

What level of technical/managerial skills does a good boss need?

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When asked “What do you expect from a good boss?”, employees say, among other things, that a boss should have good technical and managerial skills. What does this mean, and to what extent do you need such skills as a manager?

It will be helpful to make an initial distinction between **leadership and management**. In the companies for which I have worked, members of senior management often say to me: “In my team or unit, we do things differently! ...”. But after I have presented the nine dimensions of leadership (see video at www.lp3leadership.com), they are unanimous in telling me that these dimensions are the same for them all and, of course, equally valid for themselves and their teams. The differences, therefore, are to do with tools and processes, in other words management tools. There are indeed differences between the Marketing, IT, Internal Service and External Service departments, but this is to do with the tools and processes they are using.

Definition

Professional competence is the capacity to connect up, deepen and cast a critical eye on one's technical and interdisciplinary knowledge, and to apply it in one's practical dealings. It consists of purely technical skills and know-how, generally acquired through initial training and improved on over the years. Along with social and methodological skills, professional skills are all part of one's practical baggage.

Professional competence in the context of running an organization or department is managerial competence. Here the judicious use of management tools is crucial.

Management tools

The author Fredmund Malik makes a distinction between management tools, principles and tasks.

Management tools are, for example, the chairing of meetings, report writing, organizing and checking on work, personal working methods, budgeting, analytical accounting, performance evaluation and systematic selection.

In theory, a management process should be results-orientated, global and constructive. A manager should concentrate on essentials. Concentrating on one's strengths and creating a climate of trust for one's employees makes the process effective.

Self-reflection

- How do your employees prepare for meetings?
- How often do you carry out checks?
- What influence do you have over the budgeting process?
- What would no one notice if you no longer did it?

So, there are job-related skills and managerial skills (management tools you have to learn).

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The higher you rise in the hierarchy, the more generalist and strategic your skills will need to be, therefore the CEO of a large company does not need to be an expert. On the other hand, if you are the manager of a small team, at ground level, you serve as a “sparring partner” and will need job-related expertise in your particular field.

Of course, if I am a member of the management team and CFO, I will need to have a good knowledge of financial management. Similarly, an HR manager needs to have a good knowledge of human resources.

Some senior managers, some directors, are still experts in their respective fields. Maybe you know some or are one yourself. How do you recognize them? Such people, if they are not aware of it or have not done their shadow work, tend to check things to the fourth decimal point and sometimes have trouble letting go. Does that remind you of anyone in particular?

For myself, I always loved having employees who were better at things than I was (at the job-related, technical level). Why, you may ask? For three main reasons:

1. Firstly, it enabled me to delegate. Having confidence in their abilities, I had no hesitation in delegating and could concentrate on areas of strength, where I could add more value to the company and have a more powerful impact.
2. It enabled me to take holidays and let go.
3. I could give my employees the opportunity to develop their skills. If something had to be presented to senior management, to customers or partners, I was very glad to hand the job over to my team, to my employees at all levels, even apprentices.

For this, you need to have self-confidence, know your strengths and where you are leading the way. If you are afraid of losing your position, you will find it difficult to delegate and trust others.

How do you feel if your employees have greater expertise than you?

To return to managerial skills, a book you should read is “Lost in Management” by François Dupuy. He noted that in various French companies the foundations of management were being lost, basic tools were not being learned and applied.

During leadership and management courses, take stock of the assets your managers possess (in terms of basic training). Be critical and test these skills.

Among the tools that need to be mastered, two are of vital importance: delegating and taking decisions. One of my next articles will be devoted to these two tools. Your employees expect you to take decisions, especially at times of uncertainty and change. There is nothing worse than to be in a state of uncertainty, left hanging in mid-air, waiting. They expect a degree of clarity.

Define your own skills, strengths and added value, and don't be afraid to let your employees take centre stage.

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