

Growing Engagement

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Abstract

Over the past several years there has been a shift for some organizations as they look to align their management philosophies with their shift to agile development practices. This has led to different philosophies (Management 3.0, Managing For Happiness, etc) which focus on the employee and their engagement instead of viewing them as a machine to output some specific task. Overall, this shift has been a positive one which leads to better structured organizations that have higher performance and happier employees.

In this talk Levi will discuss why focusing on people over processes is a philosophy that works in any organization, regardless of the development methodology. In addition, he will go into the specifics of his experiences as both a Director of Quality and Engineering and as a Manager (Dev and Test) to give insight on what works well and what does not.

Biography

Levi has been through several different organizational alignments and changes over the past few years, including several mergers, acquisitions, organizational expansions and sustaining. His background in Psychology helps to dive deep into why specific management practices work best in a given organization. Levi is currently a Director of Engineering at XMedius.

1. Introduction

Creating an environment that individuals want to work in is a challenging thing to do for any organization. Measures show that in most workplaces, roughly 30% of an organization is considered to be an engaged worker. This means 30% of employees are passionate and feel like what they do matters to the company (Three Levels of Employee Engagement, Dailypay.). Often, this lack of engagement is created by top down control based management structures that many individuals do not want to be part of. This paper will examine the traditional forms of management and how they tend to fail in creating an engaged workplace. Then it will examine the philosophies and practices related to Management 3.0 which improve engagement in any organization.

2. Traditional Management

In most business environments there tends to be one of two management structures used which are based on a hierarchical / top down structure of command and control. Author Jurgen Appelo calls these two style Management 1.0 and Management 2.0 (Appelo, 2016, 6) recognizing that these two philosophies have built upon each other over the past decades. To illustrate their fundamental philosophy, let us look at some questions asked under these philosophies by high ranking individuals in an organization.

“How can we motivate our workers?”

If we tell our workers what to do, they will be motivated.

“How can we change the organization's culture?”

We must dictate what the culture should be. We need to tell individuals what to do.

“How can we change the mindset of managers? How can we get them to trust their teams?”

Simply tell the managers what to say and have a consistent message. Teams will come around as they are told to do the same thing repeatedly.

“How can we get teams to take responsibility?” (Appelo, 2016, 4)¹

Tell them they need to be responsible.

“Notice that *all* these questions...are asking, ‘How can we change **other** people?’” (Appelo, 2016, 4) Both the questions and the method of coming to answers focuses explicitly on how can individuals behaviors be modified through giving commands to others, similar to how factory workers have been managed in the past. To examine this further and see where this creates issues with engagement, let us look at the specifics of Management 1.0 and 2.0.

¹ Questions from book, answers are mine.

2.1. Management 1.0

While not as common in the tech environment today, Management 1.0 can be seen where developers talk about being “code monkeys” (produce as many lines of code as possible) or testers who believe their job is to execute a specific number of test cases a day. As Jurgen puts it, “[the] common practice is that [organizations] are managed like machines, with their workers treated as gears and levers....[T]he organization consists of parts and that improvement of the whole requires monitoring, repairing, and replacing those parts.” (Appelo, 2016, 6) Essentially, people aren’t treated like people. They are something produce a specific amount of output and replaced when they serve their purpose.

When trying to answer the questions above, the focus is on modifying the individual pieces or replacing them. Want to change the organization's culture? Fire anyone who doesn't fit and create bar a to ensure anyone coming in will fit. Want trust? Tell people they need to trust more. The change will always be in the modification of the individual much like modifying a cog in a machine.

This kind of management frustrates employees, is ineffective and reduces the employees desire to care about their job. It provides leaders with the illusion that they have control over individuals through short term gains in productivity, reinforcing that what they are doing is right. However, the only way to see continued “improvement” out of the organization is to increase the intensity on how behaviors are modified. It may look like increased demands on output or using fear to motivate employees which further frustrates and disengages employees. As the environment becomes more frustrating the employees engagement continues to drop in a negative spiral.

