

To Achieve or Not: The Manager's Choice

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Historically, ours has been an achievement-oriented culture. *Our national archives fairly burst* with the exploits of *rugged* men of purpose who tamed the frontier and moved mountains so that trains might run, and captains of industry who rose from the stockroom to the Boardroom in less time than it takes to mature medium-term bonds. Our ego ideals have been leaders of men and we have recited until we believe the litany of leadership: plan, direct, control, organize, decide, win!

The need to achieve permeates our daily lives – all about us, we see books on how to succeed without really trying – or advertisements aimed precisely at our very human desire to grow, to somehow become better than we are. We have all, to some extent, been targeted for miracle cures for our frustrations; – nowhere are proffered "solutions" more prevalent than in the field of management. Indeed, today's management literature is not unlike a smorgasbord from which each manager can choose according to his own appetite. . .winning through intimidation, being an OK boss, how to avoid group think, and even how to say no convincingly.

Unfortunately, the effect on actual achievement is something less than that of a good placebo. By relying on counterproductive rules of success, the modern manager in a hurry to succeed risks being stopped cold in his tracks. The problem is that most of the game plans turn out to have been conceived in a vacuum; they are, by and large, highly intuitive and subjective pronouncements of what should and should not be done. They are long on inspiration but stingy where proof is concerned. But achievement, and one's need to feel that he can achieve, is a serious matter; it deserves better treatment.

Those who have been stifled by the air of data-less certainty surrounding many a management office or bruised by running into the invisible walls of orthodoxy founded on unsupported organizational myths may agree that the time has come to collect data rather than spin personally gratifying or

corporately profitable yarns. Many of us have become increasingly curious – if not frankly contentious – about managerial achievement. Who are our achieving managers? What do they do to distinguish themselves from their less achieving cohorts? We need less speculation and more hard data about the achieving condition.

That's what this article is about: a systematic investigation of the achieving condition conducted according to the rules of scientific inquiry, tempered by the demands of rigorous statistical procedures. We have recently updated our original five-year research project on managerial achievement. We studied over 16,000 managers in the process and discovered a number of factors that significantly distinguish those who achieve managerially from those who fail to do so. Our research was a partisan effort: because we believe in focusing on things people can do something about, our studies were confined to the *behaviors* managers employ in administering the management process. Our findings are clear cut and straightforward: those who excel managerially behave differently from those of average or low achievement. In these differences lie the choice points for managers confronted with career planning. I would like to share our findings and, perhaps in the process, lay open some alternatives for those contemplating achievement.

The Achieving Manager Research Project

Our project began initially on a serendipitous note. We did not set out to prove anything or, for that matter, to study achievement. The nature of our business, in which we apply behavioral science technologies to organizational dynamics, is such that we routinely collect data on management groups from many different types of organizations, from all levels of management. These data concern the values, practices and day-to-day behavioral modes of those who make organizations function the way they do. It occurred to us that we were in a prime position to

explore any number of heretofore un-researched relationships between managerial practices and other phenomena and, because of its obvious importance; we addressed ourselves to a systematic study of factors responsible for managerial achievement.

We adopted as our major objective in the Achieving Manager Project the isolation of the behavioral traits that not only appear to characterize achievers, but to distinguish them from other managers. We opted for one of the most basic and frequently encountered research procedures known to the social sciences, comparisons of groups *identified* as different on the basis of objective criteria and *thought* to be different in terms of several other dimensions. We were already busy collecting data on those dimensions we anticipated to under lie group differences; we needed a selection criterion that would enable us to categorize managers according to achievement level.

Identifying The Achieving Manager: The Managerial Achievement Quotient

Achievement does not easily lend itself to measurement. Yet for our project we needed an achievement index that was objective and reflected the benchmarks subjectively used as reference points by managers themselves. An obvious approach would be to confine ourselves to a study of those who have made it up the corporate ladder. Such an exemplary-case criterion, rooted solely in organizational rank, was rejected as an oversimplification on two grounds. First, rank attainment cannot be evaluated without some consideration of the manager's age; the issue of *potential* for achievement is at stake and it is obscured by a pure rank criterion. Second, we wanted information about managers who are not achievers; insight into counterproductive factors or ones that simply fail to work is just as important as data about factors responsible for achievement. Our search began, therefore, with a review of pertinent techniques for assessing managerial achievement, which account for the effects of rank, age and varying levels of achievement status.

A formula for measuring achievement. We found that Blake and Mouton¹ conducted a study of managerial style and career accomplishment in which they used an achievement index developed by Dr. Benjamin Rhodes: the *Managerial Achievement Quotient* or MAQ, possesses all the properties of

concern to us. Affording an evaluation of an individual's career progress in light of his or her chronological age much as the IQ ratio provides for assessments of one's mental age relative to their actual age. The MAQ takes into account such practical considerations as the number of career moves necessary to reach the top of an organization, the age span most germane to career planning and the time in grade.

