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Error-Free Zones

It is interesting to note that when two next-door neighbours, in one country, bump into one another, while travelling in a different country, the occurrence is said to be a coincidence or, "just one of those things". However, when a building or bridge collapses, or when a plane crashes, then the occurrence is said to be the fault of some person or some thing. Moreover, no stone is left unturned in endeavouring to uncover the cause.

Many organisations, in the developed world, create ad hoc "blame-allocation-units" in order to appease external critics, tax-payers or shareholders. The role of a blame-allocation-unit is to seek out blame, allocate it to an individual or process or piece of equipment and then destroy the source of the blame. More often than not, the process of blame-allocation makes its way down a chain of command until it is allocated to those who have no-one (or no-thing) more junior to blame:

> *"...After extensive investigation, it was determined that the aircraft crashed due to a failure of a cleaner to replace the toilet paper in the maintenance area wash-rooms, thereby causing an aircraft mechanic to seek toilets elsewhere and, in the process, causing him to forget to tighten the bolts holding the engines to the aircraft. Despite the cleaner's insistence that his failure to replace the toilet paper was the result of a fatigued bolt in the toilet roll holder, our company decided to take swift action. Rest assured that the cleaner responsible has been dismissed and that we can now guarantee the safety of our aircraft."*

> *"...The bridge collapsed as a result of a series of rusted rivets that failed under load"*

> *"...The recent, erroneous reports, that the president had been assassinated, were apparently the fault of a junior sub-editor"*

Blame allocation or, more importantly, determining the cause of an error or fault is extremely important, particularly when it is used as a means of ensuring that the quality of a product or service is improved and, even more so, when it is used to ensure increasing levels of safety. The difficulty with blame allocation, as with many other management processes, is that it can become an end in itself or, worse still, a tool to be used to improve the relative position of an individual or organisation.

We assume here that undeveloped and developing countries have far fewer blame allocation units in existence, than developed countries, if only because, in developed countries, there is less evidence of buildings collapsing, planes crashing, etc. The number of such calamities occurring tends to decrease as people are made responsible for their actions and their professional outputs. The entire process of minimising man-made disasters, and the impact of natural disasters, is an integral part of blame allocation in the developed world. For the most part, blame allocation has, therefore, become a basic part of developed society, and a highly effective part of society, because it has measurably improved the safety of transport, housing, construction, medical procedures and so on. However, blame allocation tends to become so integral to the functioning of a developed society that it is applied even when not appropriate. For example, not all patients die because of medical malpractice or because ambulances arrive late. Not all companies collapse because of the actions of an individual or group of individuals. And, not all countries experience economic decline solely because of government policies. Some of these occurrences are due to an interaction of history, circumstance and timing - in other words, "just one of those things".

Blame allocation, in the developed world, has reached unacceptable levels in terms of its penetration into the basic operation of industry and business. Legal action that, several decades ago, may have been restricted to malpractice, in areas such as medicine, has now spread into almost every facet of business and industry. Employees are sued for inappropriate behaviour and employers are sued for dismissing employees for inappropriate behaviour. Customers sue manufacturers and manufacturers sue suppliers; suppliers sue their employees and the employees sue their employers. Apart from the creation of an extremely large (and financially healthy) legal sector, within the developed world, the extreme levels of blame allocation, that have been reached, have damaged the economic capacity of developed countries. Fault-finding has led to a focus on blame for its own sake (or for the sake of a monetary or career reward) rather than for the purposes of quality improvement.

At the core of the blame allocation problem is the fact that most business and industrial problems are becoming increasingly complex and multidimensional. In most cases, the easy problems in developed societies have already been addressed. For example:

> *"...Don't have two planes taking off on the same runway in opposite directions at the same time"*

As each of these easy problems is removed from the agenda, those that remain are increasingly more difficult to solve. For example:

> "*...How many planes per hour should take off to maintain safety*?"