Overall, Management 1.0 does not give the freedom necessary to create an engaged workplace but can provide the illusion of productivity that makes leaders believe that what they are doing is having an impact.

2.2. Management 2.0

Management 2.0 improves on the existing 1.0 model by recognizing people are not simply machines. “[Management 2.0] correctly understands that improvement of the whole organization is not achieved by merely improving the parts...[however], they prefer to stick to the hierarchy and have a tendency to forget that human beings don't respond well to top-down control and mandated 'improvements'”. (Appelo, 2016, 7) Think of it this way, Management 2.0 correctly identifies that you need to treat people as, people. However it sticks with the Management 1.0 style of leadership where decisions are driven from the top down.

Looking at the questions above, a Management 2.0 philosophy would answer the question, “How do we change the culture?” by thinking through individuals and groups of people. But, once a change has been determined that change would come as a top down mandate of what the culture should be. To someone in the Management 2.0 style of leadership, every problem has a solution. That solution will take into account some context of the environment, but the actual decisions will come from those who are at the top.

While not treating individuals like a machine is a large improvement on Management 1.0 philosophies, it still runs afoul of the same top down management problem. Leaders (managers, directors, VPs, CTOs) define what and how everything should be done and employees feel they are simply there to do whatever their boss says. This creates the same sort of dissatisfaction and lack of engagement as individuals want to be part of decisions and participate in the creation of the environment they work within. In the end the solutions provided from the top down do not adequately address change in the proper way creating a greater sense of disengagement.

2.3. Traditional Management Summary

At the end of the day these methodologies (Management 1.0 and Management 2.0) take a “one size fits all” approach (Management 3.0 in 50 Minutes) of top down decision making. This does not create an engaged workplace as individuals want more than to be told how to do their work, how to define their culture and how to take responsibility. Many leaders default to these top down styles of management as it is easily understandable and seems like a simple answer for how to manage others. “See problem, determine issue with problem, fix problem” is a common way we work within in engineering. However, as HL Mencken says, “For every complex problem there is answer that is clear, simple and wrong.” (Appelo, 2010, Loc 676) In this case, the wrong way of creating an engaged workplace is to believe that a simplistic top down management structuring will do this. To truly create an engaging workplace, which individuals truly want to work within, is a complex problem in which leaders need to understand the context of their environment and the people (Management 3.0 in 50 Minutes). Leaders must stop thinking about how to only tell individuals to change their behaviors and start thinking differently.

So how can we think differently? We can start by thinking of an organization as a complex web of interconnected individuals, as a system.

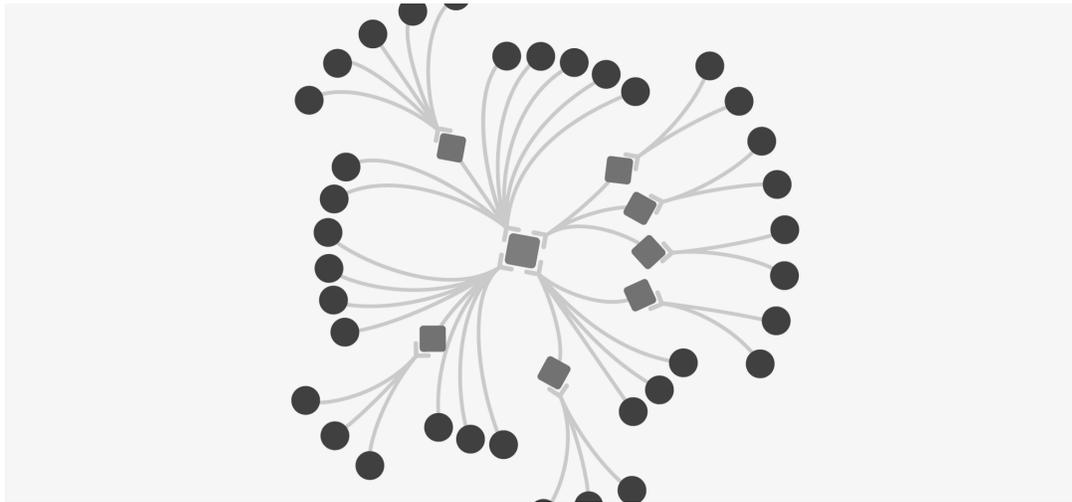
3. Systems and System Thinking

To understand what it means to think in terms of systems, we must first understand what a system is. Let us look at a few questions to highlight what is considered to be part of a system:

- *Are the people part of the system? **Yes.***
- *Are the processes within the organization part of the system? **Yes.***
- *Is the physical space (or distributed space) the people exist in part of the system? **Yes.***
- *Is what the group / team / organization accomplishes part of the system? **Yes.***

Anything which impacts the group of individuals that makes up an organization defines the system (people, processes, physical space, etc). With this in mind, let us compare visually our more traditional view of management structuring versus a more complex model.

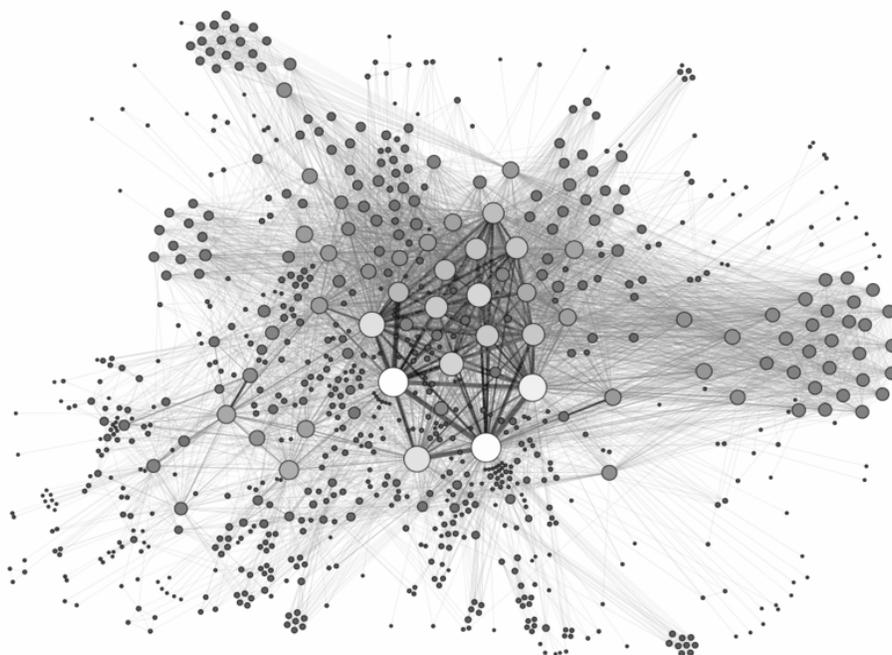
3.1. Traditional Management Visualization



(Design System Intermediaries, Medium)

The diagram above demonstrates a more traditional view of management and organizational structuring. There is a leader at the center (CEO, VP, etc) who has leaders which report to them (Director, Manager) who have individuals who do the work reporting to them (QA, Dev, Devops, etc). The squares would be considered the leaders and the circles are considered the frontline employees. This is how most people think of their organization and the interactions within them. However, as the questions above highlighted, this hierarchical structure is only one piece of what goes into defining a system as a system is the totality of interactions, individuals and the environment they exist in. To better visualize a complex system, let us look at how a system model of a social network is visualized.

3.2. System Model Of Social Network



(Social Network Visualization, Wikimedia)

As can be seen here, the relationships between individuals are much more complex than a simple hierarchical diagram. This type of system level visualization which highlights all the interactions between individuals provides a better representation of what a system of people is like and how they interact. It is not simply a VP who interacts with a manager, or a manager who interacts with an Individual Contributor². There is a complex web of interactions which go into creating an engaged workplace. Change any one of the nodes in the diagram and that will have a cascading impact which is hard to predict across the system due to its complex nature.