The Blake and Mouton study was conducted within a single firm, allowing for considerable control over the number of levels comprising the organization's hierarchy and other features which differ from organization to organization. We desired an index with more generic application so that, through broader sampling, we might guard against any uncontrolled effects traceable to unique organizational cultures; our research plan called for the study of more than fifty different organizations. We adopted a variation of the basic MAQ that reflects our research aims more realistically. As an index of managerial achievement, therefore, we chose:

$$\text{MAQ} = \frac{5(6 - \text{Rank})}{\text{Age}} \times 100$$

In the numerator of our revised formula, 5 is a constant progression factor—the time in grade per number of career moves available if one were to spend his work life in an eight-level organization – which reflects potential mobility upward in the absence of any other forces such as politics, chance, etc. Also in the numerator, the quantity (6 - *Rank*) amounts to a rank index obtained by assigning numerical values of 1 to 5 to organizational levels ranging from top (L1) to non-management (L5) and subtracting from the correction factor of 6.

In the denominator, age (20 to 50 years) represents a seniority index: the time, given a more or less standard entry age of twenty, in which an individual might advance from lowest to highest organizational levels if advancement were purely mechanical. Finally, we use the constant multiplier of 100 to eliminate decimals.

Normative data base for the MAQ. So that we might have confidence both in the selection mechanism and in the cutoff points we chose to identify individuals of high, average and low managerial achievement, we collected the necessary biographical data for computing the MAQ on a base sample of 5,451 managers. All organizational levels, from non-management supervisory personnel to Chief Executive Officer, ages from 19 to 64, and 26 different types of organizations were represented. MAQ raw scores for this group ranged from 9 to 109.5. The average manager in this base sample had an MAQ of 39.4; he was approximately 38 years old and occupied a middle (L3) management position, a profile corresponding to that found in most organizations.

Raw scores were transformed to standard scores, affording a control for bias and allowing us to categorize managers with *standardized* MAQs of 60 or above as High Achievers, 41 to 59 as Average Achievers and those with 40 or below as Low Achievers. Finally, we conducted a number of pilot studies to determine the sensitivity and discriminate power of the index. Our results confirmed the standardized MAQ as a robust and reliable indicator of managerial achievement.

We were ready for the most important part of our research, that of finding out how managers high in achievement differ from lower achievers in administering the management process; or, as Blake and Mouton phrased it, to discover the factors *responsible* for managerial achievement.

Factors In Managerial Achievement

The work of several prominent behavioral theorists guided us in our study of managerial achievement as a function of behavioral factors. The issues pursuant to managerial effectiveness that have stemmed from behavioral theory and research essentially concern motivation, the participative ethic, interpersonal competence and managerial style. These areas have been the purview primarily of individuals like Maslow², Herzberg³, McGregor⁴, Marrow et al⁵, Argyris⁶, Likert⁷ and Blake and Mouton⁸. Not only have they supplied most of the recorded examples of behavioral science applications to managerial and organizational dynamics, they have been most perceptive as well. To follow their lead in

investigating the factors responsible for managerial achievement, therefore, seems both natural and desirable from the standpoint of testing the validity of prescriptive rules.

As a point of logical departure, we focused first on managerial *and* subordinate motivational phenomena, and followed with an investigation of managers' employment of the participative ethic and its related involvement effects, as reported by their subordinates. Next, the issue of interpersonal competence, as reported by managers themselves and judged by their subordinates, was explored. And finally managerial style, that cluster of behaviors resulting from all the former, was studied as a predictor of managerial achievement.

In all, over 11,000 managers were studied in the Achieving Manager Project. All organizational levels, the full range of pertinent ages and over fifty actual organizations were represented. In each research instance, managers were assigned to High, Average or Low Managerial Achievement groups on the basis of their standardized MAQ scores. We found, I think, not only what distinguishes the achiever from the non-achiever but a basis for exemplary management as well.

The Achieving Manager: What Makes Him Run?

Do most managers aspire to the same goals in an organization, but perceive different pathways to their attainment? Or do managers differ regarding the reasons they work and then employ practices best suited to attain their different objectives? Differences in achievement imply motivational differences, not so much in amount as in kind.

While a good deal of thought has been given to motivation in the work place, the dominant thrust has been one of better understanding – and therefore managing – the subordinate personnel who make up the great majority of any workforce. Implicit in such a focus is an assumption that managers – by virtue of occupying key slots in the organization – are somehow immune to the mundane world of work motivation. Yet, given differences in managerial performance, one must realize that managers are not above a "motivational analysis" and probably also differ in fundamental ways where needs, goals and personal drives are concerned. We can trace a

manager's achievement to motivation just as we can the cooperativeness, dependability and overall productivity of their employees.

