2 Management process, roles, behaviour and skills

Learning outcomes

After studying this chapter you should be able to understand, analyse and explain:

- different models and approaches for defining management behaviour;
- the nature of the management process;
- the extent to which leadership and management should be regarded as synonyms or alternative concepts;
- perspectives on the skills and qualities needed by the effective manager, e.g. technical, personal, social, cognitive, political, etc.

2.1 Introduction

A criticism often applied to MD programmes is that they can seem remote from what managers actually do. MD processes can seem to be disconnected from the re-alities of 'doing management'. Secondments, job rotation and training can appear over-planned and programmed, distant from managers' everyday lives. As a result, MD solutions can seem too abstract, neat and logical, removed from the confusing and fragmented nature of management as 'lived experience'. MD programmes can also seem very prescriptive, implying that managers need to behave in particular ways if they want to be effective and that there are universalistic 'best practices' in the conduct of management (Mumford 1993).

A major thrust of these criticisms is that MD needs to be located in what managers define as their organisational reality if they are to 'own' the learning processes and re-ally grow from them. From this it follows that sensitivity in the design of MD and con-cern for its effectiveness is intertwined with thinking about management as an activity. Unless we have a conceptualisation of the management process, how can we decide on strategies to develop the manager?
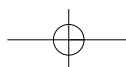
2.2   The meaning of management

Bertrand Russell (1962) once distinguished between two types of work:

> The first, altering the position of matter near or at the earth's surface relative to other matter. The second, telling other people to do so. The first is unpleasant and ill paid; the second is pleasant and highly paid. The second kind is capable of indefinite extension; there are not only those who give orders but those who give advice as to what orders should be given.

Managers definitely fall into the second category of work (and MD practitioners might be part of the 'indefinite extension').

The rise of 'management' and 'managerial values' is part of the spirit of the age. 'Management' forms much of the vocabulary, the criteria of judgement and 'world view' of post-industrial society in the early millennium. However, 'management' only really emerged as a separate discipline with the ascendancy of nineteenth-century capitalism. Since then it has gone on apace to become one of the basic institutions and key forces permeating all aspects of society (Mullins 2001). However, although 'management' is universally acknowledged as a major ideology underpinning the modern world, and part of the global paradigm shift to business values, there is no general agreement on what it is.

In the early days, management was largely seen as a mechanistic, functional and technical activity concerned with rational organisation of resources for efficiency and performance. In more recent times, it has come to be defined less as a discrete activity, the preserve of a single discipline (accountancy, engineering, HRM, etc.) and more as a process which cross-cuts all organisational functions, an integrating force for relating the myriad activities within an organisation to serve overall goals. But although synthesising and coordinating, contemporary views of management insist that it is not homogenising.

Management work varies so much. It takes different forms in different places and is practised in varying ways at various levels. There are big variations between managers in the degree of independence they are allowed and the demands placed upon them and then there are the subjective factors, differences between managers in how they *interpret* the demands and constraints placed upon them (Stewart 1985).

On top of this there is a cultural overlay which implies other differences. As Chapter 11 on cross-cultural patterns of management and development suggests, there are national variations in how management is defined and practised and, by implication, the skills and development involved.

Hales (1986) summarises the diversity and complexity within the structure of management work by suggesting four broad observations.

1. Managerial work is contingent on management function, level, organisation (type, structure, industry, size) and environment (including national culture).

2. Managerial jobs usually have an element of flexibility within them. There is usually room for choice on the basis of personal values and style and interpretation of strategy and organisational purpose.

3. Managerial work does not fall into neat sequences of tasks. Often these are contradictory, competing and ambiguous in form.

4. Managerial work is constantly being negotiated and renegotiated as circumstances change. Two managers with the same job title may be performing very different kinds of work.

Heller (1985, 1995), who has written so much that is pithy and memorable about managing, likes to claim that management is not one but a number of occupations and the skills involved are very context-dependent. He also implies that management is not something grand. In fact, it is quite a homely occupation, even if it is complex and problematic. It is as much art as science and learnt as much through homilies, maxims, stories and aphorisms as techniques and principles. Even allowing for some dramatic licence, this seems very plausible.

Mark Easterby-Smith (1986) adds to our understanding of management by suggesting that:

● management work is complex and variable; it seems far more easy to do than it is;

● managing involves ordering and coordinating the work of others, but to do this managers first have to create similar order within themselves;

● managers deal with the unprogrammed and complex problems, that is, those which cannot be routinised through ordinary organisational process;

● managers need to be able to move between technical, functional and cultural boundaries, to build order from fragmentation.

These models present very different, but not at all contradictory perspectives on the managerial project.

2.2.1 Doing management

Management has always been based on myths. One of the oldest approaches to describing management is to attempt to group management activities by type and provide a framework to explain their activity. Many classical writers have made contributions on these lines – Fayol, Brecht and Urwick, among others (Mullins 2001).

The classifications of this 'classical' school involve abstractions which attempt to capture the 'essence' of managing. Often they involve lists of what managers are supposed to do all day:

● planning/forecasting;

● organising;

● motivating;

● controlling;

● developing, etc., etc.

There are several drawbacks to these definitions. Firstly, there is the lack of clarity in the concepts. Arguably they are over-abstract and thin and pretend to an understanding of issues which are actually far more complex when they are taken apart and examined closely. They also suggest that management is a rationalistic 'step by step' process. However, this flies in the face of much recent evidence that management is really holistic and disjointed, emergent and disordered. In particular, there are important results from the work of Stewart (1985, 1994), Mintzberg (1973), Kotter (1982)

and Mangham and Pye (1991) which have added immeasurably to our understanding of the processual nature of management by dissecting the reality of how managers perform their jobs, using detailed ethnographic observation. All these studies agree that while management does have elements of technicism and some of it can be systematised around agreed principles of 'good practice', it also retains many elements of art – sensitivity, personal judgement, sense-making, having a feel for situations and the flow of events.

One theme to emerge from the empirical studies is that management can be described as a cluster of roles. Mintzberg (1973) in ground-breaking research suggests that managers typically perform ten roles, which he subsumes under key headings: interpersonal, information-handling and decisional roles. While proposing that all managers at some time exercise each of these roles, Mintzberg also recognises that individual managers will give different priorities to them. This will be an expression of their personal style and interpretation but also situational factors in the job, the organisation, the industry and the environment. Other research on management roles by Rosemary Stewart (1985) has suggested that management jobs are always a synthesis of objective and subjective factors, that is, contextual demands, the constraints which limit what the manager can do but also the choices s/he makes about what s/he will do. Nothing is determined, even if contexts set limits. It is interpretive meaning – how the manager makes sense of his or her situation – which ultimately shapes behaviour. This is the counterbalance to any claim that management is homogeneous and universal principles of good practice apply everywhere. All the evidence suggests that management can be conducted in different ways in different situations, yet with equal success.

2.2.2 Management process

The empirical studies have also provided us with vivid pictures of the experiential processes of general management. One of their undoubted effects has been to challenge some of the common assumptions about management on which traditional MD has been based. For example, Wrapp (1967) talks about the 'sacred cows', the myths which senior managers want to believe about themselves, for example:

● that general managers have a helicopter view of the organisation and know everything of importance that is going on within it;

● that general management is proactive, anticipating problems and taking opportune action to steer the course of events;

● that general management is about formulating precise objectives, conceptualising problems, reflecting on trends, developing the organisation, that is, it is very high-level strategic and change-led activity.

However, observation of managers in action suggests that actual behaviour rarely reflects these presumptions. Kotter (1982) found that compared with how the textbook said they should behave, real managers were not well organised, not systematic nor strategic. Goals were often set in conditions of uncertainty or only arose retrospectively as the direction of the organisation became clear. Resources were often allocated on political grounds, problem-solving was more about firefighting not reasoned thinking and the construction of problems presumed their solution.

Looking at daily behaviour, Kotter found the following patterns.

- Managers spend a lot of time with others in face-to-face contact, especially those at their level and external stakeholders (e.g. customers, suppliers, consultants, etc.).
- Discussions are not just focused on business decisions, but also involve a lot of general 'ad hoc' talk (e.g. asides, anecdotes, gossip).
- During these informal discussions managers ask a lot of questions during which they are probing the underside of issues, piecing together bits of data and assessing the credibility of stories to get a full picture of a developing situation.
- Managers rarely give orders but spend a lot of effort trying to influence others obliquely through cajoling, persuading, requesting, suggesting and coaxing.
- Much of the work seems to require skill in the use of language (rhetoric, imagery, use of symbols), sensitivity to personal differences and political understanding of various actors and the opportunities inherent in situations as they emerge.

In this whirl of disjointed activity it is hard to see any underlying order, certainly not the working out of rational management principles. However, what emerges from Kotter's work is that the apparently casual and accidental way in which managers use their time, set priorities and handle a network of problems and relationships is actually an efficient strategy for dealing with ambiguity and complexity. He calls this, dramatically, 'the efficiency of apparently inefficient behaviour'.

