

# CHAPTER

## The Nature of Managerial Work

### Learning Objectives

After studying this chapter you should be able to:

- Understand what methods have been used to study managerial work.
- Understand the typical activity patterns for people in managerial positions.
- Understand the importance of external activities and networking for managers.
- Understand the different roles required for managers and how they are changing.
- Understand how managerial roles and activities are affected by aspects of the situation.
- Understand how managers try to cope with the demands, constraints, and choices confronting them.
- Understand the limitations of descriptive research on managerial activities.
- Understand how managers can make effective use of their time.

Leadership is an important role requirement for managers and a major reason why managerial jobs exist. It is easier to understand managerial leadership when the context in which it occurs can be described. This chapter examines findings from research on the nature of managerial work. The research involves analysis of data from a variety of sources, including observation of managers, diaries in which managers describe their own activities, interviews with managers who describe what they do and why they do it, and job description questionnaires in which managers describe the importance of different types of activities for doing their job. One major purpose of the descriptive research has been to identify typical patterns of activity that are common to all types of managers. Another major purpose has been to compare activity patterns for different types of managers or managers in different situations. These comparative studies examine the extent to which the behavior of a manager reflects the unique role requirements of the situation.

### TYPICAL ACTIVITY PATTERNS IN MANAGERIAL WORK

To discover what managers do and how they spend their time, researchers have used descriptive methods such as direct observation, diaries, and interviews. The researchers attempted to find answers to questions such as how much time managers

spend alone or interacting with different people (e.g., subordinates, peers, superiors, outsiders), how often managers use different forms of interaction (e.g., telephone, scheduled meetings, unscheduled meetings, written messages), where the interactions occur, how long they last, and who initiated them. Reviews of this research find some consistent activity patterns for most types of managerial positions (Hales, 1986; McCall, Morrison, & Hannan, 1978; Mintzberg, 1973). This section of the chapter reviews major findings about the nature of managerial work.

### **Pace of Work Is Hectic and Unrelenting**

The typical manager works long hours, and many managers take work home. In part, this workload can be traced to the preferences of people in managerial positions. Having trained their minds to search for and analyze new information continually, most managers do this automatically and find it difficult to forget about their jobs when at home or on vacation. During the typical manager's day, there is seldom a break in the workload. Managers receive almost continuous requests for information, assistance, direction, and authorization from a large number of people, such as subordinates, peers, superiors, and people outside the organization. The research on managerial activities contradicts the popular conception of managers as people who carefully plan and orchestrate events and then sit in their office waiting for the occasional exception to normal operations that may require their attention.

### **Content of Work Is Varied and Fragmented**

Managers typically engage in a variety of activities each day, and many of them are very brief in duration. Mintzberg's (1973, p. 33) observations of executives found that "half of the activities were completed in less than nine minutes, and only one-tenth took more than an hour." The activities of managers tend to be fragmented as well as varied. Interruptions occur frequently, conversations are disjointed, and important activities are interspersed with trivial ones, requiring rapid shifts of mood. A manager may go from a budget meeting involving decisions about spending millions of dollars to a discussion about how to fix a broken water fountain (Sayles, 1979).

### **Many Activities Are Reactive**

The fragmented nature of managerial activity reflects the fact that many interactions are initiated by others, and much of a manager's behavior is reactive rather than proactive in nature. A common stereotype of managers is that they spend a considerable part of their time in careful analysis of business problems and development of elaborate plans to deal with them. However, the descriptive studies find that most managers devote little time to reflective planning. The fragmented activities and continual heavy demands characteristic of managerial work make it difficult for managers to find the long periods of uninterrupted time necessary for this type of activity. Reflective planning and other activities that require large blocks of time, such as building a team and training complex skills to subordinates, are usually preempted by "fire fighting" activities involving immediate operational problems. What little time managers spend alone in the office is typically used to read correspondence, check e-mail messages, handle administrative paperwork, write reports or memos, send e-mail messages, and scan journals or technical publications. Most managers gravitate toward the active

aspects of their jobs, and they tend to focus on specific, immediate problems rather than general issues or long-term strategies.

Problems occur in a mostly random order, and managers choose to react to some problems as they become aware of them, while others are ignored or postponed. There are always more problems than a manager can handle at any given time, and some types of problems are more likely to get immediate attention than others. The importance of a problem is a major determinant of whether it will be recognized and handled, but it is often unclear how important a problem really is.

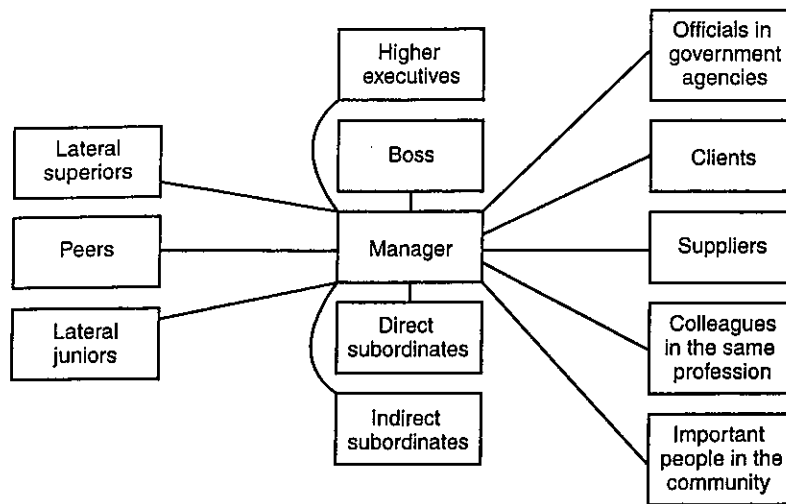
A manager is more likely to respond to a problem if there is pressure for immediate action due to a crisis, deadline, or expectations of progress by someone important, such as the manager's boss or an external client (McCall & Kaplan, 1985). In the absence of such pressure, a problem is more likely to get action when it is perceived to be similar to other problems that a manager has solved successfully in the past, when the problem is perceived to be clearly within the manager's domain of responsibility, and when the manager perceives that the actions and resources necessary to solve the problem are available. Managers tend to ignore or postpone dealing with problems for which there is no external pressure for action, problems that are fuzzy and difficult to diagnose, problems for which other managers or subunits are responsible, and problems that cannot be solved without additional resources and support that would be difficult or impossible to obtain.

### **Interactions Often Involve Peers and Outsiders**

Although much of the leadership literature focuses on the relationship between leader and subordinates, the descriptive research has found that managers typically spend considerable time with persons other than direct subordinates or the manager's boss. These contacts may involve subordinates of subordinates, superiors of the boss, lateral peers, subordinates of lateral peers, and superiors of lateral peers. In addition, many managers spend considerable time with people outside the organization, such as customers, clients, suppliers, subcontractors, people in government agencies, important people in the community, and managers from other organizations. Kotter (1982) found that the network of relationships for general managers often consisted of hundreds of people inside and outside of their organization (see Figure 2-1).

The high incidence of lateral and external interactions can be explained in terms of a manager's need for information about complex and uncertain events that influence the operations of his or her organizational subunit, and the manager's dependence on the cooperation and assistance of numerous people outside the immediate chain of command (Kotter, 1982). A large network of contacts provides information about current events within or outside of the organization that may affect the manager's job performance and career. In addition, networks can be used to obtain assistance for solving problems or making changes. The ability to assemble a coalition of internal and external supporters is especially important to make innovative changes and ensure that they will be implemented successfully (Kanter, 1983). Managers use different parts of their network for different purposes and extend the network as needed to accomplish a particular objective (Kaplan, 1986).

Networks are developed in a variety of ways, such as (1) talking with people before, during, and after meetings, ceremonies, and social events in the organization;



**FIGURE 2-1 A Manager's Network of Contacts**

(2) serving on special committees, interest groups, and task forces; (3) joining civic groups, advisory boards, and social clubs; and (4) attending workshops, trade shows, and meetings of professional associations. Cooperative relationships are established and maintained by showing respect and positive regard, offering unconditional favors (e.g., passing on useful information, offering to help with a problem), keeping in touch, and showing appreciation for favors received, especially those requiring a significant effort on the part of the person doing it. The process of networking is a perpetual activity for managers. Old relationships need to be maintained and new ones established as people in key positions change, the organization changes, and the external environment changes.

