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Sources of Inefficient Performance of Lower-Level Managers and Its Impact on Team Performance

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Abstract:

Purpose: *The purpose of this article is to identify the internal and external sources of inefficient performance of lower-level managers and to analyse its impact on the team functioning. Discussing and characterising the uncooperative performance of managers is aimed at making the factors that negatively affect the manager's? work and, consequently, their team, more familiar. The modern working environment of a manager poses a number of challenges with which they must cope. The proposed changes are aimed at improving the organisation of the manager's work and improving their performance.*
Design/Methodology/Approach: *The research method used in this article is based on a review of the literature on the subject and deductive research. Internal and external sources of inefficiency of the lower-level manager will be identified on the basis of these sources.*
Results: *The analysis of documents and the collected data can be used to prepare general recommendations aimed at improving the organisation of the manager's work.*
Practical implications: *The following proposal includes practical actions that managers can implement to improve their efficiency, such as enhancing time management, developing leadership competencies, leveraging technology, fostering proactive problem-solving, utilising corporate development programs, improving cross-departmental collaboration, and applying change management techniques. These recommendations are also applicable to higher-level managers, particularly in organisations undergoing structural shifts, leadership transitions, or strategic realignments. These propositions help to enhance productivity, employee engagement, and long-term organisational growth.*
Originality/Value: *The originality of this study lies in its multi-faceted approach, combining classical management theories with contemporary organizational challenges. It not only identifies the problems but also suggests practical recommendations for mitigating inefficiencies, such as leadership development, strategic delegation, and structured competency alignment.*

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1. Introduction: Who Is a Manager?

The modern role of lower-level managers consists of the performance of many activities within not only their competence, but also at other levels of management. In order to find the right answer to the question of what a manager does and what inefficient activities he or she has to deal with, one should first consider who a manager is in the changing environment of the organisation.

Every organisation, in order to function and develop efficiently, needs a person to carry out the management process. Such a person needs to manage a team as well as themselves in order to achieve a common goal. In the work of a manager, there are problems of complex nature, even unprogrammable and unpredictable (Simon, 2007). In modern times, the complexity of managers' tasks is further increased and brings together more and more sociological and behavioural aspects.

The functions and roles of managers adopted according to the basic concept by H. Fayol undergo some changes depending on individual functions and their quality. The functions that managers perform include: anticipating, organising, commanding, controlling and coordinating (Fayol, 1972). The results of the research of Mintzberg provide another perspective on the functions of a manager.

According to him, a manager is responsible for building relationships between the superior and the subordinate, negotiating, motivating employees, resolving conflicts, processing and distributing information, making decisions in crisis situations, and distributing forces and resources (Kuc, 2008).

Modern technologies, including artificial intelligence, can support managers in decision-making, data analysis, and team management, as indicated in research on the impact of AI on company image management (Wójtowicz, Kalinowska, and Weinert, 2024).

The first sources of managerial inefficiencies can be seen in the above functions, based on the key activities of the manager. The inefficiencies that occur are due to, among other things, possible interpersonal conflicts, tasks set for the manager that are not fully implemented, or incomplete information about the organisation itself.

These factors cause a higher level of stress over a longer period of time, and failure to relieve stress can cause a noticeable deterioration in a manager's effectiveness in his basic tasks. It should be added that functioning under constant emotional tension and operating at the highest mental level can exhaust even the most resilient people.

A person's body seeking balance will react intensely to even small things that would otherwise go unnoticed. Negative and prolonged responses in the organisation's environment affect the entire atmosphere at work, the nervousness and increased pressure of the manager affect their team, who can become the scapegoat of the manager's emotional exhaustion.

The team in such circumstances does not function efficiently on its own, due to the manager's inability to support it. The manager does not fulfil a motivational function for employees, and has a limited or impaired perception and ability to process information. In addition, decision-making in ordinary situations is hindered, and the distribution of forces and resources in the organisation is carried out in an unplanned manner. The team may also try to function without a manager, but in the long run the impact of an ineffective supervisor will affect the team.

