

Managerial Competence:

Working Productively With Most of the People Most of the Time

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In recent years managers have become more concerned about personal effectiveness and legitimately so since career progress is rightfully tied to ability. How well managers are able to accomplish the objectives for which they are accountable, the degree to which they do so in a cost-effective manner, how their practices affect the willingness and ability of those they manage to perform productively - all of these are related to effectiveness. In addition, such considerations most often serve as evaluation criteria for managerial performance per se.

Managers move up or out on the basis of how well they have administered the managerial process. Knowing this, most managers are legitimately preoccupied with finding the best way they can to accomplish work through others. But most managers are ambivalent, both eager and dubious, in contemplating new managerial technologies: maybe at last they will hit upon the fail-safe solution to their career progress; but what if it does not work? What if a change to some new, less comfortable and familiar approach is not for the better? What if their current style is the best they are capable of, even if it does not always produce the desired effect? The issue of managerial effectiveness is not without some attending trauma.

What Is Effective Management?

The whole issue of managerial performance is loaded - emotionally and factually. Managers are expected to be effective, but the guideposts to effectiveness are often inconsistent or lacking altogether. As treated in the literature, managerial effectiveness appears to be one part data, several parts personal bias, and several more parts pure emotion. In the final analysis, it is impossible to talk about managerial effectiveness unless it is defined. Even so, this does not solve the problem entirely. Pragmatists define effectiveness as whatever approach seems to work in a given situation; humanists define it as any approach that promotes growth, raises consciousness, and gratifies personal impulse; shareholders view it in terms of top dollar earnings per share; and more than a few managers define it in terms of personal power and control. And yet most managers and those they manage agree on one point - they want to be effective.

The fundamental consideration in assessing the effectiveness of any approach to management lies in specifying the goal to be served. If getting a certain amount of work out within a certain period of time is the objective - regardless of quality, cost, morale, absenteeism, or turnover - then any given style of management could be thought of as effective so long as the work arrives before the deadline. By

the same token, if effectiveness is fudged only in terms of being liked by subordinates - again regardless of other considerations - some other approach might be deemed effective. But no one lives in such a simple world. Simplistic definitions of managerial effectiveness yield simplistic results: they are short-lived; they only treat symptoms; they fail to generalize; they ignore the greater proportion of reality. And they are often disastrous because they isolate managers from their true impacts as they become more distant from the real complexities of organizational life.

The Competence Alternative

If an effectiveness criterion leads to simplistic and expedient ideas and practices, perhaps a more encompassing set of criteria based on the idea of competence would be more profitable. Competence implies a modal view, one which takes into account not the extremes of performance and other improbable considerations but, rather, a definition which addresses the broad range of managerial events and personalities which managers are most likely to encounter in their work. Hence, a modal definition of managerial competence, based on those most frequent occurrences and concerns of management, would encompass *those practices which work with most of the people most of the time*. Such a definition not only generalizes

across organizational situations, but lends itself to verification along empirical lines as well. *Competent management is an approach to managing others which seeks to make optimal use of available resources in meeting organizational objectives on a sustained basis.*

Three key phrases appear in the definition of managerial competence: *optimal* implies the best of which people are capable; *available* means those resources typically at the manager's disposal for meeting the organization's goals; and *sustained* means over the long haul, not just for fleeting moments, as people go about their work. This assumes a typical management situation where objectives are neither so ill-defined nor exotic as to require extra special considerations and personnel are average, neither extraordinary nor chronically sub-caliber. Rather the concern is with day-to-day effectiveness on the important but common issues and events where most managers spend 99% of their time.

It may be more stimulating to inject a moment of drama into the otherwise mundane world of management by focusing as many writers do on improbable dilemmas and make-or-break decisions, but to do so would simply mis-portray management as most managers know it. Management is not always exciting. But this does not mean it is easy or unimportant. Competent management is very likely the single most important ingredient contributing to organizational well-being, despite its workaday place in the total scheme of things.

If personal competence is achieved at the daily level of performance, more dramatic instances may be handled with even greater aplomb. How can this be done? If theory and supporting research are correct, the answer begins with the following conditions under which people will optimize - remembering that people are our most varying and costly available resource - and what the manager might do to facilitate the existence of such conditions:

- Most people work at their highest level when they find meaning and challenge in their work; when they are able to derive a sense of personal identity from doing what they do and doing it well; when they enjoy a sense of community, mutual respect and reliance; and are free of the distractions

caused by deprivations or undue sensitivity to peripheral considerations surrounding their work.

