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ARTICLE

**Contrary to popular opinion, the best managers are the ones who want to use their influence over people to get things done.**

# Power Is the Great Motivator

**by David C. McClelland and David H. Burnham**

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## THE IDEA IN BRIEF

In order to motivate others, managers must be motivated themselves. The key issue here is the *source* of the motivation—the way the manager defines success. Some equate success with personal achievement; some see it as being liked by others. In order to succeed in a complex organization, a manager needs to have a *power motivation,* which is not a dictatorial impulse but rather the desire to have impact, to be strong and influential. This power must be disciplined and channeled in ways that benefit the organization, not the manager himself.

## THE IDEA AT WORK

In terms of motivation, there are three types of managers:

1. **Affiliative managers** score high in inhibition—that is, they are very capable of curbing their own impulses and using power for the benefit of the organization. But they need to be liked more than they need to have power; thus, instead of using their self-control to benefit the organization, affiliative managers often use it to ensure that they're liked. Such managers tend to have direct reports who have little pride in their work group, and who feel that they have little responsibility and that organizational procedures are unclear. The reasons are easy to understand: affiliative managers tend to disregard procedures in favor of ad hoc decisions, which enable them to act based on how they anticipate people will feel about the decision.

2. **Personal power managers** are those for whom the need for power outweighs the need to be liked. These managers score low in inhibition: lacking self-control, they tend to act impulsively or arbitrarily. Personal power managers are usually more effective than affiliative managers, better able to generate team spirit and a sense of responsibility in their direct reports. But they are not good institution builders; their lack of self-control translates into direct reports who are loyal to them instead of the organization. Thus, when a personal power manager leaves the organization, the team spirit and sense of organization rapidly dissipate.

3. **Institutional managers,** like personal power managers, need to have power and to be able to influence others more than they need to be liked. But they differ from personal power managers in one key respect: they score high in inhibition. Institutional managers care more about using power for the benefit of the organization than for their own aggrandizement. As a result, they are the most successful of the three types at creating an effective work environment—one in which employees have high morale and feel a strong sense of responsibility and organizational clarity. Two additional characteristics of institutional managers: they tend to have a more democratic leadership style, one that emphasizes coaching rather than commanding; and they possess greater emotional maturity than the other types.

In a retrospective commentary written in 1995, coauthor David McClelland notes that the need for achievement takes on greater importance in small companies, and that the need to influence others can even be a handicap. The reason, he explains, is that "a constant concern for improvement, for growing the business in a cost-efficient way," is more crucial to the work of small-company managers.

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*A good manager is not one who needs personal success or who is people oriented – but one who has a need for power.*

# Power Is the Great Motivator

by David C. McClelland and David H. Burnham

What makes or motivates a good manager? The question is enormous in scope. Some people might say that a good manager is one who is successful – and by now most business researchers and businesspeople know what motivates people who successfully run their own small businesses. The key to their success has turned out to be what psychologists call the need for achievement, the desire to do something better or more efficiently than it has been done before. Any number of books and articles summarize research studies explaining how the achievement motive is necessary for a person to attain success.

But what has achievement motivation got to do with good management? There is no reason on theoretical grounds why a person who has a strong need to be more efficient should make a good manager. While it sounds as if everyone ought to have the need to achieve, in fact, as psychologists define and measure achievement motivation, the need to achieve leads people to behave in ways that do not necessarily engender good management.

For one thing, because they focus on personal improvement and doing things better by themselves, achievement-motivated people want to do things themselves. For another, they want concrete short-term feedback on their performance so that they can tell how well they are doing. Yet managers, particularly in large, complex organizations, cannot perform by themselves all the tasks necessary for success. They must manage others to perform for the organization. And they must be willing to do without immediate and personal feedback since tasks are spread among many people.



The manager's job seems to call more for someone who can influence people than for someone who does things better alone. In motivational terms, then, we might expect the successful manager to have a greater *need for power* than a need to achieve. But there must be other qualities besides the need for power that go into the makeup of a good manager. We will discuss here just what these qualities are and how they interrelate.

To measure the motivations of managers, we studied a number of them in different large U.S. corporations who were participating in management workshops designed to improve their managerial effectiveness. (See the insert "Workshop Techniques.") We concluded that the top manager of a company must possess a high need for power, that is, a concern for influencing people. However, this need must be disciplined and controlled so that it is directed toward the benefit of the institution as a whole and not toward the manager's personal aggrandizement. Moreover, the top manager's need for power ought to be greater than his or her need for being liked.

## Measuring Managerial Effectiveness

What does it mean when we say that a good manager has a greater need for power than for achievement? Consider the case of Ken Briggs, a sales manager in a large U.S. corporation who joined one of our managerial workshops. About six years ago, Ken Briggs was promoted to a managerial position at headquarters, where he was responsible for salespeople who service his company's largest accounts.

In filling out his questionnaire at the workshop, Ken showed that he correctly perceived what his job required of him, namely, that he should influence others' success

*This article was originally published in March-April 1976. It won the McKinsey Award for excellence and has consistently been one of the best-selling HBR reprints. For its republication as an HBR Classic, David C. McClelland has written a retrospective commentary.*

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DRAWINGS BY PETER SIMPSON COOK

more than achieve new goals himself or socialize with his subordinates. However, when asked with other members of the workshop to write a story depicting a managerial situation, Ken unwittingly revealed through his fiction that he did not share those concerns. Indeed, he discovered that his need for achievement was very high–in fact, over the ninetieth percentile – and his need for power was very low, in about the fifteenth percentile. Ken's high need to achieve was no surprise–after all, he had been a very successful salesman – but obviously his motivation to influence others was much less than his job required. Ken was a little disturbed but thought that perhaps the measuring instruments were not accurate and that the gap between the ideal and his score was not as great as it seemed.