The complexity that occurs within a system is why top down styles of management are ineffective at creating an engaged workplace, as they reduce the interconnected group of people to a simple hierarchical structure. While that traditional view is much simpler, it excludes many aspects that are critical to creating engagement. It also has decisions flow from leaders which are not directly connected to areas of change. Visually in the social network system graph above, it'd be as if one of the center white dots attempts to improve engagement for one of the furthest / darkest dots. There would be an impact and a change, but the distance from the context and the complexity of the system will blunt the effectiveness of the change desired.

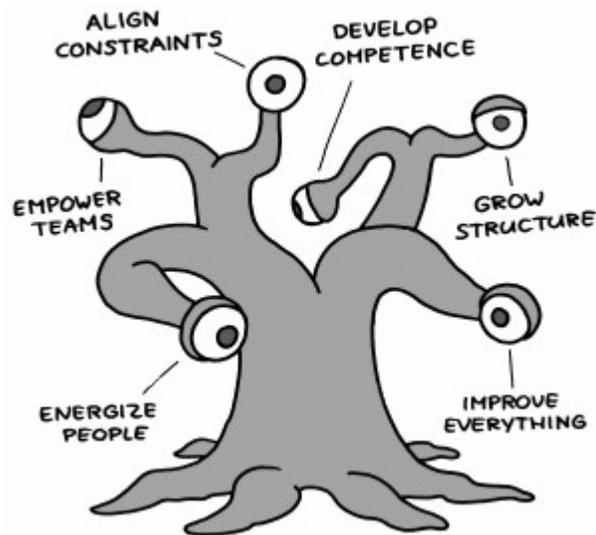
System thinking requires thinking about the different aspects of a system and its interactions with an understanding and respect for its complexity. Management 3.0 takes system level thinking and provides some general principles and practices that guides us in creating an engaged environment and workplace.

² Front line employee, or someone who delivers work.

4. Management 3.0

The goal of Management 3.0 is to use specific paradigms and practices to better treat an organization as a system of complex interactions. The core of Management 3.0 is system thinking, which Jurgen Appelo defines as “a problem-solving mindset that views ‘problems’ as part of an overall system. Instead of isolating individual parts, thereby potentially contributing to unintended consequences, it focuses on cyclical relationships and nonlinear cause and effect within an organization....Its main contribution is for people to concentrate on problematic systems instead of problematic people....[It] can give managers a more complete picture of their organization from various interesting but subjective angles.” (Appelo, 2010, Loc 1599) In addition, it better reflects the complexity and interactions of different disciplines within the workplace (QA, Devops, Dev, Product) which are often considered to be silos.

In summary system thinking focuses on looking at an organization holistically to better understand the methodology and impact of making changes. It also focuses on the group and their interactions, not on individuals, as a recognition that a person’s behavior is driven by their individual personality and the system they are part of³. Management 3.0 reflects these principles by identifying six aspects of any system that, when managed correctly, increases engagement without the top down structuring of Management 1.0 and 2.0. To demonstrate these principles, we must meet Martie, the management monster. The following sections walk through each of Martie’s aspects detailing what the principle is and examples of how these principles can be applied to any organization.



(Martie)

³ This concept is nearly identical to Lewin’s equation which states a persons behavior is a function of their personality and enviorment ($B = f(P,E)$) - <https://u.osu.edu/studentemployment/2015/01/28/bfpe/>

4.1. Energize People

Martie's first aspect is to energize the individuals that are part of the system. The question we are trying to answer here is "What motivates people within the system you're working in?" Remember, it is not just "How do I get Suzy to do her job better?" The right question to ask is, "What changes would impact the entire system to increase motivation and engagement for Suzy and other employees?" This is a very complex question with many different answers, however there are some guiding principles which can help.

