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Building Results-Focused Organizations

ENHANCING MANAGERIAL EFFECTIVENESS

Don Zillioux, Ph.D.

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Why do people want to become more effective?

It's quite natural for a person—or manager in this case—to tell himself, "Indeed, I want to be more effective." But in practice not all managers might want or be prepared to make the effort to *be* more effective.

It's not unusual to encounter a manager who simply prefers to mark time until retirement, while another could actually be in the wrong place and at the wrong job so that any additional effort could be displeasing. Yet there are managers who simply would remain complacent ("lazy" might be too harsh a word) and have no inclination to discharge their utmost best in contributing to whatever they could.

If a manager intends to be more effective and "earn their salt," they must have a proper mindset and a true commitment to becoming more effective. Often managers fail to become more effective because the "spirit is willing but the flesh is weak." A manager can become more effective by knowing how to improve not only his or her own effectiveness but also the effectiveness of subordinates, peers or co-managers and superiors.

Manager defined

Generally, a manager occupies a position in a formal organization having responsibility for the work of at least one other person with formal authority over that person. Here is a more precise definition from a management classic:

> A manager is one who is responsible for getting things done through other people, instead of doing the job himself. With stated objectives to achieve, i.e., to produce certain goods or services, he directs human activities, with the help of the other resources available, towards those ends.
>
> William F. Coventry and John L. Barker
> *Management Made Simple (1980)*

Another term for a manager is "executive." To discharge his/her roles effectively, an executive must use both the high-task orientation and high-relationship orientation with those he/she supervises in appropriate situations and where such behaviors are conducive. An executive is perceived as a good motivating force, setting high standards and treating every staff somewhat differently. Team management is preferred since an executive uses teamwork in decision-making; he/she induces commitment to objectives, encourages high performance, coordinates others in the work and uses participation appropriately. The degree to which a manager talks with subordinates as a group for them to complete their tasks is often termed a "manager interaction." Besides manager interaction other integrated managerial indicators include subordinate interaction, subordinate interdependence, solution multiplicity and pace autonomy."

Some obvious basic skills needed for managerial effectiveness are situational management, situational sensitivity and style flexibility. Almost all management gurus have advocated that traditionally a manager's role is to plan/strategize, lead, organize, coordinate/monitor, review, train/coach, evaluate/appraise and counsel people. But it takes an effective manager to discharge all of these roles; plus the need to participate, interact, integrate, innovate and motivate. Motivation is the degree to which considerable and approximately equal amounts of relationship orientation and task orientation are used in the influence process.

Manager's objectives

Most of the manager's effectiveness areas ought to be converted to annual objectives. These objectives must be measurable, specific and time-bounded contributions that a manager plans to make. A manager's superior or boss needs to agree to them, co-workers or peers ought to be given the opportunity to comment on them, while subordinates be at least aware of them. Objectives that are seldom met could reflect the substitution of hope for reality or simply a lack of skill. Like most other skills, the skill in management requires coaching, training, practice and feedback on a continuous basis.

Making decisions more effectively

Effectiveness will not be achieved unless the right decisions are made. We likened materials or finished goods as the inventories or current assets in the business of trading; and in management we can similarly recognize that decisions are a manager's stock-in-trade. A lack of decision-making can in fact lead the manager to prolonged, low effectiveness due to low stock-in-trade level.

A manager, in reviewing his/her decisions, often finds that most could have been made days before. For an effective decision, turnaround time is as important as the element of accuracy in that manager's decision-making.

At any one point in time, a manager usually has several important decisions that should be made. For some of those decisions, action is postponed for good reasons; for other decisions, action may be postponed for no reason at all. There might be no value in making decisions hastily or too far in advance but there is no point in postponing them for far too long either.

A manager might well prepare a list of all the decisions deluging her. This is not the usual "to-do" list; rather it is a list of pending decisions. This decision list should have the most pressing decision (which is not necessarily the most important) at the top. In simple terms, this means "prioritization." The usefulness of this decision list for a manager is that it could be used as a guide to action. There is, however, a great temptation for the manager to make the list and then ignore it. If necessary, he/she could start with the easiest decision first rather than the most pressing one. By so doing, the process of decision-list elimination and execution would be that much more smooth.

Knowing one's effectiveness areas

A fundamental step for a manager is to establish effectiveness areas and objectives. The manager should work these out with his/her superior to prevent the effectiveness areas from being meaningless, incorrect, unacceptable or difficult to apply. Often, managers (especially at the top) of a corporation find their effectiveness areas taking a number of different forms. This clearly reflects the inherent flexibility in the top manager's (like the GM or CEO) position. Setting such effectiveness areas then becomes making a decision about what kind of contribution could best be made by a manager to the organization.

Improving subordinates' effectiveness

When a manager improves the effectiveness of subordinates, the manager's own effectiveness also improves. Perhaps the best, single test to ascertain whether a person is an effective manager is to first gauge the effectiveness of his/her 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. Most management practitioners are of the opinion that the best way to make subordinates more effective is for a manager to give them challenging responsibilities early in their careers. The more challenging the responsibilities, the more effective these subordinates would likely become.

