

TOP EXECUTIVE APPRAISAL--A BEHAVIORAL APPROACH

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A PROBLEM

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## PREFACE

This thesis is in no sense an attempt to give a comprehensive account of top executive appraisal. It aims, however, at formulating a method--through a conceptual framework--for assessing and predicting what is most characteristic and striking in young, successful, potential executives who are destined to occupy top-level leadership positions in the industrial environment.

In an attempt to undertake such a task, I have surveyed selected management literature for the period 1950-1960 that has taken issue on the subject of top-level executive appraisal. I have interpreted the literature and have presented a composite interpretation in the form of an appropriate management appraisal plan. I have incorporated many of the findings of the behavioral scientists in their research in the area of executive performance into this thesis with the hope that the concept of leadership be clarified and broadened.

In this work I owe an enormous debt to my professors whose ideas I have absorbed in discussion or in reading and whose thoughts have so become part of myself that I am not sure what is theirs and what is my own. I therefore express my gratitude in general terms.

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The quality of business leadership and the philosophy of management which prevails today are the chief contributors to the poor morale, chronic labor trouble, and apathy and anxiety that exist among both workers and executives alike. In recent years these problems have harassed large segments of industry. The root source of such problems lies in the quality of the type of executive who is being asked to manage.<sup>1</sup>

--Robert N. McMurry

## TOP-LEVEL EXECUTIVES

Because of the dynamism which has characterized the American industrial environment in the past twenty-five years, the top executive of today--if he is to assume competent leadership--is compelled to do some critical thinking and re-examination of his role and function.

### Role and function

A generation ago, the manager was simultaneously the innovator and executor of his business. He understood clearly what he was doing and was not confused as to either objectives or methods. The workers and the general public understood the nature of his assignment and raised no serious objections. Everyone knew that the purpose of a business was to make as much profit as possible for the owner. Providing goods and services for customers was merely a means of achieving this objective. The top executive's function was to bring together and properly coordinate the elements involved in production and distribution of these goods and services. He was vested with the power to command these elements--raw material, transportation, plant facilities, dollars,

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<sup>1</sup>Robert N. McMurry, "Manhunt for Top Executives," Harvard Business Review (July-August, 1954), p. 69.

labor--and was in control of his business. By keeping the costs of these elements at a minimum and directing labor to maximize productivity he was able to increase his profits. This was his function--his philosophy--his power.

### Impact of technology

At present, the top executive finds that his role has been considerably altered. Changes have taken place gradually and in some instances imperceptibly, but they are revolutionary in general. Scientific research in the technical and operational areas of industry has been momentous. Radical advances are visible in the form of atomic power, improved electronic communication, automation and electronic data processing. The business enterprise has increased in size and complexity, thereby causing the inevitable separation of ownership from management to occur. There has been a general rise in the level of education and culture. The work force in the industrial environment has been upgraded and now assumes greater sophistication, insomuch that a new type of professional employee has made his appearance. The business enterprise has become so highly integrated and dependent on a network of other companies and industries that effective co-ordination of the elements in production is to a considerable extent in the hands of many suppliers, distributors and sub-contractors. Furthermore, in this day of almost instantaneous mass communication there has been tremendous emphasis on public opinion, industrial relations and public relations.

### Adaptation to change

The multiplicity of the highly diversified problems that are encountered in the current industrial situation today has intensified the need for more rational and perhaps more idealistic type of leadership in the higher echelons of management. To keep pace with these fast

changing patterns the top-level executive must possess a mental capacity of a high order. It is necessary that his mental and social horizons be broadened, his depth of viewpoints increased and his ability to analyze complex situations be sharpened. Thus to operate successfully in the business world he must seek deeper understanding of all information that has been amassed in the various fields of knowledge that bear on the art and skill of management.

## BUSINESS PERSONALITY

The erstwhile belief that individual success attributed to the executive in the business world was dependent upon fickle-minded chance, is something of the past. The psychologist of today has revealed that the intangible quality called personality lies in individual potential.

### Theory of personality

From a practical point of view, the problem of business personality resolves itself into four questions:

- \* What is personality?
- \* What has personality to do with business ability?
- \* Can personality be analyzed in terms of business ability?
- \* Can tangible and concrete steps be taken toward developing personality and business ability so as to increase personal effectiveness in business?

Most people have the tendency to equate personality with favorable human qualities, thereby, they maximize desirable qualities and minimize undesirable, socially unacceptable characteristics. Viewed in a different light, however, personality takes on new meaning. It is the contention of the psychologist that personality is ability and ability is the power--latent or expressed--to perform. This ability may be strong or weak, positive or negative and the strength and effectiveness is purely a matter of relative degree.

