



THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MANAGEMENT BY WALKING AROUND (MBWA)

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BY TEAM# 5:

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Introduction

Keeping people informed about company strategies is critically important in organizations of all sizes. Failure to communicate with employees or allow them access to meaningful information can exact a heavy price. A communication gap doesn't only undermine morale and performance; it can ultimately impact the bottom line. The process of Managing by Walking around (MBWA) was developed to improve team connections and general communication. In a highly effective team, members must understand the organizations end goal or destination and obtain signals over the course of their efforts to confirm that they are on track [1].

MBWA has become one of the best-known and consistently used management techniques. It is a westernized version of the Japanese concept called as "The Gemba Walk" [4]. The term describes an unstructured approach to hands-on, direct participation by managers in the work-related affairs of their subordinates. This often contrasts the rigid and distant command style of traditional management techniques [2]. MBWA emphasizes the importance of interpersonal contact, open appreciation, and recognition. It is one of the most important ways to build civility and performance in the workplace [3, 5].

Tom Peters and Robert Waterman popularized MBWA in the early 1980s because it was (already then) felt that managers were becoming isolated from their subordinates. At Hewlett-Packard, where the approach was practiced from 1973, executives were encouraged to know their people, understand their work, and make themselves more visible and accessible. Bill Hewlett and Dave Packard's business philosophy, centered on deep respect for people and acknowledgment of their built-in desire to do a good job, had evolved into an informal, decentralized management and relaxed, collegial communication style [1]. The message was clear; the more managers went to see what was being done the better the results by almost every criterion.

Literature Review

Different management styles

Different types of leadership styles exist in effective work environments. Advantages and disadvantages exist within each of these leadership styles. The culture and goals of an organization help to determine which leadership style fits the firm best. Many companies allow and even support several different leadership styles within the organization, dependent upon the necessary tasks to complete and departmental needs [8]. Below is an outline of several management styles commonly seen in business today.

Autocratic Management Style

- An autocratic manager makes decisions without the consultation of others, instead serving as a dictator type in communicating orders because they like to be in control of situations.
- This style of management can lead to work getting done on time because there are less people involved in the decision making process.
- The problem with this type of management style is that the staff are going to eventually lose motivation working in an environment where they have no input. Employee turnover is likely to run high as individuals move on to other opportunities where they can have a greater impact.

For situations or events where "on the spot" decisions needs to be made, this type of leadership can serve a purpose. However, when relying on an autocratic style of management for long

periods of time, the number of headaches and corresponding conflicts will likely increase for all involved. This style of leadership is more suited for a prison setting or in the military and not so much for business management.

Democratic Management Style

- A democratic manager is willing to share work with his staff by delegating it to get the job done. You are banking on the competency of your team to get the job done on time and to have it done correctly.
- Employees love this type of management style in business because they feel involved and part of the process. Their job performance is likely to be better than in an autocratic setting.
- Though giving them the authority to do the work may lead some to rely on other to bear the brunt of the work on the project. Also, depending on what type of work it is, employees may feel like the work is being pushed off on them because you as a manager don't feel like doing it.

Getting too many people involved in the project or process can slow the work down. It can also mean less time for you to concentrate on your work as your team will certainly ask more questions. Depending upon the situation, this may result on delays while awaiting your answers before proceeding to the next steps. Regular sync points are recommended for this type of management style to avoid such unnecessary delays.

Participative Management Style

- Sometimes known as a consultative management style, this decision making style in management revolves around getting lots of feedback from your staff before coming to a conclusion and making a decision.
- This means that the process can take a bit longer as there are more voices to be heard, but getting a consensus on major decisions can lead to buy in from those who might otherwise have been opposed to the implementation of such changes.
- The downside to this style of management and leadership is that employees may feel that you don't value their opinion, or are too stubborn, if after all of the feedback is received you go off and make the decision in your own without incorporating any of their feedback.

