
Examining Media Management and Performance: A Taxonomy for Initiating a Research Agenda

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1 Management and Performance: Introduction

The concept of performance is embedded in thinking about media managers and media organizations. Media managers are expected to yield a certain level of performance in the enterprises they manage by producing gains in cash flow, market share (e.g., revenues and audiences), organizational efficiency, and other items typically geared around financial and quantitative measures. Managers are also expected to perform in qualitative areas such as leadership, public service, and goodwill. Yet, research on these critical areas is limited.

One reason for the lack of literature is that *performance* is a difficult concept to grasp when applied to the media management environment. One area of confusion is how to define a media enterprise. Media firms can be publicly or privately owned and compete in different markets (local, domestic, international). Likewise, there are challenges with the simple term *management*. What managers do we refer to? Management in many media organizations can be found on three different hierarchical levels (e.g., executive, middle managers, and supervisors), so we would expect performance to differ across managerial positions (Albarran, 2013).

Further complicating the picture are the many possible interpretations for the term *performance*. Financial performance dominates, probably because it is the easiest to assess, especially for publicly traded corporations. Peter Drucker, considered the father of management thought, recognized the challenges of defining performance late in his career:

“We will have to learn to establish new definitions of what ‘performance’ means in a given enterprise . . . especially in the large, publicly owned enterprise . . . we will have to develop new measurements and so on. But at the same time performance will have to be defined

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nonfinancially [emphasis added] ... all institutions will have to think through what performance means” (Drucker, 1999, pp. 60–61).

While Drucker was correct in calling for new ways to think about performance, no details were offered to determine *how* we can think about performance in new ways. Further, Drucker was considering the business environment as a whole, not media management.

The goal of this chapter is to initiate a new taxonomy to research managerial performance for media enterprises and offer ideas on a possible research agenda as a means to build knowledge in this important area. But first, we will look at the literature that exists on the subject of management and performance, in order to determine what is known about this complicated topic.

2 Management and Performance: Literature Review

With the exception of McQuail (1992)—which looks at “performance” through the lens of its “public interest capacity” (p. 11)—little has been written concerning the internal measurements of performance of media organizations, or what The Walt Disney Company describes in its mission statement, as the development of “the most creative, innovative and profitable entertainment experience and related products in the world” (Walt Disney Company—Mission, 2016).

Database searches using keywords like “management and performance” and “media management and performance” generated a limited and disjointed set of articles that have some relevance to the topic. In one respect, this is not surprising given the many meanings for the key terms and the challenge of studying performance, especially if one considers nonfinancial aspects as suggested by Drucker (1999).

An argument could be made that the earliest managerial writings were focused on managerial performance. Frederick Taylor’s principles of scientific management (first published in 1911 and reissued in 1991) were designed to improve productivity—and thus performance—of an organization. Yet Taylor did not focus on the role of the manager per se. Mary Parker Follet was one of the first scholars to consider concepts related to performance in studying managerial practices (see Follett, Pauline, & Graham, 1995; Tonn, 2003).

Many texts recognize the modern school of management (e.g., Albarran, 2013; Gershon, 2009), which began in the 1960s as the era where emphasis on managerial performance became prominent. Drucker’s (1986) management by objectives (MBO), Total Quality Management (e.g., Juran, 1988) and strategic management (Chan-Olmsted, 2005; Porter, 1980) are just three of the areas developed during this era to improve efficiency and performance.

Scholarly articles on managerial performance are sparse. There is a body of work in the business literature on the topic of managerial performance of social enterprises, which often refers to non-profit enterprises. Clarkson (1995) provides one of the earliest frameworks for studying social enterprises, using research over a

10-year (1983–1993) period to focus primarily on the role of stakeholders. Alm and Lowe (2001) studied Finnish public broadcasting and identified management “arenas” that face four distinctive but overlapping markets. Bagnoli and Megali (2009) offer a framework and theoretical model that considers three areas: economic-financial performance, social effectiveness, and institutional legitimacy. Meadows and Pike (2009) utilize the Balanced Scorecard in analyzing social enterprises, and with the use of a case study argue that “in a time of rapid change” organizations must focus on actions that have the best chance of improving performance over time.