Human ability can be categorized in general into five major characteristics--physique, mental alertness, skill, aptitude and temperament. These characteristics are latent in every man and

present in variable degrees. They are evident when he performs and sufficiently tangible that they could be defined and measured and further developed to improve the chances of success.

### Personality assessment

Personality can be measured, defined and further developed through three approaches.

Performance--One approach to personality assessment is through observation of performance of the personality in action. It is assumed that people are what they do and the medium in which the personality characteristics manifest themselves is overt observable behavior.

Projectives--The second approach to personality assessment is through unstructured or semi-structured materials. These are situations into which the examinee is asked to inject meaning.

Self-description--The third type of personality assessment procedure is self-description. It best qualifies as an objective approach to personality assessment, being near the upper end of the structured-unstructured continuum.

### Projectives

Projectives are devices for stimulating the imagination and evoking dramatic improvisations which express the individual's personality. In the typical projective technique the subject is presented with a more or less vague, unstructured situation to which he must assign a meaning. Whatever the stimuli employed--ink-blot, pictures or unfinished sentences--it is assumed that the way in which the individual structures this relatively ambiguous material is not fortuitous or arbitrary, but a meaningful expression of his personality.



There are two underlying assumptions in the use of projectives. The first is that definite motives, conscious or unconscious are at work in determining the content chosen by the individual in his responses, and secondly, the responses to material involving other people reflect his interpersonal relationships in real life.

Some of the most commonly used projectives are:

- \* Rorschach Test
- \* Thematic Apperception Test (TAT)
- \* Sentence Completion and Word Association
- \* Personal History

Rorschach test--One of the earliest of the projective techniques to be introduced as a systematic diagnostic tool is the Rorschach test, developed by Herman Rorschach, a Swiss psychiatrist. Comprising ten symmetrical ink-blot mounted on stiff cardboard, the test is essentially one of perception; that is, the individual is asked to report what he sees in the ink-blot; the assumptions are made that since different people 'see' different things, response patterns are related to differences in basic personality structure.

TAT--This technique developed around 1930 by Morgan and Murray at Harvard University, presents a more structured task than the Rorschach. The test consists of thirty pictures divided into four sets of cards, a set each for boys, girls, adult males and adult females. The pictures depict various scenes, some involving one or more people, others with no people at all. They are deliberately kept vague, though in each case there is some structured core which most people recognize. The subject is instructed not only to create a plot, but also to give the feelings and thoughts of the characters in his story. It is assumed that the characters, situations or problems thus indicated are such as might be encountered in everyday life and will reveal the individual's personality.

Sentence completion and word association--In sentence completion tests, the subject is asked to complete sentences of which only the first words are given.

My greatest longing . . .

Other people . . .

Again it is assumed that the individual's defensive distortions of conscious behavior will be bypassed in this process.

Personal history--Typical of the personal history or personal document technique is one which consists of asking the subject to write his autobiography. The way in which the subject handles the task provides meaningful information about his personality.

There are four areas in job performance where projectives could be of considerable help.

- \* The maladjustment factor--the stress under which the individual will operate.
- \* The degree of stress tolerance--the extent to which he could handle frustration, fatigue and other pressures.
- \* The flexibility factor--the ease with which he could shift from one task to another with little or no loss in efficiency.
- \* The capacity utilization factor--the extent to which he has learned to use his endowments and skills on the job.

The interpretation of projectives demands a high degree of skill; analysis must flow from a comprehensive understanding of personality theory, a thorough knowledge of job requirements, considerable familiarity with management structure of the organization involved and broad experience in industrial selection problems at the managerial level.

## CONVENTIONAL ASSUMPTIONS

The traditional approach to executive appraisal has unfortunately taken root in psychological tests which attempt to apply precise objective measuring techniques to human behavior. It is undeniable that tests do have a contribution to make, but to attempt to assume that human ability could be measured and categorized against an inflexible continuum of desirable traits seems ludicrous.