Among the definitions of a manager in the literature, we can see superiority in relation to other employees as the main feature. Taking into account the gradation of the manager position in the management structure, we can distinguish three groups (Penc, 2008):

- Top managers;
- Middle managers;
- Lower-level managers (first-line managers).

Modern managers perform the management functions of the organisation. Thus, their role concerns three main areas, which can be expanded, and they focus on informational, decision-making and interpersonal roles (Penc, 2008).

In the informational role, the manager undertakes the tasks of acquiring the necessary knowledge in managerial activities, including that of the organisation's activities, and of disseminating and transmitting the right information to his subordinates. Being a representative of the company byproviding necessary information about the organisation to the environment and other companies is associated with the above role as well (Penc, 2008).

The decision-making role of the manager primarily consists of analysing and initiating programmes for the development of the company, implementing changes and motivating employees to come up with their own ideas related to the organisation. In the decision-making role, the manager faces the challenge of being an arbiter in personnel conflicts, resolves and improves organisational structures by

removing negative phenomena in the operation of the organisation or its individual elements (Penc, 2008).

Representing the organisation externally and internally, the manager fulfils an interpersonal role. This includes participation in various business contacts and representing the organisation. The manager becomes a leader who, at the head of the staff, meets the needs of employees. He becomes a link between the organisation and the external environment. Maintaining business contacts aims to guide external activities in such a way that the functioning of the organisation is in balance.

From the above roles and responsibilities, one can see the variety of planes of operation of a manager. The knowledge possessed about the organisation may be insufficient for the manager if he or she does not realise that they are operating in a changing environment, and this may be insufficient and force the manager to seek unconventional solutions that require the manager to learn.

The current dimension of the manager's function is based on three key areas, including (Penc, 2008):

- Fulfilling a role – initiator, guardian, representative of the organisation, leader, partner and manager;
- Possessing skills – setting goals, directing people, maintaining contacts, delegating authority, communicating information, preparing improvements, assessing employee performance;
- Taking action – increasing the authority and responsibility of employees, makingoptimal use of employee qualifications, adjusting the employee improvement system, creating organisational structures, stimulating employee initiative.

The above functions were put to the test during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic and forced changes not only in the work process, but also in the review of managerial competence.

In the new reality, managers have to face additional challenges, such as (Sparrow, 2021):

- motivating and building commitment and a sense of belonging to the team,
- limited contact with employees working remotely,
- assigning tasks and holding employees accountable,
- building relationships with the employee and with the team,
- difficulties in evaluating remote employees,
- transferring knowledge in distributed teams,
- taking care of employee welfare and safety.

The analysis can be usefully expanded with competences adjusted to the needs of the future, called the 21st century skills or future-oriented skills (Ioannidou and Erduran, 2022; Poteralska *et al.,* 2022), indispensable for sufficiently managing dynamic processes. Thus, the competencies of new managers should also be based także on skills related to good communication, building trust and flexibility of action (Liksza, 2021).

In any organisation, managers have specific activities to perform and associated responsibilities. In their work, it is impossible to ignore the sources of inefficient performance coming from within the organisation, as well as from outside. The most appropriate response to barriers to efficient work is to recognise the possibility of their occurrence, realise what these limitations may be, and implement solutions to neutralise the inefficiency.

It should be noted that every manager will face various constraints in his or her work. Their occurrence in the organisation's environment will also depend on the first reaction of the manager, which solves the dysfunction of the manager's work.

Dysfunction should be spoken of when a factor significantly affects the manager's work, also taking into account the time of exposure to the stimulus. It should be assumed that with prolonged exposure to negative factors, the level of effectiveness of the manager will decrease, and their interaction with the team will be ineffective, which will consequently affect the functioning of the team.

According to the definition, a team is a group of people with a variety of skills, a common approach to work, commitment to a common goal and responsibility for the result. The manager is largely responsible for the complexity of the team's character, shape and functionality. The strength of the team depends on the stage it is in. The first and second phases of team building, i.e. creating and getting to know the team, as well as the difficulties and conflicts that arise during the second stage are the most difficult part (Kozlowski, 2024).

