

Second of Two Articles . . .

A Technique For Manager Selection

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In their concern about the nature and dynamics of the executive functions some management scholars have tended to stress the more mechanistic activities of planning, controlling and organizing. Others have been mainly concerned about the motivation of subordinates. The function of selecting managers is largely omitted: both groups just assume that a manager is already on the job.

This cavalier attitude really sells the selection process short. What is possibly more important in any enterprise than the effective manager? He carries many mediocre managers on his back; he accomplishes objectives despite poor organizational structure; he inspires his subordinates to perform above the average; he keeps tab on operations by personal touch.

The scarcity of these able men in business, government, universities and hospitals raises the question whether outstanding managers are *really* as scarce as they seem or whether selection methods are so indiscriminating that able prospects are not picked. It is the writer's opinion that the latter explanation gives the better "fit" and that a

selection process based on the following approach will give good results.

Selection of Front Line Supervisors: Suggested Program

Every supervisor is faced with the problem of selecting from among his non-managerial subordinates a candidate to fill a vacant or potentially vacant supervisory position. Neither time-honored practices nor psychological tests will help solve the problem because they are not discriminatory in the sense that they identify potential management ability. And yet every supervisor needs guidance in this most difficult and risky task. He would be able to operate efficiently if he knew (1) what qualities were required; (2) in what degree each was essential; (3) what combinations of qualities were acceptable and in what degree; and (4) how to identify these qualities in candidates.

The inductive approach to these issues has been barren and it is possible that such an approach is impractical in view of the nature of the managerial job. But a deductive approach has much to commend it. From a thorough knowledge of the executive functions and the environ-

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ment in which they are discharged, certain qualities that are important to success should be identifiable. Knowing what a candidate for front line supervision will be asked to do, his success, it is believed, will depend directly on the degree to which he wants to manage, his intelligence, his analytical and communication abilities, and his integrity.¹ Based upon available records and especially upon observation and personal knowledge of subordinates, the supervisor can develop the basis for a sound evaluation of these qualities in those who aspire to management positions. And for purposes of summary, he might consider Figure 1 useful.

Factors in selection of supervisors. Perhaps the most pervasive requirement for successful performance of the managerial function is an intense *desire to manage*. This observation is derived from the close correlation between performance in the above sense and the men who possess a driving desire to achieve purposes through the teamed efforts of subordinates. Too many people drift into management because they are attracted by its rewards in terms of salary, status, and perquisites and fail to understand that it has its frustrations

and responsibilities. It is a major obligation of those who select to probe beneath these superficial reasons for promotion and search for individuals who derive a basic satisfaction from accomplishing objectives through teamwork of associates. These men in all likelihood will have the drive and determination essential in effective managers.

Intelligence. The determination of the candidate's intelligence can be quite a simple matter. If he is a graduate of a university known for its high standards, the transcript of his record will provide the requisite information. In case of doubt about the reliability of the grade index, the supervisor can evaluate this factor on the basis of the subordinate's performance of work assignments.

Analytical ability. The supervisor has many opportunities to assess the facility of a candidate in the use of scientific methodology. Subordinates are often given special assignments beyond the routine of their jobs such as reporting on a new proposal, a change in policy or procedure or a marketing program. If the supervisor learns to evaluate, not only the recommendation but the *investigation procedure*, he will have good measure of the candidate's analytical

1. He will also require leadership ability but this quality can only be assessed as management is practiced.

Figure 1

SUPERVISOR SELECTION FORM

(This form to be used in weighing the managerial potential of candidates for supervisory appointments.)

POLICY

The future of this company is largely dependent upon its ability to attract, select, and develop personnel with superior managerial potential.

This form, when completed, becomes an important instrument in the selection of our future supervisors. It becomes part of the permanent personnel record of those who are accepted.

DETAILED INSTRUCTIONS

This form is to be completed by the immediate supervisor of each candidate.

Read the definition and explanations of each characteristic before selecting the degree to which each quality is possessed by the candidate.

Attention should be devoted to a single characteristic at a time.

PERSONAL DATA

Name
Age
Date
Supervisor

1. THE DESIRE TO MANAGE

This quality can become clear only by knowing a candidate well. Discussions about management, its problems, and the candidate's reasons for desiring a management career are probably essential in coming to a considered opinion.

Check one: Candidate:
Wants to manage []
Is not sure []
Prefers technical work []

2. INTELLIGENCE

This characteristic may be determined from the transcript of the college record of the candidate and from observation of the candidate as he performs his tasks.

Grade point..... Graduate of..... Degree.....
Low High

Estimate of intelligence: [] [] [] []
1 2 3 6

3. ABILITY TO MAKE A LOGICAL ANALYSIS:

Consider the candidate's performance of work assignments and special projects in terms of his logical approach. On this basis indicate your judgment of his facility with scientific methodology.

Low High
Check one: [] [] [] [] []
1 2 3 4 5

4. ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE:

Evaluate the candidate's facility with language. Note particularly grammar and spelling, choice of words, flow of words, and ability to maintain interest while conveying information.