### Concept of leadership

The definition of just what is leadership has often been eluded. Most people have the tendency to agree unanimously that a person who has been successful has been a leader. Actually from such a definition one can say that much thought has not been given this concept. Leadership defined in this term takes into account only the end product. Because he used skill in organizing he got people to co-operate, thereby efficiency resulted. What one needs to discern is (1) what is it that makes him a leader? and (2) how to find out whether he is going to be a leader before several years are spent trying him out. To quote Dr. W. E. Henry, noted clinical psychologist, "the mythical quality called leadership which produces results in productive business lies in the area of personality and in the area of individual human relationship."<sup>1</sup>

Top-level executives are a kind of people, not a kind of combination of technical skills. This presents a very unique problem. Since they are a special specimen, this common structure attributed to them lends itself particularly well for a scientific study. The executive's behavior

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<sup>1</sup>William E. Henry, "Identifying the Potentially Successful Executive" (American Management Association, Personnel Series 127, February, 1949), p. 15.

is neatly organized into a bundle of desirable traits which could be easily measured on a linear continuum, and thus adequately analyzed by an observer. Most of the research in the past with regard to personnel and particularly to executives of top management has shown very neatly the intellectual skill and the educational characteristics which are necessary for a high level of performance. It is now clearly seen that what is probably the most crucial area of determining the success of the individual person; that is, his interpersonal relationships in a social context, his behavior on the job, his general attitudes and values, his technical skills and the kinds of experiences which have made him the individual he is now, have been left basically untouched. It is necessary to re-orient the thinking about selection and placement of executives and about the way in which they are handled and treated during business hours and non-business hours. It is necessary to re-orient the thinking of them not as units of work or producers of work, but as individuals of a particular character structure and who do or do not perform certain work units.

#### Role of psychological tests

To resolve these difficulties it is not enough to use psychological tests. In a scientific selection procedure there are three fundamental requirements.

- \* Performance must be predicted in quantifiable terms at the time of selection.
- \* Actual performance must be measured independently of the prediction after a reasonable length of time on the job.
- \* There must be sufficient number of cases to stabilize the relationship between prediction and performance for any given position.

While the first two requirements can be met fairly satisfactorily at all levels of management the third becomes increasingly difficult in top management; no statistical analysis of the relationship between test scores and job success is feasible.

In matching men to jobs, a management selection program must cope with two major problems--the complexity of the task and the uniqueness and ever-changing character of the managerial job itself on the one hand, and on the other the identification of those intangibles in the candidate's make-up which will spell the difference between success and failure. One way of handling this problem is to supplement testing with the judgments and experience of trained psychologists so that selection decision is based upon a professional rather than on a statistical analysis.

## BEHAVIORAL METHODOLOGY

Appraisal of people is an art, not a science and demands a clinical rather than a metric technique. Skilled observations rather than formal tests can predict more accurately the behavioral and inter-personal patterns of the individual.

### Empirical research

More recent empirical research in the area of the behavioral sciences--sociology, anthropology, psychology, biology, and at present economics--has shown that there is not only a uniqueness of personality pattern, but also a pattern of common personality characteristics among men who are applauded as successful, and that deviation from this personality pattern is invariably followed by what society calls failure. Dr. W. E. Henry<sup>1</sup> in a study of over one hundred business executives in various types of business houses has outlined a common personality pattern which characterizes successful executives in terms of the following components.

Great achievement desires--They show high drive and achievement desire, and much of their satisfaction comes from doing rather than contemplating work to be done.

Strong mobility drive--They have strong mobility drives, and struggle for increased responsibility and derive a strong feeling of satisfaction from the completion of the task.

Good organization ability--They possess a high degree of ability to organize unstructured situations and see the implications of their organizations.

Idea of authority--They see authority as a controlling and helpful relationship, not as destructive restrictive forces.

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<sup>1</sup>W. E. Henry, "The Business Executive: The Psychodynamics of a Social Role," The American Journal of Sociology (January, 1949), 54:286-291.

Decisiveness--They have the ability to come to a decision from several alternatives.

Self-identity--They have firm, well-defined senses of identity.

Aggressiveness--They are essentially an aggressive, active, striving group with the ability to indulge in calculated strategies.

Apprehension of fear of failure--They possess a constant fear of failure, but this very fear is channelled constructively to make them work with greater zeal at succeeding.

Strong reality orientation--They are directly interested in the practical, the immediate and the direct.

Nature of interpersonal relations--They view their superiors as symbols of their own achievement and desires and tend to identify strongly with them. While they are very responsive to superiors, they are very impersonal and uninterested in subordinates and view them in a very detached manner as doers of work.

Parental ties--They have left home and have severed close ties with their parents. While they have been able to completely relinquish their ties with the mother they still continue to view the father as a potent figure.

Such a common personality pattern has apparently been one of fairly long standing not developed over a short period of time but rather over a lifetime, as a child, at home, at school and in business.

### Utility of beliefs

A significant clue to executive success or failure seems to lie in the nature of the management job itself. Most high level jobs are a kaleidoscope of interpersonal relationships involving associates, superiors, subordinates as well as officials of other organizations. It is only by operating effectively in and through these relationships that the executive can achieve his job goals and realize his intellectual potential.

