

A Model for Understanding Managerial Jobs and Behavior

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A model having implications for understanding managerial jobs and behavior was conceived in one study and developed and applied in three others. These used various research methods, primarily lengthy interviews and observation. The main categories of the model are demands, constraints, and choices, which identify the flexibility in a job. Applications for use in organizations are suggested. Future directions for research into managerial work and behavior are recommended.

To improve the present understanding of managerial work and behavior, attention needs to be directed to the following:

1. What generalizations can be made about managerial work?
2. What differences exist among managerial jobs?

Two methodological questions also are in order:

3. What are the limitations to using managerial behavior to describe managerial work?
4. What are the limitations to using managers' descriptions of their jobs to describe managerial work?

Above all, there is a need to develop for practitioners descriptions both of managerial work and of managerial behavior that are useful to them.

Previous Studies

There have been three main reviews of studies of managerial work and behavior (Campbell, Dunnette, Lawler, & Weick, 1970; Glover, 1977; Mintzberg, 1973). Glover's (1977) work drew attention to the failure of researchers to consider the output of managerial work. Mintzberg distinguished eight major schools of thought on the managerial job which he called: classical, great man, entrepreneurship, decision theory, leader effectiveness, leader power, leader behavior, and work activity. Mintzberg's own study belonged to the last one. This school has sought to find out what managers do. The first studies concentrated on the pattern of work and showed, as Mintzberg summarized them,

that managerial work is characterized by "brevity, variety and fragmentation." Stewart (1976) later showed that this is not true of all managerial jobs and that in some jobs this pattern is a choice, as some jobholders adopt a different one (Stewart, Smith, Blake, & Wingate, 1980).

Other studies have contributed to the understanding of some aspects of the content of managerial work. Sayles (1964) drew attention to the importance and the different kinds of lateral relationships. Mintzberg (1973) suggested 10 managerial roles and made various propositions about the nature of managerial work. Stewart (1976) described some of the differences in managerial work. Kotter (n.d.), in an extended study of 15 general managers, has put forward a much more complex and comprehensive set of propositions about managerial behavior. He stresses the need for better conceptual models.

Since Mintzberg's book was published, much of the interest in managerial work in the United States has focused on his roles rather than on the other aspects of his book or on work being done from a different viewpoint. Notable exceptions to this are Kotter (n.d.) and the results of simulations reported by Lombardo and McCall (1981).

McCall and Segrist tested Mintzberg's roles by using a questionnaire based on the roles. They asked managers to rate on a 7-point scale the importance of the role to their own supervisory perfor-

mance. They concluded that the construct validity of six of the roles was supported. They also drew other conclusions, including:

Managers' perceptions of relative role importance across levels and functions were sufficiently similar to support Mintzberg's contention that managerial jobs are essentially alike (1980, p. 10).

This conclusion is doubtful for two reasons: first, the role categories used are too broad and ambiguous to enable one to tell whether "managerial jobs are essentially alike"; second, one does not know what meaning should be given to the answers to such a questionnaire. This is the reason for the fourth point listed at the start of this paper. There are a number of problems in interpreting the answers. One problem is that managers in similar jobs may give very different answers to questions about their jobs. For some questions the answers range the full length of a 7-point scale. Another problem is that answers to questions about "the importance of the role to their supervisory performance" may differ from the answers to other kinds of questions about the significance of the role in the job. This difficulty could easily be tested. Yet another problem is that comments about relative role importance may reflect cultural perceptions of the right answers rather than the job itself or the manager's behavior.

Origins of the Model

The model developed, in part, as a result of a growing awareness of the difficulties (discussed above) of interpreting managers' answers to questions about their work, and, in part, from the discovery of how widely managers in similar jobs could differ in how they saw them and in the work that they did. A model was required that would take account of this variety and flexibility and enable one to explore both the flexibility in the job and the variations in the jobholder's behavior.

The model discussed here developed out of research that belongs to the work activity school. In the model's concern for the interaction between the job and the individual jobholder, it is related to various models that have been developed to describe this concern. Turner and Lombard (1969) for example, took account of the individual's perception of the demands of the work situation as well as the meaning of past events and the perceptions of the demands of the nonwork situation. More

broadly, Bandura (1978) suggested three-way reciprocal interaction among behaviors, cognitions, and the environment as a way of viewing the role of the individual and Hackman and Oldham's (1976, 1980) job characteristics model of work motivation. However, these models focus on the individual's behavior and factors affecting it. The model described here started from a desire to describe jobs and to understand what a study of behavior could tell one about the nature of jobs. The model has subsequently been used also to help in understanding an individual's perception of the job. It is closest to Graen's (1976) role-making model, to which reference is made later, and to Hackman's (1969) and Weiss and Shaw's (1979) descriptions of how people redefine their tasks.

