Myth of the Well-Educated Manager

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How effectively a manager will perform on the job cannot be predicted by the number of degrees he holds, the grades he receives in school, or the formal management education programs he attends. Academic achievement is not a valid yardstick to use in measuring managerial potential. Indeed, if academic achievement is equated with success in business, the well-educated manager is a myth.

Managers are not taught in formal education programs what they most need to know to build successful careers in management. Unless they acquire through their own experience the knowledge and skills that are vital to their effectiveness, they are not likely to advance far up the organizational ladder.

Although an implicit objective of all formal management education is to assist managers to learn from their own experience, much management education is, in fact, miseducation because it arrests or distorts the ability of managerial aspirants to grow as they gain experience. Fast learners in the classroom often, therefore, become slow learners in the executive suite.

Men who hold advanced degrees in management are among the most sought after of all university graduates. Measured in terms of starting salaries, they are among the elite. Perhaps no further proof of the value of management education is needed. Being highly educated pays in business, at least initially. But how much formal education contributes to a manager’s effectiveness and to his subsequent career progress is another matter.

Professor Lewis B. Ward of the Harvard Business School has found that the median salaries of graduates of that institution's MBA program plateau approximately 15 years after they enter business and, on the average, do not increase significantly thereafter.[1] While the incomes of a few MBA degree holders continue to rise dramatically, the career growth of most of them levels off just at the time men who are destined for top management typically show their greatest rate of advancement.

Equally revealing is the finding that men who attend Harvard's Advanced Management Program (AMP) after having had approximately 15 years of business experience, but who—for the most part—have had no formal education in management, earn almost a third more, on the average, than men who hold MBA degrees from Harvard and other leading business schools.

Thus the arrested career progress of MBA degree holders strongly suggests that men who get to the top in management have developed skills that are not taught in formal management education programs and may be difficult for many highly educated men to learn on the job.

Many business organizations are cutting back their expenditures for management training just at the time they most need managers who are able to do those things that will keep them competitive and profitable. But what is taking place is not an irrational exercise in cost reduction; rather, it is belated recognition by top management that formal management training is not paying off in improved performance.

If the current economy wave prompts more chief executives to insist that management training programs result in measurable improvement in performance, it will mark the beginning of the end for many of the programs which industry has supported so lavishly in the past. As Marvin Bower has observed:

"One management fad of the past decade has been management development. Enormous numbers of words and dollars have been lavished on this activity. My observations convince me that, apart from alerting managers more fully to the need for management development, these expenditures have not been very productive."[2]

Unreliable Yardsticks

Lack of correlation between scholastic standing and success in business may be surprising to those who place a premium on academic achievement. But grades in neither undergraduate nor graduate school predict how well an individual will perform in management.

After studying the career records of nearly 1,000 graduates of the Harvard Business School, for example, Professor Gordon L. Marshall concluded that "academic success and business achievement have relatively little association with each other."[3] In reaching this conclusion, he sought without success to find a correlation between grades and such measures of achievement as title, salary, and a person's own satisfaction with his career progress. (Only in the case of grades in elective courses was a significant correlation found.)

Clearly, what a student learns about management in graduate school, as measured by the grades he receives, does not equip him to build a successful career in business.

Scholastic standing in undergraduate school is an equally unreliable guide to an individual's management potential. Professor Eugene E. Jennings of the University of Michigan has conducted research which shows that "the routes to the top are apt to hold just as many or more men who graduated below the highest one third of their college class than above (on a per capita basis)."[4]

A great many executives who mistakenly believe that grades are a valid measure of leadership potential have expressed concern over the fact that fewer and fewer of those "top-third" graduates from the better-known colleges and universities are embarking on careers in business. What these executives do not recognize, however, is that academic ability does not assure that an individual will be able to learn what he needs to know to build a career in fields that involve leading, changing, developing, or working with people.

Overreliance on scholastic learning ability undoubtedly has caused leading universities and business organizations to reject a high percentage of those who have had the greatest potential for creativity and growth in nonacademic careers.

This probability is underscored by an informal study conducted in 1958 by W.B. Bender, Dean of Admissions at Harvard College. He first selected the names of 50 graduates of the Harvard class of 1928 who had been nominated for signal honors because of their outstanding accomplishments in their chosen careers. Then he examined the credentials they presented to Harvard College at the time of their admission. He found that if the admission standards used in 1958 had been in effect in 1928, two thirds of these men would have been turned down. (The proportion who would have been turned down under today's standards would have been even higher.)

In questioning the wisdom of the increased emphasis placed on scholastic standing and intelligence test scores, Dean Bender asked, "Do we really know what we are doing?"[5]

There seems to be little room for doubt that business schools and business organizations which rely on scholastic standing, intelligence test scores, and grades as measures of managerial potential are using unreliable yardsticks.

Career Consequences

False notions about academic achievement have led a number of industrial companies to adopt recruiting and development practices that have aggravated the growing rates of attrition among bright and young managerial personnel. The "High Risk, High Reward" program offered by a large electrical manufacturer to outstanding college graduates who were looking for challenging work right at the beginning of their careers illustrates the consequences of programs that assume that academic excellence is a valid yardstick for use in measuring management potential:

Under this company's program, high-ranking college graduates were given the opportunity to perform managerial work with the assistance of supervisors who were specially selected and trained to assess their development and performance. College graduates participating in the program were assured of promotion at twice the normal rate, provided they performed successfully during their first two years. Since they were to be "terminated" if they failed to qualify for promotion, the program carried high risks for those who participated.

The company undertook this High Risk, High Reward program for two reasons: (1) because its executives believed that ability demonstrated by academic achievement could be transferred to achievement in the business environment, and (2) because they wished to provide an appropriate challenge to outstanding college graduates, particularly since many management experts had contended that "lack of challenge" was a major cause of turnover among promising young managers and professionals.

The candidates for the program had to have a record of significant accomplishment in extracurricular activities, in addition to a high order of scholarship, and had to be primarily interested in becoming managers. Young men were recruited from a cross section of leading colleges and universities throughout the nation.

Although they were closely supervised by managers who had volunteered to assist in their development, at the end of five years 67% had either terminated voluntarily or had been terminated from their jobs because they had failed to perform up to expectations and were judged not capable of meeting the program's objectives. This rate of attrition was considerably higher than the company had experienced among graduates with less outstanding academic records.

Arrested progress & turnover:

Belief in the myth of the well-educated manager has caused many employers to have unrealistic performance expectations of university graduates and has led many employees with outstanding scholastic records to overestimate the value of their formal education. As a consequence, men who hold degrees in business administration—especially those with advanced degrees in management—have found it surprisingly difficult to make the transition from academic to business life. An increasing number of them have failed to perform up to expectations and have not progressed at the rate they expected.

The end result is that turnover among them has been increasing for two decades as more and more of them have been changing employers in search of a job they hope they "can make a career of." And it is revealing that turnover rates among men with advanced degrees from the leading schools of management appear to be among the highest in industry.