To start with, you must understand some of the common needs and desires that occur for most everyone in a business environment. Jurgen Appelo provides a great summary of those items as what he calls 10 Intrinsic Desires. They are as follows:

- Acceptance: Need for approval
- Curiosity: Need to Think
- Power: Need for influence of will
- Honor: Being loyal to a group
- Idealism: The need for purpose
- Independence: Being an individual
- Order: Or stable environment
- Social Contact / Relatedness: Need for friends
- Status: Need for social Standing
- Competence: The need to feel capable (Management 3.0 in 50 Minutes, 19:58)

To increase engagement it must be understood which of these desires are being fulfilled and which are not. If all of these desires are being met within the system that you are part of, then the entire system thrives and engagement is high. If there is an issue with an area (one person has control over others, violating the desire of power) then that kind of behavior will cause issues throughout. If Suzy demands loyalty in every interaction, then people may simply agree all the time and never raise issues, "because Suzy said so." Or, everyone may start avoiding Suzy as she is not someone who can be trusted. Scenarios like this have much more complex causes and outcomes, but this example highlights the violation of one of the principles.

When there seems to be an issue within the system, leaders should step back and ask, "What desire may not be filled in the current system for an individual or individuals?" This helps to better understand the complexity of desires and their overall impact across the group of people. Interestingly enough, helping to energize people can be done in some easy ways when targeting specific desires. For example:

- Desire For Status / Acceptance / Honor: If only specific individuals in the organization are praised for their work, there may be a desire for Status (recognition) and Competence. So change the system! Distribute giving accolades by allowing people to give each other positive feedback. (Appelo, 2016, 23)
- Desire For Curiosity / Competence: Create structures that give time for learning (hackathons, discovery days, etc). Get individuals to share ideas on what they want to do and then let them work on it, *even if* it appears to not have significant business value.
- Desire For Order: Have a chaotic environment, but you don't understand why it is happening? Use a happiness index where employees can report each day how happy / sad / frustrated they are (Try The Happiness Index, Luis Goncalves).

- Desire For Power / Independence: Employees frustrated about a lack of power and influence, sit with them and use a technique like Dynamic Facilitation (Dynamic Facilitation, Co-Intelligence Institute) to let them feel truly heard regardless of what actions come out of the conversation.

Creating an environment of open conversation where solutions for problems come from those closest to the issues has been an area of focus for my current organization. Using the principles of dynamic facilitation (open communication, collaborative discussion, no single authority) myself and others have worked through a variety of issues that could have been driven as top down decisions. These ranged from how to structure agile, test methodologies and the release retrospectives. This kind of open discussion turned situations which were top down driven into conversations that empowered the individuals to make changes that were better than anyone in leadership could have driven. Leaders were still present, but their goal was to help the conversation be as open as possible, not to move to a specific solution or outcome. This built a positive cycle empowering individuals and creating independence.

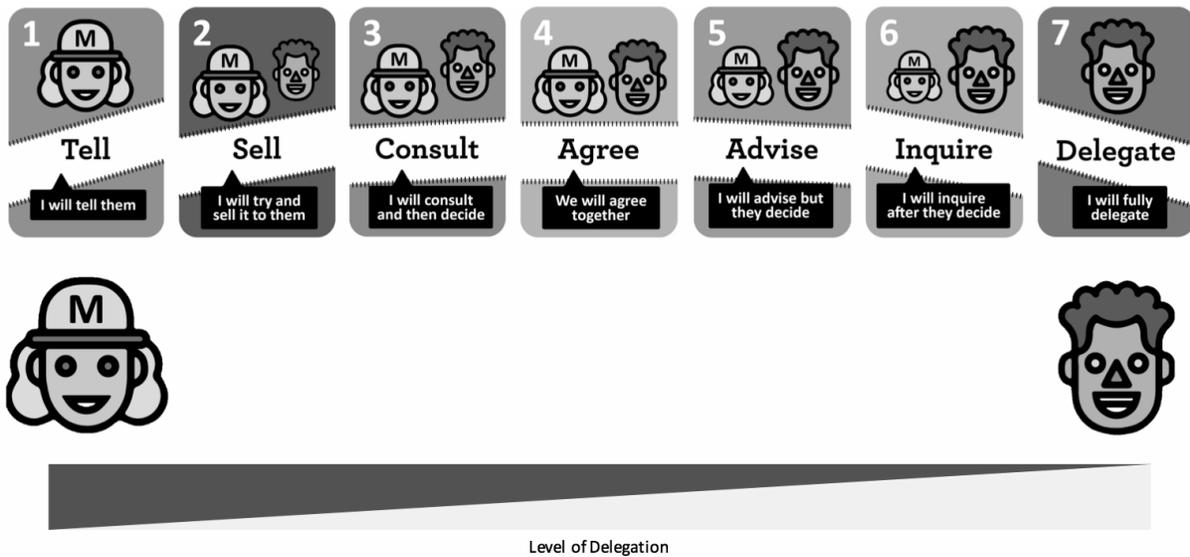
There are more suggestions for how to address the different desires, but the key is that they are addressed in a way that improves the overall system. In turn, this increase the engagement of individuals.

