



SECTION I

Challenges for Managers and Key Concepts

1.0 Overview

How can managers manage in the context of increasingly complex organizations? How can they reconcile conflicting and diverse interests and get the job done? Are there ways that managers can increase their potential to develop and implement an agenda in an organization? How do they personally cope with demanding jobs and develop their managerial identity? These are some of the questions that face today's private and public sector managers. These challenges are even more extreme for first-time managers who are experiencing their first taste of supervising staff and working with superiors and others.

The title of this course, "The Politics of Management," stems from the essential challenge of management: to bring together conflicting interests in order to achieve the aims of the organization. The skills required to achieve this kind of organizational leadership are in most respects "small p" political skills of establishing a vision, mobilizing support, and building partnerships. The Guide places a particular emphasis on the challenges for first-time managers in developing their managerial identity.

The framework and concepts presented here are based on an extensive review of relevant management literature, several hundred studies of executives, my own research on the role of

deputy ministers and chief executive officers (CEOs), my management experience of many years, and my time at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government. In addition, I have drawn on some important research by Linda Hill on the challenges of becoming a manager. This research is particularly relevant to the students of this course, most of whom are starting their careers and often working part-time in government or non-profit organizations.

This Guide helps students address some of these management and leadership challenges. It aims to provide a managerial perspective based on the realities of managing a modern organization and the challenges faced by managers in reconciling conflicting priorities and interests. Moreover, this Guide includes a practical management framework that will provide the focus for all readings, cases, research, and discussions in the course.

1.1 What Is Management?

Management involves getting the work of the organization done through other people.

The nature of management is closely linked to the nature of organizations. We define organizations, as Chester Barnard did in *The Functions of the Executive*, as

“. . . a system of co-operative activities of two or more persons, something intangible and impersonal, largely a matter of relationships . . .” (p. 75)

According to Barnard, the distinguishing feature of organizations is that they are systems of activities composed of human beings who are co-operating. And to co-operate and work effectively, these people must develop certain structures, communications, and operations. It is the task of ensuring that the overall organization is working that Barnard calls executive functions, or the functions that are specifically “management” in nature.

In 1937, Barnard developed a definition of the executive functions that has stood the test of time and that is still relevant today. He wrote:

Executive work is not that of the organization, but the specialized work of maintaining the organization in operation. (*The Functions of the Executive*, pp. 215–17)

In other words, when a sales agent becomes a sales manager, his/her job is no longer selling cars or houses. The job is developing the organization, the incentives, and the framework to help sales agents sell cars or houses. Even though they may engage in some non-executive work, their primary job is to “maintain the organization,” or to ensure that the system within which sales agents work helps to achieve the organization’s objectives. This lesson, as Linda Hill has explained in *Becoming a Manager*, is the most difficult lesson for first-time managers to learn.

Barnard described three executive functions that are critical to any organization:

- Formulate and define purpose (this is essential for linking staff to the overall direction of the organization).
- Provide a system of communication (enabling staff to understand what is expected).
- Secure essential efforts (enabling staff to contribute to the organizations). Barnard’s view was that employees had considerable power simply by not giving their best, or by not linking to the organization’s objectives.

Barnard also indicated that the executive, as head of an organization, has an obligation to find the proper equilibrium or balance between the organization and the external environment.

Rather than engage in the fairly tiresome distinction between managers, executives, and leaders, I will simply use the term manager to mean those individuals at supervisory, middle, and senior levels who have a responsibility for mobilizing and guiding organizations and their staff. Also, I will use the term managers, leaders, and executives interchangeably throughout the Guide.

Henry Mintzberg, who is recognized as one of Canada’s global gurus on the subject of management, has done an excellent job of

pulling together the views of various authors on management in his recent book, *Managing*. Following are a few quotes from that book.

On the distinction between management and leadership

Frankly, I don't understand what this distinction means in the everyday life of organizations. Sure, we can separate leading and managing conceptually. But, can we separate them in practice? Or, more to the point, should we even try? (p. 8)

How would you like to be managed by someone who doesn't lead? That can be awfully dispiriting. Well, then, why would you want to be led by someone who doesn't manage. That can be terribly disengaging; how are such "leaders" to know what is going on? As Jim March put it: Leadership involves plumbing as well as poetry. (p. 8)

On the role of the manager

Managing takes place on three planes, from the conceptual to the concrete: with information through people and to action directly. (p. 49)

We might thus characterize the manager's position as the neck of an hourglass, sitting between a network of outside contacts and the internal unit being managed. (p. 30)

Managers frame their work by making particular decisions, focusing on particular issues developing particular strategies, and so forth, to establish the context for everyone else working in the unit. (p. 50)

Mary Parker Follet wrote in 1920 that "the test of a foreman is not how good he is at bossing, but how little bossing he has to do." (p. 215)

On the authority and style of managers

What you do as a manager is mostly determined by what you face as a manager. (p. 13)

While every manager has to make the job, he or she also has to do the job. That is why managerial style cannot be considered out of context, independent of where it is practiced . . ." (p. 13)

When a specialist becomes a manager, the biggest change often is (or should be) the shift from "I" to "we." Having become responsible for the performance of others, the first instinct, as Hill found out, is to think, "Good, now I can make the decisions and issue the orders." Soon, however, comes the realization that formal authority is a very limited resource of power and that to become a manager is to become more dependent on others to get things done. (p. 65)

Mintzberg in *Managing*, also quoting Hill in *Becoming a Manager*:

Management has just as much, if not more, to do with negotiating interdependence as it does with exercising formal authority . . . being a manager means not merely assuming a position of authority but also becoming more dependent on others. (p. 65)

Summary

Managers are responsible for the total organization and their job is to provide direction to that organization, create meaning for staff and stakeholders, help establish the fundamental purpose and agenda of the organization, and enable the people and groups in the organization to work effectively and efficiently to achieve the purpose of the organization.

The manager's role is, however, deeply situational. It depends on the challenges facing the organization. The role of the manager often can involve the full range from strategy and policy and

external relations to operational details, if they are relevant to achieving a successful organization.

The major challenge that first-time managers face is defining their role and agenda in the context of the specific situation, and to develop a managerial identity and style that is both appropriate to their strengths and personality and that is required in a given managerial situation. This is the subject of the next section.

1.2 The Unique Challenges of Supervisors and Middle Managers

This section describes the unique challenges of supervisors and middle managers in a range of organizations. There are three examples provided: a policy director, a head of an enforcement unit, and a general manager of a golf course. These examples will be used throughout the Guide. In addition, this section describes the results of the general research on the challenges of transition to middle manager jobs.

Jacob Martin, director of policy: Aboriginal Affairs

Jacob Martin is a respected senior policy advisor who has developed some important policies and cabinet documents. He is the senior officer in a group of sixteen policy analysts and administrative staff. He has six years' experience in a government organization and a Masters in Public Administration with a focus on policy. When his director is promoted to director general, Jacob assumes that job.

Although Jacob has little management experience and is not too comfortable with the idea of being a manager, he wins the job due to his knowledge of the policy area and his capacity to develop briefings and presentations for senior management and stakeholders. He was also recognized for his capacity to work with teams of policy analysts and other groups. As a director with a staff of sixteen, Jacob begins to recognize that he has made a huge transition and that he needs to learn what it means to be a manager. Unfortunately, like most first-time managers, he is

going to learn on the job, in the midst of significant challenges that involve new areas of expertise such as managing relations with superiors, developing a budget and allocating resources, and dealing with staff performance issues, etc.

Diane Lavoie: manager enforcement, Fisheries

Diane is a senior fisheries officer in the Maritime region who has demonstrated superb skills at working with fishers and negotiating with clients and other groups. After five years in this position, she is promoted to be chief of fisheries enforcement, reporting to a director general who has overall responsibility for regulatory affairs and intergovernmental co-operation.

In moving from this role as a fisheries officer and working with teams on specific projects, she is now responsible for a group of twelve enforcement officers, many of whom have twenty years or more experience than her, and some who are close friends. What kinds of challenges is she going to face moving into this position? How can she best establish her role while maintaining a strong and effective group? How will she wrestle with the personal challenges of balancing her work and family life and coping with the deficiencies she will inevitably face in doing this job?

***Ronald Storie:
general manager, Heritage Golf Course***

Ronald is a golf professional with a degree in business and golf management. He has been a successful golf professional at the Heritage Golf course, responsible for managing a golf shop with four staff. When the general manager is fired because of poor organizational skills and poor member relations, the club decides to appoint Ron to the job. Ron is keenly aware of the fact that over ten years there have been six general managers, only two of whom were considered competent and successful. One moved to another club, and one left due to illness. The others were “let go” at the end of the golf season.

What kinds of challenges is Ron going to face in making this transition? He will now be responsible for the overall physical management of the course, the clubhouse, and the food and

beverage facility, as well as golf operations. Instead of just four golf professional staff, he will now have all of these groups reporting to him and he will report directly to a board of directors and the president of the board.

These kinds of transitions are not easy and can be treacherous to those who are not able to adapt and learn the new requirements of the job.

The challenges facing these three managers are very typical in government organizations and, on a smaller scale, in non-profit organizations. According to Linda Hill, this is the most difficult transition that managers face because it requires them to move from the role of an individual contributor to that of managing an organization. Unfortunately, there is not an easy bridge to these new roles as managers, and many people find they are facing a very different set of challenges and skills than on their previous jobs.

Generally, new managers form a managerial identity in their first couple of jobs, and their approach does not change substantially over their careers. Judging from the experiences of many of the students in the Politics of Management course and discussions with a range of executive coaches, many managers in government and non-profit organizations are facing huge difficulties dealing with their jobs, and many arrive at a managerial position long before they are ready to take on that challenge.

Managers who cannot adjust to these new roles face severe personal challenges. Their inability to manage their jobs also results in a range of counterproductive tendencies such as: micro-managing to the extreme; lack of team building; poor relations with superiors; inability to develop agendas; and difficulty managing relations with other groups. This results in the creation of dysfunctional organizations, which creates conflict and stress for staff and a lack of innovation and productivity.

Employees who have worked in a hostile, conflict-ridden, stagnant organization with a terrorizing boss know the toll that it can take on staff. Those who have experienced a superb and caring working environment with strong leadership and excellent

morale, teamwork, and performance will remember those organizations for years as the best places they ever worked.

Unfortunately, there are far too many organizations where managers cannot cope with their jobs and end up creating a negative environment, eroding potential performance, undermining the development of staff, and jeopardizing the success of the organization.

Since many of the students who take my course at Carleton University recognize that at some point in their careers they could be in supervisory or middle-management positions, or at least work with such managers, it is important to explore why this transition is so difficult and what it means to the forging of a managerial identity.

There is little research on the challenges faced by middle managers in public organizations, but fortunately, there has been some excellent work on private sector organizations that is relevant to both non-profit and government organizations. Linda Hill has written two significant books on this subject and has developed many cases. The first book is *Becoming a Manager: How New Managers Master the Challenges of Leadership*; it is a study of first-time managers and the challenges they face in the first two years on the job.

Hill's work is extremely relevant to the needs of students taking the Politics of Management course. Most of the research was focused on private-sector executives who made the transition from individual contributors (e.g., car salesman to sales manager). As the three examples above illustrate, managers in government and in non-profit organizations face the same types of challenges.

Five key challenges for supervisors and middle managers

Based on the experience of the writer and the above research, there are six major challenges faced by supervisors and middle managers. These challenges are all outlined in the superb *Becoming a Manager* book by Hill. This Guidebook highlights five of the challenges that Hill mentions.

(i) Recognizing the complexity, uncertainty, and demands of the job

As the head of a unit, a manager comes face to face very quickly with the fact that he is the pivot point between his group and his superiors and other groups; and he must deal with the overall environment facing the organization, which is usually complex with many issues. His job is to manage up and out and at the same time manage the overall work of his group. Hill explained this with these words:

Managers have to juggle diverse, often ambiguous, responsibilities and are enmeshed in a web of relationships with people who often make conflicting demands: subordinates, bosses, and others inside and outside the organization. As a result, the daily routine in management is often pressured, hectic and fragmented. (pp. 13–14)

(ii) Defining one's as a manager

The hardest part of the transition from individual contributor as a program officer, salesman, or policy analyst to supervisor or manager is to define one's role and where one can add value to the organization. This is where the quote by Chester Barnard really becomes useful. Managers need to define their role in terms of maintaining the organization, not doing the work of the organization. They need to define their role in terms of how they balance the external environment and expectations of superiors with the need to secure and engage their staff in achieving the purpose of the organization. Linda Hill found this to be the case in her research.

The new managers generally defined their new positions by their responsibilities, not their relationships. Starting out as new managers they did not appreciate the distinction between being primarily responsible for people rather than the task. . . . All new managers were uneasy about managing relationships with superiors and peers. (p. 21)

(iii) Understanding the limitations of authority and how to lead organizations

One of the surprises that first-time managers and supervisors find is that once they get to be the boss, the authority of the position does not equate to significant power and influence. As a result, they have to find other ways to lead their groups and achieve the results required.

As John Kotter has illustrated in his book *Power and Influence*, the complexity, diversity, and interdependence of organizations often means that the key groups that are required to achieve an agenda are outside the authority of a manager. Managers have to find ways to mobilize their organization to achieve results. Linda Hill, in her research on first-time managers in their first year on the job, described the challenges these managers faced in her book *Becoming a Manager*.

The managers did not realize that they were confronting a basic reality of managerial work: that management is as much a position of dependence as a position of authority. They had to learn to lead by persuasion and not by directive. (p. 100)

During their first year the managers became aware of some of the major principles in exercising authority: establishing credibility, building subordinates' commitment, and leading the group. . . . They still had much to learn about how to exercise power and influence; now that they understood some of the principles, they had to implement them. Exercising power and influence, especially without relying heavily on formal authority, is a challenge for even the most seasoned managers. (pp. 111–12)

(iv) Managing themselves: dealing with the stress of learning a new function and the inherent conflicts in the job

Linda Hill has also found that most first-time managers go through a very difficult period developing their managerial identity, which

involves a lot of soul-searching about their capabilities, difficulties in terms of time management, and challenges in dealing with conflicts or expectations of staff. For many of these managers, it took at least a year to become comfortable in the role and to know how to carry out the job.

Through their experience, they had to learn to reframe their understanding of what it meant to be a manager and feel competent in their new role.

The managers not only struggled with anxiety about their performance, but they also grappled with what it felt like to be undergoing a change of identity. They reported feelings of marginality, of being betwixt and between. They found “changing from” as traumatic as “changing to.” . . . the promotion to manager was a mixed blessing because it forced the managers out of the specialty with which they identified. They lost their sense of mastery and of who they were. (pp. 177–78)

(v) Developing the required understanding of the political or relationship-building requirements of the job and capacity to manage

One of the major challenges faced by supervisors and middle managers is recognizing that there are “political” aspects to their jobs that involve networking and relationship building.

Hill summed it up this way:

To succeed, most of the new managers acquiesced to their “political” responsibilities. They acknowledged that they should devote time and energy to developing relationships with those outside their unit. (p. 83)

As they became aware of and accepted both their agenda-setting and network-building responsibilities, they began to recognize just how right they had been during their first days on the job. Time management, ability to set priorities, and decisiveness were critical managerial skills. Now . . . the challenge they faced was more complex. First, they

had to be able to set the agenda for their unit, to ensure that they were focusing on the things that were the most important . . . Second, they had to manage the tradeoffs, a very delicate balancing act among their responsibilities. (pp. 79–80)

Hill researched the prime qualities that are required to make the transition from policy or program officer to supervisor or manager:

From interviews I was able to identify the prime qualities the managers saw as part of managerial character: self-confidence, willingness to accept responsibility, patience, empathy and ability to live with imperfect solutions. Most said such factors of temperament were critical in making the transition successfully. (p. 167)

In addition, Hill notes that the development of this capacity occurs mainly through the experience of doing the job. In essence, they became managers through the experience of managing.

There is some preparation that can be done to ease this transition from individual contributor to manager. However, it is likely, based on Hill's research, that managers have actually to go through this experience completely to understand and be comfortable in a managerial role. This transition—as we will see below with Diane Lavoie, Jacob Martin, and Ron Storie—is not just cognitive learning. It involves carrying out new roles and developing the emotional strengths required to manage an organization.

One of the great contributions of Hill's book is that it helps managers going through this transition understand that they are in good company, and that they can make this transition smoother by learning from the experience of other first-time managers.

Middle managers in the public sector

One of the observations by the author in his article on middle managers, "Middle Managers: Upscale Supervisors or Emerging Executives," in the Canadian federal government was that they had to recognize that in making the transition to managers, they were no longer expected to be technical experts.

They were required to understand the environment they worked in, the realities facing superiors. Moreover, they had a responsibility to develop an agenda and direction for their group that was realistic and achievable within the context of their organization. In other words, they had to recognize that there is a “small ‘p’ political” side to their job involving building relationships and developing support for an agenda or direction.

The Paton research on middle managers shows that public sector managers face many of the same challenges as first-time managers in the private sector. Public sector managers face the challenge of managing interdependence within and without their organizations, perhaps in an extreme form.