Then came the real shocker. Ken's subordinates confirmed what his stories revealed: he was a poor manager, having little positive impact on those who worked for him. They felt they had little responsibility delegated to them, he never rewarded but only criticized them, and the office was not well organized but was confused and chaotic. On all those scales, his office rated in the tenth to fifteenth percentile relative to national norms.

As Ken talked the results of the survey over privately with a workshop leader, he became more and more upset. He finally agreed, however, that the results confirmed feelings he had been afraid to admit to himself or others. For years, he had been miserable in his managerial role. He now knew the reason: he simply did not want, and he had not been able, to influence or manage others. As he thought back, he realized he had failed every time he had tried to influence his staff, and he felt worse than ever.

Ken had responded to failure by setting very high standards – his office scored in the ninety-eighth percentile on this scale – and by trying to do most things himself, which was close to impossible; his own activity and lack of delegation consequently left his staff demoralized. Ken's experience is typical of those who have a strong need to achieve but low power motivation. They may become very successful salespeople and, as a consequence, may be promoted into managerial jobs for which they, ironically, are unsuited.

**The top manager's need for power ought to be greater than the need to be liked.**

If achievement motivation does not make a good manager, what motive does? It is not enough to suspect that power motivation may be important; one needs hard evidence that people who are better managers than Ken Briggs is do in fact possess stronger power motivation and perhaps score higher in other characteristics as well. But how does one decide who is the better manager?

Real-world performance measures are hard to come by if one is trying to rate managerial effectiveness in production, marketing, finance, or research and development. In trying to determine who the better managers were in Ken Briggs's company, we did not want to rely only on their superiors. For a variety of reasons, superiors' judgments of their subordinates' real-world performance may be inaccurate. In the absence of some standard measure of performance, we decided that the next best index of a manager's effectiveness would be the climate he or she creates in the office, reflected in the morale of subordinates.



Almost by definition, a good manager is one who, among other things, helps subordinates feel strong and responsible, rewards them properly for good performance, and sees that things are organized so that subordinates feel they know what they should be doing. Above all, managers should foster among subordinates a strong sense of team spirit, of pride in working as part of a team. If a manager creates and encourages this spirit, his or her subordinates certainly should perform better.

In the company Ken Briggs works for, we have direct evidence of a connection between morale and performance in the one area where performance measures are easy to find–namely, sales. In April 1973, at least three employees from this company's 16 sales districts filled out questionnaires that rated their office for organizational clarity and team spirit. Their scores were averaged

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*David C. McClelland is a founder and director of McBer and Company; the director of research at Hay McBer, a human-resources management-consulting firm; Distinguished Research Professor of Psychology at Boston University; and a professor emeritus of psychology at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He is the author of many books, including* The Achieving Society *(Van Nostrand, 1961),* Power: The Inner Experience *(Irvington Publishers, 1975), and* Human Motivation *(Cambridge University Press, 1988). David H. Burnham was president and chief executive officer of McBer and Company when this article was originally published and now works as a consultant in the Boston area.*

and totaled to give an overall morale score for each office. The percentage gains or losses in sales for each district in 1973 were compared with those for 1972. The difference in sales figures by district ranged from a gain of nearly 30% to a loss of 8%, with a median gain of about 14%. The graph "The Link Between Morale and Sales" shows how, in Ken Briggs's company, at least, high morale at the beginning of the year became a good index of how well the sales division would actually perform throughout the year. Moreover, it seems likely that the manager who can create high morale among salespeople can also do the same for employees in other areas (production, design, and so on), which leads to better overall performance. What characteristics, then, does a manager need to create that kind of morale?

## The Power Factor

In examining the motive scores of more than 50 managers of both high- and low-morale units in all sections of the same large company, we found that most of the managers – more than 70% – were high in power motivation compared with the average person. This finding confirms that power motivation is important for management. (Remember that, as we use the term, *power motivation* refers not to dictatorial behavior but to a desire to have impact, to be strong and influential.) The better managers, as judged by the morale of those working for them, tended to score even higher in power motivation. But the most important determining factor of high morale turned out to be not how their power motivation compared with their need to achieve but whether it was higher than their need to be liked. This relationship existed for 80% of the better sales managers as compared with only 10% of the poorer managers. And the same held true for other managers in nearly every part of the organization.