4.2. Empower Teams

The second aspect of Martie, is ensuring that teams are empowered to make decisions. As Jurgen put's it, "Delegation of control is the only way to manage complex systems. There is no other option. If we didn't have delegation, the president of the United States would have to be the person with the highest mental processing ability in the entire country! Obviously, the United States have performed quite well without usually having such a person in the Oval Office." (Appelo, 2016, 11)

The key principle in empowering teams is that managers do not have to be the smartest or most knowledgeable in the system. In fact, it is often better to delegate authority down to individuals who actually do the work as this ensures the person who has the most knowledge of the situation is the one making the decision. Do we delegate all authority away for every decision? Of course not. But the goal is to delegate authority as much as possible to empower people to solve their own problems, creating better solutions than could have been done by a manager.

So how to do this? While it seems simple to say "Go forth and do the thing!" It is more helpful to create clear communication around what is being delegated and to ensure there is a shared understanding of the boundaries. This leads us to delegation poker.



(Delegation Poker, Vivid Breeze)

Delegation poker is a way of having a group discussion around the responsibilities for a given set of tasks. It breaks down the scale of delegation from Tell (Manager Decides) to full Delegation (Employee(s) decide) and recognizes that there are several levels between those extremes. For example, there are times where the manager will Advise (Employee makes the decision, but the manager gives input). The Advise level may be used in adopting a new framework or tool within the organization. Looking at a different level of delegation, the manager may Sell an employee on the decision (telling them of a decision, but providing the reasons why). An example for the Sell level may be a change in the annual review process. Managers in this scenario are going to lay out the guidelines around reviews and demonstrate value to the employees to sell them on the change. At any delegation level, the key is understanding where the responsibility lies.

In practice using delegation poker has created a higher level of engagement in the organizations I've been a part of. Much like planning poker in agile, it creates a dialog to share what their expectations around the responsibilities for various work that needs to be done. This includes allowing the employee to challenge me as a manager if I am not giving enough freedom. I've used delegation poker with groups of testers who were trying to determine how a blocking issue could be driven to conclusion. I was attempting to delegate and empower as much as possible, but the individuals felt they could not address the issues on their own. With a little bit of conversation, we clarified that there was a difference in our delegation levels and reach a consensus that an advise position would help us move forward the best. In the end, I would give input but they would retain the accountability over the decisions being made. It empowered the team to move forward, provided the help they needed and allowed them feel more connected to the work then if I had solved the problem for them.

4.3. Align Constraints

Martie's third aspect is aligning constraints. Simply put, aligning constraints is answering the question of, "What is our purpose? Why do we exist?" Often the simple answer many people give is to make money and be profitable. This can be motivating for a team or organization for a time, but does not motivate long term. So to really align constraints and have a shared purpose across an organization there must be a shared set of values which both individuals and the organization are passionate about. Another way to think of it is, "We want everyone who is involved in a business to find it valuable." (Meaning and

Purpose. Management 3.0) That value which individuals place on what they do and why they exist, is their purpose.

