

MANAGER or SPECIALIST. Which role is most suitable for you?



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Abstract

There is a current tendency in Business Schools to glorify the status of 'manager'. his practice is unrealistic because many students are not suitable for this role -which therefore leads to problems for them and their eventual employers. This article discusses alternative avenues of development which can be more appropriate for such people.

Keywords: manager; career; skills

JEL Classification: M51; M54

Introduction

There is a proliferation of MBA courses on offer and each one invariably promises prospective students the acquisition of skills to enable them to become managers, as if this were the only career ideal to aim for. However, probably only half of these candidates really have the potential to become *good* managers-the rest being more suitable for a career as specialists. What is the basis upon which this distinction should be made?

Which role is most suitable?

As explained in the Management Excellence book**, the fundamental reason is that a manager of a department requires certain interpersonal skills which some people do not possess nor are they capable of acquiring. Typical among these skills are the abilities to motivate and coach their subordinates, to handle certain difficult situations -especially those dealing with conflict, and to foster the good performance of the whole team rather than just of themselves.

The origin of this situation is that we all have an innate preference either for dealing with people or for working on tasks: very few of us are excellent in both. It is thus the first group who are more suited to be managers, whereas the second group can follow a career as 'specialists' be it in research, information technology or in other specific departmental functions like accounting. Among auxiliary characteristics of these two groups are opposing perspectives (broad and general versus narrower and detailed), and the usually less extrovert behaviour of scientific specialists, who are also more at ease to work on their own.

A common error made by companies is to designate a successful but non-suitable person as manager. Take the example of a good salesman gifted in dealing with his clients but who could be ineffective in managing other salesmen. Promoting such a salesperson to sales manager will have a doubly negative effect in that the firm acquires a bad manager and at the same time 'loses' a good salesman.

However, there are of course many people who are not at either of these two extremes; they could be represented by coordinates of say 5,5 on a 10x10 graph showing emphasis on people as opposed to task.

For such people, there is the possibility of being project team leaders where, from time to time, they lead a multi-disciplinary team working on a specific project. The project team leader option is therefore useful for specialists to get an experience of management, and for managers to improve their knowledge of complex factors concerning the product or process

being developed. The latter is particularly important in Anglo-Saxon companies which frequently select as managers people who do not have much product knowledge. Thus, for example, one finds General Managers within electrical engineering firms who do not have scientific degrees-something which would never occur in a German company who would insist on the person having an engineering or at least a physics degree.

Conclusion

To conclude, a few words about careers for the two types of employees. In the more progressive firms there are parallel avenues of advancement for managers and for specialists with fairly comparable salary scales. Although the managers may be seen as being more important and possessing greater prospects for reaching the top levels within the company, they also run greater risks of being made redundant especially during periods of change when they may get a new boss who appreciates them less than did the previous one. Moreover, as there is obviously only limited space at the top of the organisational pyramid, the less successful candidates reach a positional and salary plateau from which they are encouraged to depart from the firm after the age of 45. Such a situation is more rare for specialists who, if they have been keeping up with progress in their subject, can maintain their post to a later age.

Management Processes summary chart

Planning

- Mission, goals, strategies, plans, actions
- Continuous plans (every year for 3–5 years)
- Strategic plans (periodic, “where do we want to be?”)
- One-off plans, e.g., small firm start-up or launching major event
- New projects (why, where, who...)
- Timetable (+ PERT chart?)
- Problem solving (groups, sequence/methods, alternatives/constraints)
- Decision making (free discussion, consensus, importance, speed)

Organizational Structure

- Centralization vs. devolution (depends on culture, degree of control, staff availability)
- Departmentalization by function, product, place, hybrid, matrix (depends on importance of rapid response vs. duplication, cost)

Organizational Style

- Bureaucratic/mechanistic (hierarchy) or organic (flat) (depends on nature of environment, age/size, plus for manufacturing: on technology process (continuous/batch))
- Services: on whether routine or nonroutine

Organizational Change

- Transformation based on “hard” issues, e.g., reengineering and “soft” issues, e.g. empowerment, resistance

Staffing

- Selecting, hiring, training, evaluating, promoting, parting, future planning

Leading/Directing

- Leader behavior: carrot and stick, democratic/autocratic (depends on leader needs, nature of followers, situation)
- Leader orientation: human/broad/flexible or task/detailed/rigid (largely depends on leader's personal character and background)
- Motivation and respect (individuals/groups, methods, absence)
- Communication (internal/external, up/down, formal/informal)
- Delegation (what, to whom, how, benefits, resistance)

