

A story about Mountains

Part 3 - Management

The importance of good management for organisations and companies.

In part 1 and part 2 of 'A story about mountains' you can read how organisations or companies can be compared to mountains. In part 3 we will use this metaphor to demonstrate the importance of 'good management' and we will also indicate what can be understood by 'good management'.

The purpose of management is to provide structure to organisations and companies by means of organising people, processes and procedures. Hence, managers are responsible for organising, training and monitoring the staff. For that reason, management has a direct and important impact on the functioning and performance of organisations and companies.

In our story, management is the feature that stands for how things are structured and governed on your mountain. You could also say that management is similar to the infrastructure you develop on your mountain. Because infrastructure largely determines the 'usability' of mountains to man. Imagine you have a steep mountain peak, where no tracks or shelter can be found, which is completely covered with dense bushes and trees. It goes without saying that on this peak only few (organised) activities can take place. In such an instance, 'management' still needs to make an entrance on the mountain.

The first indications of a kind of infrastructure that you will find on a mountain consist of tracks and paths that develop in a natural way. When these paths are often used, they create a network of forest trails, facilitating the activities that take place on that mountain. When these trails concern a small hillock, and when activity is low, this is probably a suitable infrastructure and the infrastructure will be sufficient. For example, on a barren mountain you probably will not need much more than some trails, at least if your activity is limited to shepherds herding and tending to their sheep.

However, if you get more 'traffic' on your mountain, and activities become more diverse, this is clearly no longer sufficient. If the appropriate infrastructure is missing, just relying on the 'natural' network of tracks, some tracks will be missing and false tracks will also exist. Sooner or later, these tracks will affect the increased activity on the mountain. False tracks will lead people in the wrong direction, getting them off track. Missing tracks will get people who are not familiar with the environment of the mountain lost. Therefore, it is important to adapt your infrastructure to the size of your mountain and to the kind and the amount of traffic it has to bear. Furthermore, if your ambition is to grow the traffic on your mountain and to attract more people, you will undoubtedly need to invest in infrastructure.

A well-managed company or organisation can thus be compared to a mountain where you will find a customised infrastructure, adapted to the number of people and movements taking place. On such a mountain, when traffic becomes denser, the necessary space to expand the additional infrastructure also needs to be provided. Beautiful walking and cycling trails, level roads and smooth highways can complete the picture depending on what you desire to accomplish. Of course all these roads and paths need to connect to each other in a logical way. No one has any use for a bridge over a small river without any connecting roads or paths!

When there is traffic, you will also need some traffic rules. Of course, no traffic rules are needed for a small network of winding forest paths, where everyone knows his or her way. But once a more

ambitious infrastructure has been put into place and there is more substantial traffic, traffic rules will become necessary. In companies and organisations, you could say that processes and procedures are comparable to these traffic rules. And it is better to have them adapted to your organisation and its objectives. In the same way traffic rules need to accommodate for infrastructure and the traffic they want to regulate. Otherwise you might end up in a traffic chaos.

Thinking of traffic rules, perhaps, also makes you think of road safety education. It is not sufficient just to issue and implement traffic rules. You also need to explain them to those participating in the traffic. Unfortunately, 'road safety education' is not on every manager's mind! A lack of education often slows down the traffic and leads to accidents. That is what happens when the rules are misinterpreted and when people do not respect the traffic laws.

When your traffic reaches a certain size, it is appropriate to your road safety education to evaluate people and reward them with driving licences. When applicable, these licenses can be issued for different levels or categories. Furthermore, even when licenses are given, it is equally important to ensure that people know and follow the traffic rules and that you will enforce them. It makes no sense to issue rules that remain without consequence. How often does it happen that the introduction of a new system does not provide the benefits it promised and that investments do not pay off? How often is it because the proper procedures and processes are not followed correctly? This is certainly the case when these 'traffic laws' have not been taught well enough, when they are insufficiently defined or do not exist at all.

A manager should also be well informed of what is happening in 'traffic'. Measuring is knowing and the need for concrete and reliable information to managers can be compared with the importance of traffic statistics. The information gathered allows you to adapt your infrastructure where it is needed. For instance, you might have to change a junction into a roundabout because there are too many accidents and traffic is slowed down due to bad management of the crossing traffic. The correct data, coupled with good statistics, enables managers to make a thorough analysis of situations. This helps them to take wise decisions, improving the overall performance. Or in case of the mountain: modifying the 'infrastructure' and the 'traffic rules' appropriately will allow for more and faster traffic on the mountain, while reducing the number of accidents drastically.

Finally, good communication is important. As was mentioned in part 2, good communication is necessary to generate a nice and sunny climate on the mountain and make people happy. Ideally, this climate has the sun in the zenith, so that no one is blinded by the glare of the rising or setting sun. Otherwise, when communication remains lacking, everyone will end up in the dark and then accidents and bad performance will not be far away. Even worse is the presence of unclear and confusing communication. Because in the fog you have a big risk of losing your way and chain collisions and other catastrophes can also occur. Also in this instance it helps to provide the right infrastructure to deal with the possibility of fog. Illuminated paths and roads, good traffic rules, which drastically reduce the speed when fog occurs, are all measures that one can take to improve the situation. As such, management is able to anticipate and educate people on how to deal with a lack of communication, or when the presence of incorrect and confusing communication occurs.

My question is: What is the condition of the infrastructure on your mountain and how well are the traffic rules established, followed and enforced?

Peter Blekland

General Manager
BYAZ bvba