### Many Interactions Involve Oral Communication

Managers have six principal ways to obtain information: written messages (e.g., memos, letters, reports, work orders, contracts), telephone messages, electronic messages (e-mail), scheduled meetings, unscheduled meetings, and observational tours. Managers show a strong preference for the use of oral communication media such as the telephone and informal meetings. The research on managerial activities found that lower and middle managers spent from 27 to 82 percent of their time engaged in oral communication, and the figure was 65–75 percent for higher-level managers. Now that e-mail is available, this media is becoming more popular, but like written messages, it has limitations.

The research shows that much of the oral communication by managers involves exchange of information and attempts to influence people. Managers tend to prefer current information to old information, and current information is usually obtained from face-to-face contacts with people who have access to it, including many people outside the manager's organizational subunit. Informal gossip and rumors contain detailed information about recent events and new developments, whereas written

reports usually summarize old information. Neustadt (1960, pp. 153–54) found a preference for recent, detailed information even among U.S. presidents:

It is not information of a general sort that helps a President see personal stakes; not summaries, not surveys, not the bland amalgams. Rather . . . it is the odds and ends of tangible detail that pieced together in his mind illuminate the underside of issues put before him. To help himself, he must reach out as widely as he can for every scrap of fact, opinion, gossip, bearing on his interests and relationships as President.

Oral communication allows the effect of words to be magnified by the effect of intonation, gestures, and other nonverbal communication. Face-to-face interaction facilitates influence attempts and provides an opportunity to obtain immediate feedback about their effectiveness. This feedback can be used to modify and improve the manager's influence strategy and negotiating effectiveness. The descriptive research found that a manager's oral interactions tend to include a surprising amount of kidding, joking, and discussing of subjects unrelated to the work (e.g., sports, hobbies) or of trivial importance to it. This socializing activity and small talk probably helps managers to build and maintain effective relationships with the large network of people whose cooperation and support are needed.

### **Decision Processes Are Disorderly and Political**

Much of the management literature has described decisions as discrete events made by a single manager or group in an orderly, rational manner. This picture is sharply contradicted by the descriptive research on managerial work and related research on managerial decision making (Cohen & March, 1974; McCall & Kaplan, 1985; Schweiger, Anderson, & Locke, 1985; Simon, 1987). Managers are seldom observed to make major decisions at a single point in time, and they are unable to recall when a decision was finally reached. Some major decisions are the result of many small actions or incremental choices taken without regard to larger strategic issues.

Decision processes are likely to be characterized more by confusion, disorder, and emotionality than by rationality. Instead of careful analysis of likely outcomes in relation to predetermined objectives, information is often distorted or suppressed to serve preconceptions about the best course of action or a self-serving interest in a particular choice. The emotional shock of discovering a serious problem and anxiety about choosing among unattractive alternatives may result in denial of negative evidence, wishful thinking, procrastination, vacillation between choices, and panic reactions by individual managers or by decision groups (Janis & Mann, 1977).

Important decisions in organizations typically require the support and authorization of many different people at different levels of management and in different subunits of the organization. It is common practice for a manager to consult with subordinates, peers, or superiors about important decisions. The person who initiates the decision process may not be the person who makes the final choice among action alternatives. For example, a section supervisor with a problem may point out the need for a decision to his or her boss, the department manager. The department manager may consult with the plant manager or with managers in other departments who would be affected by the decision. Even when not consulted in advance, the plant manager may review the department manager's decision and decide to approve, reject, or modify it.

The different people involved in making a decision often disagree about the true nature of a problem and the likely outcomes of various solutions, due to the different perspectives, assumptions, and values typical of managers from different functional specialties and backgrounds. A prolonged, highly political decision process is likely when decisions involve important and complex problems for which there are no ready-made, good solutions; there are many affected parties with conflicting interests; and there is a diffusion of power among the parties. The decision process may drag on for months or years due to delays and interruptions as a proposal is sidetracked by opponents, preempted by immediate crises, or recycled back to its initiators for revisions necessary to make it suitable to managers whose support is needed (Mintzberg, Raisinghani, & Theoret, 1976). For decisions involving major changes in organizational strategies or policies, the outcome will depend to a great extent on the influence skills and persistence of the individual managers who desire to initiate change and on the relative power of the various coalitions involved in making or authorizing these decisions (Kanter, 1983; Kotter, 1982, 1985).

Not all decisions involve major changes or prolonged political processes. Although managers are seldom observed to make major decisions at a given point in time, they do in fact make many less momentous decisions in the process of solving operational problems, setting short-term goals, assigning work to subordinates, setting up work schedules, authorizing the expenditure of funds for supplies or equipment, and approving pay increases. These decisions often involve problems for which ready-made, low-risk solutions are available; the manager has the authority to make a decision; few important people will be affected by the decision; there is little conflict about objectives or solutions; and there is pressure for a quick decision due to a deadline or a crisis. Managers usually make this type of decision either alone or after briefly consulting with a few people, and there is likely to be only a short period of problem analysis and search for solutions (McCall & Kaplan, 1985). Although these decisions are less important, they require appropriate technical knowledge by the manager and the capacity to find a good balance between lengthy, systematic analysis and quick, decisive action. A rash analysis may result in a poor decision that fails to solve the problem or makes it worse. On the other hand, if a manager keeps delaying action to get more information about the problem, it may get worse and become an embarrassment.

### **Most Planning Is Informal and Adaptive**

Planning is often described in the managerial literature as primarily a formal process of written objectives, strategies, policies, and budgets, cascading from top management down the hierarchy, with ever more detailed versions at each lower level of management. The descriptive studies find that some planning occurs, but it is usually informal and implicit. Kotter (1982) found that general managers develop agendas consisting of goals and plans related to their job responsibilities and involving a variety of short-term and long-term issues. The short-term (1 to 30 days) objectives and plans are usually quite specific and detailed, but the longer-term (5 to 20 years) agenda items are usually vague, incomplete, and only loosely connected. A new manager begins the process of developing this agenda immediately, but initially it is likely to be very rough and incomplete. Over time, as managers gather more information about their organization or subunit (e.g., operations, people, politics, markets, competitors, problems and concerns), the agendas are refined and expanded (Gabarro, 1985; Kotter, 1982).

Kotter found that the implementation of agenda items is also a gradual, continuous process. Managers use a variety of influence techniques during their daily interactions with other people to mobilize support and shape events. The agenda guides the manager in making efficient use of random encounters and brief interactions with relevant people in the manager's network of contacts.

In his study of top executives, Quinn (1980) found that most of the important strategic decisions were made outside the formal planning process, and strategies were formulated in an incremental, flexible, and intuitive manner. In response to major unforeseen events, the executives developed tentative, broad strategies that allowed them to keep their options open until they had more opportunity to learn from experience about the nature of the environment and the feasibility of their initial actions. Strategies were refined and implemented simultaneously in a cautious, incremental manner that reflected the need to develop a political coalition in support of a strategy as well as to avoid the risks of an initial, irreversible commitment to a particular course of action. Instead of a top-down, formal process, overall objectives and strategies for the firms were more likely to be the result of a "bottom-up" political process in which the objectives and strategies of powerful individuals and organizational subunits are reconciled and integrated. The formal, annual plans were merely a confirmation of strategic decisions already reached through the informal political process.

## THE CONTENT OF MANAGERIAL WORK

The early descriptive research on managerial work was concerned primarily with providing a description of activity patterns. Then the focus of descriptive research shifted to classifying the content of managerial activity in terms of its purpose. A major difficulty in this research has been to determine what behavior categories are meaningful, distinct, and relevant for classifying observed activities of managers. In attempting to resolve this question, different researchers have developed different taxonomies of managerial roles or functions. Major lines of research on the content of managerial work are examined in the next two sections.

