

## Management by Wandering Around (MBWA) as a Leadership Mechanism in UiTM Pahang

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### ABSTRACT

*Relatively modest coordination among employees could be met through various basic management principles. Management By Wandering Around (MBWA) is one of the mechanisms that can be applied towards a better working environment in UiTM Pahang. Probably, it could help in gaining more productivity interest and harmonious relationship among employees and the higher level of management as MBWA required managers to be closed with one another. It could give lots of opportunities in revealing problems that are not implied directly or known to manager. This concept paper will discuss the application of MBWA in UiTM Pahang and the benefits gained as well. Few examples of companies that have successfully applied this concept will be explained in detail to support the statement of the effectiveness of MBWA.*

**Key words:** *Management by Wandering Around (MBWA), leadership, managers*

### Introduction

To become a leader would be one of the dreams to some of us. For them, leading is just giving direction and ensuring that those employees will do their job as expected. That is what being understood by the meaning of leading. In reality, being ('as' deleted) a leader is not an easy task because it involves responsibility and accountability. Leading itself could become critical if it is not done correctly. One of the social management philosophers that is Mary Parker Follet once said that management definition can be based on "getting things done through people" where she proposed the people-oriented ideas (Robbins, 1994). The word "people" refer to employees or staff. In other words, to achieve goals as expected, managers need to use their expertise and skill through the help from their employees. This is where the crucial part begins. Managing people requires ones to understand people. But the question is – how to understand them (employees)? Do we have to be too close as good friends? These are some of the questions that need a clear explanation to be understood. Management By Wandering Around (MBWA) is one of the solutions in finding the best way to manage organisation. This discussion will start with discussing on why MBWA can be applied based on one of the leadership theory understood and then focused on how it could be implemented at the next phase

### Management by Wandering Around (MBWA)

Boardman (2004) discussed that MBWA is a way on how managers manage the organisation by wandering around and engaging staff in informal interactions. The other definition of MBWA given is based on the explanation by Peters (1982) – one of the management gurus. The definition is taken from his book "In Search of Excellence" which will conclude on what is

MBWA. According to him, MBWA involves asking, watching and especially listening to employees.

Normally, interactions involve communication and it is known that communication is the lifeblood of the organisation. Important messages and information come through an effective communication. It can be gathered probably by formal or informal communication. The concept of MBWA is the other parts of communication types where one gets the information not solely from the formal channel or one way communication only. Apparently, most of the organisation efforts in improving their products or services are just based on fulfilling their external customer needs and lack of attention given to the other internal customer. Hence, the concept of MBWA is trying to find ways on how to increase the organisational performance from the internal customer ideas where our employee is our customer – internal customer.

Lecturers as well as the supporting administrative employees are the internal customer for UiTM Pahang. Managers (managers here are referred to leaders such as Campus Director, Assistant Campus Director, Head of Programs, Head of Department, Assistant Registrar) should be noted that MBWA is interrelated with the concept of Total Quality Management where organisation is giving focus on customer needs and get participation and teamwork by everyone in the organisation (Evans & Lindsay, 2008). MBWA concept is more to employee concern by having the formal and informal communication as well. In many cases, managers have to stress on the informal interaction or directly with employees and not only based on the formal communication such as meetings and memos as it could limit the relationship. This is the definition of MBWA according to Daft and Marcic (2001). The purpose of implementing this concept is to make sure that managers know what is going on in the organization. It happens where some managers are just staying in their offices, spending most of the times with the official works but expecting that they will become more effective and they know everything in giving solution to each problem faced. By implementing the MBWA concept, it is hoped that they could become a better managers where understanding and empathy will become the priority in doing so.

