

## **Behavioral Indicators of Manager and Managerial Leader Effectiveness: An Example of HRD Professional Partnership Research from the UK Private Sector**

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*This paper presents the results of an 'HRD Professional Partnership' study of managerial and leadership effectiveness within a UK private sector organization, and discusses how the results are being used to support evidence-based HRD practice. The paper also reveals the extent to which the results are generalized to findings obtained from several UK public sector organizations, and provides evidence in support of the notion of the universality of managerial and leadership effectiveness.*

**Keywords:** Leadership, Organizational Culture, Change

In recent years there have been numerous calls in the US and UK literatures for 'evidence-based' approaches to HRD practice (See Russ-Eft et al, 1997; Leimbach and Baldwin, 1997; Swanson, 1997; Hamlin and Stewart, 1998; Hamlin and Ash, 2000; Brewerton and Millward, 2001; Holton, 2004). More recently, the American Society of Training and Development (ASTD) has been exhorting HRD practitioners to apply research to practice, for HRD researchers to undertake research that guides and tests the practical utility of that research, and for HRD practitioners and scholars to work in partnership on workplace learning and performance projects (See Carliner and Sugrue, 2005). Despite these various calls limited progress has been made in closing the much talked about 'HRD research-practice gap'. Never-the less, the experience of one of the authors suggests an effective means for HRD practitioners to become evidence-based is through the 'HRD Professional Partnership' concept as originally defined in the USA by Jacobs (1997) and strongly advocated in the UK by Hamlin (2001, 2002a ). However, only a few studies of such partnership-research have been reported in the literature, namely those of Holton et al (1998) and Ruona and Short (2000) in the USA, and of Hamlin, Reidy and Stewart (1998), Hamlin (2002b), and Hamlin and Cooper (2005) in the UK. All of these have been conducted in public sector organisations. In contrast, this paper presents the findings of an on going HRD Professional Partnership study of effective and least effective manager and managerial leader behaviors within a UK private sector company that provides professional services to both national and international client organizations through various divisions situated within the UK and other countries around the globe. For the purpose of anonymity the company is referred to in this paper as either ABC (UK) Ltd or 'ABC'. This UK based organization is a major subsidiary of a very large international Group plc company whose other subsidiary companies provide similar and/or different professional services to a wide range of local, national, multinational and global client organizations. We refer to this parent company as either XYZ Group plc or 'XYZ'. The conference paper also reports how the results of the present study have been and are being used to inform and shape evidence-based management and managerial leadership development initiatives within 'ABC', and highlights the extent to which they are held in common with findings from equivalent studies of managerial and leadership effectiveness in several UK public sector organizations.

At this juncture we wish readers to note that our use throughout the paper of the terms 'managerial leader' and 'managerial leadership' has been influenced by the fact that the words 'management' and 'leadership', and 'manager' and 'leader' are used interchangeably within 'ABC' where all staff with responsibility for managing people are perceived as 'managerial leaders' performing leadership roles as part of the everyday task of management. Such leadership roles are different to the 'organisational leader' roles performed by top managers, but very similar to the concept of 'grass roots' leadership as identified by Russ Eft et al (1996) and Bergmann et al (1999). We have also been influenced by the fact that many modern day management theorists, researchers and writers, as well as practicing managers in many other if not most organizations, also use these words interchangeably (See Barker, 2000; Alimo-Metcalf and Lawler, 2001, Bolden, 2004).

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## Problem Statement

This section outlines the various organizational and theoretical issues of concern that have respectively informed the choice of focus and design for the present study.

### *Organisational Context*

In April 2004, a new division of ABC (UK) Ltd called 'DEF' was created to provide operational services not only to 'ABC', but also to other subsidiary companies of XYZ Group plc working in the same field. Also in April 2004, a restructuring of the 'ABC' client services unit was initiated to reflect an increased focus on improving business development and fostering greater relationships with existing clients. These two major organizational changes posed an immense cultural adjustment for all concerned which led to considerable unsettlement. The challenge within 'ABC' was to ensure its well defined management culture was maintained during the bedding in of the new structures, whilst the challenge within the newly formed 'DEF' division was to create a management culture similar to that of 'ABC' during the period of assimilation of staff arriving from the various other 'XYZ' subsidiary companies where the management cultures had been quite different. To help these processes, it was decided to initiate a program of internal practice-grounded research in order to understand in greater depth the 'ABC' management culture within every division of the company. The aim was to identify those managerial and managerial leadership behaviors perceived and judged by people throughout the organization to be either 'effective' or 'least effective' in motivating and retaining staff and contributing to organizational efficiency and high performance.

