Assessing Senior Executives: The Impact of Context on their Roles

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Assessing Senior Executives: The Impact of Context on Their Roles

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This study assesses the leadership roles of senior executives/managers. It first offers an empirical construct of five roles for senior executives: mobilizer, ambassador, driver, auditor, and servant. These roles reflect the perceptions of subordinate managers of the leadership roles of their superior senior executives. Second, it tests three hypotheses on the impact of the hierarchical level of the senior executives, the type of organization they manage (public vs. private), and the interaction between level and organizational type on senior executive roles. The data for this study were obtained from 1,687 senior to upper middle managers in three large Canadian organizations. The results showed that hierarchical level of the superior and the interaction between level and organizational type both had an impact on the roles of senior executives. The article discusses avenues for further research in senior management leadership roles.

Senior managers as a group are an attractive subject for research and writing. They typically are successful individuals, having reached the top of their organizations, entrusted with the responsibility to steer those organizations toward growth and

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prosperity. The strategic choices of senior managers help their organizations navigate turbulent environments and exploit sustainable niches.

Many researchers have studied senior managers. Mintzberg (1973, 1975) and Luthans (1988) used observational studies to describe what senior managers actually do and how they divide their time among various activities. Mintzberg concluded that managerial work consists of 10 roles classified into three groups: interpersonal, informational, and decision making. His approach has been replicated by several other researchers (Lau, Newman, & Broedling, 1980; McCall & Segrist, 1980; Snyder & Wheelan, 1981). Luthans, on the other hand, showed that effective managers behave differently than successful ones.

Other researchers have used primarily prescriptive approaches to the study of managerial effectiveness. Either through general observations (Blanchard & Johnson, 1982; Katz, 1975; Muczuk & Reimann, 1987; Wrapp, 1975) or case studies (Conger, 1989; Kotter, 1982; Levinson & Rosenthal, 1984) these authors have generated various recipes for executive performance.

The focus of previous research has been on the behavior and characteristics of senior managers, approached through use of context-free methodologies. That is, using interviews, observations, or self-administered questionnaires, various researchers have zoomed in on top managers without examining the context within which those managers operate. While these studies provide useful information on top management behavior and attributes, they shed little light on group dynamics and organizational forces that exert influence on managerial performance.

In this article, we take a different view in examining the top management group. We first explain the conceptual foundation and rationale for applying the multiple constituency approach (Tsui, 1984) and role set theory (Katz & Kahn, 1978) to study top management and then use this approach to provide empirical evidence assessing senior managers from the vantage point of their immediate subordinates, who themselves are in the middle and upper middle management.

BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

Top managers function in a role set. They operate in a web of relationships with other individuals and groups both inside and outside the organization. The success of top managers depends on the extent to which they are able to create and sustain mutually satisfactory relationships with the various groups of stakeholders, interacting with them. Different stakeholder groups present differing challenges in terms of desired behaviors, values, and attitudes (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Tsui, 1984). The expectations of such stakeholders are based on their own self-interests, work objectives, and role requirements (Tsui, 1984).

The demands of different groups are not always congruent. In fact, in many cases, these demands are contradictory. Satisfying one group may result in alienating another. To perform effectively under these circumstances, managers need to prioritize among their stakeholder groups. Assigning priorities will facilitate making decisions in the face of conflicting demands, as it underlines the relative importance of different groups and thus their differential ranking.

The dynamics of group interaction within the role set are further complicated by social, systemic forces that lead to the creation of multiple realities (Smith, 1982). Each group tends to develop a framework for viewing reality. Such a framework contains vantage points from which to examine events and phenomena and psychological filters with which to interpret them. It is through this framework that any group comes to understand its environment. The group creates its own perceived structure of reality, which evolves into a "psychological prison" (Smith, 1982, p. 12) encasing its values, beliefs, and views toward itself and the outside world.