Moreover, as each, new (and more complex) problem arises, the chances of finding 100%-effective solutions diminishes and the scope for blame allocation increases. Therefore, unless developed societies are able to come to terms with the uncertainties and risks associated with the solution of increasingly complex problems, then they will become consumed in a morass of litigation and accusation.

The first issue that needs to be addressed is that of professionalism in the developed world. The role of any professional, whether they be an accountant or economist or engineer or medical practitioner, is to ensure that they apply their knowledge in a systematic and unbiased fashion, in order to arrive at a solution to a problem. In most cases, it needs to be recognised that there will be many potential solutions to a problem and that all of these could be derived by some systematic and unbiased approach. It must also be recognised that most solutions will have relative advantages and disadvantages. So, provided that professionals act in a professional manner, one has to accept that, in the majority of cases, there will be no correct solutions and no incorrect solutions. In most cases, people will never even know whether the implemented solutions were the best solutions, because there is no way of comparing them with other courses of action. For example, one cannot suggest that the military strategies of the Allied Forces, during the Second World War, provided the "best" solutions because one didn't have enough World Wars available to test a range of solutions - one can only assume that they were good solutions because they ultimately achieved a required outcome.

Many people in the developed world have great difficulty with the concept of accepting solutions that do not ultimately deliver a required outcome. From the very first day of kindergarten, through to the submission of a PhD, people are conditioned to believe that there is a "right answer" and a "wrong answer" to every problem. In reality, of course, most problems have many answers, none of which are entirely "right" or entirely "wrong". In business, government and industry, an appreciation of this phenomenon would mean an acceptance that, provided people act in a professional, ethical and sensible manner, then they cannot be blamed when things don't work out as expected. Unfortunately, few people are able to accept this sort of reasoning and so there is a natural tendency *to sin to know for whom the bell of blame tolls - otherwise it will toll for thee*.

In order to prevent the bell of blame tolling for oneself, the normal remedy that is applied in the corporate pyramid is the

"*I am holding you personally responsible for...*"

approach. This is a pleasant euphemism for

"*If anything goes wrong, then it will be your fault and not mine*".

Superficially, at least, the approach enables a manager to use a cheap blame-transfer tactic in a way that still suggests that the manager is doing his/her job in a responsible manner.

Management insecurity, within the corporate pyramid, is a root cause of much of the unnecessary blame allocation and transfer that occurs in business, government and industry. It occurs most frequently when a manager makes unreasonable promises to his/her superior, and then expects that the delivery of the outcomes (and the blame) will be delegated to a subordinate in the organisation. If things go well, then the manager can accept the credit for a job well done. If things go poorly, then the manager can delegate the blame to the subordinate (who was *held responsible*). In the worst-case scenario, the manager can nobly pretend to accept blame without damage to his/her career prospects:

> *"I accept full responsibility for the incompetence of my junior staff... If only I had recognised the stupidity of the staff that the executive foolishly gave me to work with, then none of this would have happened..."*

Of course, the management blame allocation process appears rather crass when one strips away the pleasant euphemisms. However, the allocation of blame, to subordinates, is a strong indicator of management failure or incompetence because, by definition, a manager's role is to:

- Define reasonable outcomes
- Communicate those outcomes to subordinates and explain the role of the subordinates in achieving those outcomes
- Extract those outcomes from subordinates in reasonable time-frames.

A failure to deliver required outcomes is a clear indicator of a failure in the pyramidal management process because it implies that a manager is either:

- Incapable of defining reasonable outcomes, given the subordinates and conditions available
- Incapable of communicating the requirements, associated with those outcomes, to subordinates
- Incapable of defining reasonable time-frames, given the subordinates and conditions available.

The allocation of blame to subordinates is particularly prevalent in Western countries (particularly Anglo-Saxon countries) where management was, historically, perceived to be a financial/administrative task rather than a technocratic task. It is also symptomatic of what happens when people are appointed as *how-to-doers* before they have been *doers*. A leader or manager (in the true sense of the word) must have an in-depth understanding of what is involved in "*doing*" before he/she can comprehend the management of a doing task. A lack of practical understanding of the "*doing*" process leads to:

- Unrealistic expectations of outcomes
- An inability to communicate outcomes to subordinates (because the manager and subordinates have different backgrounds and don't speak the same "language")
- Unrealistic expectations of time-frames associated with the "doing" phases of projects.