- Management development (skills, coaching, psychology)
- Managers vs. leaders (complexity/efficiency vs. change/effectiveness)

Control

- Four financial statements (profit/loss, balance sheet, cash flow, break-even)
- Budgets, financial ratios (liquidity, leverage, profitability)
- Operations activity (stocks, capacity)
- Projects (within time-frame, budget, quality norms)
- People (performance evaluation)
- External control (auditors, non-exec administrators, regulators)

While on this topic, it should be emphasized that managers also have to 'keep themselves in shape' by frequently making use of the four management processes (planning,organising,leading,controlling) for handling complex projects. These processes (***Management Processes summary chart***), remain largely unchanged,in contrast to management functions-especially marketing & finance, which need to be considerably adapted to deal with the present situation of crisis and recession.

About the author

Andrew Kilner, PhD (Cambridge), MBA (City, London) spent over 15 years as Business Planning Manager in large international companies in several countries, and ultimately became Professor, Head of Department and first MBA director at the Rennes Graduate School of Business in France.

He is currently Director of RAFME research** into Management Excellence with a book published on this topic*** and is giving conferences and writing articles in the French business press.

Digital Marketing, Digital Disruption, and the New Rules of Digitization

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Abstract

As a constantly changing marketplace, online marketing demands constant innovation and evolution to keep attracting new customers. Marketers are challenged to choose the right channels/strategies and digital marketing tactics, the right metrics to gauge marketing success, and to allocate the right budget on the right digital areas. As digitization is steadily becoming the main pathway for consumer journeys, companies need the right DNA for the current evolving environment. The conventional management intuition about scale and complexity is challenged by the new rules of digitization radically pushed by the hyper scale businesses, and hyper scaling will probably touch more areas. The debate on the so-called “new consumer” is continuing, including considering, on one hand, the innovation made possible by integrating mobile technology and the in-store experience, and on the other hand, the need of digital marketers to be actively engaging on potential disruptors.

Keywords: digital marketing; digital disruption; new rules of digitization; hyperscale business; mobile technology; in-store experience

JEL Classification: L81; L86; M15; M31; O33

Digital marketing trends and developments

Just at the beginning of this year, on 5 January, Gabriel Shaoolian, a digital trends expert and founder and CEO of New York digital advertising agency Blue Fountain Media, argued (Shaoolian, 2015) that as a constantly changing marketplace, online marketing demands constant innovation and evolution to keep attracting new customers. Within this framework, in order to increase sales and brand recognition, he recommended *five digital marketing tactics*: *Go responsive* (by building out a responsive or adaptive website so as to offer a tailored experience for the majority of users which will be on mobile devices); *Update guest posting practices* (by making a point of creating well-written guest posts, and generating this way brand recognition and referral traffic); *Take website speed seriously* (an easy element to optimize in company’s digital marketing strategy, by running your images through image optimization software as a great first step in improving users’ interaction with company’s website and making easier their

purchases); *Add Schema Mark-Up* (and making sure that people click on your search result instead of ones higher up the page, being confirmed that websites with schema mark-up tending to rank four spots higher in search results); *Allocate more resources to content marketing* (by starting treating each piece of content that a company put out as a stand-alone representation of company's business, and adding advice that is unique to company's business or publishing studies that only this company has the data to create). In Shaoolian's opinion, the need to constantly update and refine company's strategies remains consistent across all channels, and he is pledging in conclusion for a full audit of company's existing digital marketing strategies and to identify what needs an overhaul.

At the end of the same month, MarketingProfs (Nanji, 2015) showed that according to a recent report (based on data from a survey conducted in October and November 2014 of 5053 marketers from around the world, 56% B2C-focused, and 44% B2B) from Salesforce Marketing Cloud, *social media advertising* (70% plan to increase spend), *social media marketing* (70%), *social media engagement* (67%), *location-based mobile tracking* (67%), and *mobile applications* (66%) are *the top 5 digital areas marketers plan to allocate more budget on*. Additional key findings from the report referred to key issues such as: *Channels and Strategies* (the most used digital channels/strategies by the marketers surveyed are corporate websites, social media, and SEO/SEM; the most effective channels/strategies are email marketing, social media advertising, and social media listening); *Metrics* (a top metric used to gauge marketing success is revenue growth, according to 32% of marketers; one of their top metrics is customer satisfaction, according to 30% of marketers).

