



By: *Emre Alkin*

# Not the quantity but the quality: Managers and Employees



Perhaps the worst that has happened in developing countries is not just a shortage of intermediate staff, but the employees lacking the knowledge and experience needed to do the job.

Reflecting back, my first management experience was as the Secretary General of TIM, Turkey's single umbrella organization for exports. I was only 32 years old at that time. TIM had just been established, and we wrote all the business processes from scratch.

There were only 12 of us, but the traditions of the exporter associations connected to TIM dated back to the first 15 years of the Republic. Turkey's first exporter association was established by Atatürk. At the time I was in office, there were over 50 exporter associations and 13 secretariats. The number has now increased even more.

I was fortunate because I managed the newly established umbrella organization of an institution that had traditions. Of course I made mistakes and learned from them for 6 years. I drew from the experiences of the Ministry responsible for Foreign Trade and Customs. We were people dedicated to our roles in good faith, we never covered but always corrected each other's errors.

We left no place in the world unvisited. I learned a lot in many countries. The personnel reporting to me were both smart and tirelessly dedicated workers. Honestly, I was also dedicated to them. We were like family.

## Looking in the same direction

My second significant experience was as the CEO of a large company aimed at being active in the GSM market, established with the capital of a large holding company.

The organization's goal was to become a virtual operator like Virgin in the UK by purchasing minutes from 3 operators. In addition, it would have stores selling mobile phones and accessories.

In 2007-2008, we opened 1200 stores, generated millions of dollars in revenue, and purchased prepaid cards from operators, but we couldn't manage to become an MVNO (Mobile Virtual Network Operator).

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This failure was due to the negative media coverage from our holding company, starting with the largest GSM operator. Despite the opportunities presented by our company with over 1200 stores, the largest cable TV firm didn't even give us an appointment. As a result, we sold the company to a foreign group quite profitably. However, due to conflicts of ideas between top management and operations, we did not reach our goal completely.

This single example shows how important the issue of "looking in the same direction" is. A group of executives in the holding company suddenly perceived the growing firm as a threat and never accepted it, continually trying to undermine it, and the board members on both sides struggled to find direction.

While we had difficulties protecting the institution from politics at TIM, in the private sector experience, we tried to protect the company from the holding.

I learned this lesson: In a structure where everyone seeks to find fault in others and even to create faults as a career instrument when there are none, the chances of success are already slim.

## The academy has entered a decline process

Over time, I held positions as head of

departments and vice president at universities. Back then, academics came from state institutions or universities; they were people who knew the ropes, were serious, and understood work processes. Unfortunately, since 2015, it has become increasingly difficult to find academics of that quality.

The academy has entered a decline process. This situation exists not only in Turkey but in many developing countries. An academic layer has been created that has forgotten scientific inquiry in favor of writing articles.

My next serious management experience was as Secretary General of the **Turkish Football Federation**. This organization is as old as the Republic itself, has processes defined by experiences, and operates according to international standards, but the processes that work like clockwork are constantly disrupted by administrators elected in the general assembly, who replace qualified personnel with political and arbitrary preferences. It still seems to be that way.

However, since the rules of the work are determined and monitored by international institutions, even though arbitrariness degrades football to a mediocre level, it has been possible for the institution's processes to function one way or another.

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Frankly, due to the insistence of **FIFA** and **UEFA**, federations in countries that are eager to relax rules and view training people as a „waste of time“ have had to act disciplined. However, the gap in football success and quality between countries is growing.

Returning to the topic: The then-President began to interfere with sporting and administrative matters instead of leaving them to the secretary-general, involving people he

had named as board members and advisors.

In a strange process where those without authority were burdened with the responsibility of decision-making, I decided to resign. What spilled the cup could be described as actions stemming from indecisiveness.

I opened a new chapter in my life by saying that there are no good or bad experiences. In the meantime, the tolerance shown for my mistakes has always pleased me. However, I grasped the reason for this tolerance a bit late.

My area of authority was so restricted that the mistakes I made did not create side effects from which I could learn. I learned a lot thanks to my roles in UEFA and FIFA. Eventually, I returned to school again.

## Incompetence and mediocrity

As soon as I arrived at the university, they trusted my experience and appointed me as the Vice Rector. Together with the Rector, we designed all the business processes, regulations, appointments and promotions, scientific work, relationships with students, and the university's publications. It wasn't easy, but we worked joyfully.

At the farewell ceremony, the Rector said: "If I were to describe Emre, he is loyal to time, his word, and his friends." Unfortunately, my departure was due to those who aimed to make the university's ongoing work "perfect."

When harmony was disrupted and friendships diminished, it was time to leave. I can say that due to my sufficient experience, I worked with almost zero mistakes.

The lesson I took from this was: Managers should intervene in tasks that have not reached the desired level before trying to make the good perfect. To do this, they should pay attention to others' experiences before their own. Of course, as someone who takes risks, a manager should make their final decision with this awareness.

Currently, when I look at the operation of the state, the business world, and academia in developing countries, I see that managers are overly focused on the physical condition of the facilities and pay insufficient attention to procuring, enhancing, and managing human resources. It is as if buildings, desks, or computers will do the work on their own.



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Unfortunately, this mindset has led to the emigration of human resources from these countries over the last 10 years, the idleness of quality individuals, and a situation where the hired employees do not fully meet their responsibilities.

Frankly, we are in much tougher and insidious danger than the issues related to inflation, growth, foreign politics, domestic politics, and so on. Some call it "incompetence," but I describe it as "mediocrity." It was a painful and abrupt experience for me. I was aware of the development but did not anticipate it would be so damaging.

Therefore, from now on, we must accept that we need to raise dedicated personnel who have a strong work ethic, know their processes as well as the tasks they perform, work meticulously, and have exemplary character, rather than flashy names in our institutions.

Those who work to uphold the institution's values rather than their own popularity will already become "legends." We, those in critical decision-making positions, must patiently

cultivate the human resources I mentioned, accepting that there is no shortcut to success. We will naturally accept their mistakes and provide opportunities for them to correct them. In this way, we will continue to learn ourselves as well.