

Management and the Five Constituency Model for Observing Behavioral Impact

By Colm McCormack, February 2009.

Avoiding the “False Reality” Trap

Those of us familiar with the day-to-day grind that is on-the-ground management know only too well how easily tunnel vision can set in. When anyone annoys or disappoints us, lets us down or fails to meet a target or deadline, or when conflict arises, tunnel vision can bring about what I have come to term the “False Reality” trap. Simply put: the manager comes to view the current problem as nothing more than a matter between herself and the employee on front her.

But as most of us know from organizational life, word spreads, grapevines can be highly efficient. There is therefore an onus on all managers to not just deal with issues as they arise: issues must be *managed* in such a way as to limit fallout thereby avoiding making things worse.

As you will now come to see in the paragraphs that follow, it is my view that managing with five distinct yet interconnected pathways or “constituencies” in mind leads to more desirable results and therefore to more effective management.

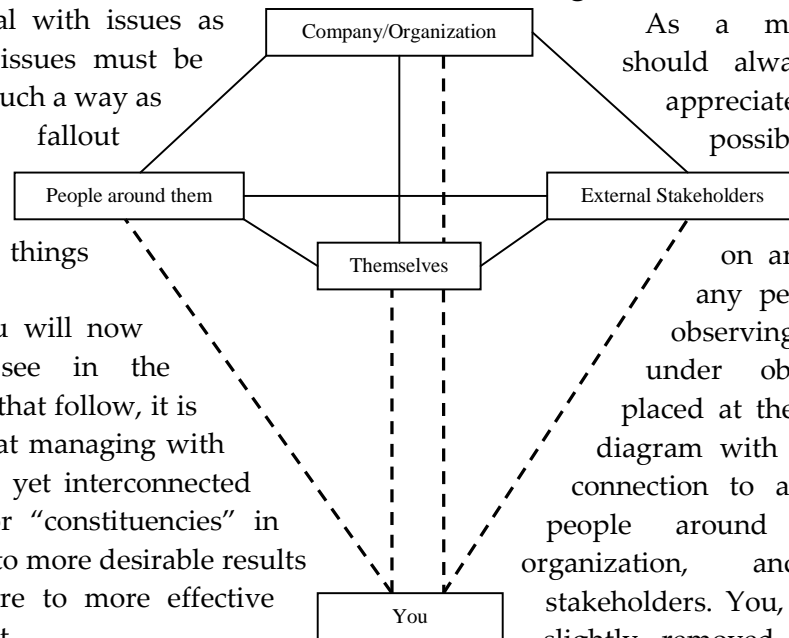
This “False Reality” principle, plus the Five Constituency model, first

appeared in **Just Manage It! If You Cannot Manage Yourself You Cannot Manage Others.**¹ The principle featured in that book to ensure that as managers we avoid upfront laziness thereby making the entire job of managing later much easier: we must always avoid short-term solutions *devoid* of long-term focus.

The Five Constituency Model has two main aims: (1) to help prevent managerial hot headedness, and (2) to enable a manager to better appreciate the potential ramifications of acting or not acting in any given way.

Moving Toward Big Picture Thinking

As a manager, you should always strive to appreciate as fully as possible what is going on around you or any person you are observing. The person under observation is placed at the heart of the diagram with firm lines of connection to and from the people around them, the organization, and external stakeholders. You, however, are slightly removed due to you



¹ For further details and FREE chapter download, go to: www.ColmMcCormack.com

exercising observation and therefore are not actively taking part or allowing yourself to be influenced by proceedings. The lines connecting you with the other four main constituencies are depicted as dashed to represent your awareness through observation of what is going on. In other words, you are aware and you choose what you will allow affect you and the extent of such effects.

There are several questions you should then ask yourself when considering each constituency. These are detailed in **Just Manage It! If You Cannot Manage Yourself You Cannot Manage Others**. But for now, let us consider an example and use it to gain a deeper understanding of the model.

