

Managers Helping Themselves “Be Their Best”

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Abstract

Periodically managers need to pause and reflect on the extent to which they are maximizing their human capital and determine how it could further be strengthened. Effectively managing energy is crucial to managers in maximizing their human capital. Expressing appreciation and providing positive feedback to the individuals and teams with whom managers work will help to regenerate energy through the positive emotions they feel resonating from these individuals and teams. Application of the outward mindset assists managers in demonstrating their understanding and being sensitive to individuals and teams at work. Being optimistic and resilient also help managers to retain energy, utilize their human capital, and increase productivity. Through the effective use of emotional intelligence, managers can maintain motivational perspectives and aid in the effective use of their human capital. Strengths’ management makes managers acutely aware of the importance of focusing on their strengths and continuing to develop them while managing their weaknesses, rather than only trying to eliminate such weaknesses.

Keywords: human capital, managers, managing and generating human energy, resiliency, optimism, emotional intelligence, strengths management, outward mindset

The term human capital was coined in the 1960’s to represent the assets people possess—and can develop—to give added value to their job and organization. Human capital is not a fixed quantity; it can decrease or increase depending upon the manager’s efforts, experiences, developmental activities, and formal position. Managers periodically need to assess their human capital, reflect on their strengths and how to maximize their use, manage their weaknesses, and develop additional human capital for enhancing job performance and satisfaction.

Managing Energy

“Most of us respond to rising demands in the workplace by putting in longer hours, which inevitably takes a toll on us physically, mentally, and emotionally” (Schwartz & McCarthy, 2010, p. 61). Managers often try to “outwork” increased job demands, which results in an energy drain. In the long run, putting in more time is not the answer to effectively addressing an increased workload. The bottom line is that managers need to allocate their energy so that it is not depleted and consciously focus on how best to use it for maximizing productivity. As Kogon, Merrill, and Rinne (2015) note, “Extraordinary productive people consistently *recharge* [their energy]” (p. 15).

The capacity for work energy comes from four sources: (1) the body; (2) emotions; (3) mind; and (4) spirit. For each of these factors, energy can be expanded and renewed with “intentional practice” (Goleman, 1995). Managers need to identify situations that place considerable demand on their energy with limited payoff to their overall productivity and minimize or eliminate them.

A resurgence in energy can be enhanced physically by managers who have proper diets, exercise, and sleep. Meditation, which creates relaxation, can also play an important role in regenerating energy. Energy regeneration can also be addressed by taking periodic breaks throughout the work day to rest the mind. The point is that managers must condition themselves to relax in order to regenerate energy (Kogon, Merrill, & Rinne, 2015). Reducing interruptions by others and interruptions managers create on their own (e.g., hyperpaced tech-enabled activities such as emails, cell phone calls, texts, and tweets) are crucial to controlling depletion of energy (Kogon et al., 2015). Expressing appreciation to others, as well as receiving positive feedback from individuals, teams, and other groups with whom a manager works, are excellent sources for regenerating energy.

Regenerating Energy through Those With Whom the Manager Works

As Drucker¹ (2010) noted:

Very few people work by themselves and achieve results by themselves—a few great artists, a few great scientists, a few good athletes. Most people work with others and are effective with other people. This is true whether they are members of an organization or are independently employed. Managing yourself requires taking responsibility for relationships with others. (p. 26)

The concept of mindset is an excellent source of how a manager can consciously work with others, both individually and through teams, to generate and secure energy. Managers need to furnish those with whom they work positive feedback and praise for effective efforts and results. In return, managers will gain positive emotions and an “upbeat” feeling that regenerates their energy.

The Arbinger Institute (2016) provides an excellent source for the application of mindset by managers through the concepts of inward and outward mindsets. The outward mindset manager perceives the efforts in work completed by individuals and teams as crucially important and meaningful. The manager demonstrating an outward mindset provides positive feedback

through praise and gives the individuals with whom he/she works specific feedback on their performance. The outward mindset represents the manager coaching people in a positive manner to help them improve and effectively meet challenges which may be difficult for them. Application of the outward mindset results in managers being regenerated through the positive feelings they receive from those with whom they work.

The inward mindset manager is egotistical, self-centered, and has little concern for others in the work environment. The inward mindset manager has very little, or no, consideration of the wants, needs, and psychological support of others with whom she/he works. Positive feelings are not received by the manager, and energy is not recognized. Figure 1 represents a comparison between the inward and outward mindsets as applied to managers.

