

Explorations  
In  
Managerial  
Talent

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# EXPLORATIONS IN MANAGERIAL TALENT

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**To Mason Haire  
Friend and Colleague**

## PREFACE

The study presented in this book is the culmination of some twenty years of research in which I have examined the traits and abilities which play a part in managerial success. Employing a variety of means, and a number of different types of managers, I have tried to obtain a picture of that broad quality which can be termed managerial talent. In the Walter Van Dyke Memorial Lecture at the University of Michigan in 1963 I brought together my first findings, and summarized my thinking at that time about the substance of managerial talent. The research reported in this book grew out of that lecture, and, indeed, is an extension of it. Here I report the findings of the application of the device I have developed to measure various pertinent human qualities, the Self-Description Inventory, to a substantial group of managers who were specially selected so as to constitute a wide and diverse sample of American executives and administrators. I have compared their qualities, and the relationships between their qualities and their occupational success, with those of line supervisors and line workers, using the results to highlight the nature of managerial talent. I have also used this report to present my ideas about what I believe the nature of management ought to be, ideas which I believe this research documents.

In this book, the Self-Description Inventory, and the scales of the thirteen traits for which it provides measurements, are presented in detail. These scales have been refined and cross-validated over the years, and the methods utilized for this, together with the results obtained in the process, are herein given. The scale for working class affinity was developed under a different title with my former col-

league, Professor Lyman W. Porter. Indeed, several of the scales which have been described in other publications have been renamed in the light of new information and new thought. I hope this presentation of the Self-Description Inventory will be useful to the many persons who have expressed interest in it, and have wished to utilize it for research purposes.

The massive increases in the size of our business and industrial firms have required increases in the number of managers who are employed to integrate and direct their activities. Great as has been the need for more managers, even greater has been the need for higher quality management; as business and industrial firms have grown in size, their problems have become disproportionately more complex. As a consequence, that which was deemed quite acceptable management just a relatively few years ago no longer suffices for dealing with matters, both internal and external, which presently face the firm.

It is, therefore, imperative that there be a greater understanding of the personal qualities which lead to effective management. For as we enhance our knowledge about the traits and abilities which underlie superior performance in executive and administrative positions, we will be better able to develop ways to select men and women for management, and to devise procedures for training them and for assessing their performance. Perhaps even more importantly, we shall gain further insight into the kinds of circumstances within the organization which foster the full utilization of the qualities of those managers who have the potentiality for excellence. The research described in this book seeks to provide some of the answers to the question of what constitutes managerial talent, and I trust that it will be helpful in this respect.

I owe a great deal to my former colleague and long-time friend, Professor Mason Haire, for the encouragement and support he has given me throughout the years I have been studying managers. A man as rich in ideas as Mason Haire can afford to be generous with them, and there is a long file of his colleagues and students, past and present, who can testify that indeed he is. In my work with managers I, too, have freely "borrowed" from his thinking. This acknowledgement of that fact is but small return for the intellectual stimulation he has given me, and most of all, for the warm and understanding friendship.

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# 1

## ORGANIZATIONS AND MANAGERS



The success of any business and industrial establishment is a function of a wide variety of factors. Some determinants of the organization's success are completely extrinsic to it, whereas others are intrinsic and are part and parcel of the very fabric of the company. The extent to which a market is available for the goods or services a firm produces, the manner and amounts it is taxed, the availability of raw materials and supplies, and the competitive situation are circumstances outside of the organization which play a part in determining whether it operates at a profit or a loss. These factors are largely, though perhaps not entirely, beyond the control of the individual firm.

There are, too, many intrinsic factors which bear upon the degree to which a firm can realize its goals. These factors are inherent in the firm, and ordinarily are matters it can do something about; such as the structure of the organization, production methods, programs for training and developing personnel, and accounting systems. One of the most important of these intrinsic factors is the talent level of those individuals who manage the firm. The management plots the firm's course and guides its activities. Furthermore, it plays a significant part in the well-being of the members of the firm. The higher the level of managerial talent to be found among its executives and administrators the more effectively will the firm operate, the more adaptable it will be in a changing world; thus, the longer its life expectancy.

This book is about managers—the executives and administrators who are responsible for the operation of our business and industrial establishments. It is an exploration of managerial talent, those traits and abilities which are important in determining the extent to which an individual will be successful in performing the many and varied functions of the manager. If the quality of managers' performance is indeed a significant factor in the economic and sociological health of the firm, then it is of paramount importance to have some understanding of the nature of the traits and abilities which determine it.

