

A Leading Manager: Working it out

Abeer Mohammed Raafat Khalaf

English Literature
Faculty of Arts
Assuit University
Egypt.

Abstract

Business fiction has not been given due attention though there are many novels that are shelved under such category. The Three Signs of a Miserable Job: A Fable for Managers and Their Employees (2007) by Patrick Lencioni, an American CEO and writer, belongs to this category. He introduces a model which tackles the reasons of job misery and how to overcome them. He explains there are three signs of job misery: Anonymity, irrelevance, and immeasurement. The aim of this paper is to examine how his model succeeds in overcoming job misery. This is going to be carried out by applying Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan's theory of self-determination in relation to transformational leadership. This model succeeds because it satisfies the three basic needs of human beings.

Keywords: Self-determination theory, transformational leadership, anonymity, irrelevance, immeasurement

Business fiction has not been given due attention though it has appeared since 1975 (Sarachek, 1995). Novels about business life “help . . . understand our basic needs and those of the people we manage: the need for identity, for self-esteem, for power, for control, for mental challenge, for acceptance, for security, for self- fulfillment, and for recognition” (Brawer, 1998, p. 2). Gary Goldstick (n. d.) defines certain features of business fiction to distinguish it from other types of fiction: The main plot centres on business topics, and the main characters are executives, managers, directors, employees, or investors in the business. *The Three Signs of a Miserable Job: A Fable for Managers and Their Employees (2007)* is a novel belonging to this category. It is written by Patrick Lencioni, an American CEO, writer, and founder of *The Table Group*, a management consulting firm. His books, novels, and articles focus on leadership and organizational health (Lencioni, n. d.). In his novel, he introduces a model which tackles the reasons of job misery and how to overcome them. The aim of this paper is to examine how Lencioni's model in *The Three Signs of a Miserable Job* succeeds in overcoming the reasons of job misery. This is going to be carried out by applying Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan's theory of self-determination in relation to transformational leadership.

The Model

The novel, it could be said, is divided into two sections. The first one, the major one, takes place at an Italian restaurant, Gene and Joe's Pizza, where Brian, the main character, a CEO, formulates and develops his model of overcoming job misery. As for the second one, it takes place in Desert Mountain Sports company where he applies his model making sure it is successful in creating job satisfaction. At the end of the novel, Lencioni discussed his model in detail in addition to providing case studies. He explained that the three signs of job misery are present everywhere, and they are easy to overcome. However, they are ignored by most companies and organizations. These three signs are anonymity, irrelevance, and immeasurement.

Anonymity

Referring to the first sign, anonymity, Lencioni (2007) said that people cannot be happy and satisfied at work if the person in charge does not recognize their presence and role. Moreover, they will not love their jobs no matter how hard they try because they “see themselves as invisible, generic, or anonymous” (p. 221). A boss or a manager must show real interest in his employees. To get rid of anonymity at work, as Lencioni added, the manager or whoever is in charge must know his/ her employees. He/ She must take time to know each one of his/ her employees personally.

He/ She has to know why his/ her employees wake up in the morning and what their plans are in addition to improving their lives. However, showing interest in employees is not done once in a lifetime; it must be displayed over and over. For example, a manager can know that his/ her employee's daughter likes dancing, but to ask about what she did in her dance recital is what is needed (p. 230).

Irrelevance

The second sign is irrelevance. Everyone must know that what they do is important to anyone whoever he/ she is. If the employee does not pay attention to the link between his/ her work and satisfying others, he/ she will not feel fully satisfied. People need to know they are needed and they help others, not just working for their own benefit. The problem occurs when employees do not pay attention to whose lives they influence or even worse they believe they do not make any difference in others' lives. Actually, all human beings want and need to help each other, and if this does not happen, misery is eventually the outcome. Consequently, people have to answer the following questions: "Who am I helping?" and "How am I helping"? As for managers, they have to show their employees that they make a difference in their lives which in turn creates satisfaction for the employees. In addition, they must show how their employees how their work influences others (Lencioni, 2007, pp. 233-235).