Low High
Check one: [] [] [] [] []
1 2 3 4 5

5. INTEGRITY:

Consider the candidate's honesty and responsibility in using time, company equipment; in reporting expenses and use of funds; in reporting both positive and negative factors concerning his performance of assignments; his moral soundness.

Low High
Check one: [] [] [] [] []
1 2 3 4 5

ability as well as his *habit* of proceeding logically.

Ability to communicate. The supervisor can judge the value of the candidate's ability to transmit ideas from his written reports, letters, oral discussions and any committee assignments in which he may participate. These activities will reflect directly his facility in choice of words, phrasing, sentence structure, paragraphing, and overall clarity and forcefulness of expression.

Integrity. It is particularly essential that candidates for management positions possess moral soundness. In our economic system managers must be worthy of trust. They exercise considerable authority, they cannot be closely supervised, and they take numerous actions which can compromise the firm. Integrity in managers means many things. It goes beyond our conception of honesty in money and material matters and in the use of time, important as these factors are. It requires a subordinate to keep his superior fully informed; to adhere always to the full truth, especially in briefing superiors; and to have the strength of character to live and act to support the moral standards of our society.

While it is not an easy matter to evaluate the integrity of a subordinate, it may surely be said that close acquaintance with him in the work environment provides the best opportunity for a correct assessment. His use of time and expense reports; his dealing with associates and businessmen; his probity in handling assignments; and his sincerity and honesty in dealing with business matters combine to give the observing superior many opportunities to evaluate integrity.

Many managers who face the problem of selecting a candidate for front line supervision may wish to consider additionally such other factors as co-operation, ability to lead others, imagination, appearance, etc. There is no particular reason to dissent from such elaboration. The question is whether these qualities in a person in a non-managerial position are really transferable when the individual becomes a supervisor. There is no doubt that such qualities are important in aiding a manager to function efficiently; there is little evidence that a non-manager who exhibits them will carry them forward with him when he achieves a supervisory position.

Who shall select? The immediate supervisor is in the best position to select *candidates* for promotion from among his subordinates. He is in a position to know them well, he sees them in work situations, he has trained them in their jobs and has coached them. If he can show that he has evaluated them objectively on the basis of the qualities set forth in the preceding section, his judgment should control.

From among all candidates recommended by their supervisors, the common manager, normally the department head, should make his selection. This practice is recommended even where candidates come from non-departmental sources. The underlying premise in this suggestion is that the department manager should have the authority to decide who, among all candidates, will work for him. In this way he can be held responsible for the future performance of all his subordinate supervisors; he

will be deprived of the alibi that someone else selected them.

Limitations of the selection process. The process of appraisal outlined in this section is not without its limitations. It is as important to understand these as it is to understand the positive promises that the suggested program embodies. Only in this way may considered judgment of the value of the procedure be reached.

The evaluation process recommended here rests upon two premises of utmost importance. First, there is no known device which will identify potential managers from among non-managers. Second, certain qualities, deduced from the nature of managing, will improve the chances of the possessor to become an efficient manager. There remains a gap in the process which limits our assurance of the eventual success of the candidate—can the man *really* manage effectively? This gap can only be filled *after* observing the candidate as he functions in a supervisory capacity. Consequently, the risk of selection failure at the front line level is high.

It is for this reason that the successful candidate should be made acquainted with the risk of eventual failure and be told frankly that if he does not succeed he will be removed. Superiors have a moral responsibility to make plain to candidates the penalty for failure so that they will be in the best position to decide their course of action. The timid will obviously decline promotion—and this is in the best interests of the firm. The confident will take the risk, and this likewise is in the best interests of the enterprise. Mediocrity has no place in management.

Selection of Middle and Upper Level Managers: Suggested Program

The process of selecting middle and upper level managers is entirely different from the program recommended for the front-line supervision. The bases for taking this position are: first, that the functions of managers are the same at all levels; second, the most reliable forecast of a manager's future is his past accomplishments as a manager; and third, all candidates for promotion at this level have many years of management practice behind them. These men have made a record as managers which can be measured objectively.

Men learn to manage by managing. The implication of this conviction is that there is a pronounced learning curve for successful managers. This would further imply that in considering candidates for promotion the quality of the execution of management functions in *their present positions* is the appropriate data to be evaluated.

Evaluation of manager performance. Since all managers must execute the functions of organizing, planning, controlling, staffing, and directing, it is logical that the quality of the performance of these functions by candidates for promotion is what must be measured. For purposes of summary and comparison a form comparable to Figure 2 is useful.

Organizing ability. The basis for evaluating this quality is the organization chart of the candidate's department and an interview with him. The important organization issues are the span of management, grouping of activities, use of staff and committees and the

Figure 2

MANAGER PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

Name..... Department..... Title..... Date.....

