

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES TO, AND EVALUATING STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING, MANAGERIAL EFFECTIVENESS IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

*Patsy Govender**

Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine managerial responses to overcoming obstacles and evaluating strategies for enhancing managerial effectiveness in a public sector organization, and attempts to understand how current obstacles could be overcome to attain managerial effectiveness. A qualitative survey design is utilized and a sample of managers was extracted from a population. Structured interview questions were utilized in the questionnaire. The findings indicate that obstacles to managerial effectiveness exist, and improvement in any one managerial role or the combined improvement of all the managerial roles will have a major effect and hence, contribute to the realization of management effectiveness. Hence, implementing the recommendations will enhance each managerial role and thereby result in accomplishing managerial effectiveness

Keywords: Management Development, Leadership Roles, Strategic Outcomes, Collective Input, Organizational Effectiveness

**School of Management (HRM discipline), University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa*

1. Introduction

Today's organizations face prudent business risks, complexities and obstacles as globalization is becoming more international with its influence and application (French, Rayner, Rees and Rumbles, 2008), and demanding "that the optimal leaders be those who, paradoxically, are strongly imbued with a sense of their ultimate expendability" (Drew and Bensley, 2001, p. 63). Managers who engage in world class standards for performance benchmarks (Greer, 2001), flexible work practices and aggressive management strategies, amongst others, will be equipped to face the emergent magnitude of challenges effectively. It is not simple to define an effective manager, and the identification of competencies in recent decades clarifies its need for effective management (French *et al.*, 2008). Managerial effectiveness emerges from personal attributes and dimensions of the manager's job in meeting situational demands, and satisfying organizational requirements (Mullins, 2002). Effective managerial leaders are behaviourally complex and are capable of integrating opposing roles (Quinn *et al.*, 2003).

2. Literature Review

Managerial tactics, a recharge of growth objectives, overcoming hurdles and leaders ensuring the creation of systems encompassing strategies, including methods for obtaining excellence, innovation and

knowledge building, amongst others (George, 2008), indicates that managers should not be dependent on one strategy, but should include many in their 'repertoire' (Becker, 2001). A business cannot succeed without effective strategy implementation, a key responsibility of managers. The dual view of formulating and executing strategy is of importance, yet difficult to attain, and is challenging to effective implementation (Hrebiniak, 2006). In addition, managers plan effectively, but a shortfall exists when identifying, facing and eliminating the main obstacles to the execution of the strategy (Hrebiniak, 2006). While aligning competencies and strengths with organizational needs effective managers can transform knowledge into action as key organizational milestones compel effective organizational leadership to lean towards sustenance and delivery processes, and to avoid any deleterious situations. Effective managers who prevent elements that enervate the workplace and recognize complexities, are important to the continuing self-renewal and eventual organizational survival (Bowin and Harvey, 2001), compelling a need for effective managerial skills. The need to develop effective managerial leadership in public sector organizations is a critical factor for sustenance.

The learning experience through management development results in an upgrade of skills and knowledge for future managerial positions (Mondy, Noe and Premeaux, 2002). Management skills entail the tools by which, *inter alia*, management strategy, techniques and personality attributes work to produce

effective organizational outcomes (Whetton and Cameron, 2005) and effective management. The achievement of special skills is a combination of experience and critical thinking (Clampitt, 2002), and emotional intelligence (Sosik and Megerian, 1999) plays an important role in leadership effectiveness.

Studies have revealed that leadership and management skills fit in four domains, and in order for effective management to occur, individual competence must be visible in clan skills, adhocracy skills, market skills and hierarchy skills (Whetton and Cameron, 2005). Furthermore, Evans and Lindsay (2005, p. 207) stress that the five effective leadership skills of “vision, empowerment, intuition, self-understanding, and value congruence” are practiced by quality leaders world-wide.

Daunting challenges, such as, legislation, uncertainty, the permeation of change, rigidity and organizational pressures are major obstacles faced by both public and private sector managers. Their dilemma is to safeguard continuously increasing ‘added value’ from their cadre of human capital (French *et al.*, 2008). Furthermore, leadership effectiveness in organizational accomplishments is often viewed as being the result of skill instead of serendipity in practices of business and management, and the dynamics and continuous sequence of leadership effectiveness depends on contextual parameters in the market area and society, including the precision of the parameters (Svensson and Wood, 2005). In this scenario, the harmful archetype is evident when leadership effectiveness is characterized by a low level of skilfulness, and a high level of serendipity (Svensson & Wood, 2005). In their study, Hoag, Ritschard and Cooper, (2002, p. 10) found that the emergence of some weak characteristics were seen as obstacles that were significant to effective organizational change, that is, it seems that managers dealt with “a pot-pourri of seemingly” unconnected challenges; unsuccessful change initiatives prevented by internal systems; external factors and maintaining the status quo. In retrospect, Campbell, Dunnette, Lawler and Weick (1970) concluded that organizing skill, hard work, pro-activity, low anxiety and ambition, amongst others, contribute to managerial effectiveness. A point to note is that managers who “isolate themselves, clinging to ‘position’ alone as the bastion of their credibility, will become enervated and will fail as they sap the lifeblood of their organizations” (Drew and Bensley, 2001, p. 63). What is desperately needed is an echelon of managers that fulfill their roles effectively.