The manager in their environment carries out their tasks, sets their goals and strengthens their position in the company. Due to the open nature of the organisation and the variability of external factors, the manager's attitudes are influenced by environmental pressures and market demands. In addition, there are individual expectations of the manager with regard to their planned development in the organisation. The three above elements form the basis for the manager's inefficiency in the organisation.

On the one hand, environmental pressures on how a manager should look, behave, and function create room for meeting unobvious and often misrepresented expectations. Failure to meet the above expectations can create dissatisfaction and a sense of being inferior or inadequate. Limitations to assessing one's knowledge, experience and competence fairly can be a roadblock to future actions.

The demands of the market can set a high bar that will demand that managers constantly improve their competence, continuously learn and update their information. It may seem that this is the natural course of action for any manager, and that development is inscribed in his actions.

Issues of concern are related to the situation of transition to another organisation, where the competences required are much higher than those possessed. The feeling of lack of prospects for development can stop or reduce the effectiveness of the operation and reduce the chance for something more developmental.

The opposite situation is having the right qualifications and meeting the requirements, but due to risk aversion such a manager is stuck in his schemes and in an organisation where he can no longer develop more.

The last factor that should be explained, and is indirectly linked to the second, are the individual expectations of the manager. This is a career set by individual milestones, which they pursue as far as possible. A manager's attitudes will be influenced by his or her personal goals. The closer they are to the goals of the organisation, the greater the likelihood of a successful performance.

The managerial tasks are also a factor shaping burdens in the organisation. The degree of difficulty and complexity of a task must be appropriate to the knowledge and skills, in addition, the provision of adequate resources for action promotes the formation of positive behaviour of the manager in the organisation and reduces the feeling of burden.

An important element is the organisational culture and work culture in the organisation. Even the best manager may fail to perform his tasks in an organisation where the organisational culture is lacking and does not meet certain standards. This is an important factor that affects the way work is performed at every level and the efficiency of the entire organisation.

Managerial tasks and the way in which authority is exercised translates directly into managerial effectiveness. Individual predispositions, as well as the manager's leadership style, affect the way power is maintained. In this description of the factors shaping the manager's workload, we can see the variety and intensity of these factors. As mentioned earlier, a cause of a manager's underperformance can be any stimulus or factor that negatively affects their work, task performance or exercise of authority.

The key is the duration and impact of the negative stimulus and the inability to get rid of it or reduce its effect on the manager's work. The following is a breakdown of the internal and external sources of the manager's inefficiency and the characteristics of the various elements affecting the work of the team.

2. Internal Sources of Underperformance

When analysing internal factors, one may be under the illusion of supposedly narrowing the source of inefficiency in the organisation to the manager alone. This is a misconception because they do not act alone, and their decisions are dictated by the decisions and behavior of other people.

The key issue becomes colleagues, to whom some of the activities could be delegated as part of the delegation of tasks and responsibility to them. This behaviour promotes dealing with important issues on the manager's level and notin the organisation as a whole, which can cause task burden and overwork. An additional part of a manager's tasks is delegating tasks and responsibility to them.

The ability to control or assist the task carried out by the employee reduces the amount of time spent in a situation where the manager performs tasks independently (Kiezun, 1997). Another possible source of managerial inefficiency is a complex sequence of mutual events based on improper organisation and planning of one's own work while postponing many important matters.

To say that inefficiency arises from carelessness, laziness or forgetfulness can have pejorative overtones. If these traits manifest frequently and noticeably affect the quality of the team, and further affect the functioning of the department or organisation, then one should consider whether the person in the position of manager should be there at all. Incapacity can be understood as the inability to formulate thoughts and tasks briefly, both to oneself and to subordinates.

The book *The One-Minute Manager* talks about one-minute goals. This has rather symbolic overtones and forces us to communicate the task in a concise way. Setting a clear goal, task or request requires getting confirmation of understanding of the content.

This translates into more efficient management, not wasting the manager's time, as well as the employee's. Clearly defined tasks are conducive to establishing responsibilities and accountability (Blanchard and Johnson, 2015).

Today, in many organisations, there are people who function through the prism of “I know better”. Overconfidence, belief in infallibility and possession of supreme competence empower such people to decide unanimously on many issues. The manager's main leadership style, which is authoritarian, can result from such behaviour.