Smith (1982) has postulated that groups use social comparison processes to learn about themselves and to shape their paradigms in reaction to actions and responses of other groups. However, in interpreting social stimuli and/or the actions of other groups, each group can engage in processes of selective attention, self-delusion, defensiveness, ethnocentrism, and outright rejection. Such complex patterns of interactions can lead to substantial distortions and to divergent views of reality.

Top management, as a group, is subject to these same forces. It is "encased" (Smith, 1982) and constrained by its own structure of reality. Researchers using interviews or self-administered approaches to the study of senior managers have in fact reflected top management's view of reality. Other researchers who have relied on observational studies have presented their own interpretation of reality. To enhance our understanding of the phenomenon of top management behavior, we need rather to examine it from the viewpoints of the other members of the role set.

In this article, we focus on the subordinates of top managers. There are two important reasons for this focus on subordinates. First, senior managers have ranked their subordinates as their second most important stakeholders after their customers (Kouzes & Posner, 1988). This level of importance is due to the subordinates' role in implementing top management's decisions. Therefore, one would expect higher volume, more frequency, and better quality of information to be communicated between top managers and their subordinates than with any other group in the role set. Second, compared to the other members of the role set, subordinates are the closest to top management. Their relatively small social distance from the top is likely to enable them to provide more detailed and more in-depth information about top managers (Smith, 1982). The subordinate group's structure of reality is richer and more fine grained than is that of other groups in the role set because it consists of a greater number of dimensions of top managers' behavior, as well as more detailed information on each dimension.

Higher echelons of organizations generally face great degrees of uncertainty due to their close interaction with the external environment and the broad scope of issues and challenges facing them (Bedeian & Glueck, 1983; Kraut, Pedigo, McKenna, & Dunnette, 1989). To function more effectively in the face of such uncertainty, top executives are likely to select subordinates who closely resemble themselves in key attributes (Kanter, 1989). They prefer to work with underlings whose structures of values, norms, and beliefs are similar to their own. Such similarity enhances mutual trust and results in more positive interaction and higher quality of two-way communication between top executives and their subordinate manager groups (Smith, 1982). An important consequence of such a resemblance is the way subordinates evaluate their superiors. Given their relatively positive experience with their superiors, and the extent of similarity in the two groups' interpretive schemes, we would expect the subordinates of higher executives to assess them favorably. This argument is further strengthened by the fact that the higher the level of the superior, the higher level of their immediate subordinates. There is evidence in the literature to suggest that managers in higher levels tend to perceive organizational attributes, including leadership characteristics, more favorably than do those in lower hierarchical levels (Payne & Mansfield, 1973). We therefore propose the following hypothesis:

H1: The evaluation of senior executives by their immediate subordinates differs by management level of the boss; more senior executives tend to receive more favorable evaluations.

One of the key factors influencing top management's behavior and the subordinates' view of such behavior is the broader context within which these groups operate. Organizational context is defined as the societal role of the organization, as well as the interplay of environmental, technological, and human forces (Ring & Perry, 1985). This context creates a set of constraints (Stevens & McGowan, 1983) and fixed conditions (Thompson, 1967) to which managers must adapt. Therefore, organizational context influences the nature of managerial behavior and actions (Dastmalchian & Javidan, 1987). Based on earlier discussions of managerial paradigms and multiple realities, one would expect that context would have an influence on the structure of the values and beliefs of those who are part of the top management role set.

One way to look at the notion of organizational context is to consider the distinction between public and private sector organizations (e.g., Allison, 1983; Whorton & Worthley, 1981). There is substantial evidence on the differences between private sector business firms and government organizations. Two particularly distinctive features are described here.

The first is the ambiguity of purpose and policy. Warwick (1975) has argued that private firms typically have entrepreneurial roots and are profit oriented. Public organizations, however, are created to satisfy the divergent interests of various external stakeholders. To cope with diversity of expectations and to create coalitions with competing groups, government organizations tend to generate vague and broadly defined purposes and policies, which would give them flexibility and reduce potential resistance to their actions and decisions.