**A manager who makes exceptions for individuals risks ruining the morale of the entire office.**

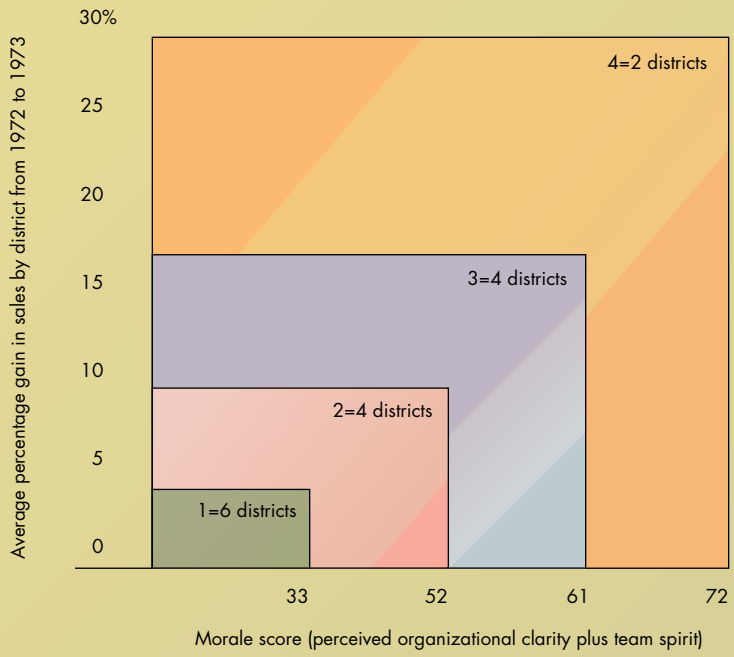
In the research, product development, and operations divisions, 73% of the better managers had a stronger need for power than a need to be liked, as compared with only 22% of the poorer managers, who tended to be what we term *affiliative managers* – whose strongest drive is to be liked. Why should this be so? Sociologists have long argued that for a bureaucracy to function effectively, those who manage it must apply rules universally; that is, if they make exceptions for the particular needs of individuals, the whole system will break down.

The manager with a high need to be liked is precisely the one who wants to stay on good terms with everybody and, therefore, is the one most likely to make exceptions for particular needs. If an employee asks for time off to stay home and look after a sick spouse and the kids, the affiliative manager agrees almost without thinking, out of compassion for the employee's situation.

When former President Gerald Ford remarked in pardoning Richard Nixon that Nixon had "suffered enough," he was responding as an affiliative manager would because he was empathizing primarily with Nixon's needs and feelings. Sociological theory and our findings both argue, however, that the person whose need for affiliation is high does not make a good manager. This kind of person creates low morale because he or she does not understand that other people in the office will tend to regard exceptions to the rules as unfair to themselves, just as many U.S. citizens felt that it was unfair to let Nixon off and punish others who were less involved than he was in the Watergate scandal.

So far, our findings are a little alarming. Do they suggest that the good manager is one who cares for

### The Link Between Morale and Sales




The six districts with the lowest morale early in the year showed an average sales gain of only about 7% by year's end. The two districts with the highest morale showed an average sales gain higher than the fiftieth percentile of national norms.

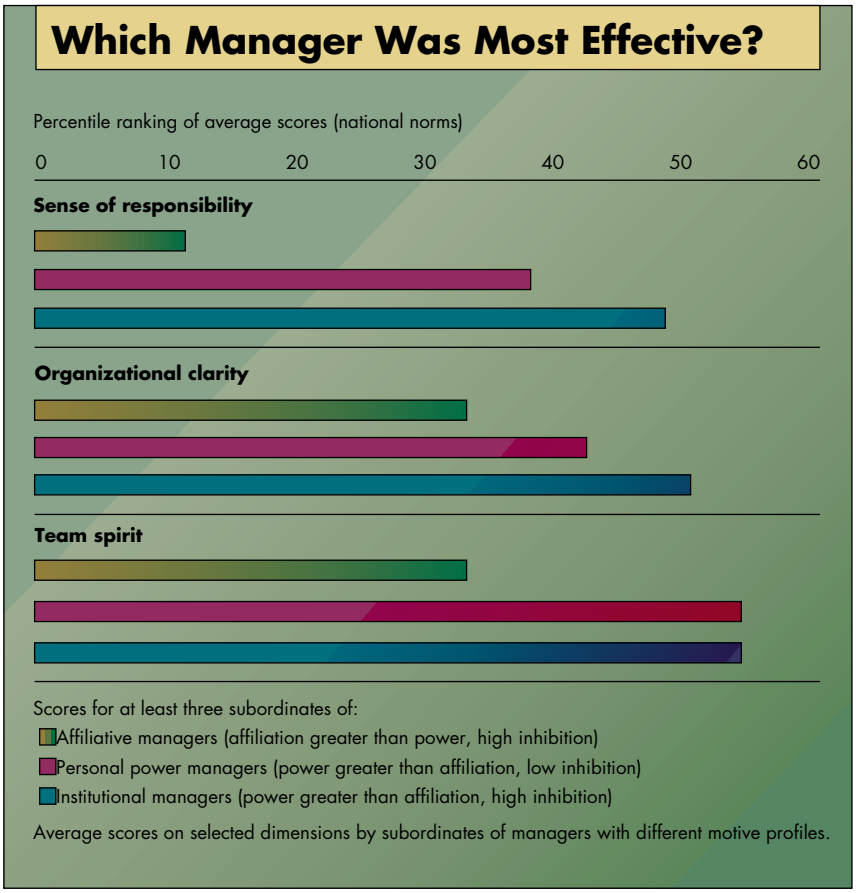
power and is not at all concerned about the needs of other people? Not quite, for the good manager has other characteristics that must still be taken into account.