Needless to say, the most obvious problems arise in technical areas when people are appointed as *how-to-doers* before they have been *doers*. For example, more than forty years after the introduction of the earliest computer systems, and despite enumerable problems with projects (caused by the complexity of software development), one of the most prevalent examples of *how-to-do* management, that was still heard around the world, in the 1980s, was that:

> "*The project should be relatively simple because it only involves software development*".

This was akin to suggesting that:

> "*Getting to Mars should be relatively simple because it only involves space-ship development*"

and, yet, it exemplified one of the most common defects in *how-to-do* management:

> "*I don't understand the process and I have been appointed as a manager in charge of those who do understand it - therefore the process must be trivial or unimportant.*"

Those who have actually "done" a task, prior to being appointed to supervise others, doing the same task, are naturally far better suited to the management process and far less likely to need to allocate blame, because they understand the difficulties of "doing". A recognition of the problems associated with telling others *how-to-do*, prior to having "*done*", is very important to understanding how blame allocation affects developed societies. In developed societies, the number of *how-to-doers*, that have not actually done, is enormous because of:

- The levels of technology that are applied and need to be managed

- The pace at which developed countries need to embrace technology within their organisations

- The number of university graduates that are appointed to *how-to-do* positions, over and above those who have not graduated from university but have actually "done"

- The intrinsic technical breadth of many areas that need to be managed.

Of course, one could argue that many activities, requiring management, are not technocratic in nature and can be managed strictly on a *how-to-do* basis. However, consider that, by the early 1990s, in the developed world, even a small business (e.g., an accounting office) required networked computers; database management; data links to other offices and so on. And, as developed countries move into the 21st Century, there will be fewer and fewer management tasks that are independent of technology management. Therefore, given a *how-to-do* management structure and an increasingly-complex technical environment, most organisations will face an escalation of the unnecessary-blame-allocation process because of the unrealistic expectations that *how-to-doers* will have of the *doing* processes.

In some developed countries, such as post-war Germany, there was a recognition that management involved both technocratic and financial/administrative duties and the country developed both educational and organisational approaches to dealing with the problem. These were largely based upon the principle that technocratic and financial/administrative functions in an organisation should have an equal weighting. The end result was a matrix-style of management, involving both technocratic and bureaucratic functions. In post-war Japan, the concept of a "spiral" approach to management tended to force employees into working in the many different facets of an organisation before moving upwards in the management hierarchy. However, whatever the approach, there needs to be a recognition that the traditional "executive" styles of management (that are often promulgated by the pyramidal corporate structure) will clearly not sustain organisations, in the developed world, against the rising tide of competition from leaner organisations with significantly-lower labour costs.

One could well argue that the reason that most developed (particularly Western) countries have outmoded management structures is "just one of those things" and that there is no-one to whom blame can be allocated for the problem. After all, by the end of the 20th Century, countries such as Australia, Britain, Canada and the United States had remained largely unperturbed for over a century, whereas countries such as Germany and Japan had economies and industrial structures that were effectively built "from scratch" in the post-war era. Similarly, the more aggressive management styles in countries, such as Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan, were a reflection of the intense international competition that was already in place in the 1970s and 1980s when they began their economic transformation.

In each case, one has to accept that the management structures that were put into place, in each country, were probably appropriate, for the times in which they emerged, but became less and less relevant with each passing year. For example, the cooperative arrangements between unions and management in Germany proved immensely successful in the post-war years, that were generally associated with economic growth. However, a half century after the war, and in the face of fierce international competition, the difficulties of reducing staffing levels in German companies (while having a strong representation of staff at senior level) became evident. Similarly, in Japan, the spiral management structure worked extremely well while there was a two-way company/employee loyalty arrangement and it was assumed that employees would remain with the same company for their entire working life. However, as Japanese companies were forced to retrench staff, in the face of international competition in the 1990s, the loyalty bonds were broken and the management structures became less relevant.

