decades, the balance of power in the labor market has gradually shifted from the employer to the employee, yet the management philosophy and style, especially in the government sector, have not adapted. We describe herein low cost adjustments to managerial methods that have proven successful in leveraging this shift.

The art of management is to get a group of people to work together toward the achievement of stated goals. The traditional managers discharge their responsibilities through planning, organizing, leading and controlling their employees. This traditional approach worked well during the industrial era when employers were in position to call the shots and during the post industrial era when shareholders provided the capital and set the tone in the corporation.

In contrast, the contemporary worker seems to have the dominant voice in the present knowledge-based economy. Owing in large part to massive advance in technology present day employees are more connected, more informed and exercise more control over the employers and other corporate stakeholders. A small number of progressive employers have recognized this trend and have shifted the focus from shareholders to employees, based on the idea that happy and empowered employees beget happy customers <sup>1</sup> and improve the bottom line. These employers are paying more attention to their employee needs, especially that section of the workforce populated by Gen-Xers and Gen-Yers <sup>2</sup>. They are finding that these needs are significantly different from those of the baby-boomer workforce and that modern workers disengage easily when their needs are not met.

The majority of employers, especially in the government sector, have not recognized the high cost of disengaged employees. Recent workforce surveys show that in North America fewer than 1 in 3 employees (29%) are fully engaged and 19% are actually disengaged <sup>3</sup>. Gallup estimates that actively disengaged workers cost the American economy up to \$350 billion per year <sup>4</sup>.

To succeed, the modern managers need to elevate employee engagement to a full-time managerial responsibility at par with planning, organizing, leading and controlling.

## Employee engagement

Engaged employees are not just committed or passionate; they have a straight line vision of their own future along with their organizations' mission and goals. They want their organization to succeed because they feel connected professionally, emotionally and even spiritually to its purpose.

Our managerial methods should create this alignment and connectivity through opportunity for participation, clarification of goals, personal accountability and relevant feedback.

For example, in planning, if the right people are not involved they will not have a sense of ownership in the goals that were set by someone else. In organizing, if responsibilities are not assigned to specific individuals, there are accountability gaps that will hinder the proper execution of the operating plan. In leading, if employees do not know how they contribute to the bottom line they will not follow the leader. In controlling, if employees do not get appropriate feedback or recognition on their performance their work will not add value to the organization.

In our experience in Yolo County, California, specifically the auditor-controller and treasurer tax-collector department, the following low-cost tools were successfully used to engender employee engagement. They are used within a management model that is illustrated in Exhibit 1.

### **Participatory goal setting**

Annual goal setting takes place at all levels of the organization, as part and outside, of the annual budget process. All department heads and key managers participate in the annual goal setting retreat which includes the county administrator and the five members of the board of supervisors. This process results in the creation of the annual *policy agenda* and annual *management agenda* that set the tone for the upcoming year.

Separately, managers and supervisors in our department get together with employees to discuss and propose the annual goals and activities for each work unit. These are further refined by discussion among the managers then memorialized in the annual *work plans* for the units.

This participatory process, although time consuming, ensures initial buy-in and continued interest from all parties.

### **Goal integration**

In keeping with the tone at the top as set in the *policy agenda* and the *management agenda* department heads refined their departmental goals that were proposed by their managers and employees to ensure that the departments will contribute to county goals. The department heads and managers then take on the task of clearly documenting this goal linkage in their *departmental operating plans* and unit *work plans* and explaining it to all levels of employees. This is another time-consuming task but a necessary one that helps the individual to become aware of how he or she contributes to the county goals and understand how furtherance of county goals also advances personal goals.

### **Individual assignment**

Each individual in the organization is assigned a list of goals and tasks or projects to accomplish during the year. The unit goals are documented in *work plans* and *goals worksheet* with each goal assigned to a manager. Tasks are developed to accomplish these goals. The key tasks are assigned to unit manager in annual *task lists* which includes brief description of the task, the function and goal that it supports, the individual responsible and the planned completion date. Task lists are recorded in Microsoft Project which allows users to apply project management features to manage their tasks. With their names attached to specific goals and/or tasks, individuals are aware and continuously reminded, of their personal responsibilities.

### **Personal accountability**

Managers review the status of their employee's task lists with the responsible individuals during weekly or biweekly meetings. Variances and issues are discussed and adjustments made during these meetings. The department head goes through a similar process with the managers to hold them accountable for their assigned tasks. This accountability check takes place again at mid-year and at year-end. Variances are analyzed and corrective actions proposed. The decisions and actions discussed in all meetings are documented in memoranda and followed up at every meeting. To reinforce accountability, all supervisors are encouraged to provide continuous

feedback and recognition to their employees as part of a countywide program. This is in addition to reviewing completion of assigned goals and tasks during annual performance evaluation.

## Conclusion

Traditional management theory holds that a manager's work involves planning, organizing, leading and controlling. This view of management has served us well in the past century, with a compliant workforce that lent itself to being managed. In recent decades, the emergence of enabling technology has liberalized this work force to the extent that it is causing the individuals to seek personal freedom and benefit along paths that may diverge from that of the traditional organization. For employers to succeed in this new labor environment it is imperative that they find the hooks to re-engage their employees in the achievement of organizational goals. Suggested low-cost methods include participatory goal setting, goals integration, individual assignment and personal accountability. It is now timely to recognize employee engagement as the fifth dimension of management in addition to planning, organizing, leading and controlling.