Managerial Achievement And Work Motivation One Person's Ceiling Is Another One's Floor

To test this notion that our three groups differ with respect to the need profiles which make up "motivation", we administered the Hall and Williams *Work Motivation inventory*⁹ (WMI) to 1,265 managers. Based on a synthesis of the *need hierarchy* concept developed by Abraham Maslow¹⁰ and the *hygiene-motivator* theory of Frederick Herzberg¹¹, the WMI accesses the factors most important to an individual in making decisions about and/or seeking satisfactions from their work. Five scores are generated from the instrument, each reflecting one of the five need systems Maslow postulated to characterize human motivation, *i.e.*, *basic creature comfort*, *safety*, *belongingness*, *ego-status* and *self-actualization*. The *creature comfort* and *safety* needs, particularly, underlie a preoccupation with the incentives Herzberg has labeled *hygiene* or *maintenance* factors. *Ego-status* and *actualization* needs are linked to motivator incentives. So, the WMI yields both a *need* and a *hygiene/motivator* profile.

The higher a given score, the stronger the represented need and, as a result, the more the individual is motivated to pursue satisfaction of that particular need. Many of his behaviors and feelings, therefore, can best be understood in terms of his hygiene-seeking vis-a-vis motivator-seeking tendencies. The rationale, simply put, is that the individual primarily concerned with and motivated by *safety* and *security* needs, will neither value the same incentives, nor employ the same behaviors to attain his or her objectives as will the individual essentially motivated by an *ego-status* need. While the former is striving to *avoid* dissatisfaction, the latter is seeking to *attain* satisfaction. To the extent that both the form and quality of managerial behaviors can be traced to motivational dynamics, any differences found in a motivational analysis will prove significant for managerial performance in general and for achievement in particular. And differences there are!

Having sorted the 1,265 managers into their respective achievement groups, we ran a comparison of their WMI profiles. Substantial differences, in a statistical sense, were found between the motivational profiles of the three groups, revealing that the manager's own needs do indeed affect the level of achievement he or she will realize in the organization.

Briefly, the need for *self-actualization* is the dominant motivational influence for High Achievers, while Average Achievers are most driven by *ego-status* needs. According to the WMI norms available, these two groups are substantially above the average in their respective need strengths and emerge as *motivator* seekers.

Low achievers, on the other hand, are caught up in a peculiar kind of double bind: at one and the same time they are most preoccupied with gaining satisfaction for *basic creature comfort* and *ego-status* needs. As Maslow has told us, it is highly unlikely that higher order needs, such as *ego-status*, will emerge until lower order needs, like *creature comfort*, have been adequately satisfied. When higher order needs arise in conjunction with lower order needs, as with Low Achievers, it therefore appears that we have a crisis of motivation in which neither *motivator* nor *hygiene* needs are being very well met.

We will return to this issue; for the moment, suffice it to say that managers differing in achievement have markedly different motivational profiles and pursue quite different incentives. Very likely, their practices differ too. Particularly, we would expect High, Average and Low Achieving managers to be characterized by different approaches to employee motivation. If this is the case, we reasoned, more serious implications than those initially apparent come into play. How do these groups of managers deal with the motivational processes within their organizations? What, then, are the motivational consequences among the organization's personnel? We conducted two more studies of motivational phenomena to answer these questions.

Achievement And The Management Of Motives: High Achievers Challenge While Low Achievers Comfort

It is generally accepted that motivation is something that people bring with them to the organization, and that managers cannot motivate their employees in any injective sense of the word. The best managers can hope for is to accurately identify the incentives under their control which coincide with subordinate needs. Managers may then be able to harness the more constructive and contributive motives of their subordinates, thereby channeling those subordinates' activities toward the doing of the organization's work.

On the other hand, we know that managers can greatly influence subordinate expectations and views of organizational reality by their actions and by the values they promulgate on behalf of the organization. Employee motives are probably some joint function of what they bring with them to the organization and the conditioning effects achieved by their managers as they mediate rewards and emphasize the practical utility of the organization's various incentives.

The manager's view of motivation - of what is important to his subordinates and of what is possible in the way of satisfactions within the organization - is a critical component of the motivational process. Depending upon his view, managers can create conditions for need satisfaction coincidental to desired performance or they may frustrate and block needs along with the expression of the very skills of which their subordinates are most proud.

In effect, the manager's *personal theory* of motivation becomes a powerful force in the work place, shaping and facilitating subordinates' expression of some need related behaviors while blocking or denying that of others. Given the various need profiles that characterize High, Average and Low Achievers, we felt that managers differing in achievement are likely to have different "theories" about the motivational process. And indeed they do; the manager's view of the motivational process and the incentives he or she emphasizes in their management of that process differ greatly for the three groups.

