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Managing from the Middle

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MANAGING FROM THE MIDDLE

A Synthesis Project Presented

by

LISA G. WILLIAMS

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies, University of Massachusetts Boston,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

June 2012

Critical and Creative Thinking Program

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A Synthesis Project Presented

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ABSTRACT

MANAGING FROM THE MIDDLE

June 2012

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Directed by Professor Carol L Smith

How can middle managers successfully improve work conditions and performance of their staff as part of becoming a better manager?

This synthesis reviews relevant literature to develop five key principles in my argument: Motivation is the key, the change process begins with me, change is an ongoing and fluid process, middle managers have a need for team and middle managers play different roles during team building.

I have also developed a handy booklet for the middle manager to use in changing their management style, which is included as Appendix. The booklet first briefly explains the principles. It then discusses four vital goals that I have pursued as a middle manager that follows from these principles (improve communication, motivate staff by appealing to higher needs, create and build team, improve critical thinking, creativity, and problem solving) and some of the strategies I found useful to meet these goals. Finally, the booklet provides 5 specific examples of change I made with the results: from mistrust to trust, from discouragement to empowerment, from conflicts to consensus, from uninspiring to effective brainstorming sessions and from chaotic to effective meetings.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER.....	PAGE
1. SO MUCH TO DO.... SO LITTLE TIME.....	1
2. MOTIVATION IS THE KEY.....	6
Motivational Theories: A Selected Overview.....	7
Change Theory: A Selected Overview.....	10
Critical Thinking in the Workplace	12
Creative Thinking in the Workplace	14
Conclusion	15
3. MIDDLE MANAGERS NEED FOR TEAM.....	17
Middle Managers.....	17
Motivation in Workplace	18
Teams	20
Team Building.....	20
4. A CHANGE HAS COME.....	24
My Final Thoughts.....	30
What's Next for me.....	31
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	32
APPENDIX: MANAGING FROM THE MIDDLE: Booklet for Middle Managers.....	34

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

FIGURE	PAGE
1. Maslow Hierarchy of Human Needs	8
(blogspot.com, 2011)	
2. Adkar 's 5 Action Model of Change	12
(Change-management-coach.com, 2011)	

CHAPTER 1

SO MUCH TO DO ...SO LITTLE TIME

INTERNAL OFFICE EMAIL

FROM: LISA G WILLIAMS

TO: PROCESSING STAFF

Monday, January 31, 2011

Office goals which we need to meet for the week of January 31, 2011

Enter new fall 11 applications 177 by Friday 2/4/11

Need fall 2011 admits 300 which means we need to process over 600 applications by Wednesday 2/2/11

Possible obstacles to reaching our goal

2nd week of spring term and we are still processing for spring 2011 class

Down one staff member due to maternity leave

Feb 1st nursing deadline-will lead to significant increase in mail, transcript and application volume

Possible 1-2 snow days (warning) with school closing

Let's meet briefly at 1pm to discuss ways we can reach our goals while handling the obstacles.

Thanks

This is an example of a typical email that I might send to staff at the start of a very busy week in the Office of Undergraduate Admissions. Undergraduate Admissions is a number driven office. The number one goal is to bring in "the class" each and every semester. This specific number of new students is specified by the Chancellor of the University. The staff is not only expected to meet weekly goals, such as these, but is expected to exceed these goals more and more every semester. The staff is often overwhelmed, overworked and stressed leading to lower productivity and attendance issues. As a manager of a staff of 8 in an admissions office, I have observed first-hand the disruptions caused by anxiety, stress and low morale. The staff feels disconnected and not a central part of the organization. They often feel as if they have no voice. The staff in my office burn out within three to four years. They begin looking for a job where they can have more say and make more decisions causing large turnovers. I've lost good, solid employees who moved on due to these issues.

In the past, I would have handled this situation on my own. I might not have asked for my staff's input or ideas for resolving this issue. I would have met with staff and then instructed them how to proceed in meeting these expected goals. I give credit to the Critical and Creative Thinking program at the University of Massachusetts Boston for making me realize that critical thinking and creativity is a valuable asset to any work place. Critical and creative thinking skills can have significant implications for improving the success in the workplace. This is because critical and creative thinking is very helpful to the problem solving process. As a manager, one needs to challenge people to think differently about the situations and problems that they encounter. For example, last summer when I was enrolled in Critical thinking (CRCRTH 601), we read a handout entitled Critical Thinking in the Workplace by J. Allyn Bradford. He argued that when people actively apply critical thinking concepts and use constructive behaviors, they develop more ideas, make fewer mistakes and reach better decisions. He also said that teams can learn to think more effectively and consequently get better results. People possess the ability to be critical and creative thinkers within the right conditions. Further, employees who are able to think critically and creatively feel more empowered and this leads staff to believe that they are an essential and key component of the business. With these beliefs, the Critical and Creative Thinking Program was the perfect choice for me. I was looking for a Graduate program that would both interest and challenge me. I have always called this program, my own personal "out of the box" major. From the start, this program made me face myself and address some internal barriers such as fear and being set in my ways that were preventing me from moving forward. Through this program, I have had to "rethink" my thinking process (taking more time to think, and more time for reflection) and change some behaviors toward being more flexible and empathic. I have learned some necessary concepts (such as team work) and developed some

tools (such as self awareness and effective communication) needed to inspire myself and my staff. I have been able to successfully reevaluate myself as a manager as well as my thinking process.

These ideas had a big impact on me. They caused me to ask many questions such as: What can I do to make my staff feel better (physically and mentally) while still getting the work done? Is it my responsibility as a manager to care for how my staff feels about themselves and their role in the organization? Most importantly, do I really care? A resounding yes! I do care! This led to the realization that I needed to make some significant changes. These changes need to begin with me. Change starts from within. Kurt Lewin described this change process as consisting of three stages; unfreezing, changing and refreezing behavior at an improved mode of functioning (Patten, 1981). I will provide further elaboration on Lewin later in my synthesis. “Business as usual” cannot be the silent yet prevalent slogan any longer. We need to do things differently and take more risks. We will never know what the results will be if we do not try. I also realized that I needed to develop the necessary skills, acquire the knowledge and examine my own attitude in order to be able to make the necessary changes.

In this synthesis, I address the need for incorporating more critical and creative thinking in the workplace, focusing especially on tools and strategies for mid- level managers. Being a middle manager means that while I am not fully in charge; I am expected to act as if I am. If I am not included in the making of a new rule, process or decision, I am still expected to embrace, support and implement this change. There is a lack of specific literature on how to be a successful middle manager while creating a team and dealing with higher manager’s input or lack thereof. I’ve had to take the existing literature and adapt the concepts and ideas to fit my own needs. I will chronicle my journey as a middle manager to change the climate in my

workplace and create a handy booklet for other middle managers to use focusing on some of the tools and strategies that I developed and found most useful.

In Chapter 2, I present the framework that I have developed for myself to guide my actions in my workplace, based on my CCT courses, readings and research. It consists of multiple elements: my fundamental assumptions about important human motives and my understanding of critical and creative thinking in the workplace. Motivation is the driving force which causes us to achieve goals. Therefore, I begin with a review of Abraham Maslow and his Hierarchy of Needs Theory (motivational theory). I then contrast these assumptions with other assumptions about human motives such as McGregor does with his Theory X and Theory Y. I discuss why I think the assumptions of Theory Y are more valid. I follow with a more in-depth discussion Kurt Lewin's 3-part Change Model. I conclude this chapter with a summation of my research findings on the need for critical and creative thinking while listing some of the tools I learned and use.

In Chapter 3, I continue my literature review focusing on motivation in the workplace (specifically) and its link to teamwork concept as a motivator. My aim is to show why/how this research led me to believe that critical and creative thinking tools and the team work concept may be the solution to some of the pertinent issues I face as a middle manager.

In Chapter 4, I reflect on the personal and professional journey that I continue to travel. I reflect on both my successes and shortcomings while implementing some of these models, tools and ideas into my daily work day. I address the future direction of my ongoing journey and discuss risks that I will continue to take.

My Appendix contains my original contribution in the form of a booklet for managers that I have developed called "Managing from the Middle". While this booklet is designed for

managers of all kinds seeking knowledge about improving management, I will focus on the specific tools and strategies that worked best for me (as a mid-level manager) and my staff. My rationale for developing this booklet is that in this busy and frantic work world, we need simple yet effective tools available and ready for our use. Focusing on the tools that worked best for me makes the reference booklet both relevant and personal.