Immeasurement

The last and third sign is immeasurement. Lencioni (2007) explained that immeasurement is not a word in the dictionary, and he has coined it because there is no existing word that could express its meaning. Employees should know how to evaluate their achievements. Thus, there must be a specific method to do that. Because if their success or failure depends on satisfying others, they will feel miserable; their "motivation deteriorates as people see themselves as unable to control their fate" (p. 222). The problem is that great employees do not want to be measured according to others' views because this means they have to pretend to be someone they are not. Employees who can measure their success will feel satisfied. In order to establish right and appropriate measures for a job, a manager must know the areas that an employee has direct contact with because if the employee fails to see the connection between his/ her work and what he/ she measures, he/she gets confused and loses interest in his/her job (p. 236). In brief, a person satisfied with his/ her job enjoys positive feelings that motivate him to act in a better way in addition to being creative and trustworthy (Wicker, 2011).

Self-determination Theory

Lencioni's model addresses human needs; therefore self-determination theory is going to be applied. Deci and Ryan (n.d.) explained that self-determination theory is made up of five 'mini-theories': "Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET), 'Organismic Integration Theory (OIT), 'Causality Orientations Theory (COT), 'Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT), and 'Goal Contents Theory (GCT)". Each one of these deals with a particular motivation. First, the 'Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET)' focuses on 'intrinsic motivation' meaning the naturally belonging motives of oneself. It studies the influence of external factors on 'intrinsic motivation'. In addition, it focuses on the impact of competence and autonomy in encouraging and developing 'intrinsic motivation'. Second, in contrast to 'Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET),' the 'Organismic Integration Theory (OIT)' focuses on 'extrinsic motivation' in its different forms and consequences. 'Extrinsic motivation' is a motive operating from outside the self to pursue an aim. The theory examines how 'extrinsic motivation' becomes internalized, becoming part of one's nature. Therefore, the person will have complete freedom to put these motives into practice. Moreover, it focuses on social factors that make a person internalize certain attitudes regarding values, aims, and beliefs. In particular, the theory shows there is a strong bond linking autonomy and relatedness with the process of internalization.

The third theory, 'Causality Orientations Theory (COT),' explains personal variations in people's inclinations to adapt to surroundings and to enact behaviors in different ways. In addition, it classifies causality orientations into three types: 'autonomy,' 'control,' and 'impersonal'. In autonomy orientation, the person is free to do what he wants in a given situation while in the control orientation, the person is motivated by rewards, gain, and approval. As for impersonal orientations, it deals with the person's anxiety regarding competence. The fourth one, 'Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT),' examines the psychological needs and their influence on having and developing a psychologically well-balanced person. It states that 'psychological well-being and optimal functioning' depend on autonomy, competence, and relatedness. If these needs are not satisfied, the person will suffer.

The last and fifth one, 'Goal Contents Theory (GCT)' is derived from the differences between a person's intrinsic and extrinsic goals and their influence on his/her motivation and wellness. Goals and aims satisfy needs; therefore, they influence the well-being of a person. Self-determination theory is based on the presence of extrinsic forces which affect the person in addition to his/her intrinsic motives and needs (Deci & Ryan, n. d.).

Competence

Self-determination theory explains that in order to understand human motivation attention must be paid to three inherent psychological needs which are "competence, autonomy, and relatedness" (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 227). First, competence means that a person feels he/she is effective in dealing with others, and is able to show his abilities and skills in addition to improving them through activity. Being competent reflects confidence and effectiveness (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Relatedness

Second, relatedness is feeling connected to others. A person cares about others and at the same time experiences being cared for. He/She enjoys a feeling of belongingness to his/her society; he/she feels secure and comfortable, not worried if others accept him or not. Relatedness can be reflected in seven major types of social activity:

