

## The Focus and Energy Grid

A study conducted by Heike Bruch and Sumantra Ghoshal at the end of the last century, looked at the activity of managers in a number of large organisations. They found that whilst all were busy, 90% of managers squandered their time in all sorts of ineffective activities.

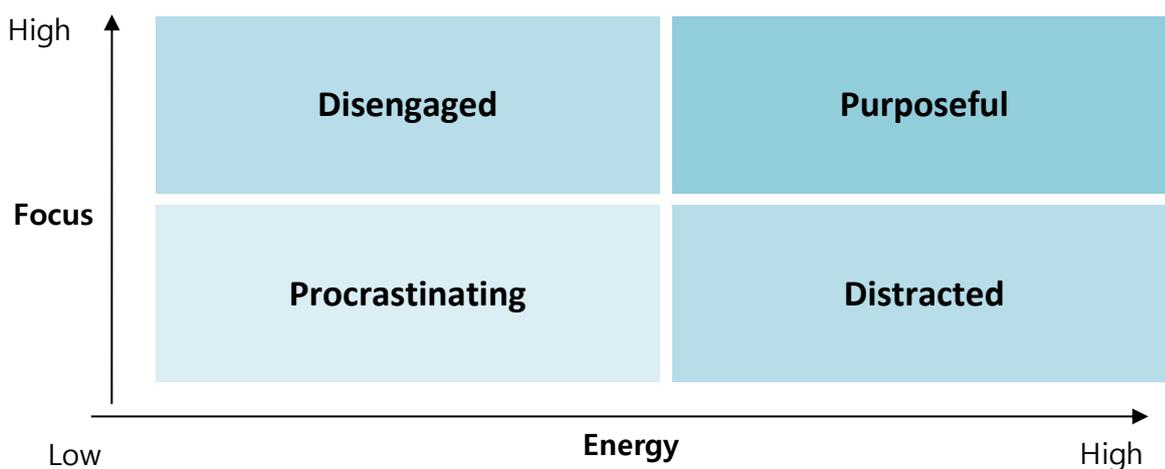
Managers are not really employed to keep the business doing 'business as usual' (the authors argue that this will almost certainly happen anyway). Instead, managers should be taking businesses forward, and getting more out of people than they would give otherwise. Managers who are able to do this demonstrate two key attributes: focus and energy.

Having **focus** means being able to concentrate on one issue at a time and to have the resilience to see it through to the end. Managers who are focussed are not reactionary. They have very clear objectives, are committed to achieving them, and are not easily sidetracked.

Managers with **energy** have the personal drive and motivation that allows them to find that little bit extra required when the going gets tough. People with energy will relish a challenge, commit 100% to an idea or project, work to overcome obstacles, and positively challenge people who block progress.

However, focus or energy alone will not deliver results. Focus without energy can result in 'paralysis by analysis' or personal stress/burnout. Energy without focus turns into distracting busyness or a series of half-completed projects and failures.

### The Focus-Energy Matrix



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## The Procrastinating

Managers who are procrastinating (in the original study this was 30%) lack both energy and focus, and appear quite passive. They 'go through the motions' of managing by performing routine tasks, attending meetings and staying out of trouble. Sometimes these managers lack clarity of what is expected of them, so fill their time with administration and 'tasked-based' duties, waiting for everything to become clear. Some procrastinators may have been exciting and risk-taking in the past, but met with repeated failure or other negative consequences. As such, they now keep their head down, hoping that no-one will notice them.

## The Disengaged

Managers who are disengaged (in the original study, this was 20%), have focus, but no energy to 'kick-start' themselves into action. They have clear ideas about what should be done but for whatever reason, are unwilling or unable to do it. Sometimes this is because they disagree with what is being asked of them (a conflict between business and personal values). Disengaged managers will often be aware of potential issues or problems, but will convince themselves that they are minor issues that will soon go away, and carry on with business as usual. Disengaged managers tend to be quite tense and anxious and often feel alienated or frustrated. They protect themselves by withdrawing from colleagues and distancing themselves from the business ("They've said that...", "If it were up to me..."). Some disengaged managers may have feel full of energy and/or focus in the past, but may have faced years of knock-backs and compromises. As such they find it difficult to get excited about anything because they are waiting for it all to ground to a halt and quietly go away.

## The Distracted

Distracted managers form the largest group (40% in the original study). They are those well-intentioned, hardworking, highly energetic but unfocussed people who confuse 'doing' with 'achieving'. Whenever there is a new initiative, a problem (however minor), or change, the distracted manager leaps into action to do something. Unfortunately, they rarely give proper thought to what that something should be, so often end up having to re-do things, undo the things they've done, backtrack, or do more things in response to the outcomes of their initial action! Distracted managers rarely plan or reflect so are in a constant state of fire-fighting, or 'running to stand still'. They tend to allow themselves to become over-committed which affects their ability to properly manage anything.

## The Purposeful

Purposeful managers are few and far between (10% in the original study). They are very self-aware, and never lose sight of what they should be doing. They make decisions based on the long-term objective, and have strong willpower to see things through. Assertive and influential, these managers pick their goals (and battles) with care. They make the difficult choices but have a deep sense of personal responsibility to their teams and their business, and build trust with those around them. Purposeful managers constantly stretch themselves and are open to new ideas, but will weigh them against objective criteria. They use their time wisely, spending it where it will have most value, and always take time out to reflect and plan. Purposeful managers are able to take on pressure, but are good at managing stress levels, and tend to have a life outside of work. They always focus on what they need to do first, and then think about how it can be done, and involve others where possible. Less effective managers look at what's possible and not, and only ever consider options within the existing boundaries. Purposeful managers will ask 'why not?' instead of 'why?'