Public sector managers had to recognize that they had to manage their relationships with superiors in a way that helped their boss to achieve their objectives and, at the same time, enable their own organization to meet their objectives.

Prior studies have addressed the complex accountability affecting Canadian deputy ministers in relation to, for example, the prime minister, the ministers, central agencies, etc. This is illustrated vividly in Osbaldeston, *Keeping Deputy Ministers Accountable*. Junior managers face similar complexity and uncertainty in their working environments, as they depend on many different groups. However, their authority is often very limited.

Like senior executives, junior managers need to follow the advice that Kotter has outlined in *Power and Influence*, of developing an agenda, building a network of support, and implementing that agenda through the network. As the author explained in his article on middle managers, junior managers, too, need to think like executives and manage their environment in order to achieve their agenda.

As an absolute minimum, managers at the chief and director level need to understand the environment that top executives face and endeavour to build relationships in order to achieve their superiors’ and their own agenda.

The Paton article also illustrates that the political environment of government, the pressures of dealing with the public and the press, and other considerable constraints are not limited to

senior executives such as deputy ministers. A program manager, or a regional director general in, for example, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, or Fisheries and Oceans, also requires a lot of managerial, leadership, and networking skills to manage their environment and achieve their objectives.

Middle managers will continue to have to learn how to manage in an uncertain and complex environment. . . . The more senior executives focus on working with ministers, parliamentarians, and external groups, the more important middle managers will become to carry out program and departmental management functions in the context of the overall policy directions and agenda of the minister. . . . To manage in this environment, middle managers will be required to develop the strategic perspective, environmental sensitivity, and broad understanding of departments and government that is usually associated with senior executives. (Paton, *Middle Managers*, p. 259)

Summary

Managers and supervisors can be successful in meeting the challenges of their new positions if they understand and accept the inherent complexity and difficulty of the job; define their role as manager as distinct from a program officer or policy advisor; understand the power relationships and decision-making in their organization; forge a managerial identity; and develop the capabilities and emotional intelligence required to lead their group.

Jacob Martin, as a recently appointed policy director; Diane Lavoie, as a new manager of enforcement; and Ronald Storie, as a general manager of a golf course, will all likely face the challenges that Linda Hill and Paton identified.

Before becoming general manager of the Heritage Golf Club, Ronald Storie has only managed a pro shop with some staff; now he is responsible for managing all aspects of a golf course, including areas where he has little experience or credibility. He also is taking on a job where the failure rate is astounding. He will need

to quickly develop his managerial identity and define his role. Unfortunately, as Hill has described, he will be doing it while on the job with the board of directors and members, as well as staff, looking over his shoulder.

Given the lack of serious management training in most public organizations, and the lack of support or advice for managers who struggle with their roles, there are far too many instances where managers face serious difficulties doing their jobs and are never successful in a managerial role.

A manager who is struggling with his or her job is not pretty. This can result in serious problems for organizations and particularly for the staff. It also can create havoc in the lives of these new managers who are just not comfortable in their jobs and never quite feel that they have a “handle” on how to carry out their role successfully.

The Politics of Management course is designed to improve the capacity of students to:

- Understand what management involves
- Analyze the organizational environment and power relationships
- Think like a manager and develop a managerial identity
- Determine the best way to develop an agenda or strategy for carrying out particular management jobs—especially in their first supervisory or management job

1.3 How Do Organizations Work? A Managerial Perspective

To be effective as a manager, one has to understand how organizations work. Because management takes place within a specific and changing context, it is very difficult to rely on general theories to guide managerial behaviour. The history, culture, structure,

environment, decision-making process, and players in each organization are different. In fact, the same organization might operate quite differently over a period of a few months.

A manager needs to know the factors, or influences, that can shape a particular organization and its decision-making processes and recognize certain trends or patterns. The executive has to, in effect, put together his/her own analysis of the organization, based on the factors at play, and has to understand how he/she interacts with the organization. The organization may be analyzed from three different perspectives:

- The overall dynamics of the organization as a whole, its environment, and its systems
- The key relationships among the groups and players within the organization
- The major issues, events, or decisions the organization faces, often within a relatively short time period

This Guide will briefly describe these three levels of analysis and their significance for managers and executives. In addition, readings in other areas of organizational behaviour, human resources, and organizational change may also be relevant. This course, however, will be focused on what these concepts mean in practical terms to the executives who have to lead and direct such organizations.

Overall dynamics of the organization and its systems

To best understand the overall dynamics of an organization, students should refer to John Kotter's *Organizational Dynamics*, which explains the six key elements required for analysis. The chart in that book is an excellent reference for understanding these factors. This chart will be included in the readings for the course.

- Environment (external and task)
- Dominant coalition
- Employees and other tangible assets
- Formal organizational arrangements
- Social systems
- Technology

(i) Environment

Kotter describes the environment as including two aspects:

- a. The external environment
- b. The task environment

The external environment is the broader context within which the manager and the organization must operate. It could include the economy, the political environment, societal values, relationships with other governments, etc. The task environment refers to the key suppliers of resources (Kotter, *Organizational Dynamics*, p.12). This would include funding organizations, those that are integral to delivery, and those in a relationship of direct interdependency such as in, for example, immigration and the RCMP, which must co-operate in the delivery of border services.

There is a wealth of research (Lawrence and Lorsch, *Organization and Environment*, p. 209) that illustrates the need for organizations to interact with their external and task environments, and organizations have to be designed to respond to these requirements. As Barnard noted many years ago, the role of the manager is often to determine how best to balance external requirements with the goals of the organization for which they are responsible.

(ii) Employees and other tangible assets

This dimension includes factors such as the size of the workforce and the nature of the assets of the organization—land, infrastructure, tools, and money (Kotter, *Organizational Dynamics*, p.14).

The range can vary widely among organizations. For example, a department of national defence can have tens of thousands of employees, dozens of locations in the country and overseas, and literally billions of dollars in equipment, some deployed abroad. Compare this to a central agency that has a few hundred staff, is located in one building, and has as its major material assets computers and computer systems. Likewise, their dynamics and their challenges will vary widely.

(iii) Organizational structure

This element refers to the formal organizational arrangements and systems that shape the operations of the organization. This includes the division of labour, hierarchy, and operational systems (Kotter, *Organizational Dynamics*, p.15). Kotter argues that organizational structures and systems can have a major impact on organizational dynamics. This is why it is so critical for managers to understand the structure and systems of their organization, and their likely impacts on the available options. One part of understanding the organization is the degree of differentiation and integration as defined by Jay Galbraith in *Designing Organizations* (Appendix A).

(iv) Social systems

The social system, according to Kotter, is the culture and social structure of an organization (Kotter, *Organizational Dynamics*, p.18). Organizations develop cultures and values that lead to the establishment of social systems, where groups sharing a common perspective work together more easily than groups that have a different background and organizational culture.

(v) Technology

Kotter defines technology as the techniques, or approaches, that the organization uses to achieve its objectives. He does not define technology as machines or equipment, but more in terms of processes. For example, the technology for a central budget agency may include: the review of submissions, the development of policy, the establishment of budgets, and controls for

departments. This is very different from a fisheries department that allocates quotas for fishing and enforces regulations in the field; or a revenue department that processes millions of tax filings and interprets the application of the tax code.

(vi) Dominant coalition

This element is extremely useful and important for managers to understand. Kotter defined it basically as the: “minimum group of co-operating employees who oversee the organization as a whole and control its basic policy making.” (Kotter, *Organizational Dynamics*, p.20)

To identify the dominant coalition, one needs to look at the major decisions made by the company, department, or association and ask who had to be involved and provide support.

Most of the time, the dominant coalition includes the senior people in the hierarchy, but not always. For example, sometimes the minister and chief of political staff take on the major policy role and allocate implementation to the deputy minister. In this case, even the deputy minister might not be critical to the dominant coalition for overall policy decisions. In other situations, it might be the deputy who is the real power broker, and the minister is content to focus on a few areas of interest and focus on his constituency.

In non-profit organizations, the key members of a dominant coalition are usually on the executive committee, or are prominent board members who represent key organizations. In some cases, however, a person will be part of the dominant coalition because they are able to articulate approaches to policy and gain support for their position.

In governments, managers are continuously assessing power relationships to understand who is shaping the decisions and how the various players interact. This is essential to determine if a cabinet document will “fly” or not.

The organizational dynamics components developed by Kotter are not new. What is really useful is how he puts them together into a framework that helps managers understand how organizations work.

The idea that these elements, in the medium term, will need to be in alignment, or achieve some sort of equilibrium, is a very significant insight. Managers can use this understanding to determine how to respond to issues when becoming aware of a major non-alignment.

If an organization faces a major change in its external environment there will be a non-alignment with the organizational structure, social systems, or other elements. This will require, through a chain reaction, that some adjustments be made to maintain alignment.

Take, for example, Research in Motion (RIM). It faced a major market shock in 2012, as Samsung and Apple developed their hand-held phones with many more applications. This eventually put a strain on the unique co-management regime of the company, required a change of the dominant coalition to a new leader, and brought about serious changes to the organizational processes involved in product development and the product itself. By 2013, they had made a lot of adjustments and launched new products to try to re-establish alignment with the market. By 2013, the stock price had somewhat recovered. At least, the company did what it had to do to realign with the market environment. Time will tell whether they were successful or were too late.

Another example might be a government organization that has a very strong culture and social system linked to established professions and universities. Or one that is wedded to a particular approach to implementing environmental or health policies and is based on strong government intervention, complex federal regulations, and lengthy processes. This culture may have little sensitivity to economic realities, economic development, and job creation.

With new governments and changes in political direction, senior management reporting to ministers may face significant challenges balancing the culture, expertise, and advice offered by incumbent officials. The government may want a more streamlined approach to regulation, more provincial versus federal leadership, and higher priority for economic and resource development. This could create a major non-alignment with the leading

officials and social system in a department. Unless the department adapts quickly, the minister will either have to appoint new senior managers, or drastically change the traditional practices and policies of the organization.

So, the reason that Kotter's framework is so useful to the Politics of Management course is that it provides a way of understanding the dynamics of organizations, and it can be easily used by managers to assess their management challenges and the areas they will need to focus on to be effective.

This Guide is designed to provide only the bare essentials that students require to analyze organizations and understand how to manage better within an organizational environment. This brief introduction is aimed to help students assess the context of the major cases in the course; it is within this organizational context that managers must develop and implement their chosen strategies.

To oversimplify this fascinating area, there are seven factors that must be continuously taken into account in analyzing an organization and developing various strategies for management.

All of these aspects of organizational behaviour must be understood within the context of the specific organization and its relationship to a particular unit or group.

- Assessing the External and Task Environment
- Determining the Power Structure and Decision-making processes.
- Identifying the Key Dependency Relationships
- Understanding the History and Culture of an Organization
- Knowing the Incentives that Drive Behaviour
- Analyzing the Forces for and Against Change and Leverage Points

- Understanding the key decisions, and the dynamics surrounding those decisions. These decisions can enhance or undermine the agenda of a manager.

Summary

There is a wealth of literature on all of these aspects of organizational behaviour, including excellent books on organizational culture, decision-making, dependency relationships, etc. It is not the purpose of this Guidebook, however, to provide a course on organizational behaviour. The key elements provided by Kotter in his *Organizational Dynamics* book will provide a sufficient foundation for the assessment of management challenges and the development of strategies to meet those challenges.

The three managers we described earlier—Jacob Martin, policy director, Diane Lavoie, fisheries manager, and Ronald Storie, golf club manager—will all find that, in their jobs, they must understand their organization and its relationships with key stakeholders and the environment.

If, for example, Diane is facing very hostile fishing groups, due to dwindling stocks and prices, the enforcement challenge is going to be very different than if all these groups are happy with their business and the department. She may require more support from superiors than normal, and the skills and capacities of the team might be quite different than if relationships with fishing groups were healthy and stable.

To succeed in his job as a manager, Ronald Storie will have to really understand the dynamics of the Heritage Golf Club and the key factors that lead to the persistent firing of previous general managers. He has to find a way to perform and meet the expectations of the board.

For Jacob Martin, a policy group usually is linked to the overall agenda of the department as derived from the minister, the deputy minister, and the overall government agenda. To do his job well, Jacob will have to understand the overall dynamics of the department and interface with the Aboriginal groups. It might be sufficient for a cabinet document to get the support of the minister, but if the government and the prime minister have

a clear preference, it will be critical further to understand the dominant coalition with respect to that issue.

All three of these first-time managers will enhance their capacity to be successful if they can understand their role and the dynamics of the organizations. This is why understanding organizations and how they work is so essential to effective management.

Power mapping for managers

In addition to the broad systems that shape the organization, a manager must take into account its structure and division of labour and its authority and power structure and identify the key players or dominant coalition.

As various authors have pointed out (Richard Cyert and James March, *A Behavioral Theory of the Firm*, p. 27), organizations are usually made up of coalitions of interests and can often be best understood by analyzing which coalition has the dominant influence at any given time or on a particular issue.

Thus, from a manager's viewpoint, it is very important to analyze how the structure, as well as the key players and groups, can shape an organization. If, for example, an executive committee is dominated by a deputy minister and assistant deputy ministers who more or less share a common philosophy and approach, then it is likely that they will make most of the decisions. However, political leaders, especially after an election, might have a very clear agenda as well. In this case, the main drivers of change will be these elected leaders, and the role of the public service would be to implement their proposed changes.

In a private sector firm, for instance, there might be tremendous differences among the executives on strategy, policy, or operations. If these strong sources of power counterbalance each other, the company will inevitably face a crisis of decision-making, including erratic decisions that are incompatible with a consistent approach.

The Politics of Management course aims to develop skills to analyze power relationships in an organization, understand the major dependency relationships, and identify the levers that a

manager can press. This type of analysis, or “power mapping,” is the focus of one of the first two cases of the course.

To establish and implement an agenda and get the job done, the executive must understand the organization and its players and be able to assess with some degree of accuracy the probability of support for a given course of action. An executive who constantly pursues an agenda, only to be thwarted by other players or by circumstances that he has failed to take into account, will soon lose credibility, as well as the ability to influence superiors, colleagues, and subordinates.

At this point three concepts must be discussed: authority, influence, and power.

Authority

Authority is the right to make decisions, or take action, as the person responsible for an organization or group. It is usually conferred to a position and can involve a variety of activities, such as establishing a budget, hiring staff, reviewing performance, signing off on contracts, or correspondence, etc.

Authors such as Kotter argue that the authority of most positions in complex organizations is not sufficient to achieve a management agenda. Managers and organizations are usually dependent on many other groups and individuals over whom they have no authority. He also argues that managers are dependent on staff for their commitment, expertise, etc. and that authority is not sufficient to elicit the required commitment to achieve an agenda.

Influence

Influence can be loosely defined as the capacity to have an impact on the actions or behaviour of others. In his book *Power and Influence*, Kotter illustrates the myriad ways managers employ to influence others: personality, credibility, expertise, vision, appeal to self-interest, and even humour (pp. 78–92).

Kotter also argues that since most positions do not, and cannot, have sufficient authority, there will be enormous power gaps in any job involving a complex organization; that is, the

gap between the required power to establish and implement an agenda and the power that the manager actually has.

For this reason, managers must develop exceptional abilities to exert influence in order to overcome their dependency on superiors, colleagues, other organizations, and even on staff. As a result, Kotter also argues, in both *Power and Influence* and *The General Managers*, it is in the area of influence where most of the focus should be for executive development. This will be further explored in the last section of this Guidebook.

Power

Power is often defined as the ability of Person A to get person B to do something that person A wants done, or, among organizations, the equivalent. Power can combine both authority and influence and possibly other factors. The successful exercise of power can be observed and measured by determining whether person A was able to get person B to take a particular action, even if person B did not agree or was not interested. If Person B was not subject to the authority of Person A, this would be a clear illustration that this was the exercise of power and not authority.

J. Pfeffer (*Power In Organizations*, pp. 97–135) illustrates many of the sources of power in an organization, which may include control of scarce resources, management of uncertainty, provision of expertise, and control over defining alternatives. One of the first cases in the course focuses on power mapping for a regional director.

Power can often be seen as a negative concept, as in the brutal regime of Stalin or Hitler, or the abuse of power by governments or individuals. In organizations, there are certainly managers who through manipulation, loyalty, fear, divide-and-conquer techniques, and even sabotage can wield power for their own self-interest or aggrandizement. In these cases, having sufficient power does not contribute to a healthy or innovative organization.

In this course, power is a neutral concept related to the capacity of a manager to develop and implement an agenda in complex organizations. The exercise of power in the Politics of Management course is aimed at achieving the attributes of effective organizations, as described in section 1.4, above.

Summary

Developing the power to define and implement an agenda is essential to management in complex organizations with high dependency relationships, and the inherent conflict that occurs in diverse organizations.

Jacob Martin, as a new policy director, will need to quickly understand where the power lies in the department, and what the major priorities are. Is it the minister who is driving the agenda? Is it the Aboriginal groups? What roles is the deputy minister carrying out—trusted policy advisor to the minister, or policy-taker from either the minister or the prime minister? Is this issue part of the overall government agenda and that of the prime minister? Is there a consensus on the problem and a clear path forward, or are there major differences of views among the key players?