Allocating blame for the management structures that are in place, in many developed countries, is therefore inappropriate because the structures are a product of historical, political and cultural factors (or, just one of those things). Moreover, management structures in any society are difficult to change, for a number of reasons. Firstly, those that need to initiate change are generally too old or too comfortable with existing structures to initiate that change unless they have a vested interest in change (e.g., they own a company that needs to change). Secondly, even a middle-aged executive has had his/her thought processes conditioned by a system and promotional structure that has elevated him/her to a senior level. And, in the absence of any further promotional prospects, a middle-aged person's thoughts naturally turn to retiring with dignity intact - in other words maintaining a "steady-as-she-goes" style that is unlikely to radically affect his/her dignity in one way or another.

The third barrier to change is that management tends to follow a process of parthenogenetic reproduction, whereby predecessors define the sorts of attributes required in their successors. For example, it is assumed that if the director of company "X" was an economist, with 20 years experience, then he should be replaced by another economist, with 20 years experience. Again, there tends to be a steady-as-she-goes attitude to preserving a structure. Finally, there may be some recognition (exasperation) that the management and structure of an organisation is so intransigent that it cannot be changed unless that change is precipitated by a crisis. So, management (like old man river) has a tendency to just keep on rolling along - at least until it hits some immovable object, such as economic recession or depression (in the case of countries) or penury (in the case of companies).

As management structures, in any society, become less and less relevant to the efficient operation of that society, there is naturally a tendency to look for sources of blame and these tend to work their way down and around various organisations. Governments blame industry and unions; industry blames unions and government; unions blame industry and government. And, when all else fails, government, industry and unions can all blame exchange rates and the protectionist and exploitationalist policies of other countries:

"*I've heard they use child labour in their factories...*"

However, most of this sort of blame allocation is rather fruitless in the sense that it does not lead to any positive outcomes for a country or for an organisation within that country. The best that one can hope for is that if everyone throws an equivalent amount of mud (blame), then some of it will stick to everyone and then everyone will be forced to re-evaluate their own performance and, hopefully, improve upon that performance.

In the inevitable mud-slinging that occurs during blame allocation, one of the causative factors that becomes apparent is that people are all too willing to accept credit for things which are not necessarily of their own making and all too eager to avoid blame for the same. Politicians and executives tend to eagerly accept that economic fortune is solely the result of their astute management but quickly absolve themselves of any responsibility for economic misfortune. Unions tend to readily accept credit for shorter working hours but blame retrenchments and factory closures on poor management and cheap imports. Again, the element that is lacking is a recognition of the multidimensional nature of problems facing a complex developed society.

The fortunes of any one country (or organisation within that country) are often dependent on a multitude of factors including:

- Political events within that country
- Political events outside that country
- Climatic conditions (e.g., drought, floods, etc.)
- Average labour rates both within and without that country
- Education and training levels
- Civil infrastructure
- Average efficiency of organisations within that country relative to those without
- Cultural influences on business.

All the above factors are in a continual state of change. It therefore follows that, even if the senior management of an organisation could develop a style which endeavoured to maintain the status quo within their organisation, then its fortunes would still ebb and flow in response to the changing external factors. Therefore, if one sought to view business management or government in a scientific fashion, and the process of decision-making as a form of experimentation, then one would have great difficulty in deriving conclusive results (pertaining to credit and blame) from that process. For example, the management of an organisation may decide to increase their expenditure on marketing by 50%. If the sales of their product increase, then one really has to determine whether this is as a result of the marketing; a natural increase in demand or a whole spectrum of other causes, pertaining to the previous performance and marketing of the product and that of competitor products. Similarly, if the sales decrease, one has to determine whether the increased marketing has led to a smaller decrease in sales than might otherwise have occurred (as a result of other factors). In most cases, the answers to such questions can never be found because it is impossible to quantify all the factors (dimensions) that have contributed to the outcome.