## THE ORIGINS AND FOUNDATIONS OF ORGANIZATIONS

Man is a gregarious creature and seldom chooses to run alone. In the congested modern society he has created for himself, he often likes to make a great point of seeking retirement from the busy scene,



wistfully sighing for the fanciful solitude of the garden, the wilderness, the mountains. Nevertheless, the occasions when he achieves real privacy are rare, and he quite fully recognizes that he really wants such circumstances merely as intervals, and not as a permanent way of life. If he is forced to have infrequent contact with his own kind, he often moves to lessen his sense of isolation by seeking community with some surrogate—a dog, a cat, a goldfish, a canary. Clearly, association with his own kind is a most important human value.

Man recognizes that there are differences among his fellows in degree of social orientation, and every once in a while he even respects these differences. While those of his fellows who require constant social intercourse may ruffle his disposition a bit, he is likely to ease them into situations in society wherein such personal qualities are helpful. Such excessively outgoing persons are made warm-up men for television shows, encyclopedia salesmen, and airline hostesses. However, those of his fellows who are at the other end of the dimension, and are disinclined to associate extensively with their fellows, man will certainly view as peculiar, aberrant, or even ill. Man will tolerate the extrovert even though he wears on the nerves and causes endless trouble, but insists upon "readjusting" or "curing" the introvert who goes about minding his own business. Isolation is not to be tolerated, nor may the loner keep his own counsel. Man seeks the company of others, and adamantly insists that his fellows act in concourse.

But working in concert brings about problems which do not occur when people act apart and on their own. With many individuals closely assembled they get in each other's way, unless there is some planned assignment of the various tasks to the different individuals who comprise the working band. If man is to work in a group, the group must be organized, and the activities of its individual members governed so that each is allocated particular functions. By this means, the work is shared in such a manner that each makes his own special contribution to the collective effort.

Groups of men gathered together in order to mutually attain some particular productive ends are not mere aggregations, a number of unaffiliated persons assembled in the same location without a system or plan. Rather, each member of the group has an assigned task, a particular set of functions, a role. Depending upon the nature

of the objectives of the group, its size, and its constitution, the roles may be few in number and kind, or they may be many and diverse. But, whatever the number of members and the number of roles, the individuals in the group perform specialized actions, and the actions of each individual member of the group must be coordinated with those of all of the others. If this were not the case, then people would be stepping on each other's toes, and the purposes of the group would never be realized. If a group is to be productive, then, it must be structured—that is, organized.

So we can say that that human institution which is termed an organization is a social group, a group wherein the individual members are differentiated one from another with respect to the functions they perform in connection with attaining the common goals, their roles being arranged or structured so that their individual actions will be integrated into a total concerted effort. An organization may be a large and complex affair which is staffed by a substantial number of individuals whose roles are manifold and are enmeshed in an elaborate and detailed structure, or it may be a simple thing with but two or three members and an equally small number of different roles. But, whatever an organization's size and nature may be, its members have a mutual interest in, and a responsibility for, a common goal. They contribute in different ways to the consummation of that goal, and they accept the relationships among their different roles.

This is not to say that every individual in an organization perceives himself as a member of a group of individuals with structured roles, each of whom solemnly goes about engaged in his own assigned activities which he recognizes to be perhaps a small but yet an integral part of the total enterprise. The soldier pressing himself into the mud as deep as he can so as to avoid enemy fire, may have no knowledge of, much less interest in, the grand purpose his nation has in waging the terrible war. All he knows is the quite immediate and personal purpose—survival. If he feels himself to be a part of the organization which has uniformed him and placed him in battle, it is as a sort of appendage of that great amorphous institutional thing whose orders, transmitted to him by some immediate superior who is his only connection with the organization, must be carried out. If he does develop the feeling of membership in a group, it is with a group comprised of other private soldiers and their immediate superiors

who share his woes and dismal circumstances. To such a group he may develop a firm and close affiliation. But it is not an affiliation to the massive organization which encompasses all of them.

