

## *Chapter Two*

# **The Different Roles of Public Managers**

The last chapter focused on the organizational environments in which managers work and on how these environments affect the organizational cultures. In this chapter, we turn our attention to how the organizational differences shape individual managers.

The first question addressed is: who are the managers in these agencies? Do differences in agency mission and culture affect the kinds of people hired or the career paths they follow?

The second major set of questions concerns what I call role conflict and role definition. I am looking here at the relationship between managers' backgrounds and their behavior in their managerial positions. First, I turn to the specific challenges posed for technical specialists who are promoted into management positions but who, in many cases, must continue to play their technical roles. I explore two variants of this role conflict: the worker-manager and the pseudo-supervisor.

Finally, I examine how managers conceptualize the management role, given their backgrounds and the role conflicts they experience. This analysis builds on the competing values model introduced in Chapter One.

### **Who Manages?**

The kinds of people hired by an organization depend in part on its mission. This is clearly true of the four organizations in our study. Let us consider, for example, educational background.

At three of the four agencies, the most common educational

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background is technical, reflecting the specific nature of the agencies' work. In the Navy, the most common degree was engineering, mostly at the B.S. level, but with several M.S. and Ph.D. degrees, mostly in scientific fields. At APHIS, most of the managers in the Veterinary Services (VS) had degrees in veterinary medicine, while most other supervisors had either B.A. or B.S. degrees, often in such fields as plant pathology. There were only a few with master's or Ph.D. degrees. EPA had the highest education level of the agencies in the study; about a third of the managers at headquarters had Ph.D. degrees and almost as many had master's degrees, usually in scientific fields, but a few were lawyers or had M.B.A. or M.P.A. degrees. I did not ask what schools people had attended, but at EPA they often volunteered their school, and many had attended prestigious colleges and universities such as Harvard, Princeton, and Johns Hopkins.

While the specific backgrounds in these three organizations differ, what they have in common is the predominance of technical training. In contrast, the work of FCS is less technical, and this is reflected in the wide variety of educational backgrounds of its managers. Only a handful had degrees in food-related fields; most had B.A. or B.S. degrees in the humanities or social sciences.

Another pattern that emerges across the four agencies is that educational levels are generally higher at headquarters than at the field and regional level, where fewer people have advanced degrees, and more have only a high school education. For example, at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, about half the white-collar supervisors I interviewed had B.S. degrees, and half had only a high school diploma (though frequently supplemented with additional training).

What are the effects of these different educational backgrounds? Does it matter, in terms of management style, whether an individual was trained as an electrical engineer, a lawyer, a veterinarian, or a social worker? It is obvious, both to the managers and to the people who work with them (such as the personnel staff), that each

profession attracts a particular type of person and that this may affect how they manage. A recurring issue is how well technical training prepares someone to move into management. For example, several people at Portsmouth discussed the problems engineers have in managing people, and some questioned whether engineering was the best background for management. At APHIS, people raised similar concerns about veterinarians, who are well-trained in veterinary medicine but not necessarily in management.

One of the most striking findings is how few managers had formal training in a program designed to prepare them for management, such as an M.B.A. or M.P.A. program. Almost all had either technical training in a field such as engineering or veterinary medicine, or (particularly at FCS) a bachelor's degree. In other words, the vast majority had not set out at an early age to become managers. Rather, most moved into management from a base in the technical work of the agency. We turn in the next section to a consideration of their actual career paths.

### Growing Your Own Versus Lateral Entry

Managers' backgrounds differ not just in terms of their education but also in the career paths that led them into management. There is a traditional image of how one gets ahead in government: you come in at the bottom and work your way up the ladder, usually in the same agency and often within one narrow division of the agency that makes use of your technical specialty. This pattern came under some attack in the late seventies, when the federal government was considering civil service reform. The traditional path was criticized for producing managers with narrow technical perspectives who lacked the breadth of vision to see how policy issues affected the government as a whole (Ban, Goldenberg, and Marzotto, 1982a). Thus, one of the original goals of the Senior Executive Service (SES) was to create an elite cadre of top-level managers who had formal training in management through

executive development programs and could move easily from one assignment to another, even across agency lines. (Huddleston, 1992, has a thoughtful discussion of this and the other, often contradictory, goals of the SES.)

Have agencies moved away from the traditional model of "growing their own"? It depends on which agency you look at, for this is another area where organizational culture plays a role. As we saw in Chapter One, the competing values model, as applied to organizations, has a dimension showing the extent to which the organization has an internal or an external focus. We might expect agencies with a stronger external focus to be more likely to hire people from outside the organization—particularly at higher levels—both because there is more interaction with potential employees in other organizations and because knowledge of the external environment is valued.

And in fact, there are marked differences in the extent to which agencies grow their own versus bringing in experienced people. EPA, with its strong adhocracy culture (see Chapter One), is clearly the most permeable organization of those studied; on average, managers at EPA headquarters had the fewest years in their agency (under twelve) than any other group. The majority of EPA managers I interviewed, both at headquarters and in the region, entered with significant prior work experience, most commonly in the private sector. Many had been employed by contractors or consulting firms that did business with EPA; others came from universities and nonprofit organizations, as well as from other federal agencies.

While the tight clan culture at FCS has an internal focus, programs such as food stamps are actually administered at a state level, so FCS employees work closely with their state counterparts. This is reflected in hiring patterns; people typically enter FCS from organizations with similar social service missions, mainly other federal agencies and state government, bringing both transferable skills and familiarity with FCS programs. But the severe cutbacks suffered by FCS in recent years have produced a gradually shrinking workforce

rather than an expanding one. Thus, the majority of employees at managerial levels have been at the agency for many years—on average, about fifteen to sixteen.

Although the Navy is trying to move its culture toward more external, market-oriented values, this is not yet reflected in the backgrounds of its managers. In the Navy, the old traditions still live: most of the current crop of managers at headquarters came in either directly from school or from the active-duty military. About a third came from private industry, but usually fairly early in their careers. Only one person I interviewed came to the Navy from another agency. Similarly, at Portsmouth, most people came in directly from school or from active military duty, with small numbers moving from other shipyards or from private industry. Most managers had put in long careers with the Navy: at headquarters, the average was more than twenty years; at Portsmouth, about seventeen. The Navy's recruitment patterns—which are difficult to change during a period of layoffs—make for a tightly knit organization that is somewhat insular and that values stability.

APHIS, too, tends to fall at the internal end of the internal-external dimension in the competing values model. Whether APHIS is seen as hiring from outside depends on which organizational lines are considered important. Most APHIS managers moved to the agency from somewhere else at some point in their career, but almost half came from other parts of the Department of Agriculture. Should such moves be considered simply as transfers within a single agency? Not if the definitions of organizational identity are drawn narrowly. At least one person told me of hiring new staff from "outside," then mentioned another part of the Department of Agriculture.