In fact, Kotter claims that if you look closer with an analytical eye, it is possible to discover some consistencies in the work of managers widely regarded by their peers as very effective. These 'consistencies' appear to go beyond the limited, rationalistic models of the classicists. In particular, managers seem to perform two key activities.

Firstly, managers build agendas during the first six months or year on the job. Typically the agenda is composed of loosely connected goals and plans. These are not formal plans but checklists to action which involve personal as well as organisational goals. Agendas help the manager to decide what to do despite uncertainty, conflicting demands and the vast amount of information which is available. Agendas help the manager in focusing time and energy.

Secondly, good managers tend to have well-established networks of cooperative relationships with people both inside and outside the organisational structure. The network helps the manager keep informed about issues at different levels. The cultivation of varied sources of information (on shifting relationships, perceptions, organisational issues) means that the manager can view any situation from a variety of perspectives. Effective managers know how to play this network – who to contact to bring together a team of balanced talents, how to create cooperative relationships between organisations, how to build alliances between different interests and how to mobilise knowledge/skills within the political community of the workplace.

Pause for thought

Talk is the work

If you are a manager, do you recognise you own 'crazy days' in the office in the following quotation? If you work with managers, perhaps you're in a position to observe how they work.

This is an extract from my field notes, the comments of a general manager running a busy clinical unit in the NHS. I asked her what she did at work.

Meeting and talking with people mainly . . . Talking seems to be what I'm paid to do. So talking on the phone, in boardroom meetings, in the car going to a meeting, in the canteen, in the corridor, walking across the car park . . . and when I'm talking I'm gathering data, so a lot of listening – mostly to other peoples' ideas and opinions; but also a lot of persuading, arm twisting, asking 'what if' hypothetical questions . . . agreeing a line. There's also some swapping of gossip and joking mixed in with negotiating and deciding how to handle something . . . most of it involves social process; there's not much time for reflective thinking. You get distracted so often . . .

Source: Personal field notes.

Other writers have added to Kotter's conclusions about the nature of management by emphasising that it is less about systems, practices and procedures, far more about organisational patterns, built up and maintained through constant social interaction. Watson (2001) talks of management as a very messy, very human experience.

- *Being part of the process* – Successful managers are said to be sensitive to the organisation's social process. They can 'tack and trim' their management style. Sometimes they are more of a boss and sometimes they are less of a boss. This 'Janus-headed' style also extends to the political arena – knowing when to conciliate and when to confront.

- *Having a political sense* – Managers who are effective often seem to be involved in political activity – bargaining, sweet-talking, compromising, persuasion, arm-twisting, being able to influence others and enlist their support, manoeuvre and shape the system to achieve a purpose.

- *Practising the art of imprecision* – Successful managers know how to make the organisation feel a sense of direction without publicly committing themselves to a precise set of objectives. Instead they set a general compass point as a steer for their overall purpose and strategy.

- *Muddling with a purpose* – Managers who achieve results often see the futility of trying to push through with a comprehensive programme. They are willing to compromise to achieve modest progress. They also understand the interconnectedness of problems and the need to remain focused on underlying issues and ultimate goals whatever the localised issues.

Managing as a 'blur of activity'

Consider this piece of dialogue between a researcher and the manager of a charity.

Tony (researcher): So Peter, can we take a few minutes to review what you have done today? I feel pretty exhausted just trying to keep up with you.

Peter (manager): Yes, it's usually like that . . . one thing after another. . . . A lot of my work is winning people over to dealing with the difficult things we get involved in as

a charity. Do you remember this morning? The first thing I do every day is wander round the staff in the office, passing the time of day and all that . . . it's having a word, seeing how they are getting on, letting them ask me things. . . .

Tony: So it's about building relationships . . . trust?

Peter: That's part of it, but it's also smoothing the way, even smooching with the power holders, doing a lot of fixing . . . rushing around and keeping things going. You start a conversation and then you're interrupted. There's a lot of persuading, encouraging . . . keeping this person right, then that person. . . . It's difficult to keep tabs on just what I'm doing from one moment to another but at the end of the day I try to add up the bits and paint myself a picture of what's going on and how I am shaping things to achieve my goals.

Question
Consider the social, cultural and political processes involved. Would you discern any strategic purpose in all this micro-dot activity?

Source: Adapted from Watson, T. Conference presentation papers Judge Institute (2002a); Watson, T. (2001) *In Search of Management*; Watson, T. (2002b) *Organising and Managing Work*.

Considered together, these observations are very useful in demonstrating that the traditional image of the manager who sits at a clear desk, quietly planning and controlling in an ordered way, is no more than a self-serving myth adopted by managers who want to believe that they are in control but know that they are not. Perhaps managers are more jugglers of human affairs than the brainy controllers of a smoothly functioning machine (Wrapp 1967). Perhaps a more realistic way of seeing managerial reality is as a 'negotiated order'(Strauss 1978) in which the manager sits at the centre of a net of interests, ideas, projects, groups and issues, constantly pulling one thread and then another, trying to maintain a precarious sense of balance through diplomacy, judgement and talk. It is through clever juggling, skilful diplomacy and astute coordination of people, budgets, issues and agendas that policy emerges and objectives are achieved.

As we will see, this new picture of what management is has important implications for how MD should be defined and how it should be conducted.

2.3   Is management leadership?

In recent years the focus of those who run organisations has shifted and shifted again. Concern to develop good administrators in the 1970s became the search for 'entrepreneurial' managers and then 'managers of excellence'. Since the 1990s the new obsession is with recognising and developing leaders. However, we should recognise that there is a cross-cultural dimension here. The modern concern with leadership is predominantly an Anglo-American phenomenon. There is not the same obsession with it in Japan, China, Germany or France (see Chapter 11).

In the West, 'leadership' is one of the great slogans of our time. We will examine the reasons behind the new priority to develop leadership capability among managers

in the final chapter. However, at this point our main concern is to examine the value of attempting to distinguish between 'management' and 'leadership' as different roles requiring different behaviours.

The issues here are tangled and difficult. Certainly in most of the literature of social psychology, OA and development, 'leadership' and 'management' are terms used interchangeably (Brotherton 1999). It is not clear how the roles of manager and leader differ and how behaviours are distinct. Until the mid-1990s, people in authority, certainly higher management, were largely assumed to have a leadership role. It is a break with previous assumptions to attempt to differentiate 'managing' from 'leading'. Could it be that in the past the overlap between them was exaggerated or are we witnessing a false distinction largely based on misunderstanding of what the senior, general management role involves? In short, has the 'sine qua non' of effective senior management always been leadership?

One way of conceptualising the spheres of 'managing' and 'leading'

Managing

- Planning
- Budgeting
- Programming
- Allocating tasks
- Organising
- Staffing
- Controlling
- Monitoring
- Problem-solving
- Ensuring order and predictability
- Efficiency

- Networking
- Building alliances
- Empowering
- Enabling and facilitating
- Creating the right culture and climate
- Coaching

Leading

- Establishing direction
- Defining
- Path finding
- Communicating
- Enthusing
- Inspiring
- Motivating
- Innovating
- Managing change
- Overcoming obstacles
- Changing paradigms of thinking

Figure 2.1 One way of conceptualising the spheres of 'managing' and 'leading'

Question

Do you think that management blurs into leadership or are these categories sharply distinguished?

There can be no dispute that managers like to see themselves as leaders because that legitimates their position as people well suited to command. However, when you look at managerial leadership close up, you find that 'leadership' here involves the use of formal authority (i.e. controlling, coordinating, directing). A cynic might observe that without the backstop of that authority managers might be unable to achieve their objectives. In these circumstances, are we observing leadership behaviour or merely the exercise of management prerogative? Rollinson (2002) takes this line further by suggesting an analytical distinction between 'headship' and 'leadership'. If managers rely on their formal position and the authority it confers, they are practising 'headship'; 'leadership' requires the authority freely given by followers who allow them to exercise their influence. 'Headship' may get the job done but it only secures compliance, not the enthusiasm and identification of people with a strategy which brings the highest levels of performance. Managerial 'headship' may be disappearing with delayering, decentralisation, the dispersal of authority and empowered teams; heads are becoming leaders using interpersonal skills and building a psychological contract with their followers or they are sharing leadership with others with the informal authority which comes from charisma, ideas and knowledge (Rollinson 2002). 'Heads' who only rely on their position power are a vanishing breed.

Considerations of this kind have brought a number of writers to draw clear distinctions between 'management' and 'leadership'. Bennis and Nanus (1985), Kotter (1982) and Boyatzis (1993), among others, have recently defined managers as concerned largely with institutional and administrative functions, for example, with organising, monitoring, controlling, planning, programming and problem-solving. Barker (1997) captures the spirit of this position. Management is about rationality, building order from chaos, turning complexity and unpredictability into routine, handling transactional relationships, stabilising successful patterns of behaviour and maintaining effective operating procedures. Management is concerned largely with 'doing'; it is relatively short term; it is task focused; it is external to teams and professional activities; it provides structure and a framework of support for the creative work of the organisation which is done by others.