## **MBWA and the Managerial Grid**

W. Edwards Deming – an American who introduced the quality management concepts to the Japanese once said, “if you wait for people to come to you, you will only get small problems. You must go and find them. The big problem is where people do not realize they have one in the first place” (Lesonsky, 2008). Nowadays, most people being managed are more educated than the workers in the previous years. More and more employees are from the “knowledge employees” and less in hands on level. Managing today’s employees require managers to become more sensitive to their needs and wants. Leaders might forget that they sometimes give more intention on how to complete tasks in a timely manner or how they could achieve the well planned organisational goals better so that they are going to be better rewarded.

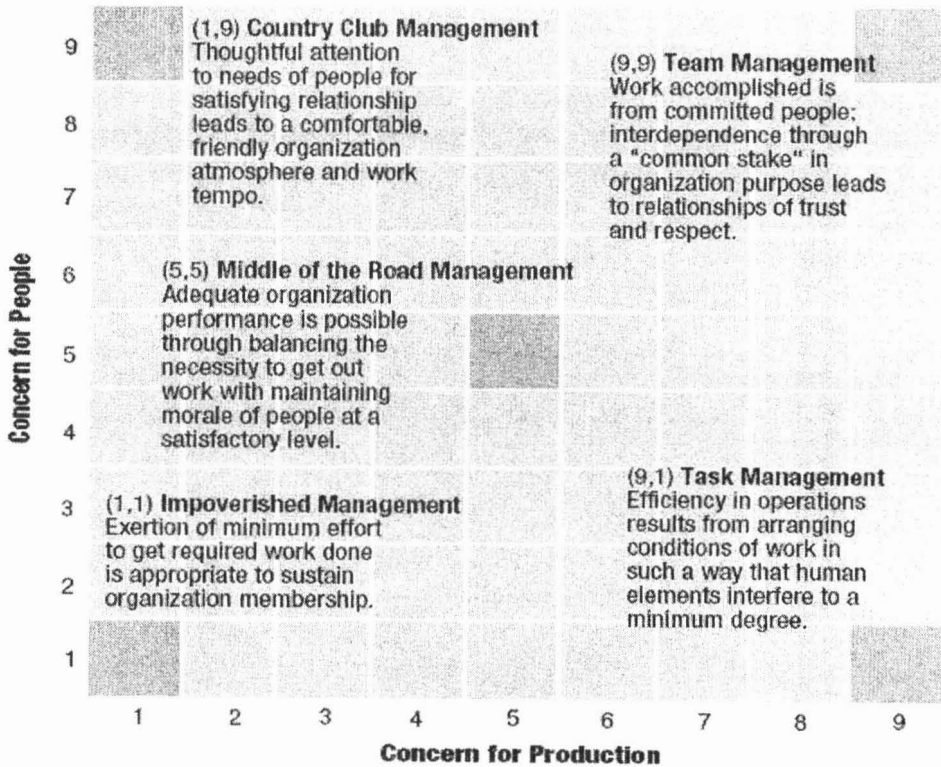
Leadership involves influencing people and it is a “people activity” (Daft & Marcic, 2000). It can be done through using the power / authority given. Employees can accept the authority used as long as it is not misused. Leadership style is not unidimensional within the task orientation of employee orientation. It must be applied both to become a better leader. MBWA is not a 100% people orientation but it will be supported by the other 100% of the task orientation. This explanation will be supported by the theory of “The Managerial Grid” developed by Robert Blake and Jane Mouton as in Table 1. This Managerial Grid helps in measuring the manager’s relative concern for people and task orientation, each expressed as a

continuum on a scale of 1 – 9 (1 is considered low concern and 9 is high concern).

Based on the grid, style 1,1 is called the *Impoverished Management* where the situation is low concern for people and low concern for task. It can be also called as *laissez-faire* because the leader does not play the leadership role. Style 1,9 management is *Country Club Management* where it reflects high concern for employees and low concern for task / production. Style 9,1 management is *Task or Authoritarian Management* shows that the leader is really efficient where he gives focus on the production or task only and forget on the other side that is the people. Style 5,5 is the *Middle of The Road Management* where it gives an intermediate amount of both task / production and people concern as well. Lastly, style 9, 9 management is called as *Team or Democratic Management* – a high concern for both task / production and people concern.