At the bottom-end of an organisational pyramid, outcomes are reasonably well defined (e.g., either the floors have been swept or they haven't been swept) and so there is some rational basis for allocating credit and blame (e.g., the floors have been well swept because they are free from dust and dirt or they haven't been well swept because they are covered in litter). However, as one moves up the organisational pyramid, the ability to assess outcomes becomes more and more difficult because of the number of contributing factors - particularly at a professional level and, even more so, at a senior executive level. In a complex developed society, it might therefore be more sensible (perhaps, even scientific) for organisations to move away from the notion of assigning credit and blame, based upon nebulous outcomes, that are influenced by a number of different sources. Perhaps then, the logical approach would be to allocate credit and blame, based upon the ability of professionals to follow a systematic, sensible, ethical and incisive decision-making process, rather than their ability to get the "right answer".

One then needs to ask whether organisations, in the developed world, could ever move to a structure where they accepted that, even if all the employees and executives did their job well (i.e., in a professional and systematic manner), that the organisation may still fail in terms of outputs - that is, come up with the "wrong answer". More than likely, most organisations (and employees within those organisations) would never accept such a scenario because it would mean that all career movements in an organisation would be focused on the old-fashioned concept of day to day performance and work ethics rather than perceived outcomes. Moreover, it would conflict with the notion that someone always has to be allocated the blame for "the wrong answer". The end result is that most organisations have become a collection of individual employees ("*me incorporated*"), each endeavouring to convince their superiors/employers (or tax-payers in the case of government) that they are constantly coming up with the "right answer" and should therefore be rewarded through pay increases, promotion or re-election.

The unfortunate result of the approach that is adopted, in terms of credit and blame allocation in organisations, is that most organisations (particularly private enterprises) become error-free zones, where it is impossible to find an individual that is prepared to admit that they made a mistake (i.e., came up with the wrong answer, despite the best of intentions). The number of mistakes being made by such organisations is probably much higher than that being made by organisations where admission of error is seen as a natural part of professionalism. And, the problem is made even worse by the fact that the quality feedback loop, in error-free organisations, is never closed - problems are not rectified because individuals are afraid to admit that they made a mistake.

Another serious problem that arises, in error-free organisations, is that individuals within those organisations tend to not only strive to avoid blame but also strive to take credit for positive outcomes. In the developed world, the morass of litigation that has been enacted in order to ensure that all the "right outcomes" are achieved within the structure of an organisation (i.e., that the correct race, gender and age of people are appointed to positions) has led to an outcome-oriented promotional system. Many organisations, in the developed world, therefore have structures where movement from a junior position, to a more senior position, is based upon an individual's ability to satisfy superiors that certain outcomes have been achieved. While seemingly harmless, in its own right, when applied in large organisations, the philosophy tends to lead individuals towards satisfying outcomes rather than doing their job well (in the old-fashioned sense of the word).

One might well ask why there should be any concerns over an outcome-oriented promotional system but the answer is clear. Employees will naturally seek to achieve (or claim) those outcomes that suit their career, regardless of the best interests of the organisation. For example, a salesman may use unscrupulous sales techniques to bolster his sales record, to the long-term detriment of the company for which he works. A factory manager may gloss over production problems, in reports to the board, so that he may be seen to be doing a good job and be promoted. An academic researcher may report back to a government department that grants have been well expended in order to secure more grants.

So, the greatest danger of blame-allocation and error-free zones is that they create a positive feedback loop that constantly feeds erroneous (or partially true) information through the hierarchy of an organisation. This makes each subsequent (higher) stage of the decision-making process more difficult to control. Nowhere is this more pronounced than in government expenditure of tax-payer funds, where the recipients of grants (public servants, companies, researchers, etc.) are called upon, by government departments, to provide feedback on the funds that they received. The customary response is that,

"*Everything is going well, spend a lot more money...*".

Needless to say, the same sort of phenomenon can occur even within small companies but the smaller the organisation, the easier it is to verify the information that is fed back (and the context in which it is fed back).

