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Developing Versatile Leadership

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Leadership consists of opposing strengths, and most leaders have a natural tendency to overdevelop one at the expense of its counterpart. The resulting imbalance diminishes their effectiveness. But leaders who work to guard against such lopsidedness can increase their versatility and their impact.

Robert E. Kaplan and Robert B. Kaiser

Modern conceptions of leadership suffer from a serious limitation. Although it is generally acknowledged that effective leaders must possess a number of sometimes seemingly contradictory qualities and skill sets, the idea that a strength taken to an extreme can be a weakness does not seem to have registered fully in the practice of management.[1] The notion that inadequate performance results from *underdoing* any of the requisite skills — delegating, giving direction, communicating, cooperating with peers and so forth — is well established and reflected in most formal systems designed to assess managers for selection or development. However, the idea that performance problems can just as easily spring from taking a given behavior to an extreme has received far less attention.

Perhaps the focus on *overdoing* hasn't been as sharp because its problematic aspects are not immediately obvious — after all, leaders often must go to extremes to meet tough challenges. It is difficult to draw the line, however, between making the serious effort required to get things done and going too far.[2] A problem commonly seen in recently promoted senior executives, for example, is their difficulty in adjusting their skill sets to the requirements of their higher-level jobs. What had, in their previous positions, been a seemingly inoffensive, even useful, tendency to get heavily involved in

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operational detail can become a big liability in their new roles, resulting in the misallocation of time and attention away from strategic considerations or getting in the way of direct reports' ability to do their jobs. Still, even in executive positions there are situations that require the individual to get deeply involved. For senior managers, then, effectiveness hinges on the ability to appropriately gear their leadership qualities and skills to the circumstances at hand.

The lack of balance in leadership, which is linked to the idea of overdoing and is well known to individual managers, has also not fully registered in the practice of management. When presented with two opposing approaches, people in general have a tendency to polarize, placing a high value on the approach in which they have greater faith and competence while overlooking or demeaning the value of the other. Despite their obvious intelligence, executives are no different. They may be too task-oriented and not sufficiently people-oriented, too tough and not responsive enough to people's needs, too big-picture-oriented with not enough emphasis on planning and follow-through. One strategically gifted individual, for example, called the practical

About the Research

The research reported here proceeded in two stages. The first stage was action research: We conducted comprehensive assessments of the leadership of individual senior managers by interviewing scores of coworkers, past and present, and administering a battery of psychological tests. We analyzed the data rigorously and interpreted it with each executive.[i] Patterns gradually emerged — forcefulness taken to an extreme, enabling leadership as the complement of forceful leadership, the tendency for executives to be lopsided one way or the other and so on.[ii] Robert Kaplan then developed a 360-degree survey to measure versatility, or lack thereof, on forceful and enabling leadership. Later a second major duality — strategic and operational leadership — emerged from our ongoing action research, and we added it to the survey. Above all, the survey needed a way to capture overdoing, which is integral to imbalance. The current version of that scale is:
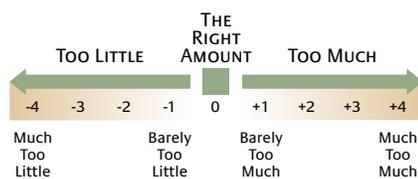
In the research we have done to date, using three samples of U.S. executives and evolving generations of the 360-degree survey, now called the Leadership Versatility Index, this duality-based way of assessing versatility has proved reliable and valid.[iii] The current pairs of survey items that measure versatility on each of the two dualities have good internal reliability, in the .90s for versatility on the forceful/enabling duality and in the low .80s for versatility on the strategic/operational duality. In addition, ratings from superiors, peers and direct reports converge to a high degree. Indices of inter-rater reliability and inter-rater agreement easily exceed the minimum standard of .70 and generally reach the upper .80s within each rating group.