Both Blake and Mouton strongly believed that style 9, 9 is the most effective management style and it works in any situation. This is where the MBWA plays its part. MBWA plays the role where managers should understand, listen and have an effective communication with the employees. At the same time, managers will play their role to direct the employees on achieving the company’s mission. Generally, the carefully mix between this two styles is hoped could create a better working environment and successful organisation.

Table 1: The Managerial Grid



Source: Adapted and reprinted by permission of the *Harvard Business Review*. An exhibition from "Breakthrough in Organization Development" by Blake et al., 1964, p. 136).

## Applying MBWA Successfully

There is no single perfect way given in practicing MBWA effectively by any management scholars. The guideline explained below is based on few articles and books found. The application can be divided into three phases namely beginning phase, development phase and maturity phase.

### Beginning Phase

Managers should start the program by implying planning to establish an overall strategy and goals as well. It is concerned with what is to be done and how it is to be done in assuring the activities are successfully implemented. Planning at the beginning phase is important to reduce overlapping and wasteful activities. The most ultimate goal('s' deleted) at this phase is creating trust among the employees as feeling of trust and familiarity between managers and employees must already exist to begin applying MBWA in UiTM Pahang.

### Development Phase

The second phase involves few activities that can be used in familiarising managers to their employees. The activities involves are as below:

#### 1. *Communication*

Managers should encourage a two way communication and talk frequently with the colleagues. It is advised that the communication should remain open and responsive to questions and concerns. An effective two way communication could prevent dysfunctional conflict from arising. Besides, managers must try to reduce any misunderstanding or disagreement by identifying and solving each problem correctly. On the other hand, managers must bear in mind that the discussion must beyond the business related issues. It is because employees might feel alienated that they are not the right person to discuss the business matter. The issues can range from the hobbies, vacations, sports, the family matters or personal life. By having these types of discussions, it is hoped that there is a sense of sharing among them.

#### 2. *Informal Gathering*

An informal gathering can be held such as "Kopitiam Corner", surprised birthday party, family day or even having lunch together in the cafe. The objective of the gathering is to show the sincerity in pursuing the relationship. Employees will give the 100% undivided faith to the company if they feel that they are being appreciated. It would be better if managers could remember their employees' names to show their concern towards employees.

#### 3. *Active Listening*

The ability to be an effective listener is often taken for granted. Listening requires managers to pay maximum attention, interpreting and remembering points. Managers must show their concern by listening carefully to any discussions, suggestions, problems or comments. They should avoid interruption while the communication takes place. Let the employees complete their thoughts before making any responses. If possible, managers should bring along paper and pencil in their pockets wherever they go. The purpose is to write down any information

gathered to make sure that it is not forgotten.

### **Maturity Phase**

At this level, it is expected that managers have reached to a stable relationship with the employees. All the planned activities should proceed as usual and it must remain stronger. MBWA activities must be practised frequently so that the employees feel comfortable with the manager's presence.

### **MBWA: Does It Work?**

Few leaders are very doubtful whether MBWA works in assisting them to pursue organisation's excellence. There are some who even claim that MBWA popularity and practicality has deteriorated because of the advancement in electronic communication and development of more modern management technique (Talent Management, 2008). Despite of the doubt and claim made by these leaders, MBWA has proven working over the years to any organisations regardless of its products, services or industry. Sam Walton, Bill Hewitt, Dave Packard and Tony Fernandez are the examples of successful leaders who have incorporated time for MBWA to their daily schedule. The successful of leaders who impart MBWA to their organisation's culture can be described through few examples below.

