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THE MANAGEMENT BOOK



ASSEMBLING YOUR TEAM UNDERSTANDING YOUR BOSS CREATING YOUR ROLE
ENGAGING & MOTIVATING YOUR TEAM PRIORITISING PROPERLY GETTING MORE FROM MEETINGS
MAKING THE RIGHT DECISIONS DEALING WITH CONFLICT HANDLING CHANGE
EFFECTIVE DELEGATION TAKING RISKS PERFORMANCE REVIEWS

RICHARD NEWTON

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The Management Book



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The Management Book

Richard Newton

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- Sensei Ian Patterson

Preface

In setting out to write this book I wanted to create something unique, novel and value adding. Not an easy challenge given the numbers of management books in existence. I have avoided the paths many management writers have travelled before and, hopefully, have created an interesting and unusual perspective on management. One that will help managers come to terms with their roles and to find ways to excel.

To provide rapid, accessible advice I have designed an easy-to-follow format and structure: the book is broken into 36 articles, organised into 9 themed parts. The articles cover the range of management issues and concerns. They can be read end-to-end, or you can dip in and read any one article by itself.

I like exposing the assumptions we make about management. There are many unquestioned and often unreasonable assumptions in management thinking. These assumptions limit our performance and achievement of our objectives. By exposing them we can examine them and then accept, improve or reject them.

Management should be at the centre of business thinking. But managers are the often forgotten heroes of business. In business writing and discourse there is a focus on topics like leadership, empowered workers, and the web phenomenon of voluntary collaborative participation. I do not doubt the value of these topics, but there is a tendency in focusing on them to squeeze management out of the picture. Worse than this, managers are blamed for all the past ills of the company. Think of how the phrase 'middle manager' is used almost as a term of abuse in organisations.

Poor management is the cause of many business ills, but every good business has good management. Without managers, empowered workers have insufficient direction and guidance; all leaders are managers too, and collaborative participation has its limits and even it needs some form of management.

We have lost sight of the centrality of management to business, and the centrality of teams to the manager's role. Topics like leadership are important. The thinking on it over the last few decades has been helpful, but it often obscures the fact that leaders do not spring from nowhere. Leadership is crucial, but it is just one part of the manager's role.

The character of management has changed and continues to change. With this comes a need to focus on different skills and competencies. Yet management is and will remain essential to business. The articles in this book will support you in retaining up-to-date skills and remaining an essential component of whatever business you work in.

Introduction

Management is not always seen as an exciting topic. This is odd given how critical it is to business. Successful businesses may thrive on creativity and innovation, but it is good management that makes them effective and efficient. When a business fails, you can be certain the finger will soon point to poor management. Perhaps we do not consider management enough because we take it for granted. We should not. Examples of poor management are everywhere. On top of this, management is changing and will continue to change in response to the evolution of business and society.

But what is management? Irrespective of the situation, a manager manages a team to get something done. If tasks are not complex, large scale or benefiting from labour specialisation there is no need for a team. If there is no team, there is no need for a manager. But many tasks need teams and those teams need managers. That, in essence, is the scope of this book: the manager's role in managing teams to get things done.

There is a large variation in what business teams do, and how they do it. So large that it might be thought impossible to write about management in a general sense. Management is context-specific. Management cannot be learnt by reading books or attending courses – management is learnt by experience.

I approach the topic by helping you decide what is right for you. I assist you to explore and understand your own situation. I expose the decisions managers make and the implications of choosing one way to manage over another.

The contents

The choice of this book's contents follows a deliberate plan. I have tried to stick to the essential parts of management, but to look at them from unusual perspectives and different angles. I have taken the approach of seeking out the underlying assumptions in beliefs and behaviours with regard to management, exposing them and challenging them. My belief is that we don't do this enough in management.

The contents give an honest view of management. I do not take the corporate line. Some aspects of management are not appealing to everyone, but by openly thinking about them you can decide how to face them, and even if management is the right career for you.

The structure

This book has been split into nine parts, each of which focuses on an important management theme. The parts are sub-divided into four sections, each containing one article. The articles are varied, but when combined provide a comprehensive view on the theme of the part. Although the articles build into a picture of management, they are designed to stand alone. You can pick any section in any part of the book and read it as an individual piece of advice.

Each of the articles is short, and can easily be read in one sitting. To ease use, the articles are all structured in the same way.