As a result, decisions are made authoritatively, and the team is faced with an imposed decision that does not take into account important issues. It is important to note that finding reasonable compromises is one of the most important and difficult challenges in the decision-making process (Hammond, Keeney, and Raiffa, 2025).

Last but not least, professional burnout is a source of managerial inefficiency. More and more people who are great managers at various levels are facing this disease. People with knowledge, competence, charisma at some point begin to feel discomfort at work. It affects the physical, mental and emotional spheres (ceo.com.pl, 2024).

According to research, occupational burnout is a long-term process, the first signs of which are downplayed. The World Health Organization defines occupational burnout as the result of improper stress management in the work environment (Brzeziński, 2024). The result can be ineffectiveness at work, emotional distance and also physical symptoms that prevent a manager from functioning properly.

Of the above factors, it is difficult to identify those that will significantly affect a manager's performance. They are interconnected, act and affect the manager to varying degrees. The response to each stimulus depends on the degree of negative impact. An important note is to be aware of the greater impact on individual elements and the need for prevention.

3. External Sources of Underperformance

External sources of inefficiency relate to the manager's environment and work environment, which they themselves may have no control over. In fact, having knowledge of the possible causes of inefficiency makes it much easier to remove them. In the work of a manager, the competencies, skills and knowledge possessed are crucial to carrying out the tasks required by the position.

The primary factor is the mismatch between the competencies possessed and the manager's duties and responsibilities. This disparity translates into all management levels in his professional life, as well as in the functioning of the team. The scope of required competencies, duties and resulting responsibilities should coincide (Kiezun, 1997).

Studies suggest that corporate incubators and pre-incubation programs can effectively support managers in adapting to external challenges by providing training, resources, and strategic guidance. These initiatives help bridge competency gaps, improve leadership skills, and create an innovative organisational culture, ultimately reducing inefficiencies at the managerial level (Weinert, Banaś, Wójtowicz, and Luft, 2024).

In the 21st century, with rapid development and technological advances, any enhancement to a manager's work can prove to be a source of distraction, which can hinder productivity and concentration . Social media, unless required by the type of position, should be turned off while at work. Using them at leisure can quickly turn into uncontrolled, aimless browsing. Such a person is unable to take full advantage of his/her break and does not rest effectively.

Social media is also a venue for team management, through which a manager can, among other things (Karpiński, 2024):

- Improve communication among team members;
- Create mobile workspaces;
- Coordinate the work of teams;
- Improve the process of knowledge sharing;
- Be able to respond quickly to conflicts and crises within the company.

Disruptions in the manager's workplace also include the actions of the employees themselves, who tend to prolong scheduled meetings, occupying their time with matters on which they can make decisions themselves. It is important for the manager to be in contact with his subordinates and members of the team, however, it is important for his work comfort to secure adequate time for his own work, without any external information.

In this regard, a secretary or assistant is useful to keep an eye on this condition. The above behaviours of employees can be minimised by delegating authority, assigning responsibility for tasks and setting deadlines that summarise the various stages of tasks.

Regardless of the source of the managerial disruptors, the most important thing is not to underestimate the first symptoms, to react as quickly as possible to remove or mitigate the effects. Managerial inefficiency in the long term permeates the space of team functioning. Sensing problems at a higher level, the team may have problems in the long run, there may be deteriorated communication within the team, and a feeling of lingering in place, as many things may depend on the manager's decisions.

Members of the team, the organisation may endure a period of weaker performance of the manager, but in the future and with repeated episodes, the organisation may have trouble retaining employees. A lack of trust in the manager and the organisation indirectly affects the entire organisational culture. The responsibility that a manager carries affects their perception in the organisation, they are able to attract people to themselves and keep them even in crisis situations.

4. Suggestions and Methods to Improve the Work of the Manager

Preventive measures to improve and streamline the manager's work address several issues related to his or her functioning in the professional sphere, as well as his or her personal habits. Taking action in both the spheres will not exhaust all the signs of inefficiency, but can minimise the risk of turning into a crisis that involves the manager. The following are suggestions for areas that a manager of any level, as well as an employee, can personally change for the benefit of themselves and their team. These include:

- managing one's time and analysing time-consuming tasks;
- delegating tasks;
- setting a work schedule;
- scheduling meetings;
- shaping the atmosphere at work.

