

Coaching Abroad

Insights About Assets

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Global corporations usually settle on a list of management competencies that they use to select, appraise, and coach managers in all of their locations around the world. When first-time coaching managers are outside of this corporate world, they can be surprised to learn that there are some very different views on the competencies needed to be an effective manager. The asset management model described in this article evolved over several years of experience in coaching managers in underdeveloped nations from Africa through Asia. These coaching cases included government managers who were controlling millions of dollars of foreign aid and essential public services; they also included managers of small businesses who were providing employment and growing the local economy. An asset management model offers a culturally appropriate framework that defines management competency in terms of three core concepts: ambition, asset leverage and innovation. The model has since proven useful as a framework for coaching inexperienced managers in small high-tech and biotech firms in the United States.

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Global corporations expect the competencies of effective managers to be similar anywhere in the world. If deadline dates are important in the New York headquarters office, the manager of the Nigerian office needs to learn whatever is necessary to perform as expected. If a coach is sent from New York to Nigeria to facilitate this learning process, the local manager and the foreign coach both understand what the criteria for performance about deadlines means in practice.

What if the coach arrives in Nigeria, but there is no headquarters office to set the

standards of management performance? This article addresses the challenge of coaching managers abroad who have never worked in a global corporation, have never taken a course in management, and have never worked for a manager who was educated abroad. The assumptions that a coach might have about corporate management competencies may be incorrect. If so, these assumptions can easily derail the first meeting during which the coach is trying to establish credibility. In seeking a safe common ground for discussion, a coach in this situation should focus on three broad domains of performance. These are (a) how much a manager is driven to be successful, (b) how good they are at getting resources, and (c) how cleverly they use resources. From these foundations, a coach can confidently move a discussion from action to motive to skill and thence to competencies. The purpose of this article is to explore this rationale and method for coaching noncorporate managers and will illustrate, through several cases, the resistance a coach might experience about changing their assumptions about the right way to manage.

Competencies, Culture, and Corporations

Competencies are an important place to initiate this discussion because most

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coaches claim to help managers become more effective by changing behaviors that reflect or define certain competencies (Morgan, Harkins, & Goldsmith, 2004). In spite of the various methods used to identify competencies (Briscoe & Hall, 1999) and all of the variations in competency definitions (Newsome, Catano, & Day, 2003), no one has claimed to have developed a superior list of competencies. Corporations tend to use what they are sold and what they can customize. The key point is that the increasing use of similar 360-degree management surveys around the world implies an acceptance of the general transportability of competencies (Leslie & Fleenor, 1998). Even when a few survey concepts may be misunderstood in a different culture, it is usually concluded that enough of the survey data are useful to justify this approach to evaluating or coaching managers (Leslie & Penny, 2003). It is also a widely accepted assumption that an ambitious manager anywhere in the world would be wise to develop competencies that are viewed as important at headquarters. While corporations often try to demonstrate that they are culturally sensitive, the confluence of cultures is well underway (Hermans & Kempen, 1998) and may be interfering with efforts to retain and respect the cultural differences among senior management attitudes and practices at all worksites (with the obvious exception that at lower levels of management and production, cultural differences are retained due to the ease and profitability of operations).

It is interesting that at the same time that managers are seeing and encouraging more similarities among managers from various countries, better quality research is emerging that emphasizes the differences. For example, Peters and Kabacoff (2003) have data based on enormous samples of corporate managers that indicate how some competencies should be weighted more heavily than others in predicting leadership effective-

ness for different countries. All other major publishers of 360-degree surveys have accumulated large data sets that undoubtedly demonstrate significant cultural differences among managers in different cultures. The limitation of these data is that they are typically based on corporate clients who can afford the costs of such research and services. This population represents a selective sample of managers and organizations in the world. In addition to this bias, it is useful to recall that the origin of all sets of competencies is the many published studies of managers in industrialized countries.

Different World, Different Competencies

Coaches can be shocked to discover that their understanding of the competencies required of an effective manager may not extend very far beyond that of the global corporation. This article offers an approach for helping coaches work outside of global corporate settings and with managers who are not from their own culture. For example, in many less developed countries (LDCs) and in many smaller companies in developed countries (DCs), managers may tell a coach that the best managers they know don't listen to subordinates, don't give praise, and can be counted on to act ethically only when there is a risk of being punished. A coach can quickly lose credibility with these managers by discussing the well-established finding on management effectiveness in DCs. This can happen when the coach doesn't first engage a manager in a discussion about "what works" in their culture.