How to use the book

There are two ways to use this book. I hope you find both of them useful.

Read it end-to-end to gain an overall picture of management. There is a rough logical ordering to the parts, from Part 1 starting with the basics, and progressing to more sophisticated and complex managerial issues. There are cross-references between

the articles to help you build a complex, flexible and many-sided view of management.

Alternatively, dip in and pick the articles that are most helpful to you. Each article is complete as a stand-alone read. Use the book as a reference source, reading articles as and when you want. Hopefully, you will come back to the book time and again.

part

three

Creating your role

In any business you will find a range of people with differing opinions, goals, skills, resources, views, information, contacts and so on. In its entirety this makes up the human and political environment of an organisation. This part is concerned with understanding and thriving in complex business environments.

The leaders of your business will try, more or less successfully, to ensure there are consistent and complementary goals and behaviours through strategy and communications. As a manager, even a senior manager, you have a limited ability to shape the environment, but you can respond to it with varying levels of effectiveness.

In a junior role you only need to be aware of part of this environment. You primarily need to understand your direct boss's opinions, needs and limitations. This is discussed in the first two sections of this part. As you become more senior you must develop an understanding of the wider human and political environment of your business. The way you do this is

through your network of relationships which is discussed in the third section.

The human and political environment is not just something you must cope with – it is something you can interpret and utilise. Having done this you can create the management role that best fits this environment. This is elaborated in the fourth section.

Deciphering your boss

What is this about and why is it important?

Unless you are a Chief Executive, you are not only a manager, you are also a member of your manager's team. You will probably spend most of your time interacting with your team and this is the focus of this book. But you must also fulfil your role as a member of your manager's team.

Your relationship with your manager or boss is one of the most important relationships at work. Manage it well, and you have a good chance of being successful. Manage it badly, and your success will be at risk.

The foundation of a good relationship is an understanding of your boss's needs and desires. Only if you know these can you fulfil the role your manager wants you to. These needs may be complex and volatile, they may not be written down and nor are they fixed. You have to decipher and monitor your boss to maintain a current understanding of these needs.

Objectives for managers

- To have a clear, comprehensive and up-to-date understanding of your manager's wants and expectations.
- To set realistic expectations with your manager.

Common issues in achieving these objectives

- Bosses provide unclear and incomplete requirements.
- Requirements are mutually contradictory.
- Requirements change frequently.

The management guide

The relationship

There are three main aspects to your relationship with your boss. Your boss is:

1. A source of needs and instructions. I refer to these as your boss's requirements.
2. A resource provider.
3. The person who performs your performance review.

This section focuses on the first of these, but it is important to understand the other two as they are interrelated.

Let's have a closer look at your boss's requirements. These are requirements that you need to understand in order to be able to fulfil her expectations and help her to meet her goals. You can think of these requirements in two categories:

- The formal needs from her role in the business, which cascade down through her onto you and your team.
- Her desires, which are less specific and more related to the person she is, her values, what she wants to achieve and so forth.

The second aspect of your relationship with your boss involves resources. If you have a good relationship with your manager, she will be a resource you can use. She should be someone you can go to for help and advice. On top of this, she is a gateway to other resources. Your manager's power is restricted and resources are limited. But what budget, headcount and other resources are allocated to you depend upon your manager's decisions. These decisions are influenced by how well you interpret and fulfil your manager's requirements.

There are two restrictions on the resources you are allocated: your manager's overall budget and who else it must be shared with. You are in competition with your peers. It is not a zero sum game where any gains for you are always at the expense of your peers. Budgets are flexible and can grow or shrink. But there is a limit,

and the more your manager allocates to your peers, the less is available for you.

Your success is not purely about the size of your budget. Sometimes you need few resources, other times you need many. But always you need enough, and ideally a little extra, to deal with the unforeseen (see pp. 173–9). You are most likely to be allocated sufficient resource if you reliably interpret and fulfil your boss's most important needs.

The third aspect of your relationship with your manager is as the person who judges your performance. How your manager assesses your performance depends on a range of factors, but central to her judgement will be your record in meeting her expectations and fulfilling her requirements.

The challenge

Your boss's requirements can be hard to fulfil. This is no surprise, but what may be a surprise is that even understanding these requirements is often difficult. Few managers are certain they are doing the things that have the greatest chance of fulfilling their boss's desires.