The second we refer to as the fishbowl syndrome. Public sector managers are believed to be under greater public scrutiny from the media and other external stakeholders than are their private sector counterparts (Blumenthal, 1979; Malek, 1972; Rainey, Backoff, & Levine, 1976). Compared to the private sector, government policy-making is a generally a more open process. This relative openness creates greater constraints for public sector executives regarding their actions and decisions (Ring & Perry, 1985).

The differential context of public and private sector organizations results in different sets of constraints on top management groups, leading to different patterns of behavior. Given the subordinates' proximity to top managers, we would expect their assessment of superiors to reflect this diversity. Therefore, the following hypothesis is put forward:

H2: The evaluation of senior executives by their immediate subordinates differs between public and private sector organizations.

Our last hypothesis relates to the interaction of organizational context and top managers' hierarchical level. The most senior levels in government organizations are generally political appointments. Therefore, the occupants of these positions may be selected for reasons other than their record of performance. This creates a potential for variance between their appointment criteria and the criteria used by their immediate subordinates to evaluate them. Even in the absence of such divergence, the subordinate's assessment of his or her superior may be negatively biased by his or her awareness of the political nature of the boss's appointment. Another pertinent issue is the relatively greater degree of freedom on the part of the private sector top managers to choose their own subordinates (Rainey et al., 1976). Based on our earlier argument that top managers tend to choose subordinates who resemble themselves, we would expect greater similarity between superiors' and subordinates' paradigms or world-views in private sector firms than in government organizations. Therefore, our final hypothesis is as follows:

H3: The evaluation of senior executives by their immediate subordinates depends on management level of the boss interacting with sector of the organization.

METHOD

Developing the Measurement

The first step in developing this study took place in an executive development program on strategic management involving 125 middle managers from a variety of public and private sector organizations. The breakdown was 65% public sector and 35% private sector participation. The public sector managers represented many government departments and a few state-owned enterprises. The private sector managers were from large and small companies in a wide variety of industries.

On the first day of the program and without any debriefing, the participants were asked an open-ended question. They were requested to describe in their own words the best senior manager they knew. The collected responses ranged from a few sentences to several paragraphs and consisted of both a set of activities and personal attributes. This information was content-analyzed using a modified version of the act frequency method (Buss & Craik, 1983, 1985). The purpose here was only to identify the central acts. All the actions and attributes that were closely related were classified together. Six broad categories of roles performed by "the best" senior executives were identified: visionary, symbolizer, mobilizer, innovator, auditor, and ambassador. There were no major differences between the participants in the private and public sectors.

This set of the six roles was then presented to the participating middle managers to ensure that their views had been properly captured. The participants discussed each role and its description. They all agreed that, in general, the set of six roles was a satisfactory representation of their portrayal of "the best" senior managers.

Based on the comments of managers and a review of the literature (see Javidan, 1991; Javidan & Dastmalchian, 1992), a preliminary questionnaire consisting of 140 items was devised. It was pretested, in terms of relevance, face validity, wording, and clarity of questions, with a group of 20 middle managers from as many organizations. Deletions and changes were made to the questions on the basis of their feedback. The revised questionnaire consisted of 120 items. Each item asked respondents to rate their immediate superior on a 7-point scale. Respondents were asked to report the degree to which they agreed with each statement. The range of possible responses was from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). To avoid substantive bias, some questions were worded positively and some were worded negatively. The number of negatively worded questions was limited due to our efforts to solicit senior management's participation in the project. We felt that too many negatively worded items could be perceived as threatening and could impede both organizational participation and subordinate response rates.

Questionnaires then were distributed to participating managers/executives in the three organizations, following the procedure outlined earlier. The managers were instructed to use the 7-point scale to evaluate their immediate superiors. The questionnaire did not provide any clues regarding the model on which it was based.

