

## **The Busy Manager**

### **Uday Arur**

Sumantra Ghoshal was the Professor of Strategic Leadership at the London School of Business. He was one of the few management thinkers with some path-breaking work to his credit, with the Economist having named him one of the 'Eurogurus' in management.

Based on his study of over 120 managers in a very large global company, he categorizes managers into of four types:

#### **The 'Average Joe' Manager**

Most managers – according to the author - are extremely busy rushing from meeting to meeting, checking their emails constantly, making endless phone calls, and generally engulfed in a constant stream of activity. Yet, often these managers achieve very little. The problem, being, that they confuse being active with purposeful action taking.

The central behavioural problem in many companies is the syndrome, which the author calls 'active non-action'. Capacities of managers get fully absorbed in daily routines with no time or energy left to for dealing with problems that require reflection, systematic planning, or creative thinking, and for which there is no external pressure for immediate action. Do you see how true this observation is?

For this unfortunate trait could well explain the nature of contemporary pharma marketing activity.

Situational factors, according to Ghoshal, are rarely the reason for this lack of purposive action. In fact, managers can act. As a rule, their jobs provide sufficient scope and freedom, yet relatively few managers make deliberate use of their action-taking opportunities. Most spend their time making the inevitable happen instead of doing what managers are paid to do – to make happen what otherwise will not happen.

Two things distinguish the relatively few managers who do take purposive action from the vast majority who just spin their wheels – energy and focus. While both focus and energy are positive traits, neither is in itself sufficient to produce the kind of purposeful companies need in their managers. Focus without energy devolves into either empty execution or burnout. Energy without focus dissipates into purposeless busyness or, in its most destructive form, into wasteful failures. Ghoshal combines both these dimensions into a matrix (see figure1) which leads to a useful framework for diagnosing the causes of non-action as well as the basis for purposive action-taking. The matrix identifies four types of managerial behaviour: *procrastination, disengagement, distraction, and purposefulness*.

#### **The Procrastinators with Low Energy, Low Focus**

Although the Procrastinators dutifully perform their routine tasks – attending meetings, writing memos, etc – they fail to take initiative, to raise the level of performance or drive change.

The nearer a project deadline looms, the more the Procrastinator busies himself with other inconsequential activities. Managers procrastinate when they feel insecure or fear failure. They believe they have no control over events, so they do nothing.

### **The Disengaged Manager with High Focus and Low Energy**

The Disengaged manager's lack of energy manifests itself in a variety of ways. Some of them, rather than acknowledging a problem and taking steps to correct it, try to convince themselves that the problem does not exist. Others while acknowledging the need for change distance themselves from the problem. In all cases, the disengagement stems from the lack of any personal commitment – typically, because the tasks lack any subjective meaning for them. Paradoxically, disengagement can be more exhausting than energetic behaviour! Disengaged managers are often plagued by feelings of anxiety, uncertainty, anger, frustration, and alienation. They deal with these emotions by withdrawing or doing the bare minimum. This makes the situation worse.

### **The Distracted Manager with High Energy and Low Focus**

These managers are well-intentioned, highly energetic, but unfocused people who confuse whirlwind frenzy for constructive action. Because they do not stop to reflect, distracted managers have trouble developing strategies and adjusting their behaviour to new requirements. Under pressure and confronting the need for change, they do the same as always, only with even more intensity. They get involved in multiple projects with the best of intentions, but eventually their interest pales, and they wind up either constantly fighting fires or abandoning their projects all together.

### **The Purposeful Manager with High Focus and High Energy**

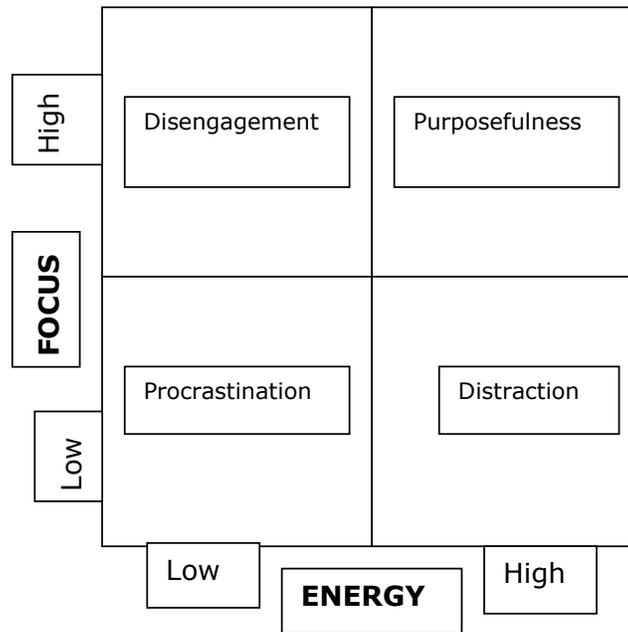
These managers, according to Ghoshal, not only put more effort into their work than their counterparts, they also achieve critical, long-term goals more often. Their clarity about their intentions, in combination with their strong will power, helps them take sound decisions about how they spend their time. A key distinguishing feature of purposeful managers is their sense of personal responsibility for the challenges they have chosen to respond to. They feel accountable for making a meaningful contribution. However, the greatest distinction lies in the way they approach work. While for other managers, outside forces such as bosses, their peers, their salary schemes, and their job descriptions determine for them what they can or cannot do, Purposeful Managers decide first what they must achieve, and then they work to manage the external environment to achieve their goals.

### **Purposeful Managers Few**

Only 10% of the managers studied by Ghoshal belonged to the category of Purposeful Managers, while The Disengaged and the Procrastinators made up 20% and 30% respectively, while the Distracted made up the largest percentage – more than 40% - of the group.

The Distracted Manager always feels a desperate need to do something – anything – and that, the author says, makes them as dangerous as bulls in a china-shop.

Decision-makers obviously need to take this bull by the horns!



**Fig. 1 Different Types of Managerial Behaviour**