



**The Chartered Management Institute's Short Course Programme
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The 6 P platform – working to achieve your goals

Ian Govan introduces a model to help managers keep in touch with their goals and make sure they're working towards them.

Much in management has become overly complicated and convoluted. Good management at any level is really little more than codified common sense. Sadly common sense is not always common practice. With that in mind, over the past two years, we have developed and tested an approach which we think clears away much of this clutter. It is simple in that it has as its base just six words. This does not mean that making it work does not require hard work. It does, but the benefits over time far outweigh that initial endeavour.

A parallel might be the TV comedy Fawlty Towers. Each of the 12 episodes are about a rude man running a genteel hotel. The hard work - numerous rewrites of the script, casting, rehearsals, recording etc - certainly paid dividends. Throughout all of that work, however, the writers, producers and cast were able to keep coming back to the basic premise. After all, the end product is either Basil being rude and impatient or setting him up to be rude and impatient later.

So it is with the 6 P Platform, a simple base that you can keep coming back to in order to see if you are working towards the ultimate goal. The other initial benefit is that the same platform can be used at any level - organisational, departmental or team, individual postholder.

Purpose

At whatever level you operate it is vital to be clear about your Purpose. Forget mission statements - and most of them are indeed instantly forgettable – and be clear about what you are trying to achieve. Answer the question 'Why are we here?' If you find that difficult, it rather begs another question - 'Why are you there?'

Short Course for Management & Professional Development

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THE SIX P PLATFORM

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In a commercial organisation it is not simply enough to say '*to make a profit*'. In a non-commercial organisation '*to serve the public*' or something similar is equally insufficient. These things are taken as read. What is it that you are actually there to deliver?

On many occasions we have started work by giving every member of a team or section of an organisation a post-it note. We then ask them to write down the Purpose of that team. They should, all of course, write down the same thing. In reality the number of times this happens is a round number. Presenting those responses to the senior manager responsible for the group is often illuminating. 'Is that what they really think we are here for?' Well, apparently so.

You cannot achieve anything unless you have a clear sense of Purpose - known and understood by all. Without this in place all other efforts will, at best, be the equivalent of putting sticking plaster over something that is probably gangrenous in the first place.

Processes

Having established the Purpose (and it may be that in complex areas there may be more than one), it is now time to establish the Processes which need to be in place in order to achieve that Purpose. Where there is more than one, each needs to be taken in turn and looked at separately.

The Processes are the key areas of work that have to be carried out. Avoid the temptation to be too detailed at this stage. This is all about being clear as to what 'parcels' of work need to be carried out.

Take a simple example that most of us can easily relate to. A bartender would have something like 'serving food and drink', 'bar maintenance', 'cash handling' and 'stock replenishment' as their key areas of work. At this stage the detail of changing a barrel, clearing tables of empty glasses and so on is not needed. That comes later.

Getting your Processes somewhere near right enables you to get close to achieving your Purpose. (The one P that does not exist in the Platform is Perfect!). If that bartender gets serving food and drink, bar maintenance, cash handling and stock replenishment somewhere near right then we are running a good bar.

The next stage is to make this happen.

Performance and parameters

These next two always come as a pair. One without the other is useless. Performance is the actual tasks that have to be carried out. Parameters are the way in which they need to be performed.

At a regular Monday-morning team briefing a manager concludes by asking his three team leaders to produce a progress report on the project for the new product launch.

At the next Monday's meeting:

- Leader A has produced a tome containing commentary, statistics and the like
- Leader B has produced a single sheet of paper containing just the headline statements
- Leader C has not produced a report at all.

Which leader's performance is lacking? Well, obviously, it's the manager's. Performance without Parameters is useless. It is called 'managing by fluke'. The original brief should have been something like '*Can you produce a progress report... I only need one or two sides of A4 containing the main points, and I need it by next Monday's briefing.*'

Simple example? Sure. But how often does this sort of thing go on day-in, day-out. Very few people go to work to deliberately do a bad job. Many end up doing a bad job, and it's not their

fault. As far as the manager in our story is concerned two out the three team leaders have not produced what was required. How demotivating and demoralising for them. And all because the manager got it wrong.

It is at this stage that we now need to put the detail on the previous thinking. The more accurate and precise we are here the better the outcomes.

Performance and Parameters can take a number of forms, each being branches of the same family tree. Some may be 'standards', others may be 'objectives', still more are 'targets'.

Standards are non negotiable. These apply at all times to all members of staff whether set corporately, departmentally, or individually. Take our bartender. A standard might be to ensure that 'x' amount of coinage is available as float in the till at the beginning of each shift.

Objectives are those things that we can reasonably and realistically expect to be achieved. *'All tables should be cleared of empty glasses and dirty ashtrays every twenty minutes'*. Under normal working conditions this can be achieved. Exceptional circumstances may cause occasional variance. These are not a straightjacket. Sometimes we have to react to specific circumstances at the time.

Targets are something to be strived for – 'challenge or stretch'. Often they will be extensions of objectives. *'Tables are always clean and ready for newly arriving customers'*.

Together these three 'branches' define the job. To establish them, each of the previously identified Processes should be taken in turn for clarity of thought.

Too often it is this level that is focused on in isolation of the real requirements. Take a training manager of our acquaintance who works for a 'blue chip' company. One of his objectives for the year (upon which his performance related pay depends) is to ensure that a minimum of 2500 staff days of management development take place. What is he doing? Making sure he puts 'bums on seats'. Has this anything to do with his Purpose? No. Surely his Purpose is something like *'to source and resource training and development solutions in line with corporate needs.'* How common is it for Performance and Parameters to be set whilst losing sight of the Purpose (if indeed that was ever established in the first place)?

