



The Advisory Alliance 60-Second Email™

Do You Still Say, "Span of Control"?

March 28, 2012

It occurred about a week ago.

I was talking with a person in her 20's, discussing management and leadership issues, when I referred to "span of control". And then it hit me.

Does that term really mean anything anymore?

If you're old enough, "span of control" used to mean something. Management and leadership positions were often measured by their spans of control, the number of subordinates they had.

But I can't remember the last time I heard someone talk about a leader's or manager's span of control.

Here are some potential reasons why:

- First, because of the Great Recession, 2 managers/leaders are now often doing the work that used to be done by 3. So spans have increased dramatically, and thus have become less meaningful (i.e. in some cases they're so high they don't make sense).
- Second, who "controls" anything anymore, if we ever did? Whitewater change is the norm these days. It's much more about navigating and keeping your head above water. Forget about controlling. Who has the time or energy for that?



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- Third, titles have become less significant. Yes, they have some connection to pay grade. But do your work and your accountabilities line up neatly with your title? Forget it. And the same is true for the leverage title's used to provide. Today that leverage is much more diffused. Which brings us to the fourth point.
- Fourth, it's not about "control"; it's about relevance, as in being relevant to your peers and your direct reports. Today, people respond less to their boss's or colleague's title than to his/her relevance: Are you relevant to my work? And are you relevant to me as an individual? If not, I'll do the work, but not the commitment. It's simply work for hire. Nothing personal, it's just business.

So here's a quick non-scientific test to see if you have relevance at work:

1. If you asked for help from your peers, would each come through for you because they wanted to?
2. When you're away from work on vacation, do people notice beyond the empty chair?
3. Do people seek you out before starting a group meeting without you?
4. If you were in the hospital for 2 weeks, would colleagues make the effort to visit you?

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Instead of "span of control", what other aspects of a leader's or manager's job are more relevant? Post your observations on our [blog](#).

You can access all of our 60-Second Emails™, including the most recent issue, *Why Your Job Description is Irrelevant*, via this [link](#).



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As always, thanks for reading.

Best regards,

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