

PIP SPEAK

THE NEWSLETTER OF
Partners in Performance

Executive Summary

Good managers actively coach their people and ensure that they are successful and grow (proactive management)

Proactive managers ensure that their people:

- are working on the right priorities (right KPIs, good targets)
- have a plan can deliver on time
 - right approach?
 - credible steps?
 - credible times and resources?
- are keeping the plan on track
 - holding to account
 - maintaining the faith and enthusiasm
 - assisting with the problem solving
 - putting their shoulder to the wheel when the going gets tough

Proactive management - Debunking the “Micromanagement” Myth

The terms “empowerment” and “micro-management” are most often seen as lying at opposite ends of a spectrum. Many people are afraid of actively managing their people because they are worried they will disempower their staff and be labelled “micro-managers”.

A better approach - which we term “**proactive management**” - is a hybrid of both styles.

The idea of a continuum with “empowerment” at one end and “micromanagement” at the other is fatally flawed. It fails to take the relative skill and will of your people into consideration.

Empowerment is not about abdicating responsibility – which is the beginning of a slippery slope to anarchy.

Empowerment is giving your people direction, coaching and the appropriate amount of rope that they need to be successful and grow. People with low skills for the task at hand get a short rope and lots of coaching. Those highly skilled and motivated for the task get a long rope, big tasks and less frequent coaching.

“Micromanagement” is generally defined as exercising excessive control of a project or group of people. But where does “excessive” start? Often employees and managers will have very different perspectives.

Diving into the detail and getting your hands dirty is not necessarily a bad thing. The art is to know when, where and at what level of granularity to intervene, and for how long, in order to provide your people with the support they need to do their jobs.

How do you avoid micro-management?

A useful approach is to ask three questions:

- Is this action going to improve these people’s ability to do their jobs?
- If I don’t engage more, will the work spin or go off the rails significantly?
- In getting into this much detail with this person or team, am I affecting my ability to provide proactive management to the rest of my organisation?

Getting involved in the detail can have tangible positive impact and it’s here we see the seeds of effective proactive management. If a project is not going as planned, the proactive manager can actually help by intervening early, asking the right questions, quickly gathering information, →



providing lessons and insight from previous experience and making decisions about personnel and resources.

This is where micromanagement and empowerment intersect. Proactively managed people are empowered (according to their level of skill and will) by a manager who knows how much rope to give them and provides good guidance and coaching to help them grow.

Proactive Management

Proactive managers actively work with their people to help them deliver on their goals by ensuring that the plan and the resources allocated to it will work and do work.

Proactive managers do not find out at the 11th hour that a key element of their business plan is late or is not going to be delivered on time.

They ensure the right things get done properly and on time - that visions and ideas are captured and delivered. This is what we call an “execution culture”.

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People working in such an environment are empowered. This is very different from the more laissez-faire interpretations of empowerment where managers set the direction, leave their people alone and therefore do not ensure that they succeed:

“There’s an enormous difference between leading an organization and presiding over it. The leader who boasts of her hands-off style or puts her faith in empowerment is not dealing with the issues of the day. She is not confronting the people responsible for poor performance, or searching for problems to solve and then making sure they get solved. She is presiding, and she’s only doing half her job.”

Bossidy and Charan, Execution, (2002)

Managers must actively manage and coach their people if they are to deliver results and if they are to grow and develop rapidly. This does not mean you have to do the tasks for them – it means ensuring they know what they have to achieve and have a credible plan to deliver it. Then applying the right amount of attention and coaching - depending on their skill and will - to ensure they will succeed.

People with high skill and high will work well with a manager who agrees the direction and the outputs and checks in periodically to ensure it’s on track. Those with low skill and low will require more coaching and shorter time between check ins to ensure they are progressing well.

If managers look at where their people sit on the “Skill/Will” matrix, they are able to determine what style is likely to be the most appropriate to manage each individual.

The skill/will matrix (top, right) enables the proactive manager to focus his or her efforts where they are needed most. Management style depends on where the individual is on the matrix for the role and task in question. Using this matrix the proactive manager is able to determine how, where, when and why to actively manage and coach. The challenge for the manager becomes one of providing the right coaching and support to help each person move into the top right hand box for that role.