The career paths at APHIS reflect the attempt to change the organizational culture via reorganization. In the field, most managers interviewed had served long careers; the average was over twenty years. But at headquarters, the picture was more complex. As we saw in Chapter One, the agency reorganized in the late

1980s and hired several senior managers from outside APHIS to head its new organizations—and, presumably, to spearhead cultural change. The resulting pattern was bimodal: either managers had worked for many years at APHIS or they had been there only two or three years. Not only was there an influx of new blood at high levels, but many of the old-line managers were moved to new positions. Consequently, at APHIS headquarters, the average time managers had been in their current positions was less than three years, lower than anyplace else in the study, while in the field, APHIS managers had been in their current positions, on average, for eleven years, the longest of any organization studied.

Does it matter whether a manager has spent his or her entire working life in an organization or has come in from outside? There are pluses and minuses in each case. On the one hand, the person who has been grown from inside probably has a strong sense of organizational loyalty and has been well-socialized into the organization's norms and culture. The Navy managers, for example, talked about managing "the Navy way." And at FCS, the fact that many of the current management had entered the agency in its early days and worked their way up produced a very close-knit group that saw FCS as being "like a family."

On the other hand, managers with more diverse backgrounds give the organization a broader perspective and bring with them experience of how things are done elsewhere. They may, for example, be familiar with new management tools such as Total Quality Management. EPA employed a number of managers who had private sector experience, which provided a useful reference point, though not always in the way many would expect. One of the funniest moments in a group interview came when an EPA manager who had come in from a corporation surprised and shocked his peers by telling them that he liked working in the government because it was so much *easier* to fire incompetent employees—clearly not what they expected to hear.

These recruitment and promotion patterns reflect the relative

values the organizations assign to stability and change. Stability can foster close working relationships and in-depth knowledge of the technical work of the agency, but it can also lead to stagnation or to bitterness about lack of opportunities for advancement. Mobility within the agency can be a symptom of institutional instability, but it can also be a sign of rapid progress up the career ladder or of opportunities for lateral movement.

The critical question is: what are the effects of these various patterns of recruitment on individual management style? We have seen, in the previous chapter, that the four organizations have very different missions, structures, and cultures. Partly as a consequence, they hire distinct kinds of people, who follow quite different career paths. Does this variation in environment and background have an impact on how people define their roles as managers? Or do the similarities in the day-to-day work of management create a uniformity of approach that transcends organizations? The answer to both questions is yes. We start by looking at some of the similarities and then turn to the differences between agencies and between cultures.

### **Common Problems in the Transition to Management**

As we have seen above, while there are differences both in the backgrounds people bring to their agencies and in their career paths, there are also some overarching similarities. Most people came into government as technical experts and moved up the technical ladder inside their agency before moving into a management position. Most had technical educations, and few had previous management experience before joining the agency. Are the people selected for management suited to it, and does their agency adequately prepare them to be effective managers?

Many of my interviewees felt their agency was not selecting the right people for promotion or adequately helping them make the transition to management. Reading over the notes from the interviews is like hearing an extended "nature" versus "nurture" debate.

A sizable number of respondents felt that good management can be learned, but they faulted their agencies for giving managers inadequate training. Some saw this as a general problem. For example, an EPA manager told me: "There might have been a little bit more aggressive training of managers. A lot of what goes on appears to be training by pushing them into the deep end of the pool. I think it should be in two parts. It should be the theory—how to deal with problem employees, to allocate assignments. Then there's the nitty-gritty nuts and bolts. What's in the union contract? What can you ask in interviews? What is sexual harassment?"

Many others addressed the issue in much more personal terms. Several told me that they had had to wait a year or more to get any supervisory training or that they had signed up for a course but it had been canceled. One first-line supervisor in the Navy blamed crisis management for his difficulty in receiving training; he told me that just the day before the interview, he had been supposed to attend a course, but had been yanked out to deal with urgent requests for information. He saw this as a reflection on the organization's management style, but it also clearly reflects the value placed on training.

Although coverage is uneven, every agency in this study does provide formal training for new supervisors. And on the basis of my interviews, it would appear that one positive effect of the creation of the SES was to focus more attention and resources on training for people at the top. But several interviewees mentioned that midlevel managers are falling through the cracks. A senior executive at APHIS highlighted this problem: "We are deficient on midlevel management training. We train them originally, and then we put them out and say, 'By golly, you're trained now, you go out and do your thing.' And we never come back and try to retrain them and see how well they're doing. We train new entry levels, and we train for technical things, but we very rarely do the management training."

The dearth of adequate training means that many people have



to learn how to manage informally, on the job. None of the supervisors mentioned any formal on-the-job training or mentoring relationships. It is clear that, in the absence of such formal training, people are likely to model their behavior on what they see around them, which may or may not be a positive example. As a supervisor at the Portsmouth shipyard explained, "For individual managers, [management style] all depends on how you have come up through the ranks, who was your supervisor, and then whether it's a person who leads by example and is a team player or 'you're going to do it my way.'" His perception was that the latter was still the more typical approach, perhaps reflecting the persistence of the hierarchy culture at Portsmouth.

The other danger, of course, is that new supervisors, as well as more experienced ones, never really get a firm grasp on the complex personnel system. Even after years, it may remain something of a mystery to a manager. Many managers would agree with a midlevel manager at FCS regional office who told me that the formal civil service system was never covered in his training and that he had had to pick it up on the job. He concluded, "I've been in government for twenty-three years, and I still don't understand the classification system. I've had several classifiers explain to me how they do it, and each one does it differently."

One might speculate whether the problem here is adequate training of management or adequate training of classifiers, but he is not alone in feeling that there is insufficient instruction in the formal aspects of the civil service.

However, the fault lies not only with the agencies. Managers themselves told me about offers of training that were deferred, usually because of the press of time. Further, even the best of training does not always "take," particularly if the skills learned are not used frequently, as one Navy SES member pointed out: "I'm not sure what authority I have. . . . I've taken courses. I forget the information. One way or another, I've accomplished what I need to accomplish."

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While the “nurture” crowd focused on training, there was also a sizable group that emphasized “nature”—that is, a person’s talents and skills prior to promotion. They criticized the tendency to promote employees into management primarily on the basis of technical expertise, and they expressed concern about inadequate screening for managerial experience or potential. Managers in several agencies agreed with the APHIS supervisor who felt that the problem was not just adequate training. As he put it, “When you become a supervisor, you’re pretty much set in your lifetime patterns. We need to be more careful in assessing the supervisory potential of people prior to selecting them.”

