

THE MAKING OF AN EXPERT MANAGER/LEADER: ISSUES FOR MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP IN THE 21ST CENTURY

BY

JAMES NWOYE OBI, Ph.D.

Faculty of Management Sciences

National Open University of Nigeria, Lagos, Nigeria

e-mail: jamesobi8245@yahoo.com

**Published by: International Journal of Management Science
vol.3, no. 8, January, 2011. ISSN: 3289-133x**

ABSTRACT

Current research that focused on expertise and superior performance came out with the revelation that expertise and superior performance are skills that come with many years of deliberate and vigorous training. Thus, it is a fallacy to attribute expertise and stellar performance to innate attribute or what people call “natural gift.” This article advises Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) and leaders who may not possess superior knowledge and skills to hire young stars and talents who can bring new ideas and new perspectives to the table. This is the only way they (the CEOs) can become stars and experts themselves. In real life, especially in developing countries, bosses at the helm of affairs prefer to hire half-baked and mediocre subordinates to work under them. They are generally reluctant when it comes to hiring stars and talented people for fear that the young stars would out-shine them into losing their authority or position. This is a wrong notion for a boss that wants to bring genuine progress to his organization. Stars and talents will bring new ideas and new perspectives into the work of the organization. By so doing, they will usher in superior performance into your organization. With the shining performance of your organization, the CEO of the organization has become a performing star himself.

Key words: Expertise, Performance, Management, Leadership, Stars and Talents

INTRODUCTION

In management, there is an age-long question that has defied a definitive answer to date. That enigma of a question seeks to know whether Expert Managers/Leaders are born or made. A new ground-breaking research shows that expertise and superior performance are the product of years of deliberate practice and vigorous training. It does not have its real root on any innate talent or skill. Furthermore, the expert must sustain his expert knowledge and superior performance through continuous training, learning and development of new skills, tactics and strategies to help him remain on top. For example, a champion boxer ruling the boxing ring must not rest on his oars or start basking on the sunshine of his present achievement. He must train hard and

harder every day to put him in a superior position to beat future challengers. Sometimes, winning championship is easy if you work hard enough for it. What is more difficult is the harder work you have to put-in continually to maintain and retain your championship position.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A Manager and a Leader are they really the same?

Before discussing the topic of making an expert, let us closely look at the two words: “Manager” and “Leader.” Can we conclude that both of them are the same? On the surface, we can say that a manager and a leader are the same to the extent that both of them are at the helm of affairs controlling people and overseeing functions and activities. However, there are certain characteristics and features that set a manager apart from a leader. Some of these differences are discussed below:

In a common and simple definition, a manager is one who is in charge of other people, working with them and through them to get the job done and achieve results (Kreitner, 2009). On the other hand, a leader is someone in authority, inspiring, influencing and guiding others to participate in a common effort (Kreitner, 2009). One outstanding difference between a manager and a leader lies in their approach to the execution of tasks and discharging of responsibilities through their subordinates and followers. While the manager says “go” to his subordinate in a commanding tone as the boss, the leader says “let us go” to his follower in a soft and caring voice, and the follower puts joy into the discharge of his responsibilities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Functions of a Manager and a Leader at a glance

Table 1, below summarized the functions of a manager and that of a leader. However, it is a subject of debate in academic and management circles today that the difference in the functions of a manager and a leader is nothing but subtle and unimportant. The reason adduced is that both groups of functions are interchangeable and that the manager and the leader can swap positions successfully (Maxwell, 2007).

S/No	FUNCTIONS OF A MANAGER	FUNCTIONS OF A LEADER
1	Practicing stewardship, directing and being held accountable for resources	Motivating, influencing and changing behaviour
2	Executing plans, implementing and delivering the goods and services	Inspiring, setting the tone and articulating a vision
3	Managing resources, being conscious, planning, organizing, directing and controlling	Managing people, being charismatic and being visionary
4	Understanding and using authority and responsibility	Understanding and using power and influence
5	Acting promptly and responsibly	Acting decisively

6	Putting customers first. The manager knows, responds to, and acts for his or her customers	Putting people first. The leader knows, responds to, and acts for his or her followers
7	Managers can make mistakes when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They fail to grasp the importance of people as the key resource; or • They under-manage or treat people like other resources; or • They are eager to direct and to control but are unwilling to accept accountability. 	Leaders can make mistakes when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They choose the wrong goal, direction or inspiration due to incompetence or bad intentions; or; • They over-lead; or; • They are unable to deliver or implement the vision due to incompetence or lack of commitment.

