Do we still need managers



There is currently a lot of talk about leaderless or autonomous or self-managed or empowered teams; all this begs the question, “do we still need managers?”

First, a quick look at what is expected of a manager through the ages

Henry Fayol in the late 1800’s defined 6 Management Functions:

1. **Forecasting**: determining objectives in advance and the methods to achieve them
2. **Organising**: establishing a structure of authority for all work
3. **Commanding**: making decisions, issuing orders and directives
4. **Coordinating**: interrelating all sectors of the organisation
5. **Controlling**: identifying weaknesses and errors by controlling feedback
6. **Reporting**: informing hierarchy through reports, records and inspections

Henry Mintzberg in the 1980’s defined 10 Management Roles:

1. **Figurehead**: the manager performs ceremonial and symbolic duties as head of the organisation
2. **Leader**: fosters a proper work atmosphere and motivates and develops subordinates

3. **Liaison**: develops and maintains a network of external contacts to gather information
4. **Monitor**: gathers internal and external information relevant to the organisation
5. **Disseminator**: transmits factual and value based information to subordinates
6. **Spokesperson**: communicates to the outside world on performance and policies
7. **Entrepreneur**: designs and initiates change in the organisation
8. **Disturbance handler**: deals with unexpected events and operational breakdowns
9. **Resources allocator**: controls and authorises the use of organisational resources
10. **Negotiator**: participates in negotiation activities with other organisations and individuals

Philippe Rodet suggests in one of his books that we need managers who:

1. Ensure that everyone can find meaning in their work
2. Set ambitious but realistic objectives
3. Know how to thank and encourage team members
4. Give autonomy and leaves space for creativity
5. Are perceived as being “reasonable” in terms of criticisms and compliments
6. Recognise personal errors

The three examples above correspond (more or less) to three clearly different social and industrial periods where those who are “managed” have evolved from low paid and uneducated “workers” to educated and better paid “employees” to well-educated, reasonably well-paid “actors” in their respective companies.

And the management “style” has evolved from command & control,

to participative to empowering.

Let’s look at the question from a team’s point of view; “what does a team need to be successful?”

Most “what does a team need to be successful?” lists look something like this (far from exhaustive) list:

1. Mission
    - The team needs to know why it exists and its global objectives
2. Deliverables
    - The mission needs to be broken down into bite size concrete deliverables
3. Competencies
    - The team needs to have (or have access to) the competences & skills needed to realise the deliverables
4. Organisation
    - The team needs processes, procedures, ways of working etc. that allow the interactions necessary to get the work done
5. Resources
    - The team will need access to resources (materials, time, money, etc.) necessary to carry out their tasks
6. Performance indicators
    - The team needs to know how they are performing (on time, on cost, at quality, etc.) in order to monitor and adapt their priorities
7. Recognition and Rewards
    - The team needs to be paid, rewarded for going the extra mile, take holidays, etc.
8. Engagement
    - The team needs to be motivated, energised and enthused by the work they are doing
9. Relationships
    - There needs to be a certain degree of sharing,

helping, supporting, etc. amongst team members

10. Environment
    - The team needs to be aware of changes in company strategy, changes within other teams, new technology, etc. in order to adapt their procedures and ways of working

I remember reading some Harvard research that said about 60% of the variance in how well a team actually performs is determined by the basic conditions that have been put into place – team objectives, the right people, team organisation, resources, meaningful work, etc.

The same research said that about 30% is down to how the team interacts and the final 10% is down to how the manager works with the team

So, after all that do we still need managers? And if the answer is yes, what do think they should be doing?