As numerous interviewees pointed out, good technical people do not always make good managers. Or in the pithy language of an EPA regional manager, “[In the past,] we had a supervisory cadre of the best engineers in the region, and some of them couldn’t manage a lemonade stand.”

Why then do agencies keep promoting their best technical staff? I heard two explanations. A few people said it reflected the fact that management was not really valued in the organization. More frequently, the explanation was tied to the classification system: if someone is at the top of the technical ladder, the only way to get a promotion is to move into management. We will look in more detail at some of the dysfunctional aspects of the classification system in Chapter Six. Here, the important issue is why people are moved into management and whether they are both suited for management and motivated to be managers or merely want the accompanying pay raise. Of course, some of these individuals adjust to the new role and find satisfaction in it. But too many made it clear that there was some degree of mismatch.

Particularly revealing were several interviews in which supervisors candidly told me that they disliked their role. For example, an EPA respondent who was still listed officially as a supervisor—and hence made it onto the list from which I sampled—had recently asked to step down from a supervisory position. He

explained: "I really found that I did not like supervising, and that meant that I was not particularly good at it. I felt I was acting like a grad school professor—'Here's your assignment. If you can do it, fine. If not, that's too bad.' It worked well when they were self-motivated but not when they weren't or weren't honest. I found giving orders difficult."

To confront the problem of mismatch by seeking a transfer takes guts. More frequently, the disgruntled manager suffers through, unwilling to give up the higher pay. The largest group of unhappy supervisors I encountered was at FCS headquarters, where close to a third of those interviewed expressed dissatisfaction. One told me his goal as a supervisor was to retire and said, "I'm probably not a great manager. I'm more of a doer than a manager." A particularly disaffected first-line supervisor said: "What scares me is I've got another twenty years to go [before retirement] and I'm not sure I can make it. I definitely want out of supervision if I can get out of it."

Obviously, most cases of mismatch are not as serious as this one. But a survey of first-line supervisors in the Department of the Army is particularly telling; it reported that fully a quarter of respondents said that they would rather not be a supervisor (U.S. Army, 1985).

Needless to say, not all technical experts lack a talent for supervision. And supervisors do need to have the technical grounding to understand the work their staffs are doing (although there is a debate both in the literature and among my respondents about the managerial levels at which this remains true). But aside from the problem of extreme lack of fit, the preponderance of technical managers leads to two forms of organizational pathology. One is what I term the *worker-manager*, and the other, more severe, problem is the *pseudo-supervisor*. Let us look at each in turn.

### ***The Worker-Manager: Leading and Doing***

The worker-manager is usually (but not always) a first-line supervisor. He or she manages a staff but at the same time remains

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responsible for hands-on technical work. This happens, in many cases, because of cutbacks and staff shortages. The phenomenon was mentioned frequently at FCS; one midlevel manager stated that the problem was "not having enough staff in general to get the work done that's demanded. The managers, therefore, have to do the staff work."

But the blame falls not just on the organizations. Managers who have spent their careers developing technical expertise still identify themselves primarily as technical experts and get their greatest satisfaction from technical work. One of the most telling questions was, "What do you like best about your job?" Particularly at the more technical sites (EPA, APHIS, and Navy), I repeatedly received responses like the following:

I'm most comfortable with dealing with the technical aspects of our program [APHIS].

What I like best is I have my own projects, and I like to do them by myself [Navy].

I guess the technical portions of the job are the most enjoyable. After all, that was my background [Navy].

These managers do not want to let go of the technical work. One might question how well they can delegate to staff, and indeed, some recognize this as a problem. But the central issue is simply that in the press of a busy day, time spent in technical work may mean less time spent in managing people. This fact is by no means lost on managers themselves. While the problem of worker-managers was mentioned in every agency, it came up most frequently at FCS (both at headquarters and at the regional office) and at EPA headquarters. At both agencies, managers expressed considerable frustration at being pulled in two directions.

One EPA supervisor estimated that first-line supervisors "probably spend 70 percent of their time doing staff work." Another said

there was "just . . . no one to delegate it to. You can't be a branch or section chief. You don't have the time to spend."

This sense of frustration was also heard at the Food and Consumer Service: "It's been my experience, although I think it's governmentwide, that people aren't rewarded for good supervision. They're expected to be good technical people first. Maybe it's because we're a crisis-oriented organization, or because most of us come up from technical positions. But we're all trying to do too much, and if we have to make a choice, it usually falls on the product, not the people."

These are just a sample of numerous comments on this subject. Several people told specific stories of giving difficult supervisory tasks short shrift because of the pressure of being a worker-manager. In particular, they were sometimes unwilling to take the time to deal with a problem employee (a subject to which we return in some detail in Chapter Five).

### *The Pseudo-Supervisor*

The problem is exacerbated when the supervisor is actually a pseudo-supervisor. We have seen above that technical people are sometimes promoted to supervisory positions in order to give them a raise and to help retain them. In the extreme, this method of circumventing the limits of the classification system leads to the assignment of sham supervisory jobs, carrying minimal supervisory authority; in fact, these "supervisors" are still working primarily as technical specialists. In such cases, the real authority remains with the person who is formally the second-level supervisor. One second-level Navy supervisor was quite frank about the arrangement: "There are eight people on the staff. We are broken down into branches, but that's only a formality. To get better grade levels, we've broken it into branches. Officially, there are branch heads. They do the performance appraisals, but they minimally act as supervisors."

Not all second-level supervisors are so open about the process, but many first-level supervisors complain that authority is held at too high a level, that they have little real authority, or that they are unsure what authority they do have.

Understanding that some first-line supervisors are really pseudo-supervisors helps make sense of the striking findings in a recent Office of Personnel Management (OPM) report on delegation of personnel management authority. The report found that the amount of personnel authority delegated to first-level supervisors varied dramatically among government installations, and that "there is no 'standard' set of personnel authorities formally delegated to first-level supervisors in the Federal Government" (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 1992b, p. 13). In a number of cases, first-line supervisors had "recommending authority only." While the more basic supervisory functions, such as approving sick leave or annual leave or determining training needs were more apt to be delegated, few installations let first-line supervisors make decisions in such functions as reassigning employees, taking disciplinary actions, making performance awards, and classifying positions (p. 17).

Even more notable was the OPM finding that when supervisors were formally delegated the authority, many did not believe they could actually exercise it. In many cases, the differences between the formal delegations and first-line supervisors' perceptions of their actual authority were stark. For example, 60 percent of the installations reported that supervisors had the authority to certify "position descriptions," but less than 20 percent of supervisors perceived that they had that authority (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 1992b, figs. 6, 7; pp. 20-21). The report concludes that "although they may have formal authority to take certain actions, many supervisors see themselves in a recommending role rather than a deciding role" (p. 22). This suggests that despite formal delegations, a significant amount of control is exercised by higher-level management or the personnel office, and that installations are not

allowing supervisors and managers to manage resources with the degree of autonomy portrayed in their written guidance.