We tested our hypothesis that versatility is central to effectiveness by correlating scores on a versatility index with ratings of overall effectiveness. The measure of effectiveness is a single item rated by coworkers on a 10-point scale, where 10 is outstanding and 5 is adequate, and our analyses indicate that this measure is reasonably reliable and valid.[iv] To arrive at an index of versatility we use the Pythagorean theorem to reduce the scores on opposing sides to a single number for each of the two dualities, forceful-enabling and strategic-operational.[v]

In each of the three studies we have done — two on only forceful-enabling leadership and one on both dualities — there has been a sizable correlation between the versatility index and overall effectiveness, on average in the upper .50s. This was true for ratings of all coworkers taken together and for each group (superiors, peers and direct reports) taken separately. The correlations were also significant when versatility and effectiveness were each rated by different groups. Furthermore, in the study of both dualities, the correlation between versatility and effectiveness was about .60 in each case, and they each made their own contribution to predicting effectiveness, together explaining over half of the variability. In other words, versatility in terms of these two dualities accounted for the majority of what it meant to be an effective executive.

i. R.E. Kaplan, W. Drath and J.R. Kofodimos, "Development at the Top: A Review and a Prospect," in "Research in Organizational Change and Development, Vol. I," eds. R.W. Woodman and W.A. Pasmore (Greenwich, Connecticut: JAI Press, 1987), 229-273; and R.E. Kaplan, "Beyond Ambition: How Driven Managers Can Lead Better and Live Better" (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991).

ii. R.E. Kaplan, "Forceful Leadership and Enabling Leadership: You Can Do Both" (Greensboro, North Carolina: Center for Creative Leadership, 1996).

iii. R.E. Kaplan and R.B. Kaiser, "Rethinking a Classic Distinction in Leadership: Implications for the Assessment and Development of Executives," Consulting Psychology Journal: Research and Practice 55, no. 1 (2003): 15-25; and R.B. Kaiser and R.E. Kaplan, "Leadership Versatility Index: User's Guide" (Greensboro, North Carolina: Kaplan DeVries Inc., 2002).

iv. Estimates of inter-rater reliability, inter-rater agreement and between-source (i.e., superior, peer and subordinate) convergence correlations for this single-item rating were comparable to meta-analytic estimates of the same statistics for multiple-item scales reported in J.M. Conway and A.I. Huffcut, "Psychometric Properties of Multi-source Performance Ratings: A Meta-Analysis of Supervisor, Peer, Subordinate, and Self-Ratings," Human Performance 10 (1997): 331-360.

v. For details, see Kaplan and Kaiser, "Rethinking a Classic Distinction in Leadership"; and Kaiser and Kaplan, "User's Guide."

process of implementing plans "operational gruel." A senior manager who made a career of turning around troubled operations spoke of strategy meetings as "spending fluff time." A naturally powerful leader expressed severe misgivings about "get-along/go-along" types. Another was too attached to the idea of being "nice" to his people and harbored resentment toward managers who lead with obvious personal power.

We have commonly seen imbalances like these when assessing executives in our consulting work on leadership. To address the imbalances, we have found it helpful to define leadership skills and qualities in terms of paired approaches that may look like opposites but together constitute a balanced whole.[3] This view leads to the notion of leadership effectiveness as the ability to draw freely from two opposing sides as appropriate for a given situation, unencumbered by prejudice against or bias for either — in other words, the ability to be versatile. It became clear to us in our work that there are two overarching balances to be struck in that regard: the balance between forceful leadership and enabling leadership (the first to emerge and the one we have studied the most) and the balance between strategic leadership and operational leadership. That is not to say that no other major distinctions apply — that between general-management skills and technical/functional expertise, for instance — but the two highlighted here far exceed any others in importance.

Consulting the literature and relying on our firsthand exposure to executive leaders, we define forceful leadership on the basis of a leader's own intellect and energy — taking charge, taking stands, having leadership presence, being decisive, setting challenging expectations for people, holding them accountable, making tough calls, asking probing questions and so on. We define enabling leadership as creating conditions for other people to be forces in their own right — empowering them, being receptive to where others stand on issues, being responsive to the needs of others, being understanding when others don't deliver, sharing the limelight and so on.

We define strategic leadership as setting long-term direction, thinking broadly about the organization, seeking ways to grow the business, aligning people with the vision and strategy and the like. We define operational leadership as focusing on short-term results, getting involved in operational detail, being grounded in the realities of implementing strategy, using processes to keep people on track and so on.

The two balances seem to complement each other: The strategic-operational duality describes *what* managers work on; the forceful-enabling duality describes *how* they go about it.