Above all, the good manager's power motivation is not oriented toward personal aggrandizement but toward the institution that he or she serves. In another major research study, we found that the signs of controlled action or inhibition that appear when a person exercises imagination in writing stories tell a great deal about the kind of power that person needs.[1] We discovered that if a high power-motive score is balanced by high inhibition, stories about power tend to be altruistic. That is, the heroes in the story exercise power on behalf of someone else. This is the socialized face of power as distinguished from the concern for personal power, which is characteristic of individuals whose stories are loaded with power imagery but show no sign of inhibition or self-control. In our earlier study, we found ample evidence that the latter individuals exercise their power impulsively. They are more often rude to other people, they drink too much, they try to exploit others sexually, and they collect symbols of personal prestige such as fancy cars or big offices.

Individuals high in power and in control, on the other hand, are more institution minded; they tend to get elected to more offices, to control their drinking, and to have a desire to serve others. Not surprisingly, we found in the workshops that the better managers in the corporation also tend to score high on both power and inhibition.

## Three Kinds of Managers

Let us recapitulate what we have discussed so far and have illustrated with data from one company. The better managers we studied – what we call *institutional managers* – are high in power motivation, low in affiliation motivation, and high in inhibition. They care about institutional power and use it to stimulate their employees to be more productive. Now let us compare them with *affiliative managers* (those in whom the need for affiliation is higher than the need for power) and with the *personal power managers* (those in whom the need for power is higher than for affiliation but whose inhibition score is low).



Average scores on selected dimensions by subordinates of managers with different motive profiles.

In the sales division of the company we chose to use as an illustration, there were managers who matched the three types fairly closely. The chart "Which Manager Was Most Effective?" shows how their subordinates rated the offices they worked in on responsibility, organizational clarity, and team spirit. Managers who are concerned about being liked tend to have subordinates who feel that they have little personal responsibility, that organizational procedures are not clear, and that they have little pride in their work group.

**A manager motivated by personal power is not a good institution builder.**

In short, as we expected, affiliative managers make so many ad hominem and ad hoc decisions that they almost totally abandon orderly procedures. Their disregard for procedure leaves employees feeling weak, irresponsible, and without a sense of what might happen next, of where they stand in relation to their manager, or even of what they ought to be doing. In this company, the group of affiliative managers portrayed in the chart were below the thirtieth percentile in morale scores.

The managers who are motivated by a need for personal power are somewhat more effective. They are able to create a greater sense of responsibility in their divisions and, above all, a greater team spirit. They

1. David C. McClelland, William N. Davis, Rudolf Kalin, and Eric Warner, *The Drinking Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1972).

can be thought of as managerial equivalents of successful tank commanders such as General George Patton, whose own daring inspired admiration in his troops. But notice how in the chart these people are still only in the fortieth percentile in the amount of organizational clarity that they create, as compared with the high-power, low-affiliation, high-inhibition managers – institutional managers.

**The bogeyman of authoritarianism has been wrongly used to downplay the importance of power in management.**

Managers motivated by personal power are not disciplined enough to be good institution builders, and often their subordinates are loyal to them as individuals rather than to the institution they serve. When a personal power manager leaves, disorganization often follows. The strong group spirit that the manager has personally inspired deflates. The subordinates do not know what to do for themselves.

Of the managerial types, the institutional manager is the most successful in creating an effective work climate. Subordinates feel that they have more responsibility. Also, those kinds of managers create high morale because they produce the greatest sense of organizational clarity and team spirit. If such a manager leaves, he or she can be more readily replaced by another because the employees have been encouraged to be loyal to the institution rather than to a particular person.

Since it seems undeniable that a manager with a power orientation creates better morale in subordinates than one with a people orientation, we must consider that a concern for power is essential to good management. Our findings seem to fly in the face of a long and influential tradition of organizational psychology, which insists that authoritarian management is what is wrong with most businesses in the United States. Let us say frankly that we think the bogeyman of authoritarianism has been wrongly used to downplay the importance of power in management. After all, management is an influence game. Some proponents of democratic management seem to have forgotten this fact, urging managers to be more concerned with people's personal needs than with helping them to get things done.

But much of the apparent conflict between our findings and those of other behavioral scientists in this area stems from the fact that we are talking about *motives,* and behaviorists are often talking about *actions.* What we are saying is that managers must be interested in playing the influence game in a controlled way. That does not necessarily mean that they are or should be authoritarian in action. On the contrary, it appears that power-motivated managers make their subordinates feel strong rather than weak. The true authoritarian in action would have the reverse effect, making people feel weak and powerless.

Thus another important ingredient in the profile of a manager is managerial style. In the illustrative company, 63% of the better managers (those whose subordinates had higher morale) scored higher on the democratic or coaching styles of management as compared with only 22% of the poorer managers, a statistically significant difference. By contrast, the latter scored higher on authoritarian or coercive management styles. Since the better managers were also higher in power motivation, it seems that in action they express their power motivation in a democratic way, which is more likely to be effective.

To see how motivation and style interact, consider the case of George Prentice, a manager in the sales division of another company. George had exactly the right combination of motives to be an institutional manager. He was high in the need for power, low in the need for affiliation, and high in inhibition. He exercised his power in a controlled, organized way. The stories he wrote reflected this fact. In one story, for instance, he wrote, "The men sitting around the table were feeling pretty good; they had just finished plans for reorganizing the company; the company has been beset with a number of organizational problems. This group, headed by a hard-driving, brilliant young executive, has completely reorganized the company structurally with new jobs and responsibilities...."

