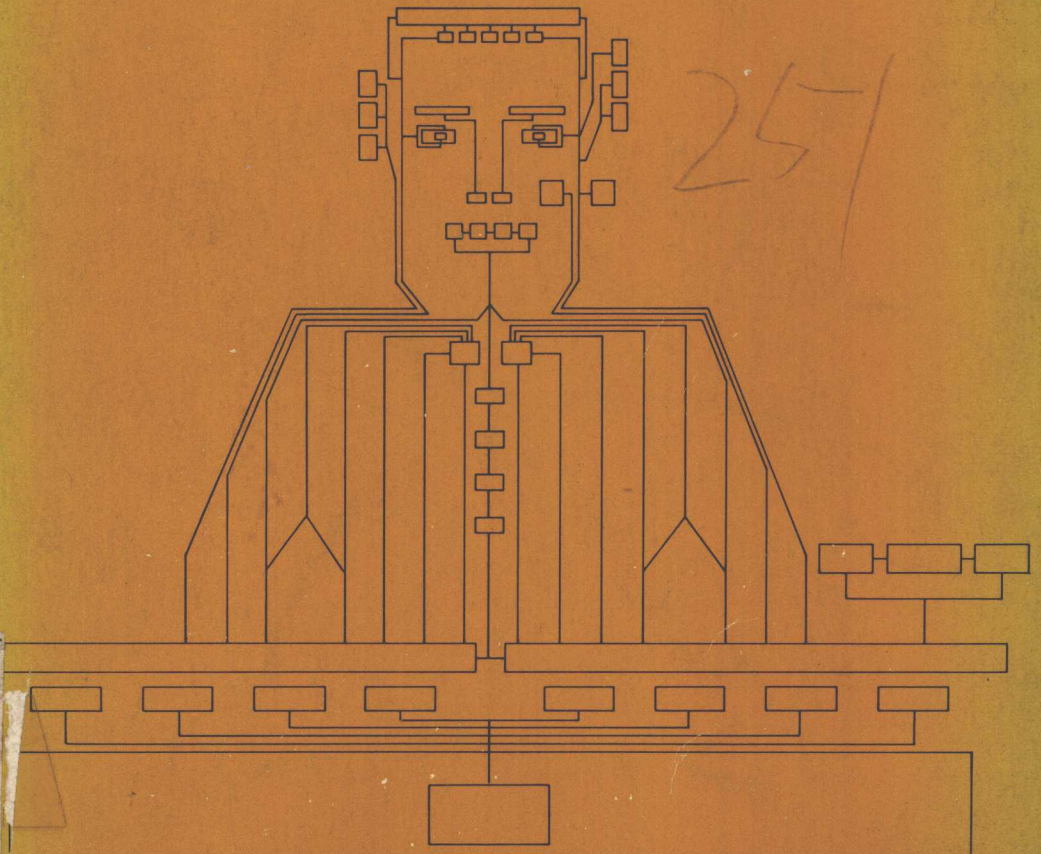


LEONARD R. SAYLES

# LEADERSHIP

WHAT EFFECTIVE MANAGERS REALLY DO...  
AND HOW THEY DO IT

257



McGRAW-HILL SERIES IN MANAGEMENT

# Leadership

What Effective Managers Really Do  
. . . and How They Do It

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## **LEADERSHIP**

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# Preface

Modern organizations are a tribute to both the human spirit and managerial capability. The work of thousands, even hundreds of thousands, can be directed and coordinated—not to piling up rocks but to landing astronauts on the moon, to inventing extraordinary calculating and communication devices, to doing a great variety of highly sophisticated and creative tasks.

But there has been relatively little effort to capture and record the action and dynamism of managerial jobs. We even take it for granted. If anything, we tend to be somewhat apologetic about managers for fear that their relative status and authority will be impositions on our freedoms as employees or citizens. Where management is studied, the approach tends to be at one of two extremes. Managers simply apply good com-

mon sense and rationality by sequentially moving from goals to plans to execution. Alternatively, managers are conceived of as being the guardians of human satisfaction at work.

Largely ignored is the process of management, the work of management, the actual day-to-day behavior and fragmented give-and-take, and the art of coping and negotiating with the unanticipated, the ambiguous, and the contradictory.