Research on media management and performance is even more challenging to locate. Grönlund (2002) examined customer satisfaction and financial performance of printing companies in Finland, but did not address management of the firms. Albarran and Moellinger (2002) looked at structure, conduct and performance of the top six global media companies, but limited performance to financial metrics. Küng (2007) examined the state of media management, and declares that “media firms are in the main addressed as businesses . . . at a macro rather than micro level, and the majority of attention is focused on exogenous changes . . . and relatively *little* on internal firm dynamics and how these impinge on *performance* outcomes” (p. 23, emphasis added). Küng does not address performance at the managerial level.

Van deer Wurff and Leenders (2008) used data from 46 professionals to identify dimensions related to the innovation and performance of media companies. Their findings did not address managerial performance, but suggested that “different types of performance build upon different types of values and practices” (p. 168).

Taken together, these limited findings indicate performance lacks systematical study by researchers. This could be due in part to the difficulty in creating operational definitions for “managerial performance,” as well as the challenge of finding and collecting observable data, a task even more demanding given the need to consider nonfinancial criteria.

3 Methodology and Industry Observations

In order to begin an examination of media management and performance with an eye toward formulation of an eventual taxonomy, we first relied upon ethnographic enquiry methods (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934, 1982). Secondly, the analysis of the data extracted from the interviews conformed to practices established by grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006, Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

As a tool for obtaining meaningful data, the interviews served one principle purpose. Silverman (1993) points out interviews provide data that gives access to facts concerning behavior, attitudes, and authentic experiences of the participant. This usage of the interview grew out of the symbolic interaction observations and approaches advanced by Mead (1934, 1982) and later by Blumer (1969). This intellectual tradition also owes much to the theoretical application of Goffman (1959, 1983) and the notion of role performing actors and their performance within

the interaction process, as well as the participant observation and ethnographic research done by Boas (1920), Malinowski (1926/1972) and Garfinkel (1967) and the naturalistic approach of Metza (1969). Many other researchers have offered critical evaluations such as Hammersley (1989), by suggesting refinements of the traditional methodology; Denzin (1970) and Denzin and Lincoln (2003, 2005), and practical approaches to the interview process itself (see Holstein and Gubrium, 1995; Seidman, 2006).

The analysis attempted to find what Glaser and Strauss (1967) term “salient categories of information” (p. 22). Once these categories were discovered, the analysis concentrated on discerning the connection between related categories, and the discovery of patterns from which understanding can be expanded (Schwandt, 2001). Further, as Strauss and Corbin (1990) contend, the development of such categories facilitates the ability of the researcher to validate other theoretical grounded conclusions.

In discussing the seminal articles concerning the foundations of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998), Charmaz (2006) contends that “they proposed that systematic qualitative analysis has its own logic and could generate theory” (p. 5). The author also defines the key element that promotes such a systematic analysis. This is the “simultaneous involvement [of the researcher or research teams] in data collection and analysis” (p. 5). In other words, data collection, analysis and theory building stand in a reciprocal relationship. This involvement includes the construction of analytic codes and categories and the constant comparison of incoming data with the objective of “advancing theory development during each step of data collection and analysis” (p. 5). The techniques include “memo-writing to elaborate categories, specify their properties, [and] define relationships between categories and identify gaps” (p. 6), sampling, and a review of the literature after analysis. In contrast, Glaser and Strauss (1967) insist that consulting the literature should only occur after data collection and an independent analysis is conducted, this insistence on this procedure has come into question, and even caused somewhat of a split between the two primary proponents of this method. Glaser (1978, 1998) argues that objective neutrality must be preserved by following this step and allowing the data to dictate the outcome. While Strauss and Corbin (1998) stress the necessity for unbiased data collection, they also acknowledge that the respondent’s views may conflict with that of the researcher, and therefore complete objectivity is problematic. Also, concerning the use of existing theory to form expectations concerning the interpretation of data, Glaser (1998) notes that in the second step of grounded theory development—*theoretical coding*—existing theory should be considered. Glaser states: “It is necessary for the grounded theorist to know many theoretical codes in order to be sensitive to rendering explicitly the subtleties of the relationship in his data” (p. 72). Noting this observation, Charmaz (2006) asks: “How do we know these codes if they have not become part of our repertoire? And if they have, would we not know something of the major works from which they are derived? (p. 165). The logical question then becomes can existing theory serve as an aid in formulating the first part of the research design, the selection of research questions?

Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, and Lowe (1991) agree, contending that “evidence is interpreted in order to provide good answers to the basic research question[s]” (p. 21). These questions should come from what Strauss and Corbin (1990) term the “technical literature,” or a literature review of the general problem under consideration (p. 52). Further, as Charmaz (2006) notes “grounded theory methods can complement other approaches to qualitative data analysis, rather than stand in opposition to them” (p. 9), and that existing theories, coming from a literature review, should be used to analyze relevant data in relation on one’s research problem (p. 168). The author recommends the researcher “consider treating extant concepts as problematic and then look for the extent to which their characteristics are lived and understood” (p. 166).

With limited scholarly literature, the authors turned to a qualitative approach, as outlined above, to assess what industry practitioners use to assess managerial performance. Limited purposive samples were contacted via electronic mail from the first author’s industry contacts inviting reaction to the following research question:

RQ: How do we assess performance by media managers?

Not all of the contacts responded, nor is this limited sample intended to represent a random sample of media managers. The professionals who did respond represented a variety of positions across the media industries in the United States, and offer managerial perceptions of *how* performance is assessed. In terms of the participants, one of the respondents was recently retired; the others were all working full-time in various managerial roles. A summary of the responses are presented in Table 1, separating the observations for financial performance from the nonfinancial performance criteria per Drucker (1999).

The managers represented a variety of audio-visual media enterprises including television, radio, and cable; different types of ownership were also represented with some managers working for privately held companies and others working for publicly traded companies. At least two managers were part of a large media conglomerate. No print, publishing, or public broadcasting managers participated.

The observations from the industry professionals fell into financial and nonfinancial categories. The responses are concise and very uniform regarding financial criteria. Performance is directly related to building revenues, cash flow, and ratings. In the U.S., ratings are highly correlated with financial performance; one rating point is directly equal to 1% of the advertising revenue in the market (e.g., local or national, depending on definition). There is also considerable agreement on the nonfinancial criteria as well, with several mentions of the need to engage in strategic planning; the ability to recruit, train and motivate staff; reduce employee turnover and improve employee satisfaction; communication skills; and earning awards or honors for the enterprise.

This brief analysis points to a much larger need for a useful taxonomy on how researchers can assess managerial performance across media organizations using both financial and nonfinancial criteria. Further, an initial taxonomy can generate ideas and suggestions for a future research agenda to guide efforts and further refine

Table 1 Responses regarding financial and nonfinancial performance criteria by seven different media managers

	Financial	Nonfinancial
1.	Ratings revenue (vs. goals/budgets, competitors, and overall market)	Industry recognition (awards/honors) Longevity/consistency of performance Reduced employee turnover Advancement of people trained by manager
2.	Ratings, revenue, EBITDA (earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization—also known as cash flow)	Image of station in the community and public service addressing the needs of the community. Innovation, communication, collaboration and integrity. Leadership skills, meeting company goals and building upon company values with the team
3.	Ratings and revenues	Ability to meet strategic goals
4.	Ratings	The overall performance of the staff they manage. The manager’s ability to train and motivate staff will be reflected by how quickly new hires are developed. Low turnover and high morale generally reflect a good manager. Time-management skills
5.	Ability to create a strategic plan, timeline and accountability for accomplishing the plan Ability to set and manage budgets Must understand sales, revenues, and ratings Understand multiple platforms and how to engage audience and advertisers with each area	Ability to provide feedback to staff so the people and product can grow Ability to work with other units
6.	Top and bottom line results Ability to create new revenue streams	The ability to recruit, train and retain talented people Ability to understand social media
7.	New business generation	Awards Public service activities involving staff Improving employee satisfaction Limit employee turnover

Source: Respondent comments compiled by the authors

the taxonomy as our knowledge of managerial performance expands. That is the goal of the next two sections of this chapter.