Another condition that may be difficult for a coach to accept is that managers can be effective and at the same time their motives can be fundamentally bad. In fact, as Kellerman (2003) notes, history is full of effective managers with the most scurrilous of intentions. In countries that support democracy, open communication, transpar-

ency in business, and independence, it may be the case that the most effective leaders in the long term are often good people. Yet, there is little evidence in history, or worldwide, to suggest that effective managers are necessarily caring, authentic, and honest people. These traits may be desirable in general, and may be essential to win promotions in some corporations, but they are in short supply in many LDC organizations. Ambition, competitiveness, fear of poverty, and very limited opportunities for advancement mean that coaching managers in LDCs requires an understanding of survival tactics in very difficult situations. Andy Grove, the CEO of Intel, wrote a book about the high-tech industry titled "Only the paranoid survive." While the book captures the challenges of corporate management, it is probably a pale imitation of the difficulties faced by managers in LDCs. The economists from Harvard who planned the radical shift from communism to capitalism in Russia probably thought that their understanding of how organizations work and how people think could be extended to the situation in Russia. The results have been a social and economic disaster, and their plans have been viewed as fundamentally naïve. The article on "gangster capitalism" in China and Russia by Holmstrom and Smith (2000) captures the event well:

We will argue here that the reason Western economists were surprised by these outcomes is because they relied on a historical-fantasy-world, neoliberal model of capitalism. The emergence of gangster capitalism and wholesale corruption in the former Soviet bloc and China should have been entirely predictable to anyone familiar with the historical origins of capitalism in Europe, the United States, and elsewhere. (p. 9)

In an article on cross-cultural coaching by Hicks and Peterson (1999), a footnote is inserted that demonstrates the caution with which a coach should approach someone from a different culture. The last sentence

in the footnote, which appears below, expresses values and expectations that would conflict with those in many LDCs.

Despite the broad applicability of the coaching strategies, our own values and assumptions about development are reflected here, as we are admittedly products of our cultural environment. Our cultural and intellectual backgrounds include valuing personal effort and individual achievement, and the expectation of direct but respectful candor in communications at work. (p. 298)

It is worth reiterating that these alternative perspectives on management need not be limited to organizations in LDCs. Even in the United States, the small business owner—particularly in the ethnic communities that exist in every large city—may emulate a management style that is very dissimilar to a description in a modern management textbook. For example, in Himsel's (2004) book on leadership about a fictional crime boss, she writes "Tony (Soprano) provides an excellent model for getting solid performance out of people and creating strong relationships in and out of the organization" (p. 199). Tony is a probably a good example of an effective manager in a DC who uses unorthodox management tactics that are shaped by his cultural background.

Leaving the Comfort of the Corporation

Coaches may want to just avoid working in organizations in which the managers seem ill-informed and have unusual views about the management role. These managers not only challenge the fundamental values of most coaches, but the fees that organizations of this nature will pay are typically quite modest. The answer to the obvious question of "So, why bother?" is that the lack of management skills in these organizations represents an enormous social problem. These managers that coaches would rather not work with are often in

important positions. If they are government managers, they may control millions of dollars of foreign aid or may be responsible in finding the best way to use a miniscule national budget to deliver essential public services in LDCs. If they are in private business, they provide employment and opportunities that can grow or destroy a local economy. These noncorporate managers even exist in DCs. They may be the young managers in high-tech and biotechnology start-ups who have gone directly from university to a management position or they may be recent immigrants trying to create a new business in a DC.

How important is good management to success? In a study of 700 companies conducted by McKinsey & Company and the Centre for Economic Performance in London, they report that poor corporate management alone accounts for 20% of the difference between a booming and a sluggish economy (Sparks, 2005). Because the base rate of competence among corporate managers is not that bad to begin with, an extrapolation of the impact of incompetent managers to noncorporate organizations in LDCs is probably much larger. The difference between good and bad management in the delivery of emergency food aid, or the vaccination of children, or ensuring that textbooks get from warehouses to schools is probably far more than a 20% impact on the economy.