As a policy director, especially a newly appointed one, Jacob has to do his own power mapping and be ready to determine his agenda and approach in relation to these factors.

A couple of examples illustrate how important it is for managers to understand the power relationships in an organization. In one federal department, a DG of Communications was known as a “yeller.” She constantly berated staff with a loud and aggressive voice and created a hostile and fearful organizational environment. At one point, thirty staff signed a petition asking for her to be replaced and sent it to the deputy minister. The deputy minister did nothing. Apparently, he had concluded that she was doing a good job; and was not inclined to make hard personnel decisions anyway. Clearly, the staff overestimated their power and did not appreciate how the deputy minister would respond.

A similar situation occurred when the senior management of the RCMP petitioned the prime minister concerning the management style of the commissioner. All of the senior staff eventually lost their positions before the commissioner changed. The commissioner outlasted all of them because, clearly, the government was not yet ready to make the change and had their own reasons for keeping him.

These two examples show how easily it is for managers to misunderstand the power relationships in an organization. The

focus of the discussion of power in this course is to learn to offset the inherent power gaps present in most modern complex organizations, and enable good managers to get the job done.

Managers and the decision-making process

One of the key ways in which managers can shape organizations is by developing a clear agenda supported by the key players, understanding the decision-making process, and using all their influence to ensure that decisions enhance the achievement of their agenda.

One useful reference that helps explain how organizations make decisions is *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies* by John W. Kingdon. His analysis is consistent with other authors who found that some organizations tend not to be goal- or objective-oriented. In some cases, many other forces, other than the pursuit of specific objectives, have an impact on the work (e.g., history; professional orientation; avoidance of uncertainty; desire to maintain autonomy; etc.). Hence, it is important for executives to understand what tends to drive the organization in order to manage it.

Kingdon also argued that to understand decision-making, four relatively separate streams must be taken into account: problems, solutions, participants, and opportunities. Sometimes, the relationship between these factors is not clear. As Kingdon states:

Some participants will actually fix on a course of action and cast about for a problem to which it is a solution, discarding problems that do not seem to fit. (p. 91)

In his case studies, Kingdon also noted that the four major streams often flowed separately, and that movement of the agenda often occurred when these streams came together either by chance, or by design.

Once we understand these streams taken separately, the key to understanding agenda and policy change is their coupling. The separate streams come together at critical times. A problem is recognized, a solution is available,

the political climate makes the time right for a change, and the constraints do not prohibit action. (p. 93)

When problems, solutions, policies, and politics come together, there is what Kingdon calls a policy window, of which policy entrepreneurs can take advantage—just like a space window (Kingdon, p. 204).

From a managers' point of view, Kingdon's analysis describes a real and immediate aspect of management. It is clear that to achieve their agenda, executives must be on top of highly current information, know the views of the various players, and understand the coupling of key streams of activity.

The organizational entrepreneur is able to take advantage of events to promote an agenda. The executive who is constantly missing the signals and who has timing problems in presenting his/her proposals will have limited success. One of the qualities of very successful deputy ministers is this ability to influence the decision-making process in government in the midst of complex political and bureaucratic dynamics and complicated processes involving cabinet and ministerial decision-making.

The same is true of managers in non-profits or the private sector. Those who can assess the total environment and trends and bring together pertinent key decisions, at exactly the right time, can develop power and influence. This is how reputations are built and careers made.

One of the most useful and unknown books on public sector management is by Gordon Chase, *How to Manage in the Public Sector*. This book was developed by a fellow student in the Kennedy School of Government in 1981. After the untimely death of Chase in a car accident, Elizabeth Reveal developed this book based on lecture notes. Chase, who was an accomplished manager in Washington and New York City, taught management from the point of view of a manager leading an organization having to deal with politicians or mayors, central agencies, the media, and other organizations.

The work of Kotter and Reveal/Chase bring an incredibly realistic assessment of management with a rare ability to articulate

the craft of management and provide real insights into what it takes to be successful.

These two quotes illustrate the insight that Chase brings to the subject:

Managers operate in a highly political and complex environment. Managers who produce are managers who have learned to turn internal and external relationships to their advantage: who know how to anticipate conflict, promote their agenda, and earn the professional respect of varied and diverse associates. Failure comes often to managers who have not mastered this environment, or taken its pitfalls and perils seriously. To understand this environment requires an appreciation of who the players are and why they are important. (p. 16)

Other players can affect the manager in a number of welcome and not so welcome ways. They can provide or withhold necessary clearances, authorizations, and approvals on budget, personnel, procurement, or regulation—that determine whether programs will flourish or wither. They can provide political support, or they can turn political power against a manager's agency and program. And they can co-operate actively and participate in a program's management and operation—through volunteer services, donation of time and skills, or organize grass roots opposition to a manager's goals and strategies. Determining who is likely to do what, to whom, and when, is a skill as well as a talent. (p. 17)

Successful executives try to manage the process of decision-making to bring together key forces in an organization (e.g., problem; choices; opportunities; participants) and promote a given agenda. They will work to define or frame a problem in a certain way to assist the agenda. They will ensure certain players are involved to support a certain direction. They may limit various

choices or shape alternatives to help their own cause. In government, if they are able to develop a strong synergy with their minister and chief political advisor in a department, their chance of success is greatly enhanced.

Osbaldeston (*Keeping Deputy Ministers Accountable*, p.85) has a chart that illustrates the complex nature of decision-making in government through a diagram that puts the minister and deputy minister at the neck of an hourglass, managing an agenda up to the prime minister and cabinet, out to various key groups, and down to the organization and department for which they are responsible. This chart will be included in the readings for the course.

Osbaldeston also argued that when ministers have a common agenda with senior management and the political staff, their chances of success are significantly enhanced. This is also a good example of the development of power in complex and uncertain situations. By aligning agendas with key department leaders and the overall agenda of the government, the ability to achieve that agenda will be considerably improved and the power gap will be dramatically reduced.

It is important that middle managers, or first-time supervisors in public organizations, understand the agendas of the key leaders of the organization and how they are working together or not co-operating in achieving this agenda.

Based on research with ministers and deputy ministers, Osbaldeston (*Keeping Deputy Ministers Accountable*, p. 90) notes that a major source of difficulty for ministers is their inability to develop a strong, coherent agenda aligned with the key players.

The very same kind of assessment could be done in terms of the relationship between a particular proposal in a private company and the overall direction of the top executives, or strategy of the corporation. A proposal that moves the corporation strategy forward and is aligned with the CEO's mandate will have a much better chance of success than one that is seen to be associated with aspects of the business that the company wishes to sideline or eliminate.

Case example: Jacob Martin

As a new policy director, if Jacob Martin is able to understand how streams of decision-making come together, determine how a particular policy proposal fits with the agenda of the government, minister, and deputy minister, and then identify the opportunities to move forward a policy agenda, he will increase his chances of success.

In an environment with many different coalitions of interests, whether it be government, corporations, or associations, an executive has to work hard at understanding key events and issues and determining how to take advantage of the convergence of issues and opportunities to promote his/her agenda.

1.4 Creating Productive, High-Performance Organizations

The business and management literature is full of studies that outline the requirements for effective organizations. As new managers take on their roles, it is very important that they have a good idea of the key elements that make organizations successful.

There is no doubt that the realities of working in government and non-profit organizations are very different from those in the private sector. An effective manager must completely understand the nature of the organization where he/she is working, and the specific requirements of managing in that environment.

The knowledge of the organization and its systems and the informal relationships one develops over the years can be a huge advantage in developing and implementing an agenda. For that reason, knowledge of the business is a very important factor. But the core challenges are very similar in public, private, and not-for-profit organizations.

There are as many differences within each of these three sectors as there are among them. Running a small, high-tech software company frequently developing new products is totally different than running an established railway or a shipping company. In government, managing the Department of Defence is surely very

different than Aboriginal Affairs or the Health department. Finally, even within the non-profit sector, there are huge differences among these organizations in terms of size, membership, policy direction, etc. that definitely affect the management approach.

To manage in a given situation is necessary to understand the unique nature of that situation and organization, reviewing how it meets the key criteria for effectiveness; then, determining the best management strategy given the realities of that situation.

Regardless of whether one is managing in government, in a private company, or in a not-for-profit association, the key elements of the job are the challenges of:

- Providing direction for an organization
- Developing the required support and commitment to achieve the objectives of that organization

This Guide is focused on the essential challenges and choices that managers must make to ensure that the organization is productive and effective. The perspective of this course is that every organization has its own history, culture, and dynamics, and a good manager has to figure that out and then develop a management approach so that he or she can create the most effective organization possible.

Successful organizations have certain characteristics that managers will need to strive to achieve if they want to accomplish its mission and build a good team.

The article “No-Name Management for the ’90s” by this author and Agnes Jelking outlines seven requirements for successful organizations in the public and private sectors (*Optimum*, Summer 1994, pp. 35– 41). These attributes were derived from an analysis of public and private sector literature on management, leadership, and organizations. These features are still valid today.

There is general agreement on the key attributes of the well-performing organizations. Thus, rather than creating still one more management panacea or buzzword, the authors presented these as elements of a “no-name management” approach, and

argued that we should focus on the consistent application of these basic principles, as opposed to the continuous reinvention of approaches to performance assessment.

Thus, good organizations, according to the no-name management approach, must have:

1. *Clear mission, vision, and strategy.* The literature on companies illustrates that companies that have a clear view of their role and, particularly, their strategy in a highly competitive market, are the most successful.

Jim Collins has written a fantastic book titled *Good to Great*. He shows that those companies with a relentless focus on establishing the right mission or strategy and achieving that mission succeed while others can disappear very easily. The challenge of having a clear mission, vision, or strategy is difficult in the private sector due to changing markets and technology and the capacity of leadership to make adjustments when strategies are not successful. In government, there are even more challenges in creating a consistent direction. The changes in government, ministers, and senior personnel can result in constant adjustments to the directions of departments that make it very difficult to provide a coherent focus and direction.

Notwithstanding these challenges, managers of organizations have to determine the core purpose and direction for an organization and then ensure that the organization works to achieve that direction.

2. *Strong and effective leadership.* Organizations are usually more effective when the leader is able to provide the direction and achieve results. This does not mean that the leader has to be an egocentric “heroic” manager, but there are certain basic requirements of leadership that make organizations successful. Jim Collins’s book also notes that the most successful leaders he has observed are amazingly humble and also believe strongly in a top-notch team approach to decision-making.

Providing direction and a sense of purpose, and building the required team required for the organization to be successful is the essence of leadership and management. Managers must be able to provide this kind of leadership but also to be able to assess themselves and their capacities and make the adjustments necessary to their strategy and their own style, depending on the requirements of the organization and its situation.

3. *Efficient structures and networks.* Most modern organizations recognize the importance of a strong financial management function, or information technology, and recognize the need to adjust organizational structures to meet changing needs. To address their challenges, companies have created single IT, human resources, and financial platforms for operations around the world. So, it is naïve to think that there is huge flexibility in large, global companies. Achieving this kind of uniformity is a major challenge for managers in global corporations.

Like large corporations, governments are complex and require some uniformity and consistency, sometimes to the point of being counterproductive. Generally, governments do create constraints, rules, and procedures that are incredibly difficult to deal with, such as staffing, purchasing, contracting, reporting to Parliament, etc. A lot of these rules and processes are driven by the public nature of government and the requirements for accountability. One of the major challenges for public sector managers is to deal with these constraints but get the job done. This sometimes involves some creativity and the ability to challenge the purpose and approach to rules and practices. It definitely requires a good understanding of these requirements and the people responsible for administering them.

Thus, whatever the organization or sector, managers have to learn to work with the organizational structure, systems, and networks that exist and shape them, where required, to achieve their agendas.

4. *Commitment and involvement of employees to perform their functions productively.* In private corporations that are successful, employees are committed to the company, and the leaders of the organization know how to build and strengthen that commitment. As far as the author has been able to determine, all surveys addressing workplace morale in government departments indicate major challenges.

The nature of government with continuous change, political dynamics, serious constraints, and constant turnover of managers can easily undermine commitment of staff to the public service. When private companies begin to fail financially, the morale issues that emerge are serious. Keeping a strong committed and focused staff in these circumstances is very challenging.

Regardless of the sector, managers have to figure out how to build a quality team and maintain the focus and commitment of staff to the organization.

5. *Clear client focus and efficient quality services and products.* In the private sector, if you do not serve clients with either products or services, you basically disappear as a company. The history books are littered with examples of companies that have missed the boat with clients or customers, while others have thrived. Jim Collins in his book *Good to Great* provides examples of these. Providing services in government is also challenging—whether it be getting a passport, an old age pension, or a driver's licence, or working with regulators on product approvals.

Managers must be able to assess the quality of the service their organizations provide and their distinctive value and to understand how their organization contributes to the quality of services and products. Then, they must be able to lead the organization into making the required improvements.

6. *State-of-the-art management support systems to ensure their continued performance.* The importance of the

administrative and management systems needed to support effective organizations is often underestimated. Unfortunately, these systems are often described as overhead, as opposed to essential functions to achieve the organization's mandate.

The great companies that Jim Collins describes develop superb human resource development policies to ensure that their companies excel. Companies like Fed Express or Wal-Mart have developed IT systems for inventory, shipping, and logistics that are very important to their competitiveness. In government, the financial, personnel, IT, and other systems are also essential for high performance.

Unfortunately, in large public sector organizations, there are so many factors shaping these support systems that they often end up being overly centralized and process-oriented and lose sight of their essential purpose. For example, government contracts as low as \$25,000 require time-consuming open bidding for transparency, and the staffing process gets mired in so many factors that getting the right person for the job becomes almost a subordinate priority.

It is essential for managers to understand these support systems and how they can help to achieve organizational objectives. It is also essential to manage their intrinsic constraints and work effectively with staff in these support functions, if one wants to be effective as a manager.

7. *Capacity for continuous learning and innovation.* This last attribute is discussed in the literature on learning organizations. Given the rapidly changing environment that most organizations face today, it is necessary to have the capacity to learn and innovate on a continuing basis. Again, Jim Collins found in his book *How the Mighty Fall and Why Some Companies Never Give In* (pp. 21–22) that organizations that fail typically ignore the signs of problems and just do not respond and learn.

Managers of organizations must be ready to learn continuously about what makes their organization tick, what

makes their team effective, and how to generate innovation and success. This also requires them to be able to reflect and learn about the effectiveness of their management approach and what adjustments might be required in various situations.

Case examples

To effectively lead a high-performance organization today, managers must learn how to develop these attributes in government, non-profit, or private sectors. In this way, a department or company can create a sustainable organization that is able to focus on its key objectives, achieve them, and constantly learn how to improve itself.

Diane Lavoie, as a recently appointed head of an enforcement group in the Fisheries department, has quickly to diagnose the strengths and weaknesses of her organization and its capacity to meet its mission. She will have to understand and maybe even interpret the mandate she has been given. She will have to provide direction to her group in a way that mobilizes them to do the job. She will have to clearly define how her group will deal with clients, which in this case is more complicated because the ultimate objective is to protect the fish from being overharvested.

As part of government, she will undoubtedly face challenges with support systems, which may include materials, such as cars, boats, or computers, or staffing actions. She may even come face to face with the challenges of dealing with poor performance. Finally, a key to success for Diane will be to continuously learn what works and to develop a team that has the capacity to learn. In addressing all of these dimensions of productive organizations, Diane can build a strong team that is able to serve the department well.

Given the complexity of organizations and their tendency to be shaped by various coalitions of interests pursuing different objectives, or responding to events in a different manner, high performance attributes may not be easy to achieve—especially on a continuing basis.

1.5 Management Challenges in Modern Organizations

The challenges that managers face at any given level in order to achieve productive and effective organizations are considerable. This course is focused on the core challenges that first-time managers and supervisors face in a wide variety of organizations. The course includes a variety of cases involving government departments at the regional level, a central agency position, and a corporate service function. The course also includes cases on non-profits. Over time, other cases will be added to increase variety and to focus further on the first two levels of management. The aim of the cases is to put students in the shoes of managers and, through the experience of analyzing and discussing cases, to develop key insights into the choices that managers can make in a variety of organizations and circumstances.

The major textbook that was originally used for this course was John Kotter's *Power and Influence*. Unfortunately, that book is now out of print, but this course contains key readings from that source. This Guidebook will briefly describe the overall approach that Kotter developed to assess management challenges. These insights were developed largely through his study of general managers of corporations (J. Kotter, *The General Managers*) but his initial work was done on his study on mayors of large cities and their roles. Interestingly, he found that the key elements for being effective as a manager in either type of organization were very similar.

Kotter's insights are at the heart of this course. He argues that there is an irreversible trend in business and government toward increasing organizational diversity and interdependence (Kotter, *Power and Influence*, pp.12–51).

Diversity can generate extensive conflicts between individuals and groups with different perspectives or stakes in an organization and make it very difficult for managers to achieve a particular agenda or direction. Interdependence—when two or more parties have power over each other and require each other to get the job done—is also a growing feature of modern

organizations. In organizations that are interdependent, unilateral action is rarely possible and co-operation is essential.