<i>Elements</i>	<i>Unsatis- factory</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Superior</i>	<i>Excep- tional</i>
1. Performance of group supervised: Quantity, quality, and timeliness of output					
2. Planning ability: Clarity of objectives, policies and premises Consideration of alternative plans Completeness of plans Communication of plans					
3. Ability to control operations: Selection of strategic points for control Completed plans are standards for measurement Can pin-point responsibility Corrective action taken promptly					
4. Organizing ability: Adherence to organization principles Clarity of authority delegations Proper use of staff, service groups, and committees					
5. Staffing ability: Skill in identifying managerial potential Selection of effective subordinate managers Skill in training subordinates Provision for management succession					
6. Ability to direct subordinates: Effective orientation and motivation Coaching skill Communication skill					

delegation of authority. A discussion with the candidate covering his conceptions and practices with respect to

these elements provides the basis for assessing his organization ability.

Planning ability. This quality can be

evaluated directly by the simple procedure of looking at the candidate's existing plans. All managers have several major objectives and for each of these there should be a plan of achievement specifying functions to be undertaken, people assigned to each function and time of accomplishment. Such plans should be reflected in formats convenient for consultation.

Controlling ability. Managers know what a good control system should look like. Every manager should be able to specify what he needs to know to operate effectively and to develop a reporting system that will tell him where his plans stand. Evaluating a candidate's control system with respect to his requirements for information, the elements of a good system, and considerations for convenient format presents no problem in the light of present day knowledge of this function.

Staffing ability. The principal issues relating to this function concern the procedures for selecting, appraising and training managers, and making certain that successors for current managers are always available. To determine the ability of a candidate to execute this function the superior needs to inquire into the subordinate's methods, and determine whether in fact a proficient successor is presently available.

Directing ability. The important elements of this function to be evaluated are the effectiveness of the candidate in orienting and guiding subordinates, in communicating with them as well as with others in the enterprise, in motivating subordinates, and in the skill with which authority is decentralized. Interviews with the candidate to discover

what he is doing in these areas as well as with the candidate's subordinates to determine their response to the efforts of their superior can provide the evaluator with a basis for measuring directing ability.

Over-all ability. Oftentimes managers like to use an over-all measure of the effectiveness of a subordinate. This is accomplished by estimating the quantity, quality and timeliness of the output of the *group supervised*. No detailed record is kept on these subjects; the superior merely considers whether he has been trouble-free with respect to these elements.

All summary evaluations are shortcuts, and have special drawbacks. In this case, an area could be trouble-free despite certain short-run deficiencies in the subordinate's ability to execute some of his functions. It is important to identify these weaknesses from the viewpoint of both the long-run welfare of the firm and the promotability of the subordinate, and consequently, too much reliance should not be placed on over-all evaluations.

Who should evaluate? As in the case of selecting front line supervisors, it is the essential function of the immediate superior to evaluate a candidate for promotion to middle or upper level management positions. He is clearly in the best position to do so, in view of his intimate knowledge of a subordinate's operation providing, of course, he knows how to evaluate. To do this effectively a deep knowledge of management principles is an absolute requirement. If this knowledge is not in the possession of the superior, someone else who does know what to look for should make the

assessment, although the chances that a subordinate of such a superior is qualified for promotion are extremely limited. The actual selection from among qualified candidates is the function of the man to whom the selectee will report.

Administration of the program. There are several considerations which a mature manager will wish to take into account as he implements this suggested technique of selecting promotable subordinates. Perhaps the first one is the realization that the program will not work automatically. Its chief merits are that it guides the superior in asking the *right* questions about a candidate's performance and there is objective evidence of this performance available for evaluation. The subjective aspect largely relates to the *degree* of proficiency assigned.

Candidates who have less than acceptable ratings in each function are not ready for promotion. Neither should they be shifted laterally on the assumption that failure in one department does not foreshadow failure in another. The universality of managerial functions implies that any manager will be a consistent success or a consistent failure irrespective of the enterprise function involved.

Another phenomenon sometimes encountered is that a successful manager over few people fails after promotion to positions involving many people. If really true, such a situation would cast doubt on the basic assumption that past managerial success is a sound forecast of future success in larger undertakings. But the "phenomenon" may not in reality be an enigma. We know, from Fayol's work, that the relative importance of

managerial functions is different for various management levels. Front line supervisors spend much more time than top executives on direction, and much less on planning and control. Thus, weaknesses in the latter functions may not be critical for supervisors but will be most important as the man is promoted upwards. However, the indication here is not that we are dealing with a phenomenon: it merely spells out the need for careful evaluation of efficiency in the performance of *all* functions. This is why the statement was made above that no promotion should be considered unless candidates qualify on each managerial function.

A further consideration relates to the handling of certain additional characteristics of candidates who qualify on the basis of the suggested selection technique. These qualities are inherent in the somewhat vague phrase, "management stature." As a superior looks at several men who are successful managers in their present positions and who are acceptably skilled in each management function, the further question arises, "which one?" At this point it is important to estimate how effective each one will be at a higher management level. Is he sufficiently forceful in character to compete for budgetary consideration? Can he hold his own with top management? Does he have the capacity for creativeness and vision required at the higher level? Is his personality compatible with new peers and superiors? These and similar considerations will have a profound bearing on his future success at higher management levels and consequently they must be carefully assessed.