### Job Description Research

Job description research attempts to identify the behavioral requirements for effective performance of a particular type of managerial job. Behavioral requirements are defined in terms of important responsibilities and duties that must be carried out, regardless of who holds the position. Early research on job descriptions for executives was conducted by Hemphill (1959) and Mahoney, Jerdee, and Carroll (1965). An extensive program of research to develop a questionnaire useful for describing managerial jobs and determining appropriate salary levels was started at Control Data Corporation in 1974 (Page & Tornow, 1987; Tornow & Pinto, 1976). The source of the items in the initial version of the job description questionnaire included items from Hemphill's (1959) Executive Position Description Questionnaire, concepts from the management literature, and interviews with managers. The questionnaire is administered to managers, who are asked to rate how important each activity or behavior is in doing the job or how much time the manager spends on it. The primary approach for identifying behavior categories has been factor analysis. Over a period of 11 years, research was conducted on seven different versions of the questionnaire with more than 10,000

managers in 12 companies, including several hundred managers at facilities in 20 different countries.

The resulting questionnaire is called the "Managerial Position Description Questionnaire" (MPDQ). Several distinct categories of managerial work content were found fairly consistently across the seven studies. An abbreviated definition of each category, based on Form 2 of the MPDQ, is presented in Table 2-1.

### Mintzberg's Managerial Roles

Mintzberg (1973) used observation rather than surveys to learn more about the content of managerial activities. He developed a taxonomy of managerial roles to use for coding content of the activities observed in his study of executives (see Table 2-2). The 10 roles account for all of a manager's activities, and each activity can be explained in terms of at least one role, although many activities involve more than one role. The managerial roles apply to any manager, but their relative importance may vary from one kind of manager to another. The roles are largely predetermined by the nature of the managerial position, but there is some flexibility in the way a manager interprets and enacts each role. Three roles involve interpersonal behavior (figurehead, leader, liaison), three roles involve information-processing behavior (monitor, disseminator, spokesperson), and

**TABLE 2-1 Managerial Position Duties and Responsibilities**

**Supervising:** Improving the performance of subordinates by working with them to analyze their strengths and weaknesses, providing training, developing skills, scheduling their work, and setting performance goals.

**Planning and Organizing:** Formulating short-term plans, carrying out projects, developing budgets, and determining optimal allocation and utilization of resources; translating long-range plans into short-term operational goals; and recommending and developing operational policies and procedures.

**Decision Making:** Making business decisions without hesitation in an unstructured situation and authorizing minor or major deviations from established procedures to meet new or unusual situations.

**Monitoring Indicators:** Monitoring internal and external forces that may affect the company, including performance indicators; corporate finances and assets; market conditions; and cultural, social, and political climate.

**Controlling:** Developing schedules and cost-time estimates for producing or delivering products or services, tracking productivity, assuring the quality of products or effectiveness of services, and analyzing operational effectiveness.

**Representing:** Answering questions and responding to complaints from outsiders; communicating with outsiders to promote company relations; negotiating with outsiders; conducting promotional activities to establish or maintain company image; and convincing others of your point of view.

**Coordinating:** Communicating with others in the company over whom one has no direct control in order to share information, meet previously established schedules, solve problems, and achieve objectives; maintaining a smooth working relationship with peers; and mediating disagreements and conflicts between key individuals.

**Consulting:** Keeping current with technical developments in one's field; introducing new techniques or technologies into the organization; and acting as expert advisor, consultant, or troubleshooter for other managers.

**Administering:** Performing basic administrative activities such as locating information on company practices and procedures, analyzing routine information, or maintaining detailed and accurate records and documents.



**TABLE 2-2 Mintzberg's Managerial Roles****Information-Processing Roles:**

- Disseminator
- Monitor
- Spokesperson

**Decision-Making Roles:**

- Entrepreneur
- Disturbance handler
- Resource allocator
- Negotiator

**Interpersonal Roles:**

- Liaison
- Figurehead
- Leader

four roles involve decision-making behavior (entrepreneur, disturbance handler, resource allocator, negotiator). Each type of role will be described in more detail.

- 1. Figurehead Role.** As a consequence of their formal authority as the head of an organization or one of its subunits, managers are obliged to perform certain symbolic duties of a legal and social nature. These duties include signing documents (e.g., contracts, expense authorizations), presiding at certain meetings and ceremonial events (e.g., retirement dinner for a subordinate), participating in other rituals or ceremonies, and receiving official visitors. The manager must participate in these activities even though they are usually of marginal relevance to the job of managing.
- 2. Leader Role.** Managers are responsible for making their organizational subunit function as an integrated whole in the pursuit of its basic purpose. Consequently, the manager must provide guidance to subordinates, ensure that they are motivated, and create favorable conditions for doing the work. A number of managerial activities are expressly concerned with the leader role, including hiring, training, directing, praising, criticizing, promoting, and dismissing. However, the leader role pervades all managerial activities, even those with some other basic purpose.
- 3. Liaison Role.** The liaison role includes behavior intended to establish and maintain a web of relationships with individuals and groups outside of a manager's organizational unit. These relationships are vital as a source of information and favors. The essence of the liaison role is making new contacts, keeping in touch, and doing favors that will allow the manager to ask for favors in return.
- 4. Monitor Role.** Managers continually seek information from a variety of sources, such as reading reports and memos, attending meetings and briefings, and conducting observational tours. Some of the information is passed on to subordinates (disseminator role) or to outsiders (spokesperson role). Most of the information is analyzed to discover problems and opportunities and to develop an understanding of outside events and internal processes within the manager's organizational subunit.

5. **Disseminator Role.** Managers have special access to sources of information not available to subordinates. Some of this information is factual, and some of it concerns the stated preferences of individuals desiring to influence the manager, including people at high levels of authority. Some of the information must be passed on to subordinates, either in its original form or after interpretation and editing by the manager.
6. **Spokesperson Role.** Managers are also obliged to transmit information and express value statements to people outside their organizational subunit. Middle managers and lower-level managers must report to their superiors; a chief executive must report to the board of directors or owners. Each of these managers is also expected to serve as a lobbyist and public relations representative for the organizational subunit when dealing with superiors and outsiders. As Mintzberg (1973, p. 76) points out, "To speak effectively for his organization and to gain the respect of outsiders, the manager must demonstrate an up-to-the-minute knowledge of his organization and its environment."
7. **Entrepreneur Role.** The manager of an organization or one of its subunits acts as an initiator and designer of controlled change to exploit opportunities for improving the existing situation. Planned change takes place in the form of improvement projects such as development of a new product, purchase of new equipment, or reorganization of formal structure. Some of the improvement projects are supervised directly by the manager, and some are delegated to subordinates. Mintzberg (1973, p. 81) offers the following description of the way a manager deals with improvement projects:

The manager as a supervisor of improvement projects may be likened to a juggler. At any one point in time he has a number of balls in the air. Periodically, one comes down, receives a short burst of energy, and goes up again. Meanwhile, new balls wait on the sidelines and, at random intervals, old balls are discarded and new ones added.
8. **Disturbance Handler Role.** In the disturbance handler role, a manager deals with sudden crises that cannot be ignored, as distinguished from problems that are voluntarily solved by the manager to exploit opportunities (entrepreneur role). The crises are caused by unforeseen events, such as conflict among subordinates, the loss of a key subordinate, a fire or accident, a strike, and so on. A manager typically gives this role priority over all of the others.
9. **Resource Allocator Role.** Managers exercise their authority to allocate resources such as money, personnel, material, equipment, facilities, and services. Resource allocation is involved in managerial decisions about what is to be done, in the manager's authorization of subordinates' decisions, in the preparation of budgets, and in the scheduling of the manager's own time. By retaining the power to allocate resources, the manager maintains control over strategy formation and acts to coordinate and integrate subordinate actions in support of strategic objectives.
10. **Negotiator Role.** Any negotiations requiring a substantial commitment of resources will be facilitated by the presence of a manager having the authority to make this commitment. Managers may participate in several different types of negotiations, including negotiations with unions involving labor-management contracts or grievances; contract negotiations with important customers, suppliers,

or consultants; employment negotiations with key personnel; and other nonroutine negotiations (e.g., acquisition of another firm, application for a large loan).

