INSIGHTS INTO THE MANAGER PERSONA'S ROLE IN MODERN ORGANISATIONS

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Abstract: *The purpose of this paper is to provide an outlook on the role of the "manager persona" in modern organisational structures. Topics covered include key traits and competencies which contribute to the success in a managerial role, and mapping of management representation across the organisational landscape. The mapping looks at theoretical elements which support manager personas to drive efficiency at different levels of the organisation. By providing insights into the manager persona and its role in the modern organisational, this paper will contribute to a better understanding of how management roles can enhance effectiveness and contribute to organisational performance. Furthermore, this paper can be a starting point for a debate on the skills and competencies that managerial representatives will need to harness in order to succeed when facing modern opportunities and challenges.*

Keywords: *competencies, effectiveness, manager persona, management, performance.*

INTRODUCTION

Through this article, the Faced with rapid technological advancements, globalisation, and a growing number of geopolitical uncertainties, organizations today are operating more than ever in a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) business environment. [1] Through the use of management and organisational design best practices, organisations can expect to develop structures which would enable them to better meet upcoming challenges. [2] [3] In this context, the role of the manager persona has become increasingly critical to the success of the organization. The purpose of this paper is to provide an outlook on the role of the "manager persona" in modern organisational structures. Topics covered include key traits and competencies which contribute to the success in a managerial role, and mapping of management representation across the organisational landscape. The mapping looks at theoretical elements which support manager personas to drive efficiency at different levels of the organisation. By providing insights into the manager persona and its role in the modern organisational, this paper will contribute to a better understanding of how management roles can enhance effectiveness and contribute to organisational performance. Furthermore, this paper can be a starting point for a debate on the skills and competencies that managerial representatives will need to harness in order to succeed when facing modern opportunities and challenges. The theoretical research paper is structured in four parts: literature review which presents the background of the research, the methodology used to conduct the research followed by the results of the research, and lastly, the conclusions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Definitions of management

Just as organisational theories have evolved through time, so too has the definition of management evolved. In

this sense, depending on the way in which the concept of "management" was perceived at the time, so too would the definition be adapted. Therefore, some of the most notable definitions of management are:

- "The process of planning, organizing, directing, and controlling the activities of an organization to achieve its objectives" - is attributed to Henri Fayol, as part of his work "Administration industrielle et générale" from 1916; [4]
- For Peter F. Drucker, it is "Management and managers are the specific need of all institutions, from the smallest to the largest. They are the specific organ of every institution. They are what holds it together and makes it work. None of our institutions could function without managers"; [5]
- And for Koontz & Weihrich, the term management has two definitions:
- "Management is the process of designing and maintaining an environment in which individuals, working together in groups, efficiently accomplish selected aims." and
- "The process of designing and maintaining an environment in which individuals, working together in groups, efficiently accomplish selected aims."; [6]

While the definition of management started out as a more statical concept, related more to process steps, than to interaction, this soon changed, as it can be seen from more recent definitions. The tendency seems to switch from the act of management, as a solitary process, to management as a group activity, to accomplish results. The same is applicable to the designated persons who hold various managerial titles & roles, and find themselves working at different levels of the organisation, as it will be presented later in this paper. For these reasons, the term "manager persona" has been selected to represent this category through his paper.

1.2. Management of the organisation

In the context of this paper, the term "modern organisation" will be used to refer to contemporary structures which are customer focused. The organisations are based around the needs of the customer. Through their endeavour, they seek to bring value through products, services, experiences, etc. [7]

One way of approaching organisational management systems is through the lens of the management team. According to Robbins et al., the role of manager does not fit a given persona. Instead, the group of authors consider that the manager persona can be present in a variety of roles across an organisation, spread across different levels, holding various titles, and performing a variety of activities, depending on the structure and organizational environmental in which they are assigned. The role of the manager is even more emphasized if the organisational environment in which the persona works is perceived to be chaotic, complex, and at times uncertain. [8]

Robbins et al.'s view is also shared by research conducted through Gallup, an advisory and analytics company which conducts worldwide polls. In the Gallup research-article entitled "How Influential Is a Good Manager?", it is highlighted that 70% of an organizational team's engagement and performance ratios are influenced by the persona assigned in the direct manager role of the given team. [9] Another research-article, this time conducted by a joint team from the KPMG - Canada branch auditing and advisory company and Ipsos-Reid market research company, revealed in 2004 that there is a strong connection between companies which have a high score for effective employee best practices and a high return on the financial performance, as well as a return on investment on the long-term. [10] As the three above research materials show, by focusing on the manager personas who can setup and maintain management systems, organisations have higher chances of standing out and position themselves as qualitative entities which benefit on the long term.