The *Management of Motives Index*¹² (MMI), a companion piece to the WMI designed for use with managers, was administered to 664 individuals. As

with the WMI, the MMI yields a score for each of the five need systems having *hygiene/motivator* significance; each score is an index of how much the manager emphasizes that particular need in his or her management of others. In mediating reality for their subordinates, High, Average and Low Achievers place significantly different emphases on four of the need systems. Moreover, these managers manage the motivational process for others *primarily as a function of their own needs!*

High Achievers place major emphasis on the *actualization*, *belonging* and *ego-status* needs comprising the *motivator* package, paying only average attention to *hygiene* factors. Low Achievers, on the other hand, virtually ignore *motivators* while stressing the importance of *creature comfort* and particularly *safety* and *security* issues having *hygiene* significance. Average Achievers stress *ego-status*, giving adequate attention to the actualization needs of their subordinates, essentially promoting *motivator* seeking among those they manage. As we expected, managerial achievement is linked to the motivational climate one creates for his or her subordinates as well as to personal striving.

Now the critical question. How does all this affect subordinates? If a manager's employees hear and heed the managers motivational message, the issue is broadened and goes beyond the mere consideration of his or her *personal* achievement to encompass the well-being of others, not to mention the probable success of their pursuit of organizational objectives. Argyris has cautioned us not to underestimate the power of the managerial self-fulfilling prophecy.

Managerial Achievement and the Fulfilling of Motivational Prophecies

To determine whether the effects of a manager's unique management of motives were strong enough to significantly influence the need profiles of his or her subordinates, we administered the WMI to over 3,500 subordinates of 1,291 managers. These subordinate data were separated according to the achievement rating of their managers and comparisons were run across the five need strengths. There are highly significant differences between the need profiles of High Achieving managers' subordinates and those of both Average and Low Achievers. Subordinates definitely hear and adopt as

their own their manager's motivational message; managers create subordinates in their own image and the image definitely differs as a function of the manager's level of achievement.

To appreciate just how potent managerial prophecies about motivation are in our organizations, one has only to compare the need profiles of High, Average and Low Achievers with those of their subordinates. The statistical technique employed to analyze our data allows for simplifying the inputs from several sources so that we may obtain a distilled, concise and penetrating summary statement of differences. Dimensions along which achievement groups most differ are identified and give us a graphic depiction of the nature and degree of differences among groups. In this case, the dimensions are identical for managers and their subordinates and, as Figure 1 indicates, they allow for the creation of four motivational realms, each a unique portrayal of the need profile of those who fall into it.

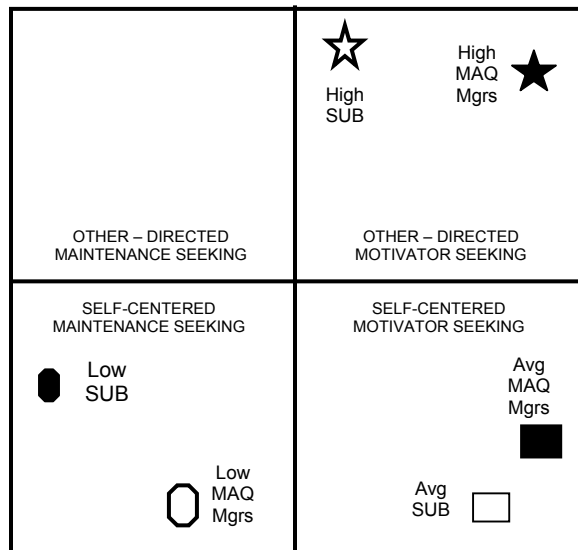


Figure 1. Motivational profiles of High, Average, and I Achieving managers and their subordinates.

The dimensions, which emerge from our analysis, indicate the degree to which managers and their subordinates are: (1) *maintenance-seeking* or *motivator-seeking* and (2) either *self-centered* or *other-directed* in their orientations to attaining need satisfaction. It is readily apparent that subordinates occupy matrix positions similar to those occupied by their managers and, moreover, managers of different

achievement levels and their subordinates occupy vastly different positions as well.

Low Achievers are *self-centered maintenance seekers*; their subordinates display the same, we may assume conditioned, need properties. High Achievers are best characterized as *other-directed motivator-seekers* and so are their subordinates. Average Achievers are also *motivator-seeking*, but the nature of their quest is qualitatively different from that of High Achievers in that it is *self-centered*; their subordinates are also *self-centered motivator-seekers*.

Thus are motivational prophecies fulfilled. Not only do personal motivations affect a manager's achievement level, so does their perception of the motivational process and his or her consequent practices in the management of motives. Indeed, in what appears to be a causal fashion, a manager's achievement is directly linked to the motivational profile of his or her subordinates. A sobering thought is inferred: *the needs and quality of motivation characterizing a manager's subordinates may say more about the manager than about his or her subordinates*.

There are other implications. The motivational assumptions of Low Achieving managers correspond in significant ways to the pessimistic, reductive view of workingman that Douglas McGregor¹³ dubbed Theory X. High Achiever perspectives, on the other hand, are consistent with the more positive developmental beliefs embodied by McGregor's Theory Y. Average Achievers fall somewhere in between pure Theory X and Theory Y, portraying what Meyers¹⁴ has called a Traditional view—essentially Theory X tempered by human relations training or related experiences. The point is that, as McGregor contends, the view the manager holds of his or her subordinates affects in rather obvious ways the manner in which he or she manages.