As Professor Edgar H. Schein of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Sloan School of Management reports, the attrition "rate among highly educated men and women runs higher, on the average, than among blue-collar workers hired out of the hard-core unemployed. The rate may be highest among people coming out of the better-known schools." [6] Thus over half the graduates of MIT's master's program in management change jobs in the first three years, Schein further reports, and "by the fifth year, 73% have moved on at least once and some are on their third and fourth jobs."[7]

Personnel records of a sample of large companies I have studied similarly revealed that turnover among men holding master's degrees in management from well-known schools was over 50% in the first five years of employment, a rate of attrition that was among the highest of any group of employees in the companies surveyed.

The much publicized notion that the young "mobile managers" who move from company to company are an exceptionally able breed of new executives and that "job-hopping has become a badge of competence" is highly misleading. While a small percentage of those who change employers are competent managers, most of the men who leave their jobs have mediocre to poor records of performance. They leave not so much because the grass is greener on the other side of the fence, but because it definitely is brown on their side. My research indicates that most of them quit either because their career progress has not met their expectations or because their opportunities for promotion are not promising.

In studying the career progress of young management-level employees of an operating company of the American Telephone & Telegraph Company, Professors David E. Berlew and Douglas T. Hall of MIT found that "men who consistently fail to meet company expectations are more likely to leave the organization than are those who turn in stronger performances."[8]

I have reached a similar conclusion after studying attrition among recent management graduates employed in several large industrial companies. Disappointing performance appraisals by superiors is the main reason why young men change employers.

"One myth," explains Schein, "is that the graduate leaves his first company merely for a higher salary. But the MIT data indicate that those who have moved on do not earn more than those who have stayed put."[9] Surveys of reunion classes at the Harvard Business School similarly indicate that men who stay with their first employer generally earn more than those who change jobs. Job-hopping is not an easy road to high income; rather, it usually is a sign of arrested career progress, often because of mediocre or poor performance on the job.

What Managers Must Learn

One reason why highly educated men fail to build successful careers in management is that they do not learn from their formal education what they need to know to perform their jobs effectively. In fact, the tasks that are the most important in getting results usually are left to be learned on the job, where few managers ever master them simply because no one teaches them how.

Formal management education programs typically emphasize the development of problem-solving and decision-making skills, for instance, but give little attention to the development of skills required to find the problems that need to be solved, to plan for the attainment of desired results, or to carry out operating plans once they are made. Success in real life depends on how well a person is able to find and exploit the opportunities that are available to him, and, at the same time, discover and deal with potential serious problems before they become critical.

Problem Solving

Preoccupation with problem solving and decision making in formal management education programs tends to distort managerial growth because it overdevelops an individual's analytical ability, but leaves his ability to take action and to get things done underdeveloped. The behavior required to solve problems that already have been discovered and to make decisions based on facts gathered by someone else is quite different from that required to perform other functions of management.

On the one hand, problem solving and decision making in the classroom require what psychologists call "respondent behavior." It is this type of behavior that enables a person to get high grades on examinations, even though he may never use in later life what he has learned in school.

On the other hand, success and fulfillment in work demand a different kind of behavior which psychologists have labeled "operant behavior." Finding problems and opportunities, initiating action, and following through to attain desired results require the exercise of operant behavior, which is neither measured by examinations nor developed by discussing in the classroom what someone else should do. Operant behavior can be developed only by doing what needs to be done.

Instruction in problem solving and decision making all too often leads to "analysis paralysis" because managerial aspirants are required only to explain and defend their reasoning, not to carry out their decisions or even to plan realistically for their implementation. Problem solving in the classroom often is dealt with, moreover, as an entirely rational process, which, of course, it hardly ever is.

As Professor Harry Levinson of the Harvard Business School points out: "The greatest difficulty people have in solving problems is the fact that emotion makes it hard for them to see and deal with their problems objectively."[10]

Rarely do managers learn in formal education programs how to maintain an appropriate psychological distance from their problems so that their judgments are not clouded by their emotions. Management graduates, as a consequence, suffer their worst trauma in business when they discover that rational solutions to problems are not enough; they must also somehow cope with human emotions in order to get results.

Problem Finding

The shortcomings of instruction in problem solving, while important, are not as significant as the failure to teach problem finding. As the research of Norman H. Mackworth of the Institute of Personality Assessment and Research, University of California, has revealed "the distinction between the problem-solver and the problem finder is vital."[11]

Problem finding, Mackworth points out, is more important than problem solving and involves cognitive processes that are very different from problem solving and much more complex. The most gifted problem finders, he has discovered, rarely have outstanding scholastic records, and those who do excel academically rarely are the most effective problem finders.

The importance of a manager's ability to find problems that need to be solved before it is too late is illustrated by the unexpected decline in profits of a number of multimarket companies in 1968 and 1969. The sharp drop in the earnings of one of these companies—Litton Industries—was caused, its chief executive explained, by earlier management deficiencies arising from the failure of those responsible to foresee problems that arose from changes in products, prices, and methods of doing business.

Managers need to be able not only to analyze data in financial statements and written reports, but also to scan the business environment for less concrete clues that a problem exists. They must be able to "read" meaning into changes in methods of doing business and into the actions of customers and competitors which may not show up in operating statements for months or even for years.

But the skill they need cannot be developed merely by analyzing problems discovered by someone else; rather, it must be acquired by observing firsthand what is taking place in business. While the analytical skills needed for problem solving are important, more crucial to managerial success are the perceptual skills needed to identify problems long before evidence of them can be found by even the most advanced management information system. Since these perceptual skills are extremely difficult to develop in the classroom, they are now largely left to be developed on the job.

Opportunity Finding

A manager's problem-finding ability is exceeded in importance only by his opportunity-finding ability. Results in business, Peter F. Drucker reminds us, are obtained by exploiting opportunities, not by solving problems. Here is how he puts it:

"All one can hope to get by solving a problem is to restore normality. All one can hope, at best, is to eliminate a restriction on the capacity of the business to obtain results. The results themselves must come from the exploitation of opportunities…'Maximization of opportunities' is a meaningful, indeed a precise, definition of the entrepreneurial job. It implies that effectiveness rather than efficiency is essential in business. The pertinent question is not how to do things right, but how to find the right things to do, and to concentrate resources and efforts on them."[12]

Managers who lack the skill needed to find those opportunities that will yield the greatest results, not uncommonly spend their time doing the wrong things. But opportunity-finding skill, like problem-finding skill, must be acquired through direct personal experience on the job.

This is not to say that the techniques of opportunity finding and problem finding cannot be taught in formal management education programs, even though they rarely are. But the behavior required to use these techniques successfully can be developed only through actual practice.

A manager cannot learn how to find opportunities or problems without doing it. The doing is essential to the learning. Lectures, case discussions, or text books alone are of limited value in developing ability to find opportunities and problems. Guided practice in finding them in real business situations is the only method that will make a manager skillful in identifying the right things to do.

Natural Management Style

Opportunities are not exploited and problems are not solved, however, until someone takes action and gets the desired results. Managers who are unable to produce effective results on the job invariably fail to build successful careers. But they cannot learn what they most need to know either by studying modern management theories or by discussing in the classroom what someone else should do to get results.