Mapping clear effectiveness areas for subordinates is useful. While attending formal courses or seminars might enhance the development of managers, the majority of real management development relates to the superior/subordinate relationship. The quality of this relationship determines effectiveness. The superior has by far the most influence in formulating it. Subordinates do not have to model their superior's style in order to become effective. There is, however, that tendency—especially if the younger ones see their superior as supportive, effective and having upward influence.

A manager often accepts or even welcomes such modeling but the real skill is in recognizing, accepting and managing differences. Managers can be effective in different ways. To force a subordinate into the manager's mold may not be of any use to the organization and it might not necessarily work. Therefore a manager, as the superior, needs to be mindful that he/she is not brainwashing subordinates and manipulating or cloning them to be more like them. Rather, the effective manager should emphasize the importance of subordinates meeting their different effectiveness areas—not to please or satisfy their managers, per se, but because the manager's position demands it.

Improving peers' effectiveness

A common and formal forum where a manager meets and interact with peers or co-managers would be the business meetings or committee discussions in the organization.

Meetings and discussions are unavoidable and can take up as much as 60 percent of managerial time.

Co-workers or peer-managers are usually open to influence at committee meetings they attended. One way to be effective is for a manager to think of starting that meeting/discussion with four questions in mind:

- What is the objective of this meeting?
- How do the other managers know if the discussion/meeting has been effective?
- Is the discussion/meeting necessary?
- Could it be shortened and concluded in 15 minutes or less?

To answer these posers out of the blue may not be recommended but managers should get around to it as soon as they can. Over time, it is a relatively simple matter for an effective manager to raise the aspirational level of peers or co-managers by sharing with them past successes and failures; by describing things as they really are, by suggesting that standards could be much higher and by citing personal examples to show that these ought to be what any manager intends to emulate and evangelize.

Enhancing superior's effectiveness

There is no more meaningful way to gain influence with a superior than by amply satisfying the superior's expectations. This often directly involves the manager in becoming more effective and at the same time, facilitating or enhancing the superior's effectiveness. One school of thought holds that, if a manager's subordinates could take action to improve the manager's effectiveness, then arguably a manager could do the same for his/her superior (the manager's boss). The manager is unlikely to do much in ways of changing the boss's style but he/she could make the boss more effective. This is particularly possible if the status and power differential between the manager and the boss is low; and if the boss's job is much interwoven with (and dependent upon) the manager's job or tasks.

What needs changing?

We need to realize that objectives without plans are nothing but dreams. These "dreams" can only become reality when the objectives are fleshed out with plans, methodically pursued and achieved. Creating plans usually means identifying needed change. Almost always, the objectives state only what is to be achieved, not how to achieve the goals and targets set. When a manager's objectives are set, the critical question of what thing or process, if any, can be changed in order to achieve the objectives must be answered.

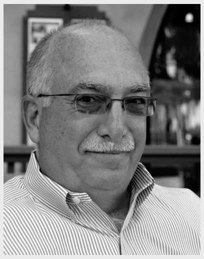
Change then, often becomes the central issue in achieving objectives.

- Change might address the re-allocation of resources like capital and human beings or even time.
- Change might require making more decisions, patching up a problem with another unit, department, branch or even another organization such as vendors.

- Change might come in the way a superior perceives a job or activity.
- Change might require the redefinition of a business activity as a “dog” or “question mark” instead of as a “cash-cow” due to obsolescence in product design.

As organizational objectives are formulated—for different time periods and for different operational units—the change required to achieve those planned objectives comes to the forefront. Because every manager’s effectiveness is ultimately measured by the outcomes achieved, each manager’s capacity to overcome resistance to change in discharging his or her own responsibilities as well as the team’s responsibilities becomes the true test and embodiment of managerial effectiveness.

About the Author



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For more than 20 years Don has advised a diverse variety of businesses, large and small, throughout North and Central America, Europe and Russia. He is a recognized thought leader and senior advisor in effective change management and the senior leader and chief scientist to SDW's Worldwide Organization Effectiveness practice.

Don has worked with various Native American government and business organizations including the Seneca Tribe of New York, Gila River Community, Fort Sill Apache Tribe, Snoqualmie Tribe of Washington and the Comanche Gaming Enterprises in Oklahoma.

Along with an extensive business within the Native American communities, SDW clients have also included SKF-West Germany, University of Rochester Medical School, National Training Institute for the Deaf, Casino Arizona and Talking Stick Resort, PURE Canadian Gaming along with many others.

Don is the author of The Results-Focused Organization, the soon to be published series of Field Guides to Organizational Effectiveness and Instrument Based Training: A Guide to Increased Effectiveness in Training. Don's writings and consulting/advisory work focus on planned change, organizational development, managerial effectiveness, sustainable performance, effective leadership and managing change with measurable results. He has been visiting professor and lecturer at the University of Rochester, National University, USIU in San Diego and is regularly featured at the National Indian Gaming Conferences. Don has authored over 30 assessment and training instruments and over 40 specific competency focused trainings.

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