Inward	Outward
1. Strives to control people	1. Strives to cause staff and others to be fully responsible and engaged in work
2. Often blames others when things go wrong	2. Takes responsibility for actions of oneself and staff in the work environment
3. Is narcissistic	3. Displays modesty toward staff and others
4. Consistently defends one's position	4. Works collaboratively with staff to solicit their opinions and collectively develop the best solutions for problems
5. Interactions with staff and others focus on protecting oneself	5. Interactions with staff and others with a focus on building positive relationships with and among people
6. Uses behaviors that sometimes try to manipulate staff and others in an attempt to improve one's own image	6. Strives to facilitate “committed behaviors” collectively with staff and others to improve work produced and achieve goals
7. Shows minimal regard for how to create “collective results” among staff and others	7. Is motivated about how to work with staff and others collaboratively and for others to collaborate with each other and oneself
8. Views staff and others in a context as to how they can help oneself achieve goals	8. Focuses on the needs and challenges of staff and others to create a work environment that prompts individual and team cooperation
9. Assumes that to simply change one's behavior is the best way to enhance the work productivity of staff and others	9. Understands changing how oneself views staff and others is more beneficial to everyone in comparison to merely focusing on changing behaviors toward staff and others

Inward	Outward
10. Focuses on how to make oneself “look good” for work produced, even at the expense of staff and others	10. Sees, thinks, and works on how to improve job performance through collaboration with staff and others that incorporates their needs, wants, and gains them recognition
11. Often creates competition between staff and causes them to work independently of each other	11. Focuses on the staff as an entity having a collective belief of working with each other for the common good of the work unit and organization
12. Focuses mainly on the job responsibilities of oneself	12. Assists staff and others in identifying their interests and being motivated to successfully achieve what they need for the betterment of the work and organization
13. Focuses on getting the work “out the door” with little identity for its benefits	13. Focuses on the meaning and purposefulness of the work and the positive impact it can have on the work unit and organization
14. Is inclined to step in, take over, and direct the work of staff and others when not pleased	14. Helps staff and others understand what they need to do; provides developmental training, when needed; and furnishes the necessary resources
15. Creates conflict that keeps staff embattled with each other (divide and conquer for control)	15. Focuses on preventing and resolving conflict among staff and others
16. Focuses on personal and professional goals and behaviors to protect and advance oneself	16. Focuses on the goals of the work unit and organization, and objectives and behaviors that take staff and others into consideration
17. Advances one’s own agenda even at the expense of staff	17. Focuses on working together with staff and others for “collective” results to benefit the work unit and organization
18. Identifies what can be taken from others to achieve objectives for oneself	18. Identifies what can be given to help staff and others successfully achieve their work objectives

Inward	Outward
19. Oftentimes tries to control the behavior of staff and others for self-benefit through power, authority, and fear	19. Relinquishes power and authority to empower staff's and others' abilities to be responsible and accountable for their work

Figure 1. Comparing inward and outward mindsets for managers toward staff and others.

Optimism and Resilience

Optimism helps managers to utilize their human capital by being motivated to “be their best” at work. Optimism prompts managers to perform effectively, even when the job challenges are monumental, and helps them to have the resilience needed to work through difficult situations when things go wrong (Seligman, 2002).

Resilience is composed of four characteristics. They are: (1) managers clearly accepting the harsh realities facing them in their jobs, including defeats; (2) finding meaning and learning from situations that go wrong; (3) having the uncanny ability to improvise and make do with whatever resources are at hand, as limited as they may be, to be effective; and (4) unwavering optimism (Coutu, 2010).

Facing a harsh reality means a manager is realistic—but not pessimistic—about the difficulties and barriers that sometimes exist to accomplish an important task or goal at work. Such a manager creates an optimistic and positive attitude that allows for enduring and moving forward when things go wrong and not letting a defeat have a lasting effect on motivation. Remember that optimism is motivational and breeds a “can do” attitude, whereas pessimism leads to a lost sense of control and a “cannot do” attitude.

The outward mindset manager does not view himself/herself as a victim in any difficult situation. Rather, she/he views the situation as a learning experience and is not overwhelmed by a defeat. When things go wrong, it is important for the manager to improvise and have alternative plans of action. Being resourceful during difficult times means the manager is constantly looking for immediate and additional resources by networking and even “calling in” favors. Throughout such times, the manager remains unequivocally optimistic.