Managing one's time should be an activity that treats it as capital to be used to the fullest extent possible, with the main focus on determining what takes up the most time and whether corrective measures can be implemented. The use of hours devoted to professional tasks depends on the style of work.

An important step is to consider what this time was used for, how much time was consumed by each task versus the original assumptions, and which people contributed positively and negatively to our productivity (Seiwert, 1998). Once the amount of time for the most time-consuming tasks has been determined, there will be an area for the manager to work on in the future and to undertake changes appropriate to his capabilities.

A distinctive factor that increases control of one's time is cooperation with colleagues involving the exchange of information and the use of shared resources. The above activities are aimed at supporting the internal activities of the organisation (Kozuch, 2021).

The analysis of factors that take time away from work can be combined with the overuse of social media. In today's smartphones, it is possible to verify the amount of time spent on individual apps. Each user can enter a time limit for particular ones. After the time for which a particular app is set expires, it switches to sleep mode. It is a useful feature for those aware of how much social media takes up valuable time, preventing full rest.

Delegating tasks is a peculiar skill for a manager of any level. It is the delegation of tasks to one's subordinates, team members as full-fledged individuals who can complete tasks. Just keep in mind that delegation is associated with the transfer of authority and responsibility to a specific employee (Pszczolowski, 1978).

It promotes dealing with tasks set before the manager or supervisor, as well as the inclusion of other employees in increasingly complex tasks. When delegating tasks, key indicators that determine the effectiveness of delegation are important.

Among them we can include (Filipowicz, 2019):

- the definition of tasks to be performed by employees,
- selecting employees for tasks,
- ensuring adequate information,

- the delegation of authority,
- support in the implementation of difficult tasks.

Establishing a work schedule will be effective if a manager has a highly structured routine of tasks, or if activities are repetitive in a certain way. Establishing a schedule allows you to plan time for intensive work, time devoted to the team, as well as planned breaks during which the manager can update their schedule.

It will not be a manager's improvement to stick rigidly to a schedule in situations where reaction, conflict alleviation or immediate action is required. With technological innovations at their disposal, a manager should familiarise themselves with tools that make their daily duties easier, find the ones that suit their nature of work and implement them in their activities.

In terms of scheduling meetings, the key question is the legitimacy of such a meeting. Is it necessary? If so, it should be planned in as much detail as possible and the main topic sent to its participants. The role of the manager is to stick to the schedule of the meeting, not to extend it forcefully and to go directly to the point.

Scheduling meetings is important in a company because it also involves employees who are distracted from their work and responsibilities (Kiezun, 1997). A meeting that lasts for a predetermined period of time or that is completed after discussing and establishing responsibilities allows everyone to get back to their tasks.

The manager, taking into account the interpersonal role they plays in the organisation, is supposed to shape the workplace by themselves. Building a work environment based on trust, support and development opportunities attracts people.

It keeps long-time trusted employees in the organisation, thus building an organisational culture and some constancy. If a manager pays attention to how employees feel and cares about the right relationship with his or her subordinates, they are largely willing to stay with the company in case of a failure of the organisation or the manager himself.

5. Method and Results

The empirical part of this paper is based on a case study, whose purpose was to determine the key sources of ineffectiveness in the work of lower-level managers, and the analysis of these inefficiencies' impact on the team's functioning. The method of a case study was chosen because it allows for an answer to a "What?" question in relation to a collection of problems' sources and effects (Yin, 2018).

A multi-method approach consisting of two main modules: a survey conducted with the CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interviewing) method and in-depth interviews

realised with the CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing) and CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) methods, was used.

The surveys were created on the basis of a review of literature on managerial competences (Sparrow, 2021; Liksza, 2021). The analysis was conducted in typical research organisations, where lower-level managers are responsible for the realisation of key tasks (operational) and have a direct influence on the team work.