### Role Conflicts

The discussion of characteristic managerial roles emphasizes the types of activities commonly expected of managers, regardless of the type of position. However, many different people ("role senders") in an organization exert pressure on the manager to conform with their beliefs about the proper and necessary way to behave ("role expectations"). At times, different people make incompatible demands on the manager, creating "role conflicts" (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, & Snoek, 1964; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1975; Shamir, Zakey, & Popper, 1998). For example, managers often find themselves beset by conflicting demands from superiors and subordinates. The conflict may involve a disagreement about the relative priority of two different roles or about the manner in which a particular role should be carried out. In trying to reconcile conflicting role expectations, a manager is likely to be more responsive to the expectations of superiors, because they wield more power over a manager than do subordinates (Kahn et al., 1964). However, the manner in which a role conflict is resolved also depends in part on how important the issue is to each role sender (Salancik, Calder, Rowland, Leblebici, & Conway, 1975). A manager who is able to reconcile the divergent concerns of superiors and subordinates is more likely to be effective (Mann & Dent, 1954; Mann & Hoffman, 1960; Tsui, 1984).

In addition to role expectations from other people, a leader's perception of role requirements will depend on the nature of the task. Role expectations from subordinates or superiors are sometimes inconsistent with objective task requirements, especially when the nature of the task or the external environment has changed while norms and beliefs about proper leadership behavior have remained the same. Here again, the leader has a role conflict: Conform to expectations from role senders and be less effective in facilitating group performance or do what is necessary to accomplish the task and take a chance on being initially rejected by role senders.

## A THEORY OF DEMANDS, CONSTRAINTS, AND CHOICES

Mintzberg's 10 managerial roles describe the type of required activities that are common to most managerial and administrative positions. However, descriptive research indicates that managers also have unique role requirements that are specific to a particular type of managerial position in a particular type of organization. Stewart (1967, 1976, 1982) formulated a model for describing different types of managerial jobs and understanding how managers do them. The model was based on extensive research using observation, interviews, and diaries.

### Core Components of the Model

Demands, constraints, and choices shape the nature of the job and strongly influence the manager's behavior.

**Demands** Demands are what anyone who holds the job must do or risk sanctions or loss of the position. In effect, demands are role expectations from people who have sufficient power to obtain compliance. Demands provide a minimum core of required duties,

activities, and responsibilities. Demands include standards, objectives, and deadlines for work that must be met, and bureaucratic procedures that cannot be ignored or delegated, such as preparing budgets and reports, attending certain meetings, authorizing expenditures, signing documents, and conducting performance appraisals. Other demands depend on particular individuals, such as the requirement by the boss that the manager knows operational details, or an important customer's insistence on dealing with the manager instead of a subordinate.

**Constraints** Constraints are characteristics of the organization and external environment limiting what a manager can do. They include bureaucratic rules, policies, and regulations that must be observed and legal constraints such as labor laws, environmental regulations, securities regulations, and safety regulations. Another type of constraint involves the availability of resources, such as facilities, equipment, budgetary funding, supplies, personnel, and support services. The technology used to do the work constrains the options for how the work will be done. The physical location of facilities and distribution of personnel among work sites limit the opportunities for face-to-face interaction. Market considerations such as the preferences of clients and customers are constraints on the type of products and services that may be provided by the manager's organizational unit.

**Choices** Choices are the activities that a manager may do but is not required to do. Choices include the opportunities available to someone in a particular type of managerial position to determine what to do and how to do it. Demands and constraints limit choices in the short run, but over a longer time period, a manager has some opportunities to modify demands and remove or circumvent constraints, thereby expanding choices. Examples of major choices include the objectives for the manager's unit, the priorities attached to different objectives, the strategies selected to pursue objectives, the aspects of the work in which the manager gets personally involved, how and with whom the manager spends time, what responsibility is delegated to whom, and how the manager attempts to influence different people. In a sense, these choices can be described in terms of Kotter's (1982) concepts as what agendas to set, what contacts to make, and how to influence people to implement the agendas.

Managerial jobs differ greatly in the amount and type of demands and constraints the job holder must face. However, even within the same job, the demands and constraints will vary depending on the perception of the job holder. They are not entirely determined by objective conditions but result instead from the dynamic interaction between manager and role senders. By their choices, managers influence demands. For example, agreeing to serve on a committee adds to demands. Moreover, people differ in the way they interpret role expectations, and one person will perceive a demand where another may not. For example, one operations manager believes that a bureaucratic regulation must be observed exactly, whereas another operations manager in the same company perceives more flexibility in what can be done.

### Situational Determinants

There are differences in the pattern of demands, constraints, and choices for different types of managerial jobs, depending on aspects of the situation such as the pattern of relationships, the work pattern, and the amount of exposure. These aspects of the

situation were found to be important for comparing managerial jobs with respect to behavioral requirements.

**Pattern of Relationships** The demands made on a manager by superiors, subordinates, peers, and persons outside the organization influence how the manager's time is spent and how much skill is needed to fulfill role requirements. More time is needed to deal with subordinates when they have interlocking jobs requiring coordination, new assignments must be made frequently, it is important to monitor subordinate performance but difficult to do so, and automatic compliance with orders and requests is not assured. More time is needed to deal with superiors when the manager is highly dependent on them for resources or assignments, and they make unpredictable demands. More time is needed to deal with peers when the manager is dependent on them for services, supplies, cooperation, or approval of work outputs. More time is needed for externals (e.g., clients, customers, suppliers, subcontractors) when the manager is highly dependent on them and must negotiate agreements, carry out public relations activities, create a good impression, and act discreetly. Having to establish relationships with many people for short periods of time, as opposed to dealing with the same people repeatedly, further complicates the manager's job, especially when it is necessary to impress and influence people quickly.

The extent to which subordinates, peers, and superiors make incompatible demands on a manager determines how much role conflict will be experienced and has obvious implications for the difficulty of satisfying the various demands. The difficulty of handling demands is also increased by incompatible interests between the manager and the various parties that are the source of the demands.

**Work Pattern** Stewart found that the pattern of role requirements and demands affected managerial behavior, and somewhat different patterns of behavior were associated with different types of managerial jobs. The following factors were useful for classifying managerial jobs: (1) the extent to which managerial activities are either self-generating or a response to the requests, instructions, and problems of other people, (2) the extent to which the work is recurrent and repetitive rather than variable and unique, (3) the amount of uncertainty in the work, (4) the extent of managerial activities requiring sustained attention for long periods of time, and (5) the amount of pressure to meet deadlines. For example, more initiative and planning of activities is required in a predominantly self-generating job (e.g., product manager, research manager, training director) than for a predominantly responding job with unpredictable problems and workload variations that are beyond the manager's control (e.g., production manager, service manager). Stewart suggested that the work pattern associated with some kinds of managerial jobs tends to be habit forming. A person who spends a long time in one position may grow accustomed to acting in a particular way and will find it difficult to adjust to another managerial position with very different behavioral requirements.

**Exposure** Another aspect of a managerial job that determines what behavior and skills are required is called "exposure." It is the amount of responsibility for making decisions with potentially serious consequences, and the amount of time before a mistake or poor decision can be discovered. There is more exposure when decisions

and actions have important, highly visible consequences for the organization, and mistakes or poor judgment can result in loss of resources, disruption of operations, and risk to human health and life. There is less exposure when there is a long delay before consequences become evident or when decisions are made by a group that has shared accountability for them. Examples of high-exposure jobs include product managers who must recommend expensive marketing programs and product changes that may quickly prove to be a disaster, project managers who may fail to complete projects on schedule and within budget, and managers of profit centers who are held accountable for their unit's costs and profits.