Occasionally, you will be lucky and have a boss who is clear about what she wants. Such a boss will be reasonable and will understand the limitations of your team. She will set you achievable and clear objectives. You won't always find yourself in this situation. Bosses' requirements are often ambiguous and imprecise. You have to learn to deal with this. Generally, this challenge increases with seniority. If you want to progress in a management career you must develop the ability to cope with the ambiguity of requirements.

When trying to understand your manager's needs you will encounter the following obstacles:

- Your boss will rarely explain all of her requirements.
- You may interpret your boss's statements and behaviour incorrectly.

- Your boss may have conflicting requirements.
- Your boss's needs will change, sometimes very quickly.
- Even if you understand the requirements, rarely will you have the time or resources to fulfil all of them.

There are many causes of these obstacles. Your boss may assume, incorrectly, that you know her requirements. Your manager has limited time to spend with you. She has a million other things to do, and the time available for you may be too short to explain her requirements. Your boss may not know her own requirements, not having the information from her boss in turn. Like everyone else, your manager is imperfect (see the next section).

Overcoming the challenge

This may seem to make your job impossible. It is not. Every manager has to deal with this challenge, and many people overcome it very well. It is an everyday and resolvable – or at least minimisable – problem.

To understand your manager's requirements you need to be in dialogue with her – regular dialogue. If you only talk to your manager every few months, unless you have an incredibly stable workload, then it is unlikely you will have a deep or current enough understanding of requirements.

Your understanding should not simply be a list of everything your boss wants, you must also seek to understand the context. Which of the requirements are really important, which are nice to have and which are irrelevant? Which requirements must be fulfilled urgently and which ones do you have time to fulfil?

You should seek to have a positive relationship with your manager. A relationship requires interaction, and leads to the opportunity for further interaction. If you have a positive relationship you will get the time to find out the information you need. Also it is far better if you are a colleague that the boss shares and discusses her challenges with, rather than a resource the boss simply dumps work on.

Given the speed with which things change in business, your current understanding of your manager's needs is valid for a limited time. Bosses are not always great at pointing out when needs or priorities have changed. You need to be constantly listening for changes. It is no use effectively fulfilling yesterday's needs.

When your manager explains her requirements make sure you understand them fully. If you do not, probe and ask questions. Be specific in your exploration.

Sometimes you may need a little time to reflect on your understanding. When your manager explains a new requirement, ask for the opportunity to think about how you will fulfil it and for permission to come back later to discuss it. When you come back, show your value by asking specific questions which achieve clarity. By doing this you will often help your manager to improve her own clarity. Normally, she will appreciate this.

If the requirement is complex or different from your usual work, do not simply take it and disappear off to deliver. Your understanding may be flawed, or your manager's explanation may have been incomplete. Think about it and then come back with more questions, and, if possible, examples of what you propose to do. *If I do it like this ... if I give you something that looks like that ... will that fulfil your needs?* If you have clarity and use this to help your manager to achieve greater clarity, then you have already added significant value.

Successful managers help their bosses to develop their understandings of their own requirements, and control their bosses' expectations of how these requirements will be fulfilled.

Often you will not be able to fulfil all of your manager's requirements. This is the time to set expectations. Advise your manager what is and what is not possible, but you should do this in the right way.

Business is an environment which favours positivity, and it is one in which bluntly saying *no*, or *I can't do this*, is frowned upon. When you cannot fulfil a requirement, there are ways of avoiding saying no:

- **Clarify priorities.** Don't say *I can't do both of these*. Ask *should I do A or B first?*
- **Define conditions.** Don't say *I can't do this*, say with *x, y and z I can do this*. Even if you know the conditions will never be fulfilled, this is usually better than saying no.
- **Give choices.** Don't say *I can't do A, B and C*. Say *would you prefer me to do A and B, or A and C?*

In setting expectations you are also trying to avoid taking your manager's problems onto your own back. When you give an unconditional yes to any set of requirements, you have taken the problem completely away from your manager. It is now all yours.

But sometimes you *should* give an unconditional yes to your manager's requirements. Businesses like staff who reliably deliver. This means managing your risks well and not saying yes when you can't do it. But businesses also like managers who say *yes I can do that* without conditions. From time to time you have to take the risk that you will be able to work out requirements and a way of fulfilling them, even if at the time of saying yes you do not know this. Choose the situations carefully, and then manage the risk (see pp. 173–9).

