

# The person with mana

*There's a meeting at your workplace, and the manager maps out the new directions excitedly. The team sits back and wonders – what's in it for us, and do we go with it?*

Watching for the subtle signs, you notice everyone looking to one person around the table. If they nod almost imperceptibly, the new direction is supported. If not, it's doomed to fail.

Who is this person? They're rarely the official manager, and their leadership role may not be on the organisation chart. But they're always there in the background - leading, influencing and enabling or preventing; possibly while a number of official leaders have come and gone.

You have found the person with "mana" – the one everyone looks to for guidance.

"Mana" is an indigenous Pacific Islander concept of an impersonal force or quality that resides in people, animals, and inanimate objects (Wikipedia).

Mana is a major factor in our personal and working lives, and it can be used for good and evil in our organisations! While the term is not related to 'management', effective leaders themselves have mana – it appears as individual personal power, strength, influence, charisma and impact.



In traditional Hawaiian cultures the king and queen were believed to possess so much mana that they could intercede with nature (they also believed their mana could be stolen through sorcery or if someone walked on their shadow).

Traditional cultures held that objects that have mana – charms or amulets - can change a person's luck. In Melanesian culture if a prosperous hunter gave a charm that had mana to another person the prosperous hunter's luck would go with it.

And today, online games featuring magic often include a limited pool of mana which is depleted when the character casts spells.

Of course we are generally all above such superstitions now, and no longer need such symbolic representations of power. That is why we don't display power dressing, power objects, prestige vehicles, titles including the word "Chief" (such as "CEO" and "CIO"), bigger corner offices on higher floors with special views, personal assistants and so on!

So, some personal 'mana' hints?

It can be learnt and developed. Individuals can develop mana, and we can help others build it.

Firstly, don't let your mana slip away – this can result from negative emotions, too much rushing and multi-tasking. We lose mana through indulgence in excessive food, alcohol/drugs or distractions like TV, and through not enough productive activities such as physical exercise, personal and professional development, and de-stressing with meditation, yoga or relaxation.

Secondly, build personal mana. Practice the leadership styles that you see as being highly effective. Emulate a favourite leader or influencer. Discover how they do what they do, and set about it

in a style that has integrity and sits comfortably with you. This is called modelling; as a consultant I'm asked to model top organisational performers so that others can get similar results.

Organisational leaders wanting to bring about change need to use mana - their own, or through other

'mana-holders'. People with mana are often key influencers behind the scenes, and effective influencing of them can include working directly with them – giving them insights into the benefits of change, providing special roles, getting them onboard. Bringing them into the foreground can help, and sometimes if that unofficial leadership is destructive, it may be time for a mana reduction!

You can build 'team mana' as well. Team bonding sessions and development programs can achieve this, and an aligned, committed team has great power.

Finally, we can look for new symbols of power at work. The leader who is best at inspiring individual effort and effective teamwork now has more influence than the leader who purely uses force to get results. In some of the most sophisticated workplaces, you'll see the 'Chief' out there, mixing it with their team, leading from the front. That takes real mana!