Data Collection

The data reported in this article were collected from three large Canadian organizations in late 1990. The first organization (Organization A) was a provincial government with an annual budget of around $250 million. It employed about 2,300 employees in 12 government departments and 3 special organizations—a liquor control board, a government-owned corporation, and a workers' compensation board. The second organization (Organization B) also was a provincial government, one with an annual budget of around $12 billion and employing some 15,000 people in 25 departments along with a wide variety of government-owned businesses and other special organizations. At the time of the study, both governments were running substantial deficits. In both governments, the highest bureaucratic level (namely, the deputy ministers) were political appointees. However, these ministers were appointed by the cabinet, not by the respective ministers. Therefore, unless there is a change in the governing party, there are few changes at the deputy minister's level. Each government's mandate runs for 5 years. The senior levels below deputy minister are bureaucratic appointees, and they are variously labeled as assistant deputy ministers, executive directors, and directors.

The third organization (Organization C) was a large telecommunication company employing over 10,000 people. The company was partially owned by a provincial government. However, it enjoyed substantial autonomy in its strategic and operational decision making, even though there were two government appointed representatives

TABLE 1
Organizational Variables

	Public Sector		Private Sector	
	A	*B*	*C*	*Total*
Number of questionnaires received	846	287	554	1,687
Percentage response rate	57	75	65	65
Total from sector	1,133		554	1,687
Level				
Top management	409	82	84	
Total from sector	491		84	575
Middle management	396	200	460	
Total from sector	596		460	1,056

on its board of directors: The rest of the 12-member board were independently selected. The company was engaged in a wide range of businesses in the telecommunications industry and faced competition in all but residential services. The company has been highly profitable over the past decade and generally is highly regarded for its technical capability and high quality of service. The president of the company was appointed in 1987 after 20 years of service with the company. He enjoyed substantial freedom in choosing his executive vice presidents and vice presidents. The sales for the organization in 1991 were about $1.2 billion.

Our contacts with these organizations were made at the chief executive officer level. After a series of discussions and presentations on the purposes of the study to senior management, all three organizations agreed to participate. We intended to have all the executives in upper middle and top management ranks assessed by their immediate subordinates. Chief executive officers were the only individuals not approached for data collection, as they did not have superiors to report to. After reaching agreement on procedures, the human resource managers helped prepare lists of all managers and executives who would receive the questionnaires.

A copy of the questionnaire, with cover letters from the researchers and from the chief executive officer stating his support for the project, along with a self-addressed return envelope, was sent to each potential respondent. Questionnaires were mailed through the internal mail in each organization. Responses, however, were mailed directly to the researchers. Table 1 provides the response rate for each organization. The overall response rate was 65%.

THE RESULTS

The Dimensions of Executive Roles

Factor-analytic technique was used to confirm the dimensionality of the six scales. Table 2 shows a summary of the results of the factor analysis, with varimax rotation, for all participants from the three organizations. It shows up to five highest loading

TABLE 2

Summary of Results From Factor Analysis

Questionnaire Item	*Factor 1 Mobilizer*	*Factor 2 Ambassador*	*Factor 3 Driver*	*Factor 4 Auditor*	*Factor 5 Servant*
My superior . . .					
1. Helps employees feel appreciated.	.83				
2. Helps make work fun.	.79				
3. Helps develop a sense of ownership.	.78				
4. Spreads enthusiasm.	.78				
5. Is a good mentor.	.74				
6. Understands interdependencies between his/her unit and the rest of the organization.		.71			
7. Understands interdependencies between his/her organization and the outside world.		.70			
8. Knows the organization's products/services.		.69			
9. Understands interdependencies between his/her unit and the outside world.		.68			
10. Knows the organization's history.		.64			
11. Is ambitious.			.70		
12. Likes to shake things up.			.69		
13. Wants to make a difference.			.57		
14. Has high energy level.			.57		
15. Is determined.			.54		
16. Expects the subordinate to follow rules and procedures.				.59	
17. Has high performance expectations.				.52	
18. Believes any new initiative should be completely analyzed.				.52	
19. Is persistent in what he wants done.				.51	
20. Expects regular progress reports.				.51	
My superior would do anything to achieve the unit's goals even if it involved					
21. A risk to his/her loss of power.					.67
22. A risk of loss of status.					.64
23. A risk for promotion possibilities.					.63
Number of items per factor	47	12	6	8	3
Eigenvalue	61.23	5.97	3.74	2.87	1.95
% variance (cumulative)	47.00	51.60	54.40	56.60	58.20

