
Testing the Leadership Pipeline
Do the Behaviors Related to Managerial Effectiveness Really Change with Hierarchical Level?

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Quote from a newly promoted executive...

“It’s like someone changed the rules of the game. I’ve been very successful in my career. But what’s worked in the past now seems to get me in trouble.”

Is this freshly minted executive alone?

Is this espoused wisdom in our field justified?

That is, are behaviors related to effectiveness actually different at the bottom, middle, and top?

Here’s what we know….

• Lots of prior research
• Mostly descriptive; nothing predictive
• No studies comparing the success formula for supervisors, middle managers, and executives

### Prior Research

**Three generalizations**

1. Three distinct levels

2. Nature of work at each level is qualitatively different

3. Quantum changes make level transitions difficult

### Three Levels

- **Top** executive
- **Middle** management
- **Bottom** supervisory

### Distinct Requirements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Time span</th>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
<th>Functional Activities</th>
<th>Primary Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Top executive</td>
<td>Long (10 to 20+ years)</td>
<td>Performance of a corporation or portfolio</td>
<td>Create structure — identify and develop consensus about future, set direction, shape organizational culture to support strategy, set policy, coordinate internal and external environment, secure capital resources</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle management</td>
<td>Medium (2 to 5 years)</td>
<td>Performance of multiple functional units or a division</td>
<td>Interpret structure — translate strategy and policy into operating goals and timelines, flesh out details of the &quot;big picture,&quot; coordinate diverse functional units, serve as communication nexus throughout organization, allocate resources across functions</td>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottom supervisory</td>
<td>Short (two weeks to 2 years)</td>
<td>Performance of small group or team within a function</td>
<td>Apply structure — assign tasks, execute operating plans, supervise and direct day-to-day production or service work, distribute resources to individuals or teams</td>
<td>Technical</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Navigating Transitions

**Success rate is low**
- At least 50% of executives derail
- Most derail at key upward transitions

**Why do transitions do so many in?**
- Little, if any, preparation: “sink or swim”
- Promotion based more on track record – less on potential
- Require significant adaptive change: strengths become weaknesses

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Freedman (1998; 2005)
Hypotheses

Test the assumption that the success formula is indeed different at different organizational levels.

H1. Patterns of behavior associated with effectiveness will be different for supervisors, middle managers, and executives

H2. Discontinuities in how the behaviors associated with effectiveness will change across levels

H3. Level differences in behaviors related to effectiveness will be consistent with dominant themes in descriptive literature

METHOD

Subordinate ratings of behaviors
Superior ratings of overall effectiveness

Sample
- 2,175 target managers (all U.S., 15 industries)
- 225 supervisors; 1,457 middle managers; 493 executives
- Targets rated by median of 5 subordinates and 2 superiors

Coding level
- Convergence on two separate forms
- Reported functional area consistent with level codes
- Age, education, salary, sex, and race differences as expected

**Measures**

Developed through EFA, content sort, CFA (independent samples)

Final model fit: CFI = .90, NNI = .91, NFI = .90, RMSEA = .05

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>k</th>
<th>α</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning Agility</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work-Life Balance</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directive Leadership</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowering Leadership</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive Leadership</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abrasiveness*</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Follow Through</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Effectiveness</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* CFA suggested Abrasiveness and Supportive Leadership form a bi-polar construct; we kept them separate for theoretical reasons.

**RESULTS**

**Mean Differences by Level**

- Statistically significant, but practically trivial ($\eta^2 = .09$)
- Only one major effect: overall effectiveness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Executives</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Managers</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisors</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>.48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Moderation by Level**

- Predicted superior ratings of overall effectiveness from subordinate ratings on 7 behaviors (MMR)

  *test behavior x level interactions to directly address hypotheses*

  *interpret with separate regressions by level*

**Test for Interaction Effects**

*Moderated Multiple Regression*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 1 – main effects</th>
<th>( \Delta R^2 )</th>
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<tr>
<td>Hierarchical level</td>
<td>.09***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Behaviors</td>
<td>.21***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model</td>
<td>.30***</td>
</tr>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Step 2 – interactions</th>
<th>( \Delta R^2 )</th>
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<tr>
<td>Level x Behaviors (14 terms)*</td>
<td>.04***</td>
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**Full Model**

\( .34*** \)

*All interactions significant, \( p < .01 \).

**Different Success Formulae**

*Separate Regression Models*

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Manager</th>
<th>Executive</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Learning Agility</strong></td>
<td>+.29***</td>
<td>+.19***</td>
<td>+.50***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work-Life Balance</strong></td>
<td>+.20***</td>
<td>+.02</td>
<td>-.20***</td>
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<td>+.12</td>
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<td>+.03</td>
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<td>-.17***</td>
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model \( R^2 \)

\( .24*** \) \( .25*** \) \( .39*** \)

**IMPLICATIONS**

**General confirmation of descriptive literature**

H1. Success formula did vary across levels

H2. Discontinuities in how behaviors related to effectiveness

H3. Changes in success formula were consistent with dominant themes in literature on the changing nature of work across levels

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<td>Conceptual, technical, interpersonal, applied, communication, influence</td>
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<td>Middle management</td>
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<td>Performance of multiple functional units or a division</td>
<td>Interpret strategy, translate strategy and policy into operating goals and timelines, flesh out details of the &quot;big picture,&quot; coordinate diverse functional units, serve as communication nexus throughout organization, allocate resources across functions</td>
<td>Technical, interpersonal, conceptual, applied, influence</td>
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<td>Bottom supervisory</td>
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<td>Performance of small group or team based on task or function</td>
<td>Apply structure, assign tasks, execute operating plans, supervise and direct day-to-day production or service work, distribute resources to individuals or teams</td>
<td>Technical, interpersonal, applied, technical, supervision</td>
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**Profile of Effective Supervisor**

To rise up from the bottom:

- aggressively seek out new knowledge, especially the technical details of your area
- don't let your job consume you; talented supervisors can get the work done and go home at a reasonable hour
- don't get too chummy with the rank-and-file…
- but don't be a condescending jerk either!

Profile of Effective Middle Manager

To get ahead in the middle:

• keep your eyes and ears open; there's a lot to take in
• step up to the tough issues and make the call – when in doubt, act!
• keep functional managers on a short leash; focus them on the kingdom, not their separate fiefdoms
• getting along makes all the difference
• show initiative and continually reach for more responsibility

Profile of Effective Executive

To succeed at the top:

• stay on that learning treadmill: you'll never know as much as you need to and learning matters more now than ever before
• be prepared to devote your life to the firm – the job is never done
• slow down and deliberate
• tap into the talent of people around you – involve them, empower them, develop them, and get out of their way
• keep your word – the buck stops here

Key Adaptive Challenges in Transitioning to the Executive Level

• Major crossover:
  from a directive, commanding central figure
to a reflective team builder and enabler of talent

• Warmth and approachability no longer critical as long as the strategy is brilliant and results are obtained.

• If results dry up and your relationships are strained, you will be at risk to derail

So What?

• T&D
  Different needs for different levels
  RJP's in career planning
• Succession/Selection
  Look for untested areas
  Strengths can become liabilities
  Hire for learning and adaptability – especially early on
• Transitions
  Before (planning, stretch assignments, orientation)
  During (support, feedback, coaching)
  After (mentoring next generation, org'1 systems)
• Meta-competencies: the "Big Two" of career success?
  Learning
  Adaptability (changing styles to adapt to changing conditions)