"Big Tim" Danielle, the former Chief Executive of RMI is a good example to start with. RMI is subsidiary of United States Steel and National Distillers. For years, the company's profit was substandard with poor productivity and profits. But later, RMI has had a remarkable success, owing to its adaption of MBWA. As the Chief executive, "Big Tim" spent much of his time riding around the factory in a golf cart, waving and joking with his workers, listening to them and calling them with their first names. In addition, he spent a lot of time with his union. He called the union members into his meeting and updated them on the company's latest information. As a result, he managed to gain 80% productivity and reduced his union grievances from about 300 to 20 without having to invest any cents on the effort (Peters & Waterman, 1982). Thus, it proves that Management By Walking Around can pay off big if it is done in the right way.

Another high technology company which highly practised Management by Wandering Around (MBWA) is HP. HP treats MBWA as a major tenet of its "HP Way" which is the company's people-centred philosophy. Many of the practices of "HP Way" became widely imitated by corporations throughout the United States in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Peters & Waterman, 1982). Under the MBWA philosophy, Dave Packard and Bill Hewitt, co-founders of HP, believed that workers are able to do a good job, make contribution, enjoy their work and gain recognition if they are provided with the proper environment. Therefore, they regularly visited their plant and communicated openly and informally with their employees. In addition, their managers were required to be approachable, open to ideas and to regard themselves as being on the same egalitarian team as their employees. They were required to walk around and talk to their employees. HP managers also believe that MWBA is the right way to find out how their employees feel about their jobs and what make the employees' work become more productive and more meaningful (Campbell, 1992). As a consequence, they were able to increase their workers capability, innovativeness and enthusiasm. The strength and ability of their staff have enabled HP to be the largest worldwide seller of personal computers and the 5th largest software company in the world. The company also posted US \$91.7 billion in annual revenue in

2006, making it the world's largest technology vendor in terms of sales. In 2007 the revenue was \$104 billion making HP the first IT companies in history to report revenues exceeding \$100 billion (Wikipedia, 2008).

Sam Walton, founder of Wal Mart which is one of the biggest retailers in the world, is another leader who ultimately embedded MBWA in his leadership style. Sam Walton was a legend in the retailing industry as he was able to expand Wal Mart consistently and turn Wal Mart to be the number one position in retailing by surpassing Sears, Roebuck. The driving force of Wal Mart success is simply Walton's attention on his employees. His concern towards his employees is mirrored in his activities. There was an incident whereby Mr. Walton woke up at 2.30 am, took four dozen of donuts to one of Wal Mart distribution centre and chatted for a while with workers from the shipping docks. As a result, he discovered that the centre was lack of certain equipment (Peters & Waterman, 1982). Besides that, the executive offices of Wal Mart are virtually empty. Headquarters resemble a warehouse. The reason is that Walton's managers spent most of their time out in the Wal Mart's eleven state service areas. What the managers did outside of the office was to lead cheerleading squad at new Wal Mart store openings and conducting soul-searching sessions with the employees. Walton himself visits every store every year as he has done since 1962. He even flagged a Wal Mart truck and rode the rest of the way to chat with the driver (1982). As a result, in 2005, Wal-Mart had \$312.4 billion in sales, more than 6,200 facilities around the world, including 3,800 stores in the United States and 2,800 elsewhere, employing more than 1.6 million "associates" worldwide. Wal Mart has also been listed as America's largest corporation on the Fortune 500 for three consecutive years (Wikipedia, 2008).

Another successful leader who incorporated MBWA in his company's corporate culture is Raymond Albert Kroc, the founder of McDonald's. Ray Kroc believes that senior managers should be out in the field, paying attention to employees, training and execution. Hence, he regularly visits stores and assessed them on the factors the company holds, Q.S.C and V (Quality, Service, Cleanliness and Value). As a result, McDonald's has now become the leading global foodservice retailer with more than 30,000 local restaurants serving 52 million people in more than 100 countries each day. It is also one of the worlds' most well-known and valuable brands and holds a leading share in the globally branded quick service restaurant segment of the informal eating-out market in virtually every country in which they do business. The company shares of stock worth approximately \$3.3 million on December 31, 2006 and was added to the 30-company Dow Jones Industrial Average (Wikipedia, 2008).