These two essential pairs are tacitly understood, if not fully formulated, by most managers. Indeed, leadership experts have long made similar distinctions in the literature. *Forceful* and *enabling,* for example, are our terms (actually, the language that managers use) for a distinction that has been made repeatedly over the last 50 years — autocratic and participative, initiating structure and consideration, "command and control" and employee-centered.[4] Yet the models in common use today — called competency models — often consist of long, unmemorable lists of skills and personal qualities not generally grouped in pairwise fashion. Therefore, these models miss the chance to identify lopsidedness, in our view the most common impediment to developing effective leadership. Our position is based on the essentially two-sided nature of leadership: For every truth there is an equal and opposing truth, and leadership models are more useful for respecting that reality.

Identifying Lopsided Leadership

For an assessment tool to diagnose lack of balance, or lopsidedness, it must be able to measure overdoing, something that commonly used performance-rating scales typically do not do. Rather, they reinforce the "more is better" view by attempting to measure either *how often* the manager engages in the behavior (for example, a five-point "extent" scale that ranges from "not at all" to "to a very great extent") or *how well* the manager performs a given task or behavior (for example, on a five-point scale that ranges from "ineffective" to "outstanding").[5] Since it is assumed that higher ratings on these scales indicate proficiency or mastery, there is no distinction drawn between "very often" and "*too* often," nor any recognition of the possibility that a manager could possess *too much* of a desired quality.[6]

What is needed, then, is a way of measuring leadership that allows for the possibility, in fact the reality, that sub-par managerial performance can result not only from a deficiency of certain skills and behaviors, but also from an excess of them as well. Aristotle made this deceptively simple truth central to his "Ethics."[7] He thought of virtue, or efficacy, as the midpoint between excess and deficiency. To measure performance in accordance with this old and worthy idea, we need only employ a rating scale that allows raters to distinguish between too little, the right amount and too much.

We built such a scale into our Leadership Versatility Index,[8] a 360-degree questionnaire that we have used for 10 years. In addition to identifying deficiency and sufficiency, the assessment tool also captures an executive's tendency to take things to an extreme. The rating scale's ability to capture overdoing on a single dimension like forceful leadership can in turn help identify an imbalance on a duality such as forceful/enabling.

Using an early version of the Leadership Versatility Index, we constructed two statistically sound scales, one to measure forceful leadership and the other for enabling leadership (for example, "Makes tough calls" vs. "Compassionate," "Makes judgments" vs. "Shows appreciation," "Forces issues" vs. "Fosters harmony"). When we studied a sample of 107 U.S. executives by soliciting ratings from them and 1,036 of their coworkers — superiors, peers

and direct reports — we found, as expected, a strong inverse relationship between the two scales. That is, the more forceful managers are, the less enabling they are and vice versa.[9] (See "About the Research.") Thus, many managers do not move freely between opposing modes; they show a bias in favor of one mode and a prejudice against its complement.

The Lopsided Leader One of the most common patterns in leadership is an overbalance toward being forceful and away from being enabling. There are many variations to this theme. Some individuals are aggressive to the point of being abrasive and abusive. Others take so much responsibility that they crowd out their own staff. Still others are so focused on having their own unit, an extension of themselves, perform exceptionally well that they do not cooperate with peers and even have contentious relationships with them. Although it is less common, the converse pattern also occurs with regularity — an overreliance on enabling behaviors and an underreliance on forceful ones. Some managers are such good listeners, facilitators and consensus builders that their people don't know what they stand for. Other managers are so respectful of other people and so afraid of imposing their ideas on them that they fail to assert themselves. Others have such great faith in people and their potential to develop that they are painfully slow to act on performance problems.

The Versatile Leader Versatility — which is the absence of imbalance — is also most usefully defined in terms of pairs of opposing qualities and skills. Versatile leaders are able to continually adjust their behavior, deftly applying the right approach, to the right degree, for the circumstances at hand.[10] These are people who can pivot readily from forcing a tough issue to fostering harmony, from holding a blue-sky session to digging into an immediate problem. In that way, the virtues of each approach are maximized and its potential liabilities are avoided. (See "The Virtues and Vices of Leadership Styles.") It may be advantageous to be exceptionally directive or tough, for example, in a turnaround or crisis, but the same approach may be counterproductive in the early stages of negotiating a strategic alliance. Unfortunately, versatility is in short supply. Our research revealed that not even one in five leaders qualifies as versatile.