OPM gives a number of explanations for the discrepancy between managers' formal authority and their perceptions of their actual authority. It talks, for example, about "tighter controls" being "placed on inexperienced or poorly performing managers or supervisors" (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 1992b, p. 26). But it does not go so far as to explore the possibility that some of the people interviewed might be pseudo-supervisors and that second-level managers have intentionally retained authority because their subordinates are supervisors in name only.

A study of first-line supervisors' competence, conducted by the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) had very similar findings. They, too, found a pattern of promoting the best technical employees to supervisory positions. And they, too, found that first-line supervisors were given very limited authority:

Many Federal organizations do not delegate much authority to first-line supervisors to make decisions and take actions. This leaves supervisors out in the trenches with very little authority to do the things that they deem necessary for the effective and efficient operation of the work unit. Concomitant with a lack of authority, some first-line supervisors also feel that their supervisors are watching over them very closely, and making decisions that the first-line supervisors themselves should be making. (U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 1992a, p. 27)

Another MSPB study puts the onus on managers themselves and reports that "when we asked managers what personnel authorities they had, they reported astonishingly few, when in actuality they had many." The study reports further that "there was not much agreement or clarity about the manager's role. . . . When 32 percent of managers responded that they did not have the authority to initiate a personnel action, a question arises as to whether such

managers should even be classed (and paid) as supervisors (U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 1993, p. 33).

*The Consequences of Worker-Managers  
and Pseudo-Supervisors*

What difference does it make, for individuals or organizations, if managers are also workers or if supervisors are closer to pseudo-supervisors? First, neither bureaupathology can be blamed solely on poor managers; both are systemic problems. For example, while MSPB (U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 1993) is critical of managers who do not fully accept the responsibilities of management, we may discern (reading between the lines) at least some cases where authority may be conferred on paper but in reality is held at a higher level—in short, cases of pseudo-supervisors. Similarly, while some managers have trouble letting go of their technical work, others feel forced to continue to do it because of staffing shortages and recognize that the management side of their job suffers as a result.

Managing well is a demanding job in and of itself. Combining two jobs puts a heavy, sometimes an impossible, demand on worker-managers. In fact, research done at the University of Michigan found that “effective leaders did not spend their time and effort doing the same kind of work as their subordinates. Instead, effective leaders concentrated on supervisory functions, such as planning and scheduling the work, coordinating subordinate activities, and providing necessary supplies, equipment, or technical assistance” (Yukl, 1981, p. 114).

The problems caused by worker-managers are especially severe in the public sector, where managers have to work within the complex constraints of the personnel, budget, and procurement systems. In such an environment, the most severe constraint many managers face, particularly if they are worker-managers, is the press of time. As we shall see in later chapters, this affects the coping



strategies they develop for working within the constraints of the formal systems.

The phenomenon of pseudo-supervisors may create even greater problems. The studies cited here are a warning that in many cases, second-level supervisors are unwilling to give up authority to their subordinates, leaving first-line supervisors unsure of their authority and unwilling to take risks. While my discussion has focused on first-line supervision—where these problems are most acute—there are indications in the interviews that agency leaders expect even highly placed executives to continue to be hands-on technical experts. Furthermore, even midlevel and upper-level managers sometimes do not have full authority delegated to them; they have to go up one level or more for review of personnel actions and certainly of related budget actions. Lack of time is bad enough, but lack of authority can paralyze lower-level supervisors or lead them to pass the buck when confronted by difficult challenges. In the worst scenario, it is not clear just where authority (or responsibility) really lies, and the hard problems, such as dealing with problem employees, get shuffled back and forth or are simply ignored.

### Organizational Culture and Management Roles

We have been looking at a problem common to all agencies and to all managers: how do people make the transition to management? In particular, how are they selected and trained, and how much authority do their superiors give them? While there are common elements in these transitions, it is clear that individuals learn management skills, and management styles, within an organizational context.

Management is a complex task, involving a number of different functions. How a manager approaches the task of managing people will depend, to some extent, on how he or she weighs the importance of different functions. These weights are, at least in part, situationally determined. Managers learn by watching those who

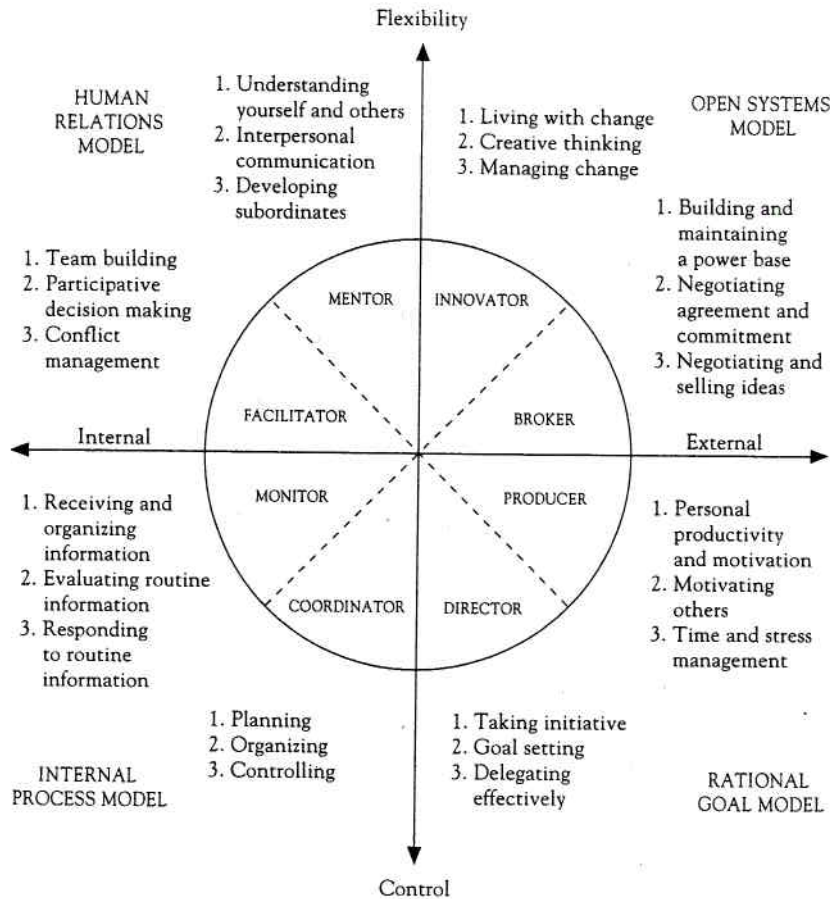
manage them and seeing "how things are done" in their organization. Their decisions are also based on incentive structures, on what is valued in their organizations. As a result, we can expect some differences in how managers define their roles to reflect varying organizational values.