Many of the problems confronting the executive, undefined or ambiguous as they are, can be resolved only by decisions which go beyond rationality. Actually they are based on some combination of fact and theory, and are choices made by interpreting things observed in the light of things believed. Thus they unconsciously call into play the individual's belief systems which dictate his motives, his work habits, his attitudes.

To understand this concept of belief systems it is necessary at this point to pursue the subject further. Take the individual in any society. He is an individual organism, a biological unit that matures and develops his own motivation and momentum. On the one hand, however, society is constantly molding him through a process of socialization by maintaining a system of inter-relationships of persons--associational groups--family, peers and adults and on the other hand it is compelling the individual to become increasingly like himself--a process of individuation. It is in this functioning capacity that the individual develops his public world--institutionalized behavior, and his private world--beliefs and value systems.

The private worlds of all individuals is of great significance in regard to their personal and inter-personal behavior patterns, for this is the world where the teachings of home, school, church and experience write their texts, the world that dictates ethical behavior, the world that spells success or failure, satisfaction or dissatisfaction for the executive.

#### Techniques which spot leadership

The behavioral scientists in the area of top executive research stress the clinical approach methodology. In the clinical approach, the underlying element is that in an attempt to undertake to understand people, it is necessary to accept them as they are. This concept



implies respect, tolerance, acceptance of human frailty and recognition of the uniqueness of each human personality. It does not stop here though but goes on further to see logically and to understand how other individuals see, feel and think about themselves, their feelings, and sentiments which are implied in their words, their behavior and their environment.

Various techniques used in the clinical approach are:

- \* Clinical analysis
- \* Projectives
- \* Sociometrics

In the clinical analysis procedure a comprehensive and detailed biographical review of the individual's background is needed covering his work experience, his career in the service, his educational background, his cultural background, his early home environment, his domestic situation, his social mobility, the state of his finances and the condition of his health. These facts can be obtained from his schools, from previous employers, from a physical examination and from his own statements. All the various data are collated and subjected to analysis by a sophisticated psychologist or psycho-analyst.

The individual is further subjected to projective testing. The projectives which are generally used are the Rorschach, the TAT and sentence completion and word association test. The analyst who is employed, interprets the number, quality, and variety of the subject's responses against his theory of personality and against his as well as the experiences of other analysts with the responses of people to the same tests.

The end result of a battery of projective tests is not a numerical score comparing subject X with other subjects. It is a verbal report assessing the subject's dominant needs and ambitions, his tolerance of frustration, his attitudes towards authority and the major conflicts that seem to be operating in his personality.

One important advantage or disadvantage of projectives in the industrial environment is their scientific weakness. They are essentially individualistic and cannot be proved right or wrong. In this business of executive appraisal there are no pat answers, no black and white decisions. The analyst can help the manager by predicting the behavior patterns of the individual, but he does not attempt to make decisions for him. He ultimately pushes back decision-making right where it belongs.

When the history of projectives is considered, it is totally amazing that they should be utilized in this manner. Projectives have been developed in the clinic where psychologists and psychiatrists have been concerned with diagnosing people who have personality problems. They have been used in this setting extensively for many years and have been so widely employed because they give an elaborate and detailed picture of an individual person. At present these tests are being explored with normal individuals and seem particularly relevant in selection practices where detailed information about a person or interpersonal situation is needed.

Projectives and their use in industry have seemed to call forth exceedingly vigorous and enthusiastic supporters and equally vigorous and enthusiastic detractors. This is mainly because the new method represents somewhat a revolution in the parent psychological and social sciences from the older and more established quantitative, statistical and objective methods. Projectives themselves, their validity and accuracy are based on informal evidence. There are many critics who would uphold that this very fact makes them rather questionable. This is a truism when in the process the test analyst is predominant and not the test itself. With all their imperfections projectives generally produce a less biased, less distorted and more comprehensive picture of the individual. They have silently made their way in industry and

among practical, hard-headed businessmen, and it can be said with certainty that they are here to stay until a better method is developed.

In this area of top executive appraisal, the concepts devised by the social scientists in studying human behavior are increasingly significant. Greater insight into culture, belief systems, attitudes, relationships, roles which have great impact on the success or failure of business executives is obtained. Answers to pertinent questions as these are formulated and predictions made with a high degree of accuracy.