On the other side of the coin is 'leadership'. This involves thinking, visioning, inspiring, taking a longer-term view, energising, building relationships, networking and giving a steer in times of uncertainty and change. Leadership is more internal to the team; it is about motivation, influence and persuasion. It is less of a one-way process than management, more a balanced psychological contract in which the needs of the leaders and followers are mutually satisfied. This relationship is fragile and constantly changing. It cannot rely solely on formal authority, on power conferred from above, only on the personal skills of the leaders and the power which followers will confer on them from below. It is about influence, being able to instil a sense of mission and persuade people to play their parts in creating a future order (Sadler-Smith 2006). Bennis and Nanus (1985) capture this distinction in their now well-known mantra that 'managers do things right; leaders do the right thing'. The contrasts in style which are involved are captured in the stories below.

Management or leadership?

Consider these two stories of management style. Do they illustrate the essential differences between managing and leading?

Harold Geneen, head of ITT, one of the largest multinationals in the world in the 1970s, presides over yet another management review meeting. We have to imagine 100 very senior international managers seated around a huge U-shaped table in a darkened room. A screen displays the performance results for each division. Each manager, representing different regions of the ITT empire, is called to the stage to give a presentation. There is a crackling atmosphere of anxiety. An illuminated green arrow moves up and down lists of figures on the screen, pausing at key stages, which usually represent an operating loss or failed profit target. The corporate managers from HQ then interrogate the manager about this issue in front of his peers.

Through the interrogations, Geneen sits there looking over his horn-rimmed spectacles, cold and impassive. He fires questions in a machine-gun manner: Why was that profit so low? Why is that project behind schedule? Why the overspend? Strong managers were known to break.

The style here seems to be that of tough-minded management planning, control, performance monitoring and evaluation – the essential stuff of managing.

However, the scene now shifts to Sweden in the 1980s, Jan Carlzon, aged just 36, has been appointed as head of Scandinavian Air Services. On his first day in office he calls a meeting of all the staff of the company – in a deserted aircraft hangar outside Stockholm. Carlzon addresses the crowd from the top of a 30-foot ladder. He does not harangue them or offer the one true vision of the future. Instead, he speaks directly and evocatively about where the company was and what it might become. He asked for help in overcoming the obstacles. It would be a long journey. He would welcome contributions from all parts of the company in developing the strategy.

Later, when SAS had gone on to great success, Jan Carlzon's speech would be remembered by staff as a defining moment in the company's history and as an inspiring starting point in the change process.

Is the style here that of leadership, of building identification with followers, engaging emotionally as well as cerebrally with people to enlist their support for change?

Source: Adapted from: Carlzon, J. (1987) *Moments of Truth*; Sampson, A. (1973) *The Sovereign State*

Brotherton (1999) believes that managerial leadership in the past was based on an impoverished model of 'leadership' (top–down direction) which ultimately rested on management prerogatives. Even the much vaunted social skills of participative leadership, fashionable in management thought since the 1960s, were no more than manipulation ultimately legitimated by formal authority. Only now with the appearance of more complex, democratic organisations, are new patterns of leadership emerging which go beyond managerialism and draw on leadership wherever that is found within the organisation. Innovative organisations require visionary, transformational leadership on which management does not have a monopoly. The future of management may be far less heroic than in the past, providing a nurturing environment for the exercise of leadership distributed throughout the organisation.

However, while there is consensus on the importance of leadership as the dynamic force within organisations, voices are now being raised against the implied subordination of managing. For example, Mumford (1999) believes that assigning the enabling, supporting and boring parts of the organisational process to the manager while

attributing the visionary, dynamic and exciting parts to the leader risks demeaning the complexity of the management process and underestimating the subtle skills of individuals engaged in the difficult art of managing. Raelin (2004) builds on this by suggesting that one-dimensional categories underpinned the differentiation of leadership from management, which were misleading. Managers had always been more than administrators and to view leaders as 'saviours' was to risk the same heroic thinking (and the same eventual disappointment) which once marked the rise of managerialism. A little TV watching of the 1960s soap opera *The Power Game* which captures the messianic hopes invested in the new men of management as agents of change, hopes destined to disappointment, should give even the most enthusiastic advocates of 'leadership' a sense of déjà vu.

Although managers were not always leaders and many management functions did not require outstanding leadership capabilities, senior managers, corporate managers, general and strategic managers had always needed to be leaders if they wanted to be effective. For decades (probably since the Hawthorne experiments of the 1930s) it had been recognised within the management community that sophisticated managers needed the ability to motivate, persuade, to form effective teams, to mobilise power through networks and build strong cultures, all of which required the sophisticated socio-political skills and the use of informal processes which went well beyond the exercise of formal authority. These capabilities amounted to a leadership role which would be essential for managers in the flattened organisations post-millennium.

Yukl (2002) takes up this theme by suggesting that successful managers in senior roles typically perform two leadership functions. One involves the formal leadership arising from their organisational positions. However, effective managers also need to perform a broader leadership role which draws on informal power bases and demonstrates persuasive influence across a much wider span of issues than non-managerial leaders are ever called on to consider. Yukl believes that these two leadership roles are mutually supportive; formal authority provides legitimation for informal leadership, and informal leadership (e.g. networking, building a reputation) augments the formal leadership role (e.g. more leverage with other management leaders).

The latest turn in thinking seeks to redress what is seen as a false subordination of management to leadership. The revisionist argument has it that leadership and management are not opposing ends of a spectrum, rather they are equal and complementary. All managers, but especially those at the top, need both qualities. Without good leadership, organisations are likely to concentrate on doing current things better and better without building a future which may require an entirely different approach (e.g. continuing to improve buggy whips for horse-drawn transport and ignoring the revolution which the motor car would bring). Without good management, leadership can be little more than hot air and dramatic postures which don't provide day-to-day direction (e.g. Bill Gates would not have been successful if his dream of 'a computer on every desk' was not matched by good management skill).

Part of this revisionist thinking also provides a counterweight to an overbalanced preoccupation with leadership by suggesting that while 'leader' may be a function within a role (few people are appointed just as leaders), 'manager' is a role definition (Bass 1995). Management is a broader field of activity than leadership. So, in Mintzberg's (1973) 11 classic management roles, roles which have a leadership element are in a definite minority. Leadership may be seen as subsumed in management, as only one part of it and relatively powerless without the exercise of other aspects of

the management process. The mystique which surrounds leadership in modern writing may have caused us to exaggerate both its singularity and its importance.

The implications of this debate are important for the primary focus of this book – a consideration of development theory and practice. Our position here is that despite the contemporary fashion for re-branding learning interventions in 'management development' as 'leadership development', we resist this trend. We believe that much of the corpus of knowledge and technique within MD remains equally valuable for leadership development. This is because much progressive MD has always attempted to develop managers as leaders who demonstrated their effectiveness through their personal qualities rather than the authority vested in their rank.

In truth, leadership and management development theories and methods seem to overlap. At this stage there does not seem to be a different set of learning approaches to developing leaders to those used for developing managers and it is not helpful to separate them out. However, in future, if leadership continues to be seen as a 'distributed activity' empowering many non-managers, then 'learning for leadership' may develop its own unique identity, probably becoming a subset of HRD. In this book we will largely consider leadership development as subsumed within management development while remaining open to insights from the burgeoning area of leadership studies and leadership development to the extent that they form a new body of knowledge and practice in learning.

2.4 The skills and qualities of the manager

Management developers need working models of managing which reflect what managers actually do. Without them management development processes become distant from the 'lived experience' of managing and lack credibility with those who are supposed to be developed by them. This can mean that managers become disengaged, even alienated from MD as a set of tools which are irrelevant and ineffective. MD will be perceived as something 'done to them' not something they 'own' because it helps them at work. MD of this kind can also perpetuate myths about managing which are misleading and counter-productive.

The value of the empirical studies which we have considered is that they prick the pomposity of management and reveal that in essence it is not some grand thing described by a term like 'strategic management' or 'developing the organisation'. Instead it emerges that managing is far more mundane and also chaotic and complex than the abstract categories suggest. The process of 'doing managing' (Mangham and Pye 1991) emerges as something quite commonplace – a series of small choices, actions and reactions, for example, writing some e-mails; scanning someone's report; talking to a group of staff; having conversations with people who come into the office and so on, which over time come together to form a line of development (which we might call a policy) for the organisation.

