

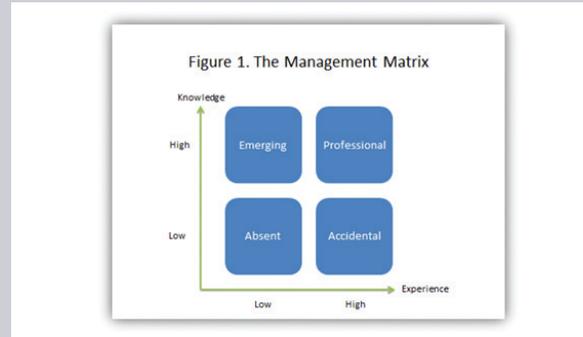
The Budget, Customer Service Delivery and Absent Managers By Grafton Whyte

The recent budget announcement was commended by a broad spectrum of commentators and is testament to the prudence and perspicuous thinking of the Namibian Government. What was particularly gratifying to us at the HP-GSB was the prominence given to service delivery in the budget, because this is the area in which we coined the alternative term Customer Service Delivery (CSD) denoting service delivery that is customer focused. The emphasis on CSD emerged due to scepticism at what could pass for service delivery when the customer is missing from the equation.

We observed that many services now need to be delivered (i.e., housing, infrastructure development and poverty reduction) but saw no 'direct' provision for increasing service delivery capacity. In our opinion, the largest contributing factor to poor CSD is lack of management capacity which, we believe has two dimensions: (1) Poor management competencies and (2) Poor management practice.

1. What management competencies?

After over fifty years of management education, essential competencies are no longer a mystery, ask any small business owner. They will cite knowledge of the product or service they are offering in the market. Next is a need to understand the process of bringing the product to market. Increasingly, that requires knowledge of basic ICT tools. The ability to manage the relationships with staff and customers to whom they sell their products and services is crucial. Finally, one must keep score to see if they are making a profit, which implies some basic competency in finance. Some would argue this is obvious for any business, but what if you are running a department in a large organisation or Government? We would argue the competencies are exactly the same. As a manager of a Government department you need to: manage the product or service you are delivering to the next department; manage the process by which those products or services are created and delivered; manage staff in your department; soft sell (or market) to your customer departments; and also be aware of the ultimate customer in the value chain- the citizen. Finally, you must manage your costs and understand the value you contribute to the organisation.



For this reason anyone attending one of our general management short courses will be exposed to each of these core elements.

2. What management practices?

The easy answer is that managers provide direction for their staff, make decisions to solve problems, take action or implement what they have decided and reflect on their actions to see if they have achieved the desired results, and to improve in future. However, life is not so simple. Organisations are complex entities with problems that are multi-faceted which defy simple one-dimensional solutions. This challenging environment in Namibia has given rise to four broad categories of managers, illustrated in the two-by-two matrix in Figure 1.

These four types of managers are classified by their experience (on the horizontal axis), the number of years of relevant managerial experience and their knowledge (on the vertical axis), formal training and education in management disciplines.

In the lower left quadrant, the Absent Manager is typified by a low number of years as a manager (less than 15) and a low level of management

knowledge (perhaps educated to undergrad degree or diploma level). These managers may find themselves ill-equipped to handle the complexity of the working environment and therefore abdicate some or all of their core practices. In a real sense they are absent from their role. Another prevalent category of manager is the Accidental Manager, who lacks professional management qualifications but does possess years of experience. Typically, at some point in their career this category of manager experiences some success. Unfortunately, from that point on, they spend the rest of their career looking for opportunities to reprise that success. To this class of manager every problem can be solved with their solution, in much the same way that a hammer treats every problem as if it were a nail. Refreshingly, the Namibian picture is far from bleak; the new class of Emerging Managers are young, hungry and ambitious. They are short on experience but recognise that the working environment is complex and uncertain, requiring novel solutions. They are busy occupying our business schools seeking to professionalise their managerial practice, with an MBA or other higher management qualifications. Our Emerging Managers are positioning themselves to become tomorrow's Professionals.

Enterprise Thinking Managers

At the HP-GSB we believe that even professional managers will have to do more if they are going to be successful in the complex, disruptive and ever uncertain times ahead. We foresee that the managers of the 2020's will need to be Enterprise Thinkers, where their dominant trait will be the courage to take risks, be innovative and be entrepreneurial. They will be instinctively customer centric yet community sensitive, realising that individual wealth is not sustainable where the majority live in abject poverty. Enterprise Thinkers, whether they are in large organisations or small businesses, will always be looking to make a positive impact on their community, business or country. To borrow a phrase from a certain sci-fi film, they will be willing 'to boldly go, where no one has gone before'.

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