So often a purpose turns into a mission statement created after hours of meetings in a conference room with a few high ranking individuals in the organization (and we wonder why people aren't motivated by it?). These "mission statements" fall short because they don't engage the core desires for the group and do not give a true sense of the purpose for the business to exist. Thus they become just another statement placed on a piece of paper and hung on an office wall or cubicle to be ignored.

So how to do this differently? It starts with creating a shared sense of value. This means the corporate values should not be laid out by the CTO, messaged through directors, driven by managers and followed by employees. Instead, value should be created collaboratively (See *Managing For Happiness On Value Stories*) (Appelo, 2016, 78). Leaders should be part of the process as they are part of the system, but they should not be the owners, drivers and dictators of the overall value. All of the individuals working together to define these values leads to a shared sense of purpose and vision for the organization.

However, defining an overall purpose is only part of the process as once purpose has been defined it must be communicated. This is a second place where many organizations make a critical mistake. Often organizations focus is on creating a written statement that a person can read, memorize and post on a wall. The question is, is that the way most individuals remember information? The answer is no. As Jurgen Appelo puts it, "Use stories, metaphors, pictures or video" for goal setting instead of a mission statement." (Management 3.0 in 50 Minutes, 35:00) The use of a story or images gives a much stronger connection to the message being communicated and creates something everyone can remember.

The last mistake that organizations make as they attempt to align constraints is forgetting the most simple step. Ensure everyone understands and is communicated the overall purpose. Jurgen Appelo's test is this, "You should be able to ask any person in the organization at any time, what is it we are trying to do." (Management 3.0 in 50 Minutes, 36:16) This goes not only for what the teams and organization are delivering, but what their purpose is as well. So often the message gets communicated to a few individuals or broadcast in a large meeting after 45 minutes of presentations and quickly forgotten. Thus the message must be communicated clearly and often to ensure it has been communicated well.

4.4. Develop Competence

Martie's fourth aspect is about developing competence both in individuals and the system. While delegating authority and allowing individuals within the system to shape it helps engagement, it does not mean that every individual will develop the skills necessary to perform well in their role or within the system. One of the key places managers can help is to create structures and opportunities which allow employees to grow both in knowledge and skills. Just a few examples are:

1. Self Development (Learning On Own)
2. Coaching / Mentoring (Grow Directed With Others)
3. Training / Certification (Grow Through Courses / Externally)
4. Culture / Socialization (Creating A Culture Of Knowledge Sharing)
5. Tools / Infrastructure (Tools The Help Growth)
6. Supervision / Control (Monitoring Growth)
7. Management (Driving Accountability of Growth and Guiding Growth) (Management 3.0 in 50 Minutes, 40:45)

These different types of learning can be applied and customized as necessary to a system which will improve engagement and understanding. As an example, take the concept of a career model. Career models can be one of the most stifling things to an individual's growth if it dictates too narrowly how an individual should grow. However, in my experience, creating career models that reflect both how growth occurs (learning basics, developing / learning depth, mastery (Shuhari, Wikipedia)) and guides employees towards the depth and breadth of their field, can positively transform the entire system. Seeing all of engineering having a clear understanding of how to progress in their job while having clarity on their specific roles (Dev, SDET, QA, etc) allowed individuals to understand how they fit within the system while having the flexibility to grow in a variety of directions. The career model kept employees from feeling like cogs in a machine (Management 1.0) while providing enough structure for them to feel secure, which was transformational in my organization.

4.5. Growing Structure

Martie's fifth aspect is similar to developing competence. Instead of growing individuals competence, the focus is on growing the structure and environment around those individuals. The goal is not to create another meeting that people should attend to fill their day and feel "connected" to their team members. Instead, it is about creating structure that improves the overall communication across the organization (Grow Structure, Slideshare). There are numerous ways of improving structure, however there are a few specific practices which have been shown to positively impact an organization's structure and engagement.