The Virtues and Vices of Leadership Styles

Taking one leadership approach to the extreme while giving its complement short shrift leads to imbalance and ineffectiveness. The versatile, and therefore effective, leader can draw upon the virtuous aspects of each approach to suit the circumstances at hand. Below is a partial list of the virtues and vices associated with each of leadership's dominant dualities — forceful/enabling and strategic/operational.

FORCEFUL LEADERSHIP		ENABLING LEADERSHIP	
Vice	**Virtue**	**Virtue**	**Vice**
Dominant to the point of eclipsing subordinates	Takes charge; in control	Empowers subordinates; able to delegate	Abdicates responsibility for oversight
Doesn't hear and value others' opinions	Takes stands and articulates them clearly	Listens to others' opinions and ideas	Takes no clear stands
Insensitive; callous	Makes tough calls, including those that have adverse effects on people	Compassionate; responsive to others' needs and feelings	Overly accommodating
Rigid; demoralizes others	Holds others accountable	Understanding	Doesn't hold others accountable

STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP		OPERATIONAL LEADERSHIP	
Vice	**Virtue**	**Virtue**	**Vice**
Looks down the road too much	Focused on setting long-term strategy	Focused on getting short-term results	Myopic; has tunnel vision
Hopelessly conceptual	Thinks broadly; focused on big picture	Knows the specifics of how things work	Bogged down in detail
Too ambitious	Expansive; aggressive about growing the business	Respects the limits of the organization's capacity	Too conservative and limiting

Because the two sets of leadership skills in a duality comprise opposite approaches, managers can experience tension between them or even see them as contradictory or incompatible. The challenge for the versatile leader is thus to meet what F. Scott Fitzgerald called "the test of a first-rate intelligence": to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function. That challenge is all the greater, given that most leaders will have to overcome their bias in favor of one of the ideas and against the other. This notion of versatility is not to be mistaken as moderation in all things. It simply denotes a wide and flexible range of behaviors, which can indeed include immoderate behavior when extreme circumstances require it.

Versatility pays off. Our research found a close association between versatility, as measured by our 360-degree questionnaire, and overall effectiveness. In every sample of senior managers we have studied, we found substantial correlations between ratings of effectiveness and versatility on both the forceful-enabling and strategic-operational dualities. These strong statistical relationships reflect the fact that versatile managers are consistently regarded as the most effective leaders in their organizations.

Our data also revealed that, in addition to versatile and lopsided, there is a third, less prevalent leadership pattern: what might be called the "disengaged leader," one who underdoes *both* sides of a duality. Disengaged leadership is associated with the lowest ratings of effectiveness.[11]

The Root Causes of Imbalance

The fact that so many managers are lopsided on one or another duality raises the question: What throws off their behavior?

Uneven Skill Development Imbalance can be a function of something as straightforward as overdeveloping one side (hypertrophy) and neglecting to develop the other (atrophy). For example, when a manager is repeatedly given the same type of assignment because of his or her obvious strengths in that area, it can deprive that manager of the opportunity to round out his or her repertoire. Also, the skills most critical to success on the lower levels of an organization — forceful and operational leadership — tend to be well developed in managers and are consequently overused as those managers rise to more senior levels.[12] Similarly, the strategic and enabling skills that can be crucial at in upper management tend to be underdeveloped in freshly minted senior managers.

Skewed Mental Models All managers operate on the basis of assumptions, beliefs, values and attitudes. When these notions are uninformed, untrue or otherwise distorted, they in turn distort the leader's behavior.[13] The least problematic case occurs when an executive fails to realize that the skills that earned her a senior-level position are not the same as those required in that position — that she is, for example, no longer responsible for actually *doing* research and development or marketing but for *orchestrating* the efforts of those who are.

Overgeneralizations also tilt leaders toward imbalance.[14] For instance, a manager who interprets his employees' need for autonomy as a mandate to be completely hands-off will often give his staff plenty of latitude to do their jobs but not make himself sufficiently available to provide technical assistance or emotional support; an executive with a core belief in "putting others first" may listen extraordinarily well but have a difficult time articulating her own views with the conviction that his staff is looking for; a manager with an exaggerated fear of overstepping bounds can be accommodating to his peers but inhibited from fighting for the resources that his or her unit needs.

