

Why managers fail

Leading yourself – 5. Apply the framework



To meet the challenges of the work environment, employees must be focused on achieving business goals, with managers creating an environment where personal effectiveness and continuous improvement is sought by all.

In most organisations however, this is not the case and managers are left wanting as they either don't know what they need to do to be successful or are not effectively supported by their organisation to do their role or both.

While people still manage to do their work it is not done effectively. Renowned Canadian organisational psychologist, Elliott Jaques, best articulated this at the 2002 Mid-Winter Conference of Consulting Psychology Division (XIII) of the American Psychological Association when he said:

“The problems resemble back pain. Muscles get knotted up and may hurt and create discomfort, they may de-energize and cut down creativity, but people can still get on with their work, even though not as well as they might have done. So it is with management. People get tied up in psychological knots, and may get hurt and de-energized, but it does not preclude them from getting on with work. The fact that managerial organisations have been as successful as they have, is due to the constructiveness and spirit of their people, who enjoy working, enjoy working together, and enjoy work opportunities however limited, and who rise above the shortcomings of organisational structures and managerial processes to make things work.”

Jaques goes on to suggest that even in the best companies, people are at most 50-60 percent as effective as they could be, and in public sector organisations less so.

The causes of poor individual performance effectiveness are a combination of the organisation's managerial systems of work and the individual manager's effectiveness.

Individual manager causes of poor performance effectiveness

There are five causes directly attributed to managers themselves. These are:

- 1. Lack of understanding of the role of a manager or the knowledge, skills and experience required**

- While manager development remains a critical issue for most organisations many managers are still unclear of their role or do not have the knowledge, skills or experience required to perform their role effectively. The issue often starts at the



very beginning of a manager's career. Their managerial journey usually begins by working hard to become a competent specialist. They get promoted to a managerial role or have management accountabilities thrust upon them because they have performed well in a role.

- When appointed they are often underequipped for the managerial role they are given and do not have a coherent standard to benchmark themselves against. The skills and knowledge necessary to perform their role have to be gained on-the-job, over time and largely through trial and error. Even when trained to be a manager, the training is often piece meal and a mix of models, practices and theories which individuals struggle to bring together into a framework for their managerial work.

2. The manager does not value managerial work

- Valuing the work is about the person's level of interest, commitment to and sense of involvement in what they do. To perform at a high standard continuously, a person must value their work. If a manager does not find value, is not interested or finds no enjoyment in managing people they are unlikely to be able to sustain effort over time or to excel in their role. As managers are often promoted from competent specialist it does not automatically mean they want or even value the role of a manager.

3. They do not have the mental capacity to solve the complex problems of managerial work

- In essence this refers to the manager's cognitive ability to assimilate data and information and to exercise sound judgment in the face of ambiguity and uncertainty. It is a critical, threshold condition for fitting a person to a role and often happens when a person is over promoted. This exercise of judgment becomes more and more important when the facts and figures stop short of obvious solutions and the increase in variables makes decision making increasingly difficult.

4. The manager exhibits extremes of temperament

- The manager may be achieving the required results however their overall capability to perform a role successfully is overshadowed by one or more negative personal characteristics and this has never been corrected. Extremes of behaviour may include: chronic problems with interpersonal relationships, aggression, disabling extremes of temperament, drug or alcohol dependency.

5. Lack of application

- Managers know what they should be doing but for various reasons don't do it. As a result people are poorly managed and developed leading to low employee engagement.



Organisational causes of poor performance effectiveness

There are four causes directly attributed to the organisation, that is, the organisation's leadership team. These are:

1. **Lack of a clear definition of the role of a manager in the organisation**

- Some organisations don't have a clear and common understanding of the role of a manager. In fact often senior management have conflicting views of what a manager should know and do. In these circumstances how can an individual manager understand their role in an organisation?

2. **Lack of organisational models**

- Some organisations have not identified the knowledge, skills and behaviours their managers need to lead, manage and develop people effectively. As a result they do not have standards to act as a benchmark for good practice. Therefore managers don't know what standards are required by the organisation.
- Some organisations have identified the individual capabilities required but they fail to communicate these to their managers and, as a result, managers are unaware of what is expected.
- Some organisations have identified the individual capability requirements and communicate them to managers but they fail to make sure that managers do in fact have the required capabilities and deliver them. They assume that managers deliver on those expectations and do not assess each manager against the required criteria to ensure a standard of performance.

3. **Lack of systems of work to support managers in their managerial work**

- Managerial work requires the organisation to provide effective systems of work to enable managers to be successful, such as, recruitment or performance effectiveness systems. Some organisations do not provide these systems for managers or they are poorly designed or implemented.

4. **Lack of role models**

- Managers of new managers may not have the knowledge, skills and experience required themselves. As they were also developed on-the-job, they do not have the capability to develop their own direct reporting managers. Even if the manager is effective they cannot pass this knowledge on to their direct reporting managers as they are unaware of how they have been effective.



The solution

To overcome these issues one fully integrated Leadership Framework for people management has been developed. The framework clearly defines the roles, accountabilities and authorities of people managers and all those with who the manager works (direct reports, peers, specialists and their own manager). It provides a set of principles and practices for effective decision making and for diagnosing and correcting managerial leadership and organisational issues. It brings clarity of thought and rational understanding to the nature of work, what it is and how it should be structured, distributed, executed and assured.

The Leadership Framework enables the design of people management systems to support productive work. At the framework's core is a strong manager-employee relationship based on working together to achieve business goals. This is a two-way, trusting, productive, working relationship focused on achieving business goals with team members working to their full potential.

Using the framework provides managers with the knowledge and skills they need and enables them to achieve their business objectives through a strong manager-employee relationship.

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