CHAPTER 2

MOTIVATION IS THE KEY

My interest in people and the human mind began at a young age. I have always been a people watcher. I've always watched and questioned why people do what they do and/or act in the manner they do. What motivates behavior? At the age of 16, my nickname was Freud among my friends. I was always trying to read my friends' mind by asking so many questions over and over. My interest continued as I studied Psychology as an Undergraduate student at Boston University and had plans. I had plans on becoming a psychologist working with autistic children. Life had other plans for me, though. After taking several years off, I returned to school at UMB and finished my BA in psychology. I started working in the Office of Undergraduate Admissions as a part-time student worker. I was eventually hired and worked my way from receptionist to processor to admissions counselor. Six years ago, I was promoted to Associate Director of Operations. This meant that I was now the manager to the staff (processing team) that I used to be a part of. I was very excited that I could use my expertise and personal insight as a benefit in this new position. My own personal memories of being a processor at that time were of frustration at doing the same thing over and over again with same results, boredom with repetitious data entry, and feeling unappreciated, unvalued and disrespected. I so much wanted to make a difference and bring about a change. I wanted to motivate the staff and help them become more responsible, participating members of a team while feeling good about their job and their work value.

This was the start of my journey as a manager. My journey continues today with a new director as well as new processing staff team. I am still people watching and trying to understand others as well as myself. I continue to find ways to motivate myself as well as the staff to work

together to meet our goals but strive to realize self worth and value in all that we do. Motivation is the key to performance improvement. My argument is as follows:

- Motivation is key to employee success
- Managers need to realize that change may be needed to motivate their employees
- Managers must be able, willing and ready to change
- Change is fluid and ongoing
- Both critical and creative thinking play a vital role in change in the workplace and is a necessity in the business world

Motivational Theories: A Selected Overview

Motivation can be anything that arouses an organism toward action for a desired goal. Motivation can be the reason for the action or that which gives direction to an action (Motivation Dictionary.com, 2011). One of the most widely discussed motivational theorists is Abraham Maslow, a professor of Psychology at Brandeis University who founded humanistic psychology out of reaction to perceived limitations of behavior theories. He is widely cited because he attempted to have a theory that catalogued the full range of human motivation. Humanistic psychology adopts a holistic approach to human existence through investigation of meaning, value, freedom, tragedy, personal responsibility, human potential, spirituality and self actualization (A Dictionary of Psychology, 2010). Maslow, beginning in the 1940's and 1950's, formulated the theory of prepotency of needs in human beings. He argued human beings have hierarchy of needs. As Patten writes regarding Maslow:

... that man works to satisfy his present needs according to their importance in a kind of hierarchal manner, being what he refers to as "lower order" and "higher order" needs. The lower needs are needs that are essentially physiological or have to do with individual

safety or security. The higher orders are social needs or deal with the individual's ego needs or with his self fulfillment (sometimes called self actualization) (Patten, 1981. p 44).

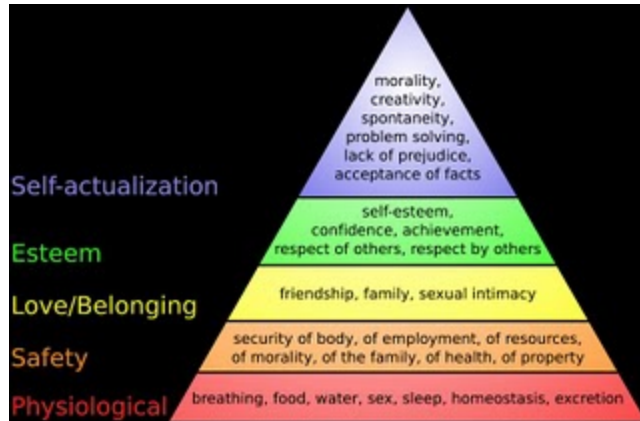


Figure 1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs (blogspot.com, 2011)

The above visual aid that he created is called a Hierarchy of Needs. This shows the different levels of human needs using a pyramid base. People are motivated to fulfill basic needs (lower level) before moving on to other higher needs. The lower needs are described as basic physiological needs such as need for air, food and water and safety needs for shelter and safety. We need to first have nutrition, shelter and safety within an orderly world before we can move on to the self actualization stage.

What connects or joins these ideas with mine is that this heuristic scheme of certain needs satisfaction can be potentially helpful to a manager. This knowledge can assist in understanding employee motivation and enable a manager to think about what need level a specific employee may be at. Using this theory, the needs of employees can be viewed individually. For example, if you have a young single mother living on her own struggling to pay bills and feed her family, her needs are still at this lower level (survival) and need to be addressed if she is to move forward using this model.

Maslow's ideas were often dismissed as being unscientific due to lack of empirical data

for his ideas. Humanistic ideas were often viewed as more philosophical than scientific. Another criticism was that Maslow claimed that only 2% of the population was in a place to pursue self actualization (Wahba, 1976). Maslow studied exemplary people such as Einstein and Frederick Douglas; people he knew clearly met the standards of self actualization. Another challenge is that even though Maslow felt that only a limited few succeed to realizing higher needs, we have seen throughout history proof that of people can still strive for self-actualization and can be successful despite deprivation.

Regardless of these criticisms, this theory is still relevant because it is still being widely used today in marketing courses and international business to understand the different needs, different value systems and cultural differences. Maslow thought of his work as pointing the way for others to follow and expand. Related to Maslow's theory is Douglas McGregor's contrast between Theory X and Theory Y, two very different theories of work force motivation. Douglas McGregor was a Management professor at MIT Sloan School of Management and President of Antioch College. He was very interested in setting forth two prevalent and opposing beliefs about human motives and their relation to resulting managerial behaviors (Patten, 1981). The traditional assumption that people by nature are lazy and unmotivated employees, he called Theory X. The assumption that he thought was a better view into the true nature of man he called Theory Y. The underlying assumption of this theory was that people by nature do have integrity and desire to achieve.

McGregor built on Maslow's prepotency theory that when needs are satisfied at one level a person is capable of having his motivations shift to a higher order. Therefore, to motivate someone we must first determine his motivational level and make a proper appraisal of this level (Patten, 1981). McGregor grouped Maslow's hierarchy into "lower order" theory X and "higher

order” Theory Y needs. He suggested that management could use either set of needs to motivate employees. McGregor urged managers to manage according to his Theory Y. McGregor’s Theory Y matches much of Maslow’s self actualization level of motivation based on the assumption that self direction, self control and maturity control motivation. McGregor felt that the key to connecting self actualization with work is determined by managerial trust of subordinates. He argues for managers to be more open and take a positive view of workers and the possibilities that this creates (McGregor, 1960). By doing this, managers help satisfy belongingness and esteem needs that enable self actualization to emerge.

Criticism of this contrasting theory is that it is often taken too literally and has unrealistic extremes. If Maslow was right and only 2% reached self actualization, then this would continue to be a problem. McGregor wanted others to use this as a starting point, for testing and investigation, not blind acceptance. Despite these criticisms, this theory is still considered a guiding principle of positive approaches to management, organizational development and improving organizational culture today.

Change Theory: A Selected Overview

Given McGregor’s theory, it is likely that managers may need to make some changes in their basic assumptions about their employees. Once managers, realize the need to change; they need to be able, ready and willing to change.

Kurt Lewin, a behavioral scientist and psychologist known as the founder of social psychology, developed the change model know as Lewin’s freeze phases in the early 20th century. This freeze model suggests change is made via a three -stage process of managing change: unfreezing, changing and refreezing. In his words:

This change involves overcoming inertia and dismantling the existing “mind set”. Defense mechanisms have to be bypassed. In the second stage, change occurs. This is

typically a period of confusion and transition. We are aware that the old ways are being challenged but we don't have a clear picture as to what we are replacing them with yet. The third and final stage he called refreezing. The new mindset is crystallizing and one's comfort level is returning to previous levels (Lewin, 1947 p.346).

This model appeals to me because change is very emotionally challenging. I believe it is an easy, adaptable model to use for change. This model is both easy to understand and interpret in concept. Herein lies the criticism, of this theory: that it is too simplistic and that there can never be true "refreezing". Many questioned the idea that change should /could ever be described as "refreeze". Lewin's thoughts about this were that this change is a journey and that it is more about establishing stability once changes have been made. Once changes are accepted they become the norm. This is still relevant today because applying these concepts at a personal level can give us insight and help us better understand how we deal with change. This is the underlying basis of many change management theory models and strategies for managing change.

