A Technologist Looks at Management

Steve Johnson

Transmeta Corp.

scj@transmeta.com

Why have Management?

- Management is:
  - Expensive
  - Slow
  - Frequently wrong
  - Often very irritating to workers
- The answer to this question differs
  - Across industries
  - Across companies
  - Across departments
  - Across individuals

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Introduction

- Management is a people process, not a technical process.
  - Different skills
  - Different kind of satisfaction
- Wide variety of behavior patterns
- Differences make us uncomfortable
  - Believe they are, really, just like us
  - Thus, have difficulty communicating
- This explains most management problems

Solutions

- Know thyself
  - . . . especially your biases
  - . . . especially your hot buttons
- Study other people's values and behavior
- Validate your insights
  - Communication
  - Observation
  - Experimentation
- Works for both managers and employees

Outline of Talk

- Introduction (above)
- Individual Differences
- Know Thyself/Communication
- Management Models
- Specific problems
- Summary

Individual Differences

First miracle of managment

There are other people who love to do what you hate to do, and they are very good at it!

Working with the Miracle

- You must
  - respect others
  - communicate with others
- Look for win/win situations
- You can learn to do this better

Model Individual Differences

- Understand Yourself
- Understand Others
- Various models
  - Myers-Briggs
  - Enneagram
  - even astrology

Validate your Model

- Does it predict others' behavior?
- What are its limits?
- Does it suggest useful ways of avoiding or resolving conflict?
- Can you personally use it effectively?

Goals of this Process

- Be open to differences in opinion and style
- View openness as something you can learn
- Easier to change yourself through understanding than to change others
- I personally have benefitted from the Enneagram writings (Riso, Palmer)

How People Program

- Understand the underlying problem
- Find every possible bug
- Only do interesting projects
- Only do things useful to others
- Want to be successful
- Program "special" jobs, with style
- Want to do it my way, now!
- Work together as a team
- Do it the right way!

We Can Abstract These Styles

- Thinkers
  - Probably most of us
  - Success = understanding, analysis
- Feelers
  - Focus on other people
  - Success = meeting people's needs, looking good
- Act-ers
  - Focus on actions, not thoughts or feelings
  - Success = activity, completion

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Inter-group Perceptions

- Thinkers see:
  - Feelers as indecisive
  - Act-ers as stupid
- Feelers see:
  - Thinkers as cold
  - Act-ers as insensitive
- Act-ers see:
  - Thinkers as timid
  - Feelers as weak

"What are you doing tonight?"

- "I think I'll go to the movies"
- "I feel like going to the movies"
- "I'm going to the movies"

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Thinker Working for an Act-er:

Act-er Boss:

"Give me antigravity by Thursday"

Thinker Employee:

"That's impossible!"

Act-er Boss:

"I won't stand for this insubordination!"

Feeler Working for a Thinker

Thinker Boss:

"We need to rewrite the program in JAVA."

Feeler Employee:

"Nobody in the team knows JAVA."

Thinker Boss:

"That doesn't matter. They can learn it."

Act-er Working for a Feeler

Feeler Boss:

"I've called a meeting to redefine the product"

Act-er Employee:

"I've already rewritten it"

Feeler Boss:

"Well, we need to have a meeting anyway"

Scenario

Mr. Feeler, the boss, wants to succeed in shipping the product by the target date.

He has given management and customers his word that the job will be on time.

Ms. Thinker has encountered technical problems that were unanticipated.

The job will not be done on time.

Usually (Boss' view)

Mr. Feeler is upset, even if it doesn't show.

He takes Ms. Thinker's news as a personal attack.

He is upset that she doesn't appreciate how important this is.

He believes that she promised on time delivery (she didn't).

So he also thinks she is a liar.

Usually (Employee's view)

Ms. Thinker thinks the boss is a jerk.

She thinks he promised things that are impossible.

She thinks he refused to listen when she tried to talk about the risks.

She thinks he implied that she was not smart enough to be done on time (he didn't).

She sees him as acting wounded instead of trying to solve the problem.

Ideally

Mr. Feeler takes the time to understand the technical risks

Ms. Thinker taks the time to make sure he understands

He is up front about the risks with management and customers (hard for him)

She realizes that he is spending time with management and customers so she can work

Ideally (cont.)

When problems arise:
- Employee, Boss, higher management and customers all have relevant information
- Can weigh options in the presence of information
  - Slip schedule
  - Drop Features
  - Commit more resources
  - Take another technical path
- Larger chance of taking action early enough to help

Personal Experience

Many years ago, I got hold of a competitive analysis written by a prospective customer who had decided, on the basis of a well-designed benchmark, that our product was 3X worse than the one that they chose. Thinking that my management needed to have this information, I made about 15 copies, attached a cover letter, and sent it to all the upper managment in my organization. 3 hours later, I was on the carpet in my boss' boss' office. "What's the matter? Aren't you a team player?"

Analysis

- I'm a Thinker. I saw our business as an objective matter of building good products, this competitive analysis as provided feedback on how we needed to improve our product.
- My boss' boss was a Feeler. He saw his job as building a team. He saw my memo as distructive to the morale of the team.
- As a thinker, I was clueless as to how my actions would appear to others.
- As a feeler, he was clueless as to how I could possibly justify such a distructive act.

Individual Styles

- Good managers can be Thinkers, Act-ers or Feelers
- So can bad managers
- But they will be good, and bad, in different ways
- Knowing this helps you on the job
- The key: do they understand, respect, and communicate with people who are different.