Trust issues, for example, are rampant in the Theory X – Theory Y postures. The degree to which managers trust their subordinates influences which managerial options he or she considers viable, particularly where participative management is concerned. Indeed, many theorists have coordinated the use of participative practices with adherence to Theory Y, while avoidance or outright rejection of such practices has been linked with a Theory X value system. We reasoned that our managerial groups may

very well differ along this dimension and moreover, if behavioral theory is valid, we *may* find employment of participative practices underlying achievement.

Participative Management and Managerial Achievement

Drawing on Kurt Lewin's action research strategy, Al Marrow, John R. P. French and their colleagues first demonstrated the efficacy of a participative approach to management in their studies of the Harwood Manufacturing Corporation.^{15,16} Their subsequent application of participative techniques to Harwood's acquisition of the Weldon Corporation is a modern day classic of applied behavioral science. Marrow and his colleagues have probably done more than any others to advance participative management as a viable and feasible technique for organizational effectiveness, but no one before has directly linked the technique to individual career accomplishment and managerial achievement.

We have seen that there is reason to expect such a relationship. Participative management is founded on the belief that people directly affected by a decision should participate in making that decision; the emphasis is on *joint* decision making about events which have future implications for the parties involved, and over which they can realistically exert influence. One has to be a manager to fully appreciate what a bone of contention such a work ethic can become; there are few who are neutral about the issue of participation. Originally embraced as a mechanism for countering the unilateral decision structure and authoritarian values often found in traditional organization theory, the participative ethic also positively affects loyalty and creativity. Now we find that it distinguishes between those who achieve managerially and those who do not.

To research the relationship between participative management practices and managerial achievement, we focused on subordinates; it is they, we felt, who are best equipped to report on their managers' use of participative practices and those all important feelings which they, the subordinates, experience as a result. We administered the *Personal Reaction Index*¹⁷ to over 2,000 subordinates of 731 managers. The PRI, used extensively for training and research purposes, assesses the degree to which the

manager allows a subordinate to participate and encourages him to influence work-related decisions. In addition, it gauges the amount of job satisfaction, sense of personal responsibility, commitment, pride in work and frustration experienced as a consequence of participation. Combined, the scales reflect an *involvement index* implying the kind of work *climate* a given manager creates.

Our results are presented graphically in Figure 2. Low Achievers, as reported by their subordinates, make minimal use of participative practices; Average Achievers make only slightly greater use. High Achievers, according to their subordinates, not only employ far and away greater amounts of the technique, but so much so that participative methods may be said to be a major characteristic of the High Achieving approach to management.

Of equal importance are the climate implications suggested in Figure 2. Our significance dimension is comprised of both participative opportunity data and *feeling* data. Only subordinates of High Achievers report the kind of satisfaction, commitment and pride in work that characterizes the work force of healthy organizations. Low Achievers, and to some extent Average Achievers, employ practices which result in repressive and frustrating circumstances typically found in neurotic organizations.

EGO-INVOLVEMENT via PARTICIPATION

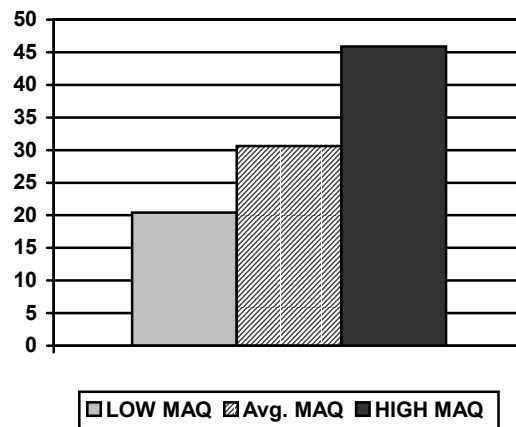


Figure 2. Subordinate ego-involvement as a function of the participative management practices of High, Average, and Low Achieving Managers.

So the manager's use of participative practices also emerges as a factor responsible for managerial achievement, but it does not stand alone any more than did management of the motivational process. According to Marrow, we may expect its effectiveness to vary with the amount of mutual confidence found in the manager-subordinate relationship. In other words, to quote Marrow, participative management will only be successful when "... employees and managers are trusting and open, and problems can be approached in a spirit of joint inquiry and a consensus worked out."

The stage must be set and a conducive climate prepared for participative management to succeed. Level of *interpersonal competence*, the management dynamic most stressed by Chris Argyris¹⁸, determines the nature of the climate within which participation is proffered. There is, therefore, ample reason to expect managerial achievement to be affected by the managerial level of interpersonal competence.