## Notes

1. Justin Fox, "How to Succeed? Make Employees Happy", *Time/CNN*, June 26, 2008
2. Anthony Balderama, "Generation Y: Too Demanding at Work?" *CNN/Worklife*, December 26, 2007
3. "Employee Engagement Report 2008", *Blessing White*, May 2008
4. Curt Coffman, "The High Cost of Disengaged Employees", *Gallup Management Journal* April 15, 2002

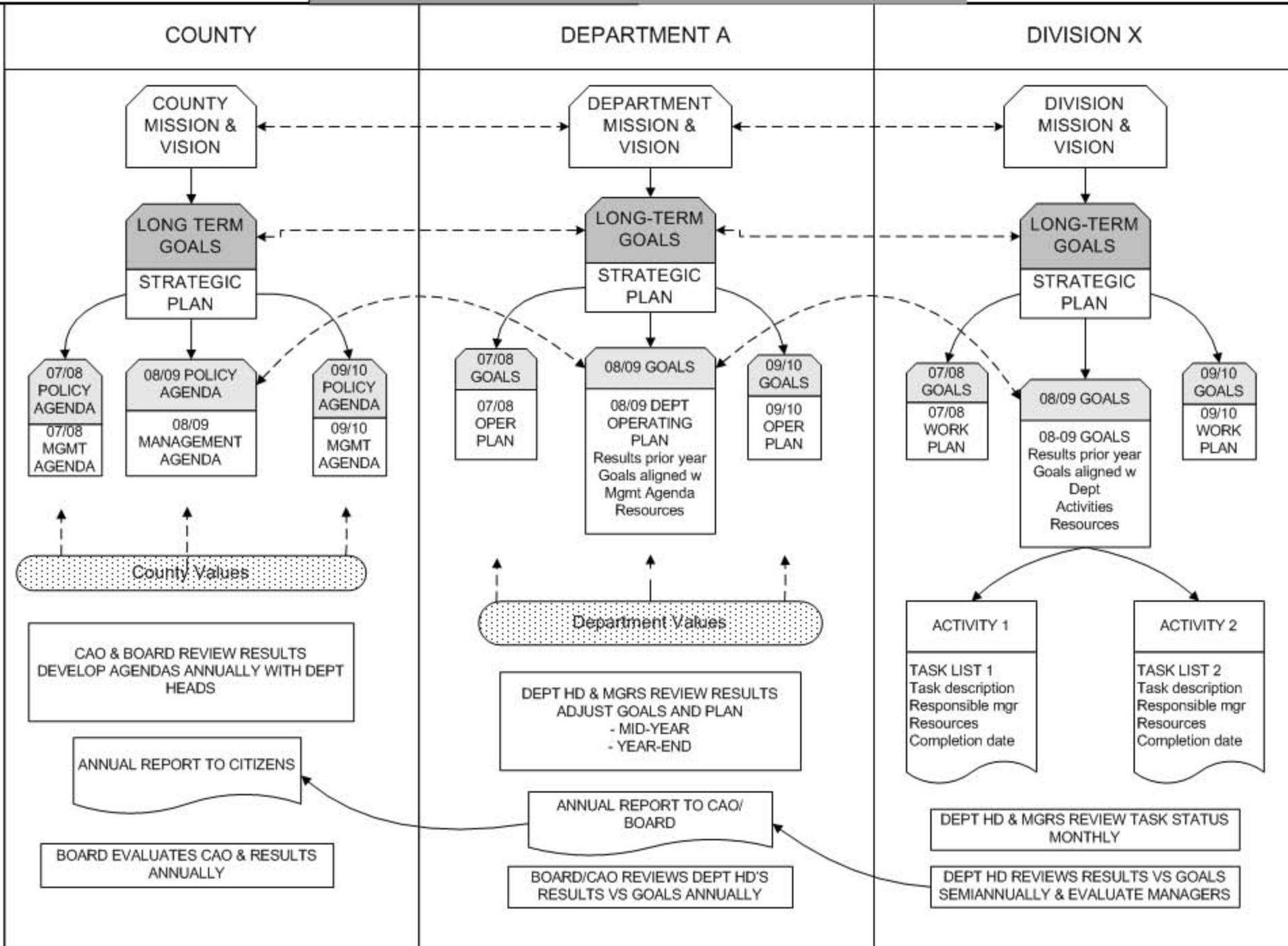
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## Abstract

**The Fifth Dimension of Management: Make it Personal** / Howard Newens *In recent decades, the balance of power has gradually shifted from the employer to the employee. The modern employee does not respond well to traditional management style. Government organizations need to adapt to this trend by fostering a high engagement culture. Techniques suggested are participatory goal setting, goals integration, individual assignment and personal accountability.*

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# Yolo County Management Model



The Fifth Dimension of Management

# Make it Personal

## Individual Assignment

## Goals Participation & Integration

## Personal Accountability