It is easy to overlook how much the competencies of successful managers in global corporations are a reflection of their working conditions. In LDCs, managers must be effective in working conditions that are quite different from that of most global corporations. In a study of 61 cultures, Van de Vliert (2006) finds that in many poorer countries, autocratic managers are more effective than democratic managers and Grove and Hallowell (1994) report that in many countries outside of the United States, leaders are viewed by followers as a

higher form of being who shouldn't ever be contradicted.

It is important to keep in mind that the observed differences do not simply tell us that LDC employees learn to be more tolerant of bad management behavior than those in a DC setting. In fact, the reality of what constitutes good leadership in an LDC can be fundamentally different. For example, in a study based on 60 cultures that includes a balance of LDCs and DCs, Grove (2005) identified 35 characteristics of managers that, on a scale ranging from one through seven, are considered good leadership attributes in some cultures and bad attributes in others. Some examples large differences are "cunning," (an average score of 1.3 from one society to 6.4 from another society), "sensitive" (2.0 to 6.4), "evasive" (1.5 to 5.7), "class conscious" (2.5 to 6.1), "ruler" (1.7 to 5.2), "provocateur" (1.4 to 6.0), and "risk taker" (2.14 to 6.0). It is clear that actions associated with effective managers in some countries are associated with ineffective managers in other countries.

In the countries in which I have coached managers, working conditions included these features: (a) there are no more than one or two employers in the entire country who offer well-paying jobs, (b) punishment can be swift and draconian for any signs of lack of loyalty on or off the job, (c) the rule of law is either absent or serves only the interests of employers and wealthy individuals, (d) laws may not permit employees to seek other employment if they want to leave their job, (e) assignments may require resources that must be paid for out of the manager's own pocket, (f) punishment for a manager's poor performance may include punishment for the family as well, and (g) promotions will be determined more by family or in-group connections than by competence as either a manager or by one's technical skills.

As in all organizations, there are effective and ineffective managers in LDCs, but

it is difficult to know how to approach the very different working conditions and behaviors to determine what skills, attitudes, and knowledge really matter when it comes to getting things done. A manager yells, throws things at people, and changes his mind and assignments on a daily basis. Yet, everyone in his department tells the coach that they want to learn to be just like that manager. No one said that coaching in these situations would be easy.

Gaining Credibility as a Coach

When I started to coach abroad I hadn't realized that I had been working in such a protective and insulated management environment. In the following paragraphs, I describe three stages in which I moved from a state of complete lack of credibility as a coach to one in which managers fully accepted my role. In the first stage I tried to educate my African clients. When they didn't seem to learn, I met the challenge of failure by just trying harder, rather than by listening to their excellent advice. In the second stage, my clients in Pakistan were gradually able to educate me so that the operation I was managing could succeed. In the third stage, I applied my understanding to win a contract from the Malaysian government by designing a management development plan that demonstrated my understanding that Malaysian entrepreneurs have different issues and needs than the global corporate managers in the same country.

The asset management model is based on the premise that trust and credibility is the foundation of every coaching relationship (Hicks & Peterson, 1999; Kouzes & Posner, 2002). If a coach introduces a list of competencies that don't describe the kinds of effective leaders that a manager has known, then coaching credibility is lost. Hicks and Peterson (1999) state "Leaders often expect affinity in expectations, style, and assumptions where little actually exists. For example, many task-oriented, outcome-driven West-

ern leaders vault past relationship building or give it only cursory consideration." (p. 302)

The asset management model described in this article is a useful vehicle for initiating a discussion with noncorporate managers. It can be a critical tool for building the rapport and credibility that a coach must have to work effectively with any population. This article does not propose a radical change in competency models. It merely offers a means for a coach to gain a better understanding of how a radically different business setting fundamentally changes what effective managers do. It is what Hogan and Kaiser (2005) refer to as a domain model of competency—their own model is developmental and includes four broad classes of competencies: intrapersonal, interpersonal, business and leadership. The asset management model is composed of three domains: ambition, asset acquisition, and innovation. It emerged through my work with managers in several LDCs from Africa through Asia. Tracking the development of this model is an important part of understanding the resistance that coaches may face in breaking through their own culturally imposed boundaries. The following cases track my own cultural reframing of the meaning of management competencies as I worked sequentially through several projects that began in West Africa and ended in Southeast Asia.

