

HOW TO BECOME MORE EFFECTIVE

W.J. Reddin.

'If a man has a talent and cannot use it, he has failed. If he has a talent and uses one half of it, he has partly failed. If he has a talent and learns somehow to use the whole of it, he has gloriously succeeded and won a satisfaction and triumph few men will know!

Thomas Wolfe.

MANAGERIAL EFFECTIVENESS is nothing more or less than achieving the output requirements of a managerial position. The best methods of achieving such output requirements can become clear through the answers to the following questions.

Do I want to become more effective?

It is natural for a manager to say 'Of course I want to become more effective.' Every manager does, but in practice every manager is not always prepared to make the effort to become more effective. One manager may simply want to mark time until retirement; another may be in the completely wrong job for him and any additional involvement would be unpleasant; some are simply lazy and not inclined to do their best in contributing what they can. A manager must be sure that he really wants to become more effective before he reads about how to do so.

What is my potential contribution?

Once a manager has decided he wants to become effective, he should initially focus on how he could contribute more, or more effectively, than he is now doing. Some managers have narrow views of their jobs. What they do they may do well, but what they leave undone is enormous. Some managers let the in-tray define their potential contribution and the clock its limit. One manager might view his contribution as simply that of managing a going concern and keeping it on an even keel; another might see the same job as having large components of subordinate development and creative problem-solving in it; still another might see his position primarily as a linking pin with other parts of the firm, and thus take a wider view of his responsibility.

Specialists seldom focus on contributions. They often see themselves simply as a knowledge bank; 'I am not paid for what I do but for what I know'. Such a view can and does insulate the specialist from the firm, the professor from the student and the university from society.

Job descriptions seldom focus on contributions and if followed too closely may discourage contributions from being made. Too often, job descriptions look downward not outward. They focus on activities a manager must perform and not the method by which his effectiveness may be increased.

Contributions can seldom be expressed or seen in terms of maintenance of a system. Where possible contribution should be expressed through effectiveness standards in terms of growth, profitability and innovation.

What are my effectiveness standards ?

The contribution possible from a managerial position is reflected in the effectiveness standards—the general output requirements—for that position. Clearly, an early step in becoming effective is to establish effectiveness standards and objectives. At any level, they must be worked out with the superior or they may be meaningless, unacceptable, incorrect or difficult to apply. Some managers, particularly those at the top of an organization, find that their standards could take a number of different forms, indicating the inherent flexibility in the top man's job. Setting such standards then becomes making a decision about what kind of contribution can best be made.

What are my objectives ?

Effectiveness standards are converted to annual objectives. These are specific, measurable, time-bounded contributions the manager plans to make. The superior must always agree to them, co-workers should have an opportunity to comment on them and subordinates be at least aware of them.

Objectives that are set for the first time are seldom met. This may reflect the substitution of hope for reality or simply lack of skill. Skill in working by management by objectives, like most other skills, requires coaching, training, practice and feedback on results.

What needs changing ?

Once objectives are set, there comes the crucial question of 'what if anything must be changed to achieve the objectives?' It may be time re-allocation, making more decisions, patching up a problem with another division or changing a superior's view of his job. The objectives state only what is to be achieved, not how to achieve them. Objectives without plans are dreams. Plans must be made and this usually means change.

There are four work elements that a manager can think of changing : superior, colleagues, subordinates, technology. Not all of these can be changed in the short or long run by every manager but each should be at least considered as a target of change so that managerial effectiveness is increased.

How can I improve my superior's effectiveness ?

Most managers would like to be able to influence their superior in some way. There is no better way for a manager to gain such influence than by amply satisfying his superior's expectations. This usually directly involves the manager in becoming effective and at the same time making the superior more effective as well.

If your own subordinates could take action to improve your effectiveness then presumably you can do the same for your superior. You are unlikely to do much in the way of changing his style, but you can make him more effective. This is particularly possible if the status and power differential between you is low, and if his job is much interwoven with your own when he will be more dependent on you.

A superior may also be influenced by using an indirect approach by getting someone else to tell him. This influence may be exerted by another manager, a book or article, a consultant or a course. The written word is a much under-used influence, yet it is particularly helpful in the low-power situation in which a subordinate usually finds himself.

How can I improve my colleagues' effectiveness ?

Colleagues are usually open to influence at committee meetings which they attend with you. Managers should therefore think of starting meetings with one of these kind of questions : 'What is the objective of this meeting?' 'How will we know if it has been successful?' 'Do we need it?' 'Can we conclude it in 15 minutes?' To do this out of the blue is not always to be recommended, but managers should get around to it as soon as they can.

