

Grid® Success Stories

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What is Grid®?

A Long-Term User Defines the Grid Experience

By Doug McQueen*

The Leadership Grid®, simply stated, is an intense, powerful seminar. But what kind of seminar? On one hand, it is a seminar for developing leadership skills. On the other, it is a seminar for dealing with change. Some think of it as a seminar that teaches how to create more effective teams. Others see