As well as clear pictures of managing, management developers also need a clear view of the qualities, skills, attributes and competencies (are these synonyms or do they differ in meaning?) displayed by effective managers. Here again there are issues of definition and meaning which are rarely acknowledged by writers in the field, let alone professional developers. However, as Mangham (1988) has perceptively suggested, management vocabulary is full of terms which purport to describe the qualities

of managers, for example, 'an empowering leadership style'; 'ability to motivate others'; 'a strategic understanding', yet are imprecise in meaning and are often interpreted very differently by those who use the same phrases. Mangham suggests that these descriptors of management capability are too vague to be operationalised and there is very little professional consensus on the features of behaviour by which they can be recognised. The reason lies in our lack of understanding of the management process (especially at the higher levels) and what is involved in distinguishing between ordinary and outstanding performance. This is partly because executive work is usually shrouded in secrecy and because higher managers themselves have difficulty in articulating in a coherent way what they do and how they do it. However, it is also a function of the very subtle socio-psychological-political processes involved which require delicate judgements disguised by the big, conventional labels (e.g. 'clear communicator', 'creative decision maker', 'dynamic leader', etc.)

Mangham argues that this is a dangerous situation for both managers and developers. The lack of a shared definitions or criteria for measuring these abstractions, or even a sensitive language to talk about a process about which we still know relatively little, means that managers are in danger of being seduced by management 'fads' and fashionable nostrums which promise easy solutions (e.g. 'transformational leadership', 'excellence', etc.). They are also in danger of being persuaded by self-serving fantasy images of management as a value-neutral, step-like process carried out by rational 'technicians' concerned to find the 'best' solution for all stakeholders to the business.

Lack of understanding of what makes a good manager means that developers are particularly 'at risk' of designing development programmes for qualities which they do not fully understand. If the diagnosis is flawed then it is little wonder that MD programmes are often challenged to demonstrate real improvement in performance and are found lacking.

Mangham was writing in the late 1980s, but the provocative issues he raises have not been resolved, despite the rise of the 'competency movement' which we consider later on. There is a need for much deeper ethnographic research into the management process at the policy levels of the organisation to describe the behaviours involved. In the meantime, bear in mind Mangham's analysis as we turn to a consideration of the literature on management skills and apply it critically to this body of knowledge.

So what are the skills which the effective manager needs to have? What is offered here is an amalgam of the insights from a number of researchers on management in recent years, for example, Pedler et al. (1994), Burgoyne (1988) Kotter (1982) Hales (1986) and so on. Most of these researchers have taken a social constructionist or symbolic interactionist approach. They try to 'take the role of the other', that is, to see the world of managing from the viewpoint of the managers themselves to understand how they make sense of their experiences. This seems like a promising line of approach if developers are to understand enough of the inside experience of managing at different levels and in different conditions to design interventions which capture the imagination of managers.

The consensus of these studies is that the modern manager is not so much a controller or director of tasks and resources as a facilitator and an enabler of diverse constituencies of interests. Management is an interactive, interpersonal and sensing process concerned with building and maintaining a precarious micro-social order so that practical tasks can be accomplished (Barnard 1938). This is echoed by Heller (1995), who claims that doing management well requires the same skills you bring to doing life, but played to the highest standard of social accomplishment.

There is broad agreement that the effective manager, everywhere and at all times, combines a number of skill clusters as shown in Figure 2.2.
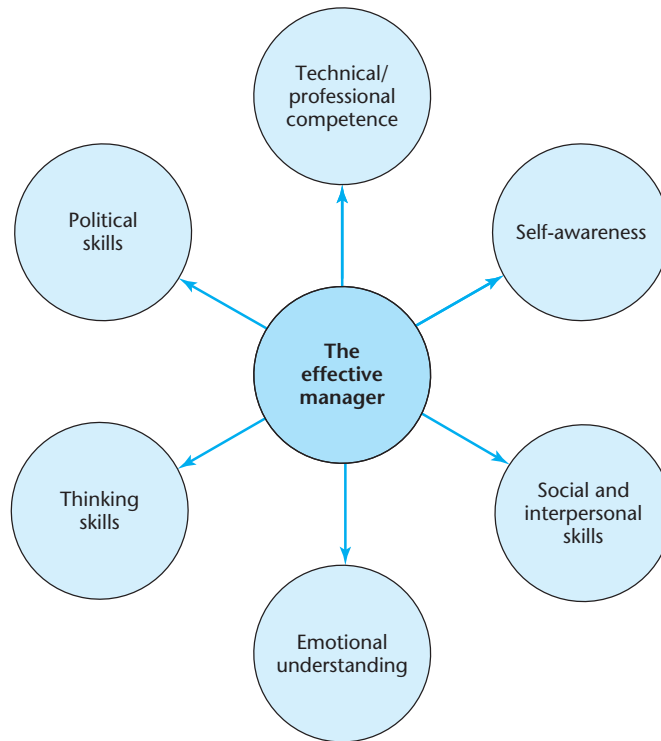

Figure 2.2 The manager: a master of multi-skilling

2.4.1 Technical competence

Management is a practical subject which aims to have an impact on the real world, so it requires functional knowledge and skill in applying a body of professional practice. Here we are talking about knowledge of product technology, marketing techniques, engineering, accountancy, knowledge of relevant legislation, knowledge of basic management principles and theories which purport to help the practitioner with 'best practice' in planning, organising and controlling (Pedler et al. 2001).

Although all levels of management require a technical base, one of the unique aspects of management is that the further you ascend the hierarchy of management, the less direct use is made of techniques and the more emphasis is placed on the social, cognitive and political skills of managing. A major problem for developers is that managers often get promoted to a high level of authority because of their mastery of technical skills. Although they may be highly professional specialists, they may not have had much opportunity on the way up to develop their people skills or to gain a broad appreciation of the organisation as a whole. Once installed in a generalist role, they often find that performance requires strategic and political skills for which their former experience has not adequately prepared them (Garratt 1994).

Typically, these managers find that their technical skills are not much use but they are not sure how they should behave. This role ambiguity can cause not only great anxiety but also behaviour which may be dysfunctional for the organisation as a whole. It is tempting for them to emphasise what they know best and act as higher-level technicians with a narrow problem-solving view of their job, interfering in issues which should be left to those lower down. This is often the situation for directors in medium-sized private companies who are rarely trained for their role. The beginnings of wisdom in management is often knowing when you are no longer paid to perform a professional-technical role and the job now requires a strategic appreciation and the use of social-political skills to harmonise the parts in the service of a greater whole (Garratt 1994).

2.4.2 Self-awareness

At the higher levels of management, technical skills are assumed and effectiveness in management seems very much linked to social and interpersonal skills.

Researchers such as Mangham and Pye (1991) and Watson (2001) have tried to give a detailed picture of the micro-processes of management. The ability to do executive work, Mangham concludes, requires an awareness of self interacting with others. What managers do is very much shaped by their own perceptions of their role, their goals, their values, their feelings, their assessment of personal strengths and weaknesses. To act effectively the manager needs a well-grounded awareness of the self; the manager needs skills of introspection.

This makes sense. How can anyone manage others unless they have first mastered themselves? The knowledge we have acquired about ourselves, which makes up our self-concept, is central to improving our management skills. Knowing ourselves helps us understand our own taken-for-granted assumptions, our categories for defining situations and people, our sensitivities, strengths and weaknesses. This knowledge is self-empowering. It allows us to capitalise on our talents. It is the first step in making any changes to ourselves which are needed to develop the skills we think we need.

Self-reflection is also important because it helps us make our interactions with others more effective and insightful. By understanding ourselves we become more sensitive to the differences and also the similarities between people; it makes us more empathic and more skilful in our repertoire of behaviours. From this 'self/other' awareness, the manager is in a position to look in on his/her own behaviour from the perspective of others. We come to 'objectivise' ourselves as others see us by internalising their perceptions.

This is what the developers mean by 'managing the self so that we can manage others'. By developing a sense of self in the world which is consistent with how we are seen, we have the self-knowledge to present ourselves well – to use the words and take the actions which will influence others through quiet skills of persuasion and coordination.

Managing as a 'Performing art'

An interesting model from micro-sociology, that of dramaturgy, examines some of the processes of 'self making'. Dramaturgy sees the world as a stage and, like actors,

we are constantly involved in constructing ourselves in front of others in expressive and symbolic ways so that they will accept our claims to identity.

Erving Goffman (1960) is the theorist most associated with this way of seeing things. He claimed that we are all managing impression with others by manipulating 'sign activity' (verbal and non-verbal behaviour) and 'sign equipment' (props such as clothes, cars, offices, etc.) to convince people to define and relate to us in a certain way.

Goffman believes that we all do this but some more deliberately than others. We lay claim to an identity, for example, a 'shrewd operator', a 'caring supporter', a 'courageous manager' and so on, and dramatise ourselves so that others will accept our claims. This dramatic performance involves 'masks', for example, gestures, voice, rhetoric, the stories we use, which compose our 'personal front' and 'mirrors' in which we reflect on how people are reacting to our self presentation. Sometimes we deliberately rehearse this front, 'backstage', so that it seems as natural as possible when we are 'on stage' in social interaction.