Work on this more if ...

- You are not confident you understand your boss's requirements.
- You regularly fail to meet your boss's expectations.

Manager's checklist

- Your boss is a source of requirements and resources. She also judges your performance.
- Successful managers interpret their boss's unclear or volatile requirements.

- Seek clarity in your boss's requirements and help your boss to achieve her own clarity.
- Actively set expectations – always try to sound positive.

The imperfect boss

What is this about and why is it important?

If you have read the previous section, and the parts of this book concerned with your relationship with your team (Parts 2 and 4), you may notice a contradiction. I suggest you act in one way with your team, but that you should not expect your boss to act in the same way with you. Why? Because your boss may be imperfect, and you should try to be better than him.

You may be one of the lucky people who has a brilliant line manager. Most people come across brilliant managers at some point in their careers. But there are many imperfect bosses. At times you will work for one. In this situation, your job is not to equal him, but to be better. Sometimes this means carefully picking what you learn from your boss. In other situations, you become a good manager in spite of your boss's quirks.

The likelihood of having a flawed boss at some time is high. One of my career disappointments was finding out that the percentage of people who are useless at their job stays about the same irrespective of seniority. You may expect the most senior people to be highly talented individuals you can learn from. Some of them will be, but if 25% of your colleagues are not up to scratch at your current level, you will find 25% are not up to scratch at the next level, and the one above that – all the way to the top.

There are lots of reasons for poor managers. Sometimes an individual was lucky in getting a promotion they did not deserve. This person may be smart, but as I discussed at the start of Part 2, smartness does not equate to great management. Sometimes your boss was a high performer in his previous job and was promoted based on this performance. Unfortunately, his skills in the previous role are not the ones required in his present role. (This has been eloquently generalised in *The Peter Principle*: 'in a

hierarchy every employee tends to rise to their level of incompetence', Laurence J. Peter and Raymond Hull; Souvenir Press, 1969.) Also there is a limited pool of talented people around. Often the person in a job is not the ideal candidate, but the least bad choice. Your boss may be one of these.

You have to learn to work with imperfect bosses. One of the upsides is that the limited number of brilliant managers means if you become a great manager, the chances are you will shine.

Objectives for managers

- To be able to cope with and perform your management role with an imperfect boss.
- To understand what to learn from your boss and what to ignore.

Common issues in achieving these objectives

- Lack of experience leads you to judge bad management as the norm.
- Viewing bad management as unavoidable.

The management guide

There are many ways of being a poor manager. Poor managers may be uncaring, uncommunicative, self-serving, unreasonable, or simply incompetent. Over time these people mostly get caught out, but not always. But your career cannot wait for your boss's limitations to become apparent to other people.

Alternatively, you may have a competent boss, but he still may manage you poorly. Perhaps his attention is elsewhere or he is biased against you for some reason. Maybe he did not choose you and as a result feels encumbered with someone he does not want.

In either case, what should you do? There are four steps to handling this situation:

1. Have realistic expectations. Do you have a poor boss or unrealistic expectations?
2. Use the existing business mechanisms to make sure your boss knows he is a poor manager.
3. Decide if you are going to take formal action and complain.
4. Assuming you are not taking formal action, deal with the imperfect manager.

Reasonable and unreasonable expectations

Always remember your boss is human. All those uncertainties that you feel, he probably does as well. All those limits in information he gives you, he may suffer from too. You are not perfect, nobody else you have ever met is perfect – why should your boss be?

Differentiate behaviour that is unreasonable from behaviour you do not like or that does not meet your expectations. The business you work in should value you and treat you fairly. But fairly is not always the same as how you want to be treated. Your role exists because the business needs an outcome achieved. It does not exist to make you happy.

If you are unsure whether you have a bad boss or not, ask friends or peers about their bosses. If your boss is behaving similarly to theirs, it is probably your expectations that are unrealistic. On the other hand, if your boss is significantly worse, then he may be unreasonable or incompetent.

One reason for dissatisfaction is the support a manager provides to you. The amount of support you should expect depends on seniority. If you have a senior role then support will be limited – you should be able to swim by yourself. You may be given high-level objectives – beyond that you have to work it out for yourself. But as a junior manager or team leader you should have regular coaching and help from your manager. You should not only be told what to do, but should also get advice on how to do it.