First-rate managers are, above all else, men and women of action. They seek to orchestrate through and with their own behavior—the behavior of aggregations of personnel, some motivated, but many obtuse and recalcitrant. The nimble and complex behavior patterns of these superb managers is a delight to behold as they move to motivate, integrate, and modify the structure and personnel that surround them. Yet few texts capture the spirit of excitement and challenge inherent in these tasks. More often the reader is confronted with the forbidding and abstract concepts of the behavioral scientist or the uninspiring principles of formal organization. Few readers of management will ever glimpse the extraordinary human adventure and accomplishment of the managerial role.

It is hardly surprising that students planning a career in administration have little conception of what they will be doing. And many managers themselves are bewildered by the job that confronts them because it differs so from the placid “clean-desk” world they had been led to expect. Even the novel, the theater, and TV have forsaken modern managers. Kings and politicians are portrayed with a modicum of realism; never managers.

For a number of years, I have sought to accumulate, through field work, firsthand accounts of managerial work. My research has ranged from extended studies of such major organizations as NASA and IBM to more modest excursions into smaller public and private enterprises. My purpose here is to try to summarize those formal and informal studies as they relate to managerial behavior and to integrate this with other published work on leadership.

I hope that this behavioral view of leadership will provide a useful supplement to more formal texts on management. It is also designed to help practicing managers comprehend the pressureful world they find and thereby become more adept

at allocating their energies among competing and often-contradictory demands.

The antecedents of this book parallel the evolution of the “conglomerate” field of organizational behavior as we know it today. In Cambridge in the late forties, I was privileged to know those who were interpreting the famed Western Electric studies and seeking to build a new branch of social science: Fritz Roethlisberger, George Homans, and Eliot Chapple. I was then studying what was called “human relations in industry” with Douglas McGregor at MIT and learning how to conduct field research with my fellow student George Strauss. Strauss and McGregor were much influenced by Kurt Lewin’s social psychological field theory, since he had been at MIT prior to his untimely death in 1947 and his students were continuing their studies of group dynamics there.

I was fortunate, also, to have social ties to the Technology Project at Yale and to be able to follow the fruitful work of Frederick Richardson and Robert Guest.

I reached Columbia in the midfifties; Conrad Arensberg, who had collaborated with both McGregor and Chapple, continued my informal education, and I was able to collaborate with Strauss and Chapple on several projects. (All emphasized operationalizing concepts, behavior over attitude, and interaction). My research skills had been made more rigorous by field work supervised by Eliot Chapple and William F. Whyte, who were transforming human relations into a distinctive discipline. Their work as applied anthropologists showed me how to use case studies to explore the regularities of human behavior, to interrelate personality differences with work flow and group behavior (later to be called “sociotechnical systems”).

So that is how this book has become an amalgam of applied anthropology, social psychology, and management. In addition, the opportunity to work with James Webb when he headed NASA inspired me to begin this study of leadership.

Columbia’s Graduate School of Business has a long tradition of seeking new knowledge about managers and management. The opportunity to observe its Solid Waste Management Project encouraged the integration and synthesis of studies of implementing change that became Chapter 9. Similarly, my association with our Center for Research on Career Develop-

ment reinforced my efforts to develop more explicit and operational methods of relating organizational work flow requirements to both management controls and personality differences (Chapters 8 and 11). Most importantly, my colleagues in the Division of Management of Organizations provided and continue to provide a stimulating and constructive environment for research and writing.

*Leonard R. Sayles*

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## Chapter 1

# The Managerial World: Expectation versus Reality

We live in a world of organizations. Aside from art, some crafts, and individual practices in medicine and law, almost all the work of our society gets done through human organizations. Even highly individualistic professional work is increasingly practiced through partnerships, clinics, and laboratories requiring managerial abilities that complement the technical skills of the surgeon or attorney.

Both public and private organizations appear to have an insatiable appetite for new executives. Even in periods of recession, most organizations keep looking for “better” managers; universities, corporations, hospitals, and government agencies constantly complain about their lack of effective “leadership” and the difficulty of obtaining truly effective managers.