The studies on which the model is based are summarized in Table 1. The model was conceived in the first study, developed in the second, and applied in the third. The fourth was a parallel study to the second, which concentrated on individuals' perceptions of the opportunities for choice in their jobs. An important aspect of the second and third studies was a comparison of the behavior of managers in similar jobs, which showed the variety of content and patterns of work of the different jobholders. The flexibility revealed by such comparisons suggests that one way of describing a job is as the sum of all the behaviors that are possible in it.

The methods used in the studies included lengthy open-ended interviews, observation from three to five days, self-recording diaries, and group discussions. The model also was developed and tested in numerous managerial programs in which middle and senior managers used it to help them to analyze their own jobs and to review their approaches to them. The methods used in the third study listed in Table 1 illustrates the general methodological approach. The interviews, which took a minimum of three hours each, asked what work the administrator had done the previous month, taking each main aspect of the job in turn. The aim was to get at what the administrators actually did during the month. The ways in which the past month was atypical were explored. The administrators also were asked what they were trying to accomplish in each area of their jobs. This material was supplemented by a record of contacts and of meetings attended during that month. The observations sought to compare the behavior of administrators who, the interviews sug-

Table 1
Details of Studies Developing and Using the Model

<i>Title of Project</i>	<i>Date & Duration</i>	<i>Staffing</i>	<i>Nature and Size of Sample</i>	<i>Methods Used</i>
1. A Behavioral Classification of Managerial Jobs (Stewart 1976) ^a	1973-1975 2½ years	Judy Slinn, 2 yrs ^c Richard Turton, 1 yr ^c	Managers (260) in jobs in different functions, levels, and companies. Intensive study of 16 managers	Lengthy questionnaire interviews. Interviews, diaries, observations
2. A Classification of Choices in Managerial Jobs ^a (Stewart, in press)	1977-1980 2½ years	Phil Long, 2 yrs ^c	Managers (98) and their bosses in different levels and functions in several companies; 6 pairs of managers in 6 different jobs	Lengthy open-ended interviews with managers and their bosses. One week's observation of each pair of managers
3. The Job and Role of the District Administrator in the National Health Service (Stewart, et al., 1980) ^b	1978-1979 10 months	Peter Smith ^d Jenny Blake ^d Pauline Wingate ^d	District administrators (41) from a stratified sample of districts	Interviews, (3-7 hours) and observation of 11 DAs. Group discussions
4. Managers' Perceptions of the Choices in Their Jobs (Marshall & Stewart, 1981) ^a	1978-1979 15 months	Judy Marshall ^d	Middle managers (86) in production/technical and sales/marketing in 3 manufacturing companies	Tape recorded open-ended interviews. Personal data

^aFunded by Social Science Research Council in the United Kingdom.

^bFunded by King Edward VII Hospital Fund for London.

^cFull time research associate

^dPart time research associate

gested, had different approaches to their jobs. The aim was to check the interview material and to get a broader understanding of these differences.

Summary of the Model

Three categories are defined below.

Demands are what anyone in the job *has* to do. There are many things that managers ought to do, because they are in the job description or because their boss thinks them important, but demands is a narrower term. Demands are only what must be done.

Constraints are the factors, internal or external to the organization, that limit what the jobholder can do.

Choices are the activities that the jobholder can do, but does not have to do. They are the opportunities for one jobholder to do different work from another and to do it in different ways.

The model can be pictured as consisting of an inner core of demands, an outer boundary of constraints, and an in-between area of choices. The choices are limited by the demands and the constraints. These are dynamic. They change over time because of changes in the situation. The jobholder also may be able to change some of the demands or constraints.

The concept of demands, constraints, and choices

posits that the area of potential choice cannot be fully used by one individual because of time pressures, the incompatibility of certain choices, and individual differences. Individuals are likely to have their own demands—things that they think must be done; their own constraints—beliefs, fears, and lack of knowledge or ability that add additional constraints; and their own perceptions of the choices.

The words demands, constraints, and choices have been used in different combinations by other writers. Graen (1976) in his role-making model refers to constraints and demands in discussing the determinants of roles and says that individuals will work out their own behavior patterns if demands are not enforced. However, his terms are not defined, his demand categories are very broad, and the choice possibilities are not explored. The concepts of constraints and choices have been used by some writers (Miles, 1980; Warner, 1977) in discussing the organization and its environment.

