



CIPRIANI COLLEGE
OF LABOUR AND CO-OPERATIVE STUDIES

THE TECHNICIAN MANAGER

**WORK
MATTERS**

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The Technician Manager

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In the S.T.E.M field, there is a well-known saying: “A technician knows how to do it. An engineer knows why it’s done that way.” It sounds simple, but the distinction it draws is profound. We all begin our professional journeys as technicians, not just in job titles, but in mindset. In IT, you start by learning how to connect components, what each part does, what causes what failure, and how to resolve it. In medicine, you learn the systems of the body, how they interact, what disrupts them, and what are the standard treatments. In both cases, you are building a map of what and how, and that foundational approach is essential for success. However, owing a map is not the same as understanding the terrain.

With experience, the exceptional few begin to do something the rest do not. They study the terrain itself and start to question it. They ask the uncomfortable question that often puts them at odds with the old guard: Why do we do it this way? They examine the value of each step, who it serves, and where there is waste. They are courageous enough to leverage their expertise to experiment with new processes and initiatives. Through successes and failures alike, they develop such a deep understanding of their craft that problem-solving becomes second nature and adapting to change is simply part of the job. This is what it means to think like an engineer.

The rest, however, never make that leap. They master each step until the process itself becomes part of their identity. They take pride in doing it better than their peers, with their eyes closed if needed, but they have never questioned it or attempted to improve it, especially if they had a hand in building it. To be clear, this is not without value. Reliable execution matters. But it is critical to understand where that value belongs, with those who are still learning the map, the new hires and up-and-comers who have not yet earned the right to challenge the terrain.

This brings us to one of the most damaging patterns in corporate culture: rewarding the wrong qualities. The obedient soldiers and old guards are frequently promoted into leadership because they demonstrated one thing, the ability to do the work the way they were told to do it. But we must ask ourselves, is that sufficient? These individuals have never been required to prove they have evolved beyond the technician phase of their careers. What follows, all too often, are managers who know the process but do not truly understand it, and who resist any change because change threatens the only thing that got them to where they are.

But management is not about knowing the process. A manager’s primary responsibility is to solve problems, navigate complexity, and lead their team through what the playbook did not prepare them for. Addressing an organizational or departmental problem requires an honest evaluation of what is being done, what is going wrong, and what needs to change. That is simply impossible with a technician’s mindset, because if you only know what you are doing and never understood why, you have no foundation from which to reason, adapt, or lead.

This weakness becomes most visible when organizations are forced to evolve. When markets shift or new technology demands a response, companies must look inward and honestly assess where their processes are failing. It is often in these moments that the technician manager reveals themselves most clearly. Unable to critically evaluate their own department, they deflect. Shortcomings get redirected toward other teams, other individuals, anyone but themselves. When reviews are completed and changes are required, they struggle to produce any meaningful movement, and the frustration from senior leadership only compounds their defensiveness.

What begins as a performance problem quickly becomes a people problem. The deflection and blame start to poison the social fabric of the organization. Trust erodes. People choose sides. Those who fear change find their champions, and those who recognize the need for it find themselves isolated or worn down. Before long, the focus has shifted entirely away from work and toward politics. Leadership finds itself spending most of its energy managing conflict rather than driving results, putting out fires and hoping that one day things will settle enough to move forward, but they rarely do.

The cost of placing a technician in a manager's chair is not just operational, it is cultural. And culture, once broken, is far harder to fix than any process. Organizations that want to grow must be honest about what they are actually promoting. Competence in execution is not the same as the capacity to lead. Knowing how to do the work is where every career begins, but it cannot be where leadership ends.