Another model of change that I find relevant to my arguments that change is important and needs to be done as a process is the Adkar Model of Change. This is a more current model. The Adkar Model of Change was developed by Jeff Hiatt, CEO of Prosci Change Management and first published in 2003. This model focuses on the 5 action needs necessary for successful individual change, and therefore successful organizational change (Hiatt, 2006). These five action needs are:

1. *Awareness* of the need to change
2. *Desire* to participate and support the change
3. *Knowledge* of how to change
4. *Ability* to implement the change on a day to day basis
5. *Reinforcement* to keep the change in place



Figure 2. Adkar’s 5 Action Model of Change (change-management-coach.com, 2011)

The above model is consistent with Maslow’s and McGregor’s assumptions that motivation leading to change is a step- by- step process. Hiatt refers to his established 5 actions as building blocks. The process is sequential, meaning that each step or action must be completed before moving on to the next. Hiatt emphasizes that it is not possible to achieve success in one area unless the previous action has been addressed (Hiatt, 2006).

Since this model focuses on the individual, one is able to determine where another is in the process and what is needed to assist them. This model provides a useful management checklist of phases of organizational consistency. I wholeheartedly agree with this models basic assumption that it is people who change not organizations and that change depends upon awareness, motivation, knowledge and ability.

This is a very effective tool for managers to use. By giving managers a specific role in responding to each employee’s individual needs, they are better able to measure where each one is within their change process. This makes them better able to assess and then assist with their helping their employees make change.

Critical Thinking in the Workplace

Incorporating critical thinking in the workplace is one of the changes that can be made

when management realizes that employees can be a contributing asset to any business. Paul (1990) states that critical thinking is “disciplined self -directed thinking which exemplifies perfections of thinking applied to a particular mode or domain of thinking” (p 554). Ennis (1989) describes Critical thinking as “reasonable reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to do or believe.

Some of what I have learned in the CCT Program has increased/changed my own critical thinking process. I now actively question ideas, apply my own experience to insights and then ask new questions. I am able to look at a problem within my office from many different angles. This change in my thinking allows for better problem solving. I also take more time to think. I often feel rushed into making decisions while at work. Being aware that effective problem solving takes time and effort, I can manage my time management skills better.

A study by Kepner Tregoe, (1981); *Minds at Work: How Much Brainpower Are We Really Using?* probed the critical thinking abilities in the workplace. This study of 1,400 managers and employees found 62 percent of workers believe that their organizations operate on half-or less---of the brainpower available to them (Business Talk, 1997). This study found that the three most significant barriers to thinking in the workplace are organizational politics, time pressures and a lack of involvement in decision making.

There are some obstacles to incorporating more critical thinking in the business world. We are often tempted to find quick fix solutions to both life and business issues. We may want to make important decisions based on intuition or emotion rather than taking the time to gather the appropriate information or carefully weigh alternatives. The use of critical and creative thinking enables teams to develop the positive insights and ideas that become the constructive basis for action. For a worker, critical thinking skills can improve his/her performance in the workplace.

Creative Thinking in the Workplace

The definition of creativity in the *Encyclopedia Britannica Online* is “the ability to make or otherwise bring into existence something new, whether a new solution to a problem, a new method or device, or a new artistic method or form.” Creativity is normally defined as the production of novel and appropriate ideas by individuals or small groups of persons working together (Amabile, 1988; Lumart, 2000-2001).

This can imply that individual managers and members of management teams are engaged in an almost continuous process of decision making and problem solving. A technique that can improve the decision process and improve the performance of the organization is important to the function of management (Summers & White, 1975).

Under these circumstances, stimulating creativity in the workplace is one of the modern manager’s most problematic challenges. This is because most business organizations tend to be excessively results oriented. Failure is seen as a liability therefore limiting interest in creativity and risk. As managers we need to remove obstacles that inhibit creative thinking and work toward encouraging them.

Some of what I have learned from this Program has also increased my own creativity within the workplace. I have incorporated brainstorming at monthly meetings with my staff to generate new and different ideas. By acknowledging my own bias, assumptions and/or prejudices, I am better able to understand and relate to my staff.

Opposition to creativity in the workplace is mostly based on fear. Businesses tend to be result oriented where failure is viewed as a liability. This kills an employee’s interest in creativity and taking risks. If we change the word creativity to innovation, management could be more receptive. This could lead to it being regarded less as a necessary evil but as an essential

part of strategic planning where all ideas are not only welcomed but encouraged. Creativity will always be relevant because we are creative creatures; it's a part of us. We aspire!

Conclusion

The theorists and evidence that I have reviewed support my basic assumptions that I began with: namely that motivation is the key to performance improvement. The evidence has also supported my other assumptions as follows:

Motivation (need)

Before we can change, we need to be motivated to change. Motivating others is a skill that can be learned and practiced. Performance is a function of ability and motivation. McGregor claims that motivated employees will always look for a better way to do a job. Motivated workers are more productive and oriented towards producing high quality work.

Change

Managers may need to change their basic assumptions about employees if they do not believe that employees can be an asset to the business. They must also realize that change is needed to motivate their employees. Managers must be able, willing and ready to change.

As managers, change begins with me (ourselves). We can't change others but can only motivate for change and assist in this change. Change is fluid and ongoing. Change can be seen as threatening and uncomfortable. We feel safe and comfortable in the environment that we are used to.

Critical thinking and creativity in the workplace

Both critical and creative thinking play a vital role in change in the workplace and is a necessity in the business world. Critical and creative thinking are processes that improve ability to look at different situations from fresh, new and unique perspectives. When you are in a

management position, it is your challenge to help people think differently about the situations and problems that they encounter. Good thinking is not automatic and requires a process; the need to develop critical and creative thinking skills of an entire work force and build critical thinking into the company's model of operations (Business Talk, 1977).

CHAPTER 3

MIDDLE MANAGERS' NEED FOR TEAM

In this chapter, I continue my literature review focusing on middle managers. I provide a definition of the middle manager as well as describe the unique challenges they face and current workplace trends. I then discuss research findings on motivation in the workplace. This leads to the use of team and team building as a motivating tool in the workplace.

Middle Managers

Who are middle managers? I find Stoker's (2006) definition for the term middle manager most useful "Group of managers who give and receive direction. Middle managers are being led by a management team or director, and are leaders themselves" (p.32).

Schlesinger and Oshry (1982) found that most organizations in this country share a relative commonality of form by having three layers within each organization. The outer layer of top managers defines and run the organization. The inner core of workers produces the organizations products and supplies the service. Between these two are the middle managers. Middle managers interpret and implement top managers' demands. Middle managers are the linking pin that takes the visions of upper management and fuses it with pragmatic needs of workforce (Skrabec, Jr. 2001). While each layer has unique role, no one can effectively perform his or her functions without the cooperation of the other levels (Schlesinger and Oshry, 1982). Skrabec said it best. Middle managers lack the positional strengths of the CEO. They do not plan the battle but lead the troops over the top.

Middle managers face some unique challenges. The biggest challenge is not having full authority but being expected to act as if one does. Another challenge is that they often receive inadequate support from their supervisors because they are sometimes seen as barriers to change.

They may also receive inadequate praise for a job well done but be held responsible if anything goes wrong even when delegating. Their role is an often a lonely one. I often explain my personal feelings as a middle manager as being on a small island by myself. My staff of 9 and upper management are floating around me on separate islands.

In the past, when companies wanted to grow, management added workers to the bottom and filled in management from above. The focus for top manager's was on planning and control leading to the need for the middle manager (Floyd and Woodbridge, 1994). Business is no longer focused on work force growth but more on higher quality, lower cost, flexibility and speed. In this context, people in the middle are thought to slow things down (Floyd and Woodridge, 1994).

Another trend affecting the middle manager is organizational change such as downsizing, restructuring and cost cutting (Balogun, 2003). Senior management is relying less on the middle manager. Information and computer technologies make it easier for those at top to monitor and control activities directly (Balogun, 2003). Reengineering has automated and obliterated the middle manager's role and caused a dramatic decrease in numbers. Roughly, 20% of job losses since 1988 have come from middle management positions (Touby, 1993).

Despite these issues, research has shown that middle management is still considered necessary. In a study of middle managers, Huy (2002) concludes that middle managers are at least as important as senior executives in facilitating change. Balogun (2003) found that middle managers are not a blockage to change, but can make an important strategic contribution.

