

Welcome to the Inquirer, a fortnightly Newsletter highlighting insights and new ideas about organisational leadership. In these lean challenging times, moments for reflection are at a premium. The Inquirer offers bulletins to support your agile leadership and your development of agile organisations. Please do feel free to share this open source Newsletter with colleagues and to join our continuing Public Leadership Inquiry and conversation with leaders on www.publicleadershipinquiry.com

Refocusing on the Craft of Management by Julian Powe

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Two quotes jumped out of Tom Davenport's and Stephen Harding's excellent recent book, "Manager Redefined" (2010, published by Jossey-Boss):

“The most valuable human capabilities are precisely those that are the least *manageable* (italics as in original)...getting the most out of people seldom means managing them more, and usually means managing them less.” (Gary Hamel and Bill Breen, Future of Management, Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2007)

“Leadership may be unnecessary and even resented when people face relatively simple or routine coordination problems.....Here lies an important leadership lesson; except for certain well-defined situations, people will perform better if they are left alone.” (Van Vugt, 2008).

Leading From Offstage

Of course managers need to exercise power. Davenport and Harding argue (in the spirit of Servant Leadership) that, rather than 'power over', effective managers lead from offstage, focusing their energy on 'power to' – to obtain resources, to clear obstacles, to build network links and to identify information sources.

They also share anecdotal evidence from their research suggesting that our 'worst bosses' are high on the dimension of busyness and low on the dimension of relational competence; and that, conversely, our 'best bosses' are low on the dimension of busyness and high on the dimension of relational competence. Our 'worst bosses' are too busy to spend time with us and also lack the relational attributes to make the time they do spend with us beneficial. Our 'best bosses' are available when needed, but not hovering; not too busy either with increasing their own output or closely overseeing work to have frequent employee contact; and qualified to make the most of the time spent with each individual.



Time spent in the last couple of weeks with a range of private and public sector managers has underlined for me the real difficulty of achieving 'best boss' status: they were all under such intense pressure from their own managers to be completely on top of all the detail that it was proving nigh impossible to lead from 'offstage'.

'Manager Redefined' is a really excellent read for those of us who have grown tired of the constant assault on the role and importance of managers in the last two decades; who see managers as pivotal to employee engagement and competitive advantage; and who are leading the current trend to free up our managers of the real suffocation of over-detailed process guides and excessive targeting, and instead, encouraging them to manage more from the perspective of their common sense and professional judgement. We highlight here their definitions of leadership and management; their model of manager performance; and the key attributes that underpin effective delivery of that model.

Leadership and Management

Davenport and Harding do a fine job showing how leadership and management represent two different disciplines and are not two ends of the same continuum.

To their minds, **leadership** entails envisioning an improved situation; determining the best path for reaching that desirable end; inspiring in others the self-motivation to reach the appealing state; and boosting energy, removing obstacles and demonstrating resilience.

Management entails acquiring, deploying, building, preserving and exploiting tangible and intangible assets; overseeing processes and implementing systems for putting these to good use; and monitoring results and making adjustments. Day to day, we need to do an outstanding job of blending these two kinds of activities; for instance, when implementing a new work process, we need to practice both leadership (by involving our people) and management (by focusing on the design of the new work process).

Model of Manager Performance

Davenport and Harding's model of manager performance includes:

- **Executing Tasks** – Using planning tools effectively, ensuring fair work distribution, using metrics that focus away from effort to emphasise results that matter to business success, and always starting the week by asking 'How can I do less hands-on work and spend more time helping the team as a whole perform better?'
- **Developing People** – Not assuming that people's skills and attributes are largely fixed; working with our people to form imaginative development plans and create a wide network of internal and external learning contacts; helping people to discover and travel diverse career paths and not just saying that upward-sloping career paths are not available; and coaching to improve skills and to reinforce autonomy and self-efficacy.
- **Delivering the Deal** – Not delivering the same reward portfolio to everybody but instead creating individualised deals for each employee; and using the full range of formal and informal, predictable and unanticipated, recognition to turbo-charge employee engagement.
- **Energising Change** – Helping our teams navigate change but with a suitably light touch; conveying and reinforcing high expectations for innovation; and not just helping our people survive the emotional toll exacted



by uncertainty and tension, but also helping them preserve their well-being and keeping them healthy physically, socially and psychologically.