MBWA is practised not only by the American corporate leaders but also by the Malaysian corporate leaders. One of the Malaysian CEOs who really embark on MBWA is Tony Fernandez of Air Asia. Tony Fernandez knows the name of his ground and on air key staff. He also greets passenger with warm and high five as they board a plane. Due to his outstanding leadership, he is able to turn Air Asia from a bankrupt carrier to the largest budget carriers operating more than 100 routes, covering over 60 destinations. Furthermore, under his leadership, Air Asia is able to increase its two aircrafts operation of Boeing 737-300 to a fleet of 72 and carry more than 50 millions passengers since its first day of operating (Salbiah, 2008).

Another supporter of MBWA strategy is Bill Marriot, chairman and CEO of the Marriot International. In order to know the treatment of the hotel to the customers who spent money with them, he did not check it with anyone else in the management. Instead, he got the information by visiting each of his hotel chains. He even assisted his guests with luggage and read every customer complaint card himself (Peters & Waterman, 1982). Today, Marriott International has about 3,150 lodging properties located in the United States and 67 other countries and territories. Its income in 2008 is US \$13.3 billion and net income of US\$696 million. The company has also



been awarded as 100 best companies to work with in 2008 by the Fortune magazine (Wikipedia, 2008).

MBWA is also applied by leaders in the education sector. One example of higher learning institution leader who implements MBWA in his working behaviour is Dr. Clifford Shisler, Director of the Office Research Grants and Contract at Northern Kentucky University. As the leader of research and grant at his university, he scheduled time once or twice a week to walk through departments and faculty office areas. During the walk through, he did not set any agenda except to talk with the faculty member about how things are doing and to identify the project faculty are currently working on. As a result, he was able to encourage the faculty members to conduct research and hence increase the research proposal submissions by various faculty members. Besides that, the faculty members were also amazed that a director is out and has made time to visit them (Shisler, 1995). Few researches have also proven that the MBWA behaviours applied by the leaders of educational institution such as conducting classroom walk through, observing classroom walk through, participating with educators in discussion and giving constructive feedback to educators are closely linked to highly desired outcome. Some of the desired outcomes are:

1. Management by Walking About behaviours lead to higher student achievement across socio-economic and cultural lines (Hallinger & Heck, 1996).
2. MBWA activities help to improve classroom instruction (Teddle, Kirby & Springfield, 1989).
3. MBWA improves teacher perceptions of the principals effectiveness (Wimpelberg, Teddlie & Stringfield, 1989).
4. MBWA improves student discipline and student acceptance of advice and criticism (Blaze, 1991).
5. MBWA increases educators' efficacy (Frase, 1998).

## **Benefits of MBWA**

MBWA can be a powerful tool for managers. By implementing it efficiently and effectively, MBWA can result tremendous benefits. Managers who incorporate the MBWA strategy into their leadership and supervisory technique simply make a point to be visible throughout the workplace at varying points of time. When managers ensure that they are visible to their subordinates, they can send several very important messages that can have positive impact to the organisation's overall business operation. Visible managers are also perceived by the workers as being "in touch" with the people and the workplace (Patterson, 2007). When employees see that the managers are genuinely concerned about their well being, respected and appreciated them, they usually return those feelings to the managers.

When workers know that their managers may pop up at any point of time, they are likely to make an effort to be on their best and most productive behavior at the majority of time. If managers get in a habit of walking through the office, store or warehouse, employees will always be prepared to impress the managers at all time and might even think twice to leave their workplace. However, they may become complacent when they feel there is little chance for the managers to turn up while they work.