This study utilizes the Competing Values Framework (CVF), an organizing Framework (Whetton and Cameron, 2005), developed by Quinn, Faerman, Thompson and McGrath (2003), to assess the effectiveness of managers, based on four basic models (the human relations model, the open systems model, the internal process model and the rational goal model) and eight roles (mentor, facilitator,

innovator, broker, producer, director, co-ordinator, monitor) which are assessed using various competencies. According to Quinn *et al.* (2003), a repertoire of competencies aids role effectiveness at managerial levels. The Framework reflects the paradoxical roles displayed by leaders and provides clarification with leadership roles. Each continuum of the Framework reflects a value which is opposite from the value on the other end, that is, flexibility versus control and internal versus external orientations (Zafft, Adams and Matkin, 2009; Cameron and Quinn, 1999). The challenges of the Framework suggests that those meeting these challenges are behaviourally complex and are the ‘most effective managerial leaders’ (Quinn *et al.*, 2003), and it assesses the value dimensions linked to effectiveness. The enhancement of managerial effectiveness is the core focus of this study. The various managerial roles form the rim that holds and motivates managers’ aspirations for continuous improvement.

The **mentor** role is associated with people development, is influential and communication is a core aspect and an essential management competency and responsibility (Oakland and Oakland, 2001; Quinn *et al.*, 2003). According to Daft (2005), leaders are champions of communication. Mentors may emerge from various sources, yet a concern in today’s work environment is the shortage of suitable mentors (French *et al.*, 2008). The **facilitator** manages conflict, engages in team building as teams feel empowered with company improvements (Evans and Lindsay, 2005), and balances the needs of individuals and groups (Quinn *et al.*, 2003). In addition, facilitators encourage participative decision-making and consensus building is the focus (Zafft *et al.*, 2009).

The **monitor** controls and monitors projects, with focus on internal control matters. Time is spent developing measures, evaluating evidence and managing information overload (Quinn *et al.*, 2003). Information overload can hinder managerial problem-solving and decision-making (Robbins, 2003). Monitors reflect on work accuracy and clarifying policies (Zafft *et al.*, 2009). The **co-ordinator** role is associated with control and continuity, maintaining smooth work processes, managing projects, designing work and managing across functions (Quinn *et al.*, 2003). In addition, this role brings order and provides stability (Zafft *et al.*, 2009).

The focus of the **director** role is communicating a vision, goal setting, designing, organizing and prioritizing, including planning and providing direction (Quinn *et al.*, 2003; Zafft *et al.*, 2009). Directive leadership spells out the “what and how of employees’ tasks” (French *et al.*, 2008, p. 430). The **producer** role entails motivating people and working productively, fostering a productive work environment and managing time and stress whilst balancing competing demands (Quinn *et al.*, 2003).

Outside competition is the focus and action is initiated (Zafft *et al.*, 2009).

The **broker** role is influential. It entails building and maintaining a power base, negotiating agreement and commitment, presenting ideas and includes envisioning change (Quinn *et al.*, 2003). In this role, negotiation is strong and the broker is influential with decisions at higher levels (Zafft *et al.*, 2009). The **innovator** role involves initiating changes, thinking creatively and managing change (Quinn *et al.*, 2003). It is an experimental role, with the innovator anticipating customer needs (Zafft *et al.*, 2009), generating ideas for 'service or product' and focusing on ensuring that the job is 'done right' (Bhattacharyya, 2009, p. 334).

3. Objectives of the study

- To assess managerial responses from three levels of managers (top, senior, middle) to overcoming obstacles and evaluating strategies for enhancing managerial effectiveness in a public sector organization in KwaZulu-Natal.
- To assess managerial comments on current practices, obstacles, areas for improvement and strategies/way forward in terms of the managerial roles (mentor role, facilitator role, monitor role, co-ordinator role, director role, producer role, broker role, innovator role) needed for managerial effectiveness.
- To assess how each of the managerial roles impact on managerial effectiveness.