- All imbued with **Authenticity and Trust** – Deep awareness of how your people experience your leadership style across a range of situations; following fairness requirements scrupulously; and really understanding that people trust people they know, which comes from strong interaction and shared experiences.

Attributes of Effective Managers

And Davenport and Harding identify five key attributes to support managers' successful execution of their model:

- **Requisite variety** (a concept from systems theory, specifically the cybernetics discipline) – Having the insight to recognise, and the adaptability to respond to, a range of employee attitudes and behavioural styles in the interests of efficient connection and personal rapport.
- **Cognitive fluidity** – The ability to make intellectual connections across topics and domains, calling for balance (eg; the capability to focus on near-term requirements without losing sight of the future), connectivity and agility (eg; identifying the ripple effects on individual employees and their deals with the organisation).
- **Ability to catalyse action** – Combining relentless attention to what really matters with a highly developed ability to get out of the way.
- **Ability to navigate the organisation** – Finding and using the organisation's tools and resources.
- **Social intelligence (taking this as the most relevant application of the connective elements in Goleman's conception of emotional intelligence)** – Showing a deep understanding of our own and our colleagues' strengths and weaknesses; creating good networks; and displaying humour, humility and empathy.

PLI Comment: *Davenport and Harding offer a very powerful blueprint for the contribution managers can make to the performance, and enhanced agility, of your organisation. As ever, implementing the blueprint rests above all on the day to day efforts of leaders. Our encouragement would be to urge you to reflect on all within your powers to:*

- *Do all the things for your managers that you would like them to do for their people, including reducing your own busyness, enhancing your relational competence, paying active attention to their well-being and engagement, and encouraging them to craft their own jobs and exercise greater autonomy in executing their responsibilities.*
- *Help your organisation (or part of it) to become one of the best, and best-known, places to become a high performing manager.*

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Murdochs, Brookes, Coulson, Stephenson and in due course the Prime Minister and other the key players to learn of the degree of their complicity, incompetence or ignorance. Just beyond the headlines lie other important questions about their leadership and two aspects in particular.

First, their responsibility for creating and guarding the culture of their organisations – did they instruct staff directly to break the law or merely allow a culture to develop where it was OK to turn a blind eye to illegal activity if the ends justified the means, rather than drawing clear line within which it was safe to operate, thus protecting the integrity of the news, the citizen and the employee?

Second, where was the overt leadership attention to running an ethical business?

The Institute of Business Ethics has a simple test to see if ethical decisions are being made:

- Are they **Transparent** - do I mind others knowing what I have decided?
- Do I care about the **Effect** - who does my decision affect or hurt?
- Do I guard **Fairness** - would my decision be considered fair by those affected?

In the mire of this story, players from the press, police and politics should be examined to see if their sins are of commission or omission. The former is more grievous and the law should take its course. The latter may not result in court cases but there are already casualties in the form of resignations and ruined careers – with more to follow I suspect. At best they have been careless with the ‘ethicalité.’

***PLi Comment** : The lessons for leaders are all too evident. Pay attention to the culture of the business. If you don't strive to create the one you want, you might get the one you deserve. And ensure that business is conducted in accordance with simple ethical tests that everyone understands and values. Why? Because it gives a clear steer for the behaviour of staff, reassurance to the public/consumer and, above all, it's good business.*

Public Leadership Inquiry is a bold research and consulting enterprise devoted to understanding and strengthening leadership and organisational change.

At the heart of our work is a focus on helping organisations to become **AGILE** and **LEAN** - two critical features of success for modern organisations. We look to the real-world experiences of leaders and undertake research that delivers insights, “know how” and the strategies needed to be agile and lean. We bring particular value to complex organisational challenges, in fact the more complex they are, they more we can help.

PLi was co-founded by Sue Duncan, former Government Chief Social Researcher; Robin Ryde, author & former CEO of the National School of Government; Steve Turner, executive coach and board level leadership advisor; and Julian Powe, employee engagement expert and board level change management advisor.