In diverse and interdependent organizations, the challenge for managers is to reconcile many different interests, conflicts, and priorities and bring them into a co-operative working relationship. Hence, management and leadership can be viewed as the “politics” of establishing the required coalition to achieve the aims of the organization or of implementing the manager’s agenda.

Thus, the central theme of the “The Politics of Management” is the challenge faced by managers of modern organizations highlighted by their dependency on many players over whom they have limited or no authority, or who may have substantially different agendas or priorities. This can create what Kotter calls a power gap—that is, the difference between the amount of power needed to get the job done and the amount of power that the manager has.

For this reason, a session in this course is directly focused on improving the ability of students to assess the levers of power that a manager can use in a particular situation to overcome the inherent power gaps in a job.

Another course priority is to discuss how managers can develop an agenda that is implementable in the context of the growing power gaps that characterize modern organizations. To be successful in these situations, managers have to understand their organizational environment, the multiple dependency relationships they face, and the key opportunities and constraints that shape decisions. Out of this assessment, they must design an agenda, or strategy, that will maximize the chance of success and contribute to an effective organization.

Kotter argues that the most effective managers are those who develop an agenda, build a network, and implement their agenda through the network. He came to this conclusion through extensive research and interviews with general managers of corporations and of mayors of cities in the USA (J. Kotter, *The General Managers*).

Managers who are trying to implement an agenda or achieve a high-performance organization must bridge power gaps through the development of influence and co-operation with superiors, colleagues, subordinates, clients, and partners. In short, to be successful in modern organizations, leaders have to learn how to gain sufficient power and influence to do a job; and learn how to use their power and influence responsibly.

The challenges that Kotter outlines for managing organizations today apply to a wide variety of complex organizations. Similarly, the kind of assessment and analysis required to develop effective managerial strategies are remarkably consistent throughout government, business, and non-profit organizations.

The reason why Kotter's *Power and Influence* is such a useful book for studying management in the public sector is that government is the extreme version of a complex organization with high interdependence and multiple dependency relations. Moreover, the techniques that Kotter advocates for dealing with complex organizations today are highly applicable to public-sector organizations.

This "Politics of Management Course" has been designed to build a strong repertoire of analytical skills and the capacity to assess the management challenges for producing effective organizations and developing strategies that can apply to a wide range and types of organizations.

The next section of this Guidebook outlines the framework that the author has developed for the assessment of the management environment and the analysis of the choices and opportunities available to a manager. This framework is the centrepiece of the course and is utilized to analyze the cases throughout the course.



SECTION II

Thinking Like a Manager: A Framework

2.0 The Framework

The framework outlined in this Guide is the centrepiece for the “Politics of Management: Thinking Like a Manager” course. It was developed by the author in the early 1990s and was based on a combination of the approach outlined by Kotter (*Power and Influence*), and by Rosemary Stewart (*Choices for the Manager*).

The “Thinking Like a Manager” framework below deliberately places the manager in the centre of relationships with superiors, subordinates, clients, and other groups. It includes key concepts necessary for analyzing the relationship of the manager with these key groups and developing an agenda. “You cannot take the manager out of management” is one of the central premises of the course.

This is the course in one chart or framework. Students achieve the most learning by continuously applying this framework throughout the course to discuss management challenges and then applying the framework to management cases. The feedback from many students over the years is that the framework is the most useful part of the course because it gives them a way to make sense of complex management situations and then determine approaches or strategies for dealing with them.

The challenge faced by many managers is bringing together the people, resources, decisions, and key forces within the organization

required to achieve a particular agenda or aim. It is critical that the manager align the key players and factors shaping the organization with the overall agenda. Executives must also recognize when constraints are real and when they can be overcome. They must, as Rosemary Stewart has shown, learn what kinds of choices they can make in terms of their role, the domain they will focus on, and their roles with respect to others.

The concept of alignment is key to understanding how managers can get their jobs done within the diversity and interdependency that characterize modern organizations. The key to managing an agenda successfully in most complex organizations, public or private, is to align all the factors that relate to the job—people, priorities, resources—so they mutually support and reinforce a particular direction. Then, over time, managers must keep adjusting, changing, and developing the key elements of the organization, the agenda, and other factors.

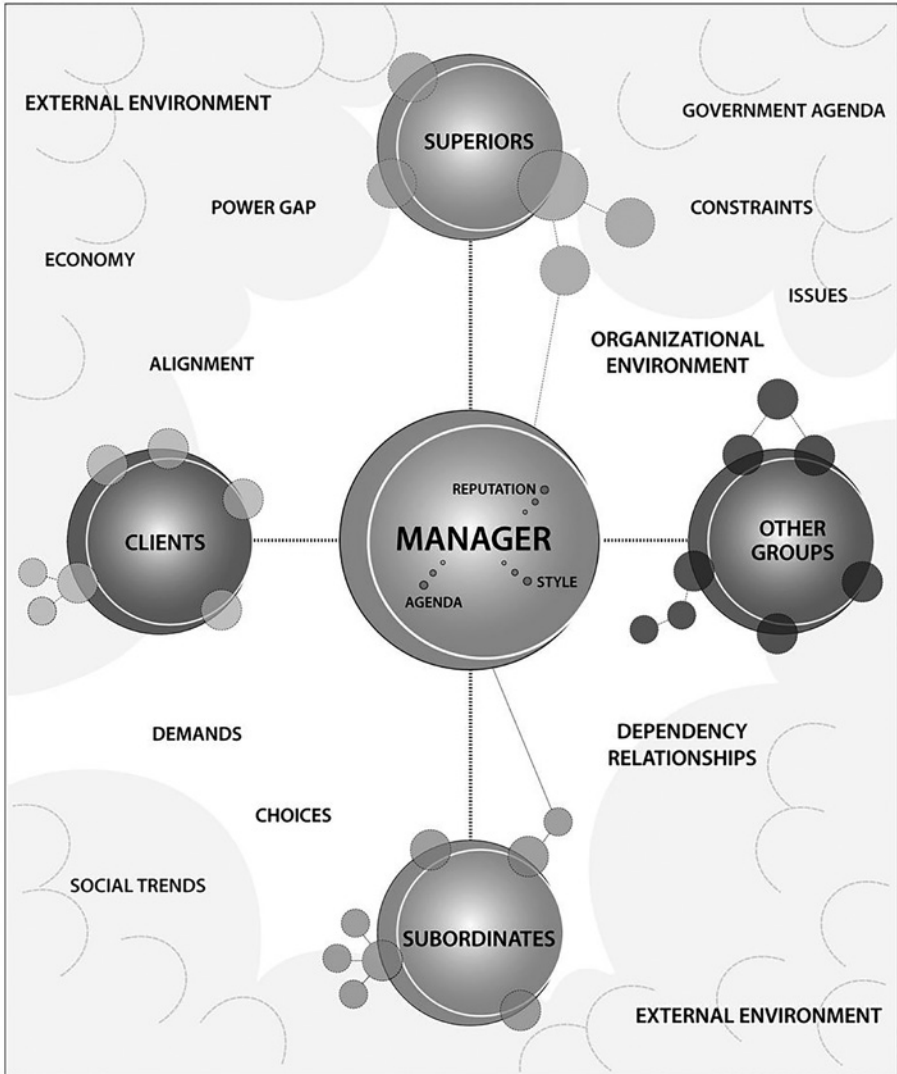
The “Thinking Like a Manager Framework” re-emphasizes the core focus of this course: the manager and the job. At the centre of the diagram is the manager, who must achieve an agenda and get a job done while dealing with superiors, subordinates, clients, and colleagues, as well as taking into account the external environment and the organization. The manager typically interacts with all of these areas simultaneously.

The manager is not just a person in a position. The manager is someone with a background, a reputation, and a certain set of skills. The managers must design their approach to the job based on the relationships they have and the requirements of the job, but also must consider their own credibility, skills, and potential to achieve a particular course of action.

In pursuing an agenda, managers are faced with issues, demands, constraints, choices, crises, personnel problems, conflicting priorities, and multiple objectives, cultures, and personalities.

The challenges that managers face are simultaneously short-term (a few minutes or hours) and long-term (several years). The issues range from specific and operational (e.g., who comes to a meeting, what should be done about a specific problem) to fundamental strategic issues of policy, organization, and service

CHART 1: THINKING LIKE A MANAGER FRAMEWORK



delivery, which could affect the organization for years. Managers must operate on all of these levels at the same time to be able to lead and direct the organization. A key challenge is to determine what needs to be done and where to focus among a myriad of possibilities.

The framework that will be used in this course is based on seven key elements that affect how managers manage. These include:

- Manager and the job
- External environment
- Organizational environment
- Relations of the manager with superiors
- Relations of the manager with subordinates
- Lateral relations of the manager with key individuals and groups
- Relationship of the manager and organization with clients

The better aligned these factors are, the more likely that a manager will overcome the challenges of diversity and interdependence and achieve a particular agenda.

Over the twenty years that I have used this framework, students have found that it provides them with an approach and concepts to make sense of what seems to be a complicated, confusing set of forces and relationships with no clear path forward.

In this course, students will learn how to use this framework to analyze the relationships between the manager and each of the elements. This will help students to improve their potential to develop strategies that can address various management challenges.

2.1 The Manager and the Job

The Manager

At the centre of this framework is the manager who has a particular agenda, or is in the process of developing one. A large part of how a manager deals with the agenda, or management issues, is the manager himself/herself.

It is essential to understand the manager and his/her style of leading an organization and the key strategies that the manager relies on to manage. There are some key references that can help students to understand these aspects of management. Students may refer to Stephen Covey, *Principle-Centered Management*, and Warren G. Bennis and Burt Nanus, *Leaders: The Strategies for Taking Charge*. Peter Senge in *The Fifth Discipline* discusses the leader as architect of a learning organization. In addition, the Myers-Briggs framework for identifying clusters of characteristics (extroverted, introverted, etc.) is useful for a manager to understand his/her own strengths.

Important aspects of management style include how the manager goes about setting the vision and direction of an organization and mobilizing people to carry out that vision. It is also vital to understand how much personal credibility the manager, or leader, enjoys in an organization.

Understanding the manager and his/her credibility and style are so important that this is the subject of Part III of this Guide, which focuses on the choices managers can make concerning their operating styles.

The Job

The second major aspect of the framework is the job for which the manager is responsible. The nature of the work, the accountability structure, the authority, and the resources available are important to understanding how the manager must act to achieve expectations.

To understand a management job, it is necessary to know the accountability requirements associated with the job. Osbaldeston's

Keeping Deputy Ministers Accountable provides some insights into the complex accountability requirements of deputy ministers and some of the differences between the public and private sectors.

Rosemary Stewart's *Choices for the Manager* is useful for understanding how managers define their jobs. Ms. Stewart relies on three very useful concepts for analyzing a management situation:

- Constraints: those factors that limit a manager in getting the work done
- Demands: those factors absolutely required to do the job
- Choices: the kinds of decisions managers make regarding their style, role, domain, boundaries, etc., while doing their jobs

It is also very important to understand the authority and the levers, in terms of decision-making, that come with the job.

Roles

What are the key roles that the manager must play in this job? Change agent, controller, resource allocator, or downsizer?

Is the manager focusing on relationships outside the organization, or mainly concerned with internal management?

Some questions vis-à-vis the manager and the job:

What are the key demands (absolute musts) on the manager at this point in time? Who is making these demands?

- Can the key demands or pressures be divided into long-term, medium-term, and short-term priorities, and managed as such?
- For the immediate demands, how long does the manager have to show real progress in addressing these demands?
- Is this particular manager oriented to developing positive working relationships with colleagues, superiors, and subordinates?

- What choices does the manager take with respect to defining his or her role (leader, negotiator, decision-maker, comptroller, firefighter, technical expert)?
- How well does this manager understand his/her own management style, its impact on others, and how to learn from experiences? (Refer to Chris Argyris, “Teaching Smart People How to Learn,” *Harvard Business Review*, May–June, 1991)
- Is the manager able to establish trust with subordinates and communicate a vision that can generate commitment and support?
- What is the manager’s style in gathering information and making decisions (open, consultative, closed, secretive)?
- How does the manager deal with superiors? Does the manager work on developing a common agenda with superiors, or try to keep them out of the way long enough to get his/her job done?
- What are the personal assets that the manager brings to the job that enhance his/her personal influence? What are the particular attributes of the manager that reduce his/her effectiveness and influence?
- How does the manager spend his/her time? How does this relate to organizational needs? Is it possible for the manager to balance new and existing demands on his/her time to achieve a particular agenda without a significant change in his/her approach?

The challenge is to figure out how to manage in a specific organizational context. Managers usually develop strategies that are contingent on the situation, but that also reflect their specific style and personal attributes.

2.2 The External Environment

An organization's external environment is critical to shaping the pressures on a manager. This external environment includes all those players or forces that are outside the direct chain of command in the organization. Generally, the role of an executive is to balance the demands and requirements of the external environment with the needs and requirements of the organization. If there is a significant change in the forces that make up the environment of an organization, the executive has to find a way to realign with those influences and manage the interface between the organization and the environment.

The following questions are relevant in our analysis of the environment:

- Is the manager working in a complex or simple environment; a stable or unstable environment?
- Among an organization's key sponsors or clients, is there a consensus on the organization's aims, objectives, mission, or operations?
- In the external environment, what are the manager's most significant dependency relationships? Upon what are these dependency relationships based (e.g., technology, need for support, resources)?
- Are there major trends and forces in the environment that support, or detract from, the direction of the organization? Are these forces, or trends, gathering momentum or dissipating over time? Force-field analysis, which reviews the forces for and against a particular change, is useful for this kind of analysis.

These dimensions of the environment can impact significantly on the manager's role. For example, the environment's degree of stability and complexity will impact on how executives spend

their time. Generally, the more complex and unstable an environment, the more necessary it is for managers to devote their efforts to maintaining the relationship between the organization and its environment and to devote time to boundary-spanning activities (James D. Thompson, *Organizations in Action*, pp. 66–82).

In stable and simple environments, managers can often devote more time to the organization's internal management and operations.

A critical aspect of management is to assess the key players, trends, and influences that are shaping the organization and to understand how these will affect the manager's superiors and job. A critical characteristic of effective managers is their ability to align their agendas and actions with the trends and influences present in the environment and to take advantage of them whenever possible.

2.3 Organizational Environment

A manager works within the context of an organizational structure and division of labour, as well as within the social system and culture that shape the organization. Thus, it is critical for the manager to understand how the organization works and makes decisions.

The type of organization and its environment can have a profound influence on the nature of the manager's job. For example, there is a huge difference between a large tax collection organization, such as Canada Revenue Agency, and an agency such as Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, which, as a federal department, is involved in a wide range of programs and services (e.g., housing, education, social services, and infrastructure) aimed at thousands of Aboriginal communities. The same differences exist in the private sector between large manufacturers, small retail organizations, and conglomerates with multiple product lines.

The evolution of the organization, its history, and the key events that have shaped its progress are important in understanding some of the elements of the manager's job. It is particularly

important to understand the culture of the organization, the kind of people who work there, and how they view their mission.

The overall structure and the key information processes are also important to understanding the organization. If it is a large machine bureaucracy—a term commonly used by Mintzberg—it will tend to apply rules and hierarchy in making decisions. A different approach would be taken by a professional organization where high standards dictate the primary decision-making method.

Moreover, decision-making processes will be affected by the extent to which an organization has a high vertical or horizontal differentiation (i.e., different and distinct groupings or divisions of labour). The more levels and differentiation that exist, the more coordinating and integrating mechanisms will be necessary to implement an organization's essential functions.

As Kotter illustrates in *Organizational Dynamics*, organizations are constantly faced with the challenge of maintaining equilibrium among factors such as dominant coalition, external environment, technology, social system, hierarchy, and assets. These factors can shape the organizational environment and how the manager must respond to various issues and challenges.

A number of excellent references provide an insight into the analysis of organizations, for example, Harry Levinson, *Organizational Diagnosis*; and Henry Mintzberg, *The Structure of Organizations*.

Some questions on the organizational environment: These are important questions for managers to understand when determining what kind of priorities to pursue and how to pursue them.

- How does the organization generally respond to changes in the environment (responsive; rigid; head-in-the-sand; reactive; crisis-driven)?
- Does the organization tend to work as a unit, or is it highly balkanized and differentiated—with each unit

pursuing its own goals—and with few unifying or integrating processes such as plans, human resource rotations, or team approaches present during decision-making? (See differentiation and integration concepts in Appendix A on concepts.)

- Do executives support each other to achieve overall goals or directions?
- How strong is the tradition of leadership by the deputy minister, CEO, or board of directors?
- Are there significant conflicts within the organization with respect to direction and mission, divisions of labour, or social systems?
- What are the core technologies, or work processes, present in the organization, and how do they shape its behaviour?
- How does the system of incentives and rewards function, and what kind of work is most valued?

2.4 Superiors

The relationship between a manager and his/her boss or bosses is a vital aspect of successful management. One of the most popular articles for students of the Politics of Management course is the article by J. Gabarro and J. Kotter, “Managing your Boss,” which is included in the bibliography.