1. Communicating about personally relevant matters (Parks & Floyd, 1996; Reis & Patrick, 1996),
2. participating in shared activities (Duck & Wright, 1993; Markman & Kaft, 1989; Tiger, 1969; Wood & Inmar, 1993),
3. having a group of friends with whom one can spend informal social time (Newcomb, 1961; Rubin, 1983),
4. feeling understood and appreciated (Reis & Shaver 1988; Swann, 1990),
5. participating in pleasant or otherwise enjoyable activities (Clark & Watson, 1998; Lott & Lott 1972),
6. avoiding arguments and conflict that create distance and feelings of disengagement with significant others (Gottman, 1994; Notarius & Markman, 1993), and
7. avoiding self-conscious or insecure feelings that direct attention toward the self and away from others. (Pyszczynski & Greenberg, 1987; Ryan, Plant, & Kuczkowski, 1991; Wood, Saltzberg, Neale, Stone, & Rachmiel, 1990). (as cited in Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, Ryan, 2000, p. 422)

Autonomy

The third and the last need is autonomy which means that a person is in complete control of his behavior. He/She acts according to his own values and beliefs. If his/her actions are influenced by external factors, he/she will accept them, and acts according to them (Deci and Ryan, 2002). He/She is considered fully autonomous when he/she makes decisive decisions as a result of his/her awareness of his/her needs and values (Knee and Uysal, 2011). These three psychological needs impact a person's motives; moreover, if they are not positively or fully satisfied, they will influence the development of that person. In brief, self-determination theory studies the motivations, needs, and characteristics of human beings (Deci and Ryan, n. d.).

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership satisfies these three psychological needs. H. Hetland, J. Hetland, Andreassen, Pallesen, & Notelaers (2011) assumed, "Transformational leadership is positively related to fulfillment of the needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness" (p. 510). What is transformational leadership? It was first used in 1973 by J. V. Downton in a sociological study. Then in 1978 James MacGregor Burns wrote about two concepts, transformational and transactional leadership. Later on, Bass (1990) mentioned four factors which define a transformational leader. They are charisma, inspiration, individual support, and intellectual stimulation. A transformational leader is charismatic; this means that his/her followers look up to him as an idol. They are attracted to his/her personality which embodies good characteristics such as pride, loyalty, trust, and faith which are enacted in times of crisis. He/She is also a source of inspiration to his/her followers; he/she motivates them to achieve great goals which in turn increases their self-confidence. He/She presents an attractive vision which they are willing to fulfill. In addition, a transformational leader shows individual support whether emotional or social. He/She should meet with his/her followers to provide a suitable atmosphere in which their needs, abilities, and hopes are developed. This should be done to encourage them to work properly. Moreover, he/she should develop and encourage his/her followers' creativity and innovation as a kind of intellectual stimulation (as cited in Nikezić, Purić, & Purić, 2012).

The novel begins with Brian, the main character, retiring after having done a good job in improving and managing the JMJ Fitness Machines company, and the place became known as “A Great Place to Work” (Lencioni, 2007, p. 11). When reporters ask him how he could manage to do that, his answer is he treats people as he would be like to be treated. After retirement, Brian and his wife, Leslie, move to South Lake Tahoe. Shortly after arriving there, he feels bored and believes he is created to manage people. One day while reading the newspapers, he finds an article about a competing company, Nike, saying it is going to kick out more than fifty of its employees, and that other companies are going to do the same thing. He gets worried about his former staff, so he calls his friend Rick Simpson, who was responsible for selling the JMJ company. Rick tells him he should forget about that place because he is no longer in charge. Brian becomes angry and informs him these employees are the reason why the company is successful, “You just don’t get it, do you? The culture we built had more to do with our success than anything else. Those patents? Those products? The brand? Hell, those are a direct result of a bunch of people who loved their jobs” (Lencioni, 2007, p. 43). Brian shows real interest in his former employees. This is why he succeeds in leading and managing his employees. This example reflects the first sign, ‘anonymity;’ this sign addresses the need for relatedness which shapes people’s social existence. At work, people spend most of their time and effort. Thus, relatedness to leaders and followers is important (H. Hetland, J. Hetland, Andreassen, Pallesen, & Notelaers, 2011). A healthy relationship based on social support should be present between a leader and his followers to develop the place where they work.

