Harold J. Leavitt

Managerial Psychology

Fourth Edition

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An introduction to individuals, pairs, and groups in organizations

Fourth Edition

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Preface to the fourth edition

The last edition of this book was written during the American "Days of May," the period of student protest, of Vietnam, of black-white confrontation, and of the emerging women's movement. This edition is written in a somewhat different milieu.

Those earlier issues have not gone away, but the sense of urgency has receded. The acute pain has been succeeded by the steadier ache of uncertainty.

Environmental and energy issues are now prominent concerns in all our lives. And while students are back at their desks, a certain residual cynicism about the establishment remains and, presumably, so do the new "we" generation values—more search for the good life, for the sailboat and the long weekend.

For the top executive this seems the era of the uncertain and sticky world; the era of regulation, of litigation, and of cloudy crystal balls.

On the inside, organizations are worrying more about getting the best from these strange young folks they're recruiting, and worrying more about motivating older people in organizations whose growth rates have slowed down. They're concerned, too, with the internal inflexibilities that follow from closer external regulation and control. Innovativeness in products, technology, and organizational design, comes harder in the sticky, vigilantly guarded settings of today.

While I try in this edition of *Managerial Psychology* to respond to these more recent concerns, I also try to stick to the basics. The psychological underpinnings of the first edition continue in this fourth edition. The book is still divided into four parts, moving from the individual, to interpersonal relationships, to groups, to larger organizational issues. The fundamentals within each section remain intact. But part 1 gives more attention to the problems of judging people and situations under conditions of high pressure and limited information. Part 2 has more on power and a lot more on pay and performance appraisal. There is a new chapter on group decision making in part 3, and a new chapter on experiments (here and abroad) with group-based factories. Part 4 has been modified quite radically to emphasize *managing,* treating the managing process as an ongoing, changing effort to find the right problems, solve them, and implement the solutions.

The whole emphasis of this edition is on the active, flexible, changing nature of both people and organizations; and on strategies and heuristics for managing changing people in changing organizations.

I hope I have eliminated the sexism of earlier editions. For my insensitivity to the implications of some of my earlier words, I can only say "mea culpa." I should point out, however, that I use the male pronoun throughout this book (to include all people). I found that the"s/he" form or random alternation of "he" and "she" interferes with the flow of thought. Nor have I added much material on the special problems encountered by women in management. The book is about managing people, with both sexes seen as doing the managing and both as the managed. Whenever it seemed to me that the sex of manager or managed might play a special role, I have tried to point it out.

My gratitude, as in the past, to Kathy Bostick for her quick and savvy working over of the manuscript. Nina Hatvany checked out lots of specific questions for me. And I am grateful, too, to the managers, students, and colleagues who keep me surprised and, I hope, alert.

Mr. Chocolate Mess, kissed by the Northern Princess, has turned into the Prince of America. And now the clear, bright voice of the Red Queen adds its firm inputs; and so do the Poet Laureate's joyous declamations on misery.

Same wife!

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1

People one at a time The units of management

Introductory note

In these next several chapters the reader will find a presentation of some concepts of human behavior that seem most relevant to managerial problems. Such consideration of people and their behavior seems a prerequisite to any conscious attempt to learn how better to "manage" people. "Conscious" is a key word, because many persons (including many businessmen), are extremely skillful managers even though they go about their activities more or less intuitively. Those of us who are not so gifted need to think out loud about human relations and about ourselves as mechanisms for solving organizational problems.

Although the book as a whole purports to deal with problems of managing, this first section focuses almost entirely on the individual human being. The reasons for this "impractical" digression are several: First, the characteristics of people in general are a good base from which to build up to the characteristics of people in organizations. Second, managers, unlike parents, must work with used, not new, human beings—human beings whom other people have gotten to first. Third, the manager is his own best managing mechanism. An examination of his own makeup should therefore be useful to him.

Part 1 is designed as follows: It starts with some fundamental assumptions about what is "true" of all people everywhere. It moves then to a more detailed examination of the ways people differ from one another and some of the sources of those differences. Next, personality differences and their influence on the ways people see and deal with other things and other people are considered. Two chapters deal with the problem of *pressure*—the effects of frustration and conflict on behavior. Two chapters are concerned with conscious problem solving, the everyday work of the manager. One chapter is devoted to values and attitudes, the points where thought and feeling meet. Finally, one long chapter is given over to the practical problem of assessing people.

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The goal of this section is both to simplify and complicate the reader's picture of people—to simplify by systematizing and interrelating some basic ideas (most of which are not new) and to complicate by pointing out the infinite shades of gray and the multitude of interacting variables that can occur in the behaving human organism.

