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How People Work: Psychological Approaches to Management Problems

Patricia Gellerman

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Psychologist, professor, consultant, Gellerman shows the remarkable range of managerial problems that can be looked at?and often solved?using the psychologist's unique viewpoint and special training. He reports 10 cases in his personal files, mostly from Fortune 500 and large international companies, and lets readers watch as he questions managers and other employees to develop insights into dynamics that drive their working relationships. Each case is presented to the reader as it was presented to Gellerman?as a management problem?by executives who suspected, correctly, that it had psychological implications. The result is a candid, up-close examination of what really goes on in organizations and how solving tough organizational problems may require counter-intuitive strategies that only a trained, experienced psychologist can muster. An engaging first-person book with wise and helpful things to say to anyone in management, or who aspire to management, and for others in the academic community who want to learn more about managers and what they actually do.

Gellerman presents examples of psychological approaches to organization design, labor relations, shop-floor supervision, sales tactics, and other problems in organizational management that are not ordinarily thought of as psychological at all. Several of these cases required the author to uncover unrealistic assumptions about human nature that were the basis of corporate policies and proposed legislation. In other cases, he deduced the unwritten rules for effective decision-making used at both ends of the management hierarchy: in one case, the decision rules used by a company's top executives; and in another case, a quite different set of decision rules used by another company's shop-floor supervisors. He also traced the origins of a disastrous strike back to its ultimate cause, and helped management change its tactics so a repetition could be avoided. In the only one of these cases which resembles conventional psychological work, he helped a vice presidential bad boss achieve lasting changes in his supervisory style. The cases demonstrate the remarkable range of different managerial problems to which the special training of the psychologist can be usefully applied.

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