This described how George himself was perceived by the company, and shortly after the workshop, he was promoted to vice president in charge of all sales. But George was also known to his colleagues as a monster, a tough guy who would "walk over his grandmother" if she stood in the way of his advancement. He had the right motive combination and, in fact, was more interested in institutional growth than he was in personal power, but his managerial style was all wrong. Taking his cue from some of the top executives in the corporation, he told people what they had to do, and he threatened them with dire consequences if they did not do it.

When George was confronted with his authoritarianism in a workshop, he recognized that this style was counterproductive–in fact, in another part of the study we found that it was associated with low morale – and he subsequently changed to acting more like a coach, which was the scale on which he scored the lowest initially. George saw more clearly that his job was not to force other people to do things but rather to help them to figure out ways of getting their jobs done better for the company.

## Profile of the Institutional Manager

One reason it was easy for George Prentice to change his managerial style was that, as we saw in his imaginative stories, he was already having thoughts about helping others, characteristic of people with the institution-building motivational pattern. In further examining insti-

tution builders' thoughts and actions, we found they have four major characteristics:

☐ Institution managers are more organization minded; that is, they tend to join more organizations and to feel responsible for building up those organizations. Furthermore, they believe strongly in the importance of centralized authority.

☐ They report that they like to work. This finding is particularly interesting because our research on achievement motivation has led many commentators to argue that achievement motivation promotes the "Protestant work ethic." Almost the precise opposite is true. People who have a high need to achieve like to *reduce* their work by becoming more efficient. They would like to see the same result obtained in less time or with less effort. But managers who have a need for institutional power actually seem to like the discipline of work. It satisfies their need for getting things done in an orderly way.

☐ They seem quite willing to sacrifice some of their own self-interest for the welfare of the organization they serve.

☐ They have a keen sense of justice. It is almost as if they feel that people who work hard and sacrifice for the good of the organization should and will get a just reward for their effort.

It is easy to see how each of these four concerns helps a person become a good manager, concerned about what the institution can achieve.

We discovered one more fact in studying the better managers at George Prentice's company. They were more mature. Mature people can be most simply described as less egotistic. Somehow their positive self-image is not at stake in their jobs. They are less defensive, more willing to seek advice from experts, and have a longer-range view. They accumulate fewer personal possessions and seem older and wiser. It is as if they have awakened to the fact that they are not going to live forever and have lost some of the feeling that their own personal future is all that important.

Many U.S. businesspeople fear this kind of maturity. They suspect that it will make them less hard driving, less expansion minded, and less committed to organizational effectiveness. Our data do not support their fears.

Those fears are exactly the ones George Prentice had before he went to the workshop. Afterward, he was a more effective manager, not despite his loss of some of the sense of his own importance but because of it. The reason is simple: his subordinates believed afterward that he was genuinely more concerned about the company than he was about himself. Whereas once they respected his confidence but feared him, they now trust him. Once, he supported their image of him as a "big man" by talking about the new Porsche and Honda he had bought; when we saw him recently, he said, almost as an aside, "I don't buy things anymore."

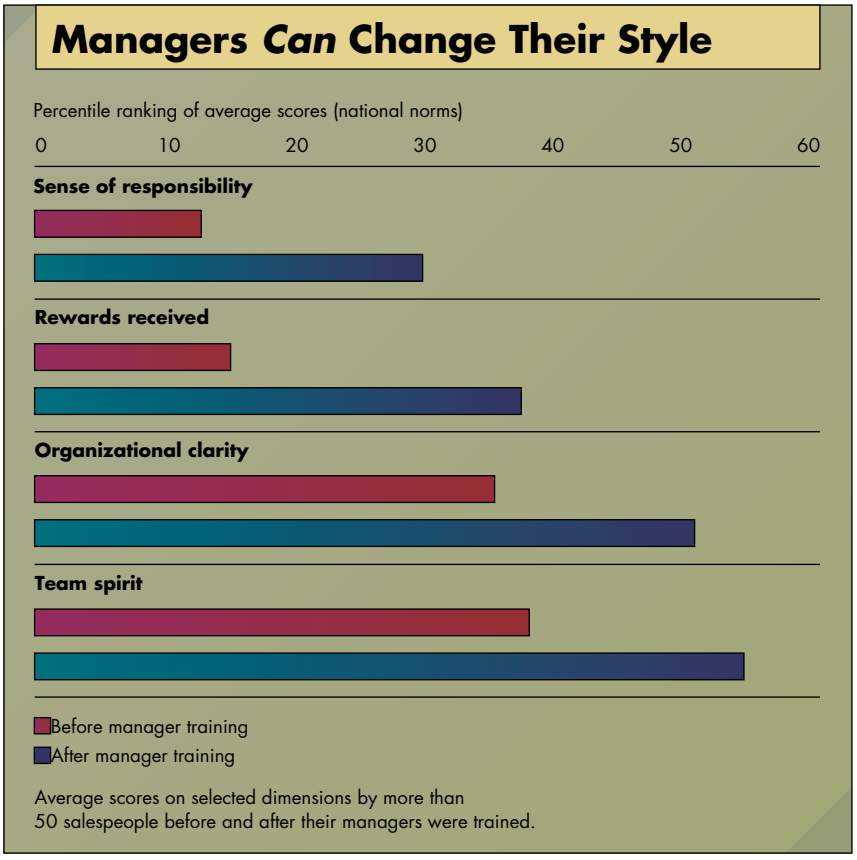
## Altering Managerial Style

George Prentice was able to change his managerial style after learning more about himself. But does self-knowledge generally improve managerial behavior?