Achievement Via Interpersonal Competence: Managing The Interplay Among Ideas, Feelings, and Norms

Interpersonal competence plays a vital role in the successful use of participative methods. Argyris has enumerated the outcomes of interpersonal competence: (1) greater awareness of relevant problems among parties to the problem-solving relationship, (2) increased problem-solving accuracy in that problems remain solved and (3) decreased likelihood for the problem-solving process to be negatively affected in any way¹⁹.

Managers involved in building and maintaining relationships with their subordinates achieve interpersonal competence through such behaviors as *accepting* responsibility for their ideas and feelings; *being open* to their own thoughts and sentiments and those of others; *experimenting* with new ideas and feelings; and *helping others* to be open to and experiment with their concepts and attitudes. When the manager can accomplish these practices in such a way that norms of individuality, interpersonal concern and mutual trust are engendered, we may call that manager interpersonally competent.

Argyris has found that the required behaviors differ in their contribution to competence *and* in the

frequency of their occurrence. For example, owning up to an idea is fairly common among managers, but it is not a strong predictor of competence. Actually it is a double-edged sword; an excessive preoccupation with his or her own ideas and feelings causes many a manager to forego participative methods in favor of more authoritarian practices. On the other hand, being open with others, willing to experiment with ideas and feelings as one helps others do the same, is an extremely potent predictor for competence but it is rare among managers. Implied, of course, is the fact that managers differ in the degree to which they perform all functions and hence, in interpersonal competence.

The *Personnel Relations Survey*²⁰, based on the Luft-Ingham Johari Window²¹ model of interpersonal processes, has proven to be an excellent device for assessing levels of interpersonal competence. In our investigation of achievement via competence, therefore, we first administered the PRS to 1,691 managers to discover how they handle interpersonal processes in relationships with their subordinates, colleagues and superiors. Not content with self reports alone, we administered a PRS companion piece - the two Part *Management Relations Survey*²² - to 1,884 subordinates who were asked to appraise their managers' practices in Part I and, in Part II, to reveal their own practices in relating to those managers.



Figure 3. Ratings of interpersonal competence for High, Average, and Low Achieving managers as given by managers themselves and their subordinates.

As Figure 3 shows, the differences in level of interpersonal competence are substantial between the managerial groups. Moreover, subordinate appraisals of competence level for the three groups are almost identical to those provided by managers themselves.

Not only do we find that level of interpersonal competence is directly bound to the level of managerial achievement, but the link is so public and obvious that subordinates confirm it and report that their own interpersonal competence varies as a function of that demonstrated by their managers; they are well aware of the interplay. Competence and its norm-setting properties, as predicted by Argyris, is a powerful factor in determining the manager's career accomplishment and in shaping the nature and quality of subordinate practices as well.

The agreement between managers' and subordinates' reports is particularly noteworthy for it means that the behavioral messages sent by many managers come through loud and clear to subordinates who internalize them as their own. As with motivational dynamics, the competence of one's subordinates is a direct reflection of the manager's managerial achievement status.

But what about the organization's achievement of its production goals? What do the data have to say about that reality? Argyris has tied interpersonal competence of the executive system to organizational effectiveness, but how is competence linked with the management of technical, as well as interpersonal facets of the enterprise? We have found in other studies that the level and type of interpersonal competence exhibited by managers coincides in predictable ways with their preferred manner for managing people-production interface in their organizations. It now appears, by logical extension, that managerial style may also be linked to managerial achievement in much the same way that both are joined to interpersonal competence. If this is so, we just might lay to rest some of those arguments about the merits of "ideal" style vis-a-vis situational or contingency approaches.

Achievement and Style: The Manager's Choice

Because under a style rubric we can bring together and subsume so many complex, peripheral facets of a given process, the construct of *style* – an

individual's preferred, relatively consistent approach to certain situations – has found acceptance as an analytic tool in discussions of decision making, leadership, sales and management. Style incorporates a whole cluster of behaviors and values, which assume true operational significance only when they are considered in conjunction.

One of the more popular treatments of management style has been the Managerial Grid[®] articulated by Blake and Mouton²³, an elaboration of the work of Rensis Likert²⁴, Fleischman²⁵ and others. With their model, we can account for those influences underlying an individual's selection of managerial behaviors: his or her values concerning task and social demands. We locate in the Grid[®] a manager's style as a function of his characteristic concerns; then we describe it in terms of the actual behaviors he or she is likely to employ in the service of such concerns. Production vis-a-vis people emphases serve as the point of departure for identifying the managerial styles and their attendant practices. The beauty of the model is that it brings together and explains, under a single unifying rationale, what appear to be vastly different approaches to management.

Equally important is the Grid's[®] affordance of a very workable, evaluative framework in terms of assessment as well as prediction of managerial effectiveness.

