

The managerial cube

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ABSTRACT

The article introduces a managerial cube that consists of three continua: The first is management vs. leadership, the second strategic vs. operative, the third responsibility vs. power. The Presidents of Finland are reviewed and classified by means of the cube. Admittedly, the interpretations remain debatable. Nonetheless, it is argued that the cube has potential for further conceptual refinement, empirical measurement and use as an instrument for management development.

Key words: Management, leadership, strategy, operations, responsibility, power.

1. INTRODUCTION

Management and leadership are established concepts in literature. Management as a "counterpoint" of leadership refers to managerial work process: e.g., the functions of management (like planning, coordinating, controlling, etc.) have been discussed at least since the early formulation of Fayol. Leadership is personal influence, infusing followers with vision and energy to carry out the vision. There is a whole host of literature on management (e.g. Megginson, Mosley and Pietri, 1992) and leadership (e.g. Conger & Kanungo, 1988). In this article management and leadership are considered to make up a con-

tinuum (see e.g. Nurmi, 1994, for another conceptualization of the relation between the two concepts).

Many management textbooks argue that top management is in charge of the strategy and it delegates the operations to the middle management and operative personnel. In fact, top management tends to be loaded with much operative routine (Mintzberg, 1973), and, strategies often emerge from middle management or even from the operative personnel (Viitanen, 1993). All managerial tasks have, accordingly, strategic and operative qualities. Strategic qualities purport making the organization fit with its environment, and they include managing and leading changes, transitions and transformations. Operative qualities mean to implement the given strategy – or, in fact, sometimes even working without a strategy. In this article, the two concepts are seen to make up a continuum.

Responsibility vs. power is regarded in this article as the third managerial continuum. Responsibility refers to managerial behaviour to maintain or improve the position of the organization even at the cost of the manager – the cost may be stress, unpleasant decisions, bad publicity and other personal problems. Power-behaviour, in contrast, improves the position of the manager himself even at the cost of his organization. The concepts are disputable (cf. Mintzberg, 1983 and Czarniawska-Joerges, 1988), but intuitively they make sense: these kind of behaviours are visible to any perceptive person in or around the corridors of power. Management literature emphasizes responsibility, and, indeed, it is what management is for. The media have been more interested in managerial power-plays, but even management researchers have started to get interested in power (e.g. Kotter, 1979).

Figure 1 depicts the cube consisting of the three above continua. These kinds of dimensionalizations have been introduced in management literature (Tannenbaum, Weschler & Masarik, 1961, Blake & Mouton, 1964, Reddin, 1970 and Hersey & Blanchard, 1977, are among the best-known). They have, by and large, focussed on leadership and people management, while the

¹ The term 'management' is used here in two meanings. In the title it refers to management in the collective sense or to the people in the managerial echelon of organizations. As one end of the management-leadership continuum the concept refers to managerial work and process. This latter meaning is elaborated in the article. These meanings are well-known in the management literature (e.g. McFarland, 1979, 10), and they are usually easily distinguished on the bases of the context of their usage.

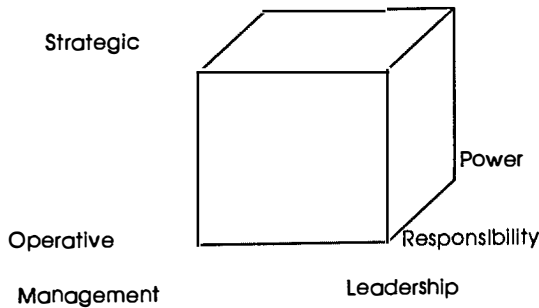


Figure 1. The managerial cube.

present cube replenishes them with business (strategic), work (operative), organization and self-management (responsibility and power).

In the following the cube is applied to the Presidents of Finland. The concepts of the cube derive from business economics: admittedly, political and business management make a difference. The Presidential material has some merits for the debut of the cube, however, the most obvious of them being its visibility, publicity and even familiarity. It belongs to the collective consciousness of the nation and its people.

The cube simplifies, even oversimplifies, the many aspects of the work of the Presidents. The material is most susceptible to conflicting interpretations, different angles and even political passions. From the research point of view, the cube, its concepts and continua are more interesting than the assessment of the Presidents. The material is rather used to illustrate the possibilities of the cube than to evaluate individual persons. The latter remains debatable, to say the least. Indeed, the debate would be most welcome. It would imply that the cube has some merits in pointing out to new vistas in the discussion; in other words, it would indicate that the cube has instrumental value.

The review of the Presidents does not and cannot rate, rank or evaluate them on a good-bad basis. Research has shown convincingly that there is no one best way to manage (e.g. Hersey & Blanchard, 1977). Instead, the fit of management and the environment seems to be decisive. So, power may sound negative, but it is a prerequisite of "good" management and, indeed, for being promoted to a manager. The following review is based on behaviour during the Presidency – all of the persons have had remarkable managerial duties before it, and their contingencies may have produced different managerial qualities than those that appeared during their

Presidency. Nousiainen (1985) has been used as the main source as regards the Presidents.

2. THE PRESIDENTS

The first President of Finland, Kaarlo Juho Ståhlberg, (President 1919–1925) was known as a professional lawyer resembling more of a professional manager than of a leader. As the Father of the Constitution of Finland and due to his success in uniting the nation after the Civil War at the outset of the independence of the country, he qualifies as a strategic change manager. He did not seek power: he gave up Presidency after the first period, but remained a "Grey Eminence" of the nation until the 1950's.