One-Sided Values An executive will tend to underemphasize certain skills and approaches that he simply does not deem important or part of his job. We have seen many executives give short shrift to the operational aspects of their jobs because they characterize such attentiveness as being "consumed with details," whereas they envision that their mandate is dealing with strategic considerations. They believe they no longer need to follow up or follow through, and they have yet to discover that those functions simply take on a different character in higher-level positions.

Executives also tend to overdo those things on which they place a premium. Those who are goal-oriented and focused sharply on hitting their targets see all too clearly how important it is to get things done, but they may overlook the strategic question of whether the *right* things are getting done. It is difficult for them to see how something they believe in deeply can be taken too far. It is only when they are asked to consider what goals and functions are being neglected because of their extreme behaviors that the problem begins to come into focus.

Fear of Inadequacy A good deal of out-of-balance leadership results from the fear of being inadequate or incompetent even though, in our experience, most executives tend to underestimate their true abilities. Managers will avoid things they believe they are not good at, such as public speaking or dealing with technical issues such as information systems or even e-mail. We have seen executives isolate themselves because they are insecure about their ability to relate to other people, or they shy away from strategy because they fear they are intellectually inadequate.[15] Of course, this sets up a self-fulfilling prophecy: Managers who avoid certain approaches because of self-perceived deficiencies forgo the opportunity to improve.

Ironically, underestimating oneself can also lead to *over*doing certain behaviors. Managers who privately underrate their

Leadership Models and Measures as an Organizational Intervention

Organizations regularly adopt leadership models to reinforce or change their leadership culture. If such a model is to send a message, it must be compact and clear, which the oft-used long lists of competencies — however worthy — are not. A list ought to be short enough to be remembered, and the desired leadership qualities should be significant enough to make an impression on managers. It also helps if the list is integrated. The unifying principle that we favor is versatility, the capacity to strike balances between opposite types of leadership. This has the added advantage of reflecting the real tensions and trade-offs that make the job of management a balancing act. What organization doesn't, for example, need to strike a balance between strategic leadership and operational leadership — between positioning the organization for the future and executing its short-term objectives? How many organizations are trying to be more customer-oriented and less internally oriented?

In any of these or similarly paired objectives, imbalance, by definition, is doing too much of one of them. Competency models, which are predicated on the idea of leveraging strengths but have no way of assessing *over*leveraging, simply cannot detect when a leadership strength is being corrupted through indiscriminate application. Yet organizations and individuals regularly fall prey to this problem. To determine how balanced (or out of balance) individual managers or an organization's management team may be requires a measure that can capture and express overdoing.

Motorola Inc. has adopted such a model and measure, which we helped to develop.[i] The model consists of five leadership requirements: envision, energize, edge, execute, and ethics and character. The first four requirements, which we had no hand in choosing, amount to the two dominant dualities we have identified in our research. "Envision" and "execute" are synonymous with *strategic* leadership and *operational* leadership, respectively. "Edge" is the equivalent of *forceful* leadership and "energize" has properties of *enabling* leadership. The fifth requirement, ethics and character, refers to the individual's core values and is the base on which the other four requirements rest. The performance measure that we developed for Motorola employs two rating scales designed to detect imbalance. Using the two scales, subordinates and superiors rate a target manager on 33 specific behaviors. On the first scale, raters are asked to evaluate the manager's effectiveness on each behavior from 1 (ineffective) to 5 (extraordinarily effective). On the second scale they rate how the manager should change his behavior to become more effective — that is, from "do a lot less" (a rating of −3) to "do a lot more" (a rating of +3).

A leadership model of this sort, organized around basic dualities germane to an organization, equips that organization to better analyze job requirements, assess individuals, make staffing decisions, plot development plans and reward people — in other words, it helps form the basis of a talent-management system designed to build the desired leadership culture.

i. R.B. Kaiser, S.B. Craig, R.E. Kaplan and C. McArthur, "Practical Science and the Development of Motorola's Leadership Standards and Assessment Instrument" (presentation at the 17th Annual Conference of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, Toronto, Ontario, April 12-15, 2002).

own competence, for instance, are liable to put pressure on themselves to demonstrate their value at every opportunity, depriving their staff of the chance to answer their own questions or solve their own problems. Others who believe they are not well liked may ignore subordinates' performance problems. Indeed, many of the excesses in managerial behavior are compensatory.