## ROLES IN ORGANIZATION

The productive organizations that modern man has constructed to aid him in satisfying his basic needs, the business and industrial establishments, have tended to grow in size until it is impossible for them to operate in as simple a way as a hunting band. As a consequence, the operations of such organizations are fractionated into parts, and to the different parts different functions are assigned. A broad distinction can be drawn between those functions which directly and immediately result in the production of goods and services, and those functions which are of a planful, integrative, and directive sort. The individuals who perform the former are termed line workers, and those who are engaged in the latter are termed managers. Line workers directly produce goods and services, or perform activities that are immediately involved in the production of such. On the one hand, there are assemblers, machinists, beauticians, and bus operators who produce things which are used or consumed, or provide services which others utilize; and on the other hand, there are clerks, repairmen, teamsters, and salesmen, who, in one way or another, facilitate the production of goods and services, or the transfer of them to the consumer.

The other class of personnel, the managers, do not themselves produce; rather, they govern the organization and control its operations. While the functions which managers perform are necessary for the productive process, they themselves do not directly and immediately participate in it. The management of an organization includes foremen, department heads, staff officers, plant managers, vice presidents, and the like. They are people who arrange things and circulate information within the organization so as to facilitate the total productive endeavor.

With the forward march of that circumstance which he chooses to call civilization, the organizations which man has fashioned to accomplish his various purposes have steadily grown larger and larger. It is the very nature of the case that the larger and larger organizations become, the more and more elaborate their structure tends to be.

Simple systems suffice when the organization is small, for then objectives are both unpretentious and straightforward. Consequently, role assignments are readily accomplished, and they are quite flexible and easily interchangeable. By the very smallness of their number, it is easy for the members to avoid interfering with each other's activities. But in large organizations, such as the immense business and industrial establishments which are so typical of our times, the task is much more difficult. The sheer geographical distribution of its members alone defeats easy communication among them. Therefore, unless role assignments are highly structured, clear and unequivocal, all is confusion. No one knows who is, or should be, doing what, and why.

All organizations, regardless of their purpose, nature, or size, must continuously provide for the coordination of the activities of the individual members so that they do not get in each other's way, but rather permit each to make his appropriate contribution. Furthermore, organizations must make some provision for the formulation of the plans which guide their activities, and for procedures which effectuate such plans. In almost all organizations these functions are accomplished by persons who are assigned the role of manager. Managers direct the activities of the organization's members, they develop policies, plans, and procedures, and make explicit the purposes of the organization. Without the government provided by managers the organization would completely lose its structure, and would then regress to the primitive state of a simple assemblage of individuals. It would be impossible for such an assemblage to achieve the group's objective, for this is something that can only be accomplished by coordinated rather than individual activity, otherwise there would have been no organization in the first place.

### WHO ARE MANAGERS?

It is by no means easy to determine who is a manager and who is not, for there is no single precise and universally accepted definition of what a manager is. Rather, there are many definitions, definitions which have been developed for different purposes. It is not uncommon to take management to be those persons who supervise or lead others. And so, supervision and leadership are taken to be the functions of managers. Such a definition would include



not only presidents of companies as well as foremen, but also leadmen, and craftsmen who direct apprentices. Legally, neither leadmen nor craftsmen are considered managers, nor would most people consider them to be such. Indeed, the common understanding of what constitutes a manager, vague though it be, does not include either leadmen or craftsmen, for their primary function is not supervisory. Furthermore, there are many individuals whom all definitions would include among the ranks of managers, but who nonetheless would be excluded by this distinction. Legal counselors, safety engineers, research chemists, and market analysts may supervise no one save perhaps a secretary, and yet there would be few who could classify them other than as managers.

While supervision is unquestionably one element in the decision of whether or not to classify an individual as a manager, it is not the sole criterion. If a person supervises others he is likely to be a manager, but not necessarily. Even if supervision by informal leaders in work groups is not counted, there are those who supervise and yet are not considered to be managers. At the same time, even if a person does not supervise anyone he may nevertheless be classified as a manager because he formulates policy, and plans or develops working procedures as an aid to others who do supervise and direct.

If a dictionary is consulted, it will be found that a manager is one who manages, and that to manage is to direct, to execute, to carry out, to guide, to administer, and, interestingly enough, to cope with, to bring about by contriving, and to husband. Therefore, it could be said that a manager is one who executes and administers. While these functions do not provide precise criteria for differentiating management positions from those of other sorts, they are at least guideposts in the taxonomy of occupations, and they do differentiate those in the upper portions of the organizational hierarchy from those at the lowest level.

### VARIETIES OF MANAGERIAL JOBS

Managers may be classified by the level their positions are in organizations as being upper, middle, and lower management. Those who are in the upper level of management are concerned with the