Over a time, it is a relatively simple matter for an effective manager to raise the aspiration level of his colleagues. He shares with them the past successes and failures; he can describe things as they really are, can suggest that standards could be much higher and, by personal example, can show that this is what he intends to do.

How can I improve my subordinates' effectiveness ?

By improving effectiveness of his subordinates, a manager also improves his own effectiveness. Perhaps the best single test of a manager is the effectiveness of his subordinates. As a minimum this would be expressed by the capacity for one or two of the subordinates to step into the manager's shoes.

The most effective way of making subordinates more effective is by giving them challenging responsibilities early in their career. The more challenging the responsibilities, the more effective the subordinate is likely to become. Also, clear effectiveness standards for subordinates are obviously crucial.

While the development of managers can be furthered by formal courses, 95 per cent of all real management development goes on in the context of the superior/subordinate relationship. The quality of this relationship determines effectiveness. The superior has by far the most influence in structuring it.

A subordinate does not have to model his style on his superior in order to become effective. The younger ones tend to do so especially if the superior appears to be effective, has upward influence and gives them support. Managers usually accept or even welcome such modelling; but the real skill is in recognising, accepting and managing differences. Managers can be effective in different ways. To force a subordinate into his manager's mould may not work or be necessary. A superior is not running a game called, 'How to be more like me'. He must demonstrate that subordinates should meet their effectiveness standards, not to please him, but because their position demands it.

How can I change the technology ?

If a manager can add a new subordinate and can define the new subordinate's effectiveness standards, as influenced by technology, are capable of wide variation. Briefly, technology is the way work can be done so that effectiveness results. Within limits, a manager is able to change his technology—that is, he is able to change the things he places emphasis on. This presents him with one of his most important opportunities to improve effectiveness. Some freedom is needed to do this, of course, and it is more likely to be found in managers at the top of the organization or in firms that have a deliberate policy of position flexibility.

Effectiveness standards are particularly susceptible to change when the job is new, or the manager is new in it, or when a crisis situation has developed, or when managers operate as a team and are thus willing to engage in flexible job-trading.

Some of the many ways that a manager can consider when modifying his technology are :

Emphasising either task or relationships.

Emphasising one of planning, directing or administering.

Being either basically an inside or outside man for his department.

Working with more or fewer subordinates.

He should also ask himself these three questions :

1. **Who else could do this?** An effective manager asks of every piece of work that comes before him, 'Who below me could do this?' He does not work

himself out of a job this way—he works himself into his right job. He may well work himself out of routine administration and into long-range planning, liaison with other divisions or the more effective development of his subordinates.

2. **How can I improve my time management?** Time, as the economists might put it, is an inelastic resource. You cannot stretch it. It appears to exist in unlimited quantities in the future, but reaching to the future for it means delay. Time management, perhaps more than anything, is the one skill a manager needs to learn.

Time management starts with a heightened awareness of time : how much time is available and how it is being spent. Some managers have found it useful to undertake a study of their own time utilisation. They are almost invariably surprised at the results and the lack of effective time management displayed.

Effective managers need to learn how to create massed undisturbed-time and distributed undisturbed-time. Massed undisturbed-time is particularly useful for projects that involve thinking sequentially such as writing a report or book. Small blocks of distributed undisturbed-time are useful for clearing the desk of the accumulation of notices, memos and travel claims to sign.

An obvious short-term way to create mass undisturbed-time is by coming in three hours early or doing work at home. This may lower effectiveness in the long-run, so other methods may have to be used. One such method, and there are practical limits in many jobs, is simply to make oneself unavailable on certain days or between certain hours. Most daily interruptions, for many managers, are on relatively trivial matters. As each interruption occurs a manager should ask himself, 'How could this have been avoided?' and then modify the decision or information system so that such interruptions either do not occur or at least are minimised.

3. **How can I make decisions?** Effectiveness can never be achieved unless the right decisions are made. Decisions are a manager's stock-in-trade. A lack of decision-making can lead to prolonged low effectiveness. Moreover, managers, in reviewing their decisions, often find that most could have been made months or years before. Timing is obviously as important as accuracy.

At any one point in time a manager usually has several important decisions he should make. On some, action is postponed for good reasons; on others, it is postponed for perhaps no reason at all. There is no value in making decisions hastily or too far in advance. But there is often no point in postponing them too long either.

Managers might well prepare a list of all the decisions facing them. This is not the usual list of things to do—it is a decision-list of **decisions**. The list should have the most pressing decision (which is not necessarily the most important) at the top. This list can be used as a guide to action. There is, however, a great temptation to make the list and then ignore it, or make it and then start with the easiest decision rather than the most pressing one.