Feeding back

Ideally, if you have a bad manager he should know he is a bad manager. But feedback does not always work. It takes a very confident individual to tell an egotistical and volatile boss that he is a poor manager. It is naive to think it is risk-free to tell your manager he is not very good. However, if you can, you should find ways of doing this.

Helpfully, in many organisations there are mechanisms to do this, such as 360-degree feedback. If these exist use them. Try to be as specific as possible in providing feedback – and link it to desired outcomes. What specifically does your boss do or not do which gets in the way of your doing your job?

If you have a relationship in which your boss asks you for feedback, or in which you feel you can tell him, then do. But be careful how you feed back to someone more senior. Rather than saying someone is not good, phrase it positively and link the feedback to the potential for better outcomes. Tell him something like: *if you interacted with me in this way ... I could do more of ... or if you did this ... I could improve performance by ...*

Making a complaint

One answer to the poor boss is to make a formal complaint. You can complain to HR or to a more senior manager. This is a big decision to make, and you should not complain about your boss lightly. If you complain, and your complaint is not upheld, it can make the relationship much worse.

However, there are valid reasons to complain and to complain quickly. Do complain if your boss:

- Is bullying you.
- Exhibits unacceptable biases, e.g. racism, sexism, ageism, disability bias.
- Is encouraging you to engage in illegal or seriously unethical behaviour.

Make sure you are clear what the complaint is. Have evidence to back it up and expect your complaint to be challenged. One person's bullying is another's high-energy team-building. One person's unethical behaviour is another's flexible interpretation of guidelines in that context.

Fortunately, these situations are rare. In most circumstances you do not need to complain about the imperfect boss. You just deal with him.

Dealing with the imperfect manager

If you have a bad boss, and assuming you are not going to simply ignore him, there are two things you can do. You can work with him, perhaps helping him to become a better manager, or you can work around him. Of course, you can do both.

Learn from your boss. Even the worst boss provides lessons to learn from – even if they are what not to do. If you have the inclination and ability to do it, try to build a strong relationship with your boss. With a deep relationship you may, sensitively, be able to give him the feedback everyone else struggles with. Alternatively, you can help him to do the tasks he performs poorly. No manager is good at everything and he may value your ability to do some of the things he is weaker at.

The alternative is to work around your boss. Your manager is not the only person with influence, power or resources. He is not the only person you can learn from, or who will help your career progress. You should seek to build a wider network than your boss alone (see the next section). As you build your network make yourself and your achievements visible to senior stakeholders. I have met successful managers who have nothing to do with their line managers, relying purely on other stakeholders. Generally, I do not advise going to that extreme, but neither would I rely on a single line manager.

One thing to avoid is politicking or bad-mouthing your boss at work. Unless you are a sophisticated politician with a network of powerful supporters the chances are it will backfire onto you. A

bad boss who thinks you have been manoeuvring around him is a dangerous combination.

There are situations in which you cannot help your boss or work your way around him. This is the time to make a decision to move on. You don't need to do it immediately, but life is too short and too valuable to work for bad bosses for too long. You will only be miserable and learn bad habits.

A final piece of advice concerning terrible bosses. The worst bosses have a reputation for being bad. If you know their reputation, avoid them in the first place. When you choose and accept a role, consider who will be your manager. Choose bosses who will help in your career or who you can learn from. If he has nothing to teach you and cannot help your career, do not work for him.

Work on this more if ...

- You are concerned about your manager's behaviour or are becoming frustrated working for him.

Manager's checklist

- Imperfect managers are a fact of life in business.
- If you have a poor manager work with him and try to improve his performance, and work around him by building a network of alternative sponsors and supporters.
- If nothing else works – move on. Take care choosing whom you work for in future.

Think networks, not hierarchies

What is this about and why is it important?

Most organisation charts and recruitment processes reinforce the concept of *a* boss. But your boss is just one stakeholder amongst many. You will be involved in numerous activities that lie outside of your boss's domain. There are project teams and task forces, cross-process and matrix reporting lines, and all sorts of other associations of allegiances and common interests. You are part of a network, not simply a hierarchy.

It would be wrong to think your boss does not matter. He or she does and will continue to do so. The relationship with your boss is usually the most important relationship you have. But it is not so important that you can ignore everyone else. There are many other stakeholders who can allocate or influence the allocation of work to you and your team, who can provide access to resources and who are involved in judging your performance. There are many people who can help you be a success or get in the way of your success. Sometimes it will not feel as if you have one boss, but several.