Demands

Demands are of two kinds: having to do certain kinds of work and satisfying certain criteria. In some jobs such criteria are specific, such as the

amount of turnover or the volume of units manufactured. In others they are very general, but some minimum level of performance will be required, although the time scale in which it is possible to judge this may be a long one. The work that managers must do themselves is determined by the factors listed in Exhibit 1.

Constraints

The common constraints that limit a manager's choices are summarized in Exhibit 1. A major organizational constraint on the nature of the choices available in a particular job is the extent to which the work to be done by the manager's unit is defined. Some jobs are responsible for a defined area of operation that the manager cannot change, such as the retail chain store manager who must operate within the physical constraints of the store and the company policies for the goods to be sold. Other examples are the area sales manager, who is limited in both the products to be sold and the geographical area, and even more constrained is the melting shop manager in a steel works. Other jobs, like that of a management accountant, have much more open-ended responsibilities.

Choices

The opportunities for choice can be classified in many different ways. For some purposes a classification by time can be useful: the amount of a manager's time that is irretrievably mortgaged by demands and the amount that is left for choice.

The category found most important for distinguishing between the opportunities for choice in jobs was that of domain, that is, the area within which the manager can be active. This was subdivided between the manager's unit and other possible activities. Jobs vary in whether and, if so, the extent to which managers can change the domain of the unit for which they are responsible. In some jobs the manager can choose to change or modify the output. Other jobs are so prescribed that no such changes are possible. Opportunities were found for a change of unit domain in jobs at all levels of management. Some jobs also offer possibilities of choice of domain outside that of the manager's own unit. This is well known at senior management levels, but it also was found that many jobs, particularly in the larger, more complex organizations, offer opportunities for managers to

choose to do work outside their own unit. These opportunities may be either inside or outside the organization and sometimes both.

One special form of domain choice found in some jobs is work sharing. This is the opportunity to share work so that the boundaries of the job are fluid. A number of writers have described examples of this in practice (Senger, 1971; Hodgson, Levinson, & Zaleznik, 1965; Stewart et al., 1980).

Another aspect of domain choice in some jobs is the opportunity to become an expert. This choice was found to exist in very varied jobs. Most of them were staff posts, but they also included some in marketing. There was a variety of examples of managers developing and becoming known for a particular expertise of their own. There also were a few examples of this choice being formally provided by the organization, as in a company in which marketing managers at a particular level had the choice of becoming regional specialists in addition to their normal work.

Choices were identified that are common to all managerial jobs. There is the choice of emphasis among different aspects of the job, so that individuals in similar jobs can devote more of their time and attention to different parts of the job. One retail chain store manager, for example, may spend more time on staff management, another on merchandising, and yet another on administration. Most, but not all, managers in charge of staff also have some choice in delegation. Another common, though not universal, choice is boundary management. Demands, constraints, and choices are summarized in Exhibit 1. These choices are discussed and illustrated in Stewart (in press).

Model Development and Validation

The model can be developed in different ways. The categories under each of the three major headings can be refined. Some of them can be used as dimensions for measuring particular characteristics of different jobs. Alternatively, the three major categories of the model can be used to develop different subdivisions, as the complexity of managerial work and behavior makes many different kinds of classification both possible and potentially fruitful.

The model can be used and developed for different purposes both for managerial and for other jobs that have an element of choice in the work that is done. It can be used to further the understanding

Exhibit 1

Summary of Different Kinds of Demands, Constraints, and Choices in Managerial Jobs

Demands

Overall meeting minimum criteria of performance
Doing certain kinds of work. Such work is determined by:
The extent to which personal involvement is required in the unit's work
Who must be contacted and the difficulty of the work relationship
Contacts' power to enforce their expectations.
Bureaucratic procedures that cannot be ignored or delegated
Meetings that must be attended

Constraints

Resource limitations
Legal and trades union constraints
Technological limitations
Physical location
Organizational constraints, especially extent to which the work of manager's unit is defined
Attitudes of other people to:
Changes in systems, procedures, organization, pay, and conditions
Changes in the goods or services produced
Work outside the unit

Choices

In *how* work is done
In *what* work is done
choices within a defined area:
to emphasize certain aspects of the job
to select some tasks and to ignore or delegate others
choices in boundary management
choices to change the area of work:
to change the unit's domain
to develop a personal domain
to become an expert
to share work, especially with colleagues
to take part in organizational and public activities

of some of the similarities in managerial work; to explore the differences among managerial jobs and to identify the types of jobs to which they apply; and to consider what distinctions other than level and function need to be made to take account of these differences. The model also can be used to compare managerial perceptions of demands, constraints, and choices in different organizations and countries.