Using this top down tool we avoid meaningless objectives. All Performance and Parameters should be contributing directly to the Purpose.

These 4 Ps provide the functional spine of what we are about. The further two are about the human element. Principles and People are embedded in everything that has been operationally established so far.

Principles

The Principles are the values, beliefs and attitudes relating to the functional spine. They are the behaviours that we want to establish. They are the way in which we go about fulfilling our duties. These do not have to be complex - in fact it is better if they are not. You can have as many as you see fit.

An example from our bartender might be *'friendly, helpful and courteous at all times'*. It might seem like a statement of the obvious but we have all experienced otherwise. Where the latter is true we have another case of inadequate management. Maybe the Principles have not been made clear. Maybe they have been assumed. We know what perils lie in assumptions.

One of the reasons that Principles are often overlooked is because they are difficult to measure. Remember the mantra *'if you can't measure it you can't manage it?'* - bunkum!

Where we cannot reasonably measure something we need to look to alternative routes. Do not be tempted to put artificial measures to things that do not lend themselves to things like quantity, time and so on.

Back to the bartender: how do we measure *'friendly, helpful, courteous'*? Smiles per hour? No. We can't, so don't. What we can do is describe typical examples of the behaviours that we mean. For example: *'always acknowledge customers when they approach the bar even if you are unable to serve them immediately'*. I don't mind this. I do mind trying to get noticed when waiting to be served. As managers we can observe to see if the behaviours we want are being carried out. If not, we can intervene where necessary.... and not a number in sight.

People

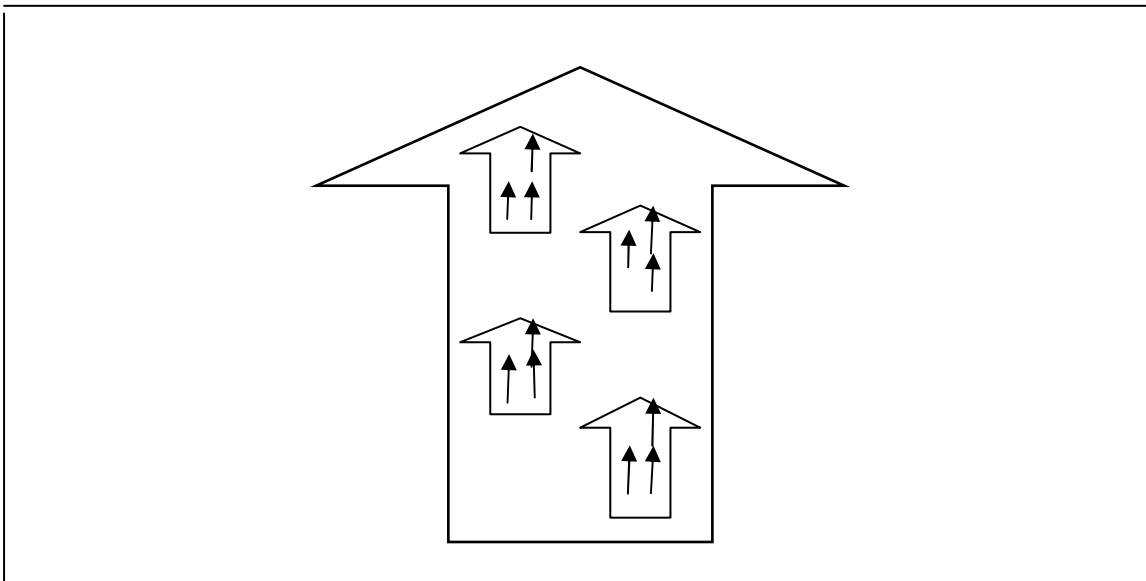
A manager we were recently working with asked the question - *'How much of my time should I spend on managing the people?'* The answer was of course 100%. Like the Principles this part of the Platform is wholly embedded in everything we do. It is not a tap that can be turned on

and off. We can't say *'I think I'll do a bit of motivation for twenty minutes, I haven't done any for a few weeks'*.

Of course the whole People aspect is complex. There are many interlinking facets - motivation, communication etc. It is not the purpose of this article to go into these areas per se. What we do believe is that these things don't just happen and that they need to be every bit as consciously addressed as the functional spine of the Platform.

Benefits

So where does this take us? If carried out properly - and let's remind ourselves here that this is not 'magic dust': it requires time, effort and energy to put in place - it ensures that everything is working towards a common goal.



The outer arrow represents the organisation's purpose. The middle arrows are the various departments within the organisation and their purposes. The small arrows represent the individual staff and their purposes. Each in turn contributes to the others.

Beyond this some of the direct and indirect practical uses of the Platform are:

- Job descriptions - not least, clarity of role for the individual.
- Recruitment and selection - helping to get the best fit for the post on offer. Even if a full match is not available we will know from day one what needs to be developed during the probation period. Probation is not merely time serving.
- Performance management - including, and beyond, the bi-annual form filling.

- Identifying Training Needs - there is no secret to this. Know what you want, see what you've got, identify the gaps, plug them. The Platform clearly establishes the first of these.
- Prioritising workloads – *'is what I am doing right now contributing to my Purpose?'*

Yes codified common sense, but are you doing it?

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