## RESEARCH ON SITUATIONAL DETERMINANTS

Stewart's broad perspective on the demands and constraints is not reflected in most of the research on situational determinants of leader behavior. Most studies investigate only one or two aspects of the situation at a time, and different aspects of the situation are examined from one study to the next. This narrow approach makes it difficult to determine if effects attributed to one situational variable are actually due to another, unmeasured situational variable. Moreover, it is not possible in these studies to evaluate how different aspects of the situation jointly affect leader behavior. Because the research has been so unsystematic, it is difficult to compare and integrate results across studies. Nevertheless, the research provides some useful insights into the manner in which managerial activities and behavior content are shaped by several aspects of the situation, including level of management, size of subunit, lateral interdependence, crisis conditions, and stage in the organization life cycle.

### Level of Management

Job responsibilities differ somewhat for managers at different levels in the authority hierarchy of the organization. Higher-level managers are usually more concerned with exercise of broad authority in making long-range plans, formulating policy, modifying the organization structure, and initiating new ways of doing things. Decisions at this level usually have a long time perspective, because it is appropriate for top executives to be thinking about what will happen 10 to 20 years in the future (Jacobs & Jaques, 1987). Middle managers are primarily concerned with interpreting and implementing policies and programs (Katz & Kahn, 1978), and they usually have a moderately long time perspective (2 to 5 years). Low-level managers are primarily concerned with structuring, coordinating, and facilitating work activities. Objectives are more specific, issues are less complex and more focused, and managers typically have a shorter time perspective (a few weeks to 2 years).

A manager at a high level in the authority hierarchy of an organization typically has more responsibility for making important decisions, including determination of organizational objectives, planning of strategies to obtain objectives, determination of general policies, design of the organizational structure, and allocation of resources. As one goes down through the authority hierarchy, managers have less discretion and freedom of action. Lower-level managers must operate within the constraints imposed by formalized rules and policy decisions made at higher levels. Blankenship and Miles (1968) found that lower-level managers had less discretion, were required more often

to consult with superiors before taking action on decisions, and made the final choice in a decision less often.

Consistent with this difference in job requirements and discretion across levels is the relative importance and amount of time devoted to different managerial activities and roles (Allan, 1981; Luthans, Rosencrantz, & Hennessey, 1985; McCall & Segrist, 1980; Mintzberg, 1973; Paolillo, 1981). The job description research found that planning, strategic decision making, and public relations are more important activities for top managers than for lower-level managers (Hemphill, 1959; Katzell, Barrett, Vann, & Hogan, 1968; Mahoney et al., 1965; Page & Tornow, 1987; Tornow & Pinto, 1976). The research on managerial roles found that the resource allocator, spokesperson, and figurehead roles are more important for top-level managers than for lower-level managers. High-level managers are usually more dependent on people outside the organization, and research on managerial activities and networking shows that they spend more time interacting with outsiders (Luthans et al., 1985; McCall et al., 1978; Michael & Yukl, 1993). Lower-level managers tend to be more concerned with technical matters, staffing (personnel selection and training), scheduling work, and monitoring subordinate performance. The number of activities carried out each day is greater for lower-level managers, and the time spent on each activity tends to be less (Kurke & Aldrich, 1983; Mintzberg, 1973; Thomason, 1967; Walker, Guest, & Turner, 1956).

### Size of Organizational Unit

The implications of work unit size or "span of control" for leader behavior have been investigated in several types of research, ranging from studies with small groups to studies on chief executives. Kotter (1982) studied general managers and concluded that managers of the larger organizational subunits had more demanding jobs in comparison to managers of smaller units. Decisions are more difficult due to the sheer volume of issues and activities and the lack of detailed knowledge a manager is likely to have. Because larger units are likely to have a more bureaucratic structure, managers must cope with more constraints (e.g., rules, standard procedures, and required authorizations). Consistent with this analysis, Kotter found that general managers in larger organizational units had larger networks and attended more scheduled meetings.

When a manager has a large number of subordinates, it is more difficult to get all of them together for meetings or to consult individually with each subordinate. Thus, leaders tend to use less participative leadership or to limit it to an "executive committee" or to a few trusted "lieutenants." Heller and Yukl (1969) found that as span of control increased, upper-level managers made more autocratic decisions, but they also used more delegation. Both decision styles allow a manager who is overloaded with responsibilities to reduce the amount of time needed to make decisions. Lower-level managers in this study also made more autocratic decisions as span of control increased, but they did not use more delegation, perhaps because delegation was less feasible for them. Blankenship and Miles (1968) found that as span of control increased, managers relied more on subordinates to initiate action on decisions, and this trend was much more pronounced for upper-level managers than for lower-level managers.

As the size of the group increases, so does the administrative workload. Managers spend more time doing things like planning, coordinating, staffing, and budgeting (Cohen & March, 1974; Hemphill, 1950; Katzell et al., 1968). The increase in coordination

requirements is magnified when the subordinates have highly uncertain and interdependent tasks. Sometimes part of the increased administrative burden can be delegated to a second in command, to a coordinating committee composed of subordinates, or to new coordinating specialists who serve as staff assistants. In many cases, however, the leader is expected to assume the responsibility for providing direction and integration of group activities.

Managers of large groups have less opportunity for interacting with individual subordinates and maintaining effective interpersonal relationships with them (Ford, 1981). There is less time to provide support, encouragement, and recognition to individual subordinates (Goodstadt & Kipnis, 1970). Problems with subordinates are likely to be handled in a more formalized, impersonal manner, and managers are more likely to use warnings and punishment (Kipnis & Cosentino, 1969; Kipnis & Lane, 1962). When a subordinate has a performance problem, the manager is less likely to provide individualized instruction and coaching.

As a group grows larger, separate cliques and factions are likely to emerge. These subgroups often compete for power and resources, creating conflicts and posing a threat to group cohesiveness and teamwork. Thus, the leader of a large group needs to devote more time to building group identification, promoting cooperation, and managing conflict. However, the pressure to carry out more administrative activities in a large group may cause the leader to neglect group maintenance activities until serious problems arise.

### **Lateral Interdependence**

The extent to which a leader's subunit is dependent on other subunits in the same organization ("lateral interdependence") or on external groups will affect leader behavior to a considerable extent. As interdependence increases with other subunits, coordination with them becomes more important and there is a greater need for mutual adjustments in plans, schedules, and activities (Galbraith, 1973; Mintzberg, 1979). Lateral interdependence represents a threat to the subunit because routine activities must be modified more frequently to accommodate the needs of other subunits, with a resulting loss in autonomy and stability (Hunt & Osborn, 1982; Sayles, 1979). Research on activity patterns of managers finds results consistent with this picture. As lateral interdependence increases, the external activities of a leader become more important, managers spend more time in lateral interactions, and they build larger networks with contacts in other parts of the organization (Hammer & Turk, 1987; Kaplan, 1986; Kotter, 1982; Michael & Yukl, 1993; Stewart, 1976; Walker, Guest, & Turner, 1956; Yanouzas, 1964).

The leader's role in lateral relations includes functions such as gathering information from other subunits, obtaining assistance and cooperation from them, negotiating agreements, reaching joint decisions to coordinate unit activities, defending the unit's interests, promoting a favorable image for the unit, and serving as a spokesperson for subordinates. The extent to which a leader emphasizes each of these activities depends on the nature of the lateral relationship. For example, when a unit provides services on demand to other units, acting as a buffer for subordinates against these external demands is a primary concern of the leader (Sayles, 1979).

Just as the leader tries to reconcile demands from above and below, so also is it necessary to make compromises in seeking to reach agreements with other units.



Subordinates expect the leader to represent their interests, but it will not be possible to maintain an effective working relationship with other units unless the leader is also responsive to their needs. Salancik et al. (1975) conducted a study of managers in an insurance company to investigate this kind of role conflict. They found that to maintain a cooperative effort, managers with interdependent work activities tended to become more responsive to each other's needs. The greater the number of peers a manager had to interact with on a regular basis, the less responsive the manager was to the desires of subordinates.