1

People are alike
Some basic ideas

Managers' decisions, like other people's, are usually based on some combination of fact and theory. They are choices made by interpreting things observed in the light of things believed. And in most of their decisions executives are reasonably aware of the particular beliefs they are using in interpreting the facts they observe. They take supply-and-demand ideas into account in making marketing decisions, for example. And they often use high-level technical theory in attacking engineering and production problems.

Managers also use theory in dealing with human problems. But in the human area theorizing seems to be much more implicit or even unconscious. The theories of human behavior that managers hold seem also to be much more diverse than their economic and engineering theories, perhaps because they are much more the private property of individual executives. Here, for instance, are some pairs of theoretical assertions that have been made by business executives. Each of them necessarily reflects some basic assumptions about the nature of man:

People are basically lazy; or, People just want a chance to show what they can do.

Always be careful of an executive who loses his temper; or, Watch out for the executive who never loses his temper.

A good salesman sells himself before his product; or, A good product sells itself.

Men think more clearly than women; or Women size up the true situation better than men.

If you give people a finger they'll take the whole arm; or, Kindness begets kindness.

People need to know exactly what their jobs are; or, People will work best when they can make their own jobs.

Each of these statements (and the list is not at all exhaustive) is either an assumption about the nature of people or a derivation from such an assumption. Each is a flat, unequivocal generalization, much like the statement, "Air is lighter than water."

The fact that many of these generalizations contradict one another suggests that they cannot all be right and therefore raises difficult questions of proof and consistency. This section of the book does not aim to prove that some are true and some are false. What is does aim to do is to provide a set of internally *consistent* generalizations; generalizations that should be *useful* in predicting human behavior, whether they are fundamentally true or not.

All of us seem to make some kind of generalizations about people, and this is important in deciding what is "practical" and what is "only theoretical." Managers have a reputation for practicality and hardheadedness, a reputation fledgling managers may mistakenly equate with entirely concrete and nongeneral thinking. Yet statements like those above are extremely general, extremely theoretical. They may express theory, but they point up the need for theoretical generalizations to serve as a foundation for practicality. Some kind of psychological theory is just as necessary for the manager dealing with human problems as is electrical and mechanical theory for the engineer dealing with machine problems. Without theory the engineer has no way of diagnosing what might be wrong when the engine stops, no way of pre-estimating the effects of a proposed change in design. Without some kind of psychological theory, the manager cannot attach meaning to the red flags of human disturbance; nor can he predict the likely effects of changes in organization or personnel policy.

The particular theoretical position outlined in these early chapters will not be new to most readers. Most of us already accept it but often do not use it. If it is good theory it should lead to useful predictions. Incidentally, if it is good theory it may not necessarily be true theory. No one knows whether some of the things said here are true or false. The reader can decide for himself whether or not they are useful.

Three basic assumptions about people

Suppose we asked this question of many kinds of people: "What are the fundamental, unexceptionable truths of human behavior?" Suppose one asked it of college students, union members, top- and middle-level managers, engineers, architects, teachers, and physicians. The answers would include generalizations like these:

People are products of their environment.
People want security.
All people want is bread and butter.
People are fundamentally lazy.
People are fundamentally selfish.

People only do what they have to do.

People are creatures of habit.

People are products of their heredity.

Some of these answers, like the generalizations we talked about earlier, seem to contradict others, but at another level the contradictions disappear. If one organizes them, one comes out with essentially the same generalizations that many modern psychologists would offer. For three major ideas are implicit in that list:

The first is the idea of *causality*, the idea that human behavior is caused, just as the behavior of physical objects is caused by forces that act on those physical objects. Causality is implicit in the beliefs that environment and heredity affect behavior and that what is outside influences what is inside.

Second, there is the idea of *directedness*, the idea that human behavior is not only caused but is also pointed toward something, that behavior is goal-directed, that people want to go somewhere.

Third, the list includes the concept of *motivation,* that underlying behavior one finds a "push" or a "motive" or a "want" or a "need" or a "drive."

These three ideas can provide the beginning of a system for conceptualizing human behavior. With the help of these ideas, human behavior can be viewed as part of a double play from motive to behavior to goal. And it is also helpful to think of this causal chain as generally forming a closed circuit. Arrival at a goal eliminates the motive, which eliminates the behavior. Thus, for instance, a person's stomach is empty; the emptiness stimulates impulses interpreted as "hunger"; the feeling of hunger stimulates behavior in search of food. He gets food. The food fills his stomach, causing the "feeling hungry" impulse to stop, which in turn stops the behavior in search of food.

This closed-circuit conception includes one major danger. Many "psychological," as distinct from "physical," goals are not finite and specific. One can consume a specific quantity of food and thereby temporarily stop feeling hungry for more. It is doubtful, however, that one can consume a specific quantity of prestige, for instance, and feel sated. Prestige and other "psychological" goals seem to be ephemeral and boundless; enough may never be obtained to inactivate the causes and hence the motive.