### *Theoretical Context*

Over the past 50 years or so substantial amounts of research have been conducted into the nature of management and leadership. However, in recent decades, few US studies have focused on the issue of managerial or leadership effectiveness, or attempted to differentiate between what Hales (1986) refers to as 'good' or 'bad' management/leadership practice. Consequently, much research is regarded as lacking relevance, utility and generalizability, and there is little agreement about what constitutes and is meant by managerial and leadership effectiveness (See Barker, 2000; Cammock, Nilakant and Dakin, 1995; Kim & Yukl, 1995). The situation is somewhat different in the UK where recently several such studies have been carried out, such as those of Barker (2000), Alimo-Metcalf and Alban-Metcalf (2001), Gaughan (2001), and Hamlin (2002b) in the British National Health Service, and of Hamlin with various co-researchers in several other types of public sector organizations as reported in Hamlin (2004).

Another major criticism of most management and leadership research relates to the lack of generalizability across organizational settings, sectors and cultures. For example, Axelsson (1998) claims that despite the volumes of management research that have been published, few studies have produced empirical results that can be generalized beyond particular organizational settings. A similar situation exists in the field of leadership research. Kim and Yukl (1995) draw attention to the fact that not only is the number of studies on specific behaviors still small, but different researchers have examined different sub-sets of behaviors, thus making it difficult to compare and contrast the findings from one study with another. House and Aditya (1997) draw attention to the fact that no pattern of leader behavior has been found to be consistently associated with any criteria of supervisor or manager effectiveness. An explanation provided by Avolio, Bass and Jung (1999) is that weaknesses in research design, such as the lack of central control over the consistency of procedures utilized in most management studies, have been the cause of limitations on the generalization of findings in this field. To rectify these weaknesses they argue replica studies should be carried out using common research designs and methods. Despite the lack of empirical evidence, and the reported problems of generalizability, Thompson et al (1996) argue that comparisons between existing lists of managerial competencies and overlaps point toward the existence of generic managerial competencies. In the field of leadership, Bennis (1999) suggests some leadership competencies are universal. This lends support to the views of House and Aditya (1997) who believe it is likely there are several generic leadership functions and universal/near universal effective leader behaviors. They suggest these are "expected, accepted, and effective across organizations, industries, and cultures", that "the logic suggesting [the] universality of leader behaviors is compelling", but as yet this represents "theoretical speculation that needs to be demonstrated empirically" (pp 453).

Hamlin (2004), who conducted a comparative analysis of findings from several replica studies of managerial and leadership effectiveness within three different types of UK public sector organizations, namely secondary schools (Hamlin, 1988), HM Customs and Excise (Hamlin, Reidy and Stewart, 1998) and an acute NHS Trust hospital (Hamlin, 2002b), has produced evidence in the form of a 'generic' model that lends support to the notion of the universality of management and leadership. The results of a subsequent replica study by Hamlin and Cooper (2005) carried out within a specialist NHS Trust hospital lend further support to the soundness and credibility of Hamlin's public sector oriented 'generic' model. Empirical evidence is now required to demonstrate whether or not

this model is also generalised to UK private sector organizations. It should be noted that the latter three replica studies were carried out as HRD Professional Partnership research.

### **Research Goals and Questions**

In light of the organizational and theoretical issues outlined above, it was decided the ABC (UK) Ltd study should be a replica of the managerial and leadership effectiveness study of Hamlin and Cooper (2005) using identical or as near identical research methods within an HRD Professional Partnership arrangement. The primary goal of one of us (Nirmal Bassi) acting as the HRD practitioner partner was to gain a better understanding of the management culture of the company by identifying those managerial and managerial leadership behaviors considered by people within 'ABC' to be either 'effective' or 'least effective' management/leadership practice. The findings would then be used to inform, shape and evaluate future management development programs and HRD initiatives in order to bring about desired organizational change and development. In contrast, the primary goal of the other of us (Robert G. Hamlin) acting as the HRD scholar partner, was to identify commonalities between the respective results of the UK private sector 'ABC' study and the previous UK public sector studies of Hamlin and his various other practitioner co-researchers. His aim was to obtain, if at all possible, additional empirical evidence that might further support or challenge current debates concerning the 'universal' versus 'contingent' nature of management and leadership. To achieve these goals the study addressed the following research questions:

1. How are the managerial and managerial leadership behaviors of middle and first line managers/managerial leaders manifested within the UK private sector setting of ABC (UK) Ltd, and which of these are perceived and judged to be indicators or contra-indicators of managerial and leadership effectiveness?
2. To what extent are the results from (i) generalized to findings obtained from equivalent replica studies of managerial and leadership effectiveness carried out in the UK public sector?

### **Research Methodology**

Adopting a constructivist ontology and interpretivist epistemology the research design comprised three stages using the following methods-

#### *Stage 1*

Concrete examples of specific 'effective' and 'least effective' management and managerial leadership behaviors as exhibited by middle and front line managers, and observed by others within 'ABC' during the 6 months period prior to the start of the study, were obtained. The method used was the well established Critical Incident Technique (CIT) of Flanagan (1954) as applied by Hamlin (2002b) and Hamlin and Cooper (2005). Observations were obtained from a representative sample of 35 managers out of a target group of forty UK based 'ABC' and 'DEF' middle and junior managers, plus twenty non-managers who were selected and interviewed on a pro rata basis. In total 555 CIs were collected of which 17 were deemed unsuitable for inclusion in the study. Of the remaining 538 CIs, 246 were examples of effective and 292 of ineffective management and managerial leadership behavior.

#### *Stage 2*

The 538 CIs were reduced to a smaller number of discrete behavioral statements (items), each of which comprised between a minimum of 3 to a maximum of 11 CIs that were virtually the same, or very similar in meaning. Open coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) and a form of 'summarizing', 'explicative' and 'structuring' content analysis (Flick, 2002, Mayring, 1983) were used for this purpose. In most cases one CI from the cluster of CIs comprising the item was selected as a representative 'verbatim' statement. For some items a 'composite' statement was created which encapsulated the meaning held in common to all of the CIs comprising that particular behavioral item.

#### *Stage 3*

The Stage 2 behavioral items were compared against those resulting from the UK public sector studies in order to search for evidence of external generalization as indicated by the sameness, similarity and congruence of meaning found between the three respective sets of public sector behavioral data. The method used was a variant of open coding applied inductively and deductively within a grounded theory mindset (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Flick, 2002).

#### *Ensuring Internal Consistency and External Validity*

Stages 1 & 2 of the study were carried out primarily by the HRD practitioner with some assistance from an independent co-researcher and the HRD scholar. Stage 3 was carried out jointly by the HRD scholar and HRD practitioner. To ensure internal consistency of the research process, the study was conducted under the guidance of the HRD scholar who had provided similar guidance to his previous practitioner co-researchers involved in the UK

public sector replica studies. To ensure and enhance the external validity of the ‘ABC’ research outcomes in terms of their plausibility, trustworthiness and credibility, a form of ‘investigator triangulation’ was applied for Stages 2 & 3 whereby the co-researchers initially worked independently of each other when first analyzing the data, and then jointly (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 1991). Overall there was general agreement regarding their respective judgments and perceptions regarding the commonalities existing between the respective sets of data analyzed at each stage of the research. Where minor discrepancies and inconsistencies arose, these were resolved through critical examination and discussion to reach a consensus.

## Results and Findings

A total of 66 discrete behavioral items were identified by the Stage 1 & 2 research of which 31 were examples of effective (positive) manager/managerial leader behaviour, and 35 of ineffective (negative) behavior. For illustration, two respective samples of these behavioural items are given in Table 1.

