

## The Role Of The Modern Middle Manager

There is much talk about the role of middle managers and the part they play in the ever-evolving world of organisational development. Here we look at the skills and abilities you need to be thought of as the consummate modern middle manager, and roles and responsibilities that come along with this status.

### Understand and interpret organisational strategy

In order to act as interpreter and executor of organisational strategy, you as a modern manager are required not only to understand the strategy, but also need to think and speak in strategic terms. You should adopt the language of your senior managers and be clear about how operational aspects contribute to organisational success. By using the correct words and terms for organisational activities, you will be able to convey consistent messages that demonstrate your own understanding and promote consistency. This means that you should understand:

- how and why the organisation is structured
- the roles and function of each department or division
- your own key deliverables or objectives

Managers should also be aware of the environment their organisation operates in, where external threats are likely to impact, and the opportunities the organisation intends to exploit. Therefore, understanding the bigger picture is the key to effective operational management. If you are equipped with this type of knowledge you will be more able to appraise options and, therefore, make better-informed decisions.

Once armed with the knowledge and tools to help others understand their part in the overall plan, you can make a more valuable and relevant contribution to organisational performance.

### Act as a change agent

Change is now a constant in most organisations, but it can still be unsettling and disruptive. Managers can play a key role in helping staff understand the reasons for change, adapt to new working practices and cope with uncertainties. You can only do this effectively if you yourself fully understand the need for change and have been part of the planning process.

Skilled change agents have excellent leadership skills. They lead by example, and are proactive and positive about improvements and development initiatives. They are talent coaches and are sensitive to individual needs, offering support, encouragement and reassurance as appropriate. Getting buy-in from staff is crucial for strategic change projects, and as a manager you are well placed to seek and nurture this. In the early stages of planning change, you will be able to represent staff views and their needs. You will be able to flag up potential issues before they arise and plan contingencies around any disengagement.

### Proficient communicator

Rather than simply being a means of conveying messages from the top of the organisation to the bottom, you have many other communication responsibilities. Your unique position in the middle of the organisation enables you to filter and edit messages. This can make you enormously powerful and you will, therefore, need to exercise this power with care.

Effective managers act as early warning systems and are adept at positioning messages and requesting information based on what they hear and see. For example, a timely mention to the senior team that news about the forthcoming salary review is overdue may prevent a potentially serious morale crisis.

Middle managers find themselves in all sorts of situations where strong communication skills are vital. You will regularly have to play the part of negotiator, facilitator, conflict manager and director. You will need to be a good listener, fair trader, and be consultative and authoritative. However, your real talent will be in your ability to apply the right style at the right time to achieve the right result. It's not easy, but it is achievable.

### Develop core competencies

An organisation's competitive advantage comes from its core competencies. That is, the things an organisation does that are superior to those of its competitors, e.g. the ability to design innovative products or the ability to produce high quality goods at a very low cost. Developing, maintaining and enhancing core competencies are the primary responsibilities of the management team. Therefore, ensuring that systems, processes, policies and people all align to support and

underpin the development of core competencies is of utmost importance. You, therefore, need to be empowered to make changes to anything that becomes a barrier to achieving organisational success.

Making sure that the workforce has the necessary skills, experience, knowledge and expertise to do their jobs proficiently is the foundation of building core competencies. In order to do this, you need to be able to appraise performance, identify development needs and source opportunities for individuals to exercise and realise their full potential.

### **Maximise performance potential**

A truly effective manager will maintain a focus on outputs at all times as their primary role is to make sure the front line delivers. As a professional manager you will not, most likely, be part of that front line but will be the team monitor, evaluator, improver, motivator, change agent and problem solver. You will be truly customer focused and instil this mindset into those on the front line by rewarding good results and successes.

Looking for ways of getting the most out of systems and people should be a passion for you. And, with an open line of communication to the senior management team, you should enjoy bringing new ideas and propositions for improvements to the table.

### **Facilitate knowledge sharing**

It is known that knowledge is power and in organisations where knowledge is shared and easily accessible, performance is higher than in places where individuals work in isolation and organisational expertise is lost when people leave. You should look at how, where and by whom knowledge is accumulated. You should develop ways of capturing and sharing knowledge in order that the organisation benefits from it and risks concerning the loss of it are reduced. Simple initiatives such as post-project reviews, working in pairs or teams and simple data capture systems can help create a knowledge sharing culture.

### **Provide expertise**

Many individuals will have become managers through promotion from the front line. It is likely that you were selected for the position because you possess valuable skills, knowledge and expertise in specific areas. In certain industries, it's necessary to employ managers who are subject matter experts as their knowledge and experience is fundamental to the effective operation of the department or function, e.g. scientists, police officers, engineers, etc.

However, many other people are given management positions because they possess certain talents that enable them to solve problems, make decisions and get the best out of other people. Generalist managers tend to be able to manage teams and functions in a wide variety of industries and sectors. If you fall into this category, you may not necessarily be a subject matter expert but a facilitator of performance. Your expertise will come from your ability to build effective working relationships.

### **Lead by example**

Underpinning every aspect of a manager's role is the ability to lead, i.e. influence others. As a role model within the organisation, a manager holds one of the most influential positions. You are exposed to staff, and possibly customers and suppliers, on a daily basis and as such should be an advocate and representative of the organisation. It is, therefore, essential that you work and behave in line with organisational values and set standards that encourage others to do the same. If a manager doesn't know, understand and believe in their organisation's vision, they will be ill equipped to provide truly inspirational and motivational leadership.

### **Related Items**

#### **Related Resources**

- Leadership
- Managing Change
- Strategy