In business, with its ability to measure results, there may be

even more pressure to upgrade managerial capabilities. After all, most companies compete openly and without secret formulas, protected markets, or impenetrable patents. Both the sophisticated stock market investor and the casual observer recognize that there are extraordinary differences in performance among firms in the same industry. Given the relatively equal access to technical and managerial knowledge, what makes for such extraordinary differences in performance? Managerial skill!

One is continually surprised by the number of obvious mistakes made by otherwise sophisticated organizations. An acquisition-minded company pulls together a number of units in the same industry still run by their entrepreneur founders. A new group vice president destroys their motivation by both being unavailable and failing to consult them on a whole series of new policies. In a short time the organization is in disarray and many of the previously profitable components are sold. In another case, the finest and costliest new hotel in America hires as chief operating officer a man who has been running another long-established, elite hostelry. Unfortunately, he has neither experience nor skill in coping with the "start-up" traumas associated with opening a new facility that is loaded with construction and personnel problems. Before it is discovered that the new manager can't deal with change, the result is near financial disaster.

Yet, in truth, the missing managerial skills do not represent profound or abstruse techniques. There are tens of thousands of tracts, as well as more erudite publications, setting forth the principles of good management. Reduced to their essential components, most research findings about good leadership seem obvious—even commonsensical, if truth be told—and not that difficult. While there are some subtle differences among them and a few "sophistications," most of the counsel, the research findings, and the pronouncements have a rather obvious central tendency. Good managers plan ahead, select qualified subordinates, and reward the best performers; they maintain open communications and encourage feedback, and so on. It seems easy.

What, then, explains the shortage, the sense of scarcity of managers? Are the requisite abilities so arcane that only a small

number of human beings have the talent embedded in their genes? Are the compensations too modest to attract men and women away from more desirable pursuits? Do organizations somehow constrain or perversely destroy the practice of good management?

### **WHY IS MANAGEMENT SO DIFFICULT?**

Why, then, should management be so problematic and good managers so scarce? Why should a rather obvious, straightforward task be mishandled so frequently? Why is what appears simple apparently much less so? We think there are answers to this paradox.

1. The organizational setting within which managers must manage is more recalcitrant than one first imagines. While we live in a world of organizations and could not survive without them, as Peter Drucker has so ably documented, these institutions impose extraordinary constraints on managerial effectiveness. We shall explore this in the chapters to follow, but it's difficult to resist one example.

Even the President of the United States, with the august power of that imposing office, can be overwhelmed by the incredible obdurateness of the organization. The *New York Times* relates how, after assuming office, Carter detected mice in the Oval Office; the very focal point of the Presidency. He called the General Services Administration who then came and handled the matter. Shortly after Carter continued to hear mice; but worse, one died in the wall and the stench was quite noticeable during formal meetings. However, when he again called the G.S.A. he was told that they had carefully exterminated *all* the mice; therefore any new mice must be "exterior" mice, and exterior work is apparently the province of the Interior Department. They at first demurred but eventually a "joint task force" was mounted to deal with the problem.<sup>1</sup>

2. Many managers are induced or seduced into trying out rather simplistic models of the manager's role, and each of these assures failure.

3. Where managers seek to go beyond these obvious models, they will have difficulty in getting help. Until quite re-

<sup>1</sup> *New York Times Magazine*, Jan. 8, 1978, p. 29.

cently organization researchers were more entranced with assembly line workers and insurance clericals than executives. But, more damning, the studies that have been done have tended to stress what managers should think and what they should achieve. Ignored is the real pay dirt—*how do you do it?*

4. Not knowing how to do it, what managerial life would be like, and what the “process would feel like,” the typical managers are shocked and dismayed by what they find. The reality of being a manager is far different from the expectations.

5. Most of the differences between the rhetoric and the reality and the preconception and the firing line relate to the pressured, time-constrained, fragmented, and energy-consuming daily routine of administration.

6. Unfortunately, students of management and behavioral scientists, like managers themselves, have no language to describe or concepts to analyze this hectic interactional world. The concepts and models that they use are more likely to relate to the world of professions, to the statics of occupational knowledge, than to the dynamics of human interaction. Management bears little resemblance to any other profession, if indeed it is a profession. It represents an extraordinarily challenging skill that must be played on a confounding “field”—the complex organization. Efforts to professionalize it, to reduce it to a set of things to know, as distinct from actions to do, further increase the gap between what managers are told and what they must really learn to do.