The Problem with Eddie

Eddie has been causing problems for a while now. His team members have made several remarks to him but these have all gone ignored. Most of his team has stopped talking to him except when really necessary. You now have to deal with this situation. Brian, the Team Leader, has come to you because you as manager are the only one with the power to fire people. Brian feels that Eddie is undermining him. Five minutes after Brian talking with you and returning to his desk you see Eddie behaving like a bit of a jerk. Right at this moment you can see only three options open to you: storm out onto the floor and let fly at Eddie, shout in Eddie's direction to come into your office right now, or fire Eddie on the spot.

Common Managerial Mistakes

Let us assume you reacted by using one of these options. We can briefly summarize the managerial mistakes you make as follows:

First, you have become emotionally involved and have reacted emotionally (anger in this case). Second, it is now Eddie and/or Eddie's behavior controlling your emotions. Third, your interpersonal skills have suffered a huge depreciation in perceived quality.

Turning to the Five Constituency Model

Let us now view the scenario via the lens of the Five Constituency Model. But remember, you are not out to manage Eddie here. It's too easy to make that mistake. You are concentrating on managing *You* at this point.²

Constituency 1: Eddie. What do you know about him? Does he sulk, react angrily? How long has he worked at the company? Does he intend staying long? Asking yourself questions such as these enables you to look beyond the behavior that is annoying you and enables you to detach and remain calm.

Constituency 2: The People Around Eddie. His team has had enough of him, but have they contributed to it in any way? Is Eddie the only one behaving like this? They have made remarks to him but have they discussed the matter with him in-depth. Now you are starting to think more deeply about the matter and you

² Managing others comes in *Just Manage THEM!* – the second book in the series. Go to: www.ColmMcCormack.com for further details.

have also expanded the breadth of your thinking.

Constituency 3: The Organization as a Whole. An emotional outburst on your part will guarantee everyone else in the building hears about it. You must therefore deal with the matter in such a way as to ensure, (1) you don't wimp out and become a doormat, but, (2) you enhance the relationship between you and Eddie and Eddie and his team while at the same time containing the effects from leaking out to contaminate the rest of the organization.

Constituency 4: The External Stakeholders. You would be amazed how easily people on the outside get to hear about what is happening within an organization. Suppliers, distributors, business partners, spouses, and more, all contribute to the communications that can help or harm your business. As with constituency 3, you must act in such a way as to ensure you solve matters without fallout adversely impacting upon external stakeholders.

Finally, the fifth constituency is YOU! Considering the previous four constituencies has enabled you to detach, to keep your emotions in check, to consider more than just Eddie – avoiding the “False Reality” trap – to manage yourself appropriately thereby enabling you to better manage the situation to the benefit of all five constituencies.

Kris and the Angry Customer

Kris is an assistant store manager at a large store. A customer has arrived into the store to return a book she didn't want but is unaware of the store's policy of not refunding for books that were

purchased several months ago. The cashier calls for a manager to deal with the matter. Kris arrives.

Immediately upon hearing the news the customer blows up, starts ranting and raving at the top of her voice and seems almost on the brink of tears. The cashier is frozen with a mixture of shock and fear.

“Okay, lower your voice please. There's no need to shout at me. I'll explain the options available to you and we'll get this thing sorted out,” are the first words Kris utters while making direct eye contact. She's not staring. Her voice is soft but unwavering. The customer replies, “I apologize. It's just that I've driven a long way and taken time out of work to do this”. “And that's perfectly understandable...” is Kris' response. The customer has now lowered her voice, has taken several deep breaths and is now visibly composing herself. The cashier looks at Kris in amazement.

Now let us look at this through the lens of the Five Constituency Model. Remember, if you only see this as a matter between Kris and an angry hot head you've fallen into the False Reality Trap. Note also how fast Kris used this system. No pen and notepad. No whiteboards to plot a strategy.

Constituency 1: The Customer. Kris did not go into confrontation mode. She immediately commanded respect by sending a clear message that she did not appreciate being roared at. But she communicated this in an authoritative, calm and respectful way. After the customer apologized, Kris was not patronizing. “That's okay”, or, “Apology accepted”, were not the

words she used. Instead we hear, “And that’s understandable”: empathy and understanding, agreement – all non-threatening.

