What Employers Want: A Postmodern Framework

GEORGE B. GRAEN
Leadership Motivated Excellence (LMX) Center

MITSURU WAKABAYASHI
University of Nagoya

CHUN HUI
Hong Kong University

Hugo Munsterberg, the father of our field, created the structure of our applied psychology theory in his *Psychology and Industrial Efficiency* (1913). His three research questions were (a) ''How we can find the men whose mental qualities make them best fitted for work which they do?'' (b) ''Under what psychological conditions we can secure the greatest and most satisfactory output of work from every man?'' (c) ''How we can produce most completely the influences of human minds which are desired in the interest of business?''

Munsterberg's design approach was to focus on relatively fixed, routine, and repetitive sets of tasks to be performed by a single employee. In addition, to be useful an adequate number of these units later called ''jobs'' must be demanded by employers. He suggested that a scientific approach be used. In contrast to the efficiency engineering approach of simplifying jobs so that most men could do them, Munsterberg chose to assess capabilities and rule out the unfit (using individual differences). In addition, he was concerned with designing jobs to engage employees to contribute their best efforts for the firm. This included what we now call ''managerial leadership.'' Later the ''job'' was assumed to be relatively stable and limited by a court enforceable document called an ''employment contract.'' In this way, Munsterberg's work created the framework for our field for the 20th century. In other words, he prescribed that we recommend only those who fit the job demands and do it in a ''scientific'' manner.

This framework was recommended for selection, placement, training, and promotions. That framework has survived the many challenges by labor unions, court suits, and various social groups. Today, ethical rules for industrial and organizational psychology have been developed to make the use of this framework more professional. Hogan, Chamorro-Premuzic, and Kaiser (2013) seem to describe this ''modern'' framework. We argue that we should get on with developing the ''postmodern'' approach for more complex, dynamic, and team-embedded positions and use the ''modern'' approach for more simple, stable, and less embedded ones.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to George B. Graen.
E-mail: lmxlotus@aol.com
Address: Leadership Motivated Excellence (LMX) Center, 10819 Gram B, Lowell, AR 72745

https://doi.org/10.1111/iops.12006 Published online by Cambridge University Press

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Munsterberg's framework seeks a ''satisfactory fit'' between the capabilities of the candidates and the demands of the job. This practice worked well for railway motormen in 1913 but often fails to work for today's managers and professionals whose duties and responsibilities are often too dynamic and too cooperative in response to the demands of turbulent environments (Hedge & Borman, 1995; Mohuman & Cohen, 1995). In our opinion, a telling criticism of the ''modern'' model of performance is that so-called ''objective performance measures'' are frequently less valid but more easily measured activities of overall job performance. The classic case of telephone ''information operators'' illustrates this point. Actual job performance was duration of call and customer and company satisfaction with the information provided, but the convenient measure consistently used was time taken ''online'' for each call and the shorter time the better. In contrast, rating of overall job performance by immediate supervisors were based on time per call, plus monitored attitude, accuracy of information, interpersonal relations with coworkers, dependability, and adaptability. We may fairly ask, why should one expect these two measures to agree? In addition, why would employers prefer the quick and dirty one?

Moreover, employment has become much more dynamic involving many challenging and dynamic, alliances with individuals and business units of many different types (Graen, 2012b). In sum, the classic definition of a ''job'' has become largely whatever performance an incumbent's immediate manager needs done from day to day or even minute to minute (Mohuman, Mohuman, & Lawler, 1992). To be useful for today's selection, placement, training, development, promotion, and leadership, a new model was required. The modern model still may be useful for the situations that remain stable, routine, repetitive, and shielded from the environmental turbulence of the 21st century (Murphy & Cleveland, 1995).

Today, employers want talent that can grow with the organization and adapt effectively to the turbulence of a competitive environment in which dramatic *change happens*. Clearly, they want their share of ''star employees'' to lead the way to greater market share and industry leadership. They realize that the days of the ''fixed job'' have past for all but those that have yet to be automated. Today's employees must live and work easily with the Internet, international competition, and many forms of work alliances including multiple team membership. Moreover, ''game changing'' turbulence has become the norm by innovators like Sam Walton, A. G. Lafley, and Steve Jobs (Graen & Graen, 2009; Lafley & Charan, 2008).

The Star System

In our opinion, the most important asset employers want is the stars (the highest performing employees that create disproportionate value). Competitive advantage doesn't flow from minimally performing employees (Barney & Wright, 1998; Lepak & Snell, 2002; Lepak, Takeuchi, & Snell, 2003). In addition, academics are aware of the ''star'' system in which the highest performers produce much more value than average performers (Ernst, Leptein, & Vitt, 2000). Top performers in many industries are ''pirated'' by competitors (Greenwood, Hinings, & Brown, 1990). Clearly, the new field of management leadership development is devoted to selecting and retaining the highest potential performers and enhancing their contributions to the organization (Day, 2000). This is different than seeking to exclude the unfit applicant.

In our collective experience, what today's employers want the most is managerial talent growing in the ''hot house'' of their leadership pipeline. Such products of the pipeline are the future promise of the organization. Unfortunately, organizations with empty pipelines are routinely downgraded by stock market analysts.

https://doi.org/10.1111/iops.12006 Published online by Cambridge University Press

More troubling, organizations without forthcoming leadership talent ready to take the reins become targets for bankruptcy and takeover. The new postmodern theory of talent development and exploitation recommends that organizations that aspire to grow more competitive (star organizations) should seek to hire talent that they may groom into stars by placing them in escalated executive leadership programs (Graen, 2012b).

The authors' identification of leadership skills as an increasingly important talent for professionals and managers, who often work interdependently and cooperatively in many different types of alliances (project management and other teams and groups), highlight the need for a ''postmodern'' framework. Measured outcropping of these skills requires identification of the relevant actors, behaviors, and contexts before valid measurement over time and situations can be done (Graen, 2012a). The newer ''postmodern'' framework is illustrated in a series of project management team performance studies (Naidoo, Scherbaum, Goldstein, & Graen, 2010). In these studies, project teams composed of engineers were assigned industrial design problems to solve for user organizations and given a ''drop dead'' completion date of 6 months. Measures were taken at four time periods: (a) *forming and norming*, (b) *problem solving*, (c) *execution*, and (d) *user project evaluation*. Team performance was evaluated by the immediate manager and a team of users on a comprehensive series of dimensions regarding the evaluation of relevant criteria of the project. In addition, reports by team members on the internal performance of the team at all three periods showed the team leadership dynamics of (a) leader content knowledge and (b) team LMX emergence during mission accomplishment (repeated measures of LMX by leader and team development by team members). These longitudinal investigations demonstrated how the ''postmodern'' framework reveals significant emerging events that contribute to overall team performance (Hackman, 2012).

Conclusion

We recommend that industrial and organizational psychology consider using the dynamic and action focused ''postmodern'' framework for dynamic, complex, cooperative, and competitive positions. Due to space limitations, we only could outline a few characteristics of this framework, but much more is offered (Graen, 2012a). Finally, we argue that the above ''postmodern'' framework is as scientific as the older ''modern'' framework but more appropriate today. Clearly, industrial and organizational psychology needs to make use of the newer technology or be left behind by our game-changing competitors. Finally, in our opinion, today's top need is to prepare our organizations to adapt to the new world of the recent celestials we call ''millennials'' (Graen & Schiemann, in press).

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https://doi.org/10.1111/iops.12006 Published online by Cambridge University Press