Obviously, the Managerial Grid[®] seemed to us a perfect vehicle for exploring the relationship of style to managerial achievement; two assessment instruments based on its format, the *Styles of Management Inventory*²⁶ and the *Management Appraisal Survey*²⁷, were used to identify most preferred styles. In the first instance, managers gave self-reports and in the second case their subordinates evaluated them. The SMI was administered to 1,878 managers and the MAS was given to the subordinates of over 2,000 managers. In both instances, we find managerial style significantly tied to managerial achievement.

Those managers identified as High Achievers, according to their own reports, emphasize an *integration* of production-people issues, avoiding those impersonal and bureaucratic practices most favored by Low Achievers. Average Achievers are not distinguished by such clear choices, but by their

aversion to any management style devoted to maintaining the human system. In general, we found that managers' self reports are more suggestive than definitive, despite the statistical significance of the differences, and again we turned to those on the receiving end.

In Figure 4 we present graphically the two dimensional nature of our results. The subordinate appraisals of their managers' practices are much more revealing; they flesh out and define the nature of differences only implied in the managers' self reports. Consistent with the Grid[®] model and numerous pieces of social research, we find two dimensions reflecting task and social demands; their existence allows us to assess managerial achievement as a joint function of *task* and *relationship* emphases.

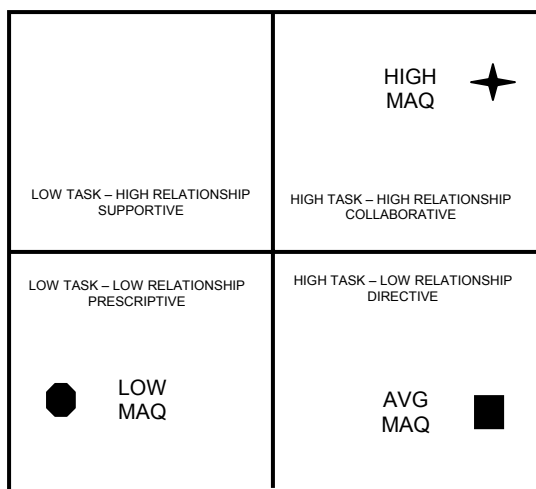


Figure 4. The relationship of managerial style to managerial achievement.

By orienting the task dimension at right angles to that of relationship, we are able to construct a grid-like model in which four general approaches or "styles" of management are defined: Low Task-Low Relationship, High Task-Low Relationship, Low Task-High Relationship and High Task-High Relationship. Such qualitative labels capture the general focus of a given style; whether or not the style corresponds to a Blake 9/9 or a Likert *System 4* is far less important than the fact that the style of High Achievers is different from that of Average or Low Achievers.

As the MAQ data plots in Figure 4 reveal, subordinates say their High Achieving managers are High Task-High Relationship oriented; in essence, a *collaborative* and participative managerial style typifies High Achievers. Average Achieving managers are placed by their subordinates in the style quadrant denoting a High Task-Low Relationship focus; they are so preoccupied with production goals that they give minimal attention to the dynamics of those who must ultimately do the work, *i.e.*, they are *directive* and self-authorizing. Finally, we find that Low Achieving managers employ practices pursuant to a Low Task-Low Relationship focus. Probably rooted in cultural imperatives, the personnel manual and standard operating procedures, such a style is mechanical and *prescriptive* in its implementation.

So it is that one's achievement is linked to his choice of management style. While there are undoubtedly cultural mandates and subtle incentives for managing in one way as opposed to another, our data reveal a *generic* basis for achievement. Our High Achievers and their less fortunate cohorts came from numerous organizations and cultural settings; it is perhaps a commentary on organizational mythology that those managers who achieve are most characterized by a High Task-High Relationship management style. The issue, as I see it, is not so much a matter of fitting one's style to the organization as a matter of choosing whether or not to achieve. Would that the solution were so simple.

**Point and Counterpoint:
Now For The Achievement Paradox**

The portrait of the Achieving Manager which emerges from our study is that of an individual employing an integrative style of management, wherein people are valued just as highly as accomplishment of production goals... wherein candor, openness, sensitivity and receptivity comprise the rule in interpersonal relationships rather than its exception... wherein participative practices are favored over unilaterally directive or lame duck prescriptive measures. Moreover, from a motivational standpoint the Achieving Manager needs to find meaning in his or her work and strives to afford such meaning to others. Higher order, constructive incentives are his or her motivational preoccupations, while their less achieving comrades remain mired in fantasies of defense and self-preservation.

The results of our study go beyond an impressionistic, ill-defined treatment of the achieving condition. Their statistical level of confidence is such that we may say with assurance that: (1) if a manager is more concerned about factors that are peripheral to his or her work than he or she is about the nature of the work itself, (2) if the manager is under wraps, secretive, un-confronting and insensitive in his or her relationships with others, (3) if their subordinates, while mirroring the manager's motives and interpersonal practices, reap none of the rewards associated with that sense of proprietorship which participation affords, and (4) if the manager remains more concerned about procedures and precedence than about productivity and the quality of life in the organization; *there is a significant probability that this manager is a Low Achiever*. But given a willingness to change, he or she need not remain so.

