

# Strategic Management from Within

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## INTRODUCTION

The essential role of the strategic manager is to develop and implement plans and policies, running the organization and working with people. How that role is carried out depends on the resources – material, human, and time -- and the context of the organization.

The question then becomes: how can managers optimally improve the organization from its present status to its best possible outcome? To answer that question requires evaluating current management practice – and even more profoundly, current personal effectiveness. Only then can managers build a strategy that improves their organization's impact on its stakeholders.

Thus, strategic management begins with self-management. What qualities exemplify effective managers? What does one bring to the table? What is one's management style? How does the work environment impact managers' action? Self-confidence and personal management success builds a reputation that attracts others to collaborate. This article includes several self-assessment exercises.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### Personal Qualities of Strategic Managers

Burgoyne and Stuart (1976) proposed two clusters of characteristics, basic knowledge and personal qualities, which relate to strategic management:

- Facts about the school, its community, and the library's role within that setting
- Relevant technical knowledge
- Management knowledge
- Analytical problem-solving skills
- Interpersonal skills
- Sensitivity to people and situations
- Ability to work well under stress
- Ability to respond to current situations with a long term consequences mindset
- Creativity
- Mental flexibility
- Abstract and concrete thinking
- Self-knowledge.

Managers need technical skills, interpersonal and communication skills, and conceptual and decision-making skills. They need to be effective when working with things, with people, and with ideas.

Specific management knowledge includes two clusters of skills:

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- Planning, organizing, directing, controlling
- Team management skills: motivating, training and coaching, and empowering workers.

The first cluster focuses on goal-setting, identifying available and needed resources, setting a direction to achieve the goals, organizing people and materials within a predictable structure, setting the climate to carry out the needed tasks, evaluating all of the elements, and making adjustments to optimize efforts and results.

The second cluster of skills recognizes the importance of human relationships and interdependence. Managers have to negotiate the fine balance between being part of the team as an accepted member as well as supervising the team. Managers have the responsibility for making sure that operations are effective so they need the authority to allocate material and human resources to that end. The key to that balance is monitoring the interplay of the team members; managers have the overall perspective so can see how group dynamics impact work flow and interactions with the external environment. Basically, team building enables resources to be used more efficiently because the team can share expertise. The potential price managers pay for exercising this supervisory role is less candor and more conformity; the team might also form internal coalitions. That latter situation actually reinforces team spirit and increases internal team power; the situation also reinforces the manager's need for some separation from that team.

## **Looking from the Inside Out**

Collins (1993) conceptualized management from the inside out, using an individual effectiveness model.

The innermost circle focuses on self-perception of personal beliefs and values, and examines self-image and self-esteem. These factors form the core lens for viewing the world, and shape how one interacts with others. Personal effectiveness depends on self-knowledge, self-respect and confidence, a sense of purpose, emotional independence, the ability to prioritize, and a willingness to take risks. With these characteristics, a person is more likely to communicate openly, listen actively, and reach out and accept others. On the other hand, if one's self-image is self-defeating or self-delusional, then that person will probably be self-defensive and narrow-minded. As a self-revealing exercise, one can write down personal key values by completing the phrase "I am ... "ten times, and prioritizing those ten characteristics. In the final analysis, it is important to be true to one's self in order to deal with others more effectively, whether they are similar or different.

The second circle focuses on self-management. How well does one manage time and stress? How well does one maintain personal health and energy? Does one consciously try to self-improve? Probably the most telling issue is pressure; what are a person's pressure points: self, family, peers, students, supervisors? How does one deal with those pressures? A certain amount of stress can be energizing and stimulating. However, too much stress can hurt a person physically and mentally. Some ways to deal with stress include: keeping physical fit, maintaining a balanced diet, relaxing, laughing, treating one's self, and sharing with others. A person can also decide whether stress is avoidable, in which case one can address the issue; if the stress unavoidable, either the person or the situation needs to change. Besides being kind to one's self, defining clear goals can help balance a person's life.

Time management is a significant aspect of self-management. The following questions can guide self-assessment. Think about how you spend your time during the week: what percentage of your time do you spend on work, professional development, family, friends, self? How does your allocation of time reflect – or conflict – with your inner values? If you spend less than ten percent of time on yourself, you

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