There have been a number of attempts to catalogue the functions of management, going back to the early days of public administration (see, for example, Gulick and Urwick, [1937] 1973). More contemporary scholars, such as Katz (1955) and Mintzberg (1973), have developed a variety of schemas for thinking about management functions. The competing values approach to analyzing managerial functions is particularly useful for several reasons. First, it facilitates movement between an organizational level of analysis and a focus on individual managers. Second, at both levels, the competing values model highlights the fact that the functions performed by managers reflect values that, at least on the surface, are in conflict with each other: stability and change, internal and external focus, control and flexibility. The model's emphasis on conflicting values provides a nonjudgmental basis for the conceptualization of management; it helps us understand that there are many valid ways to define the management role.

Figure 2.1 is a graphic representation of the model. The axes of the model when it is applied to individuals are the same as those for organizations: internal versus external focus on the horizontal axis, and control versus flexibility on the vertical axis. The resulting quadrants are described in terms derived from classic management theories: the internal process model, the rational goal model, the human relations model, and the open systems model. Each quadrant includes two specific management roles, such as mentor and group facilitator within the human relations quadrant. The parallels between these models describing individual behavior and the quadrants describing organizational cultures presented in Chapter One are obvious.

The competing values model has been used extensively in

Figure 2.1. Competing Values Model of Managerial Roles.



Source: Adapted from Faerman, Quinn, Thompson, and McGrath, 1990, p. 17. Used with permission.

studying management, both in the public and the private sectors. (See, for example, Quinn, Faerman, Thompson, and McGrath, 1990; Quinn, 1984; Giek and Lees, 1993). Much of the previous empirical work has relied on an extensive closed-ended questionnaire covering the kinds of tasks that fall within each of the eight roles. One recent exception is the research by DiPadova and

Faerman (1993), which utilized individual and small-group interviews. For this analysis, I used two questions from my individual interviews with managers: "From a management perspective, what are the most important parts of your job?" and, "What do you like most and least about your job?" What people liked least turned out to be mainly things external to themselves, such as inadequate resources. But combining what they thought was important and what they liked best (which were strongly related but not identical) provided a fairly good picture of how they defined their management role. Almost all their responses fell within one or more of the four quadrants of the competing values model. (Those that did not pertained mainly to technical, nonmanagerial work, which—as we saw—remains an important part of some managers' responsibilities.) Figure 2.2 presents a more detailed description of the coding.

In looking at how managers define their roles, there are three key questions. First, how broadly do they see those roles? Second, do definitions vary from agency to agency, and if so, are they congruent with managers' perceptions of their agency's culture? And finally, do roles vary according to the hierarchical level at which a manager is working? If so, does this division of labor differ from one agency to another?

### *The Scope of the Management Role*

Ideally, managers recognize the importance of the full range of management functions. However, in the present study, most managers spontaneously mentioned only one or two of the quadrants in the competing values model when describing their jobs, and very few mentioned all four. Previous research has shown that managers typically have at least one quadrant in which they are weak (Quinn, 1988). Managers who view their roles too narrowly may ignore, or perform poorly, essential job functions.

Further, as Table 2.1 shows, the overall pattern differs significantly by organizational level. Almost a third of first-line supervi-

Figure 2.2. Coding of Managerial Responses.

<p><b>HUMAN RELATIONS (HR)</b></p> <p><i>Mentor:</i> Focus on working with individual employees—coaching, training, employee development. Includes performance appraisal, discipline.</p> <p><i>Group facilitator:</i> Focus on working with groups. Emphasis on commitment, motivation, group morale.</p>	<p><b>OPEN SYSTEMS (OS)</b></p> <p><i>Innovator:</i> Focus on creative approaches, being at cutting edge, managing change, involvement in broad policy issues.</p> <p><i>Broker:</i> Focus on acquiring resources and on external interactions—with clients, constituents, other agencies, Congress.</p>
<p><b>INTERNAL PROCESS (IP)</b></p> <p><i>Monitor and coordinator:</i> Focus on routinization, setting up SOPs, monitoring performance, internal communication; setting work priorities, scheduling work, distributing resources, handling routine paperwork.</p>	<p><b>RATIONAL GOAL (RG)</b></p> <p><i>Producer and director:</i> Focus on getting the job done, productivity, output, setting clear goals; accomplishing technical work through others; work planning.</p>

Note: Technical nonsupervisory work (that is, staff work personally performed by a supervisor or manager) is not coded here.

sors mentioned only one quadrant as a central part of their role, compared with less than 20 percent of higher-level supervisors. At the other end of the continuum, higher-level supervisors were much more likely to mention issues in three or four quadrants than the first-line supervisors. This may reflect the reality of their differing worlds. Second-level and higher supervisors may, indeed, be

called on to perform a more varied range of functions than those at lower levels.

However, DiPadova and Faerman (1993) argue that although there were differences in managerial behavior across organizational levels, managers at all levels actually performed functions that related to all four quadrants. The difference between our findings may reflect different research methods, or it may be that higher-level managers, with more experience, are more articulate when discussing the complexities of the managerial role. But the difference in findings may also reflect the fact that agencies are not all alike in the emphases they place on the various managerial functions or in the divisions of labor that have evolved within their organizations.

#### *Competing Values in Managerial Roles and Agency Cultures*

Do managers in different agencies define their roles differently? If so, do these definitions reflect the agencies' cultures? The answer to the first question is a resounding yes. Managers' responses varied,

Table 2.1. Complexity of the Managerial Role.

Number of Quadrants Mentioned	Supervisory Level			
	First Level (N = 54)		Second Level and Up (N = 58)	
1	17	(31%)	11	(19%)
2	27	(50)	24	(41)
3	7	(13)	18	(31)
4	3	(5)	5	(9)
Mean	1.9		2.3	