It doesn't take much imagination to see how this work applies to management. Studies by Mangham (1986) and Hunt (1992) have suggested that effective managers are particularly good at understanding how they are seen and can predict others' responses to them. They use their self-awareness and interpretive understanding of others to construct themselves in ways that will win approval and allow them to progress their agendas. This has caused some writers to talk of managing as a 'performing art'.

Although Goffman's work has been criticised as suggesting a cynical view of behaviour and advocating manipulation, this is probably misreading. Goffman seems to be merely holding up a mirror to reflect the tactics people use to manage situations and the social rules of life so that they can be bent to their advantage.

Question

Do you think that one of the great secrets of successful managers is that they are very subtle and accomplished in their dramatic performances?

There seem to be a number of areas of self-awareness (Whetton and Cameron 2002). However, it seems that self-understanding in about *four* of these may be particularly linked to management success.

1. *Personal values* – what are the fundamental things you stand for? What are your core values and what would you be prepared to give up if required to compromise? How are your values related to ethical principles?

2. *Learning and thinking styles* – do you know how you think and learn? Under what conditions are you most creative? What is your preferred learning style? What type of thinker are you? Are you able to take an holistic view of things? Are you a conceptual thinker?

3. *Orientation to change* – do you feel comfortable in ambiguous situations? How flexible are you in accommodating the unexpected? Are you confident of your ability to handle complexity and diversity?

4. *Interpersonal orientation* – are you aware of any patterns in how you interact with people, for example, are you open or closed; assertive or retiring; controlling or dependent, etc? What are the consistencies and do they help or hinder you in achieving what you want?

Becoming self-aware is not easy. We are often resistant to self-knowing because we believe that information will surface which threatens our self-image. We avoid personal growth because we fear finding out that we are not what we want to be. There is also the problem that we can only go so far in understanding ourselves through introspection. We also need other people to reflect back to us how they see our actions. Self disclosure is the best strategy for building the trust which allows others to be honest with us. They mirror back to us their perceptions of our behaviour and we come to form opinions about ourselves (often radically revised opinions about ourselves) by interpreting this mirroring.

Do you know yourself?

- People think they know themselves.
- They may know a lot of who they are, but not all.
- There are likely to be areas of the self which are obvious to others but not us.

The amount of knowledge we can acquire about ourselves will depend on the extent to which we open ourselves to self-understanding.
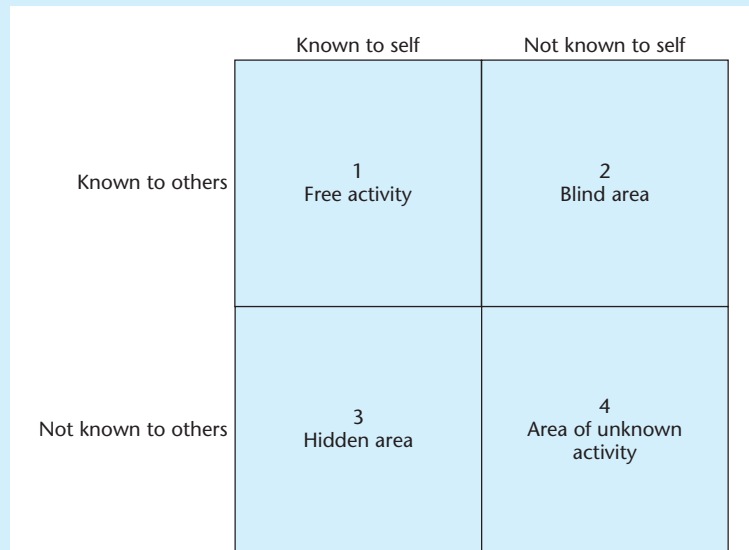
	Known to self	Not known to self
Known to others	1 Free activity	2 Blind area
Not known to others	3 Hidden area	4 Area of unknown activity

Figure 2.3 The Johari Window

Area 1: This is the 'public self' which we know and the world knows.

Area 2: This is the blind area. Includes habits, gestures, tone of voice, etc. which the world sees but of which we are unaware.

Area 3: This is the hidden area. It is what the individual wishes to conceal from others. It is the undisclosed self.

Area 4: This area is not known to oneself or to others and may come to the surface only in dreams or at a time of considerable emotional pressure.

Self-awareness involves trying to extend the areas of knowledge of ourselves to incorporate more and more of those areas where there is little or no personal knowledge. As we become more honest with ourselves, we move some feelings from the hidden area into the open area. Others notice our greater openness and become more frank and reveal to us observations which had been in the blind area. This takes us into another cycle of self-discovery.

With greater self-awareness we are able to talk to ourselves with greater authenticity, to understand the situations we are in with greater clarity and engage in organisational sense-making with a much greater chance of success.

Source: Adapted from Mullins, A. (2001) *Management and Organisational Behaviour* p. 506

2.4.3 Interpersonal and social skills

These skills are hard to define but they largely mean working with and through other people and using careful judgement. They imply sensitivity to people and situations and skill in persuading people to achieve a common goal.

A lot of management is watching, sensing, doing readings of others' behaviour. In a sense, managers are doing what we all do in social situations, but they are doing it with purpose and through complex webs of relationships within very diverse role sets (e.g. balancing the often conflicting expectations of customers, suppliers, employees, superiors, etc.). From ideas they have of themselves and their own experience managers try to infer what is going on in the heads of others. Mangham (1986) talks of this as 'the theatre of the skull'. Managers engage in a form of 'internal dialogue' to decide on the best line of action. This is really a form of 'role taking': that is, it requires social empathy in which they imaginatively and sympathetically put themselves in the minds of others, anticipating their reactions to the flow of events. By accurately modelling others' behaviour and correctly attributing intention we are well placed to act thoughtfully and appropriately.

Ethnographers of management (Watson, Hales, etc.) have found that as we interact with others in management we are judging others in terms of their significance for our plans. What are their assumptions? What values guide their management? What do they hope to achieve here? Where do they stand on various issues? Is there a difference between what they claim and what they really want? Through these 'readings', managers develop a sense of the strategy best suited to the circumstances and most likely to allow their agenda to be implemented.

The same empathy, feeling and judging are involved in other aspects of the social process. For example, the senior manager needs to have a 'sense of how things are going as a whole'. That means having a 'feel' for how things are interconnected that is, how a micro-situation has implications for the strategy as a whole; how changing the technical system will have a 'knock on' effect for the social system, for example,

motivation, morale, culture and the informal relations between groups. Social skills are needed for defining the situation in a way which encourages people to consider an alternative categorisation of experience and to persuade them to have a sense of ownership of it.

For example, senior managers, acting out their corporate role, need the communication and facilitation skills of the change manager. This means working with groups, explaining what the abstractions of the plan imply for practical action, encouraging people to reflect on their habitual scripts', recognise their limitations and disengage from them. It also means acting as a catalyst, helping people to find the confidence to look at things anew and experiment with new ways of behaving.

The social skills involved here are many and need to be employed with great subtlety, for example, 'playing devil's advocate', asking wise questions, summarising, surfacing understandings, ventilating fears, persuading, influencing and building a 'negotiated order' (Strauss 1978) around new behaviours. Ultimately this involves the manager defining the situation in terms which commands the broadest possible consensus.

Sense-making and managing

Researchers such as Weick (1979, 1995) and Pye (2005) suggest that the essence of leadership is 'sense-making'. This means making sense of organisational behaviour through talk and reflection. How do we make the complex, fragmented, behavioural, social and political processes of managing coherent and give them meaning?

This approach attempts to penetrate the constructed world of the manager. How do managers make plausible sense of their experience? How do they construct identity? How do they retrospectively review a number of events and happenings and give them meaning? How do they draw on ideologies ad models to define what is happening and what they should do (e.g. scientific management; markets; flexible form organisation, etc.)? This sense-making is interactive, is mediated by language and is constantly developing (e.g. Fisher 1996, talks of us assuming different 'managerial stances' in our careers as we slowly change our assumptions about the reality of managing).

This may be a productive 'turn' of research which provides insights into how managers make meaning through ideas, constructs, metaphors and images. A sense-making perspective seems particularly useful for explaining how the issues in management remain remarkably similar from one decade to another even though the vocabulary used to define them shifts (e.g. 'managing change' in the 1980s became 'corporate governance' in the millennium; 'empowerment' became 'social capital'; 'innovation' became 'knowledge management). It is through sense-making and its discourses that the issues of management are reframed with new vocabulary even if the basic processes remain largely timeless.

2.4.4   Managing emotion

The 'management of emotion' is also an important social skill for the manager. The manager's job requires a high level of emotional strain, a result of working in situations

of endless demands, conflicting pressures, lack of time, lack of resources and lack of clarity in knowing what is expected and how to achieve it.