Should I change my job ?

Once they have looked closely at what a job really demands, some managers decide that they are in the wrong job. Sometimes everyone knows it and sometimes no-one does. There is a big difference between having daily deadlines or not, between supervising professionals and supervising hourly-paid workers, between system management and selling. It may be that the job is too demanding, not demanding enough, too boring or involving a manager in things he would simply rather not do.

When one has seen hundreds of managers at work, it takes very little skill to pick the ones who are in the wrong job. They simply are not with it. They get no pleasure out of it. They spend all the time they can doing routine work and avoiding decisions. They are more to be pitied than blamed but they cannot be ignored. Perhaps the salary attracted them and that, together with the pension scheme, now has them locked in. Perhaps the job demands changed while they were in it. Perhaps through their own low sensitivity they did not know what they were getting into. A common example of this is the professional who gets promoted into managing his fellow professionals.

The ideal solution to being in the wrong job is obvious. The majority of managers who move from, or are moved from, a position in which they are performing poorly, turn out to be more effective and happy in the new position. A clear parallel is the college student who switches from one faculty to another. Prior to the switch he is in a turmoil of doubt. After it he wonders how he could have considered anything else.

What is my future ?

Whether or not the organization has a career plan for him, a manager should have one of his own. A manager needs to sit down annually and plan where he expects to be in ten years time. A good start is to list the ages of all your family at that time, your estimated personal holdings, your position, your salary and your accomplishments. Then fill in the ten-year gap with what it is necessary for you to do in order to achieve your plan. The future can simply occur or it can be invented. Man can see himself as a cork bobbing on an ocean of fate or as a man with his hand on the tiller facing a fresh breeze. The way the effective manager must see himself is clear if he is to invent his future.

What will the future demand ?

All effective managers realise that to stay on top of any management job requires continual learning. If senior managers were formally recognised for their informal educational attainment most would be awarded a Ph. D. These are a few of the key areas that managers who wish to advance in the future will have to learn :

Managing professionals. The ratio of knowledge workers to others will continue to increase in modern organizations. The route to the top will usually involve a term managing such men for a few years and will always involve working with them. Quite different kinds of skills are involved in this kind of management and a body of literature is steadily growing on how to do it.

Managing international operators. While meeting a mixed reaction it is becoming apparent that while the biggest industrial power in the world is the US, the second or third biggest is the US in Europe. There is no doubt that this trend will continue except that countries other than the US will start to become more than ever involved internationally. While there are some obvious resemblances between managing in one country and another, there are usually some important differences as well. These differences may be nothing more than historically different ways of doing business or may instead be reflections of a long established culture. While practical experience is obviously the best method of learning about international operation, cultivating foreign friends, travel and a study of cultural anthropology can also be useful.

Knowing another language. When you are working in or selling to another country a second or third language becomes almost a necessity. Fortunately with language laboratories, 'total-immersion' courses and other advanced techniques, it is becoming easier to learn one. University language departments have, by and large, had no interest or particular competence in language instruction. Fortunately a well established network of private language schools is growing and some large and even middle-sized companies are conducting their own training.

Managing computer-operations research. All managers will have to live with the growing impact of the computer and of advanced systems designs. To live with them, it is first necessary to understand them. Both computers and systems design are major organizational change devices. If poorly introduced or managed they lead to an array of unanticipated consequences. Properly introduced and managed they will quickly separate the firm and the managers who will be most effective and those who will not.

Social-science sophistication. A great deal of social-science application is still in the witch-doctor stage but much is excellent and showing concrete benefits. It is not so much that because social-science application will grow more rapidly that managers should take notice of it. It is just that up to a few years ago there was not much being applied at all. The social discipline of the future for managers is clearly

sociology. A solid course in organization theory would be more helpful to managers than most other university courses they could take.

Current reading. Any manager who wants to advance must read a great deal, for example a good daily newspaper, and a weekly new magazine. In addition, one or two general business newspapers or magazines, the leading technical journals in his field, his key professional journal and the Harvard Business Review, The Economist, and possibly Scientific American. The date on the impact of rapid-reading courses is still a big vague but a manager should take a course if he can, but not wait for it before he starts reading.

What can I do now ?

It would be an effective move to take action on this article now. The first step would be to list some actions you are going to take and some decisions you have to make, and then rank them in order of priority. The basis of the priority would be the extent to which each would make you more effective. As a minimum managers should consider :

- Defining their effectiveness standards.**
- Establishing their objectives.**
- Giving parts of their job to others.**
- Structuring their use of time differently.**