Diving deeper on the importance of human factors in the management system of the organisation, the authors analyse the role of the manager persona and how their role is recognised. Robbins et al. recognize that, at first, the manager persona was identifiable as the person who was managing other people, but this attribute lost its relevance in recent years, as non-managerial personas started taking up managerial activities. This changing attribute prompted the authors to define the manager as "*someone who works with and through other people by coordinating their work activities in order to accomplish organizational goals*". [8, p.5] Continuing on the idea of the manager's role as part of the organisational management system, the authors classify the layers of managerial responsibility by focusing on the following three levels:

1. **lower-level managers** – are seen as the first level of management within an organisational management structure; their main role consists of interfacing and managing their direct reports or non-managerial employees, who are directly involved in the day-to-day operational activities of the organisations, and the next level of organisational management, the so-called middle-level managers; common titles assigned to lower-level manager personas are: department managers, district managers, office managers, shift managers, supervisors, etc.

2. **middle-level managers** – also known as managers of managers, are responsible for managing and interfacing between the first-tier managers and the highest-level of management; this second-tier of managers can hold organisational titles such as: division manager, plant manager, project manager, regional manager, etc.

3. **top-level managers** – depending on the structure of the organisations, this third-tier of managers can represent the highest level of organisational management or near the top of the organisational management structure; a prime difference versus the previous two levels of management personas is that top-level managers hold responsibilities which span outside their underlying department and hold managerial responsibilities which could impact the entire organisation that they represent; organisational titles most associated with the top-level managers are: chair of the board, chief executive officer, chief operating officer, executive officer, managing director, vice-president, etc. [8, p.5]
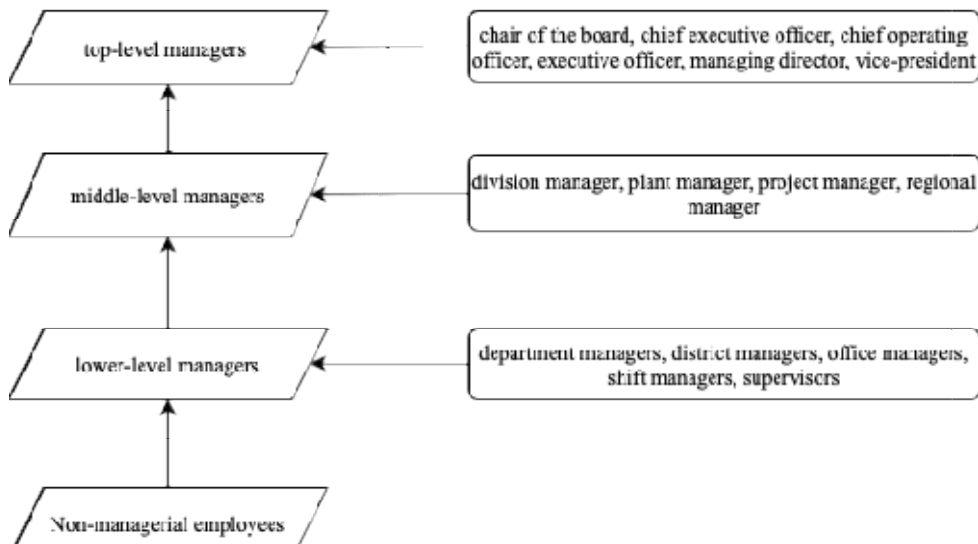
Figure 1: Organisational management system levels and corresponding title
(Adapted from Fundamentals of Management, 2013, page 5)

A graphical representation of the three levels of management in organisational systems can be found in Figure 1. This mapping reveals that it is possible that the three levels of management presented also experience the reverse effect, which means that gradually, management personas could also start having non-managerial activities, while retaining their managerial activities.