Thinking only of the hierarchy is the wrong way to focus. Businesses exist to satisfy customers by creating something of value for them. Value is not created and customers are not satisfied because work passes up and down functional hierarchies. Value is derived and customer needs are fulfilled by the end-to-end execution of processes which cut across functions and departments. Processes and process optimisation are more important than hierarchy and functional excellence.

You have distinct, but often overlapping, professional and social networks. This section is only concerned with your professional network. I use the word *relationship* as shorthand for *professional relationship*.

Objectives for managers

- To identify the individuals you want to have professional relationships with.
- To build a strong, productive web of professional relationships.

Common issues in achieving these objectives

- Too great a focus on the hierarchy.
- Ad hoc relationship building leading to a sub-optimal network.
- Lack of knowledge of how to build a network.

The management guide

The network of relationships you develop will enable you to gain influence and power. Relationships, influence and power allow you to get things done. But there is no map of the best relationships to have. To build a powerful network, you have to create your own map.

The professional relationships you build depend on two factors: luck and the actions you take to develop relationships. You will not have the time to develop meaningful relationships with everyone. There may be relationships which are not obviously beneficial, which later turn out to be helpful. However, it is worth focusing on those that are most likely to be helpful. A good network requires exploration and choices. Pick the relationships you build.

Building a complex web of stakeholders creates problems as well as benefits. Successful teams have common, shared, clear goals. The simpler these goals are, the easier it is to keep everyone aligned. Different stakeholders have different goals and desires. As you build relationships you may need to help various stakeholders achieve their desires and goals. A common business strategy creates a level of consistency between different stake-

holder goals, but is not the complete answer. Having a complex set of stakeholders challenges your ability to have clear and simple goals. The network makes your life complex with varying objectives, subjective views and ambiguous options.

As a junior manager you have a choice to develop a wide network or not. You can choose to keep your head down working for your boss. But this will limit your potential and will constrain you and your team's ability to do exceptional work. As a senior manager you have little choice but to build a network. It is the way organisations work.

Valuable relationships

A network of worthwhile relationships is not just knowing lots of people. Any of the people you know may turn out to be helpful and useful to you, and you cannot always predict which relationships will be most useful. But there are relationships which are more likely to be valuable. Individuals you can turn to for help, advice, resources or information. Generally, more relationships are better than fewer, but deeper relationships are better than more.

Relationships are bilateral. They are built not just because you choose to build them, but also because the other party chooses to build one with you. It's not just what you can gain from having a relationship, it is what the other party gains by having a relationship with you. Therefore before you start to build your network think about what makes you an attractive person for others to network with.

Whom should you choose to build relationships with? You only have a limited amount of time, and you cannot build valuable relationships with everyone. You need to decide whom to invest in building relationships with. Seek professional relationships where:

- You gain help, advice and useful information.
- You gain direct access to influence.
- You gain indirect access to influence, via the professional relationships of people you have relationships with.

- You become visible to people you want to be visible to.
- You gain access to skills or other resources.

The people who can fulfil the needs described in the points above are a varied bunch. It may seem obvious, but it is worth stating – relationships are with individuals, not with teams or departments. The individuals include your peers and senior managers. However, some influential people are relatively junior, having specialist expertise or relationships with groups like trade unions. Do not limit yourself to internal relationships. Many good mentors are external to your organisation. A satisfied customer, who is willing to express their satisfaction to important people in your organisation, can be more helpful than a supportive internal stakeholder.

The management hierarchy is part of your network. If you can, develop a strong relationship with your boss and their boss too. But do not get fixated on the line hierarchy. Lots of things work across the business, and you will miss these if you focus purely on hierarchy.

We tend to be attracted to people who are similar to ourselves. If you examine most people's networks they are full of people with common interests. Perhaps you need some common interest to develop a relationship. But try to develop a varied network. Diverse people who are dissimilar to you will be helpful, bringing different experiences, information, views, contacts and access to varied resources.

Building your network

You will naturally develop relationships with a range of people as part of your daily work. Take advantage of chance meetings with people, but do not rely on this. People with powerful networks deliberately build them. They identify the people who are advantageous to have a relationship with and go out of their way to meet them.