The tendency to do too much is often linked to a concern about doing too little. Driven people, for example, lack objectivity about what is reasonable to expect of themselves and others. The literature on perfectionism is replete with insights into this phenomenon.[16] Managers who take too much responsibility are privately afraid that they will not take enough. Those who take too much power may harbor a mistaken sense of themselves as relatively powerless. Individuals who intimidate others intellectually are surprised to hear that said about themselves, because they actually feel intellectually inadequate.

Senior managers who take too much credit or are arrogant are actually among the least sure of themselves.

The Tendency To Polarize Human beings' inherent tendency to see choices as either/or scenarios feeds into the psychology of overdoing and underdoing. When presented with a pair of opposing virtues, most people tend to choose one over the other, though in fact they may not even realize they are making a choice. For whatever personal, historical or organizational reason, they adopt a principle, a truth about leadership and do not realize they are forsaking its complementary truth.

Take the case of an executive who excels at treating people well. She listens attentively and creates an atmosphere in which people feel comfortable speaking up in meetings. She empowers people and supports them when they need help. She is soft-spoken and nonthreatening. She believes in this way of leading and strongly identifies with it. The problem is that she has turned

her back on power and self-assertion, on telling people what they may not want to hear — for example, that she is not satisfied with their performance or is unhappy about a missed deadline. This is a nearly pure case of polarizing. The individual has formed a blind attachment to the enabling side of leadership because she can find practically no fault with it. She has misgivings about the forceful side because she focuses only on its negative aspects and excesses. The side she turns away from becomes her blind side and compromises her performance.

How Managers Can Improve Themselves

An out-of-balance leadership style almost always rests on the shaky foundation of distorted beliefs about leadership, as well as associated fears. The duality-oriented model of leadership is useful because it naturally calls attention to the beliefs and feelings that underlie a manager's approach. (See "Leadership Models and Measures as an Organizational Intervention.") The resulting self-awareness puts managers in a stronger position to increase their versatility and, thereby, boost their effectiveness.

The first step toward correcting imbalance is to see it in one-self. Our data show that executives have difficulty with this: Their reading of their versatility or lack thereof was often inaccurate. Self-ratings were barely related to coworker ratings — on versatility, on effectiveness or on the link between the two. Yet superior, peer and subordinate ratings showed substantial convergence with one another. What's more, self-ratings of versatility bore virtually no relationship to self-ratings of overall effectiveness.[17] It seems that everyone sees leadership imbalances and their link to ineffectiveness except for the person in question.

Whether a manager overdoes or underdoes something, he tends to look upon it as the proper response to the task at hand. Because he overdoes what he's good at, he places a high value on it and has a difficult time seeing how one can do too much of a good thing. Because he underdoes what he does not value, he has trouble seeing the problem with neglecting what he deems value-less behavior. It is no wonder that performance problems don't get corrected easily.

Strengthening the Weak Side If they're not careful, managers can fool themselves into thinking that making up a versatility deficit is merely a matter of acquiring a skill. But reversing an imbalance requires internal work — contending with a misconception, a bias, a prejudicial attitude or a fear. The easiest internal change is simply to recognize what the job requires. It is relatively easy to make that intellectual adjustment, but the emotional and behavioral adjustments are not nearly as straightforward.

It can be equally challenging to put a highly personal modus operandi into perspective. A manager who, for instance, values her own autonomy and self-sufficiency and operates best that way must nevertheless recognize that her staff's needs may be quite different and that she must adjust her style to meet those needs.

Harder still for a manager is overcoming an inhibition or fear of what he would become if he were to strengthen his neglected side. Forceful managers, for example, worry that they will become weak. Overly enabling managers worry that they will become mean, abrasive or power-mongering. Looking across the dividing line, they see not the virtues of the other side but the worst excesses, and they recoil. These fears cut straight to the heart of managers' sense of who they are. The more out of balance the manager, the more polarized the mind-set and the stiffer the emotional challenge.

Complicating the task, otherwise objective managers have difficulty gauging how much of the new behavior they are exhibiting and, afraid of exhibiting too much, they regularly overestimate. As one shrewd fellow said, "I'm learning that when I think I'm coming on like a ton of bricks not to worry about that because my sensors are bad and so my data are unreliable." Knowing this, he has taken to asking others for their reading.