GOLDEN PRACTICES THAT MAKE A MANAGER OR LEADER EFFECTIVE

In modern management, there are thirteen (13) standard practices that make a manager or a leader effective in his or her job. These principles are summarized below:

1. Always ask what needs to be done to make your job a success. In other words, find out what goals and objectives need to be achieved for you to be seen as performing.
2. Ask what is right for your organization
3. Develop action plans for your job
4. Take responsibility for decisions taken by you
5. Take responsibility for communicating necessary information to staff
6. Focus on opportunities rather than problems
7. Run productive meeting with staff and other stakeholders
8. Think and say “we” rather than “I”. In other words, carry everybody along
9. Listen first and speak last
10. Develop a positive attitude; never envy but appreciate at all times
11. Commend, encourage, advise and show appreciation to others for their achievements and good performance
12. Delegate authority to subordinates to discharge responsibilities wisely.
(Caution: Do not delegate the life-wire or critical result area of your job or position to subordinates. Chances are that they will mess you up deliberately or in error. Better do the job yourself).
13. Hire stars and talents to build superior performance into your organization.
This is important because the manager or leader of champions and gurus is also a champion.

WHO IS AN EXPERT?

An expert is one who has a mastery, proficiency and superior performance on a particular trade, job or profession. He has all the skills and savvy required for doing the job excellently well. In service delivery, he renders superb service without exerting much force or spending much time. He has deft fingers and sharp knowledge of tasks in his job (Wells, 1978).

In 1976, a fascinating event which is today referred to as “judgment of Paris” took place in France. An English-owned wine shop in Paris organized a blind-tasting event in which nine French wine experts were invited to taste and rate 10 bottles of French and California wines. The results shocked the wine world. California wines received the highest scores from the panel. Even more surprising is the fact that during the tasting exercise, the experts often mistook the American wines for French wines and vice versa. Two assumptions were challenged that day. The first was the hitherto unquestionable superiority of French wines over American ones. The second was a challenge to the assumption in some quarters that an expert remains an expert at all times with little or no mistake. The wine tasting event revealed that expert knowledge and superior performance are still subject to fallibility (Kaplan, 2007).

An independent study carried out recently showed that expert psychotherapists with advanced degrees and decades of experience are not reliably more successful in their treatment of randomly assigned patients than novice therapists with just three months of training. How then can we tell when we are dealing with a genuine expert, a true expert that can stand exigencies on his job and always come out with consistent and accurate results superior to that of others? The picture we are painting here is that being an expert today has become a shifting target in the face of technological changes and innovations. An expert today expires tomorrow with new knowledge, new discoveries and new breakthroughs. That is why the American wine during the tasting exercise superseded the French wine without the expert wine brewers in Paris knowing that they have been left behind.

Qualities of a True Expert: A true expert must pass three tests:

- (1) His expert knowledge must lead to performance that is consistently superior to that of his peers or his professional associates.
- (2) A true expert produces concrete results. A brain surgeon, for example, must not only be skillful with his scalpel, he must also have successful outcomes with his patients. An expert chess player must be able to win matches in tournaments consistently over time, in spite of the fact that there are many dislodging variables in the game of chess.
- (3) A true expert must possess knowledge that can be replicated and measured in some reliable way (Kaplan, 2007).