Managers need to be emotionally resilient to cope with this. According to Howard Gardner (1993), managing requires 'emotional intelligence'. Gardner suggests that people have multiple intelligences – verbal, mathematical, musical, spatial and interpersonal . . . and emotional. While cognitive intelligence may be inherited, fixed and beyond our control, EQ seems to be something we can develop. Good EQ seems to have a strong positive relationship with success in handling difficult social situations and relationships.

So what is EQ? It seems to be the ability to recognise the importance of emotions in everyday life, to be able to monitor your reactions, know your strengths and weaknesses and play to your strengths. Emotional understanding and emotional qualities play a vital part in the use of intelligence in everyday life. Distilling the features of several models and perspectives (e.g. Pedler et al. 2007, Lindenfield 2000, Boyatzis et al. 2002, Goleman 1996, etc.), EQ seems to consist of several dimensions.

- *Self knowledge* – the ability to monitor, recognise and understand your emotions from moment to moment.
- *Self control* – being able to control your moods; keeping in check negative emotions and channelling positive emotions like joy, satisfaction, excitement, passion, etc. into achieving your goals.
- *Self motivation* – the robustness and emotional determination to delay immediate satisfaction for greater future benefit; being able to persist in the face of frustration, disappointment and setbacks to achieve your goals.
- *Self resilience* – means having strategies for coping with stress; not allowing stress to swamp your ability to think clearly; not succumbing to knee jerk reactions or following rigid protocols as a self-defensive means of dealing with stress.
- *Self and interpersonal awareness* – involves the ability to recognise emotion in others by 'reading' the gestures they display, sensitively interpreting tone of voice, etc.; being able to influence others by using language in a way which moves people.

According to Goleman (1996), who has written a best-seller in the field, people with high EQ are sensitive to their own feelings and the feelings of others. They also have the ability to handle emotions in a way which is productive for everyone. People with high EQ show skills in listening to others, reading the emotional currents in a group and appreciating the habitual styles which others use and allowing for them. They are sensitive to others' motivations and moods and can build and sustain deep trust relationships. Goleman went on to claim that EQ is *the* essential quality for senior management. Having it, he said, is a predictor of potential for higher level work and accounts for 85 per cent of all performance in management jobs.

Goleman's claims have been supported by psychometric studies carried out on managers by Vic Dulewicz (2000) at Henley College. He found that EQ managers were successful because of their style. Among other things, they were warm and open; showed respect to others; were 'straightforward' and didn't play games; showed a genuine interest in people and remembered small details about those they met; challenged without spoiling a relationship and had the self-confidence to pursue their ultimate goals despite mistakes and wrong turnings.

It may be that people who have high EQ often had secure and supportive childhoods – they felt safe, understood, appreciated and were helped to value their own goals and to be open to new ideas. From an early age they felt valued, had a good sense of self-worth and were guided by parents to work through their problems. If this research is correct then the 'child is very much father to the man'. Future managers have already developed their essential personal and interpersonal skills for management in the infant's playground. A future society searching for the managers of tomorrow might start with personality profiling of young children; it might also do more to shape the social conditions which help more people to develop the fine balance of emotional robustness and sensitivity which will be needed. Is this sensible social engineering or the glimpse of a new elitist nightmare?

As you may expect for such a new development in thinking about management skills, EQ is not without its critics. Some claim that it is little more than 'psychobabble', others that it is common sense dressed in new language which insightful managers have always practised. Some of this may well be true. Many philosophers down the ages have made very similar observations about the qualities of 'personality' needed for good leadership (Plato's criteria of 'nobility', see Grint 2001). But none of this is to deny the potential value of an approach such as EQ which helps managers to understand the power of emotions in influencing their behaviour and the need for social insight and social skill to marshal the power of emotion for the good of the organisation. Qualities of personality are important in management, and emotional drive can be as important as rational calculation in determining what gets done and how (Davies 2003).

Sadler-Smith (2007) talks about the importance of emotional sensitivity to transformational leadership – the ability of leaders to regulate and use their emotional range for public expression and the importance of self-reflexivity as a key feature of leadership capability. The integration of emotion into MD is a new development, but is consistent with the holistic appreciation of management skill and a major theme in new forms of mentoring, drama and ethical workshops which we discuss later.

2.4.5 Thinking skills

Cognitive skills are another essential attribute of the effective manager. Managers need the ability to think. That does not mean that they have to be original conceptual thinkers, but they do need to have good, clear minds and to be able to see the whole picture.

Many managers like to believe that their cognitive skills define them, that is, that they are sharp decision makers and smooth problem solvers. Management science models emphasise rigorous thinking and hard strategic analysis. However, all the observational studies of managers agree that in reality management involves a lot of improvising and fudging towards a solution which is good enough in the circumstances. Lindblom (1959) has called this style 'disjointed incrementalism'. Many studies of managers as decision makers show that managers typically do not search for the best possible solution to a problem because that would be too time-consuming. Instead they search for a temporary expedient to the problems involved and usually within the boundaries of previous decisions.

Herbert Simon (1957) Nobel Prize winner for work on decision-making, thinks that 'Managers do not seek the sharpest needle in the haystack, just one that is sharp enough to sew with.' By and large, managers need to be masters in making decisions which are 'good enough' in the circumstances, rather than masters of fundamental

decision-making which addresses the complexity of a situation and the underlying forces involved. This is what we meant earlier by 'muddling with a purpose'.

Mintzberg (1976) helps us to understand management decision-making by drawing a distinction between *left brain thinking* which he characterises as linear, ordered, sequential and analytical and *right brain thinking* which is holistic, synthetic and intuitive. Mintzberg claims that when you look at management decision-making closely it turns out not to be a regular, planned and systematic process. This is true of strategy as well as more operational decision-making. In fact, it seems discontinuous and proceeds in 'fits and starts'. Despite the obsession with measurement, quantification and sophisticated modelling in management, Richard Heller (1995) stresses that most business decision-making involves thinking with incomplete information, 'back of the envelope' calculations and common-sense constructs which we subsume under the label of 'judgement' because we are not fully aware of what is involved.

Mintzberg thinks that right brain thinking dominates in management. It is the ability to synthesise bits of information into a whole using robust categories of definition and classification which we have built up from the past. It is the ability to conceptualise and create a picture from pieces of evidence which is most needed in management. Continuing his metaphor of left and right brain thinking, in Mintzberg's view really outstanding managers can think in the right (conceptual) hemisphere and develop a whole picture of the organisation and its future but then programme and carry out plans of action with the left (rationalist) hemisphere.

Thinking styles

McKenny and Keen (1976) have suggested that managers exhibit different cognitive styles. Among the various categories they define are the following.

Systematic thinkers – These are the 'methods' people. They define the problem early on in their thinking process, then they search for solutions in a very orderly way. They give a lot of attention to making the implicit explicit and quantifying variables where they can. They are *deductive* thinkers who try to calculate the consequences of different approaches and choose the line which seems most likely to optimise value.

Intuitive thinkers – These managers are particularly sensitive to problem recognition. They are aware that if the problem is wrongly defined, thorough logical analysis will be misdirected and futile. Typically they fend off pressure for an early definition of the problem, instead throwing themselves into the data and thinking *inductively*, often reframing issues several times before coming to a final definition. Choosing a plan of action can also be intuitive, based on grasping a general idea and improvising actions which may make it work. Rational search protocols are sometimes used to justify decisions which might be ultimately described as 'instinctual' (although practitioners of this style may prefer 'calculated risk-taking' as a description). Although management is obsessed with precision in objectives, systems and procedures, the truth is that many decisions in management arise from rough calculations which are more based on vague surmise and a 'nose' for a business opportunity than a careful option appraisal.

Perceptive thinkers – These managers seem to use a thinking style which falls between the two previous extremes. It is essentially a 'mixed scanning' approach which involves building a broad picture of the issues within a context then attending to some 'trigger' factors to focus on certain things in greater depth. Switching alternately between the broad and the detailed they begin to develop explanatory concepts of the

relationship between factors which leads to a definition of a problem and the generation of alternative approaches. Standard analytical processes are then often used to choose a final solution.

Other writers on management have suggested a range of typologies to contrast thinking styles, for example, convergent (logical, rational, linear) and divergent (intuitive, expressive, ideational) thinking (Guilford and Hoepfner 1971); romantic and classical thinking; spiral, linear and lateral thinking, etc. There is also the concept of different languages of thinking, for example, spatial, linguistic, mathematical, social thinking (Leavitt and Bahrani 1988). These typifications have their limitations because they seek to capture something fluid and mercurial like thinking with static constructs. However, one consistent finding seems to be that the most effective managers have a broad repertoire of thinking styles, are fluent in various forms of thinking and can adapt their thinking to the needs of the situation. More particularly, they are holistic as well as pragmatic thinkers, they think for themselves, are critically evaluative of orthodoxy, try to learn from experience and avoid the narrow grooves of popular formulae (e.g. 'The One Minute Manager') or the magical appeal of panacea ('excellence', 'business re-engineering', etc.).