Diving deeper into the aspects of management through personas, the authors focus on the activities that come along with a managerial role to support organisational management systems. In the view of the authors, the concept of management is defined as *"coordinating work activities so that they are completed efficiently and effectively with and through other people"* and sort the activities of the manager perform into three categories: functions, roles, and skills. Also, the authors highlight that management should be seen as an acquired talent, not a natural inherited human trait which is learned once personas start holding the manager role. [8, p.6] When it comes to efficiency vs effectiveness, the group of authors refers to the concepts coined by Peter Drucker, which means that they consider:

- **efficiency** – as "doing things right" - in the context of organisational management, it can mean that manager personas have to obtain a high amount of output from the least amount on input that is available.
- **effectiveness** – as "doing the right things" - in the same context can refer to performing he needed activities in order for the organisation as a system to achieve its goals.

As a result, manager personas are tasked with achieving not only the goals cascaded to them as part of the organisational structure, but also to reach this achievement by concentrating on delivering the output with reduced effort. Within the organisational management system, these two concepts are best reflected through the attributes listed previously for a manager persona.

In the example from Figure 2, there are specific activities which can be used as indicators for measuring the efficiency and effectiveness of personas in a managerial function by analysing the quality of meetings before, during, and after the meeting takes place.

As the figure shows, the manager's activities in terms of effectiveness and efficiency can be analysed not only through their own actions (duration for the meetings, structure of the meetings), but also through the actions of the non-managerial employees that attend the meetings. For example, when a manager displays high effectiveness and high efficiency, the non-manager employees who take part in the meetings are more engaged and attentive to the topics of the meeting, while in the opposite corner of low effectiveness and low efficiency, there is a clear

disengagement of the non-managerial employees which are reflected in their behaviour.
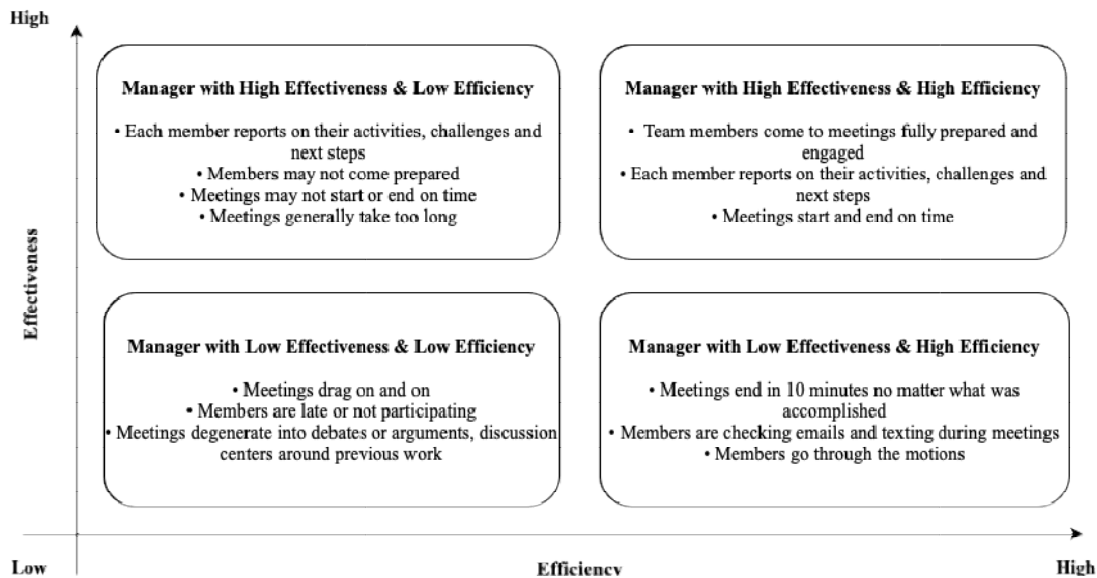

Figure 2: Examples of a manager's activities rating their effectiveness and efficiency
(Adapted from Fundamentals of Management, 2013, page 7)

Besides functions and roles, Robbins and co. also deem it necessary to consider the management skills in the analysis of a manager persona. For this purpose, the management research carried out by scholar Robert L. Katz is used, which consists of a three-tier classification:

- **Technical skills** – these imply an acquired set of expertise and advanced knowledge in the specialised field in which they carry out their managerial activity; in the early stages of a managerial role, this skillset weights more, as there is a high engagement rate with individual contributors who carry out work for the organisation;