Recognizing a Failing Competency Model

In Nigeria, at the Agricultural and Rural Management Training Institute, I launched a 1-year training and practice course for the 11 trainers of the Institute to help them become consultants for large government-owned plantations. Management development was the most common demand for services by the plantations and it was recognized that just offering brief training courses had been ineffective. I worked with trainers to design and practice implement-

ing a consulting and coaching model for their clients. I started with competency definitions from the U.S. Office of Personnel Management's leadership competency definitions.

The trainers were enthusiastic about learning this new material, but it didn't take long to discover that the definition of the ideal manager according to the competencies seldom resembled the actions of a manager who knew how to "get things done." I concluded that the influence of tribal rules, the power of kinship to a long line of tribal chiefs, and ready acceptance of arbitrary authoritarianism in superiors were factors that washed out the impact of my managerial competence measures. Power and influence as a leader in Nigeria arose from a talent for finding, controlling and leveraging resources. The attention to my list of competencies was polite, but the trainees felt that they would have minimal relevance in their working with managers. I felt that my training design may have been the problem, or perhaps the list of competencies I had selected. This first experience was not that unusual as the following quote (Hallowell, Molloy, & Grove, 2003) would probably suggest:

There are coaches and trainers who travel abroad, do their customary thing, and return home saying, "Everything went fine!" We're not surprised. In many nations, generous treatment of foreigners, the maintenance of "face," and interpersonal harmony are deeply honored values. That things should appear to go well is paramount. Thus, disasters are rare, overt criticism still rarer. Compliments abound. Nevertheless, Made-in-America coaching programs that do not systematically incorporate intercultural knowledge and skills often unravel over the long term. (p. 2)

In Malawi, a short time after the Nigerian project, I worked with the Office of the President to address a potentially politically explosive dilemma. The directorships of eight critical government-managed operations (e.g., electricity, transportation, and

water) were held by Europeans. Their contracts were ending in a matter of months. The assistant directors, who were all Malawians, were scheduled for promotions to these top jobs. My assignment was to determine which managers could handle the new responsibilities and which ones could not. The challenge was to get the weaker managers to admit that they were not ready for the job and to concede that a contract extension for their boss would be in the nation's best interest.

My strategy was to work with all eight managers as a team to develop an assessment center that they would use to select their own successor. Since I had guessed that my experience in Nigeria was in part due to the presentation of only one competency model, I decided to be more flexible. In Malawi, I presented a list of six models, and we built an assessment center linked to one of the models they had selected. In point of fact the assessment tasks, interviewing, writing a summary of a report, presenting, and negotiating with a peer—had little to do with the model we chose. After agreeing on a model, it was put aside quietly and ignored. The good news is that the four managers who couldn't perform the assessment tasks that the team agreed were necessary for their replacements did admit that they weren't ready for the long-promised promotion. The contracts of the four Europeans were quietly extended while these Malawian managers agreed to take more time to develop their own leadership skills. The outcome of the project was just what the government had hoped. The insight for me was that this team came to the same decision about senior leadership roles as did the Nigerians. It was clear that skill in multiplying resources—any way and at any time—was the key to being seen as a management success in Malawi. The image of a leader as a successful stockbroker was the cause of considerable discussion with this group. The organizing, motivating, evaluation roles of a boss were

seen as something that could be merely delegated to almost anyone.

In the case of both Nigeria and Malawi, it was clear that the competency model as I thought of it simply had little relevance to selecting effective managers. It was also the case that both Nigerian and Malawian managers could quickly agree on examples of specific individuals who were effective leaders. Because the criterion they used did not lend themselves to easy behavioral analogs, I still didn't challenge my own assumptions about competencies nor did I try to apply the insights that my clients offered.