4. Research Methodology

The study is qualitative. The objective for this research paper is to reflect on four areas in overcoming obstacles and evaluating strategies for enhancing managerial effectiveness. The study utilizes structured interview questions with fixed wording to provoke responses that are meaningful and explanatory as it helps in identifying obstacles and evaluating strategies for the enhancement of managerial effectiveness in this organization.

Interviews were conducted with managers (top, senior, middle) from a public sector organization in eThekweni, Durban, in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The research was not immersed in a social setting as questionnaires were forwarded electronically to respondents. Variations were evident with interviewees' responses. Some respondents provided limited responses, whilst others provided obstacles as reasons.

The collection of data was via a self-developed structured interview schedule which tapped into four critical areas. In terms of each of the managerial roles (mentor role, facilitator role, monitor role, co-ordinator role, director role, producer role, broker role, innovator role) interviewees were required to comment on current practices, obstacles, areas for

improvement and strategies/way forward in this organization. The nature of the questions were open-ended and structured, and respondents were required to formulate their responses, also giving them the freedom to express themselves in the stipulated areas. The administration of the questionnaires was over a three month period.

Respondents were free to express their views and divulge information of a specific nature. The data was recorded from responses to areas under each managerial role. Each respondent's input was carefully recorded without compromising the quality of the data. The data was captured and stored by the researcher.

5. Results

A qualitative mode of research style was used in reporting the research findings.

The study was based on responses from three levels of managers (top, senior and middle) in this organization. Each of the managerial roles impact on managerial effectiveness and for each role respondents were required to indicate current practices, obstacles, areas for improvement, and strategies for enhancing management effectiveness. The discussions focus on the eight managerial roles determining management effectiveness (mentor role, facilitator role, monitor role, co-ordinator role, director role, producer role, broker role, innovator role). Responses are indicated under each managerial role:

Mentor role: The current practice reflected that there is no mentorship in place in this organization and furthermore, this is not practiced. The obstacles were policy and without any doubt union objectives. In order to improve, the indication is to appoint mentors, provide suitable rewards and get buy-in from all role players. A way forward in this organization is to focus on training, adopting open communication and an objective selection criteria.

Facilitator role: The current practice was to use internal management structures to resolve any conflicts, whereas the lack of willingness of participants was an obstacle in this organization. The training of suitable staff is certainly an area for improvement and a strategy was to use/train people internally.

Monitor role: The current practice was that each job is investigated to identify critical performance indicators and these indicators are measured in terms of standards and performance projections set. In addition, individual performance is measured critically and statistics are kept but clearly more can be done in this regard. An obstacle is the difficulty to attain this in all the jobs with the result that in some instances the performance indicators are artificial and ends up being a paper exercise. Furthermore, there is a lack of data and time measurements. The areas for improvement are to

investigate jobs where critical performance indicators are not appropriate and measuring is not worth the exercise as the results are skewed. In addition, more data and more attention to the outcomes must be accorded to. With individual performance and statistics, obtaining and monitoring the required data is noted as a way forward.

Co-ordinator role: The current practice in managing projects, designing work and managing across functions is that it is usually left to the manager involved in the processes, and most major projects are outsourced. Managers reflected proper support and the lack of capacity to assist with no internal specialists as obstacles; whereas the areas for improvement is that more guidance and help is needed, including the training and development of the current staff. A way forward was to recognize the qualified staff internally and to provide adequate training.

Director role: The current practices were that part of performance management and time is spent annually in setting goals and these are evaluated three or four times a year and adjustments are effected. A further practice was that strategic action is decided at senior management level and middle management organizes more than directs. Also, internal service charters and policies are developed with a clear vision and mission statement. The obstacles indicated are that setting goals are not always filtered to all levels as it depends on the level of activity. Staff turnovers are associated with loss of experience and poor communication top-down. Assistance at the lower levels, incentives to retain experienced staff and rewards for performance are areas for improvement, whereas a way forward was that performance measurement feedback needs to be infiltrated to all staff from the executive level.

Producer role: The current practice is that there is a shift in less focus on time spent on the job and more focus on completion of the tasks. This allows for a more relaxed environment conducive to foster committed staff. Data is not sufficient to measure and the environment is usually conducive to good working. Staff have good leave benefits to allow time off. Jobs and tasks are designated to foster continuous productivity, statistics are monitored and teamwork is in place. Managers viewed standard time keeping practices as an obstacle as this does not encourage some freedom for supervisors. In addition, it is time to get involved and change processes, budgets could be utilized for more equipment and the organization is too large to foster timeous communication amongst all departments and staff. An area for improvement is to introduce flexitime where staff can monitor their own timekeeping based on a honour system and recruit specialist human resources staff to monitor and implement corrective actions/solutions. Managerial view on strategy was multi-skilling and staff rotation in this organization.