As the story unfolds, Brian and Leslie stop at an Italian restaurant, Gene and Joe’s Pizza, to order food. He sees the employees are miserable and are probably not satisfied with their jobs. He decides to improve the restaurant, and as a first step, he meets Joe, the owner of the place. Brian knows from him that many people have worked at the restaurant and then left. When he asks Joe about the reason why they left, Joe replies, “None of them are getting rich or solving the world’s problems here. It’s manual labor, really. Which is why getting them to give a damn, not to mention show up on time ... is a battle in itself” (Lencioni, 2007, p. 64). While he is talking to Joe, the employees come in. None of them know that the restaurant is going to have a new manager. No one even cares to apologize for coming late, “Offering no explanation for their tardiness, they went about their jobs without fanfare” (Lencioni, 2007, p. 65). Here, Joe reflects a negative attitude towards his employees which clearly shows he does not pay attention to the needs of his employees. He is a transactional leader. According to Bass (1997), transactional leaders are not so interested in improving their followers’ performance by encouraging and motivating them (as cited in H. Hetland, J. Hetland, Andreassen, Pallesen, & Notelaers, 2011). Moreover, Brian is upset to see the employees’ carelessness. There is no communication whatsoever between Joe and his employees. In fact, a leader has to take care of his followers’ needs in order to achieve progress otherwise lack of trust and motivation will prevail (Riaz & Haider, 2010).

Brian holds a meeting with the restaurant staff to inform them he is the new manager. He starts his meeting asking them how many of them like their jobs, but silence prevails: “Nothing. People just looked at one another as though Brian had asked the question in Russian” (Lencioni, 2007, p. 80). However, he tries to encourage them to answer, and then he changes his speech strategy saying he is present there to make them like their jobs. They are astonished to the extent they feel confused and bored. Again, Brian tries to motivate them and gets to the main point of the meeting:

How about not being miserable? How about making your life a little better and having pride in your work? Don’t you think that would be a good thing for you and your family and friends? Or do you enjoy having the life sucked out of you every time you put on that damn Gene and Joe’s T- Shirt?! (Lencioni, 2007, p. 82)

He encourages them to work together as a team. He decides to give them one dollar per hour on the weekend shift but only on one condition is that everyone follows his plan. To achieve competence, a transformational leader uses ‘intellectual stimulation’ to motivate the people he/ she leads to discuss feasible methods of dealing with and facing problems in addition to encouraging them to make sure if these methods are appropriate or not to improve the team (H. Hetland, J. Hetland, Andreassen, Pallesen, & Notelaers, 2011). Brian is, indeed, a transformational leader.

Brian tells his staff they have to evaluate their performance. Here comes in the third sign of job misery, immeasurability. In the novel, there is some sort of connection between immeasurability and autonomy. Autonomy at work is ‘a practice, or set of practices involving the delegation of responsibility down the hierarchy so as to give employees increased decision-making authority in respect to the execution of their primary work tasks’ (Leach, Wall, & Jackson, 2003, p. 28).

This means that a manager or leader allows freedom to his/ her employees to carry out their tasks in addition to being able to judge for themselves. Brian leaves his employees to choose appropriate measures of their progress. For example, "Brian wanted to give the guy a chance to come up with something on his own" (Lencioni, 2007, p. 86). In the end, he suggests that for Carl, the drive-thru employee, to know if he is doing a good job or not, he should take a note of how many times he made customers smile. As for the waitresses, Patty and Jolene, they agree they would measure their success by two ways: tips and customers' comments. Tristan, the cash register, would measure his success by how quickly he prepares checks, have customers seated, and answers phone calls while the cooks, Joaquin and Kenny, measure theirs by how fast they finish orders in addition to customers' comments. Regarding the need for autonomy, Bass (1997) said, "Transformational leadership is postulated to develop and encourage employees" (as cited in H. Hetland, J. Hetland, Andreassen, Pallesen, & Notelaers, 2011, p. 509). After some time, the performance of the restaurant improves but, unfortunately, Brian finds Carl is no longer interested in measuring his performance which means lack of enthusiasm for his job even though he is going to be paid extra money.