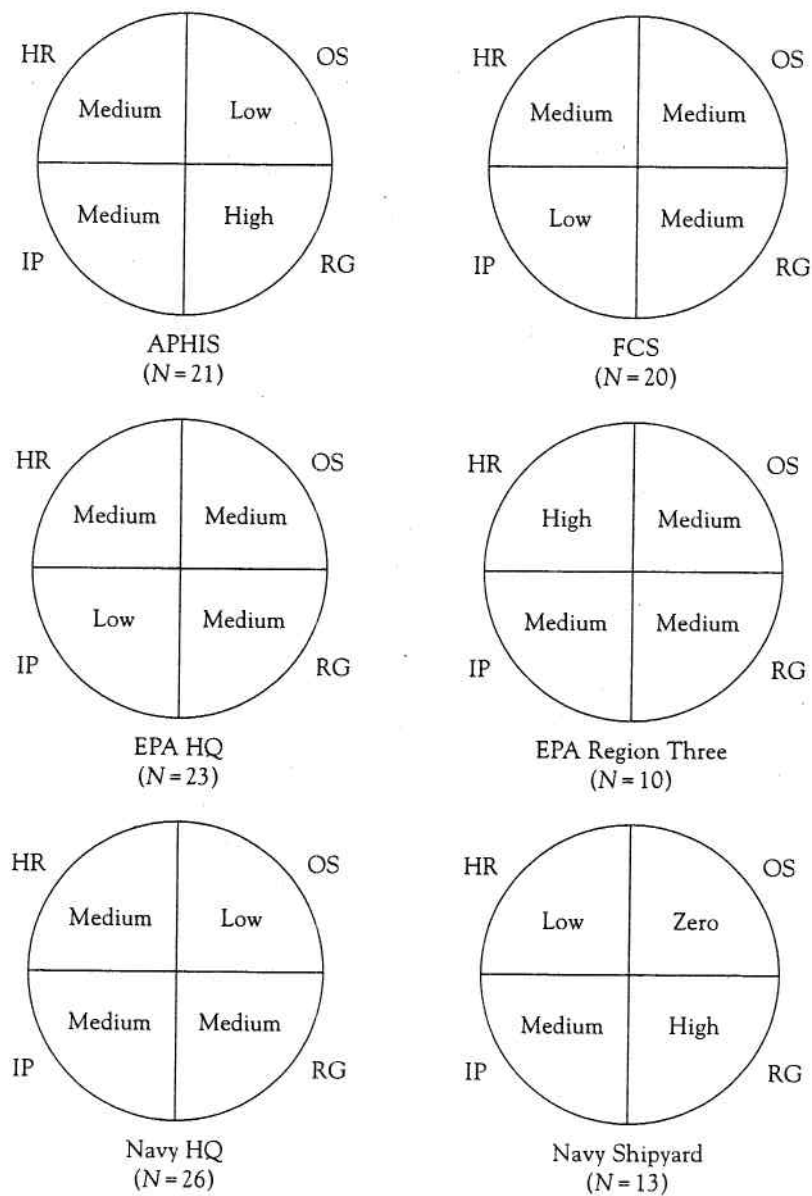
sometimes dramatically, across agencies. The relation between individual managerial behavior and organizational culture is more complex. Figure 2.3 shows the responses from each agency in the four competing values quadrants. For the Navy and EPA, the responses from headquarters and the field site have been separated out, both because the numbers were large enough to permit separate analysis and because, in each agency, headquarters and field showed clear differences. At both of the Department of Agriculture sites, FCS and APHIS, headquarters and field responses have been combined, as they showed quite similar patterns. Quadrants mentioned by two-thirds or more of respondents in an agency were labeled "high," those mentioned by at least one-third were labeled "medium," and those mentioned by fewer than one-third were labeled "low."

The most striking overall finding is that in only three sites was there a single dominant quadrant; in the others, responses were more evenly divided among three of the four quadrants (although not the same three). Let us look first at the cases where one quadrant predominated.

At two sites, the Navy shipyard and APHIS, the most frequently mentioned management functions fell in the rational goal quadrant; they included getting the work done, stressing productivity and output, and meeting deadlines. It is not surprising to find that this is how managers at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard see their job. The shipyard is a large, production-oriented organization, with large numbers of blue-collar workers. It combines a lot of routine work with high-level technical tasks, all performed under tight deadlines. Most managers at the shipyard have an engineering background. Production aspects dominate, with some emphasis also placed on the internal process quadrant, which includes monitoring performance, setting work priorities, and establishing or following "standard operating procedures" (SOPs).

There was a high level of agreement among Portsmouth people about what was important. Many of them echoed the individual who said that the most important thing was "to produce a quality

Figure 2.3. Managerial Role Definitions Using the Competing Values Model.



Key: HR = human relations model; OS = open systems model; IP = internal process model; RG = rational goal model.



product, on time, and either on or under costs." Portsmouth managers tend to be results-oriented and to like technical problem-solving. They only infrequently mentioned human relations tasks as important parts of their job, and none of them saw the more external, entrepreneurial, and innovative open systems functions as either central or enjoyable.

This picture, based on the responses of managers in individual interviews, fits well with the image of the organization's culture gleaned from responses in group interviews. As we saw in Chapter One, the external pressure to compete in order to survive was driving the traditional hierarchical culture of the Navy to move more toward a market culture. This culture is clearly reflected in how managers define their jobs.

The other organization with a strong focus on the rational goal quadrant was APHIS. There, too, at least two-thirds of those interviewed stressed the functions of that quadrant, with its focus on the producer and director roles. But APHIS managers were more balanced than those at Portsmouth; they rated medium on both the internal process and human relations models and low only on the external, entrepreneurial roles of the open systems quadrant. Again, these are people with technical backgrounds. Some are directing research, others are supervising the employees who work in the field. Many are worker-managers and still see themselves as technical experts first. Several mentioned planning and developing a strategy to approach a problem as parts of the job that were particularly satisfying. Conversely, they are uncomfortable with the functions within the open systems quadrant; they rarely mention them as important or enjoyable, and when asked what they dislike, they often cite the political aspects of the job, including the budgetary process.

The fit at APHIS between individual managers' role definitions and descriptions of the organization's culture is less exact than at Portsmouth. That may be, at least in part, because managers had a less clear-cut sense of overall APHIS-wide cultural values. The

agency made a conscious attempt to change the organizational culture to support the value of innovation, but it does not appear to have taken hold; managers' perceptions of their roles, particularly their dislike of the functions within the open systems quadrant, are consonant with a rather traditional bureaucratic culture.

In only one of the organizations I studied did managers place greatest emphasis on the human relations aspect of their jobs: the EPA's Region Three. This is in line with its strong clan culture, as well as with the priorities set by its top leadership, which has made the management of people a high priority. The bias may also be reflective of an organization that is doing better than most in selecting people on the basis of management potential and not just on technical skills. The emphasis on the human relations quadrant came through clearly in the interviews. For example, this is how one second-level manager responded when I asked her what the most important part of her job was: "It would be, I think, leading people. Motivating them. Making sure that they have good, interesting, challenging work. Creating an environment that allows them to do their best work."

At the same time as EPA regional managers emphasized the human relations quadrant, they were not neglecting the other parts of their job. In fact, they present a very balanced profile; they are the only group that rated at least medium on all four quadrants.