At the beginning of the next month, we find out (Jarsky, 2015) other news about digital marketing tactics (according to an infographic by Brand Muscle) companies should adopt in 2015: to give company's audience engaging content that keeps them subscribed to company's email list, making sure emails are mobile-friendly (91% of consumers check their email daily, while 66% of consumers made a purchase online as a result of an email marketing message; to share content company has created more than once on different social networks; to use social media tools to measure engagement and post at optimal days and times. On the other hand, as shown at the beginning of March, (Nanji, 2015) according to a recent report (based on data from a survey of 600 US marketing professionals, a combination of B2B and B2C) from

Webmarketing123: *one-third of marketers say they do not know which digital marketing tactic has the biggest positive impact on revenue*; email is the digital marketing channel with the greatest positive impact on revenue - 26%; SEO is second - 17%, followed by paid search - 15%, social media - 5%, and online display advertising - 5%. Additional key findings from the above mentioned report showed that: email is the most effective tactic for B2B marketers (31% of respondents saying it has the biggest impact on revenue); paid search is the most effective digital tactic for B2C marketers (24% of respondents saying it has the biggest impact on revenue); most B2C marketers (56%) say Facebook has generated some revenue for their business, while 46% of B2B marketers are not sure whether any social channels have generated revenue for their business.

The main pathway for consumer journeys: *Digitization*

Marketers need indeed to understand the role of marketing technologists and to increase their ability to link different technologies, and ensure a successfully intersection with their audience across channels and devices, and to constantly innovate and improve the customer experience by concentrating on a trusted brand that makes the customer feeling having someone on its side. (Purcarea, 2014) In February 2015, McKinsey Quarterly brought to our attention a valuable study (considered to be a vivid picture of the factors involved in a consumer's purchase choice - also known as brand conversion; conducted over 2012–13, and covering 70 percent of discretionary spending for about 15000 European households; compiling data on 1000 brands across a wide range of product categories, covering 20000 consumer journeys and 100000 touch points along them) on *the relationship between the level of digitization across the consumer's decision journey and the likelihood that a consumer will select a brand after considering and evaluating its qualities*. (Bughin, 2015)

According to the authors of the study, the identified landscape shows the well-known and challenging (from the point of view of company's adaptation to) so-called "Digital Darwinism", underlining, inter alia, that: digitization is steadily becoming the main pathway for consumer journeys; the likelihood of brand conversion is lower for fully digital consumers than for experimenters; most savvy digital brands are consolidating their positions within their sectors, and diminishing the chances that laggards will catch up; more thoroughly digitized brands benefit from higher levels of positive word of mouth etc. The authors of the study pledge for a

company's right DNA for the current evolving environment, in order to adapt companies needing to consider the followings: to track emerging digital models, to see if social-feedback loops are working against the company, and if company's digital channels are the most effective ones. And they recommend knowing the company's customer, figuring out the correct digital channel, and using these insights while building company's ecosystem.

A month later, in March 2015, other McKinsey representatives (Chui and Manyika, 2015) highlighted that the conventional management intuition about scale and complexity is challenged by the new rules of digitization radically pushed by the hyper scale businesses (big data business are already part of the daily lives of hundreds of millions of users, rising up and disrupting traditional businesses at surprising speeds). They argued that: by creating network effects and evaporating marginal costs digitization catalyzes rapid growth (the cost of storing, transporting, and replicating data being almost zero); we see already digital platforms which can instantly conduct experiments across a base of millions of interactions, and hyper scaling will probably touch more areas (being already a visible move from search and social networking into new sectors, like banking and retailing) as cheaper computer power, sensors, and communications accelerate the pace at which businesses adopt digital technologies.

The potential of integrating mobile technology and the in-store experience.

Digital disruption, a constant for retailer marketers

In the middle of March this year, Steve Needel (Managing Partner of Advanced Simulations; former Vice President for Product Development at A.C. Nielsen, and also former Vice President of Analytical Services at Nielsen; B. A. in Psychology from The American University; Ph.D. in Social Psychology from the University of Connecticut; member of the American Marketing Association) recalled that two years ago he has written (Needel, 2015) about our misconception of the so-called "new consumer" (overly reliant on digital technology and researching everything or doesn't daring making a purchase without consulting social media). At that time, Needel stated that he (Needel, 2013) is not sure it's relevant for most of the purchase decisions we make (showing in this respect a simple back-of-the-envelope calculation, and making reference, inter alia, to the Food Marketing Institute's 2012 U.S. Grocery Trends study), and arguing that what shoppers are doing with their mobile devices in stores may be

evolutionary, but it may just be a simplifying mechanism. In his opinion, adopting this “New Consumer approach” may well lead us into unproductive research and marketing activities in the CPG world, because there is nothing to suggest that these “New Consumers” aren’t susceptible to the usual shopper marketing activities. That is why he recommended: not confusing new tools with new behavior at the store; as marketing research has always been segmented, let’s use a level of segmentation for categories in which technology matters and another one in which it does not much matter. His point of view generated a true debate.