Motivation in the workplace

My research question was what causes poor performance in the workplace? Poor performance can stem from a lack of abilities or a lack of motivation. Mair and Lawler (1973) argue that we should not focus on inability as the root of poor performance but rather on

motivation. Ability depends on education, training and experience which can be a slow, long process while motivation can be improved quickly. Mair and Lawler (1973) have summarized the determinants of task performance as follows:

$$\text{JOB PERFORMANCE} = F (\text{ABILITY}) \times (\text{MOTIVATION})$$

Where

ABILITY= APTITUDE X TRAININGX RESOURCES

MOTIVATION =DESIRE X COMMITMENT

The best managers have productive people who are also satisfied (desire to work and commitment) with their environment. (Naalera & Lawler, 1977). One of my key assumptions about motivation in the workplace is that employees start out motivated. A new job and new experience can be motivating in itself. People have the need to impress and succeed. Most people start a new job with the best possible motives and want to succeed. Therefore, lack of motivation is a learned response fostered by misunderstanding (between managers and staff) and unrealistic expectations and demands.

Motivation is central to managers' and their subordinates' day to day interactions; motivation fluctuates and needs close monitoring and frequent recharging (Whetton & Cameron, 1995). The job of a manager is to get things done through their employees. Therefore, one needs to be able and willing to motivate these employees. Motivating others is a skill that can be learned (Whetton & Cameron, 1995). The best way to change an individual's behavior in a work setting is to change his or her manager's behavior. Often, it is difficult for managers to understand fully the impact of their actions on the behaviors and attitudes of employees. For example, if the manager comes into work after fighting with their spouse in a bad mood, this can have a negative effect on the staff. Managers having a bad day will more than likely lead to the staff having a bad day also. A manager's awareness of his/her own behavior and moods is

crucial.

Teams

How can one help build motivation in the workplace? Many workplace researchers have focused on team building as an important technique. The definition of team that I use is as follows: “2 or more individuals who share common task objectives and are mutually accountable for collective task outcomes” (Kowlowski and Bell, 2003 p.333).

Research has demonstrated the advantages to the team approach beginning with the Hawthorne Experiments conducted by Professor Elton Mayo in late 1920’s and 1930’s. He studied the relationship between productivity and work conditions. His findings were that worker productivity increases with psychological stimulus of being shown individual attention, feeling involved and being made to feel important. This is called the Hawthorne Effects. This leads to group identity, feelings of social support and cohesion which caused increased worker interaction (Dyer, 1984).

There has been some opposition to the idea that teamwork is always the best solution. Jonathan Littman and Marc Hershon conclude in their book *I Hate People* that “Teamwork suffocates creativity and has its own limitations”. In this book, they insist that corporate America puts too much on emphasis on team work. My response to this is that corporate America talks of team but does not really know how to implement and use it properly. “Team” is the word being used a lot in interviews and workshops but people using the term do not have a real and genuine interest in team concept.

Team Building

Since teams are considered important in the workplace this raises several important questions. How does one go about building and leading effective teams? What is the manager’s

role? The literature of group development reveals a wide range of theoretical models concerning developmental process of team building. The most influential model of development process is Bruce Tuckman's four stage model for team development. Tuckman's 1965 model has been the basis for other similar models such as Tannebaum's and Schmidt's Continuum Model and Hershey's and Blanchard's Situational Leader models. A common assumption of these models is that teams don't perform exceptionally from the onset but need to take time/ stages to become a unified team with a common goal.

Bruce Wayne Tuckman (born 1938) is an American Psychologist, who has carried out research into the theory of group dynamics. In 1965, he published one of his theories called "Tuckman Stages". Tuckman believed that these phases are all necessary and inevitable in order for the team to grow, to face up to challenges, to tackle problems, to find solutions, to plan work, and to deliver results (Tuckman, 1977).

What I found most interesting and relevant from Tuckman was how he described the different challenges and responsibilities for middle managers at different stages of team development. Below, I outline and distinguish the issues for the manager and team member using Tuckman's Stages of Team development.

Forming (Stage 1). The overall goal of the forming stage is to take the diverse individuals and make them into a team. At this stage, a manager needs to establish trust, comfort (how) and clarity by providing direction and rules for each member's responsibilities. The individual team member's focus is on sense of security and direction. Trust and comfort can be established from the manager by being open and genuine.

Storming (Stage 2). The storming stage involves conflict, disagreement and challenges. Tuckman suggests that this stage is necessary for growth of team and that the conflict can be productive and an opportunity for learning, although how productive depends in part on the manager's response. At this stage a manager needs to be an effective mediator and act more as a coach. Conflict resolution skills such as effective listening and dialogue are needed. Team members start to question the team leader, the team direction and vision. Cliques may start to form. Subtle forms of competition begin. This stage is necessary for the growth of the team. Team members open up and challenge each other's ideas. Tolerance and patience is necessary. Some teams may never make it out of this stage.

Conforming or Norming (Stage 3). The conforming stage is when the team begins to function as a unit comfortable in their setting. The manager needs to give I give support, provide feedback, continuously articulate vision and generate commitment to vision. In this stage, the manager acts more as a participant. The manager for example refrains from trying to solve the problem, giving the group more autonomy. Team members start to value team goals rather than individual goals. Loyalty to team also develops.

Performing (Stage 4). According to Tuckman, though difficult it is possible for some teams to reach this stage. Performing stage is when the team functions as a highly effective and efficient unit. A manager at this stage needs to foster innovation and creativity, give effective feedback and avoid reverting back to earlier stages. The team members start to become more self- managing and able to manage own process including training.

This model has helped me to understand both myself and my staff a lot better. I was able to prepare for each stage and then be ready to handle the situations that may result. I realized the need to be more flexible and focus on different strategies at different stages of the process. This

is a process which can't be rushed. The staff is not able to move to next stage unless ready and could at times regress to a lower stage.

In my final chapter, I discuss how my personal journey through the Critical and Creative Thinking Program helped me learn, practice and elaborate on the specific principles, goals and strategies that worked for me (as a mid-level manager) and my staff during this team building experience leading to my creating a "team". These principles, goals and strategies are also briefly described and illustrated in my booklet *MANAGING FROM THE MIDDLE*, included as my Appendix.

CHAPTER 4

A CHANGE HAS COME.....

My personal journey of change has not been easy. It has been a long, complicated and confusing experience. I am considerably older than my other class mates and am very settled in my ways. I have deep feelings for things learned and valued in my youth with expectations of how I should behave and act. To this day, I still sometimes wonder what my mother would say about something that I am doing.

It was 2003, I was riding high on the energy of being promoted to manager of the position I once held. I was now the manager of the staff that I once was a part of people with whom I sat, worked and ate lunch. I believe that this is one of the reasons why we got along so well. I was managing 5 other staff members that I knew well. We attended each other's birthday parties and had been to one another's homes. But then, in 2004, this staff started to move on to other positions within the University, retired or left for other jobs.

Suddenly, I found that I had a new staff to manage! My thought process was that I should keep doing what I had been doing because it worked. However, my new staff didn't know or understand me like my previous staff had. They were very hesitant toward me and uncomfortable. My staff was paying very close attention to me: what mood I was in when I entered the office, was I smiling or was I already in a bad mood. I was not aware of this until my evaluations from my Director took a negative turn. My Director was using terms like "unapproachable", "not flexible" and "rigid" when describing me. I was told that while I was an extremely organized and efficient manager, I needed to work on my interpersonal skills. At this time, however I was not receptive to this criticism. I was in the mind frame then that I was doing/acting as was expected of me as a manager. I rationalized my behavior by saying to

myself, “I am not here to make friends. Work is work. Rules are made to be followed.” Then, a really big incident occurred in early 2005, which made me realize that I better make a change or else this could negatively affect my position within this office. Three staff members joined together and went to the Director to complain about me as a manager. This led to a meeting with my supervisor, then, to several tense meetings with the staff members. At this time, I was very upset and felt betrayed. The end result was one staff member leaving. This was not the end result that I wanted. I had hoped to work this out. I was becoming aware that the problem may be me and not them but I needed to make some changes. I wanted to have a good relationship with my staff as well as get the job done.

At first I wasn’t sure exactly how to start this change process. I was cautiously ready to at least start the process of looking at myself. I had to take a long, hard look in the mirror and truly see myself. Many questions needed to be answered. Who is Lisa? How do others perceive me and why? I did and still care about what others think about me. My first question was where do I begin?