A key question, that the developed world therefore needs to address, is whether or not it should persist with an outcome-oriented approach to government and management, in the presence of the blame allocation processes and error-free zones that have been created.

An outcome-oriented approach can have enormous benefits, provided that it can be appropriately structured and harnessed. To begin with, there are few alternatives, if one discards the traditional idea of having superiors personally (subjectively) assess the performance of their underlings over a long period. Given that such traditional approaches have been deemed inappropriate, as a result of increasing litigation for discrimination, etc. (in the developed world), then only the outcome- and time-oriented approaches remain. The time-oriented approach, where one assesses employees, based on the number of hours that they work, is largely meaningless, in any professional sense, because a professional that chooses to work one hour a week may produce more than another who chooses to work 80 hours a week. Hence, there must inevitably be a shift towards an outcome-oriented approach but the difficulty is in ensuring that:

- Outcomes can be meaningfully defined
- All the factors contributing to outcomes can be identified and the contributions of individuals, towards those factors, can be isolated
- The performance of an individual (in achieving outcomes) can be carefully scrutinised.

Taking each of the above points in turn, the starting point for assessing individuals (i.e., allocating blame or credit), based upon outcomes, needs to be a meaningful definition of outcomes. For example, if a company hires a salesman and defines, as their outcome, a maximisation of sales, then a short-term outcome may be achieved to the long-term detriment of the company. If, on the other hand, the company defines outcomes in terms of the professionalism of its sales staff, courtesy to customers, ethical sales tactics, etc., then the short-term outcomes may be undesirable (i.e., less sales) but the long-term benefits may be significant (i.e., more sales as a result of referral and consumer trust in the organisation).

Looking at the second point, pertaining to an outcome-oriented approach to management, and, again, using the sales example, one has to accept that many factors contribute to outcomes, including marketing; product quality; product aesthetics and ergonomics; service support; etc. The front-end (or sales) is only one part of the overall process and maximising that part of the process may not lead to required outcomes in a larger sense. For example, if a salesman aggressively pushes poor products onto customers, in order to maximise the sales of those products, then the company may ultimately suffer from a diminished reputation. It may be more prudent for a company to accept that a product is a failure and to act to remedy that failure through redesign rather than aggressive sales techniques.

The third issue, in the outcome-oriented approach, is the most difficult to quantify. How does one measure the performance of an individual in terms of achieving outcomes? In the case of the salesman, is a good measure of performance sales per week or politeness to customers, appearance, grooming and attitude? In many outcome-oriented approaches to management, superiors try to find quick and readily-measurable outcomes that they can use to accelerate or decelerate the promotional prospects of their subordinates. However, it is often the intangible (and sometimes invisible) outcomes that contribute towards the long-term future and performance of an organisation. The old adage, *that it takes many years of hard work to become an overnight success*, is particularly relevant and, yet, it is in conflict with the outcome-oriented approach to management, which is geared towards achieving the maximum number of visible outcomes in the shortest period of time. The whole process places visible outcomes ahead of invisible outcomes and leads individuals ("*me incorporated*") to pursuing those visible outcomes at the expense of the invisible ones.

The issue of visible and invisible outcomes leads one to explore the subject of vested interests and the way in which they influence the credit and blame allocation processes. It would appear that, in a developed society, credit and blame need to be analysed and managed in the same way as any other employment issues. In particular, the following questions need to be asked and answered before placing any credence in the credit/blame allocation process:

(i) Who is allocating blame or accepting credit?

(ii) What do particular individuals stand to achieve by allocating blame or accepting credit?

(iii) How realistic is it to apportion credit or blame, given the number of factors involved in the outcomes?

(iv) How independent is the information that is received, pertaining to credit or blame?

Unfortunately, the above questions are now fundamental to any form of management, because they impinge upon the aspects of an organisation that pertain to substance, and the aspects that pertain to personal/professional objectives.