In the remaining three sites, no one aspect of the job dominated. Rather, the managers' responses were more widely dispersed across three of the four quadrants. In many ways, the more balanced pattern found in these three organizations is a positive finding, particularly if it reflects a more complex approach to the job. But it is interesting to note that at each of these organizations, there was one quadrant that was more neglected. Managers at FCS, EPA headquarters, and Navy headquarters were rated medium on three quadrants and low on a fourth. For both EPA and FCS, the weak quadrant was internal process, which includes coordinating, monitoring, and routine record-keeping. Both organizations had cultures

that valued flexibility more highly than control; FCS exemplified the values of a clan culture and EPA headquarters the values of an adhocracy. Managers at Navy headquarters scored low in the open systems quadrant, which is congruent with cultural values that emphasize hierarchy (the opposite quadrant).

To summarize: Managers do emphasize different parts of their job according to the organizations they work in, and these differences are, to some extent, consistent within organizations. In most cases, there is considerable congruence between the functions that individual managers see as important and their perceptions of their organizations' cultural values.

### *Management Role and Rank*

In some cases, the relatively even distribution of responses for an agency as a whole masks significant differences among subgroups and particularly among supervisors at different levels. As managers move up the ladder from first-line supervisor to middle- or upper-management positions, do their definitions of their managerial roles change? Some people maintain that there is a division of labor, with first-line supervisors focusing more on the internal roles and higher-level managers having more external responsibilities. But others believe that each role applies to all levels of supervision, though the exact nature of the work will change (DiPadova and Faerman, 1993). Further, Faerman and Peters (1991) posit that, as people move up the supervisory ladder, the eight separate roles become less distinct. In comparing managers at different levels, I am therefore interested in two questions. First, are different roles emphasized at different supervisory levels? Second, are there differences in the complexity of the role definitions at different levels of supervision? The simple answer to both questions is yes.

Let us look first at what aspects of their jobs managers stress. Figure 2.4 takes the information in Figure 2.3 and breaks it out by supervisory level. For three of the four organizations, I have made the simplest division: first-line supervisors and everyone else

Figure 2.4. Managerial Role Definitions by Supervisory Level.

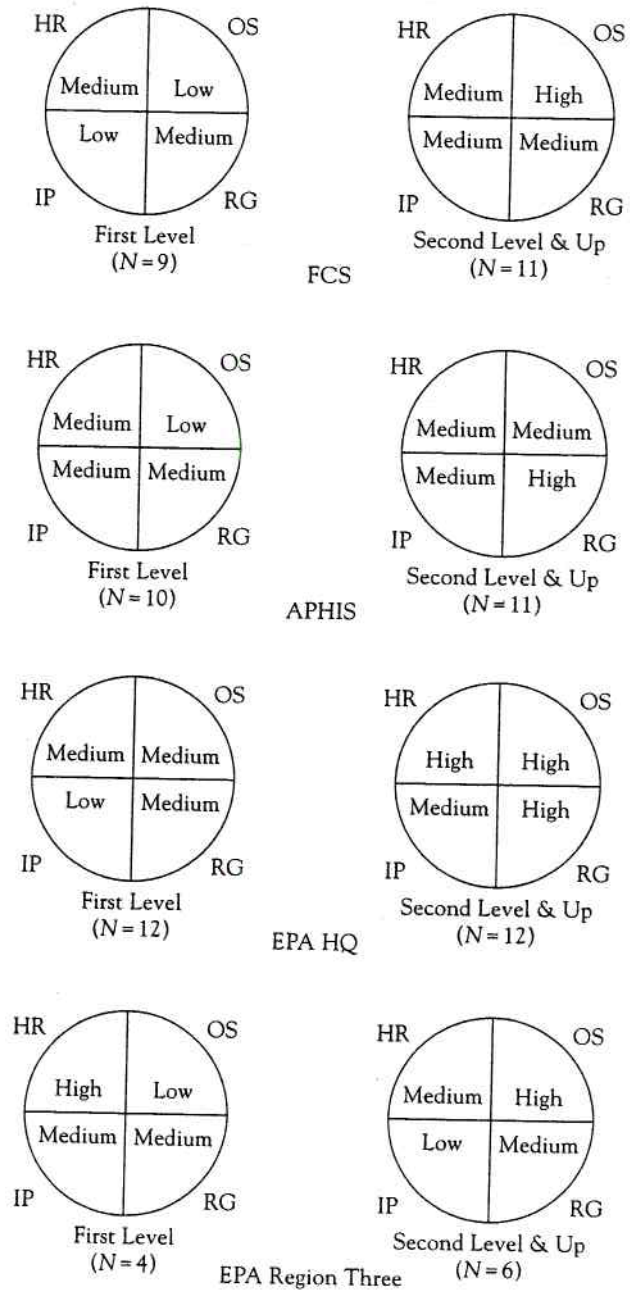
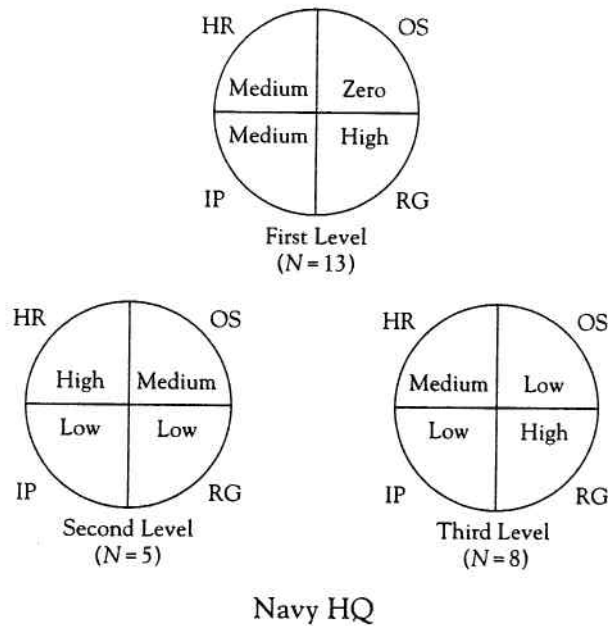


Figure 2.4. Managerial Role Definitions by Supervisory Level, *continued.*



Key: HR = human relations model; OS = open systems model; IP = internal process model; RG = rational goal model.

(second, third, and fourth levels). For the Navy, although the numbers are small, I have divided the sample into three groups: first level, second level, and third level and up. I did so because combining the second- and third-level groups hid an interesting pattern.

One clear finding is that, in almost every organization, the external, entrepreneurial, innovative roles are seen as more central to mid- and upper-level managers than to first-level supervisors. At two sites, the difference is quite dramatic: at both FCS and the EPA region, it is the least-mentioned role by first-level supervisors, but is most frequently mentioned by higher levels. At almost every other site, it comes up more often for mid- and upper-level managers; although in the Navy, it is apparently more important for midlevel managers than for their superiors. The one exception to

this pattern was Portsmouth, where no one at any level mentioned as important anything that fell into the open systems quadrant.