Management is a highly individualized art. What style works well for one manager in a particular situation may not produce the desired results for another manager in a similar situation, or even for the same manager in a different situation. There is no one best way for all managers to manage in all situations. Every manager must discover for himself, therefore, what works and what does not work for him in different situations. He cannot become effective merely by adopting the practices or the managerial style of someone else. He must develop his own natural style and follow practices that are consistent with his own personality.

What all managers need to learn is that to be successful they must manage in a way that is consistent with their unique personalities. When a manager "behaves in ways which do not fit his personality," as Rensis Likert's managerial research has shown, "his behavior is apt to communicate to his subordinates something quite different from what he intends. Subordinates usually view such behavior with suspicion and distrust."[13]

Managers who adopt artificial styles or follow practices that are not consistent with their own personalities are likely not only to be distrusted, but also to be ineffective. It is the men who display the "greatest individuality in managerial behavior," as Edwin E. Ghiselli's studies of managerial talent show, who in general are the ones "judged to be best managers."[14]

Managers rarely are taught how to manage in ways that are consistent with their own personalities. In many formal education and training programs, they are in fact taught that they must follow a prescribed set of practices and adopt either a "consultative" or "participative" style in order to get the "highest productivity, lowest costs, and best performance."[15]

The effectiveness of managers whose personalities do not fit these styles often is impaired and their development arrested. Those who adopt artificial styles typically are seen as counterfeit managers who lack individuality and natural styles of their own.

Managers who are taught by the case method of instruction learn that there is no one best way to manage and no one managerial style that is infallible. But unlike students of medicine, students of management rarely are exposed to "real" people or to "live" cases in programs conducted either in universities or in industry.

They study written case histories that describe problems or opportunities discovered by someone else, which they discuss, but do nothing about. What they learn about supervising other people is largely secondhand. Their knowledge is derived from the discussion of what someone else should do about the human problems of "paper people" whose emotional reactions, motives, and behavior have been described for them by scholars who may have observed and advised managers, but who usually have never taken responsibility for getting results in a business organization.

Since taking action and accepting responsibility for the consequences are not a part of their formal training, they neither discover for themselves what does—and what does not—work in practice nor develop a natural managerial style that is consistent with their own unique personalities. Managers cannot discover what practices are effective for them until they are in a position to decide for themselves what needs to be done in a specific situation, and to take responsibility both for getting it done and for the consequences of their actions.

Elton Mayo, whose thinking has had a profound impact on what managers are taught but not on how they are taught, observed a quarter of a century ago that studies in the social sciences do not develop any "skill that is directly useful in human situations."[16] He added that he did not believe a useful skill could be developed until a person takes "responsibility for what happens in particular human situations—individual or group. A good bridge player does not merely conduct post mortem discussions of the play in a hand of contract; he takes responsibility for playing it."[17]

Experience is the key to the practitioner's skill. And until a manager learns from his own firsthand experience on the job how to take action and how to gain the willing cooperation of others in achieving desired results, he is not likely to advance very far up the managerial ladder.

Needed Characteristics

Although there are no born natural leaders, relatively few men ever develop into effective managers or executives. Most, in fact, fail to learn even from their own experience what they need to know to manage other people successfully. What, then, are the characteristics of men who learn to manage effectively?

The answer to that question consists of three ingredients: (1) the need to manage, (2) the need for power, and (3) the capacity for empathy. In this section of the article, I shall discuss each of these characteristics in some detail.

The Need to Manage

This first part of the answer to the question is deceptively simple: only those men who have a strong desire to influence the performance of others and who get genuine satisfaction from doing so can learn to manage effectively. No man is likely to learn how unless he really wants to take responsibility for the productivity of others, and enjoys developing and stimulating them to achieve better results.

Many men who aspire to high-level managerial positions are not motivated to manage. They are motivated to earn high salaries and to attain high status, but they are not motivated to get effective results through others. They expect to gain great satisfaction from the income and prestige associated with executive positions in important enterprises, but they do not expect to gain much satisfaction from the achievements of their subordinates. Although their aspirations are high, their motivation to supervise other people is low.

A major reason why highly educated and ambitious men do not learn how to develop successful managerial careers is that they lack the "will to manage." The "*way* to manage," as Marvin Bower has observed, usually can be found if there is the "*will* to manage." But if a person lacks the desire, he "will not devote the time, energy and thought required to find the way to manage."[18]

No one is likely to sustain for long the effort required to get high productivity from others unless he has a strong psychological need to influence their performance. The need to manage is a crucial factor, therefore, in determining whether a person will learn and apply in practice what is necessary to get effective results on the job.

High grades in school and outstanding performance as an accountant, an engineer, or a salesman reveal how able and willing a person is to perform tasks he has been assigned. But an outstanding record as an individual performer does not indicate whether that person is able or willing to get other people to excel at the same tasks. Outstanding scholars often make poor teachers, excellent engineers often are unable to supervise the work of other engineers, and successful salesmen often are ineffective sales managers.

Indeed, men who are outstanding individual performers not uncommonly become "do-it-yourself" managers. Although they are able and willing to do the job themselves, they lack the motivation and temperament to get it done by others. They may excel as individual performers and may even have good records as first-line managers. But they rarely advance far up the organizational hierarchy because, no matter how hard they try, they cannot make up through their own efforts for mediocre or poor performance by large numbers of subordinates.

Universities and business organizations that select managerial candidates on the basis of their records as individual performers often pick the wrong men to develop as managers. These men may get satisfaction from their own outstanding performance, but unless they are able to improve the productivity of other people, they are not likely to become successful managers.

Fewer and fewer men who hold advanced degrees in management want to take responsibility for getting results through others. More and more of them are attracted to jobs that permit them to act in the detached role of the consultant or specialized expert, a role described by John W. Gardner as the one preferred increasingly by university graduates.[19]

This preference is illustrated by the fact that although the primary objective of the Harvard Business School is to develop managers, less than one third of that institution's graduates actually take first-line management jobs. Two thirds of them start their careers in staff or specialized nonmanagerial positions. In the three-year period of 1967, 1968, and 1969, approximately 10% of the graduates of the Harvard Business School took jobs with management consulting firms and the management service divisions of public accounting firms. A decade earlier, in the three-year period of 1957, 1958, and 1959, only 3% became consultants.

As Charlie Brown prophetically observed in a "Peanuts" cartoon strip in which he is standing on the pitcher's mound surrounded by his players, all of whom are telling him what to do at a critical point in a baseball game: "The world is filled with people who are anxious to act in an advisory capacity." Educational institutions are turning out scholars, scientists, and experts who are anxious to act as advisers, but they are producing few men who are eager to lead or take responsibility for the performance of others.

Most management graduates prefer staff positions in headquarters to line positions in the field or factory. More and more of them want jobs that will enable them to use their analytical ability rather than their supervisory ability. Fewer and fewer are willing to make the sacrifices required to learn management from the bottom up; increasingly, they hope to step in at the top from positions where they observe, analyze, and advise but do not have personal responsibility for results. Their aspirations are high, but their need to take responsibility for the productivity of other people is low.

The tendency for men who hold advanced degrees in management to take staff jobs and to stay in these positions too long makes it difficult for them to develop the supervisory skills they need to advance within their companies. Men who fail to gain direct experience as line managers in the first few years of their careers commonly do not acquire the capabilities they need to manage other managers and to sustain their upward progress past middle age.

