Healthcare

The Journey towards Self Managed Teams

1. Introduction

Management is not easy never mind self management. Teams need lots of support in the early stages of the journey towards self management and ongoing assistance thereafter.

Ask the HR Manager or Director in most medical device or pharmaceutical manufacturing sites and they will agree that they would like to increase the extent of "self management" on the shop floor, in laboratories, in maintenance functions and in many other areas. Self management is seen to aid employee retention, stimulate people and help to maintain competitiveness in what is now a high cost economy. At first glance, any team which has no "boss" may appear to be "self managed". In the same way, any team with an autocratic boss may appear "managed". In reality, both perceptions may be false. This article explores the concept of self management and outlines some of the responsibilities and activities which teams take on as they make the journey towards that elusive goal.

2. What is management?

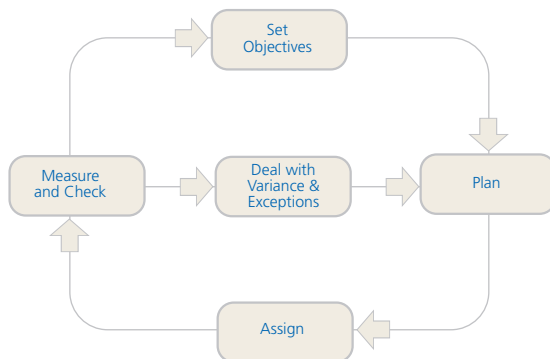Figure 1 describes a simple management process.

Figure 1. Simple Management Process

The main activities involved in managing shop floor and other manufacturing teams are listed below:

- Setting objectives
- Providing feedback on performance against objectives
- Developing processes which are capable of achieving the objectives
- Developing and maintaining a corrective action process
- Developing skill and motivation levels
- Conflict management
- Hiring, firing and appraisals

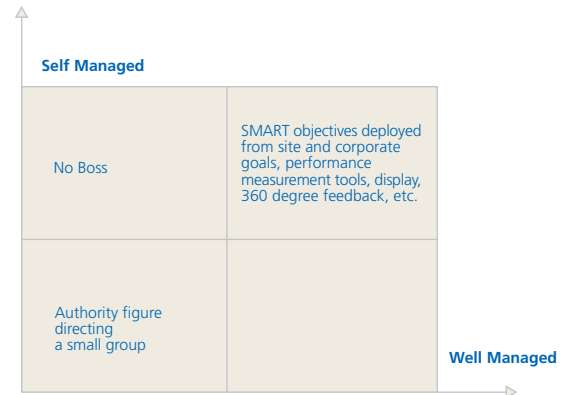The matrix in Figure 2 can be used to assess the extent of self management in a team:

Figure 2. Self Management Matrix

Many teams could not accurately be positioned in the bottom right quadrant, never mind the top right! Given that many Managers struggle to deal with the tasks outlined above even when they can allocate all their time to them, it is clear that a team whose main purpose is to produce catheters or solid dose remedies will need to be well organised and supported if it is to take over these responsibilities. In truth, most teams are on a journey from somewhere in the bottom left quadrant to somewhere in the top right.

3. Some activities of "Self Managed" Teams

"Performance Management" Roles

If a team is to progress along the journey towards self management, team members will need to take over responsibility for activities which in the past were seen to rest with Managers. One way of doing this is to appoint "role holders". For example, a "Productivity" role holder might take responsibility for measuring Overall Equipment Effectiveness (OEE) and analysing losses. Another team member might analyse causes of rejects while a third might carry out daily housekeeping or 5S audits. Some roles require more analytical skill than others and it is important that the right people take on the right roles.

Setting Objectives

Any good management process is initiated by the setting of time bounded improvement objectives, e.g. improve Volume on Time from 95% now to 97.5% in six months time to 99% in 12 months time. The objectives of any team should be "deployed" from site objectives which in turn were deployed from corporate objectives. The deployment

process (often described as "Hoshin Planning" or "cascading") should include top down ("What do we need to achieve?") and bottom up ("What is possible?") elements. A team which plays a significant role in setting its own objectives is likely to feel a strong sense of ownership and empowerment. Most teams will require a lot of assistance from support personnel as they go through the process of setting objectives in this way.

Driving the Improvement Process

Any deployment process should generate Improvement ("How will we achieve a step change?") as well as Sustaining ("How will we maintain performance and achieve incremental improvements?") activities. Thus, Improvement initiatives are generated as part of the cascading process. However, step change opportunities can also arise from the Sustaining activities of self managed teams. When this occurs it is a signal that the team feels a high level of ownership for its objectives. In business sectors where the key to long term survival is to improve faster than your competitors, this ownership is a priceless asset.

Managing Corrective Actions

A key aspect of any management process is the capacity to respond to variances and exceptions (see Figure 1). When objectives are not achieved, action items must be assigned to individuals if remedies are to be found and implemented. Once actions have been assigned, somebody needs to ensure that they are completed, preferably on time! In self directed teams, one individual often takes responsibility for managing this corrective action process. Simple tools like an "Actions Log" are essential. Again, support personnel are likely to play a role in providing these tools.

Continuous Skill Building

To achieve real flexibility, all team members need to be multi-skilled, e.g. each Operator in a production team may be able to do 80% of operational tasks and may also have skills in areas like Information Systems, Total Productive Management (TPM) and Theory of Constraints (TOC). Very often one team member will take responsibility for developing a skills matrix, training records and training plans for the team.

Communication

To achieve its potential on any given day, a team needs to be well co-ordinated. This can only be achieved via good communication. For example, a self managed production team might use the following communication mechanisms:

- A start of shift huddle to review yesterday's performance and plan for the achievement of today's objectives
- A whiteboard displaying which line items need to be completed today and a projected completion time for each one
- A weekly meeting to review the week's performance and plan longer term improvements
- Quarterly presentations to site management on recent performance, future objectives and help required.

4. Conclusion

Management is not easy never mind self management. Teams need lots of support in the early stages of the journey towards self management and ongoing assistance thereafter. In truth very few teams in any sphere of activity achieve total self management. Most progress is gradually towards the top right corner of the top right quadrant in Figure 2 but never actually reach it. The rewards of increased self management are significant:

- Employees will be more stimulated
- They will feel more ownership and empowerment
- They will be easier to retain
- Support resources will be able to dedicate their time to strategic initiatives
- As a result of all this, the organisation will improve more rapidly and be more competitive.

BSM is a leading management and technology consulting company. We help clients achieve significant improvement by implementing sustainable process, people and e-technology solutions.

If you are interested in promoting self managed teams within your organisation, please contact:

Maurice Hannon
Re-engineering Director

E: maurice.hannon@bsm.ie
T: + 353 91 746900
F: + 353 91 746959