As Gabarro and Kotter point out, the manager has considerable responsibility for developing a positive working relationship with his/her superiors by understanding their agenda, working style, and requirements. This is straightforward and obvious, but it is amazing how many managers neglect this aspect of their jobs.

One of the realities of modern management is that managers may have more than one boss. It is increasingly necessary to consider a group of people as your superiors. For example, in a government department, an assistant deputy minister's superiors might include a deputy minister, an associate deputy minister, and a senior ADM. Sometimes the relationships with ministers and their staff can further complicate these superior-subordinate relationships and the accountability structure.

With the adoption of matrix organizations and functional reporting relationships, the same complexity might exist in the private sector. In the world of global corporations, the director responsible for a plant in Canada may report to several different global groups for different aspects of the business. For example, the plant director might have two or three different products and report to global business leaders for those products. In addition, the large global companies have a central public affairs function and the director in Canada will report to them on key policy and regulatory issues— especially those of a global nature like climate change.

Some questions on managing relations with superiors:

- What are your boss's or bosses' agenda and priorities?
- What pressures or expectations is your boss facing and how does this situation affect the way he or she does the job?
- When does your boss want you to deliver on his or her key priorities?
- How does your boss learn and make decisions?
- What does the boss expect of you as manager (what are his/her key demands)? How can the manager best help the boss achieve his or her agenda?

- What are the strengths of your boss or bosses and how can they help you achieve your priorities as a manager?
- What is your boss's style of management? Are there major conflicts or differences with your approach? How can you deal with them?
- If your boss faces stiff opposition from a stakeholder group or staff, will he/she continue to support the priorities and directions established by the manager, or will he/she retreat quickly at the first sign of resistance?

Never underestimate the importance of managing the relationship with superiors. Being responsive to your superiors is not only responsible management; it is a necessity if you want to get the job done.

The surprise for many students of the course when discussing this article is that managers and staff have to devote time and energy to managing their bosses, and that a subordinate can actually shape that relationship. Some students have actually tried some different practices as a result of this session in the course and found that they were able to change the dynamics of their boss-subordinate relationship by, for example, recognizing that the boss either liked or did not like detailed briefings; by determining how the superior liked to be informed; etc.

Given the diversity and interdependence present in most modern organizations and the difficulty in achieving results, your boss is a critical asset. Without her/his support, your power and influence are considerably diminished. Managers must find ways to augment their influence and reduce their power gaps by working in partnership with their superiors. When a superior's approach to management is incompatible with that of a manager's, or is inappropriate for responding to the organization's needs, there will be huge barriers to progress.

2.5 Staff

To achieve their own agenda, managers must mobilize their staff, on which they are highly dependent. Even though managers have direct authority over staff, they must rely on the same leadership and management techniques that are appropriate in dealing with those outside the chain of command, namely influence, as opposed to authority.

The degree to which the staff are committed to the manager's agenda depends on whether the staff

- Believe the manager is credible and can achieve the agenda
- Share a common vision on the challenges facing the organization and the path forward
- Get personal meaning from the leader's approach to the organization
- Participate in the creation of the agenda
- Believe the agenda will help staff develop their own skills and career
- Feel they will be rewarded in objective or subjective terms for helping to achieve the agenda.

To mobilize staff, managers must assess their own strengths and weaknesses, as well as those of the organization and staff. Managers must understand the limitations of authority and how dependent they are on staff to get the job done.

Managers have to determine what roles they can best play and where other people in the organization can contribute. Rosemary Stewart calls this work-sharing. By determining how to share work with key subordinates, managers, colleagues, and even people outside the organization, a manager can increase the time available to pursue other items on their agenda.

To be effective in dealing with change, modern organizations require managers who are creative; and open, positive and innovative environments where staff can challenge old assumptions but are still able to work as a team committed to the organization.

Some questions on managing relationships with staff:

- What are the demands placed on the manager and their relationships with their superiors? What is the impact of the operational style of the manager? For example, a manager working for a workaholic micro-manager will inevitably be affected by the situation and will have difficulty following a delegating style of management.
- Has the manager provided an agenda, vision, or purpose that can mobilize the commitment, trust, and support of staff?
- Is the organization for which the manager is responsible able to accomplish the agenda?
- What are the work demands, incentives, constraints, and factors that affect how staff do their jobs?
- Are there key people in the organization who will be able to facilitate or inhibit the achievement of the agenda, or the demands the manager is facing?
- Are there major organizational, management, personnel problems, or constraints that must be resolved?
- What are the expectations of staff with respect to leadership style, participation, vision, and approach to decision-making?

2.6 Key Individuals and Groups

All organizations have key groups on whom the manager is dependent and that can be mobilized to help achieve her/his agenda. The distinguishing factor among these groups is that, unlike staff, the manager has no direct authority over them.

It is essential to identify such people and groups and to understand their perspectives and agendas. As Kotter has suggested, to achieve their agendas, managers must build the required network of individuals and groups, both inside and outside the organization, and then implement their agenda through the network.

It is often useful to analyze the dependency relationships between executives, certain groups, and other key players to determine the extent to which they have power over your management agenda. Then, it is important to determine their degree of support. By understanding the degree of power others have over your agenda and their degree of support, one can quickly determine who is absolutely essential to the achievement of an agenda. If you cannot figure out how to get the key players to support your agenda, you may have to find a different agenda.

There are some ways to develop these co-operative relationships; some of these are outlined in *Power and Influence*, chapter 4. In a typical organization, however, the key groups and individuals involved in a particular decision will vary tremendously according to the subject or issue at hand. For example, a manager may be extremely dependent on the vice-president of finance and vice-president of marketing to develop and introduce a new product. On the other hand, if a manager wanted to change the distribution of a product that has been successful for years, the dependency relationships would be very different.

Some questions on managing relationships with key groups and individuals:

- Who are the key groups and individuals on which you depend?
- What are the agendas, perspectives, and views of these key people, and what pressures are they facing in their jobs? What incentives affect their behaviour?

- How would you analyze these key groups and individuals or their degree of authority or influence, and your need for their support to achieve your agenda?
- What kinds of approaches could be used to build positive working relationships and partnerships with these key groups or individuals?
- What kinds of approaches could be used to neutralize or minimize the degree of harm they could do to a manager's strategy?

A manager who can develop creative approaches for building coalitions required by the organization is often highly valued and is able to accomplish tasks that others only dream of.

Clients

To a large extent, the purpose of an organization is to serve its clients. Whether the organization is serving fishermen, consumers, bank customers, or car buyers, clients are a key part of a manager's job.

Much of the literature on total quality management and the experience of some of the most successful corporations have focused on forging a positive relationship with clients. This is done by knowing what clients or customers want and knowing how to serve them, by constantly being sensitive to changes in needs or requirements and by measuring performance. The same approach can be used by governments when dealing with its citizens.

Some organizations have used the client as the focus for defining the manager's agenda and mobilizing the support of superiors, colleagues, and subordinates. Many corporations and government departments are also developing new organizational and management approaches by focusing on the client and the quality of services delivered.

Some questions on managing relationships with clients:

- Who are the organization's clients?
- Are there major conflicts between the needs of different clients?
- How do clients feel about the organization (from well-served to very irate)?
- How does the organization (superiors, subordinates, colleagues) deal with clients?
- In government organizations, it is important to know how powerful the clients are, as a group, and how they may influence policy decisions.
- How do superiors, subordinates, and colleagues work, as a whole, to meet and respond to client needs?
- What are some of the key impediments to serving clients better (management approach; systems; skills; distribution of functions; key people; etc.)?
- How does the organization measure client response or satisfaction and reward those who work to improve client satisfaction?

Managers who develop a strong and positive approach to dealing with the needs of clients can often increase their influence in an organization.

Unfortunately, in many organizations, a client-focused perspective is at odds with traditional practices. It often requires an energetic and focused leader to be able to make this kind of change. Focusing on clients can also be a useful tool for realigning other parts of the organization behind your agenda (changes to organizational structure, changes to technology, etc.)

Summary and Challenges for Managers and Supervisors

We started this Guidebook with examples of three first-time managers in a policy group, an enforcement group in Fisheries, and a golf course.

In carrying out their jobs and developing an agenda, these managers can employ this framework to understand the challenges they face in their external and task environment, the agenda and style of their superiors, their dependency relationships with other groups and their agendas, and the capacity of staff.

For the new policy director, this will provide an essential understanding of the organizational context within which he or she works and the areas that should be assigned the highest priority. Using the concepts of the course, these new managers will be able to assess the demands, constraints, and options they face and make important choices. Moreover, they will be able to identify the most important functions they must adopt and the choices they can make with respect to their domain. Likewise, they will know how to manage boundaries with other organizations and staff.

If these first-time managers follow the advice of Chester Barnard and focus on the job of maintaining the organization—setting direction, ensuring commitment of staff to the goals of the organization, and managing the interface of the organization with the environment—they will develop a stronger understanding of their role as managers and provide essential value to the organization.

As Linda Hill has found out in her research, managers essentially learn by doing. By combining an active interest in assessing their jobs and situation with hands-on experience, managers can adjust to their jobs more quickly and learn how to be effective in creating a high-performance organization.

Through this process and assessment, these new managers and supervisors can overcome some of the challenges faced by first-time managers, as identified by Linda Hill, in defining their role and establishing their managerial identity.



SECTION III

Understanding the Operating Style of Managers

3.0 Overview

Since the manager is at the heart of the framework for the “Politics of Management: Thinking Like a Manager” course, it is important that this Guidebook provide some insights into the choices that managers can make that define their managerial identity.

The “Thinking Like a Manager Framework” that has been designed for The Politics of Management course places the manager at the centre of a set of complex relationships and issues. There is absolutely no doubt that a manager can make a huge difference to the success or failure of an organization, and that leadership and/or operating styles vary enormously among managers.

Over the years, the most perplexing challenge that many students of the Politics of Management course have faced is figuring out how to work with their boss.

In the discussion sessions in the course, students have identified the full range of managers: micro-managers, who don’t trust staff to do anything; absentee managers, who seem to be disconnected from the organization; and power-seeking managers, who enjoy divide-and-conquer tactics with the staff, or taking over the territory of other groups.

The most common observation by students is that their managers are changing so quickly and the styles can be so different that they are constantly figuring out how to work in a changing environment. The second most frequent observation is that the managers seem unprepared for their jobs, and often are in survival mode and uncomfortable in the management role.

On the other side of the coin, students, either through working in government and non-profits or through co-ops, have identified excellent managers. They are successful because they know how to work with staff, superiors, and colleagues in developing an agenda and mobilizing staff to co-operate in achieving the main objectives. Unfortunately, for every ten students that describe their experiences working with managers, only about two will identify really exceptional managers who are comfortable in their jobs.

This section is aimed at helping students analyze the leadership or operating style of a manager so that students can, first, understand the manager they are working with; and second, learn how to work in the most productive way with that manager.

The section draws from the literature in this area, but also relies on the insights of the author in his thirty years of experience as a senior executive in government and head of a business association.

3.1 The Operating Style of Managers: Four Choices

The management or operating style of managers is usually defined by the way they define their role and organize themselves to do their jobs. This is reflected in the degree of control they seek; how they balance work, family, and personal interests; the trust they have in others; how they build teams; and their personal sense of competence.

To be able to manage successfully, new managers must develop an operating style that takes into account their strengths,

work-life balance, the way they make decisions, work with teams, and their overall approach to the organization.

There are four key decisions that managers will tend to make as they develop what Linda Hill called their “managerial identity.” These are outlined below with some of my personal insights from various management roles.

Most managers adopt an operating style early in their careers and stick to it—even when it is sometimes inappropriate to the situation.

This section will provide some insights that will help in the assessment of management and operating style. It also aims to integrate the thinking of key authors who will help students understand the depth of literature that is involved in this field.

This section covers four choices that determine management and operating style:

- How managers choose to adapt their style and role to the situation they face
- How they balance work, family, and health and ensure renewal
- How they define their role as a manager and leader of a management team
- How they structure organizations and decision-making in relation to their management approach

All of these choices will have a cumulative impact on the organization’s culture and its performance.

In management, there are many variations of management or operating styles, and one can be an effective executive with many different types of approaches. However, managers can make some critical mistakes that usually mean their success over the medium or long term will be seriously compromised.

3.2 Choice 1: Choosing the Manager's Role

The situation and expectations that a manager faces in an organization can vary tremendously. Some of the factors that can shape your management style are:

- The nature of the organization itself (Canada Revenue Agency is much different from Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada; a computer company like Apple or RIM is much different than a petroleum company like Exxon Mobil)
- The superiors you report to and their management style
- The team that is in place when you assume responsibility for the organization
- The culture and history or identity of the organization
- The issues the organization faces (no major issues on the agenda vs. a crisis affecting the department or government)

John Kotter has an excellent example in his book *Power and Influence* of an executive who was given a week to turn around an organization that was going bankrupt: He called an emergency meeting and at the first sign of serious resistance to developing a turnaround plan, he fired two executives. Although the approach he took might have been completely inconsistent with his normal operating style, it was what he had to do in the situation. His dramatic decision got the group to understand how serious it was, and that he was clearly in charge. Notwithstanding the very poor odds of success, he mobilized the team to develop a turnaround strategy and he accomplished his objective. This was the kind of approach he needed to take in a time-sensitive, emergency situation.

Management styles can be very incompatible. If you are an executive who tends to lead organizations through clear priorities and high delegation, your management style will be severely constrained by a micro-manager who focuses on issues and expects you to know everything about every file. If you stay in the job, your approach will have to adapt to this situation or it will take a personal toll on you.

Every job and organization has its history and culture. If the last executive was liked, respected, and effective, it is very important to recognize that a dramatic change in style will not be welcomed by the organization. In this situation, it is smart to find out what worked and build on it. If changes are needed, they should be made carefully and gradually.

If the culture of the organization is generally viewed as functional, and is strongly oriented to regions of the country or services, an executive will have to respect this and show that he or she is part of that culture. Without the credibility of being part of the organization, the executive will have difficulty getting the support needed to do the job.

Staff that are used to lots of communication, participation, and delegation will not respond well to a micro-manager who is secretive. On the other hand, an organization that is used to a strong leader might react negatively to a leader who constantly consults everyone and is slow in making decisions. The reality is that any incoming executive is compared to a predecessor—either positively or negatively.

Finally, an aspect of the situation that you face as a manager is your personal life. If you are recently married with young children, your time pressures at home will be quite different than those of an executive who is three or four years from retirement with grown-up children.

One of your decisions regarding management style is how you want to balance your work and personal life. Do you want to protect your family-work balance? Do you want to pursue other interests? Do you want to ensure enough time for exercise, sports, and health?

Executive coaches encourage managers to think these

questions through when determining their approach to their jobs. All too often, managers let the work define their priorities completely, and wonder why their families are strangers or why their marriages disintegrate.

Following are examples of different situations and challenges that a manager can face and that can affect their style:

Change agent

The manager was recruited as a change agent. He/she is expected to change the organization better to reflect the mission of the department, or the views of a minister or senior executive.

Turnaround executive

The manager is more than a change agent. He or she is expected to reverse a major financial or program problem by whatever means necessary. This situation assumes the organization is failing; if personnel, organizational, or financial decisions are necessary, the turnaround executive's biggest mistake is to be too timid in making them.

Consolidator or continuous improvement facilitator

In this situation, the organization has already been convulsed by change, or perhaps had an executive who created serious turbulence in the organization. The role of the manager is to bring some order, stability, and calm to the organization and restore it to its basic operational effectiveness.

Issue manager

In some instances, there are only a few issues the top executives of the organization care about or need to address. In this instance, the manager's job is to deliver results on these key issues and—as long as the organization is functional—this is all that is expected.

The management situations are not always clear, and the role of a manager is to figure out those expectations. Even though there will be some impact on the role and style of a manager in different situations, the best approach is not often clear. These are the

areas where a manager has to fully assess the situation and have the depth and maturity to review his/her management style and determine how best to approach it.

A manager who is expected to deliver a stable organization and focus on a few issues—but is determined to act like a turnaround executive—will run into huge problems with superiors and colleagues. Similarly, a manager who aims to maintain the status quo with minor improvements, when the key leaders want a change agent and a turnaround, will not be fulfilling his/her responsibilities.

The most difficult management situations are when there are a number of mixed signals—turnaround, change, maintain continuity, and manage a few issues, etc.—combined with different demands by superiors or key colleagues. Moreover, these expectations may change over time.

In this case, the manager must determine what are the expectations, or even help his superiors and others decide what the expectations should be. This consultation will need to include superiors and subordinates as well as key outside groups.

Summary

It is imperative that a manager assess the total environment he/she faces and the choices they will need to make in their approach to the job. Moreover, their chosen path should be aligned with the needs of the organization, the styles of their superiors, and the history and culture of the organization.

3.3 Choice 2: Choosing How to Balance Work and Family and Other Interests

Most executive coaches find that one of the major problems facing leaders of organizations is to find the right balance between the demands of the job and their family, personal interests, and health.