Sometimes to develop a strong relationship you have to put in more than you can get out initially. If you are going to

meet someone for the first time whom you want to develop a relationship with, plan the meeting. What can you say, indicate or offer that will make them want to develop a relationship with you? It is always good to have a short 'elevator pitch' with which you can quickly explain your role and what makes you and your team special in a few sentences.

When you join a new organisation you need to put particular effort into building your network. But maintaining a network is a never-ending task. A network is dynamic and ever-changing. It needs constant maintenance and enhancement. New people join organisations, roles change, power shifts. You need to be monitoring this and tailoring your network accordingly. It is sometimes said that as a manager you manage at two levels, with individuals in your team, and with the team as a whole. I believe you can add a third level to this: your network.

Your political skills will be useful in building, maintaining and utilising your network. The word *politics* is often seen as a dirty phrase in business. But political skills are not bad in themselves. They can be applied to bad ends, but they are essential skills. Wherever there are people, there is politics. You cannot avoid it – and you must be able to deal with it. Politics is not your enemy. It is a tool to be used. Without it, you will not get far.

Use your extended network, no matter how small, to increase the number of your relationships. Ask people you trust who should you develop relationships with? If they know people whom you would benefit by knowing, ask for an introduction. Return the favour. Individuals who get introduced to useful people are usually the ones who also help others to build their networks.

Using your network

A network is only of value if it is useful. Use your network to:

- Understand the organisation, and use this information in creating your role (see next section).
- Keep track of what is going on. There is lots of useful information that is never disseminated in formal briefings.

- Make yourself and your team visible. This helps with being involved in the most interesting work and also with promotions.
- Gain access to the scarce resources that will assist in fulfilling your objectives.
- Provide help to others who value your assistance.

One of the dangers of a large network is that you are constantly asked for help or to be involved in activities. You will also be swamped with more information than you can cope with. Therefore two of the key skills for a good networker are: learning to say no, without appearing unhelpful, and the ability to filter information and only process what is relevant.

Work on this more if ...

- You do not understand the value of a good network.
- Your network is not sufficiently useful to you.
- You regularly feel you would be more successful if you had relationships with other people in the organisation.

Manager's checklist

- A network, extending beyond the normal management hierarchy, is essential.
- Good networks do not happen by chance – they are consciously planned and built.
- Relationships are bilateral – you cannot only take from a network, you must give to it.
- A professional network is only of value if it is useful.

Creating your role

What is this about and why is it important?

Part 1 looked at the types of activity that make up a manager's job. Parts 2 and 3 explored the various people with stakes in your role: yourself, your team, your boss and the management hierarchy, and a host of other stakeholders. In this section all these elements are brought together to investigate how you create your management role.

There are givens in any management position, things you must or must not do. You work within a specific environment with a certain culture and expectations. There are documented descriptions of your role, such as job specifications, competency frameworks and performance objectives. You must understand these, but at best they add up to an incomplete picture. You have to search out the full requirements and create your own role.

Objectives for managers

- To develop the fullest possible understanding of your role.
- To maintain this understanding as the situation evolves.
- To select the optimal activities to perform.

Common issues in achieving these objectives

- Incomplete, volatile information, much of which is ambiguous.
- Limited guidance.

The management guide

Context: the spectrum of roles

There is a spectrum in business roles. At one end of this spectrum are fully defined roles with limited discretion. At the other end are roles with limited definition and almost total discretion.

The most junior roles in organisations tend to be typified by high levels of definition and limited discretion. There is a set of tasks to be done, an order to do them in, and a procedure to follow. The organisation strives to make the performance of these roles ever more efficient, applying standardisation and best practice, utilising tools like Six Sigma and Lean. Performance is tightly measured, and the measurement intervals are short; sometimes measurement is continuous. Not all organisations have roles like this: professional services firms, for instance, do not. But many do: for example, the staff in a call centre.

With seniority discretion tends to increase. There may still be a defined role, but how things are done is more open to the holder's choice. A person holding the role utilises expertise and experience to make judgements.

As seniority increases, the level of role definition decreases further. More aspects of the role are decided by the role holder. At the highest level perhaps only annual objectives are defined, and even these are negotiated. Once targets are set, what and how they are done is completely up to the role holder. The role holder constantly monitors the situation, makes choices and judgements, takes action and dynamically alters priorities and focus.

