How to make the matrix work

Five keys to successful matrix management, based on the authors' own experiences of matrix organizations.

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Consider this scenario: John works for the multinational conglomerate, Acme Corporation, as the country managing director for the United Kingdom. In this role, he reports to the head of the Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA) region. However, because Acme U.K. deploys a number of different product lines, John also has to report to the heads of the various product divisions located at the international headquarters in Chicago. All these managers have a strong say and influence over John's activities and responsibilities, as well as his priorities and performance.

For someone in John's situation, the old adage that "no one can serve two masters" would seem to apply. Yet a matrix organizational structure like John's need not result in dysfunction, provided that managers understand the strengths and weaknesses of this complex way of working, which for multinational conglomerates is increasingly the norm.

Based on our experiences of matrix organizations, we identify five keys to successful matrix management:

- a strong and positive corporate culture;
- the right people in the right places;
- clear roles and responsibilities in decision processes;
- shared performance measures and rewards;
- and extraordinary communications.

In this article, we analyze each of these keys, stressing how all five must work in concert if

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they are to enable the smooth functioning of a matrix organization.

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