"A man who performs nonmanagerial tasks five years or more," as Jennings discovered, "has a decidedly greater improbability of becoming a high wage earner. High salaries are being paid to manage managers."[20] This may well explain in part why the median salaries of Harvard Business School graduates plateau just at the time they might be expected to move up into the ranks of top management.

The Need for Power

Psychologists once believed that the motive that caused men to strive to attain high-level managerial positions was the "need for achievement." But now they believe it is the "need for power," which is the second part of the answer to the question: What are the characteristics of men who learn to manage effectively?

A study of the career progress of members of the classes of 1954 and 1955 at the Graduate School of Industrial Management at Carnegie Institute of Technology showed that the need for achievement did not predict anything about their subsequent progress in management.[21] As Harvard Professor David C. McClelland, who has been responsible for much of the research on achievement motivation, recently remarked:

"It is fairly clear that a high need to achieve does not equip a man to deal effectively with managing human relationships…

"Since managers are primarily concerned with influencing others, it seems obvious that they should be characterized by a high need for power and that by studying the power motive we could learn something about the way effective managerial leaders work."[22]

Power seekers can be counted on to strive hard to reach positions where they can exercise authority over large numbers of people. Individual performers who lack this drive are not likely to act in ways that will enable them to advance far up the managerial ladder. They usually scorn company politics and devote their energies to other types of activities that are more satisfying to them. But, to prevail in the competitive struggle to attain and hold high-level positions in management, a person's desire for prestige and high income must be reinforced by the satisfaction he gets or expects to get from exercising the power and authority of a high office.

The competitive battle to advance within an organization, as Levinson points out, is much like playing "King of the Hill."[23] Unless a person enjoys playing that game, he is likely to tire of it and give up the struggle for control of the top of the hill. The power game is a part of management, and it is played best by those who enjoy it most.

The power drive that carries men to the top also accounts for their tendency to use authoritative rather than consultative or participative methods of management. But to expect otherwise is not realistic. Few men who strive hard to gain and hold positions of power can be expected to be permissive, particularly if their authority is challenged.

Since their satisfaction comes from the exercise of authority, they are not likely to share much of it with lower-level managers who eventually will replace them, even though most high-level executives try diligently to avoid the appearance of being authoritarian. It is equally natural for ambitious lower-level managers who have a high need for power themselves to believe that better results would be achieved if top management shared more authority with them, even though they, in turn, do not share much of it with their subordinates.

One of the least rational acts of business organizations is that of hiring managers who have a high need to exercise authority, and then teaching them that authoritative methods are wrong and that they should be consultative or participative. It is a serious mistake to teach managers that they should adopt styles that are artificial and inconsistent with their unique personalities. Yet this is precisely what a large number of business organizations are doing; and it explains, in part, why their management development programs are not effective.

What managerial aspirants should be taught is how to exercise their authority in a way that is appropriate to the characteristics of the situation and the people involved. Above all, they need to learn that the real source of their power is their own knowledge and skill, and the strength of their own personalities, not the authority conferred on them by their positions. They need to know that overreliance on the traditional authority of their official positions is likely to be fatal to their career aspirations because the effectiveness of this kind of authority is declining everywhere—in the home, in the church, and in the state as well as in business.

More than authority to hire, promote, and fire is required to get superior results from most subordinates. To be effective, managers must possess the authority that comes with knowledge and skill, and be able to exercise the charismatic authority that is derived from their own personalities.

When they lack the knowledge or skill required to perform the work, they need to know how to share their traditional authority with those who know what has to be done to get results. When they lack the charisma needed to get the willing cooperation of those on whom they depend for performance, they must be able to share their traditional authority with the informal leaders of the group, if any exist.

But when they know what has to be done and have the skill and personality to get it done, they must exercise their traditional authority in whatever way is necessary to get the results they desire. Since a leader cannot avoid the exercise of authority, he must understand the nature and limitations of it, and be able to use it in an appropriate manner. Equally important, he must avoid trying to exercise authority he does not, in fact, possess.

The Capacity for Empathy

Mark Van Doren once observed that an educated man is one "who is able to use the intellect he was born with: the intellect, and whatever else is important."[24] At the top of the list of "whatever else is important" is the third characteristic necessary in order to manage other people successfully. Namely, it is the capacity for empathy or the ability to cope with the emotional reactions that inevitably occur when people work together in an organization.

Many men who have more than enough abstract intelligence to learn the methods and techniques of management fail because their affinity with other people is almost entirely intellectual or cognitive. They may have "intellectual empathy" but may not be able to sense or identify the unverbalized emotional feelings which strongly influence human behavior.[25] They are emotion-blind just as some men are color-blind.

Such men lack what Norman L. Paul describes as "affective empathy."[26] And since they cannot recognize unexpressed emotional feelings, they are unable to learn from their own experience how to cope with the emotional reactions that are crucial in gaining the willing cooperation of other people.

Many men who hold advanced degrees in management are emotion-blind. As Schein has found, they often are "mired in the code of rationality" and, as a consequence, "undergo a rude shock" on their first jobs.[27] After interviewing dozens of recent graduates of the Sloan School of Management at MIT, Schein reported that "they talk like logical men who have stumbled into a cell of irrational souls," and he added:

"At an emotional level, ex-students resent the human emotions that make a company untidy… [Few] can accept without pain the reality of the organization's human side. Most try to wish it away, rather than work in and around it… If a graduate happens to have the capacity to accept, maybe to love, human organization, this gift seems directly related to his potential as a manager or executive."[28]

Whether managers can be taught in the classroom how to cope with human emotions is a moot point. There is little reason to believe that what is now taught in psychology classes, human relations seminars, and sensitivity training programs is of much help to men who are "mired in the code of rationality" and who lack "affective empathy."

Objective research has shown that efforts to sensitize supervisors to the feelings of others not only often have failed to improve performance, but in some cases have made the situation worse than it was before.[29] Supervisors who are unable "to tune in empathically" on the emotional feelings aroused on the job are not likely to improve their ability to empathize with others in the classroom.[30]

Indeed, extended classroom discussions about what other people should do to cope with emotional situations may well inhibit rather than stimulate the development of the ability of managers to cope with the emotional reactions they experience on the job.

Conclusion

Many highly intelligent and ambitious men are not learning from either their formal education or their own experience what they most need to know to build successful careers in management.

Their failure is due, in part, to the fact that many crucial managerial tasks are not taught in management education programs but are left to be learned on the job, where few managers ever master them because no one teaches them how. It also is due, in part, to the fact that what takes place in the classroom often is miseducation that inhibits their ability to learn from their experience. Commonly, they learn theories of management that cannot be applied successfully in practice, a limitation many of them discover only through the direct experience of becoming a line executive and meeting personally the problems involved.

Some men become confused about the exercise of authority because they are taught only about the traditional authority a manager derives from his official position—a type of authority that is declining in effectiveness everywhere. A great many become inoculated with an "anti-leadership vaccine" that arouses within them intense negative feelings about authoritarian leaders, even though a leader cannot avoid the exercise of authority any more than he can avoid the responsibility for what happens to his organization.