### Crisis Situations

When a group is under extreme pressure to perform a difficult task or to survive in a hostile environment, the role expectations for the leader are likely to change in a predictable manner. In this kind of situation, subordinates expect the leader to be more assertive, directive, and decisive (Mulder & Stemerding, 1963). They look to the leader to show initiative in defining the problem, identifying a solution, directing the group's response to the crisis, and keeping the group informed about events. For example, a study conducted aboard navy ships showed that navy officers exercised more power in crisis situations and were more directive, autocratic, and goal oriented (Mulder, Ritsema van Eck, & de Jong, 1970). Officers who showed initiative and exercised power in a confident and decisive manner were usually more effective. In a study of bank managers in the Netherlands, Mulder, de Jong, Koppelaar, and Verhage (1986) found that consultation with subordinates was used less in crisis situations than in noncrisis situations. Managers rated effective were more likely than less effective managers to use consultation in a noncrisis situation and were less likely to use it in a crisis situation.

### Stage in the Organizational Life Cycle

Organizations move along a life cycle similar to biological organisms, with a birth stage, a growth stage, a maturity stage, and a decline or revitalization stage (Quinn & Cameron, 1983). Baliga and Hunt (1988) proposed that by examining what types of processes are important during each stage, it is possible to identify changing leadership demands, constraints, and choices for top management.

In the initial stage of the organization's evolution, a primary management responsibility is to communicate a vision of the proposed organization to potential external stakeholders (e.g., banks, investors, suppliers) who can provide necessary resources to establish the organization. Once the organization is founded, other key responsibilities include identifying and acquiring the technology needed to perform the work, recruiting the key personnel needed to staff the organization, inspiring commitment by the new members, and designing appropriate management systems (e.g., information systems, control systems, reward systems).

As the organization grows rapidly, the management responsibilities concerned with internal demands (e.g., staffing, motivation, organization of work, resource allocation, coordination) become as important as those related to external demands. In the maturity phase, when the organization's key products or services become fully developed and the market stabilizes, important management responsibilities are to structure the work, develop procedures to increase the efficiency of operations, and maintain member morale and motivation in a time of increasing controls and declining opportunity for advancement.

Eventually the organization will encounter severe environmental threats (e.g., new competitors, declining demand for its products and services). In this crisis phase the primary responsibility of management is to determine how to adapt and survive. New strategies must be identified, members of the organization must be influenced to support them, resources must be found to finance the changes, credibility must be reestablished with external stakeholders, and the structure of the organization must be changed to be consistent with the new strategy. The success of this effort will determine whether the organization declines or is revitalized (Baliga & Hunt, 1988; Hunt, Baliga, & Peterson, 1988). The behavior of top executives in different evolutionary phases of the organization is discussed in more detail in Chapter 12.

## CHANGES IN THE NATURE OF MANAGERIAL WORK

Managerial work is being altered by sweeping trends in economics, politics, and society (Dess & Picken, 2000). The trend toward globalization continues to accelerate as foreign competition intensifies, foreign markets become more important, and more companies become multinational or participate in cross-national joint ventures. Managerial responsibilities increasingly involve international issues, and managers must be able to understand, communicate with, and influence people from different cultures. Cultural diversity of the workforce within organizations is increasing as well. To build cooperative relationships requires considerable empathy, respect for diversity, and understanding of the values, beliefs, and attitudes of people from different cultures.

New technology is changing the nature of work and making it possible to provide more detailed, timely information to anyone who needs it. However, increased information about the organization's operations and environment can be both a blessing and a curse. It takes a clear sense of objectives and priorities and strong cognitive skills to deal with the deluge of information and make sense out of it. Moreover, as electronic communication becomes more important, leaders will need to adjust their behavior to fit the new technologies.

Changes in the nature of organizations present yet another challenge. Many organizations are being decentralized into smaller, semiautonomous organizational units, flattened by eliminating layers of middle management, or restructured around product teams that cut across functional or geographical lines. In the team-based organizations there is more shared leadership, and leadership responsibilities are changing in important ways. For example, team leaders are expected to be more of a coach and facilitator and less of a director and controller.

Another trend is increased reliance on outside suppliers, consultants, and contractors that provide supplies, materials, or services when needed on a just-in-time basis. In extreme cases, the vertically integrated firm that did everything itself is being replaced by a "virtual" organization that "outsources" most activities (e.g., production, payroll and benefit administration, legal services, marketing). Leaders in these new organizations are expected to function more like entrepreneurs than like traditional managers. They must identify strategic opportunities, negotiate joint ventures with people in other organizations, build strategic alliances, and coordinate interdependent activities in dozens of locations spread around the globe.

## HOW MUCH DISCRETION DO MANAGERS HAVE?

The situational research provides strong evidence that aspects of the situation influence the activity pattern and behavior content of managers. A managerial position makes various demands on the person who occupies it, and the actions of the occupant are constrained by laws, policies, regulations, traditions, and scope of formal authority. Despite these demands and constraints, some choice of behavior remains, particularly with respect to what aspects of the job are emphasized, how much time is devoted to various activities, and how much time is spent with different people. The research showed that even for managers with similar jobs, there was considerable variability of behavior (James & White, 1983; Kotter, 1982; Stewart, 1976, 1982). For example, Stewart found that some bank managers emphasized staff supervision, whereas some others delegated much of the internal management to the assistant manager and concentrated on actively seeking out new business.

In part, variability of behavior within the same job occurs because there are multiple performance dimensions. Within the boundaries imposed by the priorities of higher management, a person may choose to devote more effort to some objectives than to others. For example, activities involving development of new products may get more attention than cost reduction, quality improvements, development of new export markets, or improvement of safety practices. Development of subordinates to groom them for promotion may get more attention than team building or training in skills necessary to improve performance in the present job. The trade-offs inherent among performance dimensions and lack of time to do everything well make it inevitable that different people will define the same job in different ways. How this is done will reflect a manager's interests, skills, and values, as well as the changing role expectations of the individuals whose destinies are intertwined with the manager's.

Variability in the same job is also due to the way in which a manager deals with role conflicts. Role expectations for a leader are seldom absolute or comprehensive, and a leader usually has considerable discretion to shape his or her own role over time. Given enough time, a skillful leader may be able to reconcile role requirements that were initially incompatible. Leaders with a record of successful decisions and demonstrated loyalty to the organization are given more freedom to redefine their role and initiate innovations (see Chapter 6). However, flexibility is greater for role expectations that do not involve central values of symbolic importance to organization members (Biggart & Hamilton, 1984).

## LIMITATIONS OF THE DESCRIPTIVE RESEARCH

Most of the research on communication patterns of managers is dated, and it needs to be redone for modern organizations with new types of communication media. Managerial interaction is likely to be affected by new technology such as cellular phones, e-mail, Internet chatrooms, and videoconferencing. Managerial activities are likely to be affected by new forms of organization (e.g., virtual organizations, team-based organizations, joint venture organizations). More research is needed to examine how these activity patterns are changing in the United States as well as in other countries.

Most of the observational research on the nature of managerial work was designed to describe the typical pattern and content of managerial activities, not to answer directly the question of what activity patterns or behavior patterns are necessary and effective. Discovering that many managers carry out a particular activity does not tell us whether it is essential for managerial effectiveness. Even the results from the situational research may be misleading. The most prevalent behavior pattern in a particular type of managerial job or situation is not necessarily the most effective one.