Seeking Different Competencies

In Pakistan, my firm was hired by the Canadian International Development Agency to establish a health communications unit to increase the vaccination rate among children in rural areas. The government required that our headquarters staff in Islamabad must consist of an equal number of representatives from each province. Also, my partner and I would have to make a decision based on having only two or three choices for each position. We made the selections in discussion with our Canadian-Pakistani project manager and a manager from the Ministry of Health. Most of our employees had to learn to manage projects or operations (e.g., market research, vaccine distribution pipelines, media communications, field services, office administration, and program evaluation). Over the course of three years, the number of employees varied from four up to 14, and we managed up to 100 contractors. The employee and contractor failures and selection during this period taught me a lot about how to do selection interviews in that setting. As in Nigeria and Malawi, it became clear that the resourcefulness and drive to accumulate resources and to leverage family connections were the determining factors in predicting and guiding success as a project manager.

During the project in Pakistan, my firm was also chosen to provide a management-training course for 22 engineers and lawyers from the Indonesian Ministry of Highways. The services were delivered in Canada since part of the training involved placements with organizations around Toronto. Over half of these trainees had studied abroad; all of them spoke English and most had read management texts before coming for training. This was a well-educated and analytical group who were interested in discussing the gap between what they read in texts and how managers actually did their jobs in Indonesia. As with the other countries I had worked in, perceptions of management success had everything to do with the finding or building of assets. These managers found it curious that so much of the management role in Canada was oriented to finding, motivating, and retaining subordinates. In most Southeast Asian countries, if an employer provides any training or loans to an employee, the employee cannot legally quit unless their employer permits another employer to buy their contract. On the one hand, this means that employers readily provide considerable training for valuable employees, but the longer they stay the harder it is to leave.

Applying an Asset Management Model

My views about the value of asset management came to fruition shortly after the Indonesian project. A proposal was solicited by the Prime Minister's Department in Malaysia. Our proposal was selected, from among 15 competitors, to provide management training for 110 Malaysian entrepreneurs. The terms of reference—which were written by a graduate from an MBA program in the United States—emphasized the assessment and strengthening of the usual broad list of management competencies. We won the project because our approach described a development program that instead emphasized the trainee's skills in ac-

cumulating and leveraging assets. The government had selected trainees who were entrepreneurs who had already grown a successful midsized business. The government intended to invest in to about half of the businesses when these entrepreneurs returned from their 3-month training program. Therefore, they saw our emphasis on asset management as being particularly appropriate. In fact, the government of Malaysia later used our proposal as a model for soliciting proposals from eight other countries. Over a 3-year period, over 1,000 entrepreneurs completed this 3-month program that started in Canada. At least the project seemed successful. A cautionary note here might best be captured by a quote from Hicks and Peterson (1998) about communications in a country that borders Malaysia and shares many of the communications habits.

As one Thai executive advised a manager who was about to move to Thailand, "There are three things to remember about how people here will react to you. When someone is smiling and nodding their head, it means they like you and agree with what you are saying. Also, when someone is smiling and nodding their head, it means they don't understand what you are saying. Finally, when someone is smiling and nodding their head, it means they disagree with you and wish you would go away."

Using Asset Management in Coaching

I go through a five-step process with all managers before beginning to identify targets for change. In LDCs, there is recognition that external forces and resources are critically important for success. In the coaching that managers do in DCs, the tendency is to look more carefully at one's own capabilities.

First, we discuss why the rationale for each component of the asset management model. Some managers immediately grasp the usefulness of discussing their level of ambition, their asset acquisition successes,

and their creative ideas for using assets. Others have a very rigid view of their role that consists of little more than the careful adherence to specific procedures.

Second, I ask the client how they compare themselves with other managers with respect to each component. It is always useful to extend the discussion beyond the present job. Clients often will talk about childhood experiences and experiences off the job that provide useful insights about their motives and style. It is important to always ask for specific evidence rather than allow them to talk in generalities.

Third, I ask them to explore why they believe they are stronger or weaker than other managers with respect to the components of ambition, acquisition or application. It is important to seek explanations that include the influences of outside forces. It may be that a particular coworker, a mentor, or a team in the organization provides either motivation or resources. It may be that the nature of the product or service for which the manager is responsible account for much of their success. Outside of the organization, connections with the community, religious group or family members can also be important.

Fourth, I discuss their personal skills, behaviors, and attitudes that might account for their successes. When personal characteristics are mentioned during the preceding steps, as they always are, I list them but avoid too much discussion or emphasis until we explore thoroughly all other surrounding supporting circumstances and people. During this step, I may use a list of management competencies as an aid for discussion. This is a way of bringing into the discussion those competencies that managers in some countries often consider irrelevant or uniquely American in nature.