First, there is the concept of a community of practice. These are typically "a group of professionals who share a common interest..., a common concern, or a passion about a topic." (Appelo, 2016, 113) They are a self organizing group and it is their passion for the area that pulls them together. Some groups even reference these as "communities of passion". (Appelo, 2016, 113) The goal is always to share information and learn from others that span different teams, business units and even disciplines (Appelo, 2016, 113). This can improve the overall system by improving the communication and rapport across the different areas of an organization. The passion for the topic creates open communication and often forms new relationships that cross organizational boundaries. These benefits all comes from something as simple as getting a group of people together around a shared purpose.

The best example I've seen of a community of practice was started by a peer of mine. The organization had a distributed set of SDETs who reported into development managers with no management connection to the quality organization. My peer took the initiative to gather those who were either knowledgeable in automation, passionate about automation or both to start informal conversations on how the organization could be improved. There was no specific goal that had to be accomplished and no direct oversight from management. This allowed the group to grow and focus on the issues most relevant to those delivering automation. The group was able to effectively grow and drive standards and frameworks across the organization because it was comprised of individuals who understood what needed to be done and was empowered to impact the organization as they saw fit.

A second practice which grows structure is the simple concept of a huddle. This is an informal meetup for peers (note, not managers) to get together and make decisions. (Appelo, 2016, 114) The discussions may spawn more formal meetings or the group may simply come to a conclusion without needing any additional follow up. But, the key is creating an environment where individuals are encouraged to communicate to one another without requiring a manager to be there and make a final decision. These informal peer meetings increase the cross team communication and better enable decisions to be made.

These are just two examples of how to improve the overall communication, and there are many other ways (guilds, shared meals, etc) (Appelo, 2016, 121). All of these are focused on creating a better structure where individuals communicate freely with one another.

4.6. Improve Everything

Martie's last aspect is improving everything. Those familiar with agile will be familiar with the concept of improving everything (continuous improvement) as a process for growth. In Management 3.0 this concept is the same idea as in agile, but applied to a complex system. Improving everything is a great way to constantly grow, however it only works well with a few guidelines. First, if change is constant then the system ends up in chaos and never falls into a regular pattern. This creates stress within the system and often on individuals by violating their desire for stability. Second, if the desired change is not understood and measured, then very often there will either be the wrong kind of change or a lack of understanding if there was effective change. A simple model for examining how to improve things is as follows:

1. Anticipate (Looking Forward, Imagining, Understanding)
2. Adapt (Look Backwards and Respond to change)
3. Experiment (Explore and get feedback) (Management 3.0 In 50 Minutes, 13:30)

These three principles encapsulate many of the frameworks for making change and continual improvement (Plan/Do/Check/Act (Continuous Improvement Models Learning Resources), Fail Fast (Continuous Improvement Models), etc). The key is to start with understanding where you are going (Anticipate) and where you have been (Adapt). Once that is understood, the experimentation is almost ready to begin. The key for experimenting is to explore some questions before starting the action. For example, questions that should be asked are:

- What is the improvement desired?
- What change will be made?
- How will the outcome be measured and understood?
- How can quick feedback be gained?

Once those questions can be answered you have the guidelines and data to run the experiment. This should be done transparently and with respect to the system (no random psychological experiments on employees just to see how they react). It all starts with understanding where you are at (past / present), where you want to be (future) and how to measure the change has been effective and it leads to growing the organization in a positive way.

5. Conclusion

“Adapt what is useful, reject what is useless, and add what is specifically your own.” - Bruce Lee (Goodreads)

Thinking in terms of systems is a way of recognizing the complexities of an organization and working within it instead of trying to control it. It reminds us that while a system is made up of individuals, it is the interaction between those individuals and their environment which truly defines an organization. Yet, no theory or practice is ever perfect in quantifying the intricacies of any individual system. Nor will Martie's six aspects apply to every system equally. That is why we must always focus on Martie's sixth

aspect (Improve Everything) and mind the words of Bruce Lee. Use what works for your system! Build on it, improve it and make it better than ever before! For those pieces that don't apply, discard them without a thought. By continuing to seek holistic improvement and building upon what works for *your* system, you will find a path forward that grows both individuals and your organization each and every day.

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