- Most people put forth their best efforts when they enjoy a sense of dominion over their work, when their ideas and feelings are incorporated into the design and procedures governing their work, and when they have a sense of generative involvement in the accomplishment of objectives.
- Most people, to perform at their best level, require opportunities for interchange and collaborative comparisons with those with whom they work - superior, co-worker, and subordinate - so that understanding of the tasks at hand is enhanced while reservations, anxieties, and related misgivings are worked through as well; the resulting climate enables people to address their work more directly without distracting apprehensions about failure of internal noises stemming from unexpressed feelings or opinions.
- Most people put forth their best efforts when they see themselves as - and indeed are - collaborators in the enterprise before them; when their needs and objectives are met by achieving the goals of their organization (or their part of it) and these are attended to via an assurance of a problem-solving posture under which all contribute to and participate in generating solutions.

The effects have been confirmed time and again both in basic research and in ongoing organizations. The intention here is not to prove again the veracity of such statements; the literature is compelling. More important is the fact that for such conditions to exist, as known from data, managers must behave in particular ways.

From research with subordinate personnel, for example, we know that the manager - both in outlook and practices - greatly influences the extent to which such conditions and consequent predilections will characterize the work force. In fact, simply by reviewing the practice-effect insights gained from this research, specific managerial acts can be identified which are likely to result in those desirable circumstances

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where most people put forth their best efforts most of the time. A behavioral equation is: if we have some idea of the effects we wish to obtain and reliable information about the various effects which stem from a number of diverse practices, we can then reduce this information to a statement of which practices evoke which effects.

A review of earlier research on managerial expectations, motivation, gatekeeping, interpersonal competence, management styles, and the synthesis of all these - with the emphasis on data rather than on theory - reveals that the managerial practices with the highest levels are the following:

Positive Prophecies:

Management acts which are founded in an unfragmented, internally consistent, Theory Y view of the nature of those people who populate the work place, i.e., practices based on an anticipation that people are both capable and desirous of doing well.

Meaningful Work:

Approaches to employee motivation which take into consideration employee self-esteem, potential for growth and capacities for both finding and responding constructively to positive stimulations accruing from the nature of work and the context within which it is imbedded; i.e., major managerial emphasis on the belonging, ego, and actualization needs of people in both design and administration of work processes.

Involvement:

Managerial recognition of the power and significance of ego-involvement on the part of employees and its dependence on managerial Gatekeeping for release into the workflow, i.e., management practices which harness the energies, both physical and psychological, which characterize that generative involvement to which most people aspire in the doing of the organization's work.

Interpersonal Competence:

Competent management of the face-to-face relationships which characterize any coordinated activity; i.e., practices which promote owning up to personal ideas and feelings, sharing these openly with pertinent parties, being receptive to and encouraging others to do the same so that an

interpersonal climate free of power and performance constraints prevails.

When combined, of course, such acts amount to a total social technology of competent management in which motivator-seeking behavior is supported, participative techniques are used via sustained Gatekeeping practices, and wherein a strong personal reliance on both exposure and feedback-solicitation processes is combined with encouragement for others to do the same. Such acts constitute a set of criteria for evaluating the various technologies which emerged from the synthesis research project. Those management styles which meet the most criteria may be deemed the most competent...*the ones which work best with most of the people most of the time.*

PREDICTING COMPETENCE

A check list of critical managerial attributes and practices can be used to evaluate each style of management...both in terms of the degree to which managers themselves profess to employ the various practices *and* the extent to which their subordinates report the effects as demonstrated by their own practices and attitudes. Information is available from some 2,000 managers and over 3,500 of their subordinates. Rearranging the results from the synthesis research in a more simple format reveals an estimate of the competence of each managerial style described by Blake and Mouton in their *Managerial Grid*® model.

Competence Criteria

Clearly, an estimate of competence should proceed according to behavioral criteria on one hand and probability theory on the other, noting what managers do and how this impacts on their subordinates. This is consistent with the view that managers' expectations regarding employee potential and performance effect both their own behaviors toward subordinates and subsequent subordinate behaviors in relating to managers and in doing the work of the organization. Therefore, parameters of competence include:

- (1) whether or not the manager operates from a set of Theory Y expectations regarding those who populate the workplace;

- (2) the consistency and internal congruity of personal beliefs;
- (3) the degree to which the manager attends to and emphasizes those constructive incentives most characteristic of mature adults, viz., belongingness, ego status, and actualization;
- (4) the extent to which, in turn, subordinates respond in kind by exhibiting responsive potential to those same higher level and most constructive needs;
- (5) the degree to which subordinates report that they enjoy participative opportunities of the type found to be important in the incidence of ego involvement and commitment;
- (6) managerial estimates of their interpersonal competence as it reflects a reliance on and employment of both exposure and feedback process in relating to others in the workplace; and, finally,
- (7) the level of interpersonal competence which their subordinates report as characterizing their practices in relating to managers.