Fifth, I leave the client and start a validation process. With the client's guidance, I interview a selection of coworkers or people outside of the organization who are critical for the client's success. There are

very few situations in an LDC in which a multirater survey can provide reliable information. Familiarity with the use of surveys is limited, promises of anonymity are more credible when provided on a face-to-face basis than in writing, and the motivations of coworkers are difficult to predict. Also, the main issue is that typical competency surveys put too much emphasis on personal characteristics and do not determine the importance of surrounding conditions and people that can also explain successes or failures or further potential.

The outcome of the first five steps is to identify ways to strengthen a manager's capabilities in one of the three components of asset management that will make sense to the people with whom they work. In practice this may mean working on the same types of behaviors that one would work with in a DC. The difference is that the asset management model provides a framework that is easily understood and accepted by bosses and coworkers in any organizational setting.

Why Focus on Asset Management

Although it took experience in several countries to gain this insight about asset management, the interesting point is that the core elements seem to be the same in all of the locations. The most effective managers in all of these countries differentiated themselves from less effective managers in these three ways: (1) they were ambitious and competitive, (2) they could find, borrow, appropriate, and negotiate assets under even highly unfavorable conditions, and (3) they found ways to use the assets in unexpectedly creative and productive ways. The reason that this cluster seems to make sense is that it readily translates to how we evaluate managers in DCs. In fact, when managers in LDCs are asked whom they admire, they often cite someone like Bill Gates or Jack Welch, and then explain their choice in terms that are similar to the asset management model.

Of course, in business terms, the label of "asset manager" usually refers specifically to an investment fund manager. These managers try to maximize financial gain while controlling risk. Their measure of success is the growth, or in some cases, the sustainability, of an asset base. The fact is that leaders everywhere in the world are evaluated by much the same criteria as investment managers, even though the term "assets" includes broader factors such as the quality of the leadership team, strength of the brand, cash reserves, partnerships, and licensing.

An executive search consultant interviewing a potential CEO will ask for examples of how effectively an executive used corporate assets to build wealth and to keep the Wall Street analysts thinking and writing positive comments about the firm. In a similar manner, the assessments of leaders that are made by venture capitalists, human resource managers, investment bankers, and Boards of Directors always start with "how successful" the leader has been in previous positions. Did the leader make effective use of company assets and personal assets to achieve business objectives? The available information about this type of "success" is often vague or misleading; it comes from reference checks, interviews, financial data, and second-hand anecdotes and it is subjected to much debate and unstructured analyses. The point is that people might argue about the indicators, but they generally know what they are trying to measure (Sessa & Taylor, 2000). Of course, work style and personality are also important factors in judging fitness with any organization, but previous evidence of wealth building is always a central issue in evaluating leaders—whether in the Nigerian government or a global corporation.

From the perspective of a coach, the universal nature of these criteria provides an excellent entryway to discussing management effectiveness. The following paragraphs provide some evidence, or a ratio-

nale, for choosing the particular three dimensions for the model.

Evidence of Ambition

Successful managers are ambitious—their energy is devoted to winning and gaining in power for the next challenge. Most clients agree that ambition is probably more important than skill in predicting success in most situations. The following quote from business editor Alan Webber (2003) captures this vision well:

Rarely a week has gone by that we haven't been regaled with a stern-faced CEO staring out from the cover of a national business magazine. The message: This guy (it's almost always a guy) is ambitious, tough, decisive, a touch arrogant and a powerhouse in the business world. (p. 15a)

Most managers are aware of the negative aspects of unbridled ambition. It is a characteristic that has long been associated with management failures (Lombardo & Eichinger, 1989). The issue is the way the manager controls ambition. During coaching, it is important to explore such matters. For example, successful American presidents have a stronger need for power and achievement and are more socially assertive than less successful presidents (House, Spangler, & Woycke, 1991). However, House et al. (1991) found that in analyzing presidential success, the quality of prudence was a critical feature in balancing a strong need for achievement.