In fall 2005, I started the Critical and Creative Thinking program at University of Massachusetts Boston. I eagerly jumped right into the program. My first course was called PBL for problem-based learning (CRCRTH 611). This started my interest for problem solving. In this course, we spent many hours discussing, reframing and then trying to solve various problems. I learned that how you frame a problem affected your ability to solve it. This would be very useful when I attempted to solve office issues.

My next course was Creative Thinking (CRCRTH 602). In this course, I participated in activities designed to develop my own creativity. Prior to this course, I never considered myself very creative because I can’t sing, paint or dance. I quickly realized that creativity has many

forms. My problem was realizing what was blocking my own creativity. I learned about my own assumptions, personal bias and how my childhood experience and upbringing had now affected my thought processes as an adult. I am what I think. I was raised by a mother with very high expectations for behaviors, morals and values. Right was right! Wrong was wrong! No grey area with my mother. Her morals and values became an integral part of my childhood and most of my adulthood. I was now being forced to address these beliefs.

My early research on motivation and change began in the Processes of Research and Engagement course (CRCRTH 692). Here I was introduced to and practiced using tools for research, writing and communicating. This led me toward a specific direction for change and growth. In this course, I became familiarized with the brainstorming techniques and my ever so useful ‘post it’ method for thinking and reflecting. This involves using self-written post-it’s so as to be able to move ideas, suggestions or questions around until a thought or concept arises. I recall the first time I did this with my staff; they thought I was crazy at first! I asked them to write down a wish list on post-its. Then we moved around into yes, no and maybe categories. Now, they understood. This was a fun way for them to think and reflect on what they individually wished for.

Change needed to begin with me. I was ready. Some changes, I found easier to make than others. For example, once I realized the importance of flexibility it was easier to be more flexible. I reminded myself that the world will not come to an end if we came off course. I needed to be able to listen to other points of view or another way to do something. This did not mean that I had to believe and follow but rather that I was opening myself to new and different ideas and thoughts. I was beginning to realize and accept that everyone is unique and talented in his or her own way. Other changes were a little more challenging such as my habit of rule

following. I was a stickler for the rules. These rules were actually slowing me down. I slowly realized that rules though important should be used as a *guideline* to get from point A to point B. I also learned that rules can/should be adjusted at times. Being so rigid made me appear to be resistant to change causing my staff to be afraid to suggest change or make new suggestions.

Another example of a more challenging change was my limited risk taking. I still am consciously working on this today! I play it safe in all aspects of my life; work, clothes, food etc. I don't like taking chances probably due to fear of failure. I made risk taking one of my personal goals. I've learned to take some very small risks like eating sushi (I'm still alive) or changing my style of clothing (not so conservative). Recently, I applied for a new, more challenging job at the University. This was a very big step for me. The staff recognizes and comments on my taking some risks and trying new things. This makes them more comfortable in coming to me with their own ideas and thoughts.

The UMASS BOSTON Critical and Creative thinking program has helped me to not only be a better person but has also enabled me to develop into a better manager. Being a better manager has many meanings. By better manager, I mean holding myself and my actions responsible for my staff's health and safety and being able to motivate my staff and lead by example.

By using the program's distinctive pedagogy, I have confirmed my deep -rooted belief that Critical and Creative Thinking in the workplace is not only a possibility but is relevant in the 21st century. This program had me reevaluating what the real problems were in my office such as low morale and stress from many different angles while trying to solve them as a middle manager. While, I knew that I would gain valuable knowledge and nurture in whatever program I chose, this program got my critical and creative thinking juices flowing. I came to realize that

while I cannot directly change others, I do play a major role in guiding and inspiring others to want to make a change. I didn't start this program in order to change myself as a manager. I didn't plan to make such drastic personal and professional changes within myself. As previously stated, this Program is my own special, personal "out the box" major because it has and continues to challenge me to do more, differently and better. My change is ongoing. I will continue to deal with new staff, new issues and new responsibilities. I am not perfect nor will I ever be. I just need to do the best I can and take my position as manager seriously.

I have worked diligently on my interpersonal skills as suggested by my Director. Another technique learned in my CRCRTH course 692 was effective communication. I actively participate in effective communication daily. I aim for better communication between me and my staff by both giving and taking. My voice should not stop others from speaking with me. I have learned to think before speaking and to chose my words very carefully. I am becoming more of an active listener by paying close attention and not only listening but hearing and understanding what is being said to me. By understanding my staff and their unique qualities, I am better able to work out issues. One of my biggest successes in my opinion was being more empathic. Since I was being viewed as very judgmental and opinionated by others, I felt that this was something that I really needed to work on. What had prevented me from being more emphatic was my fear that it would lessen my position as a manager. About empathy, Goleman (1995) writes:

Being able to put aside one's self-centered focus and impulses has social benefits: it opens the way to empathy, to real listening, to taking another person's perspective. Empathy, as we have seen, leads to caring, altruism, and compassion. Seeing things from another's perspective breaks down biased stereotypes, and so breeds tolerance and acceptance of differences. These capacities are ever more called on in our increasingly pluralistic society. (p. 285)

Being able to accurately interpret other people's emotions and being sensitive to other people's feelings was eye opening! There is so much more than UMASS Boston going on in

other people's lives. As a manager, I need to take into account individual life, family, dreams and hopes.

My research continued in my Action Research for Educational, Professional, and Personal Change (CRCRTH 693) course that led me to further explore the concept of "team". In my 20 years at UMASS Boston, I have heard the term "team" used excessively and incorrectly at least 100 times. "Team this..." "We need to work as a team....." but there was never any real move toward team and its proper use. Management spoke of team but still wanted to be fully in charge. I on the other hand, was willing to relinquish some power for the good of the organization and introduce the concept of team to the staff. My staff was open to the idea and willing to give it a try. My vision of an effective team is of a happy, healthy team of people working together to resolve problems. Teams allow for more and better creative ideas and the opportunity to get more work accomplished while reaching goals as a group. I did at times feel that being a middle manager was an obstacle to my team's success. As a middle manager, I don't make all final decisions. I have limited authority. Therefore, I needed to take this idea of team, adjust to our needs and make it work for me and my team specifically.

This led to my idea for my synthesis - the creation of a Middle Managers' booklet. I have often wished that there was a quick handy guide that I could pick up and use throughout my work day. I barely have enough time to breathe some days let alone read a lengthy book or pamphlet. I always welcome help and suggestions. I thought that a handy booklet designed for all managers but especially useful for middle managers would be a great idea! I struggled with what I wanted exactly in the booklet - how long, how many topics, and how many pages- because though I wanted it to be concise I needed to get the message to the reader. From the booklet's concept, I always knew that I wanted the booklet to be easily read and used by mid-

managers everywhere. I didn't want the booklet to be too technical so as not to turn the reader off. I wanted the manager to say "ok! This sounds good. How can I take this and make it work for me?" This was the difficult part. I wanted not only an easy read but also a useful and thought provoking booklet.

I decided to break the booklet into three sections. The first section discusses the 5 principles that I find most important for middle managers to understand. These 5 principles relate profoundly to my thinking process introduced in chapter one. They also result from my research into motivation, change and team concept in chapters two and three. I believe that these managers need to have the right mindset and understanding in order to make sense of these suggestions. Here are the 5 key principles:

- Motivation is the key
- The change process begins with me
- Change is an ongoing and fluid process
- Middle managers have a need for team
- Middle managers play different roles during team building

The second section will discuss the general goals that I established as well as the strategies that I used to meet these goals. The goals I focused on were improved communication, motivating staff, create and building team and improving critical and creative thinking, and problem solving in the workplace. The final section deals with 5 specific examples of changes that I made and the results. The changes I made were based on trust issues, empowerment, resolving conflict, use of effective brainstorming sessions and more effective meetings.

My Final Thoughts

My learning continues as I continue to grow. It has not always been fun and games for me! Learning about me has been at times both stimulating and upsetting. It's difficult enough to face ones faults and even more difficult to make a change. Through hard work and dedication, I

have been able to look deep within myself and become a better manager if not a better person.

I am also so very proud of my team!!! My team continues to strive for success. This is still a very active process. We are learning and trying new ideas every day. My staff is still stressed. That's the beast of the business, but they do feel more empowered and responsible for their role in the office. Trust and respect is reciprocated. When I am out I feel confident that all is well at work. Overall, I think I'm a better "me" and a better "me" is beneficial to everyone I know and work with.