Questions (i) and (ii) are somewhat interrelated because they strike at the motivation behind the credit and blame allocation processes. A good example of where such questions need to be asked occurs whenever a new manager is appointed to a department. This normally triggers several phases:

- Blame allocation
- Credit acceptance
- Blame avoidance
- Pre-emptive blame allocation
- Pre-emptive credit acceptance.

A new manager may seek to make an imprint on his/her department, and further his/her career, by being seen to achieve "outcomes" (i.e., visible outcomes). The new manager therefore commences his/her duties with blame allocation and the shock discovery that his/her predecessor left everything in a mess that needs to be remedied by some "dramatic" form of restructuring. The restructuring generally involves some very-visible decision-making, on the part of the new manager, and a demonstration that the manager can not only handle his/her department but the broader spectrum of duties, associated with the next level up in the management structure. Common examples of this tentacle-spreading phenomenon are where the manager acquires a major software system, or commissions a major consulting report, that embraces several different departments outside his/her own. This is an integral part of the credit acceptance process because it provides evidence that the manager is "outcome-oriented" and destined to rapidly outgrow his/her department.

The next step in the process is the blame-avoidance phase, where the manager makes it clear that his/her real outcomes are the decisions that were made and not the ramifications of those decisions:

> "*It will take many years before the fruits of this exercise can be critically evaluated...*"

The blame avoidance process is then further reinforced with pre-emptive blame allocation:

> *"I just want the board to know that I'm holding all my subordinates personally responsible for keeping up with my reform agenda - I just hope that they're capable of pulling their share of the load..."*

The final phase of the process is the pre-emptive credit acceptance phase:

> *"I see my major achievement as getting this place moving and getting a range of departments to all pull together - it's up to the rest of you to take the lead I've established and keep the momentum going..."*

Of course, once the ramifications of the manager's decisions become apparent, usually after the manager has moved onwards, then the ultimate form of blame avoidance becomes available:

> *"The whole place collapsed, the minute I left - it's enough to make me cry when I think of the work I put into building it up..."*.

Anyone who believes that the above sequence of events is somewhat cynical should look closely at the way in which business, government and industry operate in the developed world. The same could probably be said of the undeveloped and developing nations if it were not for the fact that many of them are based on varying forms of dictatorial systems. However, the events, described above, are symptomatic of societies that seek simplistic solutions to complex problems and seek simplistic outcome-oriented approaches to the management of societies and industries. They are also a result of the *how-to-do* management structures, that have proliferated throughout the developed world, and that do not stem from a "*doing*" culture. Fewer and fewer people understand the ramifications of what their subordinates do and, subsequently, find it more and more difficult to assess their outcomes on any reasonable basis. Business and industry (and, indeed, government) are therefore subjected to "hit-and-run" professionals that, superficially, appear to achieve great things in short time-frames and then quickly move on before the long-term ramifications become apparent.

"Hit-and-run" professionals (a.k.a. "Astral Executives") are a common feature of some developed countries, where emphasis is placed on moving up the corporate pyramid by moving from one organisation to another (i.e., from one pyramid to another), rather than through a lifetime of loyalty to a single organisation (such as was traditionally the case in post-war Japan). The reason that such an approach is conducive to producing "hit-and-run" professionals is because people tend to be assessed on their own criteria, whenever they apply for positions outside their organisation, whereas those applying for promotion within are always assessed according to the criteria set by their own organisation. So, when an outsider applies for a position, the onus is on the organisation to disprove his/her claims, whereas when an insider applies for a position, the onus is on the insider to substantiate his/her assertions and to restrict the scope of those assertions (in the knowledge that the organisation is already familiar with his/her work). Coupled with the "outcome-oriented" approach to performance measurement, the entire environment becomes ripe for those who can astutely and selectively present data - in other words, anything that cannot be proven to be a lie becomes truth. For "*me incorporated*", a performance, composed of short-term outcomes (that were achieved through the creation of long-term problems for others) can often become a marketing tool that sells "*me incorporated*" as the instigator of rapid reforms.