If you are going to make company or departmental policy changes, this type of style can make the team feel involved and more apt to go with the flow of whatever changes are coming down. This style also works well for brainstorming sessions as you work on new product ideas or marketing promotions.

Laissez Faire Management Style

- In this leadership management style, the team is given the freedom to complete the job or tasks in any way they deem it should be done.
- It is a hands-off approach at the management level in terms of direction, but the manager is there to answer questions and provide guidance as needed.
- This is a good way for developing individual contributors into leaders. This will serve to make your team stronger in the long run. On the flip side, it can lead to conflict in the team as some employees try to assume the role as a leader in the interim or to dictate to others how their work should be done.

This type of management style tends to work very well in creative spaces. It can be perceived as fully empowering to the employee but some less experienced individuals may struggle.

Management by Walking Around Style of Working

- In the above style of working, managers treat themselves as an essential part of the team and are efficient listeners.
- The superiors interact with the employees more often to find out their concerns and suggestions. In such a style of working, the leader is more of a mentor to its employees and guides them whenever needed.
- The managers don't lock themselves in cabins; instead walk around to find out what is happening around them.

Every leader has a unique style of handling the team. The superiors must decide on the future course of action as per the existing culture and conditions at the workplace [7].

As you can see there are many different management styles and each of them can serve a purpose depending on the type of business and environment you are in. The most effective management styles are those where you can take bits and pieces and then combine with your own personal preferences to create a good healthy working environment for all involved.

Why MBWA?

Picture a manager in a lavish office with sumptuous leather furniture and wood-paneled walls. He's sitting behind a huge desk full of important work that needs his attention. He's far too busy to be concerned with anything outside his office walls: there's enough happening within. This type of boss can be intimidating and unapproachable. Yet, this is a common scenario in many organizations.

If managers build a wall around themselves, then their teams may not gain from their experience, and this can undermine problem solving and decision-making. Remaining connected can be a major factor for success: The more connected a manager is, the better he can understand what motivates members of his team, analyze what's really going on, and find solutions that meet the needs of his people and his company. As a boss, he can be admired for his wisdom, knowledge and expertise without being distant and disconnected [6].

To get connected and stay connected; managers need to walk around and talk to their team, work alongside them, ask questions, and be there to help when needed. This can be practiced using MBWA.

The conceptual purpose of MBWA

Management is communication. Every managerial function and activity involves some form of direct or indirect communication. Whether planning and organizing or directing and leading, managers must communicate with and through others. The management process of setting goals, structuring resources and guiding people to act and checking to see if and how goals are met are achieved through communication [3].

MBWA can achieve the following [2]:

- 1) **Morale** – Being heard and recognized often goes a long way to making people feel better about their jobs and their organization. MBWA makes those opportunities available.
- 2) **Productivity** - MBWA promotes informal, open and regular discussions, so people will feel free to come to you with their ideas more often.

- 3) **Approachability** – When a team sees a manager as a person and not a boss, they will be more likely to tell him what’s going on. Manager gets a chance to learn about issues before they become problems.
- 4) **Trust** – Organizations characterized by a high degree of trust are often the most successful.
- 5) **Business knowledge** – The further away managers are from customers and operations the less of a feel they have for day-to-day functions and their problems. Getting out and learning what happening on a better regular basis will give managers a better understanding of the true current situation.
- 6) **Accountability** – Budgets and appraisals are relatively blunt tools. Meeting regularly and informally with team gives more commitment and hence much can be achieved.