This time, in March 2015, Steve Needel pointed out that the longer he does marketing research, the more he realizes there are no absolutes in our business, and recommended not to care so much about “everything must be digital” (“Your shoppers are wired, why aren’t you!?”). He referred to the findings of Michael Sciandra and Jeff Inman (University of Pittsburgh), who used the 2012 and 2013 POPAI studies to understand smartphone usage in grocery stores and mass-merchandisers. Within this context, Needel underlined some astounding results (marketing folk are all “digital this” and “mobile that”; retailers are all wringing their hands trying to figure out what to do; according to the obtained data, nobody is actually using their phones in the stores for shopping - the retailer suffers and when shoppers do etc.). And Needel, therefore, considers that it is essential to get over both ideas, that using mobile devices are ubiquitous in the stores (where most of our purchases take place), and that people want to be bombarded with messages while they are in the store. That is why he didn’t recommend encouraging in-store mobile device usage.

But it is worth to add that Ellen Woods, a participant to the above mention *debate* from 2013, underlined a big difference (between: “*Do I use my phone to aid my shop in the grocery?*” and “*Do I use a phone to aid/plan my grocery shopping?*”), while another one, Leonard Murphy, made reference to a study (examining 3000 consumers in three markets – US, UK, Canada – and identifying five unique segments of “M-Shoppers”) of Columbia Business School and Aimia: *Showrooming and the Rise of the Mobile-Assisted Shopper*. (Quint, Rogers and Ferguson, 2015) This study concluded that retailers should take care not to overreact to every consumer that uses a smartphone in their store (people still want to live in a world that balances online and offline interactions), but they can take an active role in helping these M-Shoppers find the information or incentives they seek so that they walk out satisfied with a purchase. And while greater threat

for retailers, according to the above mentioned study, may well be the growing adoption of mobile device use at home (in which browsing for goods and daily deals takes the retail environment entirely out of the equation), this innovation made possible by integrating mobile technology and the in-store experience has the potential to provide greater delight to customers and keep them coming back (whether online or in-store) to the retailer.

In February 2015, Paul Schottmiller, senior vice president, strategy, retail and consumer goods, at Merkle (a customer relationship marketing agency specializing in data-based marketing solutions), attracted the attention to the fact that *digital has moved from transforming the purchasing of media* (e.g., music, movies and books) *to influencing 50 percent of all shopping purchases*, arguing that retail marketers need to be watching for, and innovating with, the next round of digital disruptors, because digital disruption is becoming a constant. (Schottmiller, 2015) In his opinion, all digital marketers will need to be actively engaging on *five potential disruptors: Location, location, location* (for a retailer, consumer's mobile screen has become some of the most valuable "real estate" to "occupy"; technologies like beacons, Wi-Fi and geo-fencing open up new dimensions for real-time and personalized marketing, there are already notable examples such as Wal-Mart with store-specific apps, and Walgreens with beacons); *Social shopping 2.0* (listening, targeting and interacting are the three main areas of opportunity today with social media, and the velocity of new social channels has continued to increase with emerging players like Snapchat and Wanelo); *Fast analytics* (built on top of big data and making marketing decisions in sub second timeframes a differentiator and potential disruptor); *It's about the journey, not the destination* (retail marketers have now the opportunity to drive increased levels of personalization thanks to improved tracking and attribution technologies across differing channels); *The death of the pure-play* (either on their websites, in social media, in-store, on mobile, or integrating - which is recommendable - all of these, marketers are now in a better position to deliver personalized omnichannel experiences that differentiate their brand).

Instead of conclusions: *The pressure of better understanding a fundamental truth*

At the beginning of March this year, Joel Robinson highlighted that: "*Marketers need to understand this fundamental truth...in a digital, social, mobile age, consumers can choose brand messages as much as the brand messages choose them. Consumers are always on, always connected and this has fundamentally changed how we shop... we browse incessantly, on*

whatever screen we have handy. Progressive marketers know their brands need to be ‘always-on’ as well to generate earned (social media) or owned (e.g. website visits) media impressions that will benefit the brand.” (Rubinson) Indeed, as we showed before, marketers (needing to be actively engaging on potential disruptors) are really challenged as digitization is steadily becoming the main pathway for consumer journeys, and within this context of the new rules of digitization radically pushed by the hyperscale businesses.

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