Many managers have had abbreviated careers because they were not able to find this balance and as a result ended up as what Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee call a “dissonant leader.” These authors illustrate in their book *Resonant Leadership* that executives can create a pattern of behaviour as a result of stress that eventually becomes self-defeating in terms of effective leadership, personal health, and family.

Many studies in the federal government and some of the work by Linda Duxbury at Carleton University in Ottawa have revealed high stress levels among public service managers and staff. These stress levels can result in amazing patterns of behaviour that show up in outbursts and cycles of what Boyatzis and McKee call the “sacrifice syndrome.” This syndrome relates to a pattern whereby the manager determines that only he or she can do the job and takes on all the responsibility. He or she works harder and harder and makes little progress; relations with superiors and subordinates deteriorate.

Given the demographic challenges that many organizations face today, it is very likely that many government and non-profit organizations will have executives in key positions who are simply not ready for these jobs. Regardless of the growth of executive coaching, it is likely that many supervisors will not have the support mechanisms in place to get good advice or to help subordinates achieve the necessary balance to remain effective.

One of the hallmarks of the executive coaching field is to advise executives to make clear choices early on in their jobs regarding time allocation, balance of work and family, and health or renewal. Stephen R. Covey calls this putting time aside for “sharpening the saw,” or keeping yourself mentally agile, physically healthy, and balanced.

Personal insights

If you work in organizations for any length of time, you will find that there is tremendous variation in how managers balance work, family, and outside interests. Some executives willingly sacrifice their health and family for work and pursue career advancement relentlessly. This tendency is often unrelated to the requirements of the job; it is related to the values and interests of the manager.

In contrast, some executives create clear limits on work in order to have a quality family life, preserve their health, or simply recharge. One example of this was a deputy secretary in the Treasury Board.

In a fairly work-obsessed environment, a new deputy secretary in a central agency announced his priorities when he started the job. He announced that family-work balance was a top priority, and that he was going home to his family no later than 6:30 p.m. Any briefing notes or letters after that time would not be dealt with until the next day. (Fortunately, Blackberries were not yet in use at that time.) He also communicated that he would leave any evening event he attended at 8:30 p.m. at the latest. He was always available to put his children to bed. These signals also helped other staffers who were trying hard to balance work and family in an organization that put a premium on working at all hours and had scant regard for family life.

Second, he made it clear that he wanted a number two person in the organization to whom he would always delegate tasks while on holidays—and when on holidays, he would be unreachable. Many other executives rotated this responsibility and, in effect, did not have a delegated number two. In high-pressure jobs where you absolutely need time to recharge, this is really important. This arrangement always gave him the comfort that the job would get done in his absence and also that he was developing another executive. Both designated acting executives eventually earned major promotions—one to senior ADM and one to deputy minister.

A major problem for managers is that their health deteriorates on the job and they do not devote enough time to renewing themselves. Their families also suffer, and the rate of separation and divorce is high. This deterioration of the body and family relationships will affect not only their physical health but their emotional health and capacity to lead organizations.

Summary

There are far too many managers, with huge potential, who ignore the need for balance and renewal. The worst offenders are those who think they can continue to work excessive hours and take on more and more responsibilities without this affecting their

competence and effectiveness as leaders. Eventually, it will. The worst of the worst managers expect staff to do the same.

It is also imperative that executives make clear choices about how they will spend their time in a job and the balance of work, family, exercise, etc., to ensure continuing renewal.

3.4 Choice 3: Choosing your Role as Leader of the Organization and Management Team

In any job, it is important to reflect on your character and approach to people in the organization. At the core of management style is character, personality, and trust.

There are many different tests available to determine your dominant traits as an individual. The Myers Briggs assessments are very good for showing whether you are E (extroverted) vs. I (introverted)]; an (N)intuitive (big thinker and future-oriented) vs. (S) sensor (step-by-step, incremental); whether you are a thinking type of personality (T), or inclined to relate to people's feelings (F), and whether you tend to judge (J) (make decisions), or (P) perceive (tend to wait and see, and have extensive discussions).

A good reference on Myers-Briggs is *Type Talk: The 16 Personality Types that Determine How We Live, Love and Work*, by Otto Kroeger and Janet M. Thuesen (1988). This book illustrates how the various combinations of personality attributes affect behaviour in the work environment and elsewhere. In the course, one class will be devoted to the question of leadership style and will include the Meyers-Briggs framework.

One renowned author on the importance of personality and character for management is Stephen R. Covey. He has written a profound book, *Principle-Centered Leadership*, which explores the values and principles that guide managers and their relationships. Covey's work has spawned a major management consulting enterprise that provides workshops to corporate clients.

The character of a person affects their management/operating style.

As Covey writes:

An emotionally immature person will tend to borrow strength from position, size, strength, intellect or emotions to make up for character imbalance. This builds weakness in the manager, weakness in others (who react with conformity or limit their own creativity) and weakness in relationships because fear will replace co-operation, defensive patterns of behavior emerge that stifle innovation and open sharing of information or debate. (p. 83)

Covey also illustrates that when managers are able to establish a set of consistent principles that are understood by the organization combined with trust, a highly empowered organization can be created. However, he clearly illustrates that the core requirement for this is the ability of the manager to trust others and create interpersonal relationships. "You cannot have empowerment without first having trust." (Covey, p. 65)

An organization managed by a leader who is insecure, who does not trust others, who is self-serving, and who has arbitrary opportunistic principles will ultimately create a culture that breeds fear, second-guessing, over-control, and under-commitment of staff.

Core character and principles of managers

The core character and personality of a manager is a major contributor to management and operating style. Thus, a big part of developing a management style is self-awareness of strengths, weaknesses, and tendencies. Effective managers will use this awareness to guard against their weaknesses and build on their strengths. They will build a team that complements them, as opposed to mimicking them.

What role can executives choose as leaders of the organization or leader of the management team? Following Covey, these choices will depend on the character and competence of the

leaders and their trust of others or capacities in terms of interpersonal relations.

The basic choice managers have about their roles in a job are as:

1. **The Boss.** They view themselves as “in charge of the organization,” “the boss,” with separate groups or even individuals reporting to them with the need for considerable direction and guidance.
2. **The Team Leader.** They view themselves as the head of a team that is responsible collectively for managing an organization and the relationships with superiors and other groups.

The team leader sees his or her job as working with the team to make key decisions affecting the organization, and when necessary the leader will make the final decision. The team leader recognizes the need to use the talents of the group to challenge each other and work together on policy, program, financial, and personnel decisions.

In at least three major management jobs, this author has had to create a management committee because his predecessor did not have management meetings and took all the decisions himself. In each of these cases, the author even faced resistance to attend such meetings on the basis that it was not “their” job to worry about the overall management the group. When each of these organizations faced major challenges, the ability of the management group to work together was critical to success. If you are a committed team manager, sometimes you might have to work to develop the team.

Covey has illustrated that when managers operate with a clear set of principles that are understood by staff, empowerment can occur. This enables staff to take the initiative and innovate, knowing the principles that the manager will use in decision-making.

If you focus on principles, you empower everyone who understands those principles to act without constant monitoring, evaluating, correcting or controlling. Principles have universal application. And when they are internalized into habits, they empower people to create a wide variety of practices to deal with different situations. (p. 98)

Many executives who follow this approach build on sports analogies such as a hockey, basketball, or football team, where success is the result of teamwork and everyone doing their jobs—but working with each other. There is no doubt that personal experience in sports teams heavily influences those executives.

One of the most interesting recent books on management is *Good to Great* by Jim Collins. This book describes empirical research on eleven companies that made the transition from good companies to great companies in their particular sector.

There are a lot of amazing insights in this book, but the three most important ones relate to how successful CEOs recruited their management team; and their particular management style.

With respect to choosing the management team, Collins was surprised to find that there was a major difference between the way good companies and great companies recruited their management team. The great companies did not follow the usual practice of selecting the best people for particular jobs or to implement the organization's strategy. They went for the absolute best people in their business and then found a spot for them in the company—even if it was not a perfect fit. (p. 63)

Once the team was established, it was expected to come up with the strategy. This approach is exactly what Wayne Gretzky did to create the winning gold medal team in Salt Lake City. He was quoted as saying: "I want the absolute best players, and then we will decide what roles they can play. I can turn a skilled scorer into a checker but not the reverse." Canada won! Gretzky reversed the trend of Canada's producing good Olympic teams but not great ones.

The second observation was on leadership style. Collins identifies what he calls Level 5 leadership in all the leaders of the great companies. He found that Level 5 leaders “embody a paradoxical mix of personal humility and professional will. They are ambitious to be sure, but ambitious first and foremost for the company, not themselves.”(p. 39)

Level 5 leaders display a “compelling modesty, are self-effacing and understated.” In contrast, “two-thirds of the comparison companies (i.e., ones that did not transition to great) had leaders with gargantuan personal egos who contributed to the demise or continued mediocrity of the company. Level 5 leaders are fanatically driven, infected with an incurable need to produce sustained results. They attribute success to factors other than themselves. When things go poorly, however, they look in the mirror and blame themselves, taking full responsibility.” (p. 39)

Another publication that provides loads of insights into management or operating style is *Managing for Excellence* by David L. Bradford and Allan R. Cohen. These authors make a distinction between a “heroic manager” and a “manager as developer,” which is very useful.

The attributes of heroism that Bradford and Cohen argue are not suited to contemporary management challenges are as follows:

- The good manager knows at all times what is going on in the department.
- The good manager should have more technical expertise than any subordinate.
- The good manager should be able to solve any problems that come up.
- The good manager should be the primary (if not the only) person responsible for how the department is working. (pp. 10–11)

They argue that this “heroic” approach to management results in a lowered quality of decisions and the tendency to withhold information from the top executive, because the executive is not encouraging and welcoming others to be part of the problem-solving. There is an attitude that develops in these organizations along the lines of “he or she is the boss and I just do what I am expected to do.” Or, “Around here, the boss wants to make all the decisions, so I just send the information to him or her and wait to see what happens.”

In an organization led by a heroic manager, the top executive tends to take on more and more responsibility (assuming others cannot do the job or that he/she must do it), resulting in a self-defeating cycle where subordinates pass more and more decisions to the top executive, and subordinates take on less and less responsibility and are less and less motivated by their jobs.

The manager is driven to get more involved—to be as central to the department as a nerve center or orchestra conductor—desperately trying to control all the diverse parts of the organization, but still unable to produce excellence. (p.17)

Bradford and Cohen argue that managers in contemporary interdependent and changing organizations must “tap the energies and potential of talented subordinates whose skills and knowledge are vital for dealing with complexity and change.” (p. 21)

They promote a “manager as developer” model, where the top executive works with a team in a framework of shared responsibility to assess the needs of an organization and set goals for improvement. This approach creates a higher commitment to excellence, feelings of responsibility of staff, and higher motivation. (pp. 62–75)

An important talent that the manager brings to the table is to be able to create the environment where the best possible ideas and decisions come from the group discussions, and the synthesis of various perspectives and experience.

An effective manager can continuously make a team function far better than its individual parts and create a sense of collective responsibility and ownership for the success of the organization.

Ineffectual managers, regardless of the situation and needs of the organization, take on all the responsibility for the organization, depriving their managers of the potential to be responsible for the organization's success. They drain energy from a management team and end up with the lowest-common-denominator decision or one that depends entirely on the thinking of one person.

These are some important decisions that managers must make in determining their roles and style in leading the organization: staffing, teamwork, empowerment and trust, and communications.

Staffing

Whom you staff as your executive assistant or secretary is critical to the organization. This role reflects you. All managers with any office experience have faced assistants who are guard dogs, protecting their boss, wielding power over staff, and creating an atmosphere of hostility. At the other extreme, an executive assistant who is very respectful of others, personable, and helpful will constantly create a positive atmosphere and a sense of co-operation and teamwork in an organization.

Teamwork

An executive who sets the tone constantly that he or she expects people to work together, to learn from each other, and use their abilities to come forward with the best solutions will eventually obtain that result. This can be done by positive reinforcement but also by indicating clearly that backbiting, unwarranted criticism of colleagues, and bureaucratic games are just not appreciated and certainly not rewarded.

Empowerment and Trust

Fear is one of the most toxic aspects of an organization. An executive who creates an atmosphere where staff are empowered and do not fear to make a mistake will be rewarded with an innovative organization. An executive who inherently trusts people to work hard and expects them to achieve their best will usually find that

is what happens. An executive who jumps all over his staff—criticizing them before understanding the situation completely—can erode the morale of an organization very quickly.

One CEO that this author worked with told a story that illustrates this point. He was a scientist working in government doing experiments. One morning, he came in at ten a.m., and his boss chastised him for being late and did not even ask for an explanation. Actually, the scientist was in the middle of a time-sensitive experiment where he had to come in from two a.m. to four a.m. to measure the results. He was dedicated to his job and to the results of the experiment. The scientist told me: “That is when I decided I could no longer work in that organization.” After that, he never even bothered telling his boss why he was late.

Communications

Probably one of the most important factors is how the executive communicates with staff. Does he or she communicate only with direct supervisors in a hierarchical system? Is there communication throughout the organization of the challenges and priorities to ensure all the staff are aware of the expectations and goals? Are there opportunities to ensure that information and advice flow from all parts of the organization when dealing with issues? Do the personnel collaborate across functions and work with others outside the organization in a positive and constructive way?

All these decisions affecting the role of managers and how they staff, communicate, and create teamwork in the organization are vital aspects of management and operational style.

A critical choice for a manager is to define early in their tenure the role they will play, their priorities, and how they will work with the management team and overall staff. Some executives actually introduce themselves to an organization by clearly outlining how they like to work with their management group and describe some of the main elements of their operating style.

These managers are usually those who have developed the self-awareness necessary to be able to understand how they impact others and the ways to be most effective as leaders of an organization.

3.5 Choice 4: Choosing How to Structure the Organization and Decision-Making

Another key choice for an executive is to decide how to manage the structure of the organization and decision-making. As Covey notes, these decisions will also depend on the trust the manager has of others and how he wants to ensure the alignment of the organization.

With a strong principle-centred organization, and good staff, the structure can be flat and flexible, with open communication. With an executive who mistrusts others, there will be a tendency to hierarchy and control or elaborate processes to limit the discretion of staff reporting to the manager.

No matter what your operating style, a manager of an organization is going to have to respond to the priorities of his superiors and clients. His or her style will be affected by the operating style of the head executive.

The way executives make decisions is also a critical element of operating style. Often this aspect of operating style can be understood only by observation or past practice. The decision-making approach will also reflect the executive's views and trust of people and their capacities in terms of interpersonal relationships.

Some executives will choose to invest in group decision-making about the priorities and direction of the organization. They will ensure that this direction has the strong support of superiors and subordinates and is in alignment with the needs of clients and the organization's culture.

The opposite extreme involves an executive who likes to manage every issue and be involved directly in all the administrative and financial decisions of the organization. A great way to understand this is to find out the signing authorities in the organization: Who has to authorize a contract or staffing action; or approve travel. Another is how the executive reviews briefings and the requirements for sign-off on the less important files.

Some executives will never take the officer with the most knowledge of the issue to meetings with superiors. Others regard

it as essential to provide development opportunities for staff and to provide the best possible information for decision-making. One director that the author reported to early in his career noticed that briefing notes did not have the name of the officer who prepared them on the document. He quickly changed that to make sure his bosses knew who was directly responsible for the file. All these are indications of the degree of control an executive wants on the transactions in the organization and relationships with superiors.

These varying approaches to decision-making are often reflected in the approaches executives take to organizations. Organizations can be designed so that decision-making is extremely hierarchical and continuously depends on “top-down,” detailed direction, or they can be designed to be much more collaborative and innovative information-sharing groups.

There is a huge variation among executives in how they organize work. This will depend a lot on whether they are heroic managers or managers as developers.

The reorganizers

Some executives reorganize every time they change jobs. These organizational changes are usually premised on some lofty goal or change in priorities. Typical war cries for organization are: “We need to break down the fiefdoms and stovepipes”; “We need to realign or re-engineer our processes”; “We need to reposition our organization to achieve our new strategic priorities.”

In many cases, these organizational changes are driven more by the need of the executive to put his/her stamp on the organization, establish control, or recruit executives who fit their particular operating style or whom they trust. These executives also tend to bring a band of loyal followers with them because they cannot trust the staff who work in the organization; or they need the comfort of familiar faces that are completely dependent on them for their careers.

Some executives like to de-layer any organization they move into so they can get as many people reporting to them as possible. They do not like having to be dependent on a few executives who run “their” organizations. There are many cases of absolute

recklessness by executives in reorganizations that undermine morale and create serious problems for years.

Executives, especially those without the ability to sense the mood or feelings in an organization, can totally underestimate the impact on people in terms of uncertainty, morale, and the sheer complexity of reclassifying and staffing jobs. My personal observation is that executives who are inclined to make major organizational changes on a continuing basis are usually high in Thinking (T) and Judging (J) categories in Myers-Briggs and high on the Intuitive ranking (N). Conversely, they are usually low in the Feeling (F) category.