Since these highly educated men do not learn how to exercise authority derived from their own knowledge and skill or from the charisma of their own personalities, more and more of them avoid responsibility for the productivity of others by taking jobs that enable them to act in the detached role of the consultant or specialized expert. Still others impair their effectiveness by adopting artificial managerial styles that are not consistent with their own unique personalities but give them the appearance of being "consultative" or "participative," an image they believe is helpful to their advancement up the managerial ladder.

Some managers who have the intelligence required to learn what they need to know fail because they lack "whatever else is important," especially "affective empathy" and the need to develop and stimulate the productivity of other people. But the main reason many highly educated men do not build successful managerial careers is that they are not able to learn from their own firsthand experience what they need to know to gain the willing cooperation of other people. Since they have not learned how to observe their environment firsthand or to assess feedback from their actions, they are poorly prepared to learn and grow as they gain experience.

Alfred North Whitehead once observed that "the secondhandedness of the learned world is the secret of its mediocrity."[31] Until managerial aspirants are taught to learn from their own firsthand experience, formal management education will remain secondhanded. And its secondhandedness is the real reason why the well-educated manager is a myth.

Letters to the Editor: From the Thoughtful Businessman

J. Sterling Livingston's article, "The Myth of the Well-Educated Manager" (January-February 1971), has attracted more letters of comment—pro and con—than any article we have published for a long time. Because of the great interest in the subject of his article, we are devoting the whole of this issue of Letters to the Editor *to it*. —The Editors

From: Franklin W. Gilchrist,

President, Aptitude Testing for Industry

Mr. Livingston deserves high praise, not only for exposing the "myth of the well-educated manager," but also for revealing the power of academia in action. Who says professors aren't salesmen?

Top executives frequently concede that academic achievement is a poor predictor of management potential. Yet, perhaps frustrated in its efforts to motivate other managers, management has overrelied on grades, degrees, and "management training." Unfortunately, management has also discriminated against people possessing talent, but no degree.

Fortunately, this is less true of sales managers. Many, if not most, have abandoned the idea that academic stars make star salesmen—perhaps discouraged by the findings of a 1963 study of 97 star salesmen conducted by the Los Angeles Sales and Marketing Executives Association. Of the 97, 59% (nearly 70% if technical sales categories are excluded) *either did not finish college, or did not attend at all*. They are the kind of dropouts we do not hear about; they are out making sales, not newspaper copy.

My conclusion: effective managers, like star salesmen, are a different breed. If so, the solution to "management development" is basically *selection,* not training. In short, pick the right guy in the first place!

From: Myron M. Miller,

Product Manager—Sewing Products, International Group, The Singer Company

Mr. Livingston's exposé of the "myth of the well-educated manager" provides cause for those of us in the front lines of the business world, as well as those responsible for formal management education, to reevaluate the credentials of those who will be moving into key management positions in the coming years.

In addition to the significant issues defined by Livingston, there is another major factor which contributes to the leveling off of growth of the analytically oriented graduate of a management-science oriented business school. I call it the "55-45 Syndrome."

With the help of the management sciences in particular, the young business school graduate enters the business world better equipped than ever before to break down the positive and negative factors involved in a particular decision-making situation. Thus he may determine that 55% of the facts available indicate that a certain action should be taken, while 45% of the facts indicate that the action should not be taken. In few situations do the facts stack up 100% in favor of the action; the closer the scales come to 50%-50%, the more agonizing becomes the recommendation or decision.

The 55-45 Syndrome is that characteristic of a person which prevents him from acting effectively once he knows that the facts are 55% for a course of action and 45% against that course of action (or even for an alternate course of action, or no action at all).

If we accept the proposition that the men who reach the most significant managerial positions are those who take action and have a good batting average on their decisions, it follows that these top men will promote their subordinates as they see growth in action-taking ability and sound judgment. For the young staff man or junior manager to convince top management that he has those required capabilities, he must be aware of the need to overcome the 55-45 Syndrome early in his career, and to hurdle the barrier every day.

The man who overcomes the 55-45 Syndrome is one who, given the slight weighing of the scales to one side, can make a decision (or make a decisive recommendation to his superior) with conviction, and then not look over his shoulder to agonize over his decision, or do everything within his power to cover himself in case the decision is wrong.

If he is making a recommendation, this man carefully and selectively defines the negative aspects involved in a course of action, not to keep the issue wide open and water down his recommendation, but only to highlight those facts of which his superior must be aware to deal prudently with other current issues or with future issues. But there must be no question about what his recommendation is.

The man who does not overcome the 55-45 Syndrome, and therefore finds his scope of management responsibility and career leveling off after 10 to 15 years, is the one who is paralyzed by the knowledge that the facts are so unclear. He cannot make a positive decision or make a decisive recommendation. If he is making the decision himself, he cannot make it without agonizing over it, and is ever ready to set things up so he cannot be accused of having made the wrong decision.

If he is making a recommendation, this man may list in a report the positive and negative factors involved in a decision, and, while he may make a recommendation, he may do everything possible to show that it is a 55-45 situation, and stress the negative factors so strongly that he can always come back and say, "Well, I made that point in my report."

This man is distressing to a decisive superior, for the superior is required to become intimately familiar with all the small details of the case itself, reanalyze the entire situation, and make the decision from scratch himself. Not only has his subordinate not taken a positive, decisive stance, but he has also complicated and confused the issue.

Such a man frustrates a busy superior who has neither the time nor the patience to deal with him. This 55-45 man may be retained for years because of his analytical ability, but he will never be welcomed into that small, selective group of men who make the significant decisions and provide the direction for a business.

Perhaps Livingston would argue that the ability to overcome the 55-45 Syndrome can only come with firsthand experience in the business world, but I believe otherwise. I am convinced that case-study situations can be set up in a university that will allow a student to sort out the facts available to him and to weigh the facts in a problem (assuming that he is also being trained at problem and opportunity finding).

Thereafter, he would be required to write reports indicating a recommendation. His academic success in that situation would not be decided by some predetermined "right" answer (since those of us in the business world are so seldom able to decide whether a position taken on a selective issue was really "right"), but instead be based on the judgment and conviction indicated by his responses. A professor could coach the student to enable him to become increasingly aware of the 55-45 Syndrome, and help him overcome it in classroom situations.

Just putting this problem of the Syndrome in the young man's mind as he enters the early years of his career gives him a start in the right direction. Fortunately, I had this problem defined by a superior some years ago, and the awareness of this problem has helped me immensely. It is better that the young man become aware of the problem in the university, than after many years of his career.

From: Timothy J. Sturm,

Manager, Personnel Development, Chubb & Son Inc.

Mr. Livingston's contentions will, no doubt, warm the hearts of many a "self-made" executive and produce an undeniable placebo effect on many an aspiring "uneducated" manager or marginally achieving college student.

For them (and for several others I have recently heard allude to this article, including one consultant who blandly lifted his entire speech from it), I think it would be prudent to explore some of the more captious implications and relationships it suggests.

Does, for example, a 67% attrition rate in a "High Risk, High Reward" program indicate anything other than that competition in such a program is keener, or that criteria for performance standards are inordinately more demanding than for regular managers? Does the fact that flexible and mobile managers change jobs more frequently than the marginally qualified, inflexible, and immobile blue-collar workers from the ranks of the hard-core unemployed have anything to do with education and business success?