The issue of "hit-and-run" professionals leads us on to examine questions (iii) and (iv) in the credit and blame allocation processes, which relate to the way in which we can acquire some impartial assessment of outcomes, in terms of those who contributed towards them. The simple answer is that there is generally no simple answer to the impartial measurement of performance and outcomes, when they pertain to professional staff. It may well be that the old-fashioned notions of considering an employee's day to day attitudes and professionalism, over a period of years, could better serve the modern world than many of the outcome-oriented approaches that have been pursued. A professional that takes months, or even years, to achieve their optimal output, and then continues to serve their organisation for a long period, is inevitably better than one that creates a superficial appearance of radical change over a short period. However, regardless of the approach taken, there is always an issue of determining impartial ways of assessing performance in a society where every individual has a vested interest in something (albeit only eating and sleeping in the case of some).

Some companies engage "independent" consultants to "independently" allocate credit and blame within an organisation. However, this only makes a complex problem even more complex because the "independent" consultants are totally "dependent" upon those who engaged them to pay their fees. So, an "independent" report may tend to avoid nasty issues, pertaining to those who are responsible for authorising payments to the independent consultants. Sometimes, the issue of allocating credit and blame becomes muddied through Machiavellian political processes, when individuals store information on minor/trivial misdemeanours and then collate them into strong arguments for the removal of other individuals, who may be competitors. In other cases, common management practices tend to cloud the allocation of credit and blame. For example, the management practice of creating a "crisis" situation (or manufacturing non-existent problems), in order to motivate subordinates into working harder and faster, tends to make credit and blame allocation almost impossible because the focus becomes one of solving non-existent problems.

In an ideal world, all the issues pertaining to credit and blame allocation would probably diminish rapidly if all those who sought to become *how-to-doers* had actually practiced "doing" in the first instance. However, in a sense, in the developed world, we have all appointed ourselves as *how-to-doers* without having been *doers*. We tell our politicians *how-to-do* and expect them to fix complex problems with simple solutions:

> "*Let's take this country back to what it was in the 1950s - a moral society and a safe place to live...*"

When some politicians endeavour to explain the complexities of a problem, then we don't vote for them because we say that they are indecisive (i.e., not outcome-oriented). Naturally, when the simple solutions posed by politicians don't work, then we blame them for being incompetent and we vote for someone else.

The root cause of our problems could be that all those of us that have been raised in pre-war-developed countries have never before had to "do", in the face of enormous international competition, and it is not surprising that we blame anything, and everything, for things not working out the way we had hoped they would (from our *how-to-do* perspective). Life, in the developed world, should be much simpler but, somehow, it never seems to be. Businesses that should work, often don't seem to and, the more we appear to work, the fiercer the competition, and the less that our achievements seem to impact. Perhaps, it isn't "just one of those things" but because we have evolved in a particular way, with management and work-place structures that, with each passing year, have less and less relevance to the world in which we must compete.

The old proverb that "*from clogs to clogs is only three generations*", is very similar to the old adage about the first generation creating wealth, the second enhancing it and the third squandering it. In the pre-war-developed countries, many of the pyramidal structures that were put into place reflected the "third generation" culture that existed and, perhaps, we now find competition fiercer because we have not born witness to the trials of the first generation of *doers*. For the pre-war-developed countries, the question is then whether they will return to clogs, while they are busily blaming one another for the problems with which they are faced.

As a final and fitting illustration of the limited-value of using blame allocation for quality improvement, consider the example of the 1990s electricity supply company that was accused of providing an unreliable service, as a result of repeated power failures over a short period of time. The faults were not said to be of the CEO's making (for not taking decisive action). The faults were not said to be of the general-manager's making (for failing to have the engineering manager rectify the core problem). The faults were not said to be the engineering manager's responsibility (for not having had the senior engineers rectify the problems). Indeed, the faults were not said to be the senior or junior engineers' responsibility or the technicians' responsibility or the linesmen's responsibility. The faults, it was reported, were the result of possums electrocuting themselves in the system. And the possums were dead and unable to allocate blame to others. The electricity supply company had truly become an error-free zone.