A common problem in LDCs is that managers reach a level of success that may exceed what they ever thought possible. They begin to exchange their ambitious style for a more low-risk protective or defensive style without realizing that their coworkers see this as a sign of weakness. The most effective managers often realize that over a period of years they are becoming less ambitious but they know better than to let it show. A common solution is to hire an ambitious subordinate who will

keep them and their colleagues under pressure. In the course of interviews, coworkers are quick to point out that if their boss begins to fade; their own success is at risk. It is very difficult in LDCs for a manager to personally initiate a transfer from one boss to another. Loyalty and other organizational ties make internal transfers rare unless they are negotiated by the bosses alone. Although ambition is clearly more like a trait than a competency, managers in LDCs are often very much aware of the need to act in an ambitious manner. It is much the same as the introvert leader who learns to act like an extrovert when necessary. It is just part of the dramatic skills needed for the job.

Evidence of Acquisition Success

The second characteristic of high-performing asset managers is that they are known for their skill in finding, borrowing, and negotiating for assets under unfavorable conditions. Accounts of successful entrepreneurs and scientists and unofficial units within large corporations are replete with tales of managers who accumulate assets even under very difficult conditions. The unofficially funded “skunk works” of some firms studied by Peters and Waterman (1982) brought fame to their founders and financial success to their employers. Within any cadre of vice presidents, there is always at least one person who manages to get more than his or her share of the budget. There are always managers who are talented at finding the assets to do what they think is important, even when the boss disagrees. When business is bad, there are always managers who find ways for their units to survive by scavenging assets (broadly stated, meaning people, money, supplies, advice from experts, old equipment, etc.) from outside the company and building strong networks with key supporters inside the firm. As long as they operate within acceptable legal boundaries, these are the

kinds of managers that can keep a firm going in difficult times.

During coaching, tales of asset acquisition often arise. Every budget is usually a basis for judging how one is doing and what strategies other managers are using. This is also a good reflection of management initiative. Getting more than one's share is always a case of pushing the limits that are set by the organization and enforced by bosses and coworkers. These are excellent topics to use for introducing the importance of building relationships and other softer aspects of management that often seem so difficult to do.

A common comment used to excuse a lack of appetite for acquisition is that one is acting in the best interests of the organization. Regardless of the possible truth of such statements, the fact is that managers who like to acquire assets never get "enough." Another clue is that managers like to accumulate more than just corporate assets. They usually have a past and current history of accumulating things that they don't really need—like baseball teams and additional houses. Is greed a good sign of executive potential? In Crystal's (1994) criticism of excessive compensation terms for senior managers, he cites management greed as a problem. Yet the most outrageous compensation packages are earned by celebrity CEOs in America. Even the leading business magazine *Fortune* answers its front-page headline "Is greed still good?" affirmatively (McLean, 2005).

Kellerman (2003) devotes several pages in her book to the evils of greed as an indicator of bad managers. In the same way that ambition can be overdone, acquiring assets can go too far also. The obvious danger is that the manager engages in theft, and is eventually stopped. However, in LDCs, when a manager stops looking for resources when they have all they need to do their job, they will soon be on the downside of their career. As a coaching discussion, it is always useful to find out whom a manager is negotiating with to bor-

row or trade resources if conditions change or opportunities open up unexpectedly. If a manager is spending all their time in just controlling and monitoring the resources they already have, they are at risk. In LDCs, conditions change rapidly for the better or worse and a manager who isn't thinking ahead of the present situation will be in trouble.

Innovative Asset Use

The third characteristic of high-performing asset managers is that they use assets in unexpected and creative ways. Michael Dell's use of credit cards to finance a business idea in his college dorm room is one example. His creativity changed an industry and nearly brought IBM to its knees. By now, everyone on the planet has heard about the Post-it note success that emerged only because of the support by 3M for a manager who had failed to invent better glue. The entire basis for six-sigma programs rests on the assumption that if they are given the necessary opportunity, employees at all levels can devise ways to improve corporate productivity. Every company wants managers who generate and sell ideas. In coaching, these tales usually elicit stories in any LDC about local heroes who started businesses with nothing, or with someone else's mistake.