- **Human skills** – refer to the capability of being able to work well both with individuals and with groups of people. Katz considers this a crucial skill, as most of the manager's role consists of working with people and their weight increases through time. This statement is further confirmed by studies in the field which showed that, on average, 40% of employees who identify as manager personas tend to stop performing people management activities within the span of 1 and a half years if they lack the skill of creating and maintaining human relationships within the organisation in which they work;

- **Conceptual skills** – is defined by the authors as the "mental ability to analyse and generate ideas about abstract and complex situations". This skillset is useful for manager personas as it helps them develop an overview of the organisation, from seeing the connections between its business units to understanding how the organisation fits in the business landscape in which it delivers its products and/or services; [8, p.27]

While not explicitly mentioned, Katz's three skillsets can be mapped directly and therefore act as factors of influence for Robbins and co.'s "Organisational management system levels" structure. As represented in Figure 3, by displaying technical skills in their activities, a manager persona could connect easier with non-managerial employees who, as defined earlier are the ones who carry out the activity for the organisation. In the next manager tier (e.g., middle-level managers), technical skills are good asset, whereas acquiring human skills helps the manager persona connect not only to individuals, but also to groups of managerial and non-managerial employees. These ideas are supported by recent studies which view middle-level managers as liaisons between organisational needs and talent management identification [11], along with an increase in demand for social support from supervising management representatives [12]. For manager personas corresponding to the top-level management tier, displaying conceptual skills in their daily activities can act as a contributing factor of their success in the role. With the fast-paced development of technology in sight, recent studies show that the openness toward development of conceptual skills will act as a differentiating factor for managers in the years to come [13] [14].

As the identified specialised literature shows, the role of the manager persona in a modern organisation is a complex one. Depending on the positioning within the organisation, managers are expected not only to perform their activities in a holistic way, but also to constantly learn new skills, and operate in wider forums of professionals. The way in which all these elements interact and support each other will be further presented in the results section.
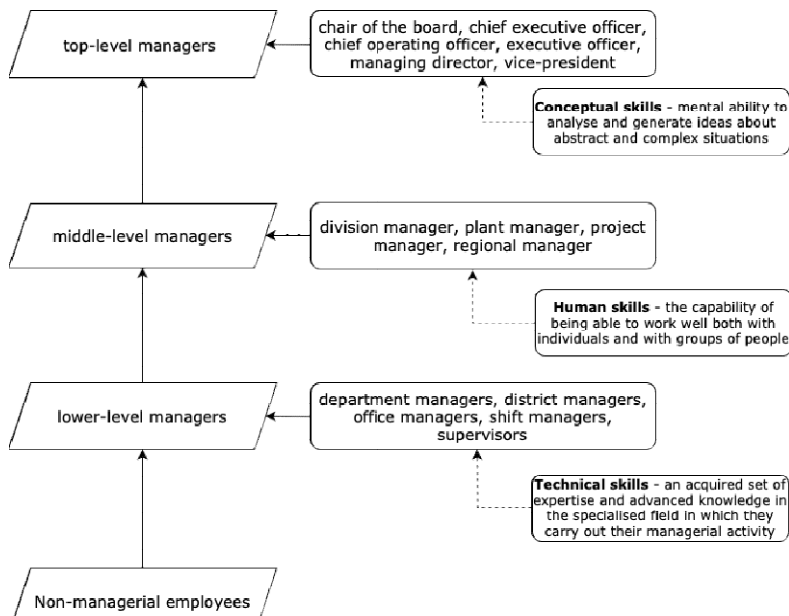
**Figure 3:** Management skills mapped on organisational management system levels (own representation)

METHODOLOGY

To showcase the manager persona's role in the modern organisation, a literature review was conducted based on well-established writings. In some cases, these publications span back a decade or more, and have been recognised in this time as reference material for educational content, as well as the basis for further research. The next step consisted of a qualitative analysis which considered both organisational management and manager persona components. The works which matched these criteria belong to James L. Gibson and Naomi Stanford. The findings of this analysis have been consolidated and presented from the organisational design and organisational design principles viewpoints.