Communication / Know Thyself

- I consider this the same topic
- The biggest barrier to communication is our own personal baggage:
  - Seeing other people as being like ourselves
  - Seeing ourselves as inadequate
  - Fearing the opinions of others

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Experience, the Teacher

- How we think, feel, and act are affected by our life experiences
- Especially the early childhood (preverbal) experiences
- Especially the unpleasant early childhood experiences
  - There is something wrong with me
  - The world is a dangerous place
  - You must do as I say

For Example

- Someone ignored by their parents may need much support and encouragement
- Someone whose parents expected them to excel may have trouble dealing with failure
- Someone whose parents were strict may resist authority

How Can I Know This?

- Be open to lots of possibilities
- Try different things and see what works
- Understand your own limitations, weaknesses
  - Gives you compassion for others
  - Helps you forgive their weaknesses

Look for Hot Buttons

- Hot Buttons -- overreaction to events
- In areas where we are sensitive
  - We have trouble controlling our behavior
  - We have trouble accepting other ways of behaving
  - We communicate poorly
  - We make other people uncomfortable
  - Other people communicate poorly with us

Example

- I worked with someone who needed a lot of respect from others.
- If he did not get a constant stream of reassurance from management, he became mistrustful to the point of paranoia.
- I learned to constantly find things to say to reassure him
  - They were true--I wasn't lying
  - But most people didn't need them said so often

Hot Button Behavior Modes

- Fight: Our problems are their fault
- Flight: Evade, avoid, bitch, gossip, quit
- Freeze: "just do my job", turn off

Another Way

- Know thy Hot Buttons
- Become aware of your discomfort
- Tolerate it
- Increase communication, even if uncomfortable
- See the other person's point of view
- Forgive them their faults

Dealing with Conflict

"The enemy has a secret.
The secret is ourselves.
Our destiny is working with this."
Brian Swimme

Personal Plan Of Action

- First, recognize that there are issues and you own them
- Become aware of your own biases and prejudices
  - Reading
  - Group Work
  - Therapy
  - Feedback by mentors

Communication Techniques

- Active (reflective) listening
- "I" statements, not "You" statements
- Take responsibility for your own position
- Understand gender and cultural issues

The Goal is Awareness

- With awareness, you have choices
- Without awareness, you don't

How Bosses Manage

- Understand what the company needs
- Anticipate trouble and head it off
- Plan for the future.
- Help my employees be productive
- Make our group (and me) successful
- Bring out the special talents of each employee
- Tell people what to do
- Make the operation run smoothly
- Set high standards

All these are Needed, but:

- Bosses do what they are comfortable with
- They may not be aware of their style
- Employees may
  - need something different
  - want something different
  - thus, misinterpret what is offered

Company Culture

- Bosses, and companies, have different cultures
- Very influenced by the top people
  - Honesty
  - Sexual harassment
  - Quality
  - Visionary
- Often, cultures are Thinker, Feeler, Act-er
- Disfunctional Companies = Disfunctional Families

Scapegoats

- Companies, and Families, sometimes nominate a single person to be “bad”
- They express the “bad-ness” of others, so they can feel good
- When the “bad” person leaves, it can be very disruptive

Example

- One co-worker spent 10 minutes every staff meeting for many months complaining about our Sys Admins--not enough of them, not competent, etc.
- When he went on vacation, we were all relieved to be spared his “whining”
- But before the meeting was over, several of us (including me) had complained about our Sys Admin situation.

Management is Difficult

- Success is invisible, failure obvious
- Power is illusory
- Personal satisfaction is difficult to get
- Must bend to many strong pressures
- A host of nasty, common employee problems
  - Divorce
  - Illness
  - Addiction

Performance Reviews

- Managers hate and fear these.
- Feelers and Act-ers hate them because they have to think and get verbal.
- Thinkers hate them because the fear employees may get angry or upset
- Communication styles are critical here, especially if the news is bad
- Role play training is useful, where employees get to play manager

Performance Reviews (cont.)

- Realize when you are getting your review that your boss is probably
  - Uptight
  - Not at his best in communicating
  - May try to gloss over the uncomfortable topics quickly
- You may not take understand bad news the first time

Summary: Do You Want to Manage?

- Recognize that it is a skill
  - Different from technical skills
  - It can be learned.
- Look for opportunities outside of work to develop skills
  - Church
  - PTA
  - Professional societies
  - Take courses, read books
  - Know thyself and others

General Books

Deborah Tannen, “Talking from Nine to Five”

A wonderfully insightful book on how we talk to others on the job, and how culture and gender patterns affect communication.

Robin Casajarian, “Forgiveness”

A beautiful and wide-ranging book-- forgiveness is not just for big things, and is done primarily for our own health and development.

Enneagram Books

Don Riso, “Personality Types”

Another Enneagram reference, focusing on how individual personality types behave when stressed or expansive.

Helen Palmer, “The Enneagram In Love and Work”

A good description of the nine basic Enneagram types and how different types interact in intimate and work relationships.

Another Enneagram Book

Michael J. Goldberg, “Getting your Boss’s Number”

Specifically about discovering your type and your boss’s type, and understanding the resulting patterns and problems.

Software Development Books

De Marco, “Controlling Software Projects”

One of my favorite books on technical management.

DeMarco and Lister, “Peopleware”

Wide-ranging book on everything from private offices to meetings. You will wish your boss had read this book.

Another Software Development Book

- McCarthy, “Dynamics of Software Development”
  - Building effective programming teams and managing them.