4 Developing a Taxonomy for Management Performance

There are many possible ways to create a new taxonomy. There is not a single format that can be universally applied to any industry. However, in looking at various taxonomies across disciplines outside of the natural sciences, one finds the following four steps are typical:

- Introduce the key terms that are the foundation for the taxonomy
- Group related terms by topic or subject
- Link groups of terms together to show relationships
- Test the taxonomy and refine as needed

This effort will focus on the first three steps and will offer a possible research agenda later in the chapter on ideas to test and refine the taxonomy.

Key Terms. Our taxonomy consists of two foundational concepts, *management* and *performance*. There have been several efforts to define media management, but there is not really a consensus by the field as to how to define media management (Albarran, 2008; Küng, 2007). So rather than begin the taxonomy with this continuing debate, we will, instead focus on defining management by *stages*, which is really more helpful in establishing the taxonomy.

In many media organizations, management tends to be found on three distinct stages of analysis discussed below. While there may be synonyms for the stages used here, the responsibilities typically remain the same within each area.

- *First-Line Management Stage:* This is the lowest level of management and the entry point for most new managers. First-line managers typically have responsibility for specific tasks and a limited workgroup of employees. They do not usually have budgetary control or the ability to make personnel decisions independently. One example might be a News Producer who works with a group of Producers or Assistant Producers.
- *Middle Manager:* This stage of management has budgetary control for a unit, the ability to hire personnel, and expectations to meet specific goals established by superiors. The number of personnel they are responsible for is larger than those found at the first-line stage. Examples of middle managers would be positions like a General Sales Manager or Director of Marketing and Promotion, or News Director.
- *Executive:* This stage of management is responsible for the entire enterprise, and usually works with a team of middle managers in building strategic plans to meet the goals established by the corporate/parent owner. Executive managers must be adept at finance and budgetary management, build revenues and control expenses, grow market share, and establish public service efforts for the organization. Titles vary, and include such things as President and General Manager or Publisher.

Note that there is not a stage for corporate management in this taxonomy. The effort here is to build a taxonomy that could apply to a specific media organization, such as a single television station, a newspaper, a native digital firm, etc. Corporate management operates very differently. If publicly traded, stockholders vote in an annual election for the Board of Directors, and the Chief Executive Officer reports to the Board. The same holds for privately held companies, with the exception that there is no public trading of stock, as control is held by the Board. Both Boards

(public and private) have fiduciary responsibility to the corporation as part of their election.

There are many factors which may change the structure from organization to organization. For example, the degree to which a firm is centralized or decentralized has a direct bearing on how much decision-making authority and autonomy a manager has at any stage below the executive. The pressure to become more entrepreneurial and to develop leadership capacities within media companies usually drives the trend toward decentralized decision-making.

Performance. Based on the limited research and qualitative analysis, it seems appropriate to define performance along the two dimensions identified in the literature review: financial and nonfinancial. We can further define these broader headings as follows:

- *Financial Performance*: Refers to management's ability to improve economic performance over time, measured by metrics such as profit margin, return on assets, return on equity, growth of assets and growth of sales. Performance also can be assessed by considering changes in market share (as measured by audience ratings, circulation, or impressions on digital platforms), which directly impact the ability to charge advertising rates.
- *Nonfinancial Performance*: Refers to more qualitative aspects associated with management and includes such areas as the ability to meet goals, reducing employee turnover, improving employee satisfaction, leadership of the enterprise, public service and community initiatives, and awards and honors.

Given these foundations, it is now possible to visualize a grid consisting of the stages of management on one axis and the performance dimension on a separate axis. This grid is presented in Fig. 1.

The next step in the development of the taxonomy would be to drill down into these respective dimensions to identify specific variables/concepts that would coincide with each stage of management. Figure 2 looks at the levels of management and the financial performance dimension, and how that might break down across managerial levels. As Fig. 2 illustrates, there is a greater emphasis on financial performance at the executive and middle management areas; less so at the first-line management state. Clearly, a great deal of the time spent by the executive manager is assigned to financial performance goals and metrics, and ultimately his or her tenure depends on regularly meeting financial objectives.

The middle manager is expected to keep tight control of the unit's budget and expenses, and meet the goals established by executives. Middle managers are always challenged by the demands of meeting financial expectations from above and meeting the needs of their individual unit and the employees they manage below. But middle managers who do this successfully make good candidates for executive positions.