Skill in some fields, such as sports, is easy to measure. Competitors are standardized so that everyone competes in a similar environment. All competitors have the same start and finish lines, so that everyone can agree on who came first. That standardization permits comparisons among individuals over time, and it is certainly possible in business as well. In the early days of Wal-Mart, for instance, Sam Walton arranged competitions among store managers to identify those whose stores had the highest profitability. Nonetheless, it is often difficult to measure expert performance, for example, in projects that take months or even years to complete and to which dozens of individuals may contribute. Expert leadership is similarly difficult to assess. Most leadership challenges are highly complex and specific to given company, which makes it hard to compare performance across companies and situations. That does not mean that scientists should abandon their effort at measuring performance. One popular methodology adopted in dealing with these challenges is to take a representative situation and reproduce it in the laboratory. For example, we present emergency room nurses with scenarios that simulate life-threatening situations. Afterwards, we compare the nurses' responses in the lab with actual outcomes in the real world. We have found that performance in simulations in medicine, and sports correlates with objective measurements of expert performance. Testing methodologies can be devised too for creative professions such as art and writing. Researchers have studied differences among individual visual artists, for instance, by having them produce drawings of the same set of objects. With the artists' identities concealed, these drawings were evaluated by art judges, whose ratings clearly agreed on the artists' proficiency, especially with regard to technical aspects of drawing. Other researchers have designed objective tasks to measure the superior perceptual skills of artists without the help of judges. Certainly, it takes time to become an expert. Even the most gifted performers need a minimum of ten years of intense training before they can win international competitions (Maxwell, 2007).

BECOMING AN EXPERT DEMANDS DELIBERATE PRACTISING

To people who have not reached a national or international level of competition, it may appear that excellence is simply the result of practicing daily for years or even decades. However, living in a cave for decades does not make you a geologist. Not every practice makes perfect. To develop expertise, you need deliberate and dutiful practising. You have to put your whole life and will and determination into practising the art if you must become an expert or a champion. When people practise ordinarily, they focus on things they already know how to do. Deliberate practise is different. It entails considerable, specific, and sustained effort to do something you cannot do well, or cannot do at all. Research across domains shows that it is only by working at what you cannot do that you turn into the expert you want to be (Maxwell, 2007). To illustrate this point, let us imagine that you are learning to play golf for the first time. In the early phases, you try to understand the basic strokes and focus on avoiding gross mistakes (like

driving the ball into another player). You practise on the putting green, hit balls at a driving range, and play round with others who are most likely novices like you. In a surprisingly short time (perhaps 50 hours), you will develop better control and your game will improve. From then on, you will work on your skills by driving and putting more balls and engaging in more games, until your strokes become automatic. You will think less about each shot and play more from intuition. Deliberate practise can also be adapted to developing business and leadership expertise. Classic example is the case method taught by many business schools, which presents students with real life situations that require action. Because the eventual outcomes of those situations are known, the students can immediately judge the merits of their proposed solutions. In this way, they can practise making decisions ten to twenty times a week. War games serve a similar training function at military academies. Officers can analyze the trainees' responses in simulated combat and provide an instant evaluation. Such mock military operations sharpen leadership skills with deliberate practise that lets trainees explore different areas. Let us take a closer look at how deliberate practise might work for leadership. You often hear that a key element of leadership and management is charisma. Being a manager or a leader frequently occasions standing before your employees, your peers or your board of directors and attempting to convince them of one thing or another especially in times of crisis. A surprising number of executives believe that charisma is innate and cannot be learnt. Yet if they were acting in a play with the help of a director and a coach, most of them would be able to exhibit some element of charisma, especially over time. In fact, working with a leading drama school, we have developed a set of acting exercise for managers and leaders that are designed to increase their powers of charm and persuasion. Executives who do these exercises have shown remarkable improvement. So charisma can be learned and developed through deliberate practise. Winston Churchill, one of the most charismatic figures of the twentieth century practiced his oratory style in front of a mirror (Ammeh, 2008).

DELIBERATE PRACTISING AND THINKING

Genuine experts not only practise deliberately but also think deliberately. The Golfer, Ben Hogan once explained, "While I am practising, I am also trying to develop my powers of concentration. I never just walk up and hit the ball." Hogan would decide in advance where he wanted the ball to go and how to get it there. We actually track this kind of thought process in our research. We present expert performers with a scenario and ask them to think aloud as they work their way through it. Chess players, for example, will describe how they spend five to ten minutes exploring all the possibilities for their next move, thinking about the consequences of each move and planning out the sequence of moves that might follow. We have observed that when a course of action does not work out as expected, the expert players will go back to their original analysis to re-study and re-assess where they went wrong and correct mistakes and map new strategies to avoid future errors.