Table 1: *Samples of Effective and Least Effective Managerial and Managerial Leadership Behaviors Exhibited by Middle and Front Line Managers within ABC (UK) Ltd.*

### *Positive (Effective) Behavioral Items*

- Takes action to enable staff to see the bigger picture
- Effectively delegates tasks and decisions
- Is innovative and creative in producing new ideas to help staff
- Adopts an open and approachable leadership style
- Gives praise and constructive feedback to staff
- Immediately tackles poor performance issues
- Offers support to staff that are facing problematic or difficult circumstances with work related tasks
- Helps and supports staff to learn from their mistakes or ‘under performance’
- Involves staff in decision making and problem solving
- Actively supports career development [of staff] within organization

### *Negative (Least Effective) Behavioral Items*

- Fails to give feedback about performance
- Fails to follow up on agreed actions and/or commitments
- Abdicates responsibility and lacks ownership by ignoring, opting out or failing to make a decision
- Demonstrates selfish and self-serving behaviors.
- Exhibits parochial behavior and demonstrates a ‘silo’ mentality
- During change or problem situations, fails to consult with key people and/or involve them in decisions
- Displays autocratic and controlling behaviour
- Withholds information and fails to give any explanation
- Generally fails to respond to staff when they ask for help, support or guidance
- Undermines staff by criticizing, humiliating or giving them a dressing down in front of others

The Stage 3 research, which compared and contrasted these 66 behavioral items against the different sets of positive and negative behavioral items resulting from the three UK public sector replica studies, revealed high degrees of sameness and similarity. A very high proportion of the ‘ABC’ manager/managerial leader behaviors were either near identical/very similar in substance and meaning, or alternatively contained a significant and transparently obvious element of congruent meaning, as indicated in Table 2. As can be seen, the proportion of

Table 2: *Number and Percentage of ‘Effective’ and ‘Least Effective’ ‘ABC’ Manager and Managerial Leader Behaviours Held in Common with Equivalent Behaviours Manifested in three UK Public Sector Organizations*

	HM Customs & Excise (HMCE)	Acute NHS Trust Hospital (ANHS)	Specialist NHS Trust Hospital (SNHS)	Across the three UK public sector organizations
‘ABC’ behaviours that are near identical or very similar in meaning	57 (86.5%)	46 (70%)	42 (64%)	64 (97%)
‘ABC’ behaviors containing some element of congruent meaning	6 (9.0 %)	12 (18%)	15 (22.5%)	1 (1.5%)
‘ABC’ behaviours with no transparent congruence of meaning in evidence	3 (4.5%)	8 (12%)	9 (13.5%)	1 (1.5%)

'ABC' behaviors containing no congruence of meaning across the three respective public sector studies ranged from 13.5% to 4.5 %. However, when the 'ABC' behaviors were compared against the overall set of behaviors obtained from these three previous replica studies combined, 97 % (64 of 66) were found to be near identical/very similar to at least one of the public sector behaviors, a further 1.5% (1 of 66) were found to contain some element of congruent meaning, and only 1.5% (1 of 66) had no transparent commonality with the public sector findings.

To illustrate the types of overlap, sameness and similarity existing between the manager and managerial leader behaviors identified by the private sector 'ABC' study, and those identified by the three public sector replica studies carried out in HM Customs & Excise (HMCE), in an acute NHS Trust Hospital (ANHS) and in a specialist NHS Trust Hospital (SNHS) respectively, several examples are given in Table 3.

Table 3. *Illustration of Sameness and Similarity of Manager and Managerial Leader Behaviours Manifested within both UK Private Sector and Public Sector Organizations*

<i>Near Identical/Very Similar Behaviors</i>	<i>Behaviors With Some Element of Congruent Meaning</i>
Positive/effective behaviors	Positive/effective behaviors
ABC: <i>Immediately tackles poor performance issues</i>	ABC: <i>Shows care and concern for health and well being of staff</i>
HMCE: <i>Actively monitors individual and team performance</i>	HMCE: <i>Gives people time to acclimatize and adjust to changes in organisational structures and/or systems rather than confronting them with an imposed big bang approach to change</i>
ANHS: <i>Recognises problems and takes necessary action. Takes control of difficult situations (e.g troublesome staff) and deals with them quickly and appropriately</i>	ANHS: <i>Gives time to listen to staff with problems or worries relative to work or personal issues</i>
SNHS: <i>Recognises and acts appropriately when things are wrong. When problems occur deals with them quickly and fairly</i>	SNHS: <i>Makes time to talk to staff (e.g. engenders feeling of value in staff by showing an interest in their work</i>
Negative/ineffective behaviors	Negative/ineffective behaviors
ABC: <i>Abdicates responsibility and lacks ownership by ignoring, opting out or failing to make a decision</i>	ABC: <i>Talks to staff in a patronizing, condescending or derogatory way</i>
HMCE: <i>Abdicates responsibilities (e.g. leaving own managerial work un-attended)</i>	HMCE: <i>Behaves to team members in a domineering, dictatorial, overbearing, or sexist manner and/or makes unreasonable and unfair demands on them</i>
ANHS: <i>Avoids or abdicates from his/her responsibilities. Sits on things, pretends problems do not exist, avoids saying yes or no</i>	ANHS: <i>Undermines or dismisses the efforts of staff (e.g. dismissive in dealing with staff ideas, makes cutting remarks)</i>
SNHS: <i>Avoids making decisions. Refuses to recognise problems or deadlines (e.g. leaves tasks to last minute)</i>	SNHS: <i>In meetings criticizes or acts in a negative way towards staff. Engages in bullying or harassing behaviours</i>