First-line managers, as expected, have limited expectations regarding financial performance. But failure to control expenses and reduce excessive overtime and

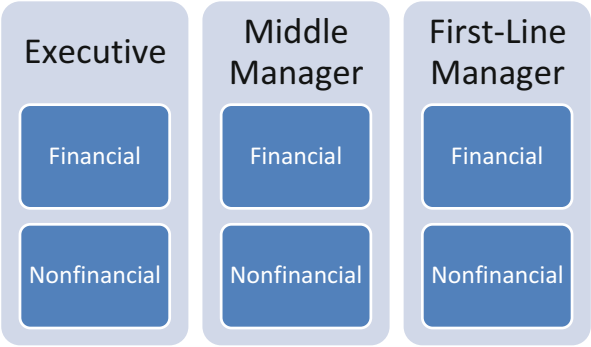


Fig. 1 Management and performance taxonomy grid. Source: Author rendition

Executive	Middle Manager	First-Line Manager
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strategic planning for enterprise• Set financial goals for enterprise• Set rating or circulation targets for enterprise• Increase cash flow (EBITDA) on an annual basis• Increase profit margins annually• Control expenses for enterprise• Budget generation• Approve capital expenditures• Generate new revenue streams across platforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meet quarterly revenue goals for unit• Meet rating or circulation goals for unit• Control expenses for unit• Prepare and manage budget for unit• Reduce employee turnover• New business development as applicable to unit	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meet quarterly tasks/goals• Manage within established budget• Complete tasks on time to avoid overtime• Maintain efficiency in workgroup to eliminate expenses

Fig. 2 Stages of management and performance variables. Source: Author’s rendition

inefficiency within the workgroup could affect the overall financial performance of the enterprise.

Underscoring this discussion is the fact that a media organization is first a business with financial expectations. It is also many other things, but a media organization is always a financial organization, and this applies to non-profit

Executive	Middle Manager	First-Line Manager
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide leadership for the entire enterprise• Lead efforts to promote company values• Lead innovation efforts• Set public service goals for enterprise• Promote communication for the enterprise• Set goodwill standards for the enterprise• Recognition of awards and honors for the enterprise	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide leadership to the unit• Lead innovation efforts for the unit• Mentor employees for future growth and advancement• Reduce employee turnover for the unit• Active communication within the unit• Lead public service activities for the unit• Awards and honors for the unit	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide leadership to the workgroup• Recruitment, training and orientation of new employees• Reduce employee turnover for the workgroup• Provide feedback to employees• Build positive morale among team and with other workgroups• Lead public service activities for the group• Establish good communication among group• Awards and honors for the group

Fig. 3 Stages of management and nonfinancial performance variables. Source: Author’s rendition

institutions like public service firms as well. Many scholars outside of management and economics tend to look at media companies differently, but it is critical to recognizing that the media industry is a business and to understanding how it functions in a society, especially if that society embraces free markets and a capitalistic orientation.

The final step in the initial development of this taxonomy is to consider nonfinancial performance variables across management stages. Figure 3 considers this aspect of the taxonomy.

Figure 3 provides initial criteria for evaluating performance of nonfinancial variables. Here first-line and middle managers must be more concerned with employee recruitment, coaching and development (Steinmetz & Todd, 1975) while executive management is more concerned with leadership for the entire enterprise, company values, and innovation across the enterprise. Strong communication skills, public service efforts, and recognition via awards and honors run across the areas. It is also important to note leadership begins at the lowest stage of management, and increases in complexity as one takes on more responsibility.

This effort to establish this initial taxonomy encounters several limitations. The taxonomy may not be applicable to all types of media enterprises, nor would this taxonomy necessarily be applicable to enterprises outside of the United States. With

limited research on managerial performance to build the taxonomy, some variables may be missing. However, the taxonomy provides a framework on which media management researchers can address these multi-faceted concepts.

5 Applying the Taxonomy: A Possible Research Agenda

The taxonomy offers numerous ideas for researching managerial performance variables using both financial and nonfinancial dimensions. In this section, some propositions are offered as broad guidelines for consideration when designing studies utilizing the taxonomy, followed by some specific research questions and possible topics to guide future research by scholars on managerial performance.