A recent, and engaging, attempt to categorise management thinking is an article by Gosling and Mintzberg (2004) which suggests that there are five 'management minds'. Complex organisations of the future need a 'reflective mindset'. They also need people who can probe beneath the surface and understand how things relate together, an 'analytical mindset'. They need managers who have a sense of how things go, a 'worldly mindset'. The diversity and boundary-spanning nature of great organisations requires a culturally sensitive or 'collaborative mindset'. Finally, managers need an 'action mindset' which means creating a sense of shared direction. Managers will be stronger using 'some minds' rather than others. But all managers need to be able to move seamlessly between mindsets as changing circumstances require.

Model building

A distinguishing attribute of effective managers which seems to set them apart is their ability to do accurate 'readings' on situations. They seem to be able to discern patterns in the swirl of events. They recognise 'old friend' patterns because they have been in the loop before. They understand the context, see linkages of cause and effect and how issues interlock.

They can also see new patterns. They can see trends and themes behind the figures. By constantly scanning their environment and focusing on anomalies they notice slight changes from the familiar which sensitise them to the possibility of new trends which may require a timely response.

This is how Harold Geneen (1985) who ran the famous multinational ITT for over 20 years, described his management thinking:

> You're processing a lot of data and then you see something in the figures which stands out. Perhaps something is a little out of gear, perhaps the beginning of a new trend. The figures won't tell you what to do but they get you thinking. You collect other data. Sometimes you begin to see a new pattern, although often it isn't new, it was there all the time . . . you just hadn't seen it.

This cognitive skill seems similar to the idea of 'experiential knowing' or 'tacit understanding' developed by Michael Polyani (1966). This seems to involve an ability to see the underlying form of things through immersion in them. Typically managers work

closely with the grain of an emerging situation. By being close to it they come to discriminate more closely between the factors, to see how fragments join together to make larger wholes and how presenting problems become symptoms of other larger issues. This allows them to develop provisional models of what is happening, drawing on accumulated business experience of 'situations like that' or reframing things so that they can be considered from a new angle.

Often thinking unfolds in the context of action. Karl Weick (1983) claims that despite popular myths, managers do not typically think and then do. They are more likely to think through acting. Typically they act with some vague goals, half-thought-out hypotheses and provisional models of the situation. These get them started. They do things and this generates outcomes which can then be examined. By having something tangible to look at means that they can build on earlier lines of action. They are understanding a situation whilst acting within it.

This iterative process may sound inefficient because the thinking is ad hoc and mistakes will be made as people improvise to get it right. But Weick thinks that this is an effective strategy for managers struggling to cope with the chaos of organisational life, such as Kotter, Watson and the ethnographers have described. It allows mental models of the situation to become more and more refined and action more focused as the contours of the problem emerge more clearly.

Weick concludes that managers cannot be reflective thinkers, planning everything out in detail before acting. Instead, they need to be practical thinkers who engage incrementally with the muddle of the organisational process. They should beware of thinking in formulae, avoid the myth of step-by-step logical action and instead operate with clear values and intentions, a few concepts, some simple models and boundless energy and flexibility.

Creativity

Despite the obsession of many managers with the 'one right way', with systems and with 'best practice', successful managers value ideas and creativity (Heller 1995). The capacity to think freshly and to recognise the value of new thinking as it emerges are important cognitive skills for the manager.

Creativity is a special form of thinking where reason, sensitivity and judgement come together. It involves gut feeling and calculated risk-taking, having ideas and knowing how to apply them. Creativity in management often means 'going against the grain' and doing something different. Often it involves an entrepreneurial approach to managing which combines innovation with flair (e.g. Anita Roddick or Richard Branson would be celebrated models).

The literature on creativity is vast and there are many conflicting views on what it is and how it can be encouraged. However, there is a good deal of consensus (e.g. Adams 1988, Weisberg 1986, etc.) that creative managers have the following qualities:

- *Observant of the processes around them.* They give attention to things and are therefore aware of small changes which may be the precursors of new trends.
- *Independent in thought.* They avoid thinking in conventional categories and in stereotypes. They try to reason things out for themselves.
- *Interested in the connections between things.* They have a synthesising ability to relate disconnected things together to form new ways of seeing.

- *Aware of ideas in different areas of knowledge and have an appreciation of how these elements can be combined.* Arthur Koestler, who has written a lot on creative thinking, calls this 'bi-sociation', that is, it is the ability to make connections between previously unrelated areas of thinking.

- *Good at seeing the whole picture because they have a 'helicopter' view of things.*

- *Able to see something new and strange in the familiar and the ordinary.* They can make the familiar strange by looking at it from another angle.

- *Improvisational in approach.* Many researchers on the creative process (like Weisberg), have found that 'leaps of imagination' and 'creative breakthroughs' are a lot less common than trial and error, constant 'worrying' at a problem and continual improvement on what has been tried before until something unusual, fresh and workable emerges.

- *Able to overcome emotional blocks to creativity of which there are many*, for example, fear of taking risks; fear of making mistakes; fear of being judged; fear of standing out.

- *Driven by an obsessive commitment to their work mediated by a spirit of play, fun and adventure*.

Of course, this a tall order and it is not given to all of us to be as original and groundbreaking as we would like. But even if managers cannot always have the ideas themselves, they can at least demonstrate the qualities of empathy and understanding which build an environment in which creative energy is encouraged within the organisation they manage.

Pause for thought

How to disable your creative manager

All too often organisations engage in 'double talk' in which rhetoric about supporting creativity is subverted by the day-to-day processes based on immediate tasks and deadlines. Take this quote from the CEO of a Fortune 200 company:

> We're always on the look out for someone broad gauge. We're especially impressed by good 'all rounders', people with a broad portfolio of talents, interests and achievements. They've done something interesting with their lives and may do something interesting for us. We look at a CV and say 'This man seems different, there's evidence of a creative mind here. He will be an asset to us'. But then, soon after he's appointed, we're groaning that he won't stay late or is reluctant to make the 'stop over' in Scunthorpe because of his poetry class.'

Question
Have you ever been on the receiving end of this sort of 'double bind'?

2.4.6 Political skills

Finally, successful managers display political skills. Organisations are ultimately political systems. All organisations have limited resources. Groups within the organisation all want a share of these resources to further their projects. This means that bargaining, conflict and the selective mobilisation of power are essential to control the

process by which the cake is divided. Winners in this organisational game are often those who are politically saavy and know how to make a good case and manage organisational rules in their own favour.

As John Hunt (1992) says, senior managers are not in a position to claim that they are above the dirty business of politics. If they don't play the political game then they are abandoning the ground for others to skew the system in their own interests.

Organisational politics involves:

● senior managers building up their departments by fighting for additional resources and authority;

● senior managers engaging in debate over the 'meaning' of the strategic plan so that definitions favourable to their interests prevail;

● conflict between cliques over equipment, space, budgets, staff, etc.;

● individuals jockeying for position to advance their careers.

Organisational politics is the 'backstage' of the organisation where the empire building, log rolling, careerism, interest-group lobbying and patronage relationships take place. The skills which are needed here involve all the qualities we have considered before and some other, more specific ones.

(a) *Diagnostic skills* – The best political operators seem to be effective in mapping the political terrain. They have a sense of the distribution of power within an organisation, the perspectives and cultures of different groups, who are the prime movers of events, the agendas of different actors and who has to be won over to build a winning coalition behind an initiative (Hunt 1992, Pfeffer 1981).

(b) *Tactical skills* – Managers with political skill seem to know how to switch between methods of influence. They know how to test the water for a proposal while avoiding a commitment on which it is difficult to renege. They use formal authority sparingly because they know that the overt use of power demonstrates not strength but weakness. They prefer to achieve their objectives through more indirect means. The skills here involve 'fixing' meetings in advance by getting the powerful 'on side' before they go into committee; cutting deals with the most powerful players; engaging in social exchange relationships (e.g. support in return for patronage) to construct critical alliances around core issues; controlling the timing and presentation of issues; using outsiders to legitimate activity; using networks to plant and collect confidential information (Kakabadse 1983).

(c) *Shaping skills* – Sophisticated players seem to be good at shaping the political process so that they can achieve their goals indirectly, through influence and persuasion. Accurately attuned to what is at stake for each of the participants in events, the politician-manager concentrates on areas of common interest to build consensus while subtly moving perceptions so that change becomes possible. This involves the ability to read signals, develop rapport and sell ideas in terms of the other's interests. Language skills are important here. Political managers know how to manoeuvre to promote sectional advantage while claiming to speak for the organisation as a whole and justifying what is done in terms of the rallying symbol of the 'greater good of the company'. They use language to 'manage attention' and to 'manage meaning' (Bennis and Nanus 1985). They are adept at presenting arguments, anticipating objections and counter-arguments; using language with a sense

of its emotional associations to convince others of their definition of the situation. Here politics shades into 'impression management', conveying messages through personal performances so that others are influenced to endorse values, beliefs and actions (Mangham 1986).