7. Rather than responding to the reality and the complexity many managers retreat to one or another simplistic but appealing models of the managerial role:

*The all-powerful boss:* Taking Machiavelli and the Mafia seriously and recognizing that power-hungry and politically savvy individuals have always been able to make it, many managers reduce management to simple power politics. They insist on complete loyalty and punish the deviants; they divide and conquer, demonstrate raw courage, and know how to wheel and deal. It works in a one-boss operation, in a few remaining political fiefdoms, but not in a complex institutional world.

*The complete bureaucrat:* These managers have learned their textbook lessons well. To them management is applied rationality, clearheaded good sense, and a taste for legalism.

Just as Frederick Taylor and Max Weber suggested, they try to define tasks clearly, avoid overlapping responsibilities, and make sure everyone has only one boss; the staff is purely advisory, and the line has the authority. They write off all the difficult human problems of getting cooperation and coordination by defining them away in their crystal-clear job description. Everything is normatively correct, but human beings don't operate that way.

*The sophisticated technician:* Here are the managers looking for complete and well-packaged cures to the human problems that the bureaucrats ignored in their machinelike precision. They assume that consultants and business schools turn out ready-to-install cures for organizational ills. Whether it is a management-by-objectives (MBO) plan, job enrichment, organizational development (OD), or whatever, they want the newest and the fanciest. Unfortunately, they ignore the fact that there are no easy ways to compartmentalize "fixes." MBO deals with almost the entire organization: structure, leadership styles, controls, and much more. Depending upon who uses it and how, it can be almost anything. The same is true of the other methods; they have no meaning analogous to a finance department's decision to develop a new capital budgeting technique. Almost every management technique really affects the entire organization and can be shaped or misshaped to do pretty much what the managers want. None have independent reality, and most have no independent validation. Not only are they a conglomerate of half-digested procedures, they are not operationalized. OD in one organization means something totally different from what happens next door (even though the same consultant is being paid).

*The rejectionists:* And then there are those managers who are embittered and confused with how difficult organizational life appears. They argue that there are no rules of the game for their crazy, mixed-up organization. While the person next door may be dealing with rational people in a sensible organization, they must confront a ship of fools.

### **THEY NEVER TELL YOU HOW**

Managers seeking guidance from the academic world and the experts will discover that what first appears useful and relevant



has a fatal shortcoming. The books and speeches emphasize what the good manager should be thinking and/or the results he or she should be achieving. They tend to omit the critical "how" to do this.

### **Why Managers Do What They Do**

A significant share of the writing on management seeks to differentiate effective from ineffective managers on the basis of differences in perception: how they view the world around them and themselves.

Thus good managers are supposedly those who:

- Trust and have confidence in both the capabilities and the motivation of subordinates and believe that they want to accept responsibility and work hard<sup>2</sup>
- Believe that shared authority (participation) is both desirable and useful
- Seek achievement and legitimate power
- Are reasonably self-confident, assured, optimistic, sensitive, and alert

### **What a Good Manager Should Achieve**

Alternatively there is the traditional emphasis on what good managers accomplish: they are effective in planning ahead, delegating, coordinating, staffing, organizing, even making profits. In other words, "good" managers make "good" decisions that work out to be sensible plans, reasonable delegations, and desirable results.

The traditional management textbook was largely devoted to what you were supposed to accomplish. In contrast, the organizational behavior approach stressed what you were supposed to think (of yourself and others). Almost no recognition was given to the rather obvious point that probably everybody wants to accomplish the same thing. Few managers *don't* want to plan well, staff well, or coordinate well. The problem is *how*. Since Weber and Taylor, it's been an open secret that organizations ought to utilize techniques like planning and delegation. Similarly, most (but surely not all) managers want to be confident, achievement-oriented, and respectful of the motivations

<sup>2</sup>Douglas McGregor is most frequently cited for this way of suggesting the distinction between a Theory X and a Theory Y manager.