

Managing in the New Millennium

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- *At a recent conference in the UK, a group of managers discussed some of the new ideas in management which are currently emerging from best practice organisations. Their discussions led to predictions of five powerful ideas which delegates believed would emerge as challenges for firms in the New Millennium.*

At first glance these suggestions might seem a bit crazy. Yet there are already signs that they are taking hold in long-term thinking, successful firms who have learned to be flexible, proactive managers of increasingly dynamic and unpredictable business environments. Take a look at them and see what you think.

THE FIVE POWERFUL IDEAS: HOW DO YOU MEASURE UP?

1. Employees set their own wages / wages are set according to individual needs:

The shift towards empowerment of employees is already taking place in most successful organisations. Responsibility for quality, devolved decision-making, and employee autonomy are already well known. The obvious next step is to increase financial responsibility and accountability throughout the firm.

Employees will begin to take control of their own financial management. Trust-based organisations will ensure wages are set by individuals in the interests of both themselves and the organisation. Abuse of such a system will be minimised as organisations develop genuine systems of shared values, co-ordinating behaviour through shared ideals and vision.

2. Hierarchies re-appear but are based around wise and trusted leaders:

The hierarchical organisation, based on a minimum number of levels (varying according to industry and complexity), will re-assert itself as the most efficient model of business organisation. Leadership and organisational mobility, however, will be based on wisdom and trust. Leaders will hold authority based on the trust and the genuine goodwill of subordinates. Leadership will be based on wisdom, respect, experience and ability.

3. The notion of "customer" is abolished from business practice; there is movement towards "partners in a business process":

Already the concept of 'preferred customer' has surfaced in some industries: that is, a customer who is committed to an honest partnership with the supplier. The development of associations of consumers and producers working in partnership will ensure the ongoing collaboration necessary to create Total Quality products and services.

Partnerships will be based on shared values and beliefs about innovation, new product development, effective use of technology and environmental sustainability.

4. Virtual Reality technology leads to a shift in culture towards the "virtual organisation":

The virtual organisational model is already emerging. For example, in the Information Technology sector some firms have 'paperless' or 'deskless' offices which act as meeting points for employees who essentially work from home, use portable technology, and may never even meet the boss! Organisations based around 'virtual interfaces' will appear mediated via technology. Meetings will occur across the globe, people will shop and work from home. However, we may also see the development of new psychological and social ills caused by increased isolation of employees. Companies will have to adapt to these new technologies and practices.

5. What is powerful idea number five?

The fifth powerful idea is that there will be at least one more powerful idea dominating management beyond 2000, and future success depends on identifying it now! The successful firms will be those who proactively look for the 'next wave of change' and whose organisations are flexible enough to adapt to the changes, even to anticipate them.

The extent to which these changes will really appear is, of course, a matter for speculation. The managers who discussed these ideas at the conference agreed on one thing in particular: the signs that these changes are on the way are already to be seen if one is prepared to look. Perhaps they will become self-fulfilling prophecies! Only time will tell - and we have less than five years to go! What is your company doing in order to capture the powerful ideas for beyond 2000?

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