Lauri Kristian Relander (1925–1931) was the President of relatively peaceful times. Clearly he was more of a manager than a leader, and in this position he liaised with foreign countries. He did not attempt much of a change, and there was not much need of it either – accordingly, he was more operative than strategic as a manager. He never sought Presidency, he was not even a candidate in the popular vote, but came to be elected as a "Black horse" of the electorate – it is most difficult to see him as a power-driven person.

Pehr Evind Svinhufvud (1931–1937) became President due to his reputation from the days of the independence struggle. He was not able to become the leader of the whole people, but his political supporters acknowledged him as one. He defended what had been achieved, but did not formulate new visions or strategies. He showed signs of power-interest, but by rejecting his radical supporters, he showed more responsibility than power.

Kyösti Kallio (1937–1940), was able to build bridges between different groups of the people. This was to be of an immense importance in the war to come. But even so he was not an influential leader. His strategic potential did not suffice in saving the international position of the country – neither in the Scandinavian orientation nor towards the Soviet Union at the threat of war and during the Winter War. His sense of responsibility far exceeded his power until his withdrawal from the Office and dramatic death.

Risto Henrik Ryti (1940–1944) is difficult to classify partly due to his personality, but mostly due to the war-time contingencies that made crisis management the predominant style. He was elected into the Office as a highly appreciated professional, lawyer, economist and manager.

History decided otherwise. Ryti's strategic options were few, but he used the narrow margin he had in his war policy jointly with the military leadership. By signing the Ribbentrop-pact in person he took a greater personal responsibility than any other President in any single decision.

Carl-Gustaf Mannerheim (1944–1946) became President at an old age and at the end of a long career during which he had shown sundry managerial and leadership qualities. He was nominated President without popular vote as a figure-head to pave the road to peace, as he had credibility among the Finnish people as well as in the eyes of Stalin. This certainly qualifies him as a leader. The road from war to peace was given to him as an operative task without alternatives – he had had a role in formulating this strategy in his former duty as the Marshal and war leader, but as President his role remained operative, even symbolic. In his Presidency he was not power-driven: he accepted the duty as a responsible soldier and he withdrew from it as soon as it seemed politically possible.

Juho Kusti Paasikivi (1946–1956) assumed Presidency as an old statesman, who had remained “unstained” during the war years and by the war policy. He was definitely a leader, who could not help influencing, whenever he found it was necessary. He transformed the foreign and internal policy and politics. This was not necessarily in line with popular views: he was a strategist, no doubt. During his term he felt the burden of responsibility at a difficult time and he maintained his role for his sense of duty.

Urho Kaleva Kekkonen (1956–1981) reigned for a quarter of a century. He was a strong leader who influenced much beyond the formal position of Presidency. His impact on foreign policy, EFTA-arrangements and the European Conference on Security and Cooperation were strategic achievements. If there ever was a power-driven Finnish President, it was Kekkonen as exemplified by how he remained in the Office period after period and how he used power over other institutions and people.

Mauno Henrik Koivisto (1981–1994) cannot be seen from a historical perspective as yet. He does not seem like a leader, but prefers to be a manager withdrawing to his formal role. On the other hand, he has achieved a remarkable change in the political culture of the country; this is generally alleged to leadership. He does not look like an emerging strategist either. But then again, the international (strategic) position of the country has changed during his term along with the great

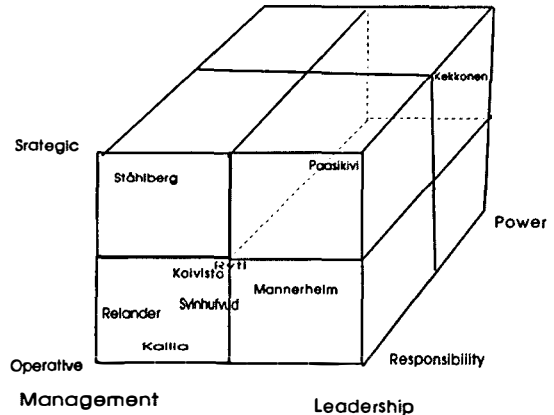


Figure 2. The presidents of Finland interpreted by the managerial cube.

changes of Europe. Koivisto has consciously and explicitly diminished the power of Presidency.

3. CONCLUSION

Picture 2 summarizes the above interpretations. What do we learn from the exercise?

Management-leadership -continuum is not easy to apply to all Presidents. But there are also more evident cases. There are managers and there are leaders. It seems that tumultuous times have called for leadership qualities.

The line between strategic and operative qualities does not look like an unequivocal one either. Strategic qualities emerge at times of crises, while a more operative phase may follow after the dust has settled.

Responsibility seems to be a stronger quality in the Presidents than power. This may be a characteristic of The Very Top – in getting there power may have been more prominent.

What do we learn about the cube from this all? Has it any merits in categorizing the material? Some Presidents are easier to classify than others. The cube reduces and simplifies the colourful tapestry of the political reality. It leaves much margin for interpretations and differing views. Yet, and in so doing, the cube seems to point to essential qualities, and, hence, it is worth further refinement. This can be exercised at least in three directions.

Firstly, the continua, the concepts and their relations would benefit from a better conceptual scrutiny. This is especially true of the responsibility-power -continuum.

Secondly, the continua are tempting for traditional empirical measurements. This would start with constructing scales for the continua. Then, it would be possible to find out correlations between the continua. Maybe, the continua do not make up a cube at all, but a more complicated constellation.

Thirdly, the cube could be used for management development in a somewhat similar manner as the Managerial Grid by Blake & Mouton and 3-D by Reddin have been used. This kind of management development is based on the feedback that managers receive about their qualities on the continua. As the cube includes even strategic, responsibility and power considerations, it poses a wider view about management than the earlier ones, although the cube, of course, is built on its predecessors.

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