Consider the results shown in the chart "Managers *Can* Change Their Style," where "before" and "after" workshop training scores are compared. To judge by their subordinates' responses, the managers were clearly more effective after coming to terms with their style. The subordinates felt that they received more rewards, that the organizational procedures were clearer, and that morale was higher.

But what do those differences mean in human terms? How did the managers change? Sometimes they decided they should get into another line of work. This happened to Ken Briggs, for example, who found that the reason he was doing so poorly as a manager was because he had almost no interest in influencing others. He understood how he would have to change in order to do well in his present job, but in the end decided, with the help of management, that he would prefer to work back into his first love, sales.

Ken Briggs moved into remaindering, helping retail outlets for his company's products get rid of last



year's stock so that they can take on each year's new styles. He is very successful in this new role; he has cut costs, increased dollar volume, and in time has worked himself into an independent role selling some of the old stock on his own in a way that is quite satisfactory to the business. And he does not have to manage anybody anymore.

In George Prentice's case, less change was needed. He obviously was a very competent manager with the right motive profile for a top company position. When he was promoted, he performed even more successfully than he had previously because he realized that he needed to become more positive in his approach and less coercive in his managerial style.

But what about a person who does not want to change jobs and discovers that he or she does not have the right motive profile to be a manager? The case of Charlie Blake is instructive. Charlie was as low in power motivation as Ken Briggs, his need to achieve was about average, and his affiliation motivation was above average. Thus he had the affiliative-manager profile, and, as expected, the morale among his subordinates was very low. When Charlie learned that his subordinates' sense of responsibility and perception of a reward system were in the tenth percentile and that team spirit was in the thirtieth, he was shocked. When shown a film depicting three managerial climates, Charlie said he preferred what turned out to be the authoritarian climate. He became angry when the workshop trainer and other members in the group pointed out the limitations of this managerial style. He became obstructive in the group process and objected strenuously to what was being taught.

In an interview conducted much later, Charlie said, "I blew my cool. When I started yelling at you for being all wrong, I got even madder when you pointed out that, according to my style questionnaire, you bet that that was just what I did to my salespeople. Down underneath, I knew something must be wrong. The sales performance for my division wasn't so good. Most of it was due to me anyway and not to my salespeople. Obviously, their reports that they felt I delegated very little responsibility to them and didn't reward them at all had to mean something. So I finally decided to sit down and try to figure what I could do about it. I knew I had to start being a manager instead of trying to do everything myself and blowing my cool at others because they didn't do what I thought they should. In the end, after I calmed down on the way back from the workshop, I realized

## Workshop Techniques

We derived the case studies and data used in this article from a number of workshops we conducted, during which executives learned about their managerial styles and abilities as well as how to change them. The workshops also provided an opportunity for us to study which motivation patterns in people make for the best managers.

At the workshops and in this article, we use the technical terms *need for achievement, need for affiliation,* and *need for power*. The terms refer to measurable factors indicating motivation in groups and individuals. Briefly, those characteristics are measured by coding managers' spontaneous thoughts according to how often they think about doing something better or more efficiently than before (need for achievement), about establishing or maintaining friendly relations with others (need for affiliation), or about having an impact on others (need for power). When we talk about power, we are not talking about dictatorial power but about the need to be strong and influential.

When the managers first arrived at the workshops, they were asked to fill out a questionnaire about their jobs. Each participant analyzed his or her job, explaining what he or she thought it required. The managers were asked to write a number of stories about pictures of various work situations we showed them. The stories were coded according to how concerned an individual was with achievement, affiliation, or power, as well as for the amount of inhibition or self-control they revealed. We then compared the results against national norms. The differences between a person's job requirements and his or her motivational patterns can often help assess whether the person is in the right job, is a candidate for promotion to another job, or is likely to be able to adjust to fit the present position.

To find out what kind of managerial style the participants had, we then gave them a questionnaire in which they had to choose how they would handle various realistic work situations in office settings. We divided their answers into six management styles or ways of dealing with work situations. The styles were democratic, affiliative, pacesetting, coaching, coercive, and authoritarian. The managers were asked to comment on the effectiveness of each style and to name the style they preferred.

One way to determine how effective managers are is to ask the people who work for them. Thus, to isolate the characteristics that good managers have, we asked at least three subordinates of each manager at the workshop questions about their work situations that revealed characteristics of their supervisors according to six

that it is not so bad to make a mistake; it's bad not to learn from it."

After the course, Charlie put his plans into effect. Six months later, his subordinates were asked to rate him again. He attended a second workshop to study the results and reported, "On the way home, I was nervous. I knew I had been working with those guys and not selling so much myself, but I was afraid of what they would say about how things were going in the office. When I found out that the team spirit and some of those other low scores had jumped from around the thirtieth to the fifty-fifth percentile, I was so delighted and relieved that I couldn't say anything all day long."

**"It is not so bad to make a mistake; it's bad not to learn anything from it."**

When he was asked how he acted differently from before, Charlie said, "In previous years when corporate headquarters said we had to make 110% of our original goal, I had called the salespeople in and said, in effect, 'This is ridiculous; we are not going to make it, but you know perfectly well what will happen if we don't. So get out there and work your tails off.' The result was that I worked 20 hours a day and they did nothing.