- \* How productive will he be as an administrator?
- \* Is it likely that he will manifest authoritarianism?
- \* Will he be able to encourage consultation and participation from associates and subordinates?
- \* To what degree is he free from passivity, dependence, submissiveness and conformist's traits?
- \* Is he narcissus, mother independent, father dependent?  
Is he narcissus, mother dependent, father dependent?  
Is he non-narcissus, mother independent, father dependent?
- \* Does he exhibit drive, initiative, creativity, empathy, self-reliance and a capacity to take calculated risks without anxiety?

Sociometry is another technique which is destined to have real impact on managerial circles. Sociometrically, people are not assessed by tests or by analysts, but by people--peers, subordinates, superiors. The theory of interpersonal relationships, attraction-repulsion, is used to determine what others think. For instance in a group each member is asked to nominate the three men he thinks would manifest the greatest influence on the group. Sometimes they are asked to rate on honesty, intelligence and sense of humor. Positive and negative votes received by each man are totalled and a score assigned to that man. The score represents his peers' joint estimate of his aptitude for a particular job.

Sociometrics do not require the judge to give a rationale for his judgment. Individuals are asked to express their over-all feelings about other individuals. This technique has been a slow runner in the managerial race, but as scientific management gives way gradually to participative management in industry, selection by choice and popularity will replace selection by ability.

## RECONCEIVING EXECUTIVE APPRAISAL

Effective development of managers does not include coercing them into acceptance of the goals of the enterprise nor does it mean manipulating their behavior to suit organizational needs; rather it calls for creating a relationship.

### Individual development

Business management is painfully aware of its need for qualified leadership at the top and at the intermediate levels. If management is to find and develop competent top-level executives, reliable guideposts to go by must be formulated. First, it must know what kind of man it is hunting for, and secondly, it must map out a course of work which can be used in initiating growth and development in the individual. It is believed that no one should be chosen for a top-level executive position unless he is thirty to forty years old. At this age, he has had ample opportunity to display the latent skills predisposing to good management practice. If he does not display them, then one is pretty sure that he does not have them, or they are present in a very negligible degree and no amount of training can develop them.

To make a successful thrust into the business world the individual must display a constitutionally high level of psychic energy to ensure adequate drive, aggressiveness and creative imagination. He must possess an unusual degree of genuine self-reliance as distinct from the compensatory over-aggressiveness and boastfulness of the basically insecure. He should display an open-minded receptivity to suggestions and criticisms from associates, subordinates and superiors, and finally he must be an active and dynamic doer and innovator.

In the past two decades there has been tremendous development and growth of executives' training programs. One has noticed a slow change in the methods adopted. No longer is management concerned with attempting to change executives at the top-level to fit into a pre-conceived pattern, but rather the attempt is towards growth, self-actualization and optimum performance. To accomplish this it is necessary that management assume the responsibility of planned performance standards for the individual and provide opportunity for satisfying the whole range of personal needs which he brings to his work.

Training of the individual should be incorporated in this procedure of planned performance since it provides excellent opportunity for the individual to understand and interpret the social, political and economic changes both national and world-wide which influence the problems of corporate management. It also tends to broaden the understanding of basic values, issues and circumstances influencing the long range development of the climate in which business operates.

#### A new concept

The future executive should be given the opportunity of handling special assignments as early as possible in his career, particularly problems which are real, require plenty of analysis, and cut across departmental lines. It is here he gets the opportunity for using his creativity and originality in making decisions as a member of a group, within the scope permitted him, and on his own. It is here he gets the practice of working with and through people. It is here where he can establish short term performance goals for himself. He can do a great deal of thinking about the job, make a careful assessment of his capabilities and weaknesses and finally formulate plans to accomplish his goals. Some targets of specific action in formulating work systems and procedures may be--improve communications in a certain department; reorganize the office by implementing EDP to minimize routine,

clerical work; or undertake certain studies which would give insight into personnel practices or consumer buying habits and product movement as discovered through motivation research. At the end of the work period he takes inventory of the work done and appraises his accomplishments in the light of targets set. Under these circumstances he is no longer the subordinate examined by a 'judge' but rather he is examining himself, his strengths and weaknesses and defending them not only to his superiors but also to his peers and subordinates. He reaps the rewards of a job well done or pays the price of a faulty, ill-organized one. The subordinate's role in such a process is now changed for he becomes an active agent rather than a passive object.

Effective development of managers does not include coercing them into acceptance of the goals of the enterprise nor does it mean manipulating their behavior to suit organizational needs. Rather it calls for creating a relationship within which a man can take responsibility for developing his own potentialities, plan for himself, and learn from putting plans into action. In this process he can gain a genuine sense of satisfaction, for he is utilizing his own capabilities to achieve simultaneously both his objectives and those of the organization.

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