Implementing MBWA

Managing by walking around requires involvement, active listening skills, recognition that most people want to contribute, and most importantly commitment at an individual level. It is most effective if managers exhibit sincerity, and are genuinely interested to know about employees and their work. Managers can start by first committing themselves to the process keeping in mind a few fundamentals:

- **Walk Persistently** - Wander about as often as you can, but persistently and preferably daily. Project the image of a coach and mentor as the goal is to improve relationships and improve performance, not be a job inspector and spy on them.
- **Relax** - Engage with your employees in a relaxed and casual mood as you make your rounds. Rigid or formal conversations may lead to similar stiff responses, which defeats the purpose of this exercise.
- **Listen actively**- Ensure that you actively listen to your employee’s suggestions, comments or complaints without any judgments. When employees feel you're hearing them, managers probably seem more genuine.
- **Invite feedback and ideas**- Ask for ideas on ways to improve the work. Employees can be more creative in an informal conversation as sometimes formal meeting with seniors, or business rules or processes may stop them from voicing their ideas.
- **Consider good ideas/ suggestions**- Emphasize on what you have learned while conversing with your employees, and make note of opportunities your employees point out that can be developed into solutions for improving efficiency, making work easier, and increasing engagement.
- **Be responsive**- Provide some ‘on the spot’ help or suggestion or feedback. If you don't know an answer, figure out and then follow up. If you can't share something, communicate so.
- **Spontaneous recognition**- Managers can use this time to reward people for doing something right through public recognition. If they come across some good work, compliment the person. This is a perfect way to show your gratitude.
- **Communicate**- Use the opportunity to communicate the organization’s values. Share company goals, philosophy, values, and vision. These "walk-around" should give the opportunities to mutually share information that helps everyone understand and do their jobs better.

- **Build relationships-** Effective organizations aren't all about work. Build relationships and talk about family, hobbies, vacations, and sports. It could be an amazing feeling to relate on a personal level with the people in your office that can translate into the effective work association.
- **Wander around equally-** Managers want to be approachable to everyone, regardless of job title or position. Ensure that they don't spend more time in one section than another and don't always communicate with the same set of people.
- **Don't judge or critique-** Managers wandering around can make employees nervous. So, managers should ensure that if they see some concerns, talk to the employee later, in private.

Finally, wandering around can be most effective when not exaggerated. It should be regular enough to get a decent feel for what's going on, but not so often that your presence feels like a routine distraction. [3] [6]

Research Questions

The goal of this research is to assess MBWA as a leadership style through real world application. The purpose of this study is to understand the impact or effectiveness of "management by walking around" in enhancing the organizational commitment. The elements of the study are seen by answering the following questions. As a part of this research we also conducted interviews with business heads/senior managers who as part of their job roles use MBWA as a management technique. Following are some of the questions that were asked:

- Describe exact responsibilities and activities over which you had oversight?
- What are the biggest challenges facing the people you manage and how do you support them?
- What is the current 'know-your-team' style of the management?
- What management roles would MBWA be considered most effective and ineffective?
- How does MBWA help you to accomplish your team's performance?
- Do you manage team members in a different location? How do you most effectively manage those team members?
- How does MBWA help you to accomplish your leadership goals?

Research Design

The data we have collected for this survey was obtained using a tried-and-tested 'interviewing' technique. For this survey, we interviewed people at key positions across different industries. Leaders and managers employ multiple techniques to manage their teams; MBWA is one of them.

The goal is to understand the key usage cases of MBWA, its effectiveness (or usefulness), preferred leadership styles, challenges faced and how managers can mistakenly use this effective technique to play favoritism or micromanaging their teams.

The table below categorizes the firms by their effective industries:

Firm	Industry
Firm 1	Information Technology
Firm 2	Semiconductor
Firm 3	Automotive

Table 1: List of Interviewees**Results and Discussion**

The interview techniques helped us to gain a first-person view of how effective and useful, MBWA technique is. Below are the cited responses of different managers from the survey.

Firm 1

Background: Business Head in an IT Company with over 17 years of experience in developing solutions for different ISVs and enterprises.

Biggest challenge: “There is intense competition for promotions, growth, etc. and getting top performers to cooperate with each other in the team and work towards a common goal can be challenge. In such situation having a better connect with the team helps to make them understand bigger goal and encourage team spirit”.

Leadership style: “I work through intuition and hands on leadership. It’s important for me to delegate in my role, and yet be able to provide necessary mentoring and cover when my juniors need support. MBWA actually accomplishes that well – since being out there allows me a close interaction with the team on a regular, day to day basis, and not just during pre-scheduled planning and review meetings”.