What's next for me?

I intend to continue on my personal and professional journey of growth. I will continue to research and investigate motivation and the use of team. I plan on attending conferences and seminars on team, team building, and effective leadership. I may even one day be able to take my booklet and run workshops or mini-conferences on my strategies for being a successful middle manager.

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MANAGING FROM THE MIDDLE

MOTIVATION IN THE WORKPLACE

BOOKLET FOR MIDDLE MANAGERS
LISA G WILLIAMS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

PRINCIPLES

Motivation is the key

The change process begins with me

Change is an ongoing and fluid process

Middle managers have a need for team

Middle Managers play different roles during team building

GENERAL GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Improve communication

Motivate staff by appealing to higher needs

Create and build team

Improve critical thinking, creativity, and problem solving

SPECIFIC EXAMPLES OF CHANGES I MADE AND RESULTS

From mistrust to trust

From discouragement to empowerment

From conflicts to consensus

From uninspiring to effective brainstorming sessions

From chaos to effective meetings

ENCOURAGING WORDS FROM MY TEAM

HELPFUL WEBSITES

INTRODUCTION

My name is Lisa Williams. I am an Associate Director in a fast paced, number driven Undergraduate Admissions office at a 4-year public University. I currently manage a team of 9 employees. I have had to personally learn the principles and develop the skills that would work best for me as a middle manager with my team. While as a middle manager, I do not have absolute power as in the final say, my role is still very crucial for my team to effectively reach our goals. Once we as middle managers realize that we do possess the power to both motivate our staff and bring forth positive change, we can truly become more effective.

This booklet contains the **principles** that led to me establishing new **goals**. I then use specific examples of **changes** I made as part of using these principles and pursuing new goals with the **results**. I would like for other managers to be able to implement some of my ideas right away. I conclude with some positive input from my staff and useful websites and links. This booklet won't address all issues but will definitely get you started in the right direction.

PRINCIPLES

1. MOTIVATION IS THE KEY

As managers, we need to be able to effectively motivate our staff. One of my key assumptions about motivation in the workplace is that most employees start out motivated. A new job can be motivating in itself. People have the need to impress and succeed and most people start a new job with the best possible motives. Therefore, a lack of motivation is often a learned response fostered by misunderstanding usually between managers and staff from unrealistic expectations and/or demands.

What is motivation and why is it important?

Motivation can be anything that arouses organisms toward action for a desired goal. For managers, motivating others is a skill that can be learned and practiced. Motivated employees will always look for a better way to do a job. Motivated workers are more productive and oriented towards producing high quality work.

What motivates people's behavior?

Abraham Maslow developed a comprehensive theory that catalogued the full range of human motivation that is captured in a visual heuristic called the Hierarchy of Needs. This theory explains that people are motivated to fulfill lower level basic needs such as physiological and safety needs before moving on to other, higher level needs such as achievement and esteem and ultimately needs for self- fulfillment. The higher needs are very positive and self-sustaining intrinsic forces promoting continued growth and the development of competence, after basic “deficiency” needs have been met.

This heuristic scheme of a hierarchy of needs can be potentially helpful to a manager in two ways. First, this knowledge can assist in understanding employee motivation and enable a manager to think about what need level a specific employee may have. Using this theory, the needs of employees can be viewed and approached individually. Second, the employer can think about how to design the workplace to utilize the power of higher level needs.

Related to Maslow's theory is Douglas McGregor's contrast between Theory X and Theory Y as two very different theories of **work force motivation**. Douglas McGregor was very interested in contrasting two prevalent but opposing beliefs about human motives and their relation to resulting managerial behaviors. The traditional assumption is that people by nature are lazy and unmotivated employees, who will not act without extrinsic motivators (such as money); he called this Theory X. He thought a better and more accurate view into the true nature of man was that people by nature do have integrity and intrinsic desire to achieve and be competent employees. He called this Theory Y.

2. THE CHANGE PROCESS BEGINS WITH ME

Given McGregor's theory, it is likely that managers may need to make some changes in their basic assumptions about their employees. Once managers realize the need to change, they need to be able, ready and willing to change. Managers must realize: "This change starts with me!" Kurt Lewin, a behavioral scientist and psychologist developed the change model known as Lewin's freeze phases in the early 20th century. This freeze model suggests change is made via a three -stage process of managing change: unfreezing, changing and refreezing:

- **Unfreezing**

Change your mind set. Realize the need to have your staff clearly understand why change is needed and what will happen if we don't change.

- **Changing**

Change occurs as a process that unfolds over time. It does not happen instantly. As a manager, one must realize that change is a very emotionally, challenging period of confusion and transition. This stage takes time and patience.

- **Refreezing**

Change leads to new stable patterns; that is it leads to refreeze. Comfort level returns. Managers need to realize that this stage is more about establishing stability once changes have been made. Once changes are accepted they become the new norm.

3. CHANGE IS AN ONGOING AND FLUID PROCESS

Change is not easy. It is a challenging and never ending process. Some people fear change and try to avoid it at all times. In my specific case, I had staff who were so used to doing it one way/same way that they could not envision the possibility of a positive outcome from change. Change was initially seen as a negative action which resulted in resistance. I needed to find a way to make the staff and myself comfortable enough to be open to change.

The Adkar model, developed by Jeff Hiatt, CEO of Prosci Change Management and first published in 2003, appealed to me because I found it straight forward enough to my own change process. This model focuses on the 5 action needs necessary for successful individual change, and therefore successful organizational change. These five action needs are:

6. *Awareness* of the need to change
7. *Desire* to participate and support the change
8. *Knowledge* of how to change
9. *Ability* to implement the change on a day to day basis
10. *Reinforcement* to keep the change in place

The above model is consistent with Lewin's assumptions that change is a step- by- step process but further unpacks the diverse building blocks of the process. The process is sequential meaning that each step or action must be completed before moving on to the next

This is a very effective tool for managers to use. By giving managers a specific role in responding to each employee's individual needs, they are better able to measure where each one is within their change process. This makes them better able to assess and then assist with their helping their employees make change.

4. MIDDLE MANAGERS HAVE A NEED FOR TEAM

Middle managers are those who interpret and implement top managers' demands. Middle managers are the linchpin in a large organization that take the visions of upper management and fuses them with pragmatic needs of the workforce. This job can be lonely and very stressful. At times, middle managers may believe that they are powerless to make changes because of the need to conform to the vision of the top management. For example, working in a fast paced numbers driven office, I found that the stated goals with very little down time was not only stressful but also was causing staff to be unhappy. This was leading to high turnover rates. As a middle manager, I was spending a lot of valuable time rehiring and retraining a new staff. I needed to find a way for my staff and I to work together to alleviate some of the stress while getting the work done. I also wanted a happier, healthier staff in a friendlier environment

My research led me to the concept of **teambuilding** and its positive effect on staff motivation. My definition of team is two or more individuals who share common task objectives and are mutually accountable for collective task outcomes. By thinking of my staff and myself as a team, I am no longer alone or solely responsible for producing the outcomes. As a team, we work together around shared and clearly defined goals, each with skills and strengths that contribute to the outcome, taking pride when we can succeed.

5. MIDDLE MANAGERS PLAY DIFFERENT ROLES DURING TEAMBUILDING

A focus on the importance of team raises many questions such as how to proceed and what do managers need to do to build effective teams? The Tuckman stages, developed by Bruce Tuckman (1965), were helpful for me because it portrayed team building as an ongoing process and highlighted how managers need to change roles depending upon where they are in the process. According to Tuckman, there are 4 stages of team building with different manager roles to be enacted at different stages:

Forming (Stage 1). The overall goal of the forming stage is to take the diverse individuals and make them into a team. At this stage, a manager needs to establish trust, comfort and clarity by providing direction and rules for each member's responsibilities. Trust and comfort can be established from the manager by being open and genuine.

Storming (Stage 2). The storming stage involves conflict, disagreement and challenges. This stage is necessary for growth of the team and the conflict can be productive and an opportunity for learning. At this stage a manager needs to be an effective mediator and act more as a coach. Conflict resolution skills such as effective listening and dialogue are needed. Tolerance and patience is necessary. Some teams may never make it out of this stage.