As a manager you sit some way along this spectrum. You may have a reasonably well-defined role but you will also be expected to exercise discretion and judgement. With a career in management you will continually move away from defined roles towards roles in which you have more and more discretion.

The features of discretionary roles

Discretionary roles involve:

- The need to make choices about what to do and how to do it, but limited information on the options.
- Many stakeholders with differing needs. It is naive to assume that interests will be aligned – at times there will be contradiction between the needs of stakeholders.
- Volatile needs. What is critical in a business one day tends not to be next.
- Constrained resources and time. Even where interests are aligned, you will not have the time or resource to fulfil them all.

When you take your first management job no one will tell you *all* the things that can be considered as part of your role, what must be focused on and what should be ignored, what the priorities are and so on. You will only be told some of them. Other things will become apparent in dribs and drabs, constantly change, or remain unclear. Somehow, you have to make sense of this situation.

Some people respond to this by panic and confusion. Individuals newly promoted to management roles sometimes find the level of ambiguity overwhelming. But after a while most people get used to it.

Your management role is not defined for you. You must explore it and then create it. It is *your* management role.

Exploring, creating and thriving

What is your role? Given all the variables it may be impossible to give the perfect answer to this question. But there are answers which are wrong, satisfactory, good or better. You obviously want to avoid the wrong answers. Whether you want to find the satisfactory, good or better answer is up to you and your ambition.

Although you do not have total freedom it is up to you to shape the role. Start by:

- ***Identifying givens:*** the unquestionable things you must do and how must you do them.

- **Limiting the role:** you will not please everyone. Identify anyone you must please and those you can overlook. If you are unsure to start with, begin with your boss.
- **Ignoring what you cannot influence** (see pp. 180–4).
- **Taking advice:** find a guide to help you through this. This may be your boss, a senior peer or some other mentor. Many people are willing to be of help if asked.

Identify the givens by observing people's behaviour. You want to find the real essentials, not just the things people say must be done. This is best explained by a couple of examples:

- Many organisations have apparently mandatory administrative processes, but in some businesses you will find many people whose careers have never been harmed by ignoring these processes. In this situation, these processes are not mandatory.
- In some organisations you may have to submit regular budget updates. If you find that everyone scurries around like crazy to do these, dropping any other work – this is mandatory.

You cannot learn the real givens from a management book. You learn them by observing and listening to your business and its culture.

There are other things you can do that will help you understand and become at ease with your role:

- **Accept you cannot do everything:** no manager does, nor should you try to either.
- **Start unadventurously:** do the things which your closest stakeholders (usually your boss and your peers in his team) do and want done.
- **Limit your risk:** seek approval for what you are doing and manage expectations. Tell your boss what you intend to do, what you will not be doing. Confirm this is what he wants.
- **Avoid big promises:** there will come a time to make big promises. Your first few days in a management role are not the time to do this.

One of the golden rules is that you must keep doing something. Managers cannot disappear off into a quiet room for days and days to analyse the situation. Your boss expects you to do things. Your team needs you to give guidance, define priorities, and make decisions. This cannot wait. It is generally better to be doing sub-optimal management activities than to be doing nothing at all. You will also learn more by performing the management role than by thinking about it.

As you become more familiar with your role and your network grows, become more adventurous and experiment. Take small steps, by doing different things. Find what actions get praise and reward, and do more of them. Find what actions get censure or penalty, and avoid them. Identify which actions give you what you want – find a way of doing these. Once you are confident you can take some risks (see pp. 173–9).

You are not alone, and do not have to find everything out by yourself. Observe those around you, especially those who are successful, and work out what they do that your less successful peers do not. Listen to your experienced peers' conversations. Then create your role.

Do not stop shaping your role. When you become a new manager making sense of the situation is one of the biggest and hardest tasks. It is a task that never goes away as businesses continue to change and adapt. So must you. You will find after a while that this making sense out of the unclear becomes second nature and even subconscious, and then you will really thrive as a manager.

Work on this more if ...

- You do not understand your role, are confused or feel lost.
- You regularly find out there are aspects to the job you have not performed but you were expected to.

Manager's checklist

- Do not expect the full definition of your role to be given on a plate.
- What definition is given will be incomplete.
- Observe, listen and make sense of your role. Continue to make sense.
- If you are unsure, start with a limited, unadventurous role and expand as your confidence and experience grow.
- But whatever state you are in, keep doing something.

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