One issue that is particularly germane to this analysis is the emphasis placed on the human relations roles. One might expect these functions to be most central to the job of the first-line supervisor, who has day-to-day responsibility for working with, developing, and appraising staff members. But the only place where this prediction is borne out is the EPA regional office where, it would appear, first-line supervisors take seriously their responsibility to work with and develop their employees; the more senior levels of management leave them alone to do this and thus pay somewhat less attention to human relations issues. At the two Department of Agriculture sites, there is no difference by supervisory level; at both levels, moderately high attention is given to human relations concerns. The most interesting patterns were at EPA and Navy headquarters. At both sites, higher-level managers were *more* likely to see human relations functions as important to their jobs. At EPA, I combined the figures for second- and third-level managers because they did not differ; human relations issues were rated high at both levels. But in the Navy, the second-level supervisors focused more on human relations than did the higher levels.

What is going on here? One possible explanation is that the data reflect the phenomenon of the pseudo-supervisor. Particularly in the Navy, one finds first-level supervisors focusing primarily on technical production issues while their immediate superiors center their efforts on human relations tasks and place very low emphasis on the rational goal quadrant. This makes most sense in a situation where many personnel functions are not delegated to the first level but are actually held by the second-level supervisors.

### Conclusions

Looking at managers' backgrounds and at how they define their roles helps us to understand how they approach the challenges of

management, particularly within the complex environment of the federal system. It also helps us to think more broadly about constraints on managers. Managers usually talk about constraints as forces external to themselves and often blame the formal system, the civil service rules and regulations, for tying their hands. But in fact, the formal system is not the only constraint they face. Their own limits as managers may constrain them even more.

First, we have seen that recruitment and promotion patterns sometimes result in a lack of fit—in managers without aptitude for or interest in management. Some of these individuals grow into the job, but others remain frustrated and unhappy. This frustration is even greater when there is no clear separation between the role of worker and of manager, when a person is trying to do two jobs and feeling that he or she is doing neither well. For worker-managers, the greatest constraint may simply be lack of time to carry out even basic management functions.

Still others are limited by a lack of formal power or authority. Officially, they are supervisors, but actually, they have little power to do anything and are really pseudo-supervisors, afraid to act or to take risks for fear that they will overstep the bounds of their limited authority.

Finally, some managers are limited by overly narrow views of their roles. They may be unaware of the full range of management responsibilities, or they may choose to ignore parts of the job that they find difficult or distasteful, thus limiting their effectiveness.

Are there ways to address these problems and to improve the quality of management in federal agencies? Reform proposals have focused on a variety of issues.

Some have proposed changes in the way the government recruits and trains managers. For example, while a research report by the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (1992a) concluded that "federal first-line supervisors see themselves and are seen by others in the workplace as being of fairly high quality overall" (p. 1), it recommended overhauling federal supervisory selection systems

to do a better job of identifying people who were qualified based on "core supervisory tasks and abilities," rather than basing selection primarily on technical capacity (p. 3).

Observers of the federal government have long been calling for better training of federal managers. (See, for example, National Academy of Public Administration, 1983; National Commission on the Public Service, 1990; U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 1992a, 1994.) New supervisors need training to help them make the transition to management and to give them a broad understanding of their role; lack of training may contribute to the overly narrow role definitions we saw above, particularly among first-line supervisors. But training is also needed—and rarely given—to help people as they move up to higher levels of management and need to rethink their role. Further, as we shall see in later chapters, lack of training in the specific rules and procedures of the civil service makes managers fearful of taking action because they do not feel they really understand the complexities of the formal system. But committing the needed resources to training becomes ever more difficult as budgets are squeezed.

While some reformers have focused on individual managers and their recruitment and training, others have recognized the need to change the incentives built into the classification system. It is these incentives that drive the need to move people into management jobs to justify a pay increase. In fact, some movement in this direction was visible in the four agencies studied. Two agencies, FCS and EPA, were experimenting with nonsupervisory tracks to promotion, which would enable them to reward and retain their top technical staff without forcing such individuals into supervisory positions. This was seen, by and large, as having a positive effect on the quality of supervision. However, it is not an easy solution to sell to some personnel offices. As we shall see in Chapter Five, it goes deeply against the grain of traditional classification values. Indeed, at APHIS, managers were still bemoaning the fact that they have not succeeded in establishing an alternative, nonsupervisory career path.



Revamping training and making changes to fine-tune the requirements for promotion are relatively modest changes. The Clinton administration is engaged in far more drastic attempts at reform. As we saw in the Introduction, the National Performance Review (NPR) recommended deregulation of government and decentralization of responsibility from control agencies and units to line supervisors. The NPR also advocated delayering: reducing what it saw as redundant layers of management. Both reforms were used as justification not just for moving people out of management positions but also for massive cuts, justified by the reduction both in managers and in staff for such oversight functions as budgeting, personnel, procurement, and auditing.

Undoubtedly, if my analysis is correct, the creation of pseudo-supervisors means that there are indeed extra layers of supervision that could be eliminated. But often, these people are actually the best of the technical staff. It would be ironic if past attempts to reward them made them appear redundant and thus placed them in danger of having their positions eliminated today. In fact, the manner in which some agencies are coping with the requirement to reduce the number of management layers may actually compound the problems discussed in this chapter. They are reclassifying their first-level supervisors as "team leaders" but are not significantly changing their job assignments (Ban, 1994b). Since they are still responsible for day-to-day supervision of staff and for performance appraisals, there is a likelihood of even greater confusion about supervisory authority than in the past.

But agencies are not merely relabeling positions. The implementation of the NPR calls for massive cuts, with a goal of reducing the federal workforce by 252,000. This figure was later raised to 272,900, and even broader cuts were proposed following the Republican congressional victories in 1994. As Kettl points out, "About 55 percent of the cuts . . . were to come from the ranks of middle managers, although neither the report nor subsequent discussion made clear exactly who was in the 'middle'" (1994, p. 7). Rather

than deregulate first, then determine actual staffing needs and decide what could be cut and who should be redeployed, the administration began with the cuts. As Kettl put it, "By committing itself to an arbitrary reduction, the NPR eliminated any chance that a serious look at the composition of the work force and the skill mix of government would drive the reductions" (p. 8). The net effect in many agencies has been to further reduce workforces that were already cut to the bone in the Reagan-Bush years, putting even more pressure on managers to do more with less (or, as we shall see later, do less with less) and to stretch themselves too thin by serving as worker-managers.

In short, there have been some modest attempts to improve the quality of management through better selection and training, but the actions taken to flatten and downsize organizations following the 1993 NPR reports may, ironically, add to the constraints on managers rather than reduce them.