

## **Why management is the key to changing the labour experience.**

Media careers offer many potential benefits: opportunities for creative expression, a sense of making a difference in the world, flexibility and autonomy – but often at a price. That price includes long hours, unpaid/under-paid work, lack of investment in professional development and training, lack of mechanisms for worker voice - more fundamentally, I'd suggest - it includes endemic insecurity, deep rooted inequalities and too often working cultures that range from unsupportive to downright abusive. For too many that price is unacceptably high.

The very aspirational nature of media work, the precarity of project-based employment, and informal working cultures all serve to make the industry a particularly high-risk environment, both for a range of discriminatory practices, perpetuating inequalities, and for multiple forms of bullying and harassment.

Management practices – at all levels - are a key component in any attempt to ameliorate those risks, and to ensure a supportive, professional, sustainable environment for media workers. Good management is probably the industries' best defence against the brain drain.

Research within organisational psychology suggests that the balance between job *demands* and job *resources* is critical in maintaining workers' health (especially mental health), motivation and retention - and indeed in minimising negative factors like work-place bullying .

The *resources* that enable us to meet the *demands* of our work are many and various. They include factors specific to the individual such as education and training, personal health and family support. However they also include features of the *work environment* – and the features most closely correlated with positive outcomes for employees include a good supervisory relationship (generally defined in terms of positive management practices) and social support (defined in terms of good relationships with colleagues and supportive working teams). Social support itself, meanwhile, is *also* closely correlated with positive management practices - so in effect leadership and management impact on the worker experience and outcomes both directly and indirectly.

Positive management and leadership practices are generally defined in terms of providing a positive and ethical role model, motivating teams with a clear vision

and expectations;, encouraging innovation and creativity in others; and a genuine concern with the wellbeing and development of the individuals within a team.

Empirical studies collectively indicate a positive correlation between good management and employee's psychological well-being - and a negative correlation with both employee burnout and workplace bullying.

Conversely, 'destructive' leadership practices are correlated with poor employee outcomes. Indeed, the literature suggests that the negative impact of 'toxic' leadership outweighs the positive impact of effective leadership. This applies equally in the case of actively tyrannical leadership, and that of a passive, laissez-faire approach, which avoids engaging with issues or individuals.

Our survey reported in *State of Play 2021* found that the vast majority of those with Management responsibility in the TV industry had had no management training – and it seems, particularly in the wake of the recent Good Work Review of the wider creative industries, that the media industry is beginning to take the need for management training to heart – ( with the BFI, for example, recently investing 1.5 mil in a management raring programme for the screen industries.)

An important caveat, however - training alone cannot address the need for better management practices in the industry – there are structural as well as cultural factors to be addressed. Our research into the experiences of what would, in any other industry, be called televisions middle managers', found that, with the best will in the world, they often struggled to implement positive management practices in an industry they found to be at best resistant and at worst positively hostile to them doing so.

Again, drawing on the organisational psychology literature: Leadership and management practices *themselves* are found to be highly susceptible to the working environment. Contextual factors may play *at least* as big a part in determining the kind of leadership practices observed as personal characteristics and belief - including work-related stress or frustration, the expectations associated with a given role, and organisational culture

On the whole management skills are not valued or rewarded in media production – successful creatives are promoted into management positions with little or no appreciation of what this involves, limited interest in the business of managing people – and often with some questionable role models to follow.

While training is a good start, it is in danger of being used as a sticking plaster or a tick box exercise to avoid employer liability.

If media companies are serious about good management they need to do more. They need to actively address and discourage destructive leadership practices, take an informed approach to recruiting and preparing leaders, establish a *culture* that supports positive management practices, and find strategies to help keep managers' *own* workplace stress under control. They need to provide *structural* support in the form of HR policies that recognise and promote a duty of care, as well as transparent, accessible means for workers voices to be heard and complaints to be addressed.

Good management is critical to changing the labour experience - but it cannot be achieved by individual managers alone – It requires a structural and cultural step change by employers and the industries in which they operate.