What kind of political animal are you?

All effective managers play the political game but some are more skilful than others. Here is a satirical model of political behaviour which uses animal stereotypes. In terms of these analogies how would you define yourself?

Foxes (clever)

– interested in power
– somewhat unprincipled
– calculating
– simulate feelings
– close to grapevine
– get support through bargaining
– manipulate procedures
– will exploit others' weaknesses
– cunning, manipulative

Owls (wise)

– aware of purpose
– clear principles
– have personal ethics
– tactful/emotionally literate
– good listeners
– learn from mistakes
– use rules for higher ends
– sense of loyalty
– look for win/win
– wise statesman

Donkeys (inept)

– not skilled interpersonally
– play psychological games (badly)
– self-obsessed
– emotionally illiterate
– judgements based on feelings
– inept at building alliances
– not listening
– see black/white
– not tuned to grapevine
– think in formulae

Lambs (innocent)

– ethical
– rely on formal systems
– don't appreciate politics
– believe in authority
– believe in position power
– respect for rationality
– believe ideology
– open/share information
– loyalty
– naivety

Table 2.1 What kind of political animal are you?

Source: 'Political management: developing the management portfolio', *Journal of Management Development*, Vol. 9, No. 3, pp. 42–59 (Baddeley, S. and James, K. 1990)

2.4.7 Managerial wisdom

The genuinely self-developing manager seeking to master his or her craft and become a sophisticated 'master manager' is in search of wisdom to become an organisational owl. Watson (2001) talks of the frustrations of managers trying to articulate deeper processes of thinking, judging and acting which are often 'glossed' as either 'experience' or reduced to a few abstract formulae. Resisting this temptation but continuing

to seek your own personal ordering and articulation of meaning within the chaos of organising is the mark of wise practice.

Isaiah Berlin (1979) in a famous essay suggested that wisdom among wo(men) of power starts with an understanding that the strategies are always bound to fail because they can never account for the infinite complexities and variety of human behaviour. The abstractions and formulae of those who claim to plan and control are always at odds with the 'intractable and infinitely complex relationships between men and events'. Instead of trying to rationalise and pretend that their resolutions, decisions and memos can shape the chaos of business and organisational environments, Berlin recommends the cultivation of sensitivity to the deeper structures of experiences. By this he seems to mean the development of a fine-tuned awareness of the way things are going, the flow of events, the boundaries of the possible. Among other qualities it requires an ability to discriminate sensibly between the real and the sham, an appreciation of how issues are interlinked, how change in one sphere will have consequences in another, and things are not always as they seem.

Although this may sound obscurantist and mystificatory to some, others such as Ericisson and Smith (1991) are obviously following a similar track when they say that wise decisions often do not require vast amounts of information or massive expertise, more a different way of seeing which offers a possible way out. Seeing the familiar in a new way is part of wisdom, as are the following.

- Tolerating contradictions between alternative points of view, both of which may have part of the truth and staying with paradox until some resolution can be found.

- Appreciating that the working out of a dialectic is fundamental to the frictional medium in which management must be conducted.

- Recognising that all organisational knowledge is partial, a representation filtered through ideologies, perspectives and expectations.

- Acknowledging that your understanding will be conditioned by your subjectivity. Wise practitioners are fully aware of themselves – their prejudices, values and perspectives (having deliberately made these explicit to themselves through reflection) and understand how these will influence them.

- Appreciating that issues need to be understood in terms of underlying tendencies, not just surface phenomena. Looking beyond facades of coherence and falsely rational appearances.

- Seeking to make critical inquiry an everyday reflex, that is, constant self-questioning, seeing things from the viewpoint of others, accepting that everything cannot be classified into defined categories or clear patterns.

It is likely that the reader will be able to add to this list of 'wise' behaviours. Ericsson and Smith stress that these skills take years to build up through exposure to a variety of experience, observation, reflection, listening to others (and the voice within), mediated by humility and an intrinsic desire to improve.

Grint (2001) concludes that Aristotle's belief that leading (and managing) requires *techne* (skills), *episteme* (knowledge) and *phronesis* (wisdom) is still relevant. While the first two can be taught directly, the third, and most important to managing, may only be acquired through reflection on experience which is ultimately the responsibility of the individual. It is ironic that wisdom, arguably the most important quality in using managerial power with principled purpose, is that very quality which we seem to know least about developing.

Pause for thought

Emergent being

Marcel Proust, the great writer, had something to say about becoming wise which applies to being a managerial leader quite as much as being a thoughtful practitioner of life:

> 'We do not receive wisdom, we must discover it for ourselves, after a journey through the wilderness which no one can make for us, which no one can spare us, for our wisdom is the point of view from which we come at last to regard the world'

The beginning of wisdom in management is knowing that you need to make the journey and that you will largely be alone in doing so. Are you ready for that? Do you have some sort of strategy of self reflection and learning so that you can proceed?

Source: Marcel Proust (1927) Remembrance of Things Past, Chatto and Windus

2.5   Conclusion

Management is a complex activity. It requires highly developed cognitive, interpersonal, presentational and political skills. Various empirical studies have found that managerial behaviour defies easy categorisation. Managing is a disjointed activity in which the significant and the trivial are interspersed. The qualities which make up a successful manager are numerous and varied (technical, social, emotional, cognitive and political skills). Despite the many changes in organisations and management that have occurred in recent times, is continuity in the management process and the skills required to perform it more pronounced than discontinuity in the daily experience of managing? Would the manager from the 1940s transported to an office in the early years of the new century still recognise the same deep processes of managing? Perhaps the processes of sense-making, of constructing meaning from the complexity of events and the skills of coordinating and persuading others have a timeless quality to them. Equally, despite the fads and fashions, how quickly do the processes of learning for those who are to be groomed for the use of authority really change from epoch to epoch? These are themes which will thread through this book and are questions to which we will return.

Review questions

1 Can you see a clear linkage between formal, classical definitions of management and what managers do? Explain.

2 Do you think that the practice of management, in its essentials, has really changed over the past 50 years? Discuss.

3 Fashions in training, learning and development come and go and terminology changes. However, the fundamental means by which people are developed to exercise (managerial) power are relatively unchanging. How far would you agree with this statement?

4 'The soft skills in management are the most vital and also the most unteachable. People either learn them for themselves or they don't. Despite its claims, MD is almost irrelevant to building these higher level skills. If you don't have the self insight you won't go far'. How would you react to this comment by a senior manager?

5 How far would you agree with the view that general management requires skills which are not so different from those required in ordinary social life?

6 'At higher levels of management you need to be a lay politician'. Do you agree?

Web links

A website which examines the traits and qualities of managers and leaders:
http://www.mapnp.org/library/ldership/traits.htm

The website of the Chartered Management Institute which has led much recent debate on the qualities needed in management and the role of MD:
www.managers.org.uk

A website on Emotional Intelligence which you might try:
www.myskillsprofile.com

A useful website on leadership issues:
http://leadertoleader.org

DVDs/Videos

Three DVDs, one a soap opera, one a Hollywood film and one a fly-on-the-wall documentary, are worth watching because they give a sense of 'being there' as managers conduct their business. However, with the two dramatisations you have to allow for exaggeration.

The Power Game, Parts 1 and 2, ITV (1964–68)
Gives a sense of managers doing their stuff. Highly popular with the British management community at the time and still relevant today.

Executive Suite (1953) Director: Robert Wise
A believable glimpse of power and politics in the boardroom.

Startup.com (2001) Director: Chris Hegedus and Jehane Noujaim
A documentary which shadows two dot.com entrepreneurs as they try to make their business work. Again, a feeling of watching over the shoulders of directors 'doing management'.

There are innumerable films on leadership, although not many set within business organisations. Try:

Dead Poet's Society (1989) Director: Peter Weir
Gandhi (1982) Director: Richard Attenborough
Thirteen Days (2000) Director: Roger Donaldson
Twelve Angry Men (1957) Director: Sidney Lumet

If you 'read' these films and others cited in forthcoming chapters as 'text', there are many lessons to be had.

Recommendations for further reading

Those texts marked with an asterisk in the bibliography (below) are recommended for further reading, especially the following:

Dalton, M. (1959) *Men Who Manage.* A classic which some readers will question as recommended reading because of its age, but it provides a sense of the day-to-day processes of management and the tactics involved, which has not been bettered.

Kotter, J. (1982) *The General Managers.* Another excellent ethnography of how managers perform their craft with 'evergreen' lessons.

Raelin, J. (2003) *Leaderful Organisations.* Breaks the paradigm by suggesting that building leadership is not just, or even mainly, about developing individuals but more about building teams and building organisations, one of the key themes of this book.

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