In many of these organizational change situations, the entire department is aware that the organizational structure will not last long after the executive leaves. In many cases, it is well known that the change in organization has little to do with the effectiveness of the program or department.

In Covey's words, these managers are not service-oriented (i.e., thinking of the organization's clients or its staff). They are driven to change for self-interest or to ensure that the organization conforms better to their operating style; or they have a highly conceptual idea of structure and decision-making, whether it is functional or not.

Some leaders are notorious for reorganizing. It is their modus operandi when they are appointed to a department. Staff check with the department formerly managed by this leader and quickly hear: "Watch out! He [or she] will reorganize the place in the next few months or de-layer the organization, and it will never be the same." When you see this train wreck coming down the track, find another job.

The program managers

On the other hand, some executives approach organizational change very carefully. Their focus is on delivering the results of programs, and some actually start with an operating assumption that you should not change the organization for the first year on the job.

Their motto is: understand how it works first and then see if change is needed. This fits well with John J. Gabarro's work on

managers who take charge of organizations. (See *The Dynamics of Taking Charge*.) Gabarro observed that after an initial “taking hold” stage where some immediate and necessary changes are made, most successful executives go into what he calls an immersion stage, where they get to know the organization and determine where improvements can be made. The major changes come about eighteen months into the job when they know exactly what levers to pull and what changes to make.

Unfortunately, in government, eighteen months is a very long time. Ministers, deputy ministers, and many other levels of management often do not stay in their positions for that long. Gabarro’s research is still very useful because it is likely that managers have to go through the same stages in taking charge of an organization, but probably act faster in government, and to a lesser extent in non-profit organizations.

Others do not view structure as that important unless there is a huge obstacle in mandate or capacity. Their view is that it is the people who really matter. Hire the right people, and they will figure out a way to achieve the aims of the organization. In general, this group of managers is wiser, less egocentric, and accomplishes more than the “reorganizers.”

The reluctant reorganizer

Finally, there are also reluctant reorganizers. This group starts with the premise that reorganization should only be done when absolutely necessary for major strategic changes in the business of the company or department.

They are painfully aware of the impact that reorganization can have on morale and the stability of the organization. They are also very conscious of the challenges of rewriting job descriptions, classifying new positions, recruiting new people, and the toll that a reorganization can have on productivity. On a Myers-Briggs type indicator test, they would probably show up with a better balance between Feeling (F) and Thinking (T) because they view an organization through the perceptions and feelings of others, as opposed to simply viewing it as structures and boxes or ideas.

In government, a reorganization often takes two years to implement, including approvals and the staffing and classifying of new jobs. In one reorganization in a federal department, the director of one group was still acting after three years because the job had not been classified and staffed on a permanent basis. It is not unusual to find a situation where another reorganization is starting when the last one has not been totally completed in terms of classification and staffing—resulting in constant churning and uncertainty for staff.

The reluctant reorganizer finds that in order to achieve a change in organizational direction, or to change the management team, the only way to do it is to change the organization. This type of executive also makes the organizational changes that are absolutely necessary and tries to create, through the change, an almost immediate gain in terms of organizational coherence and morale. He/she manages the change very carefully, with sensitivity to impacts on people. This kind of executive can make an organizational change a win-win for most participants and does not create the kind of destruction that reorganizers are known for.

In addition to organizational structure, principle-centred leaders will choose organizations that enable highly motivated people to innovate and achieve the directions of the organization, whereas heroic or control-oriented managers will seek organizational structures that reflect their personalities or needs, as opposed to those of the organization or staff, and provide ways to limit the authority or flexibility of staff.

Personal insights

The author has been the architect of four major organizational changes: three in the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat and one in the Office of the Auditor General. I have also been subjected to what I would call random violence in organizational changes when I was a young policy analyst at Indian Affairs.

In all of these organizational changes, I probably would be called a reluctant reorganizer, but in every case, the decisions that were made related to strategic changes in the functions of the group.

The organizational changes were sometimes the result of government-wide decisions, such as the elimination of the Office of the Comptroller General, resulting in the integration of the Audit and Evaluation group with the Administrative Policy Branch; or the elimination of the Ministry of Privatization and Regulatory Affairs when Regulatory Affairs became part of the Administrative Policy Branch at Treasury Board. In these cases, the challenge was to integrate new organizations into an existing organization.

My observation on reorganizations in government, after observing dozens of them, is that most are poorly thought-out and ineffective. They do not deal with the fundamental requirements for organizational success, are driven far too much by the egos of senior executives, and are implemented exceptionally poorly. This leaves staff confused, uncertain, and demotivated. Few reorganizations produce a net gain in performance for the organization.

The best example I can think of is a department that had a deputy minister who was notorious for reorganizing, based on an esoteric and very personal model of decision-making. He created elaborate processes and matrix groups where reporting relationships were unclear and responsibilities even less so, reduced to: "Do what the DM wants."

Everyone in government and industry knew that the DM's reorganization would not last a month after he left. And when he left, far earlier than he expected or wanted, it became clear to his successor that the organization could not work. When asked whom she reported to, one director in the spaghetti-like organization said: "I have no idea. I report to a room." The DM had made a choice. He may have rationalized that the organizational design was related to the needs of the organization, but it was far more related to his unique operating style of decision-making.

Summary

A key indicator of the management style is how the executive makes decisions or how the organization makes decisions. Who is involved? How are they involved? Does the executive ensure the key information and perspectives are part of the decision?

Does the manager look for and encourage alternative views and recognize his or her biases or weaknesses in making decisions, as well as strengths?

The approach to organization can be related directly to the character, competence, and personality of the lead executive. The approach managers take to organizations will sometimes vary according to the situation they face, but will also be determined to a significant degree by their personalities and approach to working with their teams.

Successful executives learn to design organizations to meet the results of the department or business and refrain from elaborate changes that are simply an extension of their personal preferences or ambitions. They also focus on changes that will last well past their tenure as executives.

Conclusions:

The impact of management and operational style on the organizational environment

These choices on management and operating style can have a major impact on the working environment of an organization.

A manager can create a hostile, risk-averse, fear-ridden organization with micromanagement and mediocrity in performance. Or another manager can create an innovative, respectful, team-oriented and service-oriented organization where people love their work and feel they are making a contribution.

Anyone who has worked in an organization and witnessed a change of CEOs, DMs or ADMs, DGs, or other managers has been surprised at just how much difference a manager can make to the atmosphere of an organization. This is one of the first lessons that a young person learns in an organization.

Organizational performance studies show that innovative and productive organizations are associated with a positive working environment that encourages innovation and focuses on results and teamwork. When surveys of these quality organizations are carried out, they provide a 360-degree feedback on the operating style of managers. Many of the questions in these surveys relate to the degree of openness, trust, and communication in the organization and the extent to which staff feel they understand

objectives and directions and are participants in the organizational decision-making.

These choices for a manager on operating style will determine how managers spend their time, how they work with a management team and make decisions, and how they work on the substantive issues facing the organization. All of the choices will determine the overall organizational environment and ultimately the performance of the organization.

3.6 Lessons for Students of the Politics of Management Course

One of the most important lessons that young professionals need to learn early in their careers is to understand themselves and their tendencies in terms of management and operational style and to work on improving their ability to lead organizations in positive ways.

Linda Hill's book *Becoming a Manager* has an excellent chapter on the "transformation" required for becoming a manager. She notes that "managers must act as managers before they really understand what their job is or what they are supposed to do" (p. 231). This insight leads her to conclude that managers learn best by a constant interaction between experiencing the job and its requirements along with the development of their abilities in terms of interpersonal judgment, self-knowledge, and the ability to cope with stress and emotion (see p. 230). In her view, managers need to be "highly proficient at learning from experience in an organizational context" (p. 239).

Earlier in this Guidebook, a few examples were used of first-time managers taking over a policy group of sixteen people or a manager becoming responsible for an enforcement group in a fisheries department. As new managers, these individuals should not only develop the capacity to understand their environment, dependency relationships, and power gaps; they have to make serious choices about their operational style.

Is Jacob Martin as the new head of Policy in Aboriginal Affairs going to continue to be the lead person on a particular policy file that he had before becoming director? How will the manager set priorities and manage the overall team? All of the four key choices identified in this section that govern operating style will be relevant. As a new manager, many of the choices will come quickly. The question is whether Jacob, with his limited experience as a manager, will recognize these choices and consciously make decisions about his approach to management.

Diane Lavoie, as chief of Enforcement, and Ron Storie will also face challenges determining what role they should play in their group, how they will work with their team, and how the organization and decision-making should be structured. All three will be much better off making these decisions if they have good role models, some basic understanding of the operational style that will work best, and the approach that is best suited to them. Unfortunately, like many first-time managers and supervisors, they will probably end up learning on the job.

Another important lesson for first-time managers and supervisors is to recognize that all management positions involve “power stress.” Managers have to find ways to maintain a balance between work and family, protect their health, and ensure continuous personal renewal.

These choices provide a framework for discussing management challenges and for gaining further insights into the operating style of managers described in the management cases in the Politics of Management course.

In reviewing readings and discussing cases or management issues and challenges, ask yourself:

- What kind of management style does this executive have?
- What is driving the executives’ approach to their jobs and the way they work with their management teams and others?

- Does this management style fit the situation and will it contribute to the overall success and effectiveness of the organization?
- How could the executive improve his/her overall management and operating style?

Also, if you are managing a group or ever expect to be a manager:

- What kind of management and decision-making style are you likely to have?
- What are the areas where you are likely to be strong as a manager, and where you need to improve?

The answers to these questions will help you to understand your own operating style as well as others and hopefully understand how the interaction of these operating styles is likely to work.



APPENDIX A

Key Course Concepts

This appendix outlines and defines some of the key concepts used in The Politics of Management course. These concepts are tools for analyzing the case studies and developing managerial strategies. They are also useful for studies of managers.

Politics

Politics “involves activities which attempt to influence decisions over critical issues that are not readily resolved through the introduction of new data and in which there are differing views. Political activity is activity which is undertaken to overcome some resistance or opposition. Thus, politics is really the process of building and gaining support from various individuals or groups and inevitably includes influencing others.” (Jeffrey Pfeffer, *Power in Organizations*, p.7)

The politics of management is therefore defined as the activities that executives carry out in order to influence others to achieve their agenda and the aims of the organization.

Power

“It is generally agreed that power characterizes relationships among social actors. Most definitions of power include an element indicating that power is the capability of one social actor to overcome resistance in achieving a desired object or result . . . power is a relation among social actors in which one social actor ‘A’ can get another social actor ‘B’ to do something that ‘B’ would not otherwise have done.” (pp. 2–3)

In this course, power is viewed as a neutral concept. Power can be used wisely and can be absolutely necessary to achieve the aims of the organization or society. In the wrong hands, too much power can also lead to negative results. In this course, we assume that the aim of maximizing power for the leaders of organizations is to achieve a productive organization or the positive agenda of the leaders. Power is in many ways the sum of authority and influence.

Power Gap

A power gap is a major gap between the amount of power needed to achieve an agenda or a particular job and the amount of power that the executive actually has. As Kotter indicates, authority is limited for most managers and is not sufficient to achieve an agenda in most complex organizations. When pursuing an agenda, many of the groups on which the manager depends are outside the manager's chain of command. Even with the staff reporting to a manager there can be limits to the effectiveness of authority. Understanding power gaps is therefore a critical skill in developing and implementing an agenda.

Authority

"The distribution of power within a social setting can also be legitimated over time, so that those within that setting expect and value a certain pattern of influence. When power is so legitimated, it is denoted as authority . . . The transformation of power into authority is an important process, for it speaks to the issue of the institutionalization of social control." (p. 4)

In organizations, authority is often established through positions or roles or history and culture. However, as Kotter has pointed out, direct authority in most complex organizations is limited and not sufficient to achieve the agendas of the organization or leader.

Dependency and Dependency Relationship

"The argument that the organization is a coalition of support implies that an important factor determining the organization's behaviour is the dependencies on the various coalition

participants. Three factors are critical in determining the dependence of one organization on another. First, there is the importance of the resource, the extent to which the organization requires it for continued operation and survival. The second is the extent to which the interest group has discretion over the resource allocation and use. And, third, the extent to which there are few alternatives, or the extent of control over the resource by the interest group, is an important factor determining the dependence of the organization.” (Pfeffer, *The External Control of Organizations: A Resource Dependence Perspective*, pp. 45–46)

As Kotter has indicated, given the interdependence of organizations and the importance of players to the executive’s agenda, it is critical to understand the degree of dependence on others. Most complex organizations are faced with multiple dependency relationships that must be defined and understood clearly, and executives must develop strategies for gaining co-operation and support where required.

Accountability

Accountability is the obligation to answer to a person or group for the exercise of responsibilities conferred. Accountability involves the fundamental question of who is responsible for what and to whom. According to this definition, people are accountable only to those individuals or groups with whom they have a direct authority relationship based on legislation, convention, or organizational hierarchy. It is important to note that the concept of accountability is much more precise than more general concepts such as responsibility to someone or being answerable to someone. (G. Osbaldeston, *Keeping Deputy Ministers Accountable*, p. 5)

Obviously, knowing to whom the manager is accountable will help him/her design an agenda and identify demands, choices, and requirements for managing the relationship with that person (i.e., the boss).

Demands

Demands are what anyone in the job has to do. There are many things that a manager ought to do because they are in the job description, or because his or her boss thinks them important,

but demands “are only what must be done.” (Stewart, *Choices for the Manager*, p. 2)

For this course, I like to think of demands as the three or four tasks that a manager absolutely must do if he/she is to be viewed as doing his/her job. These are the basic expectations of bosses, the firm, or others that must be fulfilled if the person is to carry out his/her basic responsibilities. For example, think of performance appraisal time when the manager is meeting with his/her superior. What are the three or four tasks (maximum) that the manager should have done to keep the job and be viewed as a high performer?

Constraints

Constraints are “the factors internal or external to the organization that limit what the jobholder can do.” (Stewart, *Choices for the Manager*, p. 2) Constraints can consist of resource limitations or legal, technological, cultural, organizational, and political limitations. Constraints are not just objective impediments. They are a combination of real obstacles and subjective perceptions of obstacles.

While many managers can find constraints everywhere they look, others can work around every constraint that comes up without even slowing down. Why? One of the major challenges for managers is to decide which constraints they should accept, which ones they should challenge, and which ones they should simply avoid. This often requires a good understanding of the systems that the manager is working with; moreover, the manager must understand his/her own tendencies to follow rules, ignore rules, or manage rules.

Choices

According to Rosemary Stewart in *Choices for the Manager* (pp. 17–24), choices involve the decisions managers can make about doing their jobs where they have some discretion. This can involve choices about the degree of delegation, the focus of the group in relation to other groups, and the degree of focus on technical as opposed to the overall management of the group. One of the major points in Stewart’s work is that managers are not

sufficiently aware of the choices they have and do not often take advantage of some of the opportunities that exist for choices.

Stewart points out that in managerial jobs, there are major choices in what aspects of the job are emphasized, what tasks to focus on, the degree of work-sharing or delegation, and the extent to which the jobholder concentrates on the traditional domain for the job or focuses on adding new areas of responsibility.

Choice: Work-sharing

Work-sharing, as described by Rosemary Stewart in *Choices for the Manager* (pp. 50–53), involves the sharing of work responsibilities or tasks between a manager and his/her superiors, subordinates, and colleagues. It is one of the areas of choices that managers can make with respect to how they carry out their jobs. Work-sharing can be an important strategy for building alliances, sharing responsibility, or enabling a manager to pursue particular priorities.

Choice: Boundary management

Boundary management involves the management of the relationship between the unit for which the manager is responsible and the groups or activities outside the unit. Managers often make important choices with respect to how they manage these relationships. For example, some may be active in managing the interface between the organization and outside groups, and others may be passive.

Managers who are aware of this choice will seek to maintain or to improve the conditions within which the unit operates. Their efforts may need to be focused upon their boss, other senior managers, staff and service departments, suppliers and customers, whether inside or outside the organization . . ." (Stewart, *Choices for the Manager*, p. 25)

Dominant Coalition

The dominant coalition is “the personal characteristics and the internal relationships of that minimum group of co-operating

employees who oversee the organization as a whole and control its basic policy-making.” (Kotter, *Organizational Dynamics*, p. 20)

One can discover the dominant coalition not by organizational charts but by determining the groups of people who have to be involved and agree before major decisions are made. If one were to take ten major decisions and find out who was involved, there would usually be a few dominant players who would be critical to all the decisions. Dominant coalitions can vary tremendously in organizations. Obviously, understanding the dominant coalition is important for managers in analyzing how they can achieve an agenda.

Alignment and Non-Alignment

When an organization’s key systems have characteristics that fit together, are congruent, consistent and co-aligned, one usually finds there are efficient processes at work and a relatively stable equilibrium. This usually means there is alignment in the organization. When there are significant imbalances or contradictions between, for example, the demands of the external environment and the organizational structure, there is a non-alignment. This usually leads to disequilibrium and changes. (Kotter, *Organizational Dynamics*, p.39)

Heroic Manager

This term, used by David L. Bradford and Allan R. Cohen in *Managing for Excellence*, (pp. 10–17), means the following:

A heroic manager is a person who sees himself or herself as being the person responsible for the future direction and tasks of the organization. Heroic managers figure they must understand what is going on in the department at all times. They should have more technical expertise than any subordinate. They must be able to solve any problem that comes along, and they should be the primary, if not the only, person responsible for how the department is operating.