Broker role: The current practice was to leave it up to the individual manager to manage a section and get staff buy in, and the final decision is often taken by the Executive Committee. An obstacle is union representatives and resistance to change, whereas an area for improvement is staff liaison. Managers did not reflect on a way forward in this regard.

Innovator role: The current practice is that an annual drive is undertaken to record innovative practices and a data base is compiled in this regard. With regards to living with change and managing change, it was left to managers in sections. Furthermore, consultants were used to conduct internal surveys. Since organizational restructure is too large in such an organization, change requires a lot of planning and careful implementation. An obstacle was that often managers do not take the time to record innovations. Staff perceptions and organizational culture is often negative and sometimes hard to determine because the organization is too large. In order to improve, the view was to look at processes on a regular basis and to utilize staff ideas. In addition, there should be more consultation with staff, gradual changes, and participative management was required. A way forward/strategy is to look at all processes more frequently and include participation of all effective employees from planning to implementation stages.

6. Discussion

The objective of the study was to assess the managerial responses to overcoming obstacles and evaluating strategies for enhancing managerial effectiveness in a public sector organization. In terms of an overall assessment, the interviewees have suggested the provision of adequate training, open communication, objective selection criteria, effective monitoring, performance management and feedback to all staff, the introduction of flexitime, multi-skilling and staff rotation, including participation of all effective employees from planning to implementation stages (Figure 1). The improvement in any one role or the combined improvement of all the managerial roles will have a rippling effect and hence, contribute to the realization of management effectiveness. Hence, implementing the recommendations presented in Figure 1 will enhance each managerial role and thereby result in accomplishing managerial effectiveness.

A gap is evident in the broker role where managers were unable to provide a way forward or suggest strategies for the future. The implication is that senior managers themselves need development in this broker role. Furthermore, ambidextrous leadership is a requirement and a catalyst for effective managerial leadership. Cascading from this is the discharging of responsibilities effectively, enriching leadership processes via managerial effectiveness and

setting the preconditions to effective organizational performance.

The study will contribute to further research linked to managerial effectiveness in an organizational setting. The findings are anchored to one public sector organization. Considering that this is a large public sector organization, unexpected areas have surfaced in respondents' input, that is, there was a lack of time measurements, with no mentorship in place and performance feedback need to be given to all staff in this organization. Furthermore, training surfaced twice with interviewees as a way forward in the facilitator and co-ordinator roles. With regards to current changes, managers as producers feel that it is time to get involved and change processes in this organization, yet with the innovator role change requires a lot of planning.

This study has sought to present a diversity of evidence to enhance our knowledge on a way forward for the enhancement of managerial effectiveness in the public sector. The deduction is that the obstacles experienced by managers have an effect on their performance. Effectiveness is seen as a combination of both quality and quantity relating to performance where the manager has responsibility (O'Driscoll, Humphries and Larsen, 1991). Research studies indicate that organizational achievements are often made known by suggesting that there is a relationship and correlation with the leadership effectiveness of the organization, and this effectiveness of leadership may be regarded as the result of 'timely precision' in both management and business practices, including the result of 'contextual precision' (Svensson and Wood, 2005). A repertoire of managerial roles, competencies and strategies is a way forward for contemporary organizations seeking to foster excellence. Some of the confines and limitations expressed by managers is a clear indication that with the creation of a culture of allowing leaders to make mistakes, rectify them and develop new skills, the organization can be steered with reason, rationality and skillfulness.

The study was restricted to a public sector organization and the sample represents one public sector department. The generalisability of the study is limited. However, the results of the study expose many ideas in guiding futurists in overcoming obstacles to, and evaluating strategies for enhancing managerial effectiveness in public sector divisions.

The structured questions can be replicated in other service organizations or it can penetrate private sector organizations. Furthermore, comparisons of both sectors or investigations focusing on management effectiveness from the viewpoint of subordinates would enhance the study further. Alternatively, management effectiveness can be examined from the perspective of both superiors and subordinates. Mapping out the effectiveness criteria in other sectors spells the emergence of other research

opportunities. Also, research studies can emulate and expand on the effectiveness criteria.

7. Conclusion

This study has sought to present diverse evidence and fertile material from the three levels of management in a public sector organization so that future studies will enable researchers to take note of complexities organization-wide, tapping into organizational processes and practices with the ultimate aim of managerial effectiveness. Effective managers need to show optimism, set strategic goals and set new boundaries for competitive businesses in an era where companies change direction and strategy continuously and effectively.

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Figure 1
Recommendations for enhancing managerial effectiveness in the public sector