Brian encourages the staff to take their jobs seriously and at the same time enjoy it. He explains to them that in order to know how much their progress is they have to know how they influence others: "It has to do with how you make a difference in the life of someone other than yourself" (Lencioni, 2007, p. 102). This example reflects the second sign, 'irrelevance'. An employee will not be competent until he detects a relation between his/ her work and the outcome (Markland, Ryan, Tobin, & Rollnick, 2005, p. 822). Brian is trying to make them realize the benefit of positively influencing others. He explains to his wife how necessary it is for the employee to know that he / she makes a difference in others' lives. He provides her with a clear situation showing 'irrelevance'. He encourages an employee called Migo at the restaurant by telling him how thankful he is to have him: "Migo, if it weren't for you, my job would be so much more stressful. You make such a difference in my work every day, and that makes me a happier person" (Lencioni, 2007, p. 137). After this remark, Migo becomes happy, and starts to work harder and come earlier to the restaurant. In fact, Lencioni's sign of 'irrelevance' addresses a person's need for competence. Markland, Ryan, Tobin, & Rollnick (2005) explained, "Competence is facilitated when individuals are helped to develop clear and realistic expectations about what behavior change could do for them, they are helped to formulate realistically achievable goals, they are encouraged to believe that they are capable of engaging in the appropriate behaviors, and positive feedback regarding progress is provided" (p. 819). Migo becomes competent due to Brian's encouragement and positive feedback. He even becomes the manager and owner of the restaurant along with Joe. A transformational leader, according to Bass & Avolio (2004), shows 'individualized consideration' which shows that a leader stresses the importance of understanding the needs of his/ her followers, and works on developing them to a great deal (as cited in H. Hetland, J. Hetland, Andreassen, Pallesen, & Notelaers, 2011). This is what Brian does with his staff at the restaurant.

Brian moves on to explain 'anonymity;' employees cannot be happy if the boss or the manager does not pay attention to whom they are outside the work place. He remembers how his manager had influenced him: "The manager has to be key . . . it was Kathryn who made me love my job, and it was much about her taking an interest in me as a person as it was anything specific she did connected to my work" (Lencioni, 2007, pp. 140-141). He believes employees are miserable because they have to pretend to be someone else at work. A good example of 'anonymity' is shown when Brian and his wife go to see his employees, Migo and Salvador, play soccer, and chat with their families after the match. He wants to show them that he cares and supports them. He says to his wife human beings "wanted to be needed, and wanted to be known" (Lencioni, 2007, p. 142). Thus, 'anonymity' is one of the elements that help in preventing job misery. Once again, 'anonymity' addresses the need for relatedness which is important. People who, according to Baumeister & Leary (1995), socially interact in a good way and have satisfying relationships with others are said to enjoy a longer life and develop better physical and mental health. (as cited in Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, & Ryan, 2000). This is why Lencioni stresses the importance of anonymity.

There are many examples in the novel which highlight anonymity. Brian is doing his best to show interest in his employees: "Here and there Brian began to make observation and ask questions. How long have you lived in the Tahoe area? Where did you grow up? Where'd you get that tattoo and why? What did you do for fun this week" (Lencioni, 2007, p. 146)? He knows that Patty's daughter is allergic to wheat, so he tries to find wheat free pizza for her. He brings Carl science fiction books he loves. Moreover, when Salvador decides to move to a new place, he prepares a goodbye lunch party for him.