Conforming or Norming (Stage 3). The conforming stage is when the team begins to function as a unit comfortable in their setting. The manager needs to give support, provide feedback, continuously articulate vision and generate commitment to vision. In this stage, the manager acts more as a participant. The manager allows for more group autonomy. The manager acts like one of the team. This is the stage that my team spends most of its time. When we rehire new staff, we start back at stage 1 but we are getting better at moving through the stages

Performing (Stage 4). Though difficult it is possible for some teams to reach this stage. Performing stage is when the team functions as a highly effective and efficient unit. A manager at this stage needs to foster innovation and creativity, give effective feedback and avoid reverting back to earlier stages.

GENERAL GOALS AND STRATEGIES FOR MIDDLE MANAGERS

1. IMPROVE COMMUNICATION

As middle managers, we need to develop and improve on our communication skills daily, if we are to create teams and effectively motivate our staff. How our staff perceives us depends not only on verbal communication but also non-verbal communication. For example, if I have an argument with my husband before work and I come in in a bad mood (eyes averted, not smiling, no greetings), at least one staff member will take it personally and think I am mad at them specifically. This can affect their work mood. Although, there are many strategies for improving communication. I provide the following three as examples:

- **Say what I mean more clearly and specifically**

Communication is a two way street, I can't assume that I am always being understood. Personally, I now focus on deliberately thinking before I speak. I realize I need to wait for a person to finish speaking, stop and think about what I am going to say and why. I need to find a way to not overwhelm staff with unnecessary details but to be specific enough to get my point across. I also need to be careful to avoid overgeneralization. I found that everyone is unique and what works with one person may not work with another.

- **Actively listen to others**

As a manager, I need to be able to pay close attention so as to hear and understand what my staff is really saying. I now focus on truly giving my undivided attention. This was one of my biggest faults. In the past, I would listen and try to email at same time. These actions not only made me seem uninterested; they also cut down on my ability to truly understand. Our attention is limited and we cannot multi-task as much as we think.

- **Attend to the emotional and nonverbal aspect of my message**

I also now pay more attention to my body language such as my facial expressions or the way I stand during a conversation. I realize that people are watching me closely and will respond as perceived. I smile more. I say thank you and please more. Showing appreciation is essential for continued motivation. Last but not least, I have added more humor when possible. If a situation is funny, it is ok to laugh. Laughter can also defuse a tense situation. I actually like my staff and enjoy their company. We can enjoy our work and each other.

2. MOTIVATE STAFF BY APPEALING TO HIGHER NEEDS

As middle managers, we also need to be able to effectively motivate our staff daily. This involves recognizing that some of the most powerful forms of motivation depend upon higher level needs. I have focused on three ways to effectively motivate the staff:

- **Make sure the work you provide is productive and challenging**

If the work is badly designed as it was in my office, it will be hard to motivate people and work will be less than ideal. We had old procedures, did a lot of repetition and we were still doing things in a way that no one could explain why. Effective managers understand that work design has a strong impact on performance. When a person finds a job inherently unsatisfying, there's not much you can do to motivate him or her. Job design and enrichment combine to match characteristics of the job with workers' skills and interests. Short term motivating is effective, but for real long lasting success it must be developed over time. My staff now assists in procedure writing and their ideas and thoughts are given a genuine chance which makes the work more meaningful and challenging to them.

- **Make sure you provide the staff with the necessary tools they need to carry out the work and that what you ask is perceived as “fair”**

It is important to make sure that you give your team members the necessary support, tools, resources and training as needed. In the past, I allowed myself to be rushed during training due to deadlines. I now have a structured training guide and make sure that new staff is fully trained. Setting specific performance expectations is also important. Even when the expectations seem ridiculous, I encourage staff to think and try new ways to get the work done. Life is not always fair. What can I do to help them reach our goals? I make myself available to assist with some of the filing, pulling and phone calls while they focus on data entry as well as hire extra student assistance.

- **Make sure you provide ongoing intrinsic reinforcement**

Sustaining change can be difficult. Once you make change, it is crucial to making it stick. What builds intrinsic reinforcement? Rewards and recognition need to be perceived as fairly distributed according to clear guidelines. I incorporated honest and direct feedback. I came up with a reward and recognition system that I could enforce such as time off and a flexible schedule option. I stress personal responsibility and hold individuals accountable for individual

as well as group goals.

3. CREATE AND BUILD A TEAM

The collective ability to innovate is better than one person. Creating a team follows from the need to empower and build on intrinsic motivation. They should share in the rewards of doing something well. Creating team involves a change in power relations that allows them to feel that they are making a contribution. As a middle manager, I identified two strategies that I found useful when forming teams.

- The first was **getting to know each and every member as individuals**. I needed a better understanding of each individual's strengths and weaknesses. This can happen when we take into account several variables such as age, sex, race, religion and culture. I take the time to listen to family/personal stories as well especially cultural stories. One's culture and their views and perceptions, affect ones behavior.
- Secondly, I found the use of **team building activities** such as non- competitive team contests (where everyone is a winner) or get-to-know you sessions when we hire new staff. Add a little food and drink and it's a social event. I also find it useful to initiate some outside activities so we could get to know each other off campus. I find that staff are sometimes more relaxed in a non- work environment and are open to different suggestions. As a team, we have gone to Amusement parks, bowling several times and most recently paintball.

4. IMPROVE CRITICAL THINKING, CREATIVITY AND PROBLEM SOLVING

Another goal was to improve critical thinking, creativity and problem solving within the work day. We needed new solutions to old problems. I needed to encourage staff members to place their inhibitions and fears aside and provide me with as many ideas and solutions as possible. Then we could take several ideas and incorporate together as some possible new methods. Innovation involves creativity.

I sought to reach this goal in the following ways:

- **Setting clear goals and helping staff understand relations among goals**

Specific goals are measurable, unambiguous and behavior-changing. They outline exactly what needs to be accomplished, and when it will be considered as "achieved". In my fast paced number driven business, sometimes goals are inconsistent which results in confusion, stress and unhappiness that will bring production to a halt. In my office, we have weekly, monthly even daily changing goals. It's the way of the business. I found that I need to make sure that staff understands end of semester goal but are aware that flexibility is needed. Once the staff is clear about what *exactly* needs to be done and know *how long* they have to do it, they can focus more on meeting the goal. This allows for more time to think. Staff can start to formulate creative ideas to assist in making goals.

- **Reframing a problem (from upper management) in order to be more intrinsically motivating**

Although as middle managers, we cannot the goals (that come from top management); we do have the power to reframe a problem in ways that allow making it important. For example, in my job in admissions, I have worked with the staff to alleviate the stress of demanding goals by redefining the problem. We needed to approach the problem differently. For instance, I asked staff members to remember when they applied to college and the stress and fear they felt. I wanted them to think of the applicants not as numbers but as real live people. I needed for the team to realize how much power they possessed. They are holding the key to an applicant's dreams and aspirations. If we do not process in a timely manner and meet the deadlines/numbers expected, applicants will not get their decisions on time causing a dream deferred. Fortunately, this type of thinking makes it easier for the team to take this impossible task and turn it into reality. Reframing a problem, ties into critical thinking and creativity by allowing for a possible change in staff perspective on the problem or decision.

- **Use of brainstorming**

I wanted a new fun way to encourage more thinking on the job. My staff does a lot of data entry daily. Brainstorming was a techniques well studied within my Critical and Creative Thinking Graduate program. Brainstorming is a way to develop and create solutions to problems by

generating a list of spontaneous ideas. Even though we are very busy, we could still take the time to use this technique. Later, I elaborate more on effective brainstorming. Brainstorming allows for staff to stop repetitive work and be able to process and think spontaneously.

SPECIFIC EXAMPLES OF CHANGES I MADE AND RESULTS

1. FROM MISTRUST TO TRUST

In my case, I first needed to build more trust and loyalty. The staff had been suffering from low morale and burn out for years. Trust and loyalty can lead to stability resulting in less turn over and more productivity. Workers want to work in a stable environment with a possibility for growth. There are two aspects of building trust that I worked on that involved changes in my behavior:

- **Changes to help build more trust between me and my team:** I vowed to respect my staff by showing genuine empathy and valuing their privacy. I made sure to remain objective and consistent at all times. I learned to admit to my own mistakes and am willing to listen to others suggestions for resolving.
- **Changes to help build more trust between team members:** I encourage and expect respect between team members. Interrupting, loud talking and rudeness is no longer permitted. I stress working together and helping each other out when possible. I actively seek ways to staff to bond and suggestions from staff are seriously considered.