THERE ARE TWO KINDS OF LEARNING

Deliberate practise involves two kinds of learning: Improving the skills you already have and extending the range and reach of your skills into unfamiliar areas. These twin tasks require enormous concentration and constant practise. The famous violinist, Nathan Milstein wrote: "Practise as much as you feel you can accomplish with concentration." On a particular occasion, Milstein became concerned because others around him practised all day long. So he asked his mentor, Professor a. Mantel how many hours he should practice, and the professor said, "It really does not matter how long. If you practise with your fingers alone, no amount of time is enough. But if you practise with your fingers and head, two hours is plenty of time for success." This statement emphasizes the importance of building concentration into your daily practise. It is interesting to note that across a wide range of experts, including athletes, novelists, and musicians, very few appear to be able to engage in more than four or five hours of high concentration and deliberate practise at a time. In fact, most expert teachers and scientists set aside only a couple of hours a day, typically in the morning, for their most demanding mental activities, such as, writing about new ideas. While this may seem like a relatively small investment, it is just about two hours a day that most successful executives and managers devote to building their skills, since majority of their time is consumed by meetings and day-to-day concerns. This little time adds up to some 700 hours a year, or about 7,000 hours more a decade. Think about what you could accomplish if you devoted two hours a day to deliberate practise.

The Elusive Nature of Deliberate Practising: It is very easy to neglect deliberate practise. Experts who reach a high level of performance often find themselves responding automatically to specific situations and may come to rely exclusively on their intuition. This leads to difficulties when they deal with a typical case, because they have lost the ability to analyze a situation and work through the right response. Experts may not recognize this creeping intuition bias, of course, because there is no penalty until they encounter a situation in which a habitual response fails and they find themselves lagging behind other experts. Older professionals with a great deal of experience are particularly prone to falling into this trap. Research has shown that musicians over 60 years of age who continue with deliberate practise for about 10 hours a week can match the speed and technical skills of a 20-year old expert musician who is currently not taking deliberate practise seriously. Therefore, there is no complacency in the life of an expert if he must remain shinning.

Take all the Time You Need: By now, it would have been clear to you that it takes a good deal of time to become an expert in any field of human endeavour. Our research shows that even the most gifted performers need a minimum of ten years of intense training before they can win international competitions. In some fields, the apprenticeship period is longer. It now takes most elite musicians 15 to 25 years of steady practise before they can succeed at the international level. Not only do we have to be prepared to invest much time, energy and resources in preparing to become an expert, we also have to start the effort early in our life. Your ability to reach a world-class level is constrained if you are starting off fresh at the age of, say, 55 years. Once after giving a talk on how to become an expert, Andrew Ericsson was asked by a member of the audience whether he or any other person could win an Olympic Medal if he began training hard at a mature age. Ericsson replied, “as it is at the present time, it would be virtually impossible for anyone to win an Olympic Medal without a training history that spans not less than 20 years in early life (Kaplan, 2007).

You Need Fine Coaches and Mentors: If we analyze the development of well-known experts, we see that in almost every case the success of their entire career was dependent on two factors – the quality of their practising and the experience of their coach. Research on world-class performers has revealed that future experts need different kinds of teachers at different stages of their development. In the beginning, most are coached by local teachers, people who can give generously of their time. Later on, it is essential that trainees seek out more advanced teachers to keep improving their skills. Eventually, all top performers work closely with teachers who have themselves reached international levels of achievement. Having expert coaches makes a difference in a variety of ways. To start with, they can help you accelerate your learning process. The twentieth century philosopher and scientist, Roger Bacon argued that it would be impossible to master mathematics in less than 30 years. And yet today individuals can master frameworks as complex as calculus in their teens. The truth is that, scholars have since organized the material with the aid of modern science and technology in such a way that it is much more accessible and easy to tackle. Students of mathematics no longer have to climb Mountain Everest of difficult calculation problems; they simply follow a master guide, a champion coach through an easy and well-trodden path (Kaplan, 2007).