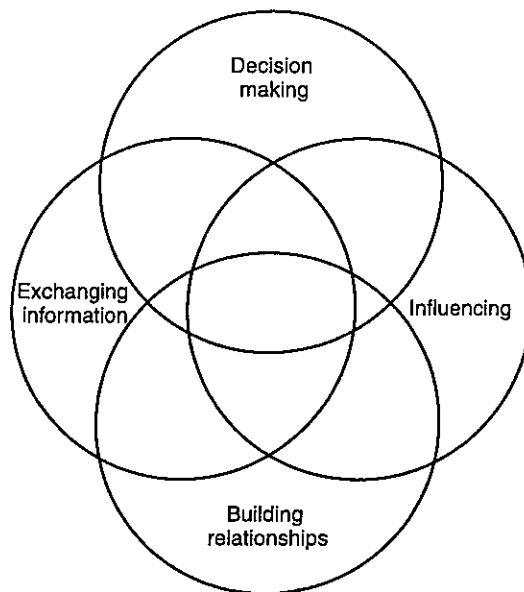
Job description studies measure the perceived importance of various activities and responsibilities for the job. This research reveals similarities and differences in skill requirements across various types of managerial positions. The primary purpose of the research is to facilitate development of compensation systems, selection procedures, and performance appraisal procedures, not to determine how managerial behavior is related to managerial effectiveness. The importance ratings made by many managers may be biased by shared stereotypes or implicit theories about effective leaders. As yet there is little evidence to demonstrate that the managerial activities and behaviors rated most important are also the ones related most strongly to criteria of managerial effectiveness.

Other descriptive studies analyzed data from interviews with managers predetermined to be effective (Kanter, 1982; Kotter, 1982; Kotter & Lawrence, 1974), or with managers from organizations designated as effective (Peters & Austin, 1985; Peters & Waterman, 1982). These researchers attempted to find common themes that might explain why the managers were effective. However, the studies did not compare effective managers to ineffective managers. More reliable insights would be gained if researchers compared behavior patterns for effective managers and ineffective managers of the same type and explicitly examined the relation of managerial behavior patterns to the requirements of the managerial job situation.

As for the problem of classifying the content of managerial activities, some convergence is evident among the various descriptive approaches, but only at the level of broad categories or processes. Most managerial activity can be described in terms of four general processes: (1) developing and maintaining relationships, (2) getting and giving information, (3) making decisions, and (4) influencing people. These processes are interwoven among a manager's activities, and any specific activity may involve more than one process. The resulting overlap among categories is depicted in Figure 2-2.

## APPLICATIONS FOR MANAGERS

Even though most descriptive research on managerial activities was not designed to determine how they are related to managerial effectiveness, the research does provide some insights about coping more effectively with the requirements of managerial work. This section summarizes some tentative guidelines for effective managerial leadership. The reader is cautioned to remember that most of these guidelines are patterns and themes inferred from exploratory descriptive research and practitioner insights, not results from research designed to test propositions about effective leader behavior. Guidelines for using time wisely are presented first, followed by guidelines for problem solving.



**FIGURE 2-2** Four Primary Processes in Managing

### Guidelines for Managing Time

Table 2-3 summarizes some things managers can do to use their time wisely, cope with demands, and handle role conflicts.

- **Understand the reasons for demands and constraints.**

It is essential to learn how others perceive the manager's role and what they expect. Perception of demands and constraints inevitably involves subjective judgments, but many managers fail to take the time necessary to gather sufficient information on which to base these judgments. Do not assume that everyone agrees with your

**TABLE 2-3** Guidelines for Performing Managerial Work

- Understand the reasons for demands and constraints.
- Expand the range of choices.
- Determine what you want to accomplish.
- Analyze how you use your time.
- Plan daily and weekly activities.
- Avoid unnecessary activities.
- Conquer procrastination.
- Take advantage of reactive activities.
- Make time for reflective planning.
- Identify important, solvable problems.
- Look for connections among problems.
- Experiment with innovative solutions.
- Take decisive action to deal with crises.

vision, priorities, or ideas about effective management. Before one can satisfy people or modify their expectations, it is necessary to understand what they really desire. Understanding role expectations requires frequent face-to-face interaction, and entails asking questions, listening to others rather than constantly preaching, being sensitive to negative reactions (including nonverbal cues), and trying to discover the values and needs underlying a person's opinions and preferences.

- **Expand the range of choices.**

Too many managers focus on the demands and constraints and fail to give adequate consideration to opportunities to define the job in different ways. It is essential to step back from the job and see it in a broader strategic perspective. It is usually possible to be proactive with superiors about defining the job in a way that allows more discretion, especially when there is already role ambiguity due to poorly defined responsibilities. Choices may be expanded by finding ways to avoid demands and reduce constraints. Planning and agenda development should include a conscious analysis of the demands and constraints limiting current effectiveness and how they can be reduced, eliminated, or circumvented.

- **Determine what you want to accomplish.**

Time is a scarce resource that must be used well if the manager is to be effective. The key to effective time management is knowing what you want to accomplish. A person with a clear set of objectives and priorities can identify important activities and plan the best way to use time; without clear objectives, no amount of planning will improve time management. The objectives and priorities may be informal, as with Kotter's (1982) mental agendas, but they need to be identified by a deliberate, conscious process.

- **Analyze how you use your time.**

It is difficult to improve time management without knowing how time is actually spent. Most managers are unable to estimate very accurately how much time they spend on different activities. Most time management systems recommend keeping a daily log of activities for one or two weeks. The log should list each activity in 15 minute blocks of time. It is helpful to indicate the source of control over each activity (e.g., self, boss, subordinates, others, organizational requirements) and whether the activity was planned in advance or an immediate reaction to requests and problems. Typical time wasters should be noted on the log (e.g., unnecessary interruptions, meetings that run too long, searching for misplaced items). The time log should be analyzed to identify how important and necessary each activity is. Consider whether the activity can be eliminated, combined with others, or given less time. Identify whether too many activities are initiated by others, and whether adequate time is allowed for activities that are important but not urgent.

- **Plan daily and weekly activities.**

In the extensive practitioner-oriented literature on time management, there is considerable agreement about the importance of planning daily and weekly activities in advance (e.g., Webber, 1980). When planning daily activities, the first step is to make a "to-do list" for the day and assign priorities to each activity. This prioritized activity list may be used with a calendar showing required meetings and scheduled appointments to plan the next day's activities. Most of the discretionary time should be allocated to high-priority activities. If there is insufficient time to do important activities with immediate deadlines, then one should reschedule or delegate some activities that are less important. The task of juggling the various activities and deciding which to do is a

difficult but essential component of managerial work. Remember that it is more efficient to do a series of similar tasks than to keep switching from one type of task to another. Sometimes it is possible to schedule similar activities (e.g., several telephone calls, several letters) at the same time during the day. In addition, it is wise to take into account natural energy cycles and biorhythms. Peak alertness and efficiency occur at different times of the day for different people, and peak periods should be used for difficult tasks that require creativity.

- **Avoid unnecessary activities.**

Managers who become overloaded with unnecessary tasks are likely to neglect activities that are important for attaining key objectives. Managers may accept unnecessary tasks because they are afraid of offending subordinates, peers, or the boss, and they lack the self-confidence and assertiveness to turn down requests. One way to avoid unnecessary tasks is to prepare and use tactful ways to say no (e.g., say that you could only do the task if the person does some of your work for you; suggest other people who could do the task faster or better; point out that an important task will be delayed or jeopardized if you do what the person requests). Some unnecessary but required tasks can be eliminated by showing how resources will be saved or other benefits attained. Unessential tasks that cannot be eliminated or delegated can be put off until slack times. Sometimes when a task is put off long enough, the person who requested it will discover that it is not needed after all.

- **Conquer procrastination.**

Even when it is obvious that an activity is important, some people delay doing it in favor of a less important activity. One reason for procrastination is the fear of failure. People find excuses for delaying a task because they lack self-confidence. One remedy for a long, complex task is to divide it into smaller parts, each of which is easier and less intimidating. Deadlines are also helpful for overcoming procrastination. When setting deadlines for completion of difficult tasks, it is better to allow some slack and set a deadline that is earlier than the date when the task absolutely must be completed. However, having some slack should not become an excuse for not starting the task. Schedule a definite time early in the day to begin working on unpleasant tasks that tend to be procrastinated. Such tasks are more likely to get done if tackled first before the daily stream of demands provides excuses to avoid them.

