

Managers should insist on professional status

Soapbox

By Ruth Spellman

A few weeks ago, in this column, leading academic Richard Barker denied management professional status, claiming that the role cannot, and never should, be viewed as a profession. ("Management can never be a profession", September 5).

Although many people may be inclined to side with Prof Barker, I am determined to change their minds. Management absolutely should be, and must be, regarded as a profession in its own right. A failure to recognise this is already damaging UK plc.

Acknowledging that the discipline has professional status is the only way to address the current poor standards of management. Perhaps the reason that some are willing to deny that management has professional standing is that many managers simply do not want to accept their responsibilities. It is estimated that there are 4.6m managers in the UK, and many of these fell into their roles "accidentally". Having not set out to become managers at the start of their careers, these individuals often do not appreciate the vital importance of management excellence. Indeed, many do not recognise that they are managers at all, as the shape of their role differs so greatly from traditional outdated views of what it means to be a manager.

Rather than shying away from their responsibilities, managers should be clamouring for professional status.

There is widespread management under-performance in the UK. Currently, only one in five managers holds a professional qualification

and this must change before the competitiveness of the UK is further eroded. According to Chartered Management Institute's 2004 report, "Developing Managers: A European Perspective", the UK invests less in management development than most of its continental neighbours, (£1,625 per manager in the UK, compared with €4,438 in Germany), with only Romania spending less than the UK training the people who manage and lead its businesses and public sector organisations.

These are the people whose decisions and actions will play an enormous part in helping the UK turn the corner now the recession is coming to an end - we need to be confident they will do the right and best thing for the country.

Recognising management as a profession will help to raise leadership standards and safeguard our competitive future. It will also encourage more international companies to consider establishing themselves in the UK.

We cannot afford for international businesses to ignore UK talent. In an age of austerity, management

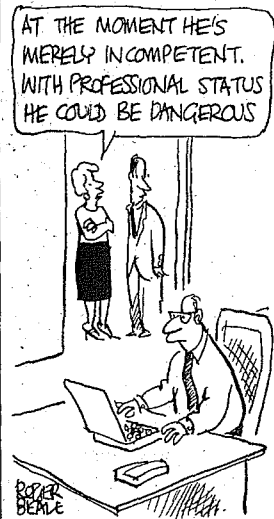
skills are vital for recovery and, if they are not properly regulated, poor leadership can have an impact on the bottom line. If poor skills cause mistakes, there will be cost implications in rectifying their incompetence. Although professional status cannot prevent every mistake, it can make managers appreciate the importance of their role, the potential consequences if they underperform and that they are accountable.

If further reason is needed, consider the moral implications of poor management. Managers are entrusted with considerable responsibility and their actions can have an impact well beyond the confines of their organisations. You only need to look to recent examples in the financial and energy sectors to see the devastating impact that substandard management can have on people's lives. Society, the environment and the economy can all suffer from poor decisions and managers have a duty to improve their skills to minimise the levels of incompetence that have been commonplace lately in both the UK and the US in particular.

If managers continue to make these mistakes, they must be held accountable. Members of CMI adhere to a code of conduct that, if broken, results in their membership being revoked. If more managers signed up to this code of behaviour, we could combat bad management once and for all.

Management may not yet be viewed as a profession across the board but it should and must be and it is high time for managers to take note.

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