MBWA is able to foster an open door policy in an organisation. When managers make a point of bumping into the workers regularly, they make it much easier for the employees to share information with the managers and less stressful to open up to managers about all types of issues. Open door policy is needed in an organisation so that employees know they can come to

managers with any concerning issues and ask questions or highlight problems without seeking the managers out. Furthermore, open communication is the key to business survival, particularly when times are tough. During tough time, there is the possibility that employees leave their employer. When employees leave for a new employer the reason is seldom deals with money - salary and benefits, but rather with feelings of not being appreciated, or their talents not recognized and being used to full potential. In the end, it all comes down to treating employees with the appreciation and recognition that they rightly deserve. The traits and practices that an effective manager can utilise to handle these events are to enjoy getting out from behind the desk, or the top floor and practise management by wandering around.

MBWA can be used to show support to those whom managers supervise, and finally, gives managers a first-hand look whether the manager's intentions, visions, and values are reflected in the actions of employees. As such, walking around can provide a tangible demonstration of manager's leadership impact.

MBWA is not a philosophy for low and mid level managers only. In fact, it is the most important for top level managers. In large organisations, top level managers are frequently far removed from the actual day-to-day operations of their companies. It is critically important that they truly understand the needs and desires of their people and organisations. MBWA allows open and informal communication to occur between managers and workers and helps break down the crippling effects of organisational bureaucracy. This approach also allows employees to frequently generate high levels of spontaneous and creative synergy because employees and the boss can freely and casually exchange ideas. Thus, organisations that needs "leader" in their top organisational positions must encourage and engage in MBWA.

MBWA can tangibly demonstrate that managers are interested in a particular area. It enables managers to communicate a tone, style and perspective. By walking around, managers will have an opportunity to "walk his talk," to show commitment to the vision and core values of the organization. Along those same lines, MBWA provide a chance for managers to communicate "live in person", the organization's strategic plan (Linowes, 2008). For example, if safety, quality and customer service are the core values of the company, managers can help to enforce these priorities through regular contact with their employees. By being clear regarding what the managers expect of the employees when facing conflict between any of these core values, managers are able to avoid any costly problems.

MBWA enables managers to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) of the company. As organizational decision makers, it is critical that managers understand the SWOT that exist in their business environments before making important decisions. It is also important to know the effects and repercussion of decisions on the firms. A solution that seems clear-cut on paper might have disastrous consequences in practice. By being familiar with the true working environment of the firm and its people, managers are able to avoid such costly mistakes made from the wrong decision. When managers elect to walk around and get to know their employees on a more personal basis, their employees will see them as a person not as merely as a boss. In addition, as managers get to know their employees, managers will be able to form their own opinions about the workers, as opposed to having to rely on hearsay. MBWA helps managers keep their accountability. When managers are out talking to the workers face-to-face, they will feel uncomfortable seeing the workers again if they have not solved the workers' problem. Therefore, in order to build the trust among employees on them, managers need to solve the problems of their employees immediately. With the trust of the employees, it is easier for the managers to lead the employees.



## Conclusion

Despite of the environmental and technological changes that occur today, MBWA still proves to be effective in helping leaders or managers to achieve excellence in their organisation's performance. UiTM Pahang can change and become one of the best among the UiTM's campuses as well as the other higher institutions only if the designated leaders are committed to improvement. Most of the founders and CEOs of successful companies in the world such as RMI, HP, Wal Mart, McDonalds', Marriot International and Air Asia, are the ultimate supporter of MBWA strategy. Under their leadership, the performance of the companies led by them increase significantly, in terms of revenues, profit, productivity as well as number of stores and chains. To enjoy the advantages of MBWA, leaders and managers need to implement it effectively. Effective MBWA helps managers and leaders to be visible, increase workers productivity, encourage open door policy and generate high levels of spontaneous and creative synergy. MWBA managers are also able to identify their company's SWOT and they are trusted by their employees due to their accountability. It is hoped that MBWA could be effectively implemented in UiTM Pahang towards a better world class university in future.

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