Moderating the Overused Side To stop overdoing it, managers also need to do some internal work, although of a somewhat different character. Rather than strengthening muscles they have allowed to atrophy, they have to undertrain muscles developed to the point of hypertrophy. That kind of work involves learning to place less value on, and identify less with, a particular skill or personal quality such as operational competence or tough-mindedness. Underneath these exaggerated values or distorted beliefs often lie unacknowledged needs or fears. Managers whose fear of not being responsible enough leads to a debilitating sense of responsibility, or whose anxiety about not adding enough value causes them to strain to prove themselves at every opportunity often cannot allay such anxieties on their own. They can, however, be greatly aided with positive feedback about their competence in general or in the particular respect that they fret about — *if* they can internalize the feedback.[18]

The key to moderating strengths that have been taken to an extreme is for managers to learn to be more nuanced in their application. When managers contemplate easing up, they tend to worry that they will lose all of the capability they rely so heavily upon. Unconsciously, they treat any modulation as binary. They need to see the control mechanism not as an on-off switch, but rather as a dial, one that they simply can turn down a notch or two. They don't have to give up their gift; they can instead make more discriminating, and therefore more effective, use of it.

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1. The concept that overused strengths can become weaknesses is not entirely absent from the field of leadership assessment, though it is rarely reflected in the design of standard tools. When considered,

it tends to be treated as an afterthought rather than integral to the design of the measure. For instance, some instruments provide prescriptions for leadership development by comparing ratings of "how often" the manager does a particular thing to an "ideal amount" that is estimated using a statistical formula. Using other instruments, respondents rate how often the manager engages in a number of specific behaviors, indicating whether the manager should do more, less or the same amount of each of several sets of behaviors — not each specific behavior. See, for example, J.B. Leslie and J.W. Fleenor, "Feedback to Managers: A Review and Comparison of Multi-Rater Instruments for Management Development" (Greensboro, North Carolina: Center for Creative Leadership, 1998).

2. Research on derailment has shown that the strengths that propel managers up the corporate ladder can become liabilities. See W.M. McCall and M.M. Lombardo, "Off the Track: Why and How Successful Executives Get Derailed" (Greensboro, North Carolina: Center for Creative Leadership, 1983); and M.M. Lombardo and C. McCauley, "The Dynamics of Management Derailment" (Greensboro, North Carolina: Center for Creative Leadership, 1988).

3. The dualism inherent in life and leadership has long been observed. In the 6th century B.C., Pythagoras assembled a much studied table of opposites. (See, for example, K.S. Guthrie, ed., "The Pythagorean Sourcebook and Library," Grand Rapids, Michigan: Phanes Press, 1987). The contemporary field of leadership has seen many two-sided models. Consider, for example, Blake and Mouton's "managerial grid" with its two axes, i.e., concern for production and concern for people; R.R. Blake and J.S. Mouton, "The Managerial Grid" (San Francisco: Gulf Professional Publishing Co., 1994). Or Douglas McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y; D. McGregor and W.G. Bennis, "The Human Side of Enterprise: 25th Anniversary Printing" (New York: McGraw-Hill/Irwin, 1985). Or Robert Quinn's competing managerial values, results and relationships, stability and change; R.E. Quinn, "Beyond Rational Management: Mastering the Paradoxes and Competing Demands of High Performance" (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991).

4. For a comprehensive review of the many variations on this theme, see B.M. Bass, "Bass and Stogdill's Handbook of Leadership: Theory, Research, and Managerial Applications," 3rd ed. (New York: Free Press, 1990), 415-543.

5. Leslie and Fleenor, "Feedback to Managers."

6. F. Shipper, "Mastery and Frequency of Managerial Behaviors Relative to Sub-Unit Effectiveness," Human Relations 44, no. 4 (1991): 371-388; and F. Shipper and C.S. White, "Mastery, Frequency and Interaction of Managerial Behaviors Relative to Subunit Effectiveness," Human Relations 52, no. 1 (1999): 49-66.

7. Aristotle, "Vol. XIX. Nicomachean Ethics," translated by H. Rackham (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1926).