Performance Feedback is Essential on the Road to Becoming an Expert: The development of expertise requires coaches who are capable of giving constructive feedback. Real experts are extremely motivated students who seek out such feedback. They are also skilled at understanding when and if a coach’s advice does not work for them. The elite performers already knew what they were doing right and then concentrate on what they were doing wrongly. They deliberately pick intelligent and experienced coaches who would challenge them and drive them to higher levels of performance. In hard training for expertise, you do not need commendations but strict corrective instructions that will harden and motivate you to higher performance.

The Expert will depend on his Inner Coach at Maturity: So what happens when the expert is fully blown; when he becomes an Olympic Gold Medalist, or an international chess master, or a CEO of a vibrant company. Ideally, as your expertise increased your coach would have helped you to become more and more independent, so that you are able to set your own development plans. Like good parents who encourage their children to leave the nest at maturity, good coaches help their students to learn how to rely on their “inner coach.” Self-coaching is practiced in every field when the trainee has acquired good level of expertise under a coach. Expert surgeons, for example, are not concerned with a patient’s post-operative status alone. They also study any unanticipated events that took place during the surgery, to try to figure out how mistakes or mis-judgments can be avoided in the future (Maxwell, 2007).

Benjamin Franklin’s Classic Example on Self-Coaching: Benjamin Franklin provides one of the best examples of motivated self-coaching. When he wanted to learn to write eloquently and persuasively, he began to study his favourite articles from a popular British publication, “The Spectator.” Some days after he had read an article, he particularly enjoyed, he would try to reconstruct it from memory in his own words. Then he would compare it with the original, so he could discover and correct his mistakes. He also worked to improve his sense of language by translating the articles into rhyming verse and then from verse back into prose. Similarly, famous painters sometimes attempt to reproduce the paintings of their masters. Anyone can apply these same methods on the job. Say, you have someone in your company who is a master communicator, and you learn that he is going to give a talk to a unit that will be laying-off workers. Sit down and write your own speech, and then compare his actual speech with what you wrote. Observe the reactions to his talk and imagine what the reactions would be to yours. Each time you can generate by yourself decisions, interactions or speeches that match those of the people who excel, you move one step closer to reaching the level of an expert performer.

THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR WHEN JUDGING AN EXPERT

1. Wrong notion of expertise: Many people are wrongly believed to possess expertise. However, true expertise is demonstrated by measurable and consistently superior performance. Some supposed experts are superior only when it comes to explaining why they made errors. For example, after the 1976 ‘judgment of Paris’ as discussed at the beginning of this paper, when California wine won in the blind tasting of wine, the French wine experts argued that the results were an aberration and that the California wine would never have won under normal circumstances.

2. Less dependence on intuition: The belief that you can improve your performance by relaxing and just trusting on intuition is popular with some people. However, while it may be true that intuition is valuable in routine situations, informed intuition is the result of deliberate practise. You cannot consistently improve your ability to make decisions without considerable practise, reflection and analysis.

3. Adopting new methods is not enough: Many managers hope that they will suddenly improve performance by adopting new and better methods, just as golf players may think that they can perform better by the use of a new club. But, in reality, the key to improving expertise is consistency and carefully-controlled efforts.

4. Ability to do difficult tasks easily and quickly: An expert in any field of human endeavour is known to possess alertness and smartness. He accomplishes difficult tasks with ease and in record time. He is always at home with his job and does not exert unnecessary fiscal effort to get the job done.

CONCLUSION

This article used the result of a blind wine tasting in Paris, France referred to as “judgment of Paris” to support the view that experts do not always produce accurate or superior performance. Sometimes, it is even difficult to identify, establish or recognize who is a real expert. A true expert must possess some outstanding qualities. These qualities include; top knowledge or skill that produces superior performance. An expert produces concrete results. He must have skills and knowledge that can be measured in some reliable way. To become an expert will require many years of deliberate and vigorous training under an experienced coach.

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