

The nine attributes of a “good” manager

(extracted from *Essence of a Manager*)

I define nine key characteristics which together as a package indicate the potential “goodness” of a prospective manager:

- I. the ability to properly exercise power,
- II. judgement,
- III. the ability to communicate,
- IV. an understanding of networks and relationships,
- V. strength of character,
- VI. courage,
- VII. the ability to motivate ,
- VIII. integrity,
- IX. class

These nine fundamental attributes are both necessary and sufficient to complete a full profile. I would be reluctant to classify any person as having the potential to be a good manager if any of the above were totally missing from his armoury. It is not necessary to include in this list such attributes as intelligence and knowledge and creativity which are present in all individuals to varying degrees and which are implicit in all of the above. It is not necessary either to include such attributes as leadership, decision making and vision and strategic thinking in this list. They are all of great importance but they are also all present as consequences or as derivatives of the nine fundamental building blocks. It should be noted that the fundamental characteristics are not separable and do not exist independent of each other. The complete package is what is needed and what should be assessed. These are therefore the areas I would investigate when assessing a prospective manager and I would look to track record and any results from aptitude tests and the like as a complement and primarily to illuminate the assessment of these characteristics.

To create a complete and consistent “picture” of what to look for in a good manager, I start with the core requirement of a Manager; which is to mobilise the actions necessary to achieve a particular objective. I break this central requirement down into three component parts; firstly the power to mobilise actions, secondly the ability to exercise this power and leading, thirdly, to the **proper exercise of power**. Most of the actions to be mobilised will generally be carried out by others. Some of the actors to be mobilised will be the manager’s subordinates and some will be his peers and even occasionally his superiors. Others will be members either of his personal networks or of the connected chain of intersecting networks, and some will be total strangers.

When and how and to what purpose power is to be exercised is indispensable to being a good manager. This relies on the manager being prepared and willing to make judgements and on the quality of his **judgement**. I take judgment to be the exercise of mind resulting in an actionable conclusion. This is integral to his choices and decision making. Whether for choosing broad strategies, or for choosing the correct short-term objectives and sub-objectives, or for selecting the right people, or for selecting the actions to be mobilised, or for choosing the right avenues for such action or anticipating other people’s reactions or

behaviour, the manager's readiness to make judgements and the soundness of such judgements will determine the actions that can be, and need to be, mobilised. The soundness of the judgements will determine the risk involved and the level of exposure to risk. It is his judgment which releases his exercise of power and the mobilisation of actions.

But his judgments must be made manifest in many people. The art of **communication**, such that what is perceived by the listener is what was intended by the communicator is what makes desired actions possible. Communication here is not just his meaning, his message and his subsequent "broadcast" but includes also its "reception" and conversion to meaning in the mind of the recipient. The broadcast itself may be written or visual or verbal or non-verbal. It may be explicit or implied or direct or indirect. The good manager knows how to listen and is aware of what has been heard and comprehended by those he directs his communications to and how actions he desires are consequently generated.

A significant factor in mobilising actions is the activation of one's own networks. Many members of intersecting and connected networks may also need to be energised. For the manager it becomes important not just to have a wide network of his own with meaningful relationships but also in having an understanding of how **networks and relationships** function in general. Many of the actors he needs to mobilise will be members of other networks than his own. Not only must the manager understand how chains of actions will unfold through the various networks, but he must also be able to judge if and when and how he must empower others to perform the actions he needs performed. They may well be part of multiple networks and subject to multiple and conflicting calls to action.

The manager will be subjected to many stresses; from actions not going as planned or because the actors are not performing as they should or because superiors are demanding results or because deadlines are approaching. Making choices and judgements and following through on the basis of these judgements in an atmosphere of stress demands a fundamental and inherent **strength** of character. Every judgement will also be accompanied by a probability of risk. Sometimes the risks will materialise. The exposure to the risk itself, the toughness to accept setbacks and reverses, to avoid despair and resignation, to maintain equilibrium and direction of purpose and the resilience to move on are all contained within his strength of character.

To have a belief in one's own judgements, to be aware of and expose oneself to the risks inherent in the actions pursuant to the judgements made and to hold to the course of action decided in spite of setbacks or opposing views or peer pressure calls for a full measure of **courage**. I take courage and bravery to be almost synonymous but distinguish between the two by taking courage to be the capacity for a regular stream of brave actions. It is courage which keeps the manager forever subordinating his fears, expanding his envelope of available actions and constantly breaking new ground. It is his courage that can help to create a culture of courage in his immediate surroundings and even through the entire organisation.

Most of the actions that have to be mobilised will be carried out by others. In many cases the actions required will be as a chain of actions, reactions and counter actions, where many of the actors will be mobilised only indirectly. The **ability to motivate** people must be applied not just to oneself – but to the entire orchestra of players who must act. Motivation

will be needed not only for subordinates but for all the actors who may be required in his chosen chain of actions. This includes superiors, third parties, total strangers and sometimes even competitors. Leadership capabilities are closely tied to the ability to motivate others in a particular direction or to a particular goal. A good leader may not necessarily be a good manager but a good manager will always have some leadership capabilities. The good manager must not only choose the players in his orchestra but also write the music, orchestrate it and conduct the entire orchestra.

It is axiomatic that without **integrity** every other attribute is suspect and rendered worthless. Without a palpable integrity, a manager's judgement becomes suspect, his earning of trust is jeopardised and his motives become questionable. By integrity, I mean here a consistency of behaviour with his underlying set of values. Integrity of purpose, of judgement, of communication, of actions and of relationships must all be present. Without integrity a manager can command no trust, no confidence, and no respect and will lose the power to mobilise any actions.

Finally, the wrapping around all these attributes, the packaging around the individual which completes the picture and makes it a whole is what I choose to call **class**. For each of the first eight attributes there is a threshold level – on the necessarily arbitrary and subjective scale the assessor determines – which needs to be exceeded. It is not necessary that all attributes are present at a very high level, but it is important that they be in balance. A well-rounded individual will be one who exhibits uniformity in the strength of the other attributes. Class is not his appearance or his clothes or cultural sophistication. Class is style and much more than style; it is integrity and courage and strength and all the other attributes allied to an uncompromising professionalism. I believe that an individual having one or more of these attributes being dominant or lacking an attribute, leads to sharp and ragged edges in a manager's profile and show up as a lack of class. In this respect class is a holistic picture of the individual describing the shape or a profile of the other attributes.