

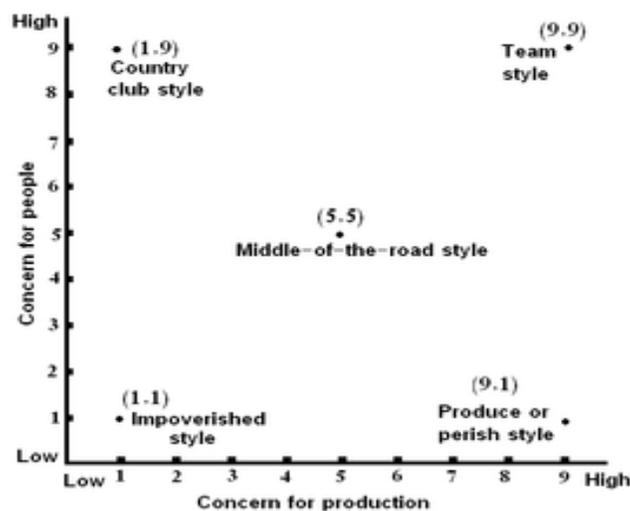
Howard Clinton on Managerial Grid

Dr.Sudhir Tare

The Coffers Dams (1969) is a mature work of Kamala Markandaya. In this novel the efficiency of western technology is pitted against the passivity of the aborigines of a tribal village in South India. The plot of the novel is centered on the construction of a dam to channelize a turbulent river in a hilly region. Having undertaken the vast project of constructing a dam, Howard Clinton, the protagonist of the novel is determined to finish it successfully at any cost.

In present research paper I will try to analysis the protagonist of the novel, Howard Clinton on the parameters of Managerial Grid. The Managerial Grid may be newer term for the readers of literature. This was designed by Jane Mount and Robert Blake in 1957 and further reformed by various scholars time to time. Let me explain the Managerial Grid in detail.

The Managerial Grid¹ Model is a behavioral Leadership Model. This model originally identified five different leadership styles based on the concern for people and the concern for production. A graphical representation of this model is as follows:



The model is represented as a grid with *concern for production* as the [x-axis] and *concern for people* as the Y-axis; each axis ranges from 1 (Low) to 9 (High). The resulting leadership styles are as follows:

- The indifferent (previously called impoverished) style (1,1) : evade and elude. In this style, managers have low concern for both people and production. The main concern for the manager is not to be held responsible for any mistakes, which results in less innovative decisions.
- The accommodating (previously, country club) style (1,9): yield and comply. This style has a high concern for people and a low concern for production. Managers using this style pay much attention to the security and comfort of the employees, in hopes that this will increase performance. The resulting atmosphere is usually friendly, but not necessarily very productive.
- The dictatorial (previously, produce or perish) style (9,1): control and dominate. With a high concern for production, and a low concern for people, managers using this style find employee needs unimportant; they provide their employees with money and expect performance in return.. This dictatorial style is based on Theory X of Douglas McGregor, and is commonly applied by companies on the edge of real or perceived failure.
- The status quo (previously, middle-of-the-road) style (5,5): balance and compromise. Managers using this style try to balance between company goals and workers' needs. By giving some concern to both people and production, managers who use this style hope to achieve suitable performance but doing so gives away a bit of each concern so that neither production nor people needs are met.
- The sound (previously, team style) (9,9): contribute and commit. In this style, high concern is paid both to people and production. As suggested by the propositions of Theory Y, managers choosing to use this style encourage teamwork and commitment

among employees. This method relies heavily on making employees feel themselves to be constructive parts of the company.

In this novel, 'Concern for production' may be changed by the phrase 'Concern for Construction' of a dam. Howard Clinton the chief engineer of British Company, giving priority to construction against odds and pressures, works under the stresses caused by nature and hostile attitudes of Krishnan and his band of Indian technicians and workers. He battles against various impediments, accidents, workers' unrest and official delays. He can not brook any opposition to his plan or any delay in the schedule. For the construction of dam Clinton seems adamant, when he says: "My work, from mounting conviction, which loomed tall as a mountain now; my dam, my business."²

Howard Clinton is a builder with a still will who drives everyone ruthlessly into completing a project. In his single-minded pursuit of goal, he reminds the story of Mahabharata. When the Pandavas and Kauravs were boys, Dronacharya trained them in archery. One day, Drona conducted an examination. For this he placed a wooden bird on a tree branch and asked each of them to shoot at the left eye of the toy bird. As each of the princes took aim, he asked him what he saw. One said he saw the sky and the trees and the bird, another that he saw his bow and arrow and the bird's bright feather, and so on down the line of princes. When it came to Arjuna's turn, he said he saw the iris on left eye of the bird. And what else, Drona asked. Nothing else, was Arjuna's reply. Just the iris on the left eye of the wooden bird.