8. The data summarized here is presented in greater detail in R.E. Kaplan and R.B. Kaiser, "Rethinking a Classic Distinction in Leadership: Implications for the Assessment and Development of Executives," Consulting Psychology Journal: Research and Practice 55, no. 1 (2003): 15-25; and R.B. Kaiser and R.E. Kaplan, "Leadership Versatility Index: User's Guide" (Greensboro, North Carolina: Kaplan DeVries Inc., 2002).

9. Prior studies of this basic distinction, by whatever name, have shown either a negligible or, most often, a sizable positive correlation between the assertive, task-oriented side and the participative, people-oriented side of leadership. We suspect the reason is that, to date, researchers have not directly measured overdoing. See Bass, "Handbook of Leadership" (chap. 24), for a narrative review. For a quantitative review of more than 200 primary studies that examined the correlations between these two dimensions of leader behavior, refer to R.F. Piccolo, T.A. Judge and R. Ilies, "The Ohio State Studies: Consideration and Initiating Structure Revisited" (presentation at the 17th

Annual Conference of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, Orlando, Florida, April 11-13, 2003). Both reviews concluded that a strong and positive relationship exists between the two, and both acknowledge that this is inconsistent with how the two dimensions are conceptualized.

10. We fully recognize that so-called "contingency theorists" have considered the idea of versatility since the 1960s. These theorists argued that the most effective leadership behavior depended on circumstantial factors. "Situational leadership theory" has been the most popular of these models, most recently articulated in P. Hersey, K.H. Blanchard and D.E. Johnson, "Management of Organizational Behavior," 8th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2000). During that same period, Victor Vroom presented a decision-making tree to help managers determine how much to involve others in a decision on the basis of situational factors like the importance of decision quality, acceptance, speed and so on; see V.H. Vroom and P.W. Yetton, "Leadership and Decision-Making" (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1973). A contingency theory relevant to the strategic/operational distinction has not yet been put forth, suggesting that social scientists are more interested in the *how* of leadership than the *what*.

11. The three nonversatile patterns — lopsided toward forceful, lopsided toward enabling, and disengaged — correspond to the three basic leadership styles identified in Kurt Lewin's seminal research from the 1930s — authoritarian, democratic and laissez-faire; see K. Lewin, R. Lippitt and R.K. White, "Patterns of Aggressive Behavior in Experimentally Created Social Climates," Journal of Social Psychology 10 (1939): 271-301. These patterns also correspond to the three counterproductive interpersonal orientations that Karen Horney, the psychoanalytic theorist, formulated. What she called "moving against others" corresponds roughly to forceful, "moving toward others" to enabling and "moving away from others" to disengaged; see K. Horney, "Our Inner Conflicts: A Constructive Theory of Neurosis" (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003).

12. For a recent description of the changes in perspective and values required when advancing upward in the management hierarchy, see R. Charan, S. Drotter and J. Noel, "The Leadership Pipeline: How To Build the Leadership-Powered Company" (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000).

13. R.E. Kaplan and R.B. Kaiser, "The Turbulence Within: How Sensitivities Throw Off Performance in Executives," in "Leading in Turbulent Times," eds. R.J. Burke and C.L. Cooper (Oxford: Blackwell, in press).

14. Overly simplistic worldviews also account for lopsided leadership. Douglas McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y, for instance, are relevant to imbalance on the forceful/enabling duality. Theory X managers, who believe that people are motivated to do just enough to get by and are basically lazy, tend to be too forceful and do not enable enough. Believing that people are basically motivated to work hard and will do so if given the right conditions, Theory Y managers are inclined to be too enabling and not forceful enough. We suspect that versatile leaders see the grain of truth in both positions. See McGregor and Bennis, "The Human Side of Enterprise."

15. R.E. Kaplan, "Internalizing Strengths: An Overlooked Way of Overcoming Weaknesses in Managers" (Greensboro, North Carolina: Center for Creative Leadership, 1999); and R.E. Kaplan, "Know Your Strengths," Harvard Business Review 80 (March 2002): 20-21.

16. S.J. Blatt, "The Destructiveness of Perfectionism: Implications for the Treatment of Depression," American Psychologist 50, no. 12 (1995): 1003-1020.

17. Kaplan and Kaiser, "Rethinking a Classic Distinction in Leadership."

18. Kaplan, "Know Your Strengths," and Kaplan, "Internalizing Strengths."

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