Effectiveness: “MBWA, for me, is indeed the most effective way for communicating with the team, although it does have its limitations when the team is spread across geographies. In those cases, a quick phone call with an optional WebEx works best.

The biggest advantage of MBWA is that, as a leader, it takes you out onto the floor, giving employees a better connect with you, since they are in their comfort zone. When giving demos, or discussing status, it puts employees a lot more at ease than if you were to summon them to an executive cabin.

Email used to be my most preferred mechanism earlier, due to its pervasive availability, and offline capabilities. You can send an email without waiting for the other party to be available and is very effective for sending out quick comments or instructions. However, email encourages impulsive behavior, and I have been consciously trying to avoid it for the past year or so.”

Usefulness: “MBWA is definitely the best option for managers in industries like IT, where a lot of innovation and thinking is required, ensuring leaders have a good pulse of what’s happening on the floor. It’s absolutely critical in BPOs and call centers, where young, inexperienced workers can gain tremendously from the experience of seniors. In traditional manufacturing and blue-collar industries, MBWA may not be as convenient, especially on factory floors, but wherever possible, should be followed as a way for senior management to stay connected and accessible to the workers”.

Negatives: “One should be careful in not letting MBWA get used as a means to keep a watch on team members, peering over their shoulders, and keeping them constantly on the lookout for wandering managers! One should also ensure that you give equal attention to everyone, and not have a set of favorite employees you spend all your time on”.

Firm 2

Background: With over twenty years in the semiconductor industry and the majority of that time spent managing people at different levels, this manager has seen numerous trends and management challenges.

Biggest challenge: “I think by far the largest challenge relates to cross site development”. In other words, it is very difficult to judge individual success and happiness without being able to interact. “I try to meet with my employees face to face whenever I can but just the logistics of traveling to another country consistently make this difficult”. Program indicators only show part of the story and often “simply reflect to success of the group rather than the individual”.

Leadership style: “I think this has varied a great deal over my career” and “has a lot to do with what my focus is at the time”. That may sound inconsistent but as a manager “you are not only responsible for team effort and development but also often individual tasks”. As you advance, you are given “responsibilities for varying corporate directives, some of which require far more peer to peer interaction and pure data collection”. In general, however, “I believe that I am perceived as a manager that is more interested in removing roadblocks for your success”. “Micro managing is counter-productive but a few minutes of face to face ‘how can I help’ time is highly productive in so many ways”.

Effectiveness: “People management can be quite different that project management” in that for projects you tend to be more concerned with defined progress and task deliverables. When factoring in people management skills you want to ensure that the employee not only delivers results but also receives guidance and development opportunities. “In most cases there is a fine balance and techniques such as MBWA are a good way to judge progress. General progress indicators can easily be developed for tracking workloads and completion dates, but it is not as easy to determine if an employee is correctly challenged or happy”. Even phone conversations, although better than email, “only paint a limited picture of a person’s success”.

Negatives: You have to be really careful on how you employ various interactive techniques. “And it varies between people”. “I have managed very effective and content individuals who wanted to be completely left alone. Any ‘intrusion’ into their workspace above a limit was deemed as micromanagement”. Contrast this with people who “want or need constant reassurance”. You really have to learn what works best for each individual. “I have often found that just asking what people are comfortable with is the best policy”. This needs to be revisited on a fairly regular basis as situations and comfort levels often change over time.

Firm 3

Background: The person is a Sr. manager in an automotive firm and handles 7-8 projects. He has a team of approximately 50, 10 in different locations.

Biggest challenge: He has a visibility with the vice president of the company and hence, tries to be as strategic as possible. This forces the team to keep pace with the developments. Such fast pace increases the maturity level of the team and makes them self-sufficient. Also, because of more visibility, there is too much pressure and work and hence no time for long formal meetings for updates.

