

Going to Cape Falco?

You probably don't know where Cape Falco is, or even if you do, you may not know how going to Cape Falco could have anything to do with leadership effectiveness. Cape Falco is a small area on the southwestern shores of Mallorca in the Mediterranean. Today my partner and I were going to Cape Falco to visit some friends, and after plugging the coordinates into my car's GPS system, off we went.

The sun was shining down and the sky was pretty much cloudless, and it looked like it was going to be yet another brilliant day. The GPS system almost instantaneously plotted out which roads to take to get to Cape Falco and all looked good, so I began to drive. We had never been to the destination before and the route to it was pretty obscure and convoluted. And if that wasn't enough, some of the roads near the destination were pretty crap, but we made it just before the time we were scheduled to arrive. As I was parking the car, I began to realise that our little driving experience was a pretty good metaphor for some of the dynamics of management in today's organisational world. Here is why.

Managing today really isn't all that different than it used to be except for a few critically important areas. Two of the key areas are the application of technology, and the transaction time. Clearly, these two areas are interconnected and when one of them changes, the shift impacts the other one...and everything else a manager does. That last part – “everything else a manager does” is the key to think about. As technology has evolved, it has decreased the transaction time; and this has put additional pressures on the ability of managers to make the right decisions, for the right reasons, at the right times. No longer do managers have the luxury of time when making decisions, back when communicating a decision across business units globally took time. Now decisions flash around the globe at a speed not imagined years ago. The need for decisions to be “right” the first time is critical. And as the transaction time has decreased to almost nothing, our reliance on technology dramatically. The evolution of technology has given managers tools to help them manage, but at the same time, it has caused us to become highly addicted to it. And this is where our visit to a friend's house yesterday comes in.

Not that many years ago, if we had been invited to a new friend's home, we would have asked for directions, or a map, or some landmarks that we could see along the way to make sure we were going in the right direction. We also probably

would have left quite a bit earlier as the part of the island we weren't sure what we might encounter along the way. And as it turned out, had I known what some of the roads were like, I would have probably asked if we could meet someplace else. But it is 2021 and my partner and I have GPS mapping programmes built into our phones. The directions that come through not only give us step by step routing information, but also a real-time mapping aid with speed, time, and traffic information. The time it said it would take was the time it actually took, and all I had to do was follow the directions of the voice telling me where to turn and when. This technology has been a real benefit for people going from one place to another. The reason is that it only has to worry about relaying information from the current vehicle location to a satellite, and then back to you.

The challenges that managers face with all of today's technology are different. Some of the decisions managers make do deal with “stuff,” but most of them deal with people and people's willingness and ability to do something. And because of the speed of technology, the expectation is that the things we expect our people to do differently will happen almost immediately. That is like when you were given a computer for the first time and told to use it efficiently and effectively, even though you didn't know how to do so. We need to accept that making changes in how we do what we do may require training and patience. In today's high-pressured organisational world, those two elements may not be always available.

Personally, I love technology and what it has done to make our lives easier. But at the same time, I recognise that we have paid a seriously expensive price to have it. A good question to think about isn't “*are you going to Cape Falco;*” it is “*do we still have the skills and competencies to manage if for some reason our technology fails?*” A good follow-up question is, “*are we making the right investments in our people who we expect to manage everything?*”

These questions are of critical importance, especially as senior organisational leaders love to banter on and on about how people are their organisation's most important asset. Not investing in our people at an appropriate level to technology investments will result one day in an inability to use the technology effectively. Your competition that is using technology effectively will fix it so you don't have to worry any more. Of course this is because your competition will put you out of business...and you out of a job.

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