This led to a team who can trust each other without worrying about competition. Less time is spent wondering if other processors are doing same amount of work. Staff trusts that everyone will keep their commitments. The staff increased trust with me has led to better conversations. When something is not working, they feel they can trust me with their ideas and holding everyone accountable.

2. FROM DISCOURAGEMENT TO EMPOWERMENT

Research shows that the more people feel they can control their destiny, even if it's just setting their own deadlines or having an opportunity to own a project or initiative, the greater their resilience to stress and the adverse health effects that can result. Empowering your staff allows them to quickly and efficiently deal with the many issues that arise during the day or work week. By empowering the staff, we are able to energize, motivate and provide them with the self-assurance they need to do what is best for the organization. Empowerment is a type of freedom that produces an incredible sense of responsibility among the staff. Everyone has ideas about how to improve their work and how to do it a better way. By empowering staff, we are expressing to them that we value their knowledge and experience. This creates commitment and a stronger desire to stay within the organization.

In the past, as a middle manager I would have made all decisions, determined individual and group duties and oversee all work. Now, I incorporate more group decisions, have staff create and monitor their own daily schedules and do more delegating. This has resulted in the staff having more self-confidence, increased feelings of value and led to a sense of accountability and control. Now, staff members make their own daily/weekly schedules and set a plan in action for when 1-2 staff members are out on vacation at same time.

As expected, this can sometimes be very time consuming but is so worth the results. We have a bigger team with more ideas and suggestions. This has resulted in a team that feels directly and personally involved in their daily work day. We are not just crunching numbers but active members in reaching goals.

3. FROM CONFLICT TO AGREEMENT

Conflict is a natural part of team building; so if one wants to develop teams one has to be prepared to resolve conflicts that arise within teams as part of “managing” the process. Although conflicts are natural, poorly managed conflict takes away from actual work time, causes distractions, unhappiness, stress and possible violence. In my earlier years as a middle manager, I might have resolved some conflicts by ignoring some (hoping they would go away) or imposing a solution (that may not build on team members as collaborators). I now know that I need to be able to calmly and professionally assist in resolving conflict even if I may be the only one being calm and professional.

Here are two examples of conflict and what changes I made to assist in resolving:

- **One or more staff slacking off leading to other staff member’s unhappiness**

In the past, I have had one or two staff members constantly on telephone, texting or using face book and not accomplishing the stated goals for the day. This led to others staff members having to cover for them by working harder causing resentment. In the past, I may have worked around this employee and unwittingly gave my more productive staff more work. I now recognize this is an important problem which can’t be ignored. To resolve, I must first determine the real issue(s). Is this this person slacking off due to laziness (with a need to refocus on productive work), incompetence (with a need to retraining) or is there personal reason (with a need to address issue and see if I can assist). Then, I need to refocus disgruntled staff members back to task at hand by keeping workload fair and consistent.

- **Developing of cliques within team**

We have had 2-3 staff members that become so close that they unknowingly excluded others. This led to some new staff members feeling alone. In the past, I may have ignored this. Why care as long as work gets done? I now know that cliques can cause a rift within a team. My solution was to come up with ways to separate cliques briefly during work hours and teaming them with other staff members. I also have all staff participate in new staff training.

This has led to stronger relationships amongst all members. New members feel comfortable approaching both me and other team members. Disrespect is not allowed! Even though we have bad days, each other’s personal feelings are always considered. Staff no longer

feels the need to spy or report on other staff members. They are now confident that I will handle any problems as needed in a fair and honest way.

4. FROM BOREDOM TO EFFECTIVE BRAINSTORMING SESSIONS

As stated previously, I incorporated brainstorming. Time was set aside during staff meetings for this. I needed for these sessions to be effective. After a couple of thrown together sessions I realized that the actual setting up of the session was crucial. The following is what I found most useful for an effective brainstorming experience:

1. Provide topic ahead of time

Brainstorming is about creating, sharing, and building a set of ideas on some topic. As a manager, you should always provide some background information about the problem or topic ahead of time. The staff needs time to process and think about it before the session. Make sure to have fun! No topic is so serious not to enjoy different and wild ideas. Continue with follow through and immediately incorporate some useable ideas. Some examples of topics we discussed were a no expense wish list and brainstormed what material was actually needed in a folder.

2. Pay attention to environment

Just as unique as your staffs' personalities; so are their learning and communicating skills. Some will need to see the ideas, some just hear them, and so it's best to let individuals arrange themselves so they are comfortable and ready to participate in a way that works best for them. Make sure to explore all 3 learning and communicating styles

- Auditory
- Visual- use of white board, flip charts , markers and sticky notes
- Kinesthetic- interaction

3. **Have a facilitator**

A good brainstorming facilitator needs to be experienced with the process and needs to follow the rules to ensure that the brainstorming session is effective. The facilitator is required to engage everyone, capture notes and lead the process to ensure ideas are flowing, explored for branching and not holding up the process. The facilitator needs to make sure that everyone is given a chance to speak, that no one feels uncomfortable and rules of courtesy and etiquette are maintained. The facilitator doesn't necessarily need to participate in the creative brainstorm but as a Team member I have always participated.

We now have brainstorming sessions at least once a month during staff meetings. This has led to a new and different twist to these meetings. The staff confidently makes suggestions of all types. For example, in the past we stored applications using their social security number. After a brainstorming meeting, we changed to applicant's last name for storing. This has made matching transcripts and locating an application much easier.

5. FROM CHAOS TO EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

As a middle manager I have learned that different types of meeting are needed and used at different times. More effective meetings are needed to ensure that team members understand the purpose of each meeting and what is expected of them. I make time to meet with the staff as often as possible but realize these meetings need to be structured and relevant. Some of the changes, I specifically made are listed below:

- Better use of time by providing agenda ahead of time. Everyone is prepared to meet leading to briefer, more useful meetings. Before I just called everyone together and said let's meet.
- Full participation is required so that everyone has a role and a voice. Before I would be the only one talking.
- Deliberate follow through of ideas and/or concerns which makes sure everyone is accountable even myself. Before we would meet then get wrapped up with new issues never resolving old issues.
- Deliver feedback in a timely manner. Before I paid attention to my time schedule only. Staff has time needs as well.

Though it is a struggle due to nature of business, we try to meet at least twice a month. This results in quicker and more effective meetings where we are able to focus and get a lot accomplished. Planning is essential. No more surprise meetings. This new approach to meetings has helped the staff to realize that staff meetings are an intricate part of the work plan and can help keep us updated as goals change.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Managing from the middle is a challenge and not for the faint hearted. Not only do we carry our own burdens and stress, but we carry our staff's. My personal philosophy as a manager has always been that a happy staff will lead to a much more efficient, focused and productive staff. Though, my team and I still struggle daily to make this "team" effort work, we are able to communicate better and worked together as a group.

My own "learning" continues. I continue to grow. I sometimes fall back into my old habits. The difference is this time I can recognize and change my behavior. It is difficult to face our own faults and can be even more difficult to change. Through continued hard work and dedication, I have been able to look deep wit in myself and become a better manager and person.

I am also so very proud of my team!!! My team continues to strive for success. This is still a very active process. We are learning and trying new ideas every day. My staff is still stressed. That's the beast of the business but they do feel more empowered and responsible for their role in the office. Trust and respect is reciprocated. When I am out I feel confident that all is well at work.

ENCOURAGING WORDS FROM MY TEAM

Below, I provide some words of encouragement from my “team” and list several helpful websites. Hopefully, this booklet has generated some ideas for change and how to implement them.

While not only offering incentives, you also made sure you gave us “props” on a specific task we were really good at and exceeded. That way, whoever was good at one specific task would tackle that, while the others worked on the task they were good at=teamwork. Everyone is better at something than others, so we all balanced out. (N.A)

Communication was much better. Also, we could give you OUR feedback on our process in our job. (R.S)

You gave us the opportunity to work among ourselves in order to develop a way to be more proactive with the tasks we had, so we were better able to manage our own time (N.A.)

You worked on your delivery of words and remained calm when dealing with a stress in the office (T.L)

HELPFUL WEBSITES

<http://management.about.com/od/careerdevelopment/a/TenThingsToDo.htm>

http://www.ehow.com/how_2081988_be-better-manager.html

<http://management.about.com/cs/midcareermanager/a/htbebettermgr.htm>

<http://www.accentonskills.com/BizCriticalCreativeThinking.pdf>

<http://cmm.thepodcastnetwork.com/>

<http://www.ifthen.co.uk/2011/09/critical-thinking-in-business/>