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The survey consisted of two parts: part A encompassed demographic and professional data (sex, age, education, tenure, characteristics of the performed functions), and part B included the assessment of 10 competencies connected with effective management, whereas the respondents assessed both the importance of a given competency (0-10 scale, from "unimportant" to "very important"), and the level of its possession (0-10 scale, from "lack" to "expert").

From January to March 2025, the survey was sent online to 120 lower-level managers, 85% of the surveys were sent back. In addition, in-depth interviews with 17 key lower-level managers with at least 10 years of experience were conducted.

The interviews' goal was to verify the survey's results, identify factors influencing the level of competencies, and to determine the barriers limiting the effectiveness of managerial work. The respondents were able to discuss the results, point out any possible deficiencies and share the suggestions pertaining to the methods of competency development. Applying methodological triangulation (joining qualitative and quantitative methods) increased the reliability of the results and allowed for the formulation of precise recommendations for organisations.

In a survey in which 102 lower-level managers took part, the respondents assessed the key competencies connected with good communication, building trust and flexibility of actions as very important – the average importance rating amounted to around 7.0/10. Nevertheless, the level of possession of these competencies was evaluated at 4.2/10 on average, which points to a visible discrepancy between expectations and actual abilities.

In the survey, the respondents pointed out that insufficiently developed communication competencies and lack of flexibility in action constitute barriers impairing the effectiveness of managerial work, especially in the context of limited

contact with people working remotely, of problems with assigning tasks and difficulties in the judgement of the effectiveness of work in dispersed teams.

Additional information, confirming the results of the survey, was obtained in in-depth interviews (conducted by means of the CAPI/CATI methods) with 17 key lower-level managers. The respondents had the opportunity to discuss the results, point out any possible gaps and share suggestions pertaining to the methods of competency development.

During the interviews, they stressed that insufficiently developed abilities in the scope of communication, building trust and flexible reactions to dynamic changes constitute key barriers limiting the effectiveness of managerial work. They indicated that the development of these competencies is indispensable for overcoming the barriers connected with remote work, effective assignment of tasks and assessment of team work.

The application of methodological triangulation, which connects quantitative with qualitative data, increased the reliability of the results and allowed for the formulation of precise recommendations for organisations. Statistical analyses, such as the Student's *t*-test ($t = 3{,}05$, $p = 0{,}038$) and the Spearman's rank correlation ($r = 0{,}878$, $p = 0{,}021$) confirmed the salience of the difference between the importance assessment and the level of competency possession.

The multiple regression model ($R^2 = 0{,}699$, $p < 0{,}001$) proved that tenure is a key factor influencing the development of these abilities. These results, together with the data from interviews, unambiguously indicate the necessity of intensifying development activities in the areas of communication, building trust and flexibility in action, which will allow for overcoming the barriers to the effectiveness of managerial work.

6. Conclusion

The analysis of the lower-level manager's role and functions indicates that a modern manager is a multifaceted person, acting in a dynamically changing organisational environment. In an age of digital transformation of the 4.0 and, in future, 5.0 economy, managers must cope not only with traditional tasks, but also problems stemming from limited contact with remote employees, difficulties in task assignment, work assessment and knowledge transfer in dispersed teams.

The key competencies which need to be developed are the following: good communication, building trust and flexibility in action – abilities indispensable for effectively managing a team and for adaptation to rapidly changing conditions.

The survey conducted among lower-level managers in research organisations provided valuable conclusions, but had some limitations. The sample group

consisted only of managers from the research sector, which hinders extrapolating the results onto other sectors. Moreover, the competencies assessment was based on subjective respondents' opinions, which may influence the results, and the number of in-depth interviews was limited, due to which the full picture of the barriers could remain uncaptured.

In the future, it is worth expanding the analyses with a comparison of managerial competences in different economy sectors and to apply more objective methods of assessment, for example, through task simulation or assessment by independent experts. Longterm research will also allow to observe the development of competencies and to judge the influence of training programmes on work effectiveness.

To sum up, the results underline the necessity of a systematic development of managerial competencies in the scope of communication, building trust and flexibility in action, to meet the challenges of economy 4.0 and 5.0. The introduction of complex development programmes and creation of structural career paths may considerably improve management effectiveness, contributing to longterm increase of an organisation's value.

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