Is it surprising that so many MBA degree-holders are moving into staff or consulting jobs, when last year four out of five new jobs were of staff complexion? It may be that their perceptual skills have been developed highly enough for them to see the corollary to Charlie Brown's observation:

“The world is also full of people who are anxious for advice.”

From: W.J. Ryan,

Director, Staff Training & Development, Kemper Insurance

Although I am certainly in no position to confirm or deny Mr. Livingston’s facts as to the success of undergraduate business schools and graduate programs in producing successful managers, I do generally agree that academic preparation for a field—which has not really been elevated yet to the level of a science and is still primarily an art—does not and cannot constitute the total preparation.

I agree with two thirds of his criteria for identifying successful managers. I agree that the abilities to identify problems and opportunities and to deal with the emotional level of human nature are two extremely important criteria.

However, I do *not* agree that the desire for power over people is or should be a criterion for identification of managers. I am sure it is true that many people aspire to become supervisors or managers just out of this quest for power. Certainly we have had many examples of this in government and other arenas of human activity, including the business world. It has been axiomatic in government that the one who most energetically seeks power is usually the one to be least trusted with it.

Another common phenomenon is that the person with this drive frequently is the one who assumes an early lead in the rise of any organization’s hierarchy, but it is also true that this same person often disappears almost as rapidly from the role of the leader. For example, certain studies produced in the development of procedures for identifying qualified OSS personnel during World War II indicated that, in a problem situation, the first person to emerge as a leader was usually not the person who was still the leader when the problem was eventually solved. The group eventually rejected him unless he had truly valid solutions to offer.

However, the other two criteria described by Livingston are significant. It is particularly true that the “cerebral” type of person finds it extremely difficult to deal with the less certain and everchanging conditions produced by emotional interactions in groups. I see this in the rigidity of many young people. A preparation which is too academic for the manager's role, therefore, will not only fail to prepare a person for this aspect of his role but will even deceive him as to its real nature.

Livingston's entire thrust is against academic programs in universities. All his factual evidence is concerned with these programs, except for one case. It squares with my own observations, particularly his evidence that MBAs seek staff positions to act "in an advisory capacity."

His one exception is Harvard's Advanced Management Program, attended by men with 15 years of business experience, who earn one third more than MBAs. I should think they would. They are already successful to some degree, or their companies would not have sent them to the program. Moreover, the act of selection implies company affirmation of their success and assurance of further success. The doctrine of the self-fulfilling prophecy is at least partially operative in such cases.

Livingston's recurrent theme is that much of managing—the "operant behavior"—can be learned only by doing. This I fully concede. I begin every one of our courses with this statement.

I particularly have stressed that *real* authority comes, not from position or conferment, but, in the long run, from the person's own knowledge and ability. This proposition, by the way, was articulated for businessmen by Henri Fayol in France over 50 years ago. (He was a coal-combine executive all of his life, not an academician, but he provided the impetus for formal education in management in his country.)

What are the implications for our own management program? As I see it, simply that what we started to do in the first place, and have continued to do—that is, to keep our company programs practical, with a minimum of academic input—is the correct procedure.

As an example, in the West Coast Managerial Seminar we just concluded, after appropriate knowledge input, we asked the group members to draft position guides for the position of a Personal Lines Underwriting Manager in our discussion case. We required that they display these guides on an overhead transparency for the entire group and discuss them, in order to identify the practical aspects of the managerial role. We asked them to draft objectives for the case in question and for their own units, following presentation of the theory of management by objectives.

After a presentation of the significant behavioral science theorists, we asked each person in the group to identify a particular person with whom he felt he had a "motivational problem" and describe him in the terms of the guidelines laid down by the behavioral scientists we had just presented to them. Then they discussed the cases in subgroups and before the entire group.

This quick example is intended to show that, within the practical limits of the classroom, we have been attempting to add to academic input as much practical application as possible. Beyond this, of course, we must resort to the proposition that supervising and managing can be learned only on the job, but I do not subscribe to this limitation on management education as defining its outer perimeter. In this respect I disagree with Livingston's implied—but not clearly stated—conclusion that there is no place for formal education (theory input) in this field.

The proponents of "on the job" learning in any field operate on the theory that one who is thrown into the water without any preliminary swimming instructions will either sink or swim. This is not true. There is a third alternative: that he will learn to swim badly.

This is another way of saying that, while experience is eventually necessary, it should be preceded by some instruction, theory, or knowledge input so that the learner may benefit more rapidly and with maximum effectiveness from experience. One way in which I have heard this stated is that knowledge of theory and principles enables the learner to "categorize and recognize his experiences when he encounters them on the job."

Livingston mentions this basic concept in his third paragraph, but dismisses it saying, "Much management education is, in fact, miseducation because it arrests or distorts the ability of managerial aspirants to grow as they gain experience." It's true that much of it is miseducation, but, apparently, he is referring to the degree programs. Even so, it's no good to sound as though one wants to dispose of the baby with the bath water.

However, this concept best expresses the rationale for a program of "formal education" which embraces both knowledge input and as much practical application as can be obtained within the limits of a formal course, with complete recognition that the learning cycle is not complete until the learner actually operates within the arena for which he is being educated. Experience alone is not all it is cracked up to be, as the pragmatic Mr. Franklin perceived when he described experience's "dear school" as a last resort for fools who reject other forms of learning.

This brings up the importance of on-the-job coaching by managers of their subordinate supervisors and managers. Again, we try to use what leverage we have in a training function to bring this about (e.g., urging branch and department managers to contact subordinates enrolled in our courses, to discuss applications of course content, further development, and so on).

As a footnote, there may be some significance to the fact that Livingston is the head of Sterling Institute, which has several divisions all offering management education in one form or another to business and industry.

One division produces teaching materials in the form of fairly simple and easy-to-use "games" to demonstrate various principles of supervision. This division appears wedded to the idea of making this kind of learning as experiential as possible; the sample of the material which I saw and used, and examination of the descriptions of the other games, indicates to me that they do this rather well.

Sterling Institute is also building a number of training centers around the country where they will be offering companies classroom facilities, with extremely sophisticated audiovisual equipment.

In these aspects of their activity, at least, they seem to feel that there is enough worth in formal classroom training to charge a rather substantial amount for providing these facilities to companies.

From: Donovan R. Greene,

Manager—Los Angeles Office, The McMurry Company

Mr. Livingston has articulated some conclusions, supported by facts, about management development and training that a number of us in the field have suspected or known for some time, but were never quite able to confirm and summarize as nicely as it is done in this article.

Livingston's emphasis on the critical importance of identifying a man's "need to manage" is a contribution of great value to any executive who gets involved in management selection decisions. Based on some of the pioneering work of Professor David C. McClelland, we know it is possible to measure the strengths of a man's need for power or need to manage. Perhaps it was beyond the scope of Livingston's article to discuss the techniques available for identifying and measuring a man's need to manage.

While those of us in the field of executive selection understand these techniques, wouldn't it be worthwhile to have them described in either an appendage to Livingston's article or perhaps in a separate article?[1] The readers, hopefully, now understand the importance of looking for a man's "need to manage" before they put him into a supervisory position. I suggest that Livingston and McClelland together write an article for HBR on how to identify the power as well as the achievement motivation in aspiring managers.