RESULTS

3.1. Designing the organisation

Designing an organisational structure is not as easy as it looks. This is a reality which strikes manager personas when they lay out the design for creating or modifying an organisational structure. As the following lines will show, there are multiple alternatives to choose from when starting on this journey, such as framework of departments or frameworks in which to position the roles of the employees.
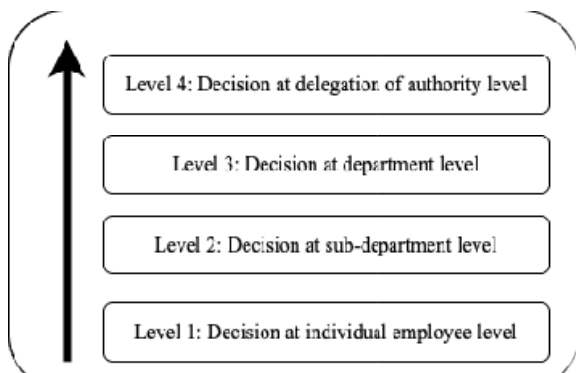

Figure 4: Visual representation of Gibson et al.'s Organisational Structure Design Steps (own representation)

All these activities happen under the term known as organisational design. According to Gibson et al, organisational design is defined as the "management decisions and actions that result in a specific organisation structure". [15] Depending on the culture of the organisation, the process of organisational design can take place

iteratively or in a single wave. Also, depending on the managerial staff involved in the same process, the structure can be set up by one person or by a group of managers. Whichever combination is chosen, the collective of authors agrees that the first design decisions should be made at the individual employee's level, and then move with definition the roles in the sub-department level, followed by the definition of roles at department level, with a final fourth level considering the roles or areas which require delegation of authority within the new structure. This bottom-up organisational design is further visualised in figure 4.

Another view on the topic of organisational design comes from Naomi Stanford's "Organisation Design: Creating high-performing and adaptable enterprises" where she describes the organisational process as "the outcome of shaping and aligning all the components of an enterprise towards the achievement of an agreed mission". [16] In this view, the organisational design should focus on creating the structure starting with the qualities of the design in mind and points out to the confusion created among managerial and non-managerial personas in these kinds of contexts.
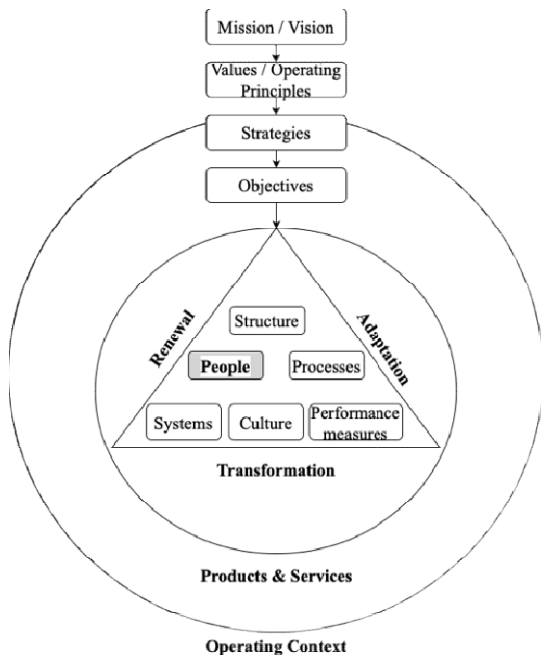
Figure 5: Conceptual representation of Stanford's Quality-Driven Design (conceptual representation)

A conceptual example of how a quality-driven organisational design can look like can be found in Figure 5. According to this representation, the start point of the organisational design is the management view on what the organisation's mission, vision, operating principles, strategy, and objective should be.

When comparing the approach provided by Gibson et al. vs Stanford, the first remark is that each starts the design of the organisation from the complete opposite. While Gibson's approach focuses on putting the individual at the start of the organisational design, so a bottom-up approach, Stanford opts to commence the organisational design starting from values and objective criteria, which positions this approach in the top-down category. This shows that organisations are flexible in their approach, and each can decide to tackle the organisation of its organisational system. For this purpose, Stanford indicates to a list of factors to consider, which are detailed in Table 1. Once the starting point of the organisations are defined, and understood by everyone, the next level which needs to be addressed is the context in which the organisation operates.