Leadership style (described by team): He is very sound both technically and managerially. Because of the busy schedule, he comes office early and tries to have stand-up meetings with the team. Sometimes he talks on non-work related topics or delegates the presentations to the team. This gives freedom to the team. The team gets a sense of partnership and commitment.

Effectiveness: The manager practices MBWA frequently as his management style. Walking to the cubicles and asking for the developments is his style of management. He believes mail is a very formal communication with the team members. Mails don't make relationships. He takes the words as commitments. If, he is not around to talk personally, call is the second option. The same is the case with the team members. They are not hesitant to talk to or call him.

People who are in different locations occasionally have videoconferences with him. Appreciation mails, motivational speeches build the trust with them. He believes that a new joiner, be it in physical team or virtual team should have a face-to-face conversations with managers. This relaxes him and gives the ability to approach.

Negatives: There are no negatives with MBWA unless walking into cubicles is not spying. Walking should not be walking to make the managerial presence felt. Talking is the key. The manager says, "When you have a face-to-face conversation with a person, you can read him and understand the issues more. Even in calls you can have a sense of reading the emotions. Such impacts are not achievable through mails."

Firm 4

Background: The person is a Project Manager in a Software Services firm and handles multiple projects in USA and Russia.

Leadership Style: MBWA helps in trust building and open communication which indeed leads to accomplishment of goals related to the project deliverables. "Leadership is based on consensus, I make decisions based on pros and cons of the outcomes. Dictation is not my style".

Effectiveness: "MBWA, for me, is the most effective approach for knowledge sharing. It is the best method to know status of the project as quickly as possible. I have been working as a project manager for 10 years and have been constantly using MBWA, which helped me to get an idea of what problems team members face by talking to them face to face. It was useful for me to understand the level of personal skills that team members have, that in return made me understand that they need more training and for me, to reschedule the project deliverables (only if possible). I call MBWA an informal way of formal one on one."

Usefulness: "MBWA is a very good option for managers in software industries, I have mixed emotions, but overall it is good. The main usefulness of it is that we meet project schedule, improve ideas, and helps in getting quick reminder and verification of work. Bonding with team members is very important to build trust, which helps in understanding the skills of the individual and problems the individual face. This makes a manager to handle the work or distribute the work among the team members effectively."

Negatives: "I manage teams in Russia too, in that case MBWA is not a good idea. I make use of communication through technology medium like emails, instant messenger and audio conference. So, MBWA is definitely not a good idea for managing geographically dispersed teams. MBWA is the best known method for the teams that are local and not virtual. The main negatives which I felt was that the some team members don't like MBWA, because they feel that they are being watched continuously and some of them don't like to interact frequently by face to face, they like to keep it formal through emails."

Conclusion

Management by walking around (MBWA) is a common management practice that can be very helpful in managing and engaging employees, setting a good examples, and staying in touch with what's really happening with employees [9].

It means that the manager leaves his or her office, plant, lab, etc. (onto the floor) and sees firsthand what people are doing. The purpose is two-fold: both to learn what is going by gaining a sense of morale, and also to demonstrate that you're interested and involved [9].

MBWA can be practiced effectively if it doesn't turn into a prowl and growl. It can be effective if:

1. It is a part of regular routine. If a manager is only visible during special occasions then MBWA can never be successful.
2. MBWA is not for correcting employees. Unless there are some urgent issues to be addressed, it is not for finding faults publicly. Managers should have calm and confident demeanor to feel employees confident enough to speak.
3. Managers should respect employees' privacy. They should not talk intrusively.
4. Managers should listen actively rather than checking their blackberries. Eye contacts and paraphrasing gives team members a level of understanding.
5. The managers should treat every member as equal. Dropping in on some often than others gives a wrong impression.

The managers we interviewed agree that walking around is a very effective engagement technique. Even though they may not have been aware of the specific terminology, they all practice this management technique. This technique helps them to know the realities of their teams both earlier and better. It improves connectivity and helps the team to transition to a high performing one.

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