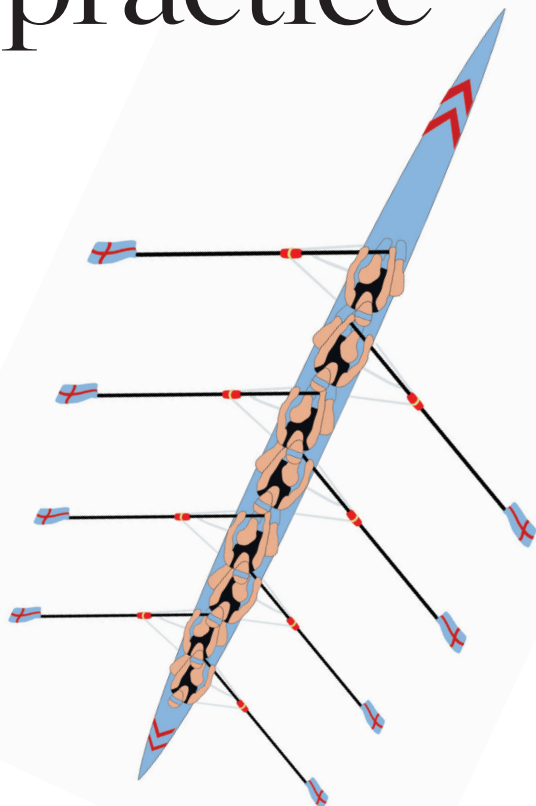




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# Management is team work and not solo practice



**W**hat makes a good manager? No one knows for sure. Just as we really do not know the origin of the universe

and the evolution of mankind. With more scientific discoveries about the moons and the stars, we are revising our knowledge of the solar system and about climate change. So is the case with the science of management.

What makes a good manager is a discovery science. Therefore, we will revise our theories and perspectives as we accumulate more knowledge. However, just as I know quality when I see it, even though I cannot articulate or explain it, we know a good manager when we see one.

We definitely know bad managers. A bad manager is rude, authoritative, and has a management caste mindset. Also, bad managers genuinely believe that they are superior in intellect as compared to those reporting to them; and that their job is to demand work, loyalty, and favours from their subordinates.

This still does not answer the question: What makes a good manager? As I was reflecting on this question, it reminded me of a research study we had carried out in the 70's about what makes a great teacher. Contrary to expectations, a great teacher was great not just because of subject matter expertise but also because of listening skills (empathy) and passion for their work.

I am pointing out this example to make a point. It is clinical in nature and hands-on experience matters. Good managers come from diverse experiences and encounters. Good management is as much an experiential science as it is a cognitive science. And surprisingly, whereas the half-life of cognitive knowledge is getting shorter, the half-life of experiential knowledge is getting longer. It is therefore not enough to have a good MBA, unless it is blended with experiential learning.

Based on my own research and consulting experiences, I find that there are certain common behaviours, attitudes, and traits among all good managers. And here they are:

- **Tend to be great listeners:** They care about their subordinates' perspectives and solutions to a managerial issue. Listening enables them to understand that there are multiple perspectives to a situation. They do not believe 'it is my way or the high way'. In other words, they are good learners and they tend to be pragmatic and not dogmatic about their professional discipline.
- **Value the time of their subordinates:** They do not like to keep others waiting just to prove the point that their time is more

men' to their own bosses. And finally, while fair and equitable compensation is important, they are not obsessed with it. In short, good managers tend to have political, personal, and economic detachment with respect to the job at hand.

- **Hands-on:** They like to be more like player-coaches. Of course, this is very common in cricket. The captain of the team is a player also. This hands-on mindset not only gains respect from their subordinates but the managers also acquire greater compassion and understanding of the hardship the subordinates experience. Unfortunately, as we move up the organisation ladder, it becomes more difficult to be hands-on managers. This

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valuable than their subordinates' or that they are the boss. It also means that they are comfortable going to the subordinates' office place or factory as much as they are comfortable with others coming to their office.

- **Love to mentor and coach:** They believe the real purpose of management is to make ordinary people extraordinary. Good managers are like diamond cutters. They take pride in getting the brilliance and value of the rough diamond. The best managers are therefore more like athletic coaches and trainers who take pride in their athletes and put the spotlight on their star athletes while they remain in the background. In team sports such as basketball and football, it seems this is even more necessary. Management is team work and not solo practice.
- **Practise detached commitment:** I also refer to this as selfless independence. They tend to be independent of politics and ethos of the organisations. They tend not to be 'yes

is why it is better to have a flatter organisation with as few levels of management as possible.

- **Deep generalists:** In other words, they are not only experts in their field of specialisation (R&D, customer service, sales, marketing, supply chain, or manufacturing) but they also have knowledge about other functions, especially about staff functions such as legal, IT, accounting, finance, and HR. In addition, they tend to have a general knowledge of the industry and all of its stakeholders.
- **Generate great 'Ah ha' moments:** They suggest new initiatives and new ways of doing things. They tend not to be content with status quo and they do not believe in the orthodoxy of their profession. In other words, good managers change, and embrace innovation and risk taking. They practise anticipatory management in favour of status quo or crisis management.

So what makes a good manager? Nobody knows for sure, but we are getting there. **M**