"This time I approached the salespeople differently. I told them three things. First, they were going to have to do some sacrificing for the company. Second, working harder is not going to do much good because we are already working about as hard as

criteria: (1) the amount of conformity to rules the supervisor requires, (2) the amount of responsibility they feel they are given, (3) the emphasis the department places on standards of performance, (4) the degree to which rewards are given for good work compared with punishment when something goes wrong, (5) the degree of organizational clarity in the office, and (6) its team spirit.[1] The managers who received the highest morale scores (organizational clarity plus team spirit) from their subordinates were determined to be the best managers, possessing the most desirable motive patterns.

We also surveyed the subordinates six months later to see if morale scores rose after managers completed the workshop.

We measured participants on one other characteristic deemed important for good management: maturity. By coding the stories that the managers wrote, which revealed their attitudes toward authority and the kinds of emotions displayed over specific issues, we were able to pinpoint managers at one of four stages in the progress toward maturity. People in Stage I are dependent on others for guidance and strength. Those in Stage II are interested primarily in autonomy. In Stage III, people want to manipulate others. In Stage IV, they lose their egotistic desires and wish to serve others selflessly.[2]

The conclusions we present in this article are based on workshops attended by more than 500 managers from some 25 U.S. corporations. We drew the examples in the charts from one of those companies.

1. Based on G.H. Litwin and R.A. Stringer's *Motivation and Organizational Climate* (Boston: Division of Research, Harvard Business School, 1966).

2. Based on work by Abigail Stewart, as reported in David C. McClelland's *Power: The Inner Experience* (New York: Irvington Publishers, 1975).

we can. What will be required are special deals and promotions. You are going to have to figure out some new angles if we are to make it. Third, I'm going to back you up. I'm going to set a realistic goal with each of you. If you make that goal but don't make the company goal, I'll see to it that you are not punished. But if you do make the company goal, I'll see to it that you will get some kind of special rewards."

When the salespeople challenged Charlie, saying he did not have enough influence to give them rewards, rather than becoming angry, Charlie promised rewards that were in his power to give – such as longer vacations.

Note that Charlie has now begun to behave in a number of ways that we found to be characteristic of the good institutional manager. He is, above all, higher in power motivation – the desire to influence his salespeople – and lower in his tendency to try to do everything himself. He asks people to sacrifice for the company. He does not defensively chew them out when they challenge him but tries to figure out what their needs are so that he can influence them. He realizes that his job is more one of strengthening and supporting his subordinates than of criticizing them. And he is keenly interested in giving them just rewards for their efforts.

The changes in his approach to his job have certainly paid off. The sales figures for his office in 1973 were up more than 16% over 1972 sales and up still further in 1974 over 1973 sales. In 1973, his gain over the previous year ranked seventh in the nation; in 1974, it ranked third. And he wasn't the only one in his company to change managerial styles. Overall sales at his company were up substantially in 1973 compared with 1972 sales, an increase that played a large part in turning the overall company performance around from a $15 million loss in 1972 to a $3 million profit in 1973. The company continued to improve its performance in 1974 with an 11% further gain in sales and a 38% increase in profits.

Of course, not everyone can be reached by a workshop. Henry Carter managed a sales office for a company that had very low morale (around the twentieth percentile) before he went for training. When morale was checked some six months later, it had not improved. Overall sales gain subsequently reflected this fact – only 2% above the previous year's figures.

Oddly enough, Henry's problem was that he was so well liked by everybody that he felt little pressure to change. Always the life of the party, he is particularly popular because he supplies other managers

## Retrospective Commentary by David C. McClelland

Two important changes have occurred in the workplace since David H. Burnham and I wrote "Power Is the Great Motivator" in 1976. The big, old-fashioned hierarchical organizations we studied have flattened out. And female managers have entered the workplace in full force.

Yet our findings about management style still hold true, regardless of a manager's gender, for the type of hierarchical organization we observed in the article. Successful managers– what we called institutional managers – have a strong need for power (that is, for influencing others) that is greater than their need to be liked, and they exhibit self-control.

That finding was confirmed through subsequent research, including a study of people who were promoted up the managerial ranks at AT&T. Of people who joined AT&T between 1956 and 1960, the institutional managers had been promoted 16 years later to a higher level much more often than other types of managers, we found. We also discovered that the same managerial characteristics predicted future success for both men and women who entered the AT&T system between 1976 and 1980.

However, in a recent study of PepsiCo, a large, decentralized company, we found that having a high need for *achievement* contributes more to success than does a high interest in influencing other people. In fact, the need for power was often a handicap in that company. That confirms earlier convincing evidence that a constant concern for improvement, for growing the business in a cost-efficient way, characterizes successful managers of *small* companies, which is what many subsidiaries of PepsiCo essentially function as.

To show conclusively how women manage, we still need much more information. But the AT&T follow-up research did provide an opportunity to observe the subtleties in style differences between the best female and male managers. Using an objective coding system to analyze the stories managers wrote about hypothetical situations, Ruth Jacobs, a principal at McBer and Company, and I found the women much more consensus oriented than the men. In particular, the women seemed to think about power as a resource that can be used to influence outcomes on the job and to focus the competencies of the people who work for them. Men in the study, on the other hand, tended to think of power more as an end in itself, as something they can use to react against or take power away from others in authority. Men saw power as a way to supersede others in power; women rarely did.