From: Richard A. Ellis,

Senior Project Director, Nelson Associates, Inc.

Mr. Livingston correctly judges that formal education and training programs have not been very effective in producing corporate leadership. But I do not feel that one may properly jump from this observation to the sort of general indictment of business education which is contained in this article, and the evidence presented by Livingston for his secondary contention—that there is "no direct relationship between performance in school or training programs and records of success in management"—is not at all persuasive.

There have been many attempts in numerous fields—notably, in medicine—to show that academic success is unrelated to long-range career achievement. J.L. Spaeth of the University of Chicago has shown (in his book, *Recent College Graduates,* in press) that almost all of these investigations suffer from the same analytical error repeated in this article: the population which is used to test the proposition is preselected in some way.

For example, variations in scholastic records of students at the Harvard Business School are quite unlikely to be good predictors of long-range career advancement, because those students are so highly selected in the first place that differences among them in academic ability are trivial. One would suppose, in fact, that data for these men might be used to prove exactly the opposite point, since both their undergraduate academic records and their career achievements are probably somewhat superior to those of men from other graduate schools of business.

Without pushing this argument too far, it might be observed that if the Harvard men are not, in fact, superior in just this way, then there is no earthly reason for any of us to prefer those graduates over men from other schools, and Livingston is out of a job! In other words, we cannot have it both ways.

Livingston also refers to Eugene E. Jennings' research at the University of Michigan on a less biased group of cases, but here the findings are equivocal, to say the least: "The routes to the top are apt to hold just as many or more men who graduated below the highest one third of their college class than above." This statement is subject to an interpretation precisely opposed to that proposed by Jennings—that about half of the men at the top came from the top one third of their classes, or slightly more than might be anticipated if there were no positive relationship between academic success and managerial leadership.

Furthermore, the finding ignores the fact that undergraduate grades may have already acted to weed out less capable people who fail to graduate at all, and it may be more reflective of the college-going characteristics of past generations of managers than of the potential effects, for good or ill, of today's business education.

The truth of the matter is that young managers are considerably better educated these days than were their predecessors; this is not a "myth" at all. To be sure, these educational advantages probably do not confer any special capabilities for leadership. As Livingston correctly observes, top management potential rests heavily on psychological factors and on a man's on-the-job experience.

The contribution of business education may be viewed as establishing a common set of rules by which the game is to be played, a type of necessary but not sufficient condition for corporate advancement. The scholastic skills do not guarantee success, but without them it may be next to impossible (for younger players, at least) to compete at all. The business schools may claim to do better than this, with every graduate presented as an incisive, dynamic leader. Those of us who buy the product need not swallow this whole, however.

From: Joseph P. Di Bella,

Production Services, Eastern Airlines

During my two-year tenure at Columbia Business School, I too wrote on what I thought was an inadequate education program. My letter, "School Should Stress More Entrepreneurship," was published in the Columbia University *Graduate Business News*. Basically, I expressed my feelings that the curriculum was training staff personnel and not managers or leaders.

My views are primarily founded on the training program I underwent in a service academy. In addition to academic grades, a cadet is also graded on his ability to make decisions and lead a group. The program gives students an opportunity to experiment, develop a leadership philosophy, and learn from mistakes, without costly setbacks to a career. The graduate's training is apparent in the service; in most cases, he is better prepared to manage than is his counterpart, the reserve officer. The difference, however, diminishes to an insignificant level within four or five years.

Yet, after two years in the business world, I find my MBA education invaluable. Thus, I assume the "well-educated manager" needs both: the present MBA program and an opportunity to practice business *administration* in an academic environment.

From: Robert A. Zywicki,

Vice President, Anixter Bros. Inc.

The university, the student, and the business organization are all responsible, to a degree, for the failure of many top students to live up to their potential.

The student is taught to look for simple solutions to complex problems. The good manager seeks complex solutions to simple problems. He knows that all problems can be restated in simple terms: How will this affect profit? If he states the problem in any other form, he has missed the point.

But solutions must be complex because people are complex, and it is through people that he must implement his programs. He must adjust his programs as competition and other outside factors alter the circumstances. Business courses stress fact-finding, problem-solving, and implementation but not opportunity-finding or follow-through. It is no wonder more and more advanced-degree graduates are becoming consultants. That is what the courses are designed to produce.

Perhaps many high achievers seek the grade rather than the knowledge. The credit and honor that go with a high grade become the end and not the means. This trait, which makes for a good student, does not necessarily make for a good manager. The man who is concerned with getting credit for achievement rarely is a good manager. A good manager is a credit giver, not a credit taker.

Business may be compounding the problem by starting the well-educated man in a position too far up the organizational ladder. He has not earned his position; his education has bought it for him. He learned by thinking from a thinker rather than by doing from a doer.

Cicero said it many years ago, "Natural ability without education has oftener raised man to glory and virtue, than education without natural ability."

From: Subscribers-at-large

We cannot possibly publish all of the letters we received in reaction to Mr. Livingston's article; and, besides, many raised some of the same points. Accordingly, we present below excerpts from a number of additional letters to illustrate the range of ideas expressed.—The Editors

- Our experience at the company I head parallels exactly the conclusions Livingston reached in his article.

Samuel B. Casey, Jr., President, Pullman, Inc.

- Although I am in accord with Livingston's views, I think some of his arguments are in the "umbrellas cause rain" vein of persuasion. This seems to be so because he bases part of his argument on the absence of a close tie between grades obtained in an academic environment and the level of success in business, as measured by progress up the rungs of the *line* organization ladder and by level of income. However, it seems to me that the fault lies with those in business who, over a period of time, assumed that there was a relationship between grades and potential success, and then went ahead blindly and made selection and placement decisions on that unquestioned assumption. This suggests that criticism should be leveled at the selection processes of business organizations instead of at the educational institutions.

If one were to assume that grades and degrees from educational institutions could be equated with success in the business world, then one could comfortably expect to find that our leading, best-selling novelists and winners of the Nobel Prize for Literature were holders of a Ph.D. in English. If this does not prove out, English departments in universities should be roundly criticized for the kind of education their faculties are providing. However, it is the essence of education that defends English departments and schools of business against charges of flying false colors.

Thomas S. Isaack,

Chairman, Department of Business Administration, College of Business and Economics, West Virginia University

- Livingston points out that many MBAs have not progressed at the rates they expected, and he cites high turnover rates in the early years of employment as indicating poor managerial performance. Certainly, turnover is not a sign of successful cooperation between a company and an employee, but neither is nonturnover necessarily a sign of healthy partnership. It may be that MBAs from prominent schools feel more mobile than their fellows and, when dissatisfied, are more likely to seek employment elsewhere. They, as well as their employers, may have unrealistic expectations of their own early performance.

John Keohane,

Programmer/Analyst, Sears, Roebuck and Co.

- Scholastic standing, intelligence test scores, and grades are based upon institutional objectives. So why should anybody expect this to be indicative of anything other than success in the institution? Are the institution and its concerns a good map of what goes on in the outside world? Obviously not!