TABLE 3
Reliability and Validity Coefficients

	Total Sample	*Organization B*
Role	*Internal Consistency Coefficients Reliability*	*Interclass Correlation Coefficients Validity*
Mobilizer	0.98	0.89
Ambassador	0.92	0.82
Driver	0.86	0.68
Auditor	0.79	0.81
Servant	0.95	0.92

items for each factor as well as the total number of items per factor, the percentage of variance explained by each factor, and the eigenvalues. Items that had multiple loadings of greater than 0.40 were dropped. In addition, only items with factor loadings of 0.45 or more were retained. As shown in Table 2, the factor analysis produced five factors accounting for 58.2% of the variance of all items.

The first factor closely matched our *mobilizer* role and contained 47 items. It reflected the relationship between the superior and his or her subordinates. The 47 items in this factor pertained to such issues as employee empowerment (e.g., "helps build a sense of personal responsibility"), concern for employees (e.g., "goes to bat for subordinates"), and employee development and recognition (e.g., "is always on the lookout to identify high performers"). This factor had by far the largest eigenvalue.

The second factor closely matched our *ambassador* role. The 12 items in this factor are reflective of a global view of the organization, knowledge of its history, products, and politics, and competence and realism.

The third and fifth factors (*driver*, 6 items; *servant*, 3 items) encompass aspects of our symbolizer and visionary roles. They refer to such personal attributes as ambition, energy level, and fortitude. They also point to the superior's determination to make a difference and his or her willingness to make personal sacrifices.

The 8 items in the fourth factor approximate our *auditor* role and relate to high expectations, respect for rules, attention to analysis, and keeping informed. The factor analysis reported in Table 2 resulted in a profile consisting of five roles, reducing the number of items in our preliminary questionnaire from 120 to 73.

Coefficient alpha (Cronbach's alpha) was computed to examine the internal consistency reliability of the scales. Table 3 shows the means, standard deviations, Cronbach's alphas, and the within-organization agreement estimates for the scales for one of the organizations. Alphas ranged from .79 to .98, which shows that the internal consistency reliability estimates of the scales are high and acceptable.

An additional procedure was performed to measure the construct validity of our scales. In Organization B, we received permission to include specific questions in the questionnaire that would identify the superior's title, branch, and department. In this way, we were able to identify the superiors who were being assessed. As a result, we managed to group and match the responses by each superior's subordinates. Due to missing data and the fact that for 11 superiors we had only one subordinate responding, the usable number of superiors for whom we had data from more than one subordinate was 39. The number of subordinates for each of these superiors ranged from 2 to 8.

For each such superior, the interrater reliability estimates across his or her subordinates on all scales were computed using a formula suggested by Shrout and Fleiss (1979). The inclusion of this within-group (or within-unit) agreement estimate responds to recent suggestions in the organizational climate literature that the large majority of studies have not reported within-unit reliability indicators (Dastmalchian, Blyton, & Adamson, 1989; Glick, 1985; James, 1982). It is suggested that a certain level of within-unit agreement should be established before one can consider a concept by aggregating the individual perceptions. The within-unit agreement coefficient (i.e., interclass correlation coefficient, or ICC) was measured for the five roles and is reported in Table 3. Although there is no test for statistical significance of the ICC, those reported in Table 3 are quite high and well above those reported in other studies (Glick, 1985).

These findings show that there is very strong agreement among subordinates of the same superior on the way they assessed their common superior on all five roles. Such high degree of consensus among subordinates is further evidence that the respondents were interpreting questions in the same way and were very close in their assessment of their common boss. The high degree of interrater consistency satisfies the validity and reliability criteria espoused by Glick (1985), by showing that different observers see the same physical stimulus in roughly the same way. This is important as it confirms that our instrument for measuring the construct of senior executive profiles is highly stable across several informants on the same stimulus. We are therefore justified in aggregating individual responses (Glick, 1985).