- **Take advantage of reactive activities.**

Although some degree of control over the use of one's time is desirable, it is not feasible for a manager to plan in advance exactly how each minute of the day will be spent. The unpredictable nature of the environment makes it essential to view chance encounters, interruptions, and unscheduled meetings initiated by others not just as intrusions on scheduled activities but rather as opportunities to gain important information, discover problems, influence others, and move forward on implementation of plans and informal agendas. Obligations that might otherwise be time wasters, such as required attendance at some meetings and ceremonial occasions, can be turned to one's advantage (Kotter, 1982; Mintzberg, 1973).

- **Make time for reflective planning.**

Managers face relentless pressures for dealing with immediate problems and responding to requests for assistance, direction, or authorization. Some of these problems require immediate attention, but if managers become too preoccupied with reacting

to day-to-day problems they have no time left for the reflective planning that would help them to avoid many of the problems, or for the contingency planning that would help them cope better with unavoidable problems. Therefore, it is desirable to set aside some time on a regular basis for reflective analysis and planning. Listen to Antonia Bryson, a deputy commissioner in New York City's Department of Environmental Protection (Haas, 1994, p. 60):

What happens in government is that you always tend to get caught up in crises . . . But it's helpful to sit back at the end of every week and ask, is this part of my long-term plan of what I want to accomplish while I am in this job? . . . The higher up you go, the more you have to constantly examine how you are setting your own priorities. Are you going to the right meetings? Are you going to too many meetings? Are you using your staff members effectively to make sure you yourself are spending time on the right things and accomplishing what you want to get accomplished?

Making time for reflective planning requires careful time management. One approach is to set aside a block of private time (at least one to two hours) each week for individual planning. Another approach is to schedule periodic strategy sessions with subordinates to encourage discussion of strategic issues. Still another approach is to initiate a major improvement project, delegate primary responsibility to a subordinate or task force, and schedule regular meetings with the individual or group to review plans and progress.

### Guidelines for Problem Solving

Dealing with disturbances and problems is an important activity that requires considerable time for most managers. The following guidelines explain how managers can make better use of the time they spend trying to solve operational problems (see also Table 2-3).

- **Identify important, solvable problems.**

There are always more problems than a manager can resolve, and it is desirable to evaluate (1) whether a problem can be solved within a reasonable time period with available resources, and (2) whether it is worthwhile to invest the time, effort, and resources on this problem rather than on others (Isenberg, 1984; McCall & Kaplan, 1985). Descriptive research on effective managers suggests that they give priority to important problems that can be solved, rather than ignoring these problems or trying to avoid responsibility for them (e.g., by passing the problem to someone else or involving more people than necessary to diffuse responsibility for decisions) (Peters & Austin, 1985; Peters & Waterman, 1982). Managers should attempt to avoid or postpone action on problems that are either trivial or intractable. Of course, some problems are so important that they should not be postponed even when the initial probability of a successful solution is low.

- **Look for connections among problems.**

In the process of trying to make sense out of the streams of problems, issues, and opportunities, a manager should look for relationships among them rather than assuming that they are distinct and independent (Isenberg, 1984). A broader view of problems provides better insights for understanding them. By relating problems to each other and to informal strategic objectives, a manager is more likely to recognize opportunities to take actions that contribute to the solution of several related problems at



the same time. Finding connections among problems is facilitated if the manager is able to remain flexible and open-minded about the definition of a problem and actively considers multiple definitions for each problem.

- **Experiment with innovative solutions.**

Effective managers are more willing to experiment actively with innovative approaches for solving problems, rather than spend an excessive amount of time studying them. Whenever possible, experiments are conducted initially on a small scale to minimize the risk, and ways are found to obtain the information necessary to evaluate results. In some cases, an action is taken not because the manager believes it is the best way to solve a problem but rather because taking limited action is the only way to develop an adequate understanding of the problem (Isenberg, 1984; Quinn, 1980). Peters and Waterman (1982, p. 13) found that managers in effective companies had a bias for action characterized as "do it, fix it, try it." One manager described the following approach for quickly introducing innovative products: "Instead of allowing 250 engineers and marketers to work on a new product in isolation for 15 months, they form bands of 5 to 25 and test ideas out on a customer, often with inexpensive prototypes, within a matter of weeks" (Peters & Waterman, 1982, p. 14).

- **Take decisive action to deal with crises.**

In a crisis situation (e.g., financial turmoil, a threatened takeover, health hazards, a serious accident or natural disaster), people are usually anxious and concerned about how they will be affected. The leader is usually expected to take quick, decisive action to deal with an emergency or crisis situation before it becomes worse. Effective leaders quickly identify the cause of the problem, they take decisive action to direct the work unit's response to it, and they keep people informed about progress in efforts to deal with the crisis (Stewart, 1967, 1976).

## SUMMARY

The descriptive research found that managerial work is inherently hectic, varied, fragmented, reactive, disorderly, and political. Brief oral interactions predominate, and many of these involve people outside the manager's immediate work unit and chain of command. Decision processes are highly political, and most planning is informal and adaptive. This activity pattern occurs, in part, because managers face several dilemmas. To carry out their responsibilities, managers need to obtain recent, relevant information that exists only in the heads of people who are widely scattered within and outside the organization; they need to make decisions based on information that is both overwhelming and incomplete; and they need to get cooperation from people over whom they have no formal authority.

Identifying meaningful and widely applicable categories to describe the content of managerial work has been a problem for a long time. One approach is the taxonomy of managerial roles proposed by Mintzberg. Another approach is represented by job description research that asks managers to rate the importance of different activities and responsibilities for their jobs.

Some of the descriptive research has examined differences in behavior related to aspects of the managerial situation. Stewart identified several situational influences on leader behavior. The pattern of interactions with subordinates, peers, superiors, and

outsiders is affected by a manager's dependency on these people and by the demands they make on a manager. The type of work pattern depends on the nature of the work itself: self-generating or responding, repetitive or variable, uncertain or predictable, fragmented or sustained, and subject to tight deadlines or relatively unhurried.

Comparative research on managers in different situations reveals several other aspects of the situation that affect managerial behavior, including level of management, size of the organizational unit, lateral interdependence, crisis conditions, and stage in the organizational life cycle. Managerial work is being altered by sweeping societal trends such as globalization, workforce diversity, the pace of technological change, and the emergence of new forms of organizations.

Despite all the demands and constraints a manager faces, some choice of behavior remains. Even managers in similar positions define their roles differently. There are choices in what aspects of the job to emphasize, how to allocate one's time, and with whom to spend it. Managers will be more effective if they understand the demands and constraints in their job situation and work to expand their choices. Finally, effective managers are more proactive in their behavior, and even when reacting to unforeseen events, their behavior more closely reflects their objectives and priorities.

In general, the descriptive research suggests that managerial work includes four general types of activities: (1) building and maintaining relationships, (2) getting and giving information, (3) decision making, and (4) influencing people. The next chapter examines leadership behavior embedded in these activities or occurring in conjunction with them.

### Review and Discussion Questions

1. Briefly describe typical activity patterns in managerial work.
2. What does descriptive research tell us about managerial decision making, planning, and problem solving?
3. Briefly describe Mintzberg's 10 managerial roles. Are some roles more important than others?
4. Briefly describe how managerial behavior is influenced by the nature of the job situation according to Stewart.
5. How are managerial activities and behavior affected by level of management, unit size, and lateral interdependence?
6. How is a crisis likely to affect managerial activities and behavior?
7. How does the organizational life cycle affect the relative importance of different managerial functions and activities?
8. How much latitude do managers have in what they do and how they do it? Is it more accurate to view managers as "captains of their destiny" or "prisoners of their fate"?
9. Why do managers have so much difficulty managing their time?
10. What are some guidelines for managing time better?
11. What are some things managers can do to improve problem solving?

### Key Terms

constraints  
demands  
dependency  
exposure  
job description research

lateral interdependence  
managerial activities  
Managerial Position Description Questionnaire  
managerial roles

networks  
organizational life cycle  
role conflicts  
role expectations