These assumptions of causality, motivation, and direction are nevertheless useful assumptions if they are accepted as universal. Causality, motivation, and direction can be thought of as applying equally to all people, of all ages, in all cultures, at all times. When one makes such assumptions they should lead one, upon observing human behavior, always to seek motive and, behind motive, cause.

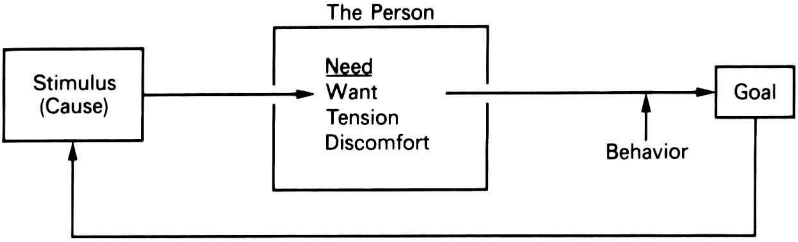

Fig. 1. A basic model of behavior.

A warning is once again in order. These assumptions are relatively modern Western assumptions. Let's not confuse their universal applicability with the belief that that's all there is or ever will be to human nature. There may well exist realms of human thought and behavior that are not encompassed by those three assumptions. And we may—possibly—someday realize that while those assumptions are useful they limit our range of intellectual vision.

But to get back to the assumptions:

There are many different perspectives on them, but the basic assumptions remain intact. For example, one can say that behavior is an attempt to get rid of tension. Tension then equals motivation; and the objective of behavior is to eliminate the necessity for behaving. Words like "motives" or "needs" or "drives" are rough synonyms for each other as well as for words like "tensions" or "discomforts" or "disequilibriums." Behavior is thus seen as an effort to eliminate tensions by seeking goals that neutralize the causes of tensions. Generally, such a view is called a *deficiency* model of motivation.

Such deficiency models are useful in another way. They put the emphasis on the *push* from inside the person rather than on the *pull* from outside. Managers, for instance, often encounter problems with subordinates who "don't know what they want." They feel restless and disturbed but can't seem to say what it is they are after. Most of us behave this way a good deal of the time, feeling the push of tension from inside but not being able to identify the precise goal that would eliminate the tension. We search vaguely, trying one job or another, one boss or another, one idea or another, until—if we are lucky—we hit on something that does the trick. Only then may we be able to tie up that particular feeling or tension with some specific goal, so that next time we can head directly for where we want to go. The baby, after all, doesn't start out crying, "I want a bottle." He starts out saying, "I feel discomfort somewhere inside." He then goes on to try all the different behaviors he can muster until he discovers that the bottle eliminates that particular discomfort. Only then can he identify this goal and narrow down his behavior so that he can get to his goal without exhausting himself.

But no matter how one views these concepts, they suggest that the ultimate condition of mankind can be thought of as an equilibrium condition in which he need not behave. This ultimate will be unattainable so long as one fly after another goes on landing on man's rump to stir up some new need and to force him to go on swishing his tail.

Of course the same landscape can be drawn from a brighter perspective. The tendency not to behave unless one has to can also account for the human capacity to learn. It can account for the baby's ability to become an increasingly efficient food finder. The diffuse kicking, squalling, and rolling give way over a few years to the simpler and more efficient behavior of learning to find and open the cookie jar. If people were not thus naturally stingy in their expenditures of energy, if they did not abhor unnecessary effort, if they were not lazy, then their factories would probably be no more efficient today than they were fifty years ago, if the factories existed at all.

Growth models

Until now we have treated human needs as tensions that arise out of *deficiencies,* out of want or lack. In recent years a strong case has been made for what has been called "growth motivation," a self-generating view of at least some major human needs. It is in the nature of man, this argument runs, to reach out for something more no matter what his state of satisfaction. People do not sit on their duffs even if they are very well fed and very comfortable.

Growth models are thus open-ended in their view of human potential. They see the human beings as continuously developing, moving on from one level of motivation to the next higher one, and so on; and thereby continuously repositioning himself to accomplish ever "higher" ends.

This position is important because it leads one toward a more optimistic posture in approaching the question of motivating people. If one views motivation as arising exclusively out of deficiency, then one begins to think about ways of creating deficiencies for others in order to motivate them. "Let's make him unsatisfied by making him hungry, then he'll work." The growth-motivational view points out that it is when human beings are satisfied in their more basic needs that the "higher" needs are likely to flower. It is when people are freed from the simple deficiencies that they can really begin to work as complete human beings.

Neither growth nor deficiency models allow much room for the idea of "habit," if habit means uncaused or undirected repetitive behavior. If the word "habit" is to fit here, it will have to mean some-

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