Thus Clinton can be put on the highest point of axis "X"; i.e. concern for production, here it should be termed 'Concern for Construction'; of the Managerial Grid. Uma Parameswaran, a prominent critic of Kamala Markandaya, is right when she says, "Clinton is motivated by a kind of ambition that transcends the material."³ But unfortunately this is one side of the coin, another side is ugly. On the axis "Y" of the Managerial Grid, Clinton's performance is poor. He is conducted by business ethics only.

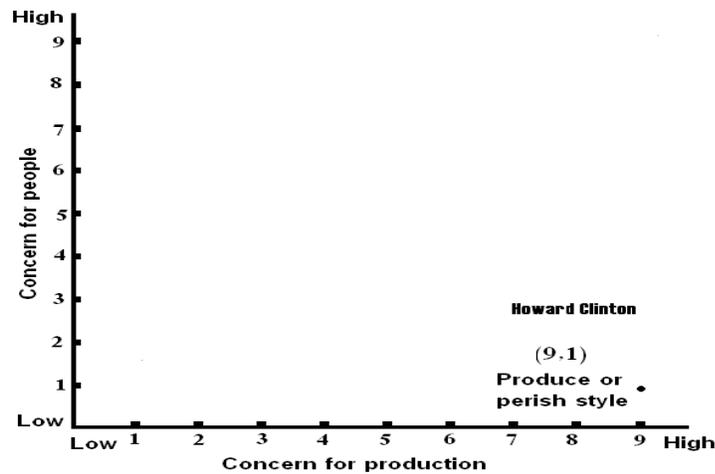
In his system of business ethics, one can not stop work even if dead human bodies have to be buried. The two main crises of the novel are two accidents. The first is the

death of Bailey and Wilkins, and work has to be suspended to give them a “decent Christian burial”. In the second, forty-two men fall into the river and two of the dead bodies can not be recovered because a boulder has jammed them. While Mackendrick, partner of Clinton and others seek the possibilities of recovery, Clinton decides, “rather than delay the work, the bodies can be incorporated, into the structure.”⁴

Krishan, the spokesman of the Indian workers says that unless the bodies are recovered and given decent last rites, the workers would go on strike. This event has critical consequences, both sides realize that human values should be the basis of technological progress, regardless of the diversity in the cultural matrices. The cynical arrogance with which Clinton at first refuses to accommodate the Indian sentiments about accidents victims is indicative of the “Western push” in technology and the racial prejudice. A.V. Krishna Rao and Madhavi Menon comment: “The work of the coffer dams progresses fast at the cost of the sensitivity to human consciousness.”⁵

The entire episode and Clinton’s attitude proves him a ruthless manager. Even his wife Helen and his partner Mackendrick think Clinton lacks humanity. Mackendrick thinks: “He seems to miss out somewhere on the human level.”⁶ Helen accuses him of being inhuman. When she tells Clinton about the physical impact of the blasting on the tribals’ flimsy huts, he seems dismissive, “They will get used to it. People do when they have to”⁷

Both, Mackendrick and Helen, are guided by Humanitarian Ethics, but Clinton has only business ethics, therefore he should be put at the lowest on axis “Y” of the Managerial Grid. He does not acknowledge the humanity over the work and fixed target. For him the graphic presentation of Managerial Grid should be:



Clinton stands as a Perish Style(9,1) Manager. He controls and dominates, with a high concern of construction and low concern for people. He is, in fact, the symbol of modern-work-culture, which have been studied and forecasted by Kamala Markandaya, in sixties. This will have been in fashion in western world only. But now in this post globalization era entire world is suffering from this dehumanized work-culture. Now-a-days only business and market ethics are conducting the human values, beliefs etc. Kamala Markandaya created an embodiment of modern-manager in the form of Howard Clinton.

References:

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5. A.V. Krishna Rao & Madhavi Menon, Kamala Markandaya: A critical study of Her Novels 1954-1982. (New Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation,1995) p93
6. Markandaya Kamala, The Coffer Dams (New Delhi: Hind Pocket Books,1969)p63
7. Ibid p120.

Author:

1. Dr. Sudhir Tare: Assistant Professor of English Acropolis Institute of Technology and Research, Indore (M.P.)