Table 1: Adaptation of Stanford's "Design the organisation with the operating context in mind" factors (Adapted from Guide to Organisational Design, 2007, page 9)

Factor / Context	Internally facing the organisation	Externally facing the organisation
Technological	Systems development	New technology with business impact (e.g., VoIP)
Social	New manager persona	Social changes, group changes, etc.
Political	Disagreement among leadership	Change of government
Legal	Compliance standard issues	New laws (e.g., GDPR, HIPAA)

Environmental	Product issues	New standard (e.g., circular economy)
Economical	New business direction	Import or export dependencies
Additional	Natural disasters	Hostile takeover conditions

3.2. Organisational design principles comparison

An analysis of the theoretical groups of factors shows that there is a wide variety of factors which can influence the design spanning from multiple and diverse areas, such as technological development, environmental aspects, economic challenges, and even unforeseen events such as natural disasters or company-wide takeovers. An aspect on which both Gibson and Stanford have a similar with are the agreement on principles based on which organisations carry out their organisational design. In Gibson's case the principles are organised into three points under the "division of labour label, while Stanford mapped the principles under the name five principles on which organisational design is performed. Both groups of principles can be found side-by-side in Table 2:

Table 2: Gibson et al vs Stanford organisational design principles comparison

Gibson' et al.'s "Division of Labour"	Stanford's "Five principles of organisational design"
1. The work activities need to be organised based on the different personal specialties of the employees (e.g., accounting skills, engineering skills, organisational governance skills, etc.)	1. Business strategy and the organisation's operating context are the items driving the design of the organisation (not the acquisition of a new IT system, etc.)
2. The activities of the employees should be structured in accordance with the sequence of the activities performed within the organisation; this is known as "horizontal specialization"	2. Organisation is designed with a holistic thinking approach in mind (from systems, to people, to process, and culture, across the entire organisation)
3. The work activities can be split and structured also in the vertical pillars of the organisation in organisations where multi-vertical structures are set up but, at the same time, overseen by the same CEO.	3. Focus on designing the organisation for future conditions, not for the conditions of the present time
	4. Design should take a considerable amount of time and not done under pressure – the effort put into design needs to be weighted accordingly
	5. Design should be done considering that it is a fundamental process, not a maintenance process;

By analysing the two sets of principles, it should be pointed out that:
- both set of principles have in common that they advocate for design with the employee at the centre of the organisational activity;
- both set of principles consider organisational design to be a lengthy process and not forced by immediate circumstances;
- when it comes to differences, as with previous parallel, Gibson's principles are more employee oriented, while Stanford's principles tend to lean more to the high-level view, leaving room for adaptation;

While the points made by both Gibson and Stanford reflect the modern organisation, the conclusions resulting from the comparison reveal that there are some organisational focus areas which are not addressed and can be considered for future research directions, such as: design of a framework to support skills adoption when transitioning from one management level to another, ways to measure progress of efficiency and effectiveness of managerial effort, etc. Some other aspects that would require further research are the Agile ways of working and transitioning from a waterfall to an agile organisational model through a hybrid approach.

CONCLUSIONS

This research paper investigated, analysed, and provided theoretical insights into the manager persona's role in modern organisations through the review works in the field of organisational management. By analysing the key traits and competencies of a management role within a modern organisational structure, this paper contributes to a better understanding of the requirements for the mapping of management representatives across the organisational landscape. As this is a work of theoretical research there are a series of limitations this paper represents. To start with, the availability, within the organisational structure, of roles which include individual contributors and management staff for further research. The number of roles and demographical markers do not constitute a differentiating factor.

These last two factors can be considered for further lower-level research in a future paper. Another limitation is the recent availability of academic materials. As mentioned in the methodology section, the references considered are over a decade long, to allow for long-term results to be able to be validated by the test of time.

The results of this theoretical research provide a series of insights to the role of the manager persona in the structure of modern organisations. First, due to the nature of nowadays' business landscape, organisations should consider the development of internal structures which are resilient to VUCA events. This can be achieved by examining historical research on organisation evolution, as well as whitepapers which link company results to effective employees. Secondly, a thorough understanding is required of the role attributions where there is a mix of individual contributor and management attributions, as that role can contribute to the effectiveness of the entire organisational structure. Finally, by comparing organisational design best practices, such as those of Gibson et al. & Stanford, organisations have the opportunity to increase their assessment capabilities and achieve better efficient & effective results in their field of business. The above sets of findings can also be considered as gaps in literature which can become the subject of future research reports. Given the above, this paper brings contributions to the field of management and organisational design by showing the practical applications of organisational principles to modern organisations.

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