Decision Rules

Statisticians often use a technique called a “hit” table in making predictive estimates of the type required to assess management competence. The notion is that in predicting an outcome, one is primarily interested in accuracy or the number of “hits” obtained as opposed to the number of misses. By using a very similar procedure, it is possible to estimate the probable competence of the five management styles studied in the synthesis research. A point system is first established for measuring “hits” on competence criteria. For example, should a manager report a reliance on the well-knit Theory X orientation? He or she should at least receive a one point hit for the authenticity and clarity of beliefs but no points for the Theory X view. No points are given for X-Y confusion. When scoring multifaceted criteria, as in the case of motivational dynamics, weighted points are given for hits on each of three potentially important need systems.

By employing such a system, the proportion of actual hits to possible hits across the seven parameters of competence may be taken as an index of probable managerial competence. When this type of logic is applied to the data from the synthesis research, different estimates of competence result for the five management styles described by Blake & Mouton. The results of the hit analysis indicate that the basic technologies underlying each of the Grid® styles differ dramatically in overall managerial competence.

RESULTS

Table 1 contains a summary of the hit analysis of each of the Blake and Mouton managerial styles. The point system employed is indicated for each component. And the estimated competence for each style - expressed in terms of probabilities - is given as the proportion of obtained to possible total points. A close study of these data, coupled with a review of the findings from the synthesis research, will give a clearer and fuller depiction of each style than previously available - just what a given style entails, where it is more or less in accord with behavioral principles, and its impact on subordinate characteristics and practices.

The 9,9 (Developer) Style: 92% Competent

The 9,9 (*Developer*) style is rooted in a fairly pure form of *Theory Y* thought. These managers, characterized by maximum concerns for both production and people, *capitalize on the involvement strategy*. Their subordinates report *high levels of participation, satisfaction and commitment* to decision products. These managers have a *strong preference for a Socialized power orientation* with both the Personalized power and Affiliation motives being rather low. They view power as a fact of organizational life and use the power available to them to enhance the quality of worklife for all concerned. In their management of motives, 9,9 (*Developer*) oriented managers assume that their subordinates are typical mature and healthy adults described by Maslow and Herzberg, primarily concerned with *higher level needs*; their subordinates respond in kind and are most preoccupied with *actualization* and

belongingness, although less preoccupied with *ego-status* gratification than might be expected. According to managers and subordinates alike, the *interpersonal competence* of 9,9 (*Developer*) management is the *greatest* of all those studied; high, balanced and uniform reliance on exposure and feedback solicitation processes is reported irrespective of power differences. Finally, subordinates employ these same interpersonal practices, thus promulgating *collaborative - risk taking* values throughout the organization.

***The 5,5 (Manipulator) Style:
54% Competent***

The 5,5 (*Manipulator*) style flows from essentially *Theory X* thought somewhat obscured by a *compartmentalized* version of *X-Y* confusion. Managers *involvement strategies* to a *limited* extent, but subordinates are *moderately satisfied* with this state of affairs. Regarding the use of power dynamics, 5,5 (*Manipulator*) managers show a strong preference for *Personalized* power coupled with an *above-average orientation* toward *Socialized* power. These managers are *inconsistent* in their approach to power and such managers “*soften*” their approach by showing some appreciation of the goals associated with *Socialized* power. Managers disposed to a 5,5 (*Manipulator*) style assume that subordinate motivation lies primarily in a concern for *creature comfort*, *safety* and *ego-status* needs. Subordinates, however, appear unaffected by such motivational emphases; they are most concerned with the motivator factors deemed most important by Herzberg and Maslow. Both Managers and their subordinates report an *average interpersonal profile*. The practices of 5,5 (*Manipulator*) management are limited interpersonally; subordinates reflect the same, limited competence practices.

***The 9,1 (Taskmaster) Style:
50% Competent***

The 9,1 (*Taskmaster*) style is rooted in an essentially pure *Theory X* view of mankind. *Little* use is made of *involvement strategies* and subordinates react to this deprivation with feelings of *high frustration*. Highly oriented toward *Personalized* power, such managers tend to *relish their available*

power and use it for their own personal advancement. Motivationally, 9,1 (*Taskmaster*) devotees stress *safety-security*, *creature comfort* and *ego-status* pursuits. Their prophecy is fulfilled; subordinates report like concerns. An *autocratic-complacent* interpersonal profile characterizes 9,1 (*Taskmaster*) management; subordinates, however rate both their managers and themselves quite competent interpersonally.