Constituency 2: People around the Customer. You can bet people in the store looked up the second this thing blew up. If Kris reacted in kind, then a failure to manage herself effectively (Constituency 5) would have led to other customers being affected. Resulting complaints from either the customer, onlookers, or both, would see word spread to the rest of the organization (Constituency 3) and possibly to external stakeholders (Constituency 4) such as customers, community members, business partners, employees from the local competitor, etc.

Kris’ reaction shows she can manage herself in an effective way. This has a positive and immediate impact on the angry customer which in turn prevents negative consequences from the exchange seeping out to contaminate the remaining constituencies. Onlookers may have been excited about the potential for a big fight, but now the sensationalism has been removed from the issue, the entire matter has been diffused and the customer – while not over the moon with delight – is more amenable to a civilized discussion.

Again, note how fast this worked. Kris avoided the False Reality Trap. She automatically served the Five Constituencies in a positive way without having to plan or defer the matter and, more importantly, without having to pander to an overly-demanding customer.

Use P.R.I.C.E. to Stay on Track

As an aid, use what I term the P.R.I.C.E. guidelines to keep issues of Paralysis, Reality, Inaction, Cowardice and Ease of use, in mind.

P – Paralysis: This is not a paralysis-by-analysis model. It is quick-draw mental evaluations. You saw this with Kris’ speed in the bookstore. Simply pause to consider the five constituencies and then move on. The very fact that you are thinking in more directions than simply focusing on Eddie or the angry customer puts you ahead of a lot of managers out there.

R – Reality: Thinking of five constituencies instead of just two allows the actual reality of the situation to enter into your thinking: people are watching, listening, and they *will* spread gossip if you make a mess of things.

I – Inaction: Looking at the bigger picture should not lead to you choosing inaction. Don’t over complicate things.

C – Cowardice: You will come across loyalties, cliques, coalitions. Using this model should not lead to you doing nothing and becoming paralyzed with fear. Seeing the bigger picture and a wider range of choices available to you is *not* the same as overburdening yourself.

E – Ease: Finally, ease is what underpins this model. Keep it simple. Don’t rush in and make things worse. Think briefly of the people around the employee, the organization as a whole, the external stakeholders and then yourself – your emotions, your perceptions, your mood, your reputation. Far too many managers derail because of emotional outbursts.

They sour the atmosphere in just one moment of madness.

A Better Overall Outcome

Far too many managers rush in to solve the problem. Often it seems there is just not enough time in the day to stop and think: put the fire out and move onto the next one. But that's precisely the point. By retaining too narrow a perspective on employee issues – thereby falling into the “False Reality” trap – we make the wrong choices. We rush to deal with the current problem but without long-term focus and without expanding the breadth of our thinking. This leads to us having to put out bigger fires later: we temporarily solved today's problem only to swap it for a bigger one – or several bigger ones – later. In the language of my previous articles, our Choice leads to greater Demands being made of us and strengthens the Constraints under which we must operate on a daily basis.

Effective management calls for the ability to expand the choices available to us. It demands that we pause occasionally, not speed up. Effective management requires effective behavior. We saw this with Kris and the angry customer. Kris did not engage in paralysis-by-analysis. She didn't go reaching for a management textbook or a copy of this article to see how to deal with the situation. No onlooker would ever have guessed she was following a model in her head. To others Kris presented as a naturally gifted manager: practice makes perfect.

In the first book of the “**Just Manage It!**” series – *If You Cannot*

Manage Yourself You Cannot Manage Others – I devoted a lot of pages to emphasizing to readers the need to stand back and observe the people around them. The story of Kris and the angry customer in the bookstore is a true one: I witnessed it in January 2009. From observing Kris in action, we can see how she has developed the ability to cool a hotheaded customer without becoming a doormat, without pandering to the customer, and doing so to the benefit of more than just herself and the customer: great management.³



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³ The Five Constituency Model is explained in greater detail in *Just Manage It! If You Cannot Manage Yourself You Cannot Manage Others*, where an Inverted version of the model is discussed plus an amended version of the model to enable its use in the family/home setting. Go to www.ColmMcCormack.com for further details.