Research Propositions. A few research propositions are offered to help researchers interested in the topic.

- Research on management and performance must recognize that multiple stages of management exist, and to gain a holistic understanding, researchers should conduct studies that take into account the different stages of management found in the organization under study.
- Research on managerial performance must design studies that address both financial and nonfinancial variables.
- Scholars must recognize the inherent differences in studying media organizations that are public, private, domestic or global. Also, the size of the enterprise (multidimensional to single enterprise) must be understood.
- Scholars must recognize the challenge of setting operational definitions for performance variables where data is not easily obtainable, as well as gaining the necessary permissions to study internal management practices in media organizations. This could be accomplished through an ethnographic-based grounded theory described earlier.
- Researchers must recognize that little theoretical knowledge exists on managerial performance, and that their work can contribute to the broader development of the field and refinement of this initial taxonomy.

Research Questions. There are many potential research designs and studies that can be visualized through the use of the taxonomy. What follows are a few suggestions that scholars might consider in conducting research related to managerial performance.

- *What variables are the most salient in measuring managerial performance?* There are a number of financial and nonfinancial variables presented in the taxonomy, but which are the most important? How do these performance variables differ across management? Such a study could take many possible designs, including a factor or regression analysis to determine which variables would constitute a model to gauge performance, or a qualitative study using in-depth interviews with actual media managers to address the research question.

- *How does managerial performance change over time?* One variable not presented in the taxonomy is time. What time frame is optimal for evaluating managerial performance? Ideally any analysis would be conducted over a period of time, perhaps several years to recognize the inevitable highs and lows of the business cycle. Such efforts could focus on individual managers over time, or looking at the entire enterprise. First-line managers are more concerned with the day-to-day or next week, while middle managers are focused on the next quarter or 6 months. Executive management takes a longer perspective, although there is also a tendency (at least in the U.S.) to focus on quarterly performance for public companies.
- *Is there a link between performance variables and tenure in management?* One would hypothesize that management tenure is positively linked with performance, yet there is no research to determine if this is true. Likewise, poor performance may result in shorter manager tenure, but again, no research exists.
- *How does the type of ownership influence managerial performance?* This is an interesting question to ponder. Many media organizations are owned by corporate parents, yet there are still smaller enterprises and single person or family-owned operations found in many media industries. Does corporate ownership hinder or help managerial performance? Do nonfinancial performance variables matter for large corporate conglomerates?
- *What role does the individual employee play in assessing managerial performance?* Clearly the ability to recruit, train, motivate, and mentor employees throughout the enterprise is a shared management role. To what extent should employee perceptions/feedback be used in assessing the performance of the manager? Further, what is the best way to collect this data? Subordinates in any industry may be apprehensive about talking about their supervisor. Such data may offer insight as to what management practices lead to greater satisfaction and less turnover in media organizations. For example, many U.S. and European companies utilize 360-degree evaluation (see Atwater, Waldman, Ostroff, Robie, & Johnson, 2005; Gentry, Ekelund, Hannum, & de Jong, 2007). In the 360 system, employees evaluate their manager, the manager completes a self-evaluation, and the manager's immediate superior does an evaluation. The same questions are asked at each stage, but formulated a bit differently as needed for clarity and precision. The answers are then compared to see how close or disparate the results.

6 Summary

Media management and performance are two concepts with many different interpretations. Management and performance are interdependently linked when assessing a media organization, yet the field lacks a systematic way to tackle this complicated topic.

This chapter has attempted to help this process through the initial development of a basic taxonomy that can be utilized by researchers interested in studying management and performance. The taxonomy breaks down the three stages of

management and the two performance dimensions in to a series of variables for use in research.

The different sections of the taxonomy are presented and discussed, followed by a series of propositions to guide thinking and a set of possible research ideas for future study. The taxonomy and research agenda presented here can serve as a baseline of research and offer some heuristic value.

The taxonomy should be thought of as a work-in-progress; it is an initial iteration based on the limited research available on management and performance. Hopefully, other researchers will help refine the taxonomy with their own investigations, and generate new thoughts and ideas to move forward our knowledge base on the topic of management and performance.

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