## Discussion

This section discusses the results from the perspective of both the practitioner and scholar within the HRD Professional Partnership of ABC (UK) Ltd.

### *HRD Practitioner Perspective*

The research has produced a source of 'best evidence' that has had significant potential for immediate application within 'ABC' in support of evidence-based HRD practice. For example, the identified effective and ineffective manager and managerial leader behaviors have already been used to inform and support the development of an 'ABC' Global Managerial Competencies Framework, and to contribute towards a review and revision of the company's core management training and development programs. Furthermore, the research data obtained to date is currently being, or is planned shortly to be used to inform the management recruitment strategy, prioritise the business training and development strategy, develop a series of OD workshops designed to help further embed and nurture the desired 'ABC' management culture, and to identify and provide other bespoke HRD interventions focusing on specific units, departments or managers in need of specific development. Additionally, it is planned to use the effective and ineffective behaviors as the basis for a subsequent factor analytic study designed to establish the criteria of managerial and leadership effectiveness applying within 'ABC'. The criteria so identified will then be

used to inform, shape and support the future performance management system and appraisal process throughout the organisation.

#### *HRD Scholar Perspective*

The findings from the present study lend strong empirical support for those such as Thompson et al (1996), House and Aditya (1997), and Bennis (1999) who believe in the universality of managerial and leadership competencies, and in the existence of generic management and leadership competencies and universal effective managerial leader behaviours. Furthermore, the results provide additional empirical evidence in support of the 'generic' model of managerial and leadership effectiveness offered by Hamlin (2004) which he claims could be used as 'best evidence' in support of evidence-based management practice as called for by Axelsson (1998). The fact that only 1.5% of the 'ABC' manager and managerial leader behaviors contained no element of sameness, similarity or congruence of meaning with any of the UK public sector behaviors suggests 'universalistic models' of managerial and leadership effectiveness are more consistent with the facts. This challenges the thinking of those such as Flanagan and Spurgeon (1996), van der Velde et al (1999), Shipper (2000) and Garavan and McGuire, (2001) who subscribe to 'contingency models' of management and leadership.

#### *Limitations of the Study*

All of the Stage 1 & 2 research results to date have been derived from concrete examples of behavior exhibited by 'ABC' and 'DEF' managers based in the UK. Hence, although the findings have already been used to help inform and support the creation of a global managerial competencies framework, additional research is required to demonstrate empirically the extent to which the findings of the present study are generalized to the organizational settings of 'ABC' divisions situated in other countries around the globe. This further research could comprise several replica CIT studies involving non-UK based 'ABC' participants followed by a comparison of findings with the present study in order to verify, if possible, the existence of 'ABC' commonalities and universals that would validate the international application of the UK findings. Additionally, more replica studies need to be carried out within a range of other types of UK private and public sector organizations to demonstrate further the existence of generic and universal/near universal effective manager and managerial leader behaviors common to both sectors.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The present UK private sector 'ABC' study complements the UK public sector 'replica' study of Hamlin and Cooper (2005) by further demonstrating the benefits to be gained from HRD practitioners and scholars engaging in HRD Professional Partnership research. In particular, it illustrates how relevant research with strong academic credentials can become, as Jacobs (1997) claims, an essential counterpart to HRD practice, and how HRD practitioners can advance their professional practice through organizationally grounded 'backyard research' as advocated by Swanson (1997). Furthermore, it addresses the call of the ASTD for HRD practitioners and scholars to work in partnership on workplace learning and performance projects. The authors strongly commend the benefits of HRD Professional Partnership research to other HRD practitioners and HRD scholars.

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