



# Champions and chiefs

By Peter Fox

Clarifying key management roles required for remote electronic networking

## Two key functions

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In a traditional physical organisation 'management' organises staffing, facilities and production. They may be able to call on the expertise of specialists such as human resources, management services and plant manager.

In a remote electronic working environment it is worth making a clear distinction between production and the means of production. **For the most part the means of production is the people and their interrelationships.** (We also need a communications infrastructure but for the purposes of this discussion we'll say that this is a technical service function that doesn't require management involvement.)

When people work remotely we need to take special care that they are

- well suited to, and at ease with their role
- well knitted in to their colleagues with good working relationships
- committed to the goals of their team and organisation as a whole
- performing their jobs diligently
- being used to their maximum potential
- not being unnecessarily 'messed about' and forgotten by management.

This is a list of checkpoints for maintaining the means of production.

## Chiefs

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The role of a director is a production manager. In a Treem-based organisation there will be a hierarchy of directors down to almost the lowest level. Another way of expressing this is to say that anyone with a responsibility to deliver some sort of production is a Chief.

It may seem like this is an 'all chiefs and no indians' situation - well in a way it is 'all chiefs'. The team leader of a lowly group has responsibilities for delivering certain things and some leeway in how to get it done. Remember that when working remotely teams will be much more isolated and autonomous and this culture will require delegation of tasks with the concomitant responsibility for achieving them.

A chief is responsible for some mission. Missions will be divided into sub- and sub-sub- missions so we need a chain of directors. We may be better off thinking of a chief as a team leader - someone who has management responsibility in addition to 'doing a real job'.

## Champions

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A champion provides the backbone for loyalty and determination to succeed.

Their role is to maintain the means of production, ie. the workforce. Part of their job is to select suitable people, organise promotions, develop skills in-house and all the other important 'human resources' functions that you'd expect in any organisation.

However when it comes to remote working we need more than that. They need to provide leadership and maintain the morale of lonely remote workers.

Typically in a LRC<sup>1</sup> organisation there would be one for each wing and they would be at the very top level. The one-per-wing arrangement has two benefits:

- The champion will have the same mind-set as the people who work in that wing. So they should be much better at motivation and clear-speaking. Also of course the 'one of us' aspect is a bonus.
- The champions are in a competitive atmosphere, competing with each other, coming from different points of view, each convinced that what the organisation needs of more of their sort of people. You can't be a champion if all you do is turn up occasionally wearing your badge and pat people on the back.

Even the lowest-level worker can appreciate that there is somebody right at the top looking after their interests, not letting the other wings take all the glory or pay, making sure there is the right training available and so on.

## Discussion

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Why have we separated production management from means of production management? Because they have very different characteristics and objectives:

- Production requires a focus on 'local', delegated matters in the immediate term while MoP requires long-term development throughout a vertical slice of the organisation.
- Production concentrates on outputs. MoP concentrates on inputs.
- Production is about specifying and supervising work. MoP is about maintaining and developing skills.
- Quality from a production point of view is about measuring results. Quality from a MoP point of view is having well motivated in the right place.

Also production requires basic man-management skills while MoP requires a much greater insight and competence in 'people skills'. No organisation is fixed so we want to be able to appoint/promote 'managers' without needing to worry too much if they have the high level of people-skills required. Remember that in a remote organisation it is a lot easier for mis-understanding, issue-avoidance, molehills turning into mountains and undetected mis-matches of expectation to occur - all of which will strangle normal workflow.

In short

- champions are leaders
- chiefs interpret and promulgate orders.

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<sup>1</sup> See Left-Right-Centre in this series.

In a physical organisation, what happens when for instance a team has too much work for the existing number of staff? Traditionally the manager would have some protocol for acquiring more staff (if that's the solution).

Departmental budgets would be examined and policy decisions made. Roles would be specified and staff borrowed or recruited. The interview/selection process would typically be led by the manager with clerical assistance from the HR department. The remote organisation process is quite similar but with the champion taking the lead once they have been made aware of the situation. This means that the skills of the organisation can be developed according to a plan to suit the whole, or at least that wing.

## Conclusion

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From this analysis it should be clear that Champions are probably the most important people. They have a critical strategic role in providing a workforce suited to the needs of the organisation and a critical tactical role in keeping the lonely remote workers connected with the good reasons for belonging to the organisation.

We have lightened the people-skills burden on 'line managers', and in the process made the way in which people are managed less erratic. (We still want managers to be good with people but the bar is lowered and there is a safety net.)

## Exercises

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- 1 Why is it important that a Champion is 'one of us'?
- 2 Why is it important that Champions sit at the highest board level?
- 3 Leadership is a difficult thing to define. Perhaps you can develop a few rules of thumb for spotting leaders and potential leaders.
- 4 What are the obstacles to retro-fitting Champions into an existing physical organisation?
- 5 How would the people-skills required of a production manager (ie. Chief) differ between
  - a traditional physical organisation
  - b remote working network without Champions
  - c remote working network with Champions

More information: [vulpeculox.net/treems](http://vulpeculox.net/treems)

Other subjects in this series :

- The Grumblee
- Left-Right-Centre
- Moots

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Peter Fox is the sole originator of Treems and associated concepts as described in this series. He lives in Essex, England is pleased to correspond with people working in the same field.