Since 1976, my work focus has returned to a lifelong interest in *competencies* in management.

with special hard-to-get brands of cigars and wines at a discount. He uses his close ties with everyone to bolster his position in the company, even though it is known that his office does not perform well compared with others.

**In good managers, power is checked by maturity and a democratic style.**

His great interpersonal skills became evident at the workshop when he did very poorly at one of the business games. When the discussion turned to why he had done so badly and whether he acted that way on the job, two prestigious participants immediately sprang to his defense, explaining away Henry's failure by arguing that the way he did things was often a real help to others and the company. As a result, Henry did not have to cope with such questions at all. He had so successfully developed his role as a likable, helpful friend to everyone in management that, even though his salespeople performed badly, he did not feel under any pressure to change the way he managed people.

What have we learned from Ken Briggs, George Prentice, Charlie Blake, and Henry Carter? We have discovered what motives make an effective manager – and that change is possible if a person has the right combination of qualities.

Oddly enough, the good manager in a large company does not have a high need for achievement, as we define and measure that motive, although there must be plenty of that motive somewhere in his or her organization. The top managers shown here have a high need for power and an interest in influencing others, both greater than their interest in being liked by people. The manager's concern for power should be socialized – controlled so that the institution as a whole, not only the individual, benefits. People and nations with this motive profile are empire builders; they tend to create high morale and to expand the organizations they head. But there is also danger in this motive profile; as in countries, empire building can lead to imperialism and authoritarianism in companies.

The same motive pattern that produces good power management can also lead a company to try to dominate others, ostensibly in the interests of organizational expansion. Thus it is not surprising that big business has had to be regulated periodically by federal agencies.

Similarly, the best managers possess two characteristics that act as regulators – a greater emotional maturity, where there is little egotism, and a democratic, coaching managerial style. If an institutional power motivation is checked by maturity, it does not lead to an aggressive, egotistic expansiveness. That means managers can control their subordinates and influence others around them without having to resort to coercion or to an authoritarian management style.

Summarized in this way, what we have found out through empirical and statistical investigations may sound like good common sense. But it is more than common sense; now we can say objectively what the characteristics of the good manager are. Managers of corporations can select those who are likely to be good managers and train those already in managerial positions to be more effective with more confidence.

*Authors' note:* All the names and case material in this article are disguised.

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That has meant taking a close look at people who are outstanding managers and trying to break down exactly how they go about work vis-à-vis the way less effective managers do. The work developed as a reaction to studies that seem to resurface every 25 years or so (as they have done again recently) asserting a link between intelligence and overall competence. Intelligence, those studies claim, is a hereditary factor that cannot be altered and is therefore the only relevant measure of a person's "competence."

My work has shown the opposite to be true. In fact, results of the Scholastic Aptitude Test given to college-bound students, among others, relate little to how competently those people manage in the workplace later in life. People who scored exceptionally well on SATs often later functioned poorly as managers, and people with only average scores often made the best managers. It is not intelligence that separates the best people from the worst when it comes to job performance. To measure competency levels, I coded interviews with managers about everyday work situations for specific behaviors, including self-control, self-confidence, an ability to get a consensus from people, and strong motivations for achievement, power, or both.

Indeed, such motivational characteristics (as illustrated by the institutional managers in our article) continually emerge as what separates world-class managers from mediocre ones. That is as true today as when we wrote the article, and it applies to women as well as to men. What has happened in the meantime is that we have a better idea of what combinations of motives and other competencies that we can measure in interviews create managerial success in the new decentralized organizations.

## ARTICLES

**"Asinine Attitudes Toward Motivation" by Harry Levinson (*Harvard Business Review,* January–February 1973, Product no. 73106)**

Many leaders and managers operate on the assumption that their employees are jackasses: stubborn, willful, and stupid. This approach becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, and results in a crisis of motivation. Because many managers value their own personal achievement higher than influencing others to get things done, they are unwilling to relinquish the control that would enable the best solutions to motivational problems to succeed.

**"One More Time: How Do You Motivate Employees?" by Frederick Herzberg (*Harvard Business Review,* September–October 1987, Product no. X87507)**

Focusing on job enrichment strategies, Herzberg contends that if you want to make jobs more attractive, you need to reshape them continually, in ways that offer employees more responsibility as well as enhanced opportunities for growth, learning, recognition, and achievement.

**"The Work of Leadership" by Ronald A. Heifetz and Donald L. Laurie (*Harvard Business Review,* January–February 1997, Product no. X97106)**

Heifetz and Laurie echo the claim of McClelland and Burnham that the desire for personal achievement can get in the way of effective leadership. Leaders do not need to know all the answers, but they do need to ask the right questions. The central task of adaptive leadership is to refuse to supply a quick fix to the problem and to mobilize organizational energy to keep people focused on discovering a collective solution.

## BOOKS

***The Human Equation: Building Profits by Putting People First* by Jeffrey Pfeffer (1997, Harvard Business School Press, Product no. 8419)**

The desire to influence others to succeed is the most effective motivation a manager can have. Similarly, corporate practices that put people first make for the highest-functioning organizations. After all, declares Pfeffer, a company's human resources represent its most important asset.

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