Transitioning From Asset Management

The concept of asset management skill, as described here, is a readily identifiable characteristic across several different cultures, industries, and socioeconomic lines. In every country in which I have coached, managers can quickly come to consensus on the corporate managers, politicians, and successful entrepreneurs who shared the clusters of behaviors described above. It even seems at first glance that the managers who score highly on any of the common 360-degree surveys of competencies would probably score highly on any measure involving the three domains of ambition, ac-

quisition and application. It is not that this overlay would be a bad thing. After all, the point is just to find an entryway to start discussions with managers in LDCs. The fact is that many good asset managers would not rate that highly on a 360-degree survey.

Some of the leaders who are admired for their success in LDCs are described as arrogant, self-centered, demanding, and unreasonable. They are often not well liked, and in fact they are sometimes feared. If this sounds familiar, consider some of the managers who are models of American Enterprise. Al Dunlap may have failed at Sunbeam, but he headed 16 companies before reaching Sunbeam and made a remarkable amount of money for investors in his firms. A few other examples include Jeff Skilling of Enron, Jack Welch of GE, Rich Pinole of Right Management Consultants, Donald Trump of Trump Enterprises, Steve Jobs of Apple, Martha Stewart of Stewart Enterprises, and Bill Gates of Microsoft. In 2004, a survey conducted by the consulting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers and The Financial Times reported that Gates, Jobs, and Welch were among the top 10 world's most respected leaders. However, while all these managers may have had their softer moments, it is likely that their subordinates would not have given them high ratings on measures of sensitivity, consideration, tolerance, praise, and support of others' ideas. The Yankees baseball manager Casey Stengel probably reflected this style in his statement that "the key to being a good manager is keeping the people who hate me away from those who are still undecided."

Getting promoted in a corporation often means being liked and being liked does influence performance appraisals and ratings on 360-degree surveys. There is nothing wrong with that, but it just reflects a bias in our competencies that may be appropriate for a finely tuned corporation in a DC. It was 35 years ago that Peter Drucker said that two thirds of the managers that

have been elevated to executive management positions do not know what it is to adopt an entrepreneurial approach. So of course we wouldn't rely on a standard 360-degree survey of competencies if we were going to select a turnaround manager for a failing corporation, or an entrepreneur. The conditions under which these latter types of managers work are probably more common models of leadership in LDCs.

There has been considerable research on entrepreneurs that bears on the asset management approach. A recent study of entrepreneurs by Baum and Locke (2004) supports aspects of the asset management model. In a large longitudinal study of entrepreneurs they determined that the ability to find new resources at critical times to grow the firm was one factor that differentiated the successful from less successful entrepreneurs. They labeled this "new resource skill" and they labeled another factor "passion" that they describe as "confronting opportunity and challenges with fervor and ardor." If they can get through the risky part of building their business to a state of corporate complexity, it is certainly the case that they will start developing new competencies that make them look more like a corporate manager, or they are in danger of being pushed out of a management position. Perhaps the same phenomenon will occur in LDCs. As the organizations in the countries become more developed, the managers who have focused their competencies on becoming strong asset managers need to develop the broader set of competencies. Had they started that phase of development too soon, with a well-meaning but misguided coach, they may fail.

Next Steps With Asset Management

Even the coach who doesn't work with managers in LDCs might find some applications for this approach. Consider the fact that the turnover of corporate leaders is just one indicator that current assessment meth-

ods are not taking into account what psychologists know about assessing management potential (Sessa & Taylor, 2000; Hogan & Kaiser, 2005). Part of the issue in gaining an audience and gaining credibility with the decision-makers on boards of directors is to speak in the same terms that they use themselves. The questions they pose are those that make up the three domains of the asset management model. Determining the set of competencies in each category and building measures around those competencies that integrate input from other experts on the board may be an approach worth pursuing. Certainly it should be possible to move beyond the guesswork that often passes for evaluation by boards and executive search consultants.

It would be obvious that a relentlessly ambitious and creative approach to the acquisition and use of assets could define an individual who would not only lose the cooperation of colleagues but also engage in an unsustainable level of risk taking. Research could be initiated, even in LDCs on a qualitative basis, to identify some possible moderating variables. Some promising variables with which to start may include Jacques's time perspective (Jacques & Clement, 1991), Kegan's complexity of thought (Green, 2004), or emotional intelligence (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2001). The more challenging aspect would be to combine psychological variables with organizational and historical variables. Baum and Locke (2004) present some promising measurement methods which warrant further study.

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