Testing the Hypotheses

To test the hypotheses, five regression models were analyzed. Each model had one of the five roles in the executive leadership profile as the dependent variable. Independent variables were the level of the executive being assessed, the sector (private vs. public), and the interaction effect between level and sector.

As was shown in Table 1, 35% of respondents reported that they were assessing top-level senior executives, whereas 65% reported that they were assessing middle- to upper-level senior managers. We assigned a score of 2 to the former and 1 to the latter group. Regarding the sector, 33% of the respondents belonged to a quasi-public telecommunication firm (Organization C), and the remaining 68% were from two government organizations (Organizations A and B). The former were assigned a score of 2 and the latter 1 for the purpose of our regression analysis. These were reported in Table 1.

The following regression equation was used to test the hypotheses:

$$Y_i = a_i + b_{ik}(\text{level}) + b_{ij}(\text{sector}) + b_{ijk}(\text{level} \times \text{sector})$$

where

TABLE 4
Results From Regression Analysis

DEPENDENT VARIABLES	R^2	INTER-CEPT	LEVEL β[a]	LEVEL B[b]	SECTOR β	SECTOR B	LEVEL x SECTOR β	LEVEL x SECTOR B	F
1. MOBILIZER	.01	199.45	.13	23.82 (5.31)	N.S.	N.S.	-.07	-7.77 (3.04)	10.55
2. AMBASSADOR	.02	61.88	.15	6.22 (1.14)	N.S.	N.S.	-.09 (0.64)	-2.08	15.90
3. DRIVER	.02	29.87	.10	1.95 (0.60)	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.	10.91
4. AUDITOR	.01	38.87	.11	2.68 (0.69)	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.	8.06
5. SERVANT	.02	8.45	.10	1.69 (0.46)	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.	N.S.	13.92

NOTE: All reported standardized regression coefficients are significant at or below the .001 level. *F*s are significant at or below the .001 level; degrees of freedom (21, 1444).
a. Standardized beta.
b. Unstandardized beta (standard error).

i = leadership roles
j = sector (public vs. private)
k = superior's level.

The results of the regression analyses are reported in Table 4. All five regression equations are significant in terms of the overall F (at .001 level), but the explanatory power of all the models was quite small, $R^2 = 0.01$ or 0.02. Such a low predictive power is indicative of the need for other independent variables besides those studied to help us better understand the determinants of the variation in the five roles in our model. While this is important to keep in mind, it is not of major concern in this study, as our interest is not in examining the determinants of the profile. Rather, we are interested in assessing the impact of our prespecified independent variables.

Our first hypothesis was that higher-level executives are more favorably assessed by their subordinates than are those at lower levels. Our finding supports this hypothesis. All the regression coefficients related to superior's level are statistically significant. The higher the superior's organizational level, the higher the rating of his or her performance in the mobilizer, ambassador, driver, auditor, and servant roles.

Hypothesis 2 postulates that managers in public sector organizations are rated differently from those in private sector organizations. Our finding did not support this hypothesis. None of the regression coefficients for "sector" variable were significant.

Hypothesis 3 relates to the interaction effect between level and sector, postulating that higher-level managers would get differential ratings in private sector organizations rather than in public sector organizations. Our findings provide partial support for this hypothesis. The regression coefficients for level by sector were significant for the first two regressions, namely, for mobilizer and ambassador roles. The negative sign is an indication that the positive impact of level on rating (i.e., the higher the supervisor's level, the higher the rating on roles), is associated with the lower scores on the sector variable (i.e., private, scoring 1, vs. public, scoring 2). Thus higher-level managers in private sector firms are assessed more highly on mobilizer and ambassador roles than are their counterparts in the public sector.