Emotional Intelligence

“Emotional intelligence is an assortment of mental abilities and skills that can help you to successfully manage both yourself and the demands of others” (Walton, 2012, p. 3). Emotional intelligence stresses: (1) knowing yourself; (2) controlling emotions through self-management; (3) showing consideration, empathy, and feelings for others to build positive relationships; and (4) effectively using social skills to build an awareness that aids positive interactions and relationships with others (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009). Specific explanations for each of these four areas are:

- (1) *Knowing yourself* stresses being cognitively aware of your mood, and thoughts about a given mood at a given time, to help manage behavior. Specifically, when examining a negative mood (e.g., anger), it is usually best to reflect before reacting, unless eminent danger exists. It is important to have positive “self-talk” to get the mind out

- of a negative mood. Think positive thoughts to prompt a positive mood (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009).
- (2) *Controlling emotions through self-management* is dependent upon the manager's acute awareness of the emotions for the purpose of remaining flexible and striving for positive behaviors. For some situations, the manager's emotions can prompt an adrenaline rush that instantaneously results in a behavior which may not be appropriate at that time. "Real results come from putting your momentary needs on hold to pursue larger, more important goals" (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009, p. 33).
 - (3) *Showing consideration, empathy, and feelings for others* is building on positive relationships. Relationship management is the manager's ability to use emotions to interact successfully with others in the work environment, both individually and with teams. This stresses building positive relationships that bond the manager with others at work. In order to do so, the manager strives to understand the wants, needs, and emotions of others. Effective listening is a paramount skill to building effective relationships (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009).
 - (4) *Effectively using social skills to build awareness* to accurately read the emotions of other people in the work environment and understand what is actually driving their behaviors. This requires the manager to attempt to "think and feel" as the other person does by putting him/herself in the situation of the other person. (In essence, this is known as role reversal). Being an astute observer and listener is important, as well as reading nonverbal behaviors and observing each person to understand the context for her/his reactions in a given situation. "To be socially aware, you [the manager] have to spot and understand people's emotions while you're right in the middle of it—a contributing, yet astutely aware, member of the interaction" (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009, p. 39).

Managers need to recognize, understand, and acknowledge their negative thoughts and feelings and then develop the "emotional agility" to move past them. The process of emotional agility includes accepting the negative emotions, analyzing what situation prompted them, and then being agile enough to switch to positive actions to produce a solution to address the situation. This managing of negative emotions so that the result is a productive solution to a situation is called "workability" (David & Congeton, 2015, pp. 125-126).

Goleman (1995) identified that individuals have two minds: (1) the rational mind that is logical and (2) the emotional mind that is impulsive and sometimes illogical. Because of the potential for the emotional mind to sometimes be illogical, it is imperative for managers to pause and reflect before letting their emotional mind's thoughts be expressed either verbally or nonverbally.

Strengths' Management

"Excellence can be achieved by focusing on strengths and managing weaknesses, not through the elimination of weaknesses" (Clifton & Nelson, 1992, p. 11). This axiom represents the goal of strengths' management that emphasizes managers utilizing their strengths to achieve excellence. As Rath and Conchie (2008) note, "the most effective leaders are always investing in strengths" (p. 2).

Rath and Conchie (2008) encourage managers to take the most recent edition of the leadership specific version of the Clifton Strengths Finders to better identify and understand their strengths. A manager's strengths usually are represented by those tasks for which great satisfaction is realized. In essence, managers get positive psychological rewards in the form of satisfaction when exhibiting their strengths. They also are more effective and productive. Managers should continually nurture and develop their strengths, rather than assuming that such strengths will always be strong and need no further attention. Rath (2007, p. 9) notes that managers “can be a lot more of who [they] already are” by focusing on continued strengths' development.

Rath (2007) found that staff members who had the opportunity to focus on their strengths in their jobs were six times more likely to be meaningfully engaged in work than staff members that did not have this opportunity. Thus, managers applying the logic of strengths' management to those they supervise via matching staff members' strengths with work assignments, will increase the productivity of each person as well as the total work unit.

Summary

Managers occasionally must pause to reflect on what constitutes their human capital and how they can maximize its use. It is crucial for them to ascertain how to maintain a high-energy level and be able to regenerate their energy from time-to-time. Utilizing an outward mindset will aid managers in working effectively with others, which will enhance their performance and, in turn, result in positive emotional feedback for the managers to regenerate their energy. Effective managers are resilient and remain optimistic, even in difficult and challenging times. Being optimistic is motivational and helps maximize human capital.

Through the application of emotional intelligence, managers are able to deal with their emotions more objectively and effectively, and be more productive. Through the application of emotional intelligence, managers significantly contribute to people in their work environment. Lastly, it is important for managers to focus on utilizing and continually developing their strengths while managing their weaknesses, rather than focusing solely on eliminating the weaknesses.

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