There is another situation which shows Brian's wisdom in dealing with his employees. Migo asks Brian how come that Patty and Jolene are the ones who get more tips though their job is based on the cooks claiming if food is bad, customers would give no tips. As a result, the cooks should be paid more money. In fact, Brian has no specific answer: "He was tempted to go into a long dissertation about the history of restaurants and the difference between a customer-facing employee and a cook or a dishwasher. Instead, he gave the only answer that he felt comfortable giving. 'Yes.'" (Lencioni, 2007, p. 149). He asks his employees to give him time to discuss this issue with Joe, the owner, in addition to informing Patty and Jolene not to worry about having their tips cut off. The restaurant staff is happy and satisfied with Brian's management. He is closely connected to his employees, and he tries to avoid an argument that causes hard feelings.

Fortunately, Brian succeeds in making the restaurant a better place. Larger revenues are achieved. The employees are happy and doing their best in serving the customers. His job as a manager of the restaurant ends as his friend Rick makes him an offer to work as a CEO of Desert Mountain Sports company, a place near Lake Tahoe. The place is down in revenue and profit. Brian loves the challenge and accepts the offer. He spends the remaining time before going to Desert Mountain Sports company in teaching Joe about management. He tries to encourage Joe to change his mind about his employees and to take interest in them, and even manages to convince Joe to measure his progress in running the restaurant. They "had agreed that the four measurements would be nightly receipts, tips, return business, and employee satisfaction" (Lencioni, 2007, p. 165). In addition, Brian puts Migo in charge of the restaurant, and before he leaves, the employees prepare a warm goodbye party for him.

Brian's next mission in Desert Mountain Sports company is to make it attractive to a potential buyer. He finds that the place has two problems: a customer service problem and employees' problem. He decides to meet store managers, executives, and employees in order to see if he can apply his model which he has formulated and developed in the restaurant. He explains the model, but finds disbelief on their side. The head of merchandising, Spencer, mocks Brian saying, "You're saying that we have to get to know our GMs better as people, tell them they make a difference in someone's life, and then hold their hands while they come up with a way to measure their success" (Lencioni, 2007, p. 187). Brian responds calmly trying to persuade them to follow his model, and they finally agree to apply the model in their stores as they have nothing to lose. Excellent results are achieved after six months, and Desert Mountain Sports company is sold. After having carried out his job successfully, Rick makes him another offer. This time it is a hotel chain in London that has employee satisfaction problems. Once again, Brian accepts the offer and moves to London. The novel closes with Brian opening a box sent from Lake Tahoe. He finds two T-shirts with a picture of two smiling faces in addition to the following words: "Migo and Joe's Pizza and Pasta. Here, There, Everywhere" (Lencioni, 2007, p. 213). This means Joe has changed his policy because as shown Migo has become a co-manager. Finally, Joe has been successful in communicating with his staff.

Conclusion

Brian is a transformational leader. He cares about his former staff at JMJ Fitness company though he is no longer the manager. He encourages and motivates the Gene and Joe's Pizza restaurant staff. He shows interest in the staff, and pays attention to their needs. At the Desert Mountain Sports company, he is patient enough to bear the employees' sarcasm in order to work out his model. Since he is a transformational leader, his model addresses the three basic psychological needs: competence, relatedness, and autonomy. Competence means a person has an inner motive to be efficient while relatedness means a person has a universal inclination to communicate with others and to experience feelings of being cared for. As for autonomy, (Chirkov et al., 2003), it means the freedom of choice according to one's values and beliefs, and if he/she decides to act alone or is asked by someone to do something (cited in Deci and Vansteenkiste, 2004). "These needs," as Deci and Vansteenkiste (2004) said, "are not learned but are an inherent aspect of human nature and thus operate across gender, across culture, and across time . . . to promote optimal functioning and prevent diminished functioning" (p. 25). This means that these needs are part and parcel of human nature and must be satisfied otherwise a person may suffer. Lencioni's model succeeds in overcoming job misery because it satisfies the three basic needs of human beings.

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