DISCUSSION

Our study showed that higher-level executives are rated more favorably than are their subordinates on all five dimensions of the senior management profile. One possible explanation is that presence at a higher organizational level is a reflection of longer experience. Senior managers, through greater exposure, over time, to organizational issues, are more competent at performing these roles (i.e., the learning curve effect). In fact, in all three organizations, there was substantial stability in upper middle and senior ranks.

An alternative explanation is that subordinates of senior managers, who themselves are in upper middle management positions, tend to have a more positive image of their supervisors' performance than do those in middle management ranks. This could be a reflection of a generally positive attitude (Payne & Mansfield, 1973; Smith, 1982), a reflection of greater similarity between top-level executives and their subordinates (Kanter, 1989), or it could be due to the fact that upper middle managers are engaging in a process of ethnocentrism, self-delusion, and cognitive dissonance (Smith, 1982).

Assuming that managers in upper middle ranks have been selected and groomed by top management, they may assess their bosses more positively to confirm, in their own minds, that top management is competent in everything, including succession planning. Doing otherwise would cast doubt on the tops' ability to choose their successors, resulting in a high degree of cognitive dissonance and a shattering of the respondents' structure of reality and self-image (Smith, 1982).

Our finding did not show any differences of the ratings of executives in public versus private organizations. This lack of support may be due to the limited number of organizations in the survey. There were only three organizations in our survey, two of which were in the public sector. The third was a telecommunications company, which was partially owned by the government but enjoyed, to the best of our knowledge, almost total freedom in its decision making and faced private sector competitors in all but one of its businesses. Our sample may, therefore, lack sufficient size and diversity to help us examine the impact of sector on how executives are assessed.

Our study did provide some interesting results on the interaction between supervisor's level and organizational sector. Higher-level managers in the private sector tend to be rated more favorably on two of the five roles in the study. But these two roles, namely, mobilizer and ambassador, are quite important among the five. In other words, the combination of level and sector does not significantly differentiate among managers in terms of their perceived dedication, ambition, and results orientation. It does, however, differentiate among them in terms of their interactions with internal and external stakeholders. Higher-level private managers are perceived as better ambassadors, as leaders who understand organizational interdependencies with external stakeholders and better manage these relationships. They also are perceived as better mobilizers, leaders who better manage the relationships with their internal stakeholders, namely, employees and subordinates.

An interesting distinction between the two roles where there are differences and the three where there are no differences is that the former two relate mostly to the superior's behavior while the latter three relate mostly to his or her personal attributes and characteristics. So, the differences between higher- and lower-level private sector managers in terms of personal attributes are not significantly higher or lower than the differences between higher and lower public managers. But the same is not true for behavioral patterns. One can speculate that while all managers are similar in personal attributes, higher-level private sector managers are faced with more challenging external and internal issues, and/or receive more appropriate training and development throughout their careers than do higher-level public sector managers. Thus by the time they reach the top positions they are better capable of handling the challenges.

To conclude, our research project seems to have generated more questions than answers. While we showed a clear positive impact for supervisor's level, we were unable to eliminate alternative explanations. Further research is needed to contrast the three possible reasons for our findings. We also need further research to examine the impact of sector on senior management assessments. We need to examine a larger variety of private and public sector organizations to be able to reach generalizable conclusions. Furthermore, we need greater insight into the reasons for higher ratings of private sector senior managers on the mobilizer and ambassador roles. Given the importance of the two roles, an understanding of the reasons for the differences may shed light on how to improve top management performance in the public sector.

Furthermore, our study focused on the leadership profile of senior managers. We need further tests of the instrument used here to ensure its validity, reliabilities, and generalizability. Of particular concern is the mobilizer factor, which consists of 47 items and is much larger and more significant than all the other factors. Its size and significance may be an indication that from the subordinate's point of view the construct of top management's relationship with subordinates is the most important aspect of their performance. These findings also could be caused by common method variance. The fact that most questionnaire items were worded positively may have, at least partially, contributed to so many items loading on one factor.

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