***The 1,9 (Comforter) Style:
38% Competent***

Those favoring the 1,9 (*Comforter*) style harbor views of mankind which are essentially *Theory X*, glossed over by *X-Y Confusion* which takes the form of *rationalization*. While a *substantial* amount of *participative activity* is reported, none of its salutary effects on climate are realized; subordinates are *dissatisfied and frustrated*. High in both *Socialized* power and *Affiliation* motivation which, while not mutually exclusive, are basically *incompatible*. This particular combination appears to reinforce the perceptual distortion noted in other areas regarding the use of this style and is further indicator of their *own personal conflicts around authority relationships*. The 1,9 (*Comforter*) approach to motivation flows from an assumption that subordinates are most concerned with a strange mix of *actualization*, *belonging* and *creature comfort* needs; this is primarily a *supportive maintenance* view and subordinates respond by being most concerned with *social* and *safety* needs. Managers’ use of the 1,9 (*Comforter*) *permissive-apprehensive* profile results in judgments of *low interpersonal competence* from their subordinates. Moreover, subordinates tend to behave with equal incompetence in their relationships.

***The 1,1 (Regulator) Style:
15% Competent***

The 1,1 (*Regulator*) management style is a manifestation of fairly pure *Theory X* thought. While *moderate* use is made of *involvement strategies*, subordinate reactions suggest that these are *superfluous*. An *equally low* preference for *Personalized*, *Socialized* power and *Affiliation* needs characterize the 1,1 (*Regulator*) manager’s

use of power. This manager feels “powerless” and adopts essentially a “go-with-the-flow” or “just-do-what-you’re-told” orientation. Motivational assumptions are in keeping with Herzberg’s *hygiene theory* of motivation; *creature comfort* and *safety* needs are most emphasized by the 1,1 (*Regulator*) manager. Subordinates are concerned with *safety* and *belongingness*, consistent with their managers’ emphasis on lower level *dissatisfiers*. In terms of relative interpersonal competence, 1,1 (*Regulator*) oriented managers are *the least competent* of all, pictured by themselves and subordinates alike with *bureaucratic-defensive* profiles. Their subordinates are also essentially *incompetent interpersonally*.

The results of the hit analysis of the components of managerial styles are revealing in several ways. Of primary interest, of course, is the portrayal gained of each style’s relative competence. The 9,9 (*Developer*) style clearly emerges as a quantum improvement in competence potential when compared to other styles. In addition, the strengths and weaknesses of a given style emerge more clearly when it is analyzed in terms of its basic components. Indeed, some perhaps unexpected characteristics become apparent, particularly when managerial self-assessments are then compared with subordinate reports. For example, the 9,1 (*Taskmaster*) style - obviously deficient in its management of employee motivation - emerges as considerably more competent than the 1,9 (*Comforter*) style which, while more competent in its attention to employee motives, has a less competent motivational impact on subordinates. The reason for this motivational anomaly can very likely be traced to the substantial differences obtained in interpersonal competence; both managers and their subordinates report greater competence on the part of the 9,1 (*Taskmaster*) style as compared to the 1,9 (*Comforter*) interpersonal practices. These and other effects are captured by the hit analysis.

REFLECTIONS

From these findings managers can gain insight into the choices available to them. Whether one’s personal career progress is the most important concern or the well-being of

subordinate personnel or the viability of the total organization, the message inherent in these data is clear: **the 9,9 (*Developer*) style is vastly superior to all other styles in its potential for attaining the best efforts from most of the people most of the time.**

Also of interest is the picture which emerges from the data of what Blake and Mouton have called the “*Statistical 5,5*” or what Earnie Larsen has called the “*Tapdancer*” approach. In effect, the “*Statistical 5,5*” or “*Tapdancer*” is a manager who adopts a style of management based on how he or she “reads” each individual managed and the particular set of circumstances that exist. More recently, others have called this person a “*situational manager*.” Unfortunately, whatever its title, such a position is still *manipulative in style* and leads to several pitfalls, not the least of which are: *inconsistency* in management, in-group *discontent*, employee *insecurity*, and the greater possibility of *inaccurate “readings”* on the part of the manager. All of the above serve to unnecessarily complicate any approach to sound management for both the manager and the people being managed. As a result it is a style that *at best* about *50% competent*. If, however, this manager “miss-reads” the situation, then it is not realistic to assume that as much as a 50% competence level is accurate.

While managers may prefer any number of combinations of styles, they should choose these honestly and in terms of their probable consequences: one cannot obtain 9,9 (*Developer*) results with other than 9,9 (*Developer*) practices, regardless of intent or neo-behavioral reasoning. Each style is fixed in terms of both its component factors and its effects; no amount of rationalizing or theorizing can change this basic fact. Like it or not certain practices yield their own respective results. Therefore, while every manager is free to manage as he or she chooses, *working productively with most of the people most of the time - i.e., managing competently may only be accomplished by using the 9,9 (*Developer*) methodology.* Now, at least, the choices and consequences are clear. The rest is up to the manager.