One form of validation should be that of the logic of the threefold categorization in the model. Objections to this categorization can be made on the grounds that demands and constraints may be different ways of describing the same thing—for example, a boss's expectations. However, it is helpful to retain this distinction in analyzing a job or working with managers on their perceptions of the job. The main form of validation is whether others, both academics and practitioners, find the model a fruitful way of conceptualizing managerial work and be-

havior and of thinking about their interrelationship.

Implications of the Model

For Researchers and Teachers

The conclusion is that to understand what managerial jobs are really like, one must understand the nature of their flexibility, that is, their choices as well as the core demands. Some forms of flexibility are common to many managerial jobs, and some, such as emphasizing one aspect of the job more than another, are universal. But there are important differences, too, in the opportunities that managerial and other responsible jobs offer for one jobholder to behave differently from another. Therefore, one should be more cautious not to overgeneralize about managerial work and behavior and more aware of the many exceptions to the generalizations. The need is to move on from Mintzberg's (1973) roles and propositions about managerial work to an analysis that takes into account the variations in behavior and the differences in jobs before attempting to generalize about managerial work.

The model provides a different way from those used before of conceptualizing the common characteristics of managerial work. It also provides both a way of thinking about the differences between jobs and an account of some of these differences (Stewart, in press).

It is hoped that this paper will encourage others to contribute to conceptual thinking about managerial work and behavior and to undertake well designed studies of actual managerial behavior. Much could be learned by careful comparative studies, which also could be used to explore organizational and cross-cultural differences.

For Managers

The opportunities for individual managers to do what they believe to be most important for the job, the organization, or their own purposes exist to a greater or lesser extent in all management jobs. Those who abhor the existence of such flexibility may try to prevent it; but even though they may succeed in limiting some forms of flexibility, there are many others that will continue to exist.

Observations of managers in similar jobs show that their focus of attention differs. For all of them

this leads to some differences in the work done. In the less constrained jobs, much of the time is spent on different work. The pattern of work and the methods of contact also differs, although the culture of the company could be more of a constraint here than the nature of the job. There seems no reason to assume that such a variety of behavior is peculiar to British managers, who were the ones studied, and will not be found among American managers, although there will be some differences in cultural constraints.

The implications of flexibility in jobs can be looked at from the perspective of the organization and from that of the individual.

Organizational Design. The ways in which the organization is structured and the extent of formalization will affect the nature and amount of flexibility in jobs. This is not a new finding, but the classification given earlier enables one to consider how choices are likely to be affected by different designs. Jobs in charge of units that are either physically separate or provide the manager with a clearly identified territory offer somewhat different choices from those embedded in large organizations. Such separate units often reduce the opportunities for lateral contacts and the choices of work that these may provide, but they also usually mean more independence from interference by others. Jobs heading such units offer considerable satisfaction for the right individuals, even though they have to operate within close constraints.

Job Design. The amount and kinds of autonomy in a job are commonplace to those interested in job design, but their attention has been on the lower level jobs. The analysis in this paper can help one to look at the nature of flexibility in different managerial jobs and at the desirability in more routine jobs, like financial accounting at the junior and middle levels, of including some task that offers greater potential for choice.

Management Effectiveness. The different foci of attention of individual managers and of members of management teams mean that it is important to

look for the gaps that may be left. This is not to argue for a more restrictive approach, but for a clearer recognition of the possible gains and losses of the differences in individual behavior.

Selection. The implications of flexibility are to emphasize what is already known, but often not sufficiently considered. In selecting someone for a post, one needs to consider not only the qualifications and experience, but also what aspects of the job are likely to be given most attention. This needs to be allied to a consideration of the needs of the particular job at that time, so that the choices that the individual is likely to take are matched to those that the job needs.

Education and Training. The model has been used extensively to help managers to reconsider their view of their job and their way of doing it.

There are lessons for the limited utility of time management approaches that are similar to the conclusions of Cohen and March (1974) in their study of university presidents. They argue that to change the pattern of activities one must change the orientations of the presidents to their jobs, to themselves, and to the relationships between the two.

Career Decisions. An implication both for the individual and for the organization is that different kinds of flexibility appeal to different people and are, therefore, an important aspect of a job's characteristics.

Summary. The framework of demands, constraints, and choices is useful primarily as a way of thinking about the nature of managerial jobs and about how managers do them. It can provide a more realistic understanding of both than can be obtained from the traditional ways of describing jobs or of thinking about managerial performance, as these tend to be too formal and idealistic. They do not take into account how human beings in jobs actually behave. A more realistic understanding of choices in behavior can make for better decisions about how to select, appraise, and develop managers and for a better appreciation of the kind of managers that the organization really wants.

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