



MITCHELL PHOENIX

Management Development and the Middle Ages

The Four Pillars of Successful Management Development

Pillar 1: Focus on Results

Businesspeople are good at measuring a return. Stereotyped from at least the Middle Ages as bean-counters with abacuses, the Blackberry-wielding modern version of the medieval merchant knows how much things cost and how many of them s/he is selling. You measure the impact of lean manufacturing techniques on the bottom line. You measure the ROI of developing and marketing a new product. You can even measure how much each individual salesperson pulls in for the business.

But modern businesspeople are useless at measuring the return on investment in management development. Research conducted by DDI found that only around 25% of organisations formally measure the results of leadership development programmes. A recent IRS survey polled 74 organisations which ran management development programmes, out of which 13 said they were a failure, 22 said they hadn't achieved a return on investment, and only six believed their programmes had been a great success. Both sets of findings suggest that today's management development is a long way from the shrewd calculations of yesterday's merchants.

What can the past teach us? In the times when Powerpoint, flip-charts and break-out groups didn't exist, the closest businesspeople got to management development was the apprentice system. Of course, no-one would advocate asking managers to live in poverty for seven years, sleeping on their boss's floor and only having Sundays off if they are lucky (if you recognise any of that, it's time for a move - depressed job market or not). What is instructive about the apprentice system is that it asked apprentices to produce something to prove they had learned the skills of their trade. This "masterpiece" was visible proof of whether the apprentice had become a master or not.

Management development programmes which do not create measurable results are like apprenticeships where no masterpiece is required. In fact, they are like apprenticeships where no work is required at all. What guildsman would accept an apprentice into the stonemasons' guild without visible evidence that he could carve stone to an acceptable standard? As turnaround specialist Ross Stuart observes, "if you can't see any results, you have to question whether there are any."

Management as we know it did not exist seven hundred years ago, but Mitchell Phoenix' Kevin Yates is convinced that we should judge the development of our managers by the same yardstick that guildsmen used: the evidence of our eyes. "Only by creating results in response to the challenges of the workplace can managers truly measure their development," he says, "and that's the only way you will be able to accurately judge ROI." Because of this, Mitchell Phoenix programmes are designed to create results from the first day. "Focus on results is one of the four pillars of successful management development programmes," says Yates, "and in conjunction with a unique structure, robust content and expert facilitation, they will repay your investment many times over."