We are just as secure in our observation that to achieve, one must employ achieving practices and eschew self-serving, defensive self-authorized techniques. A manager must first embrace that collaborative stance which flows from the view that work – his or her own and that of their subordinates – is the source of challenge, meaning and opportunity for self-expansion. Through their practices managers must acknowledge that their subordinates, as people at work, possess interests and expertise and they must create openings for their expression and incorporation into the workflow. The manager must be receptive to innovation, sensitive to the dynamics of relating and willing to take risks. And finally, ever conscious of their role of norm setter, managers who would achieve must look to their subordinates for their reflection: *truly achieving managers produce achievers*. The data could not be more clear.

Yes, but...

It is noteworthy that, in most major respects, the behaviors of Achieving Managers coincide with the very ones the behaviorist school might "prescribe". For the past several years, the literature has been filled with such prescriptive entreaties authored by behavioral scientists and aimed at practicing managers. However, there have also been more than a few rebuttals aimed at the same group, authored by those of a different persuasion. These detractors more often than not dismiss the contributions of psychologists, sociologists and cultural anthropologists as being impractical for an

organizational world filled with excruciating pressures for production, or as the theoretical ramblings of well-intentioned but appallingly naive spokesmen for the "soft sciences." Al Marrow²⁸, a psychologist and Chief Executive Officer of Harwood, has commented at length on managers' resistance to behavioral science concepts; even when these theories are successfully applied, managers remain un-persuaded – the paradoxical failure of success!

Non-behavioral consultants meanwhile, going for the soft underbelly, are quick to undermine the "foreign" field which intrudes. Charles Bowen²⁹, CEO of a major management consulting firm, has suggested that there is an aura of fantasy surrounding most of the ideas and methods for upgrading managerial performance within a behaviorist framework. All that is needed for management development, according to Bowen, is an atmosphere in which managers can make hard decisions and make them right. That's putting realism into management development...or is it? What could be more realistic or practical than career accomplishment? and that's what we're talking about.

The Achieving Managers in our study are individuals who, compared to their management cohorts, are excelling in their managerial roles and making major contributions to their organizations. And we have discovered that these same individuals embrace philosophies and practices fully consistent with the erstwhile impractical prescriptions of those maligned purveyors of soft science "who never had to make a payroll!"

The irony is that in this day when the medium is the message, many managers are more receptive to magic elixirs of success: "cute" treatments of mundane phenomena found in any human organization, grossly oversimplified versions of personal success formulae, popularly packaged and dispensed over the counter with no prescription necessary. Charm schools, rules for making it up the organization, encounter groups, computer games, key principles for avoiding incompetence...they all sell. But where is the proof? How do these *really* relate to managerial achievement? Managers might profitably ask such questions. Of prime importance in our study of achievement is the fact that we are able to speak from data rather than from intuition; we are bound by our results rather than by our prejudices.

Who Shall Achieve, The Dilettante Or The Doer?

A related issue is raised by those pragmatists who ask, "Why should we invest time, energy and money to learn more about something that every business administration student picks up on his or her way to the real world?" Well... if *everyone* already knows the jargon of the human side of enterprise, *someone* isn't putting this knowledge to work. Achieving Managers account for only 13% of all the managers we studied. It seems, as Marvin Weisbord³⁰ has observed, that there exists a vast gap between managers' glib concept and name-dropping and their creative use of science-based theories to improve the management of their organizations. And yet, from a purely selfish point of view, it must occur to some managers that a *few* of their colleagues are doing something about putting theory into practice. These individuals we have identified as Achieving Managers, but in their organizations they may simply be called the movers: those who, through some uncanny streak of luck, just happen to get ahead.

Dreaming of things that never were...

The results of the Achieving Manager Research Project may, upon reflection, be seen to address the future, the prospect not of how things are but of what they may become. Chris Argyris³¹ has pointedly referred to the capacity of people to go either way - toward growth or toward stagnation. And it is this theme which emerges most strongly from a study of managerial achievement. *Managers* have a choice. They may decide which way they will go - toward growth and achievement or toward stagnation and accommodation - just as surely as they decide where to live or what career to pursue.

The High Achiever's approach to management can result in not only sweet dreams of success, but true excellence - be it in a small firm, one of *Fortune's 500* or the Oval Office. And each of us has the option of becoming an Achieving Manager because the manager's achievement may be traced to the behaviors he or she employs. If we would make but one impression, let it be this: *Managerial achievement does not depend upon the existence of personal traits and extraordinary skills unique to outstanding individuals. It depends instead on the manner in which the manager behaves in conducting organizational affairs, and on the values he or she holds regarding personal and interpersonal potentials, all of which can be learned. The key to becoming an Achieving Manager is to learn to behave like one.*

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