The nine features of mastery in management

23.04.2025 09:53:58 | Management Insights, Lukas Michel | 0 Comments | Unmanaged,

Mastery

Read Blog 2 of 3 on the features of better management.

This blog was originally published for the GLOBAL DRUCKER FORUM BLOG

In our first blog, we talked about the *unmanaged* state which describes how many organizations today are stuck in a cycle of "muddling through," led by outdated management models and well-meaning but overwhelmed leaders. We made the case for better management, not more control but more clarity and capability.

Now let's zoom in on what better management actually looks like.

What does *mastery in management* mean? What separates the organizations that evolve, adapt, and thrive from the ones that simply survive?

Over 25 years of research, across 500 organizations and industries worldwide, we have identified nine distinct features of organizations that operate at the level of mastery. These features don't belong to a trend or framework, they describe how modern management fit for the 21st century environment works when it's done right.

Let's walk through them.

1. Diagnostic Management

Mastery starts with seeing clearly.

Diagnostic management means constantly asking: *What's really going on?* It's about identifying patterns or gaps in your management practices, not just fixing symptoms. Leaders who operate this way don't jump to solutions. They diagnose first, like

doctors with deep context and curiosity.

In practice, it means using data to identify gaps but not being ruled by it. It's about developing management intuition through inquiry, reflection, and evidence, not opinion based on outdated practices.

2. Systemic Management

Everything is connected. Mastery respects the system.

Systemic management recognizes that organizations are social systems, not machines. You can't pull one lever without affecting another. So instead of managing departments in isolation, systemic leaders think in terms of relationships, flows, and consequences.

They ask: *How does this decision affect culture? Strategy? Customers? Learning?*

This kind of thinking helps avoid siloed decisions that lead to fragmentation and instead fosters coherence.

3. Human Management

Mastery honors the people who make it happen.

Human-centered management is about understanding what drives motivation, collaboration, and meaning. It's about recognizing people as sources of innovation, not just resources to be optimized.

Mastery means managing *with* people, not *at* them.

It also means fostering trust, psychological safety, and the conditions where people share their unique knowledge and grow, not just perform.

4. Holistic Management

Mastery sees the whole picture, even when it's messy.

Holistic management means integrating multiple perspectives: strategic, operational, cultural, emotional, even ethical. It's about seeing beyond the income statement and balance sheet to understand that performance is shaped by both hard and soft factors.

Holistic leaders aren't afraid to ask, "what are we missing?" They

engage with complexity rather than simplifying it away.

5. Regenerative Management

Mastery creates more than it consumes.

This is about sustainability, not just environmental, but economic, social, and organizational sustainability. Regenerative management builds capacity instead of draining it. It focuses on creating long-term vitality over short-term wins.

Regenerative leaders cultivate learning loops, innovation capacity, and resilience. Their organizations get stronger over time, not just bigger.

6. Integrated Management

Mastery is not a patchwork of practices, it's a living, breathing whole.

Integrated management brings strategy, culture, structure, and operations into alignment. It avoids contradictions like "we value innovation" while punishing risk-takers.

When integration happens, the organization moves with coherence. Priorities are clear. Processes support purpose. People know how their work contributes to the whole.

Integrated management is like a well-rehearsed jazz band, flexible, creative, and in sync.

7. Distributed Management

Mastery shares the load and the intelligence.

In a world that moves fast, centralized decision-making is too slow. Distributed management pushes autonomy and accountability to the edges, empowering teams and individuals to act with purpose.

It is not chaos. There is still direction and structure. The key is clarity where everyone knows the *why*, so they can figure out the best *how* without being told.

Distributed leadership builds adaptability, engagement, and speed.

8. Unique Management

Mastery doesn't copy; it creates.

There is no one-size-fits-all in management mastery. The best organizations build their own approach, tailored to their values, context, and goals.

They don't just imitate what others are doing. Adopting "best practices" from another organization rarely works. Great organizations innovate their management, deliberately. That is why mastery is always *unique*.

It's also why benchmarking can be misleading. What works for one organization might not work for another.

9. Interactive Management

Mastery listens, learns, and evolves in real time.

This is where everything comes together. Interactive management is about continuous feedback, learning, and co-creation. It treats the organization as dialogue, not a command chain.

Instead of annual reviews, interactive organizations reflect and adjust constantly. They're responsive, not reactive. Leaders engage, sense, and respond with their teams, customers, and the environment.

What Do These Features Have in Common?

They all shift management from control to capability.

From pushing harder to becoming smarter.

From muddling through to mastering the art of running an organization that actually works for its people, its customers, and its future.

Here's the punchline: most organizations already have the potential for mastery. They just need to clean the windshield to see where they are going. What is missing is the awareness and the tools to see how far they are from the goal of management mastery and how to get there.

The roadmap to management mastery is what the next blog is all

about.

A Quick Preview of Blog 3: The Journey to Mastery

If Blog 2 gave you the “what,” Blog 3 will give you the “how.”

We’ll guide you through the five-stage journey organizations take toward mastery:

Assessment → Adoption → Adaptation → Evolution → Perfection.

And we’ll introduce you to a game-changing tool: the Organization Twin.

This digital mirror lets leaders see how their management really works compared to others, across time, and across nine dimensions of mastery. It’s the single best way we’ve found to stop muddling through and start managing with insight.

Move from overwhelmed to aware. From firefighting to foresight. Mastery in management isn’t a dream. It’s a journey and it is one that starts with seeing your organization and your role in a whole new light.

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The upcoming book: Michel, L; Nold, H and Bosbach G. (November 2025). *‘Unmanaged’: How Mastery in Management Replaces Muddling Through Leadership*. LID Publishing, London.

About Management Insights

Founded by Lukas Michel, Management Insights draws on more than 25 years of research and practice to help people understand how their organizations work. The Organization Twin brings organizational patterns into view for reflection, dialogue, and informed choice.

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