When I say that someone is an underachiever, I mean that he cannot meet my objectives. He might be more competent than I, and he might see my objectives as useless or meaningless. Even management by objectives really means making the right things happen. But what are the right things? My son can outperform a black boy from Roxbury in a suburban school, but my son cannot survive in Roxbury. Who is the underachiever? It depends on the objectives desired.

Livingston says that management experts have contended that " 'lack of challenge' was a major cause of turnover," so the experiment he gave as an example was based on this assumption. But if the assumption is not accurate, everything falls with it. Perhaps the young managers wanted excitement, growth in competence, and enrichment on their own terms.

Thomas Lifrieri, Member of the Faculty, Center for Continuing Education, Northeastern University

- In any organization there is just so much room at the top. As an individual advances near the apex of the pyramidal hierarchy, his growth will naturally be inhibited, not so much because of his inability, but because there are simply fewer positions to advance into. I'm inclined to believe this is the real cause of the leveling-off effect for MBAs as well as for all employees. This argument is further strengthened by Livingston's own admission that MBAs' incomes continue to grow, though their careers may not; that is, they are competent employees with no further room to grow, so the company pays them more in order to retain them.

Thomas J. Eckroat,

Planning Engineer, Hallmark Cards Incorporated

- Fifteen years or more of strain will take their toll—regardless of one's educational background. More than others, the young MBA graduates have had to demonstrate their superiority, work in a large variety of assignments, move frequently from place to place—all at a heavy cost to their personal stability and their home life. If the zest for power has flagged around age 40, it may be because of what happened *after* these people left college. The point is that, as a group, MBAs are more exposed than non-MBAs.

I believe that the time is long overdue to release youngsters from what they regard as a compulsion to attend college. And those who do engage in formal studies should be utilized more productively by our institutions.

During the past decade, while business shelved educated men and women in their prime years, the United States encountered some problems. The need for campus reform is manifest. But perhaps the widespread practice of aborting careers in midstream, reported by Livingston, is the failure that needs examination most urgently.

Harold W. Fox,

Chairman, Department of Marketing, College of Commerce, De Paul University

- The compensation comparison between those who attend Harvard's Advanced Management Program and those who attend its MBA program has no syllogistic significance. Livingston's comparison is analogous to comparing (a) the compensation of generals who did not attend West Point with (b) the compensation of *all* West Point graduates. The author's brand of logic would insinuate that West Point is not accomplishing anything either.

I submit that there is Set A, consisting of all those who have MBA degrees, and Set B, consisting of all management aspirants who do not have MBA training. A portion of Set A and a portion of Set B will actually achieve management positions. Of those in Set B who achieve management positions, a tiny elite portion will achieve managerial positions with companies of such stature that they can be sent to the Advanced Management Program, while those who already have MBA degrees are not usually sent to the program, simply because they already have attended the school. Therefore, even if there is a similar, and perhaps larger, elite among them, it doesn't show up in the comparison. In conclusion, no valid inference may be derived from a comparison of all the members of Set A with a tiny subset of Set B.

I'm not sure Livingston is right in inferring that the MBA program fails to provide its graduates with a certain ingredient of managerial skill they must have in order to "reach the top." *It is possible that these men with graduate degrees have more managerial skill than those who are actually promoted to the top spot.* Livingston glibly assumes that those who achieve the top spot are ipso facto the ones with the best managerial skills. Perhaps a great deal of subjectivity was involved in the evaluation of their managerial skills. This possibility seems to be substantiated by many remarks in the article which imply that managerial activities are laden with subjective emotional considerations.

Ray G. Wasyluka,

Vice President, Division of W.R. Grace & Co.

- The more effective use of human resources, in my experience, often takes second or third place to the more effective use of machine tools, pumps, schedules, audiovisual aids, and curriculum design. Questions about the relevance of management education, such as Livingston raised, might as easily apply to the education (and use) of engineers, civil servants, hospital administrators, foremen, professors, and so on.

If management education is not making the impact it should, a large part of the reason stems from the failure of organizations to reach out actively in its utilization. If organizations used what *is* taught in the field of management more effectively, they would get a great deal more for their money, and they would also contribute to the development of what *should* be taught in formal management courses.

Peter P. Gil,

Associate Dean for Teaching Programs, Alfred P. Sloan School of Management, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

- Formal education must expose its students to day-to-day responsibility and decision making if it is to be truly effective. As Livingston points out, having the facts presented in a case versus having to determine the facts on the job represents a big difference in perception that can and must be developed. Perhaps a co-op form of education is really the best method in light of these facts.

E. Burns Roensch,

Marketing Manager, Hackney Corporation

- I feel strongly that Livingston's "needed characteristics" for management personnel may have sidetracked a fourth and very vital trait, which he has possibly concealed in the word "personality." I agree wholeheartedly that the need for power and the need to manage are of prime importance, and that the mastery of empathy is a real asset. But these qualities can many times cascade one into a turbulent whirlpool unless one is well moderated by sincere *humility*. Many will argue that there is no place in top management for humility, and certainly not for its display. The real trick is to exercise a kind of humility that cannot readily be recognized by one's subordinates!

R.W. Sumner,

Defense Products, Westinghouse Electric Corporation

- Could it be that many of our young people have been forced into universities—although they did not want to attend—and were temperamentally unsuited for higher education, thus laying the groundwork for much of our university restlessness and the overcrowding of universities? This would contribute to the necessity of lowering standards so that everyone could be given a "vital" diploma necessary for even securing an interview with the majority of businesses. Could our universities themselves have therefore suffered from the "overselling" of the necessity of their product?

F.S. Thompson,

Consultant in Transportation

- A reasonable objective for the graduate schools of business is to improve the overall level of productivity and effectiveness of American business. The fact that there are not more MBAs who are company presidents in no way undermines the validity of this objective. It may be that graduates working on corporate staffs do, in fact, have a greater effect on management behavior because of their mobility across all organizational levels and departments.

Graduate schools of business provide the body of knowledge needed to mold "professional" businessmen. As is true with most professions, training only assures a minimum level of competence; other, less measurable factors influence maximum level of achievement. Business has benefited from MBAs, and as the schools change, more and more graduates can earn top management positions.

Joseph L. Podolsky,

Director, American Information Development

- The somewhat sparse evidence Livingston presents suggests all sorts of possibilities besides those which he considers. It suggests, for example, that it is easier to select successful managers from men who are at the age of 40 than from those in their early twenties. It suggests that a 2-year course of graduate business education carries a man very successfully through the next 15 years, but is not necessarily of high differential value thereafter (not a fatal objection to most capital expenditure projects in an age of rapid change).

Livingston points out that two thirds of Harvard graduates start their careers in staff jobs, and that in three recent years 10% of them have gone into management consultancy, as compared with only 3% a decade earlier. It does not follow, however, that this is what they *prefer*. That word could only properly be used if MBAs shied away from line positions, other things being equal. But the blunt fact is that employers' offers of line positions often just do not compete. Consultancy organizations skim the cream because they offer higher salaries, wider experience, and better prospects. No case has yet been cited of business graduates preferring lower-paid staff positions because they do not want the profit accountability of the better-paid line positions they have been offered.

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