The tendency of the heroic manager to crave complete responsibility and control may create major dysfunctions in an

organization. This management style can limit the free flow of information, undermine the staff's sense of responsibility and create an organization that is limited by the creativity and energy of one person, as well as major bottlenecks that reduce the organization's ability to adjust to change.

Heroic managers usually create an environment that results in lower-quality decisions and motivation problems with employees. The best employees usually leave because they cannot grow and develop without being able to assume responsibility, take risks, and make mistakes—which the heroic manager won't allow.

The heroic manager's style often creates a self-fulfilling cycle where the manager accepts more and more responsibility and subordinates back away from responsibility . . . often reducing their performance. The result is that the heroic manager works harder and harder to make up for the gaps and eventually falls victim to his/her limitations. (See p. 17)

Post-Heroic Manager

Manager as developer: Bradford and Cohen, *Managing for Excellence* (pp. 60–62)

The post-heroic leader believes that an organization's success is the result of teamwork and co-operation of staff and shared responsibility. At the same time, as the “manager works to develop management responsibility in subordinates, he/she must develop the subordinates' abilities to share the management of the unit's performance.” (Bradford and Cohen, *Managing for Excellence*, pp. 60–61) The manager takes the view that “only when subordinates become skilled in the managerial tasks required for total departmental success can the sharing of responsibility lead to excellence.” (p. 61)

Rather than depending on heroic rides-to-the-rescue—with all the answers and total responsibility—they have sought the far greater power and potential for excellence available in the commitment and abilities of their whole group. (p. 61) These managers have in mind a developmental, collaborative, galvanizing, but subordinate-centred image. (p. 61)

Espoused Theories and Theories—in-action (Argyris)

Argyris distinguishes between “espoused theory” and “theory-in-use.” The former is the theory of action to which a manager gives allegiance, and which, upon request, he communicates to others. However, the theory that actually governs his actions is his “theory-in-use,” which may or may not be compatible with his “espoused” theory. Furthermore, the individual may or may not be aware of the incompatibility of the two theories. (*Organizational Learning: A Theory of Action Perspective*, p.11)

Force Field Analysis

This term refers to the assessment of the potential for change. (Beckhard and Harris, *Organizational Transitions*) Before deciding on an intervention strategy, the manager needs to determine the amount of control or influence he/she has over the causes or conditions providing the stimulus for changing in the first place. To do this, he or she could do a force field analysis.

“On one axis we can list the sources of the forces pressing on the management that are pushing toward a change . . . and on the other axis we can identify the potency of the force. Management can then array the nature of the forces operating in the situation.” . . . Using the length of arrows, one can then indicate the strength of these forces for and against a particular direction. (p. 29)

Differentiation and Integration

These two concepts are very important for understanding the challenges of managing organizations and their dynamics.

Jay Galbraith, in *Designing Complex Organizations*, describes differentiation as the organization of various sub-tasks in the organization. This is usually equated with some common elements of the tasks involved and a division of labour. (p. 3) For example, a department of health might have highly differentiated groups consisting of scientists doing research, program groups promoting health outcomes, and administrative and information technology staff. All of these groups would involve different occupational groups and operational functions.

The other dimension involves the various approaches used to bring together the organization to achieve the overall objectives. The fundamental dynamic that he describes is that the more differentiation, the greater the challenge in finding ways to achieve integration. Throughout the book, he describes various ways to achieve this end, such as common objectives; information and planning systems; lateral relations; and ad hoc co-operation across specialty groups.

These concepts are useful for managing organizations because if a manager is faced with a highly differentiated organization with little cohesion and little interest in co-operating to achieve a common purpose, the management challenge will be considerable.



APPENDIX C

How to Study a Manager — Research Guidelines

The study of a manager can really help students to apply the concepts of the Politics of Management course to the challenges faced by a practising manager. A study of a manager can be done as part of the case course, but it usually takes too much time for most students. In order to focus on the studies of managers, the author has taught a research seminar that involved studies of managers using the framework of the Politics of Management course. This course may be offered again at some point in the future.

About 100 students have done studies of managers using these guidelines, which provide students with a better idea of the rationale for conducting these research papers, the range and types of papers that qualify, and the approach that is often the most useful for doing these studies.

To facilitate these studies, the professor will provide students with a letter introducing managers to the course, explaining the nature of the study, and promising full confidentiality, as well as the right to review the final product.

Why Study Managers?

The focus of this course is how managers work within organizations and how they can overcome the many challenges they face in getting the job done. By learning key concepts and approaches to management and applying them to cases, students are able to gain a better appreciation for what managers have to do to be effective.

By undertaking a study of a manager, students have the opportunity to apply the lessons of the course to a manager in their work environment. In a typical course with twelve to twenty students, the class can also learn from about a dozen examples of managers.

The key requirement for this study is that it must involve a manager who is supervising or directing others in an organization. Papers that involve general management issues, such as comparisons of the private and public sectors, or a study of an organization, do not meet the requirements of the course.

What Should the Study Involve?

Over the four or five times I have taught the research seminar course, students have done a tremendous variety of papers. This includes sales managers of car dealerships, general managers of information technology companies, human resource directors in departments of government, and project managers in National Defence. These studies have also included park managers, country program managers in an international development agency, entrepreneurs of small consulting firms, heads of associations, CEOs of hospitals, and school principals.

The variety of management jobs is simply amazing. The framework and concepts of the course were easily applied in these studies, resulting in excellent insights into the challenges faced by these managers.

Generally, both students and managers have enjoyed the papers and learned a lot from doing them. No paper has ever resulted in difficulties or embarrassment for a manager.

Many managers have commented very positively on the studies and often used the material afterwards. Managers, even if initially reluctant, often end up volunteering to spend more time in interviews than they had anticipated and have found it refreshing to think and talk about their jobs.

Students have found that these research studies of managers served to reinforce the key concepts and lessons. Studies done by students on themselves, or close colleagues, have been as successful as other studies.

The only studies that students have found difficult were those of their direct bosses, or of managers who were too busy to be available for interviews. Although studies of direct bosses are acceptable, one has to recognize that there are some limitations in doing such studies. Also, a very busy manager can create havoc with your schedule to produce this paper.

Do These Studies Involve an Assessment of Managers and Their Effectiveness?

A frequent question that is asked about these studies is: are students supposed to do an evaluation of the manager and his or her strengths and weaknesses or effectiveness? The simple answer is “no.” The paper is meant to be analytical, not judgmental, in nature.

The aim of the paper is to apply the framework for the course outlined in “Thinking like a Manager” or other key concepts and ideas to a management job. The purpose is to understand the challenges faced by the manager and the strategies he or she uses to carry out that particular job. The furthest one should go in making judgments is to note that a particular requirement of this job seems to be X and there seems to be a gap between this requirement and what the manager sees as the key demands of the job.

Does the Research Identify the Manager or Organization by Name?

The simple answer to this is NO—absolutely not. In this world of high transparency, there are always going to be risks and sensitivities if a paper identifies the individuals involved. This may also reduce the willingness of managers to participate. Including the real name of the manager or the organization is not important to achieving the purpose of the course. If it were a principal of a high school that was being studied, the aim would be to understand the challenges faced by a principal. It just does not matter what school it was, or his or her name.

In the hundreds of papers that have been done for this course, I have never had a problem with a study of a manager—because we

maintain their anonymity. Therefore, you must create a fictional name for the organization or department and for the manager.

Requirements for the Paper

The requirement of the paper is to apply the framework and concepts of the course to a manager's job. The quality of the paper will be judged on how well the student has described and analyzed the job using the literature and concepts of the course and how well the student has understood the particular challenges of the job and types of management strategies required to do the job effectively.

How students present this material is very flexible. It is the *result* that the professor is aiming to achieve, not a particular form of communication or writing.

The paper can be developed in many ways. It can be a fifteen-page, single-spaced paper with a few references. (Kotter, *Power and Influence*, p. 122) You can present the paper as a deck of slides (e.g., on PowerPoint). You can do the study as a video. Once, three students videotaped a presentation of their study of a manager; that was very effective.

You can also write the study as a case. Two students did that as part of the course, and it worked very well. The case should be written following the format recommended by this course; a teaching note should be attached analyzing the manager's situation and what he/she did do or should do.

Whatever format you choose, be sure to link your study to the "thinking like a manager" framework and key concepts. In this way, the professor will be able to determine whether you are using the course concepts. Some students make the mistake of simply describing a manager's job but not using the concepts to analyze their findings. This is insufficient.

Use of the Papers

These papers not only provide students with an opportunity to learn, they are useful for providing the professor with examples of management situations that can be used for the ongoing enrichment of the course and the cases.

I regard this course as a “live” course where knowledge is continuously developed by the professor and students. By incorporating lessons learned from these papers, the course will over time become stronger and more useful. For example, some of the cases currently used in the course have been developed in co-operation with former students.

Over the next few years, the professor wants to develop several more cases further focusing on first-time managers and supervisors. If students do not want any of their material used, they should indicate this on their paper, or raise it personally with the professor. In these cases, copies of the papers will not be kept.

Choosing a Manager

It is preferred that students contact their own manager to arrange for the study. When asking the manager for permission to do the study, it is very important to agree on some of the ground rules. At this point, provide the manager with the letter from the professor.

- The manager should agree to be available for two to three interviews and to provide some information or materials on his or her job and the organization.
- The manager may also agree to let the student interview others in the organization such as colleagues, clients, or subordinates.
- Some managers will even give students access to their schedules so that they can analyze the nature of their jobs.
- It is very useful to use a tape recorder in interviews. Out of hundreds of interviews I have conducted with deputy ministers and ministers, few have refused to be taped. Tapes allow you to review the information later and also produce very good quotes that can make a paper come alive. If the manager is uncomfortable in any way with the tape recorder, forget it.

- You can also ask the manager if he/she would feel comfortable identifying a few others who could add some additional perspectives on the challenges of the job.
- The student should agree to share the completed paper with the manager and to disguise the information to whatever degree the manager wants.
- If the manager has any difficulty with the confidentiality of the paper or the approach, students should ask the manager to contact the professor for further information or assurances.
- If the study is being done as part of a research seminar, the student might wish to ask the manager if he or she would be willing to come to class and discuss his/her management job. Usually, in a one-semester course, at least five managers will come to class.

How Should Students Go About the Study?

There is a series of very logical steps in conducting this kind of research.

Step 1: Choose the manager to be studied and do some background research.

Once you have agreed with the manager to do the study, you should gather up some general information on the organization and the job and start analyzing some of the characteristics of the job and the kinds of challenges the manager faces.

Using the “thinking like a manager” framework in Section 2 of this Guidebook and the kinds of questions outlined in that section, you should prepare some key questions that you would like to address to him or her.

Before the interview, you could send an email to the manager explaining the aim of the study and sharing with him or her the “Thinking Like a Manager” chart. This will help he or she understand the focus of study. In many instances, the manager

will start thinking about his or her job using this framework and prepare for the first interview.

Step 2: Conduct the initial interview with the manager.

The first interview enables you to get some insights into the job of the manager and how he or she defines their role. In this interview, you should stick to general questions and let the manager tell you about his/her job.

You should ask questions like: What were the key challenges you faced in this job? What was your major agenda? How did your priorities fit with those of your bosses and subordinates? How did this job compare to other jobs?

All of these kinds of questions are open-ended and enable the manager to describe the job in his or her terms without being overly constrained by specific questions.

It is also useful to get some background information in the initial interview, such as: job description; organization chart; strategic or operational plan; description of the organization; and the biography of the specific manager. The assistant to the manager is usually very helpful for this purpose.

Step 3: Conduct other interviews or review key information made available.

It would be very useful if the manager were to refer you to two to three other people that could provide their perspectives on the job, particularly if you have a theme for the study such as a reorganization, a key issue, a major change, etc. This theme can then be explored in these interviews. Discussions with others will also provide an opportunity further to explore various dimensions of the “thinking like a manager” framework; or gaining some perspective on the operating style of the manager.

Step 4: Further analyze the information and the job.

This is a key step. With some information on the job and the organization, and possibly some additional interviews, the student should do a thorough analysis of the manager’s job and how the manager approaches it.

It is often helpful at this point to start writing the outline of the paper because it helps to determine gaps you might have and suggest additional questions.

It is key at this point, if you have not already done so, to choose an approach to the paper, a theme or a key research question. For example, in a case of major downsizing in a private sector organization, the question might be: How did a director balance the demand from HQ and bosses to cut staff with the need to keep the organization functioning and maintaining morale?

Study Example

One study involved a principal of a new school who had to recruit an entirely new staff for opening in September. This study was fascinating. The principal came to class and explained that when he staffed the new school, he chose the teachers not for their teaching abilities but for their ability to contribute to extracurricular activities—sports, drama, etc. The reason he did not focus on teaching was that it is very hard to assess this quality for high school teachers, and generally, teachers would all be sufficiently competent. He was looking for teaching plus other potential contributions. He believed strongly that a new high school needed lots of activities to create an identity and a vibrant atmosphere and spirit. He knew what his agenda was and he succeeded. This manager came to class and the class was a major success because it illustrated how a principal, as manager, could develop and implement an agenda.

Once you have made significant progress on the theme of the paper, you are ready for the next phase. If you have not done some thinking about what the paper will look like before the final interview, you will inevitably find that when you are writing the paper, you will be saying: “Why did I not ask that question at my interview?”

The development of a chart can be a powerful way to engage a manager in reviewing his working environment and its challenges.

Students will find it very helpful to develop charts and discuss them with the manager during the final interview further to understand the manager's role and his/her job.

Step 5: Complete Your Final Interview(s).

It is hard to do a good study in less than two interviews with the manager, and there is seldom time to do more than three.

The second interview with the manager should focus on key themes that the student wants to explore (e.g., taking charge; problems in changing the organization; developing an agenda; implementing a particularly difficult aspect of an agenda; alignment problems; relations with superiors; adapting to a changing environment). Be careful to ask questions in a general and non-technical way. For example: "What kind of power gap did you face?" is not a good question. It is better to determine a way to ask the question that gets to the issue but without overusing the technical concepts of the course. In this interview, the student should probe a bit. To help interview the manager, it is very useful to develop some charts (similar to the charts in Osbaldeston's *Keeping Deputy Ministers Accountable*) that depict the manager's job and issues. This often helps focus the interview and provides the basis for the paper. By using the tape recorder you will be able to develop key quotes on various aspects of the job (e.g., relations with bosses, the environment, management choices, style). There is nothing better than using the manager's own words to describe his or her situation.

Step 6: Prepare and Finalize the Paper.

As noted earlier, there are many ways to present the paper, but the core requirements of a successful paper involve: a description of the job; an assessment of the challenges of the job using the "thinking like a manager" framework; some examples of management strategies used by the manager to get the job done or deal with a particular challenge; some insights into management style using Section 3 of this Guidebook; and, finally, some conclusions.

At some point, the paper, deck, case, or video must be prepared. When writing or developing the paper, it is really

helpful to use charts illustrating the role of the manager and to use quotations where appropriate. Mask the name of the organization and manager as much as possible.

Class Discussion

The approach that has been the most successful for conducting class discussions of these studies is as follows:

In a twelve-session course, the first few classes are devoted to understanding the framework and concepts of the course. Since it takes time for students to undertake studies, classes four, five, and six might involve some specific examples of studies or guests to discuss their jobs. By the middle of the course, some students will have completed some work with managers, and they might be available to attend class.

If the student has made progress on a study, but the manager is not available to discuss the study, class presentations of the research will be organized. In these instances, the class usually involves two one-hour sessions in which the student discusses the study and the results. Usually, the student provides a brief handout to guide the class discussion. Students are invited to ask questions and provide comments. The main role of the professor is to provide any additional insights using the framework or concepts of the course. When a manager comes to class, the format is as follows:

- The student presents an overview of the study of the manager using the concepts and framework for the course. This usually takes about half an hour.
- The manager then discusses his or her job.
- Students ask questions and carry out a dialogue with the manager.

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About the Author



Richard Paton was born and raised in Renfrew and still regards Renfrew fondly as his hometown. He was an avid Junior “A” hockey player in the 1960s, and a competitive golfer at the Renfrew Golf Course and in Ontario.

Since his education and career started in Renfrew, he chose the General Store Publishing House, located in Renfrew, to publish his first book.

Richard has an MA in Canadian Studies from Carleton University and a MPA from Harvard University. He has taught the Politics of Management course part time over the past twenty-five years in the Masters of Public Policy and Administration Program at Carleton University in Ottawa, Ontario.

His management experience involved a variety of senior executive positions in the federal government, including deputy secretary of the Treasury Board Secretariat. He has been president of the Chemistry Industry Association of Ontario for the past seventeen years.

He lives in Ottawa with his wife, Julia, his son, Michael, and his daughter, Jasmine.