Managing for shifting Skill-Will

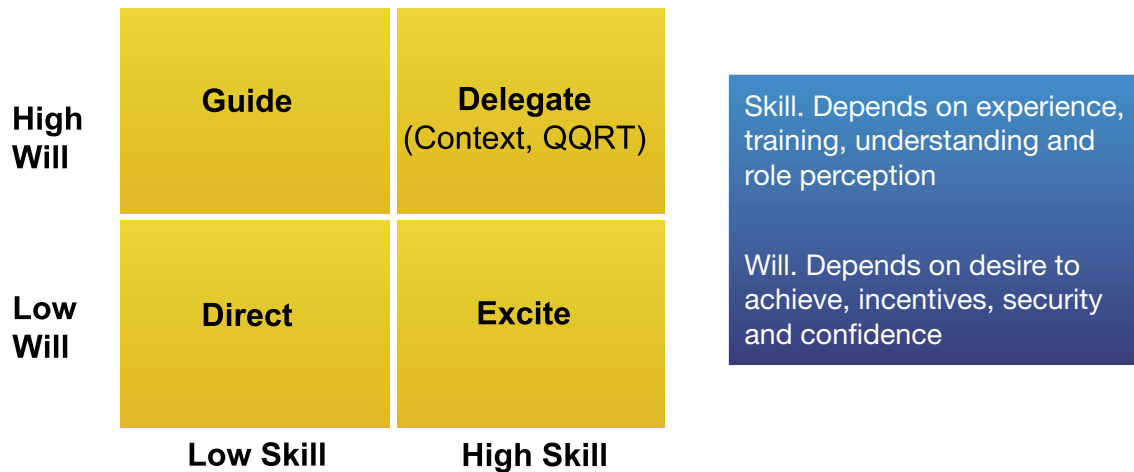
Each individual’s skill and will is continually shifting over time, and often differs by task. Naturally, the more effective the proactive manager is at moving people towards the top right corner, the more often the manager needs to adjust the level of coaching and management required by each individual – along with stretching them into increasing levels of responsibility.

For example, your direct report may have the skills to do “task x” and need only a light touch, with a check in to see he or she is on track. Other tasks to which they may be new may require more proactive coaching or guidance.

Similarly, a person may be “turned on” by one task or activity and need very little management. However, if another task does not appeal to them they might need tighter management to get it done.

■ Skill/Will Matrix: Selecting an Appropriate Coaching Style

1. Identify where an individual currently sits on the Skill/Will Matrix
2. Err on the side of caution when first placing someone – you can always loosen up quickly
3. Modify your coaching style to suit the individual at the time
4. Over time, work to move the individual to top right and adapt your style along the way



Source: Adapted from "The Tao of Coaching", Max Landsberg, 1997

Mutual Responsibility

Thinking about mutual responsibility provides another way of knowing how closely to manage to ensure the objective is achieved.

A good proactive manager is at neither of the two ends of the spectrum. The conflict avoider is no good to work for in the medium term because you don't get stretched, challenged and coached - and you don't grow. You don't get challenged to take the responsibility to deliver so you don't deliver.

Table bangers are also no good to work for because they are not there to support and coach you if it doesn't work (and there will be plenty of times when it doesn't) so you don't have a safe environment to learn and grow. When things turn to custard it's unpleasant to turn around and discover you are alone in the spotlight.

By contrast, the proactive manager develops you much faster, challenges you and gives you the best chance to meet that challenge. →

■ Mutual Accountability Spectrum

Unless you *effectively* hold the reviewee accountable you are not driving operational excellence...

'I'd rather not confront the shortfall in performance. I'll just leave it and put up with it'

Holding to account...

- Shows my recognition of this person's potential and that I care that they achieve it
- Creates an opportunity to coach, support and assist
- Is a proactive, 2-way process where manager is proactively involved to ensure direct report succeeds

'I'll let this person know that there will be severe consequences for not delivering'

It's my problem

It's our problem
(mutual accountability).
I am accountable for your success too.

It's your problem

Conclusion

The micromanagement-empowerment dichotomy is false. Proactive management is a critical step for constructive empowerment. The key is to know when to intervene, at what level of detail and for how long, in order to empower your people to do their jobs.

There's no mystery about what it takes to empower your people as a good proactive manager:

- ensure people are working on the right priorities
- ensure they have a credible plan for delivering those priorities on time
- keep close enough to ensure the plan stays on track and people get the support they need

Proactive management is an essential quality to build in any organisation that wants to sustain continual improvement for long term growth. We believe it is essential for building an empowered workforce and a culture of execution.



Tips for Managers

- proactively review with your people 'what are the goals/targets, how are we going to get there' – this does not mean working it out for them it means giving them sufficient coaching and input along the way that they get the right solution (how much depends on the individual's skill will)
- hold regular reviews (both formal and drop ins) with them to ensure they are on track and joint problem solve on the areas that are slowing them down etc
- don't do the thinking for them, don't issue instructions for them (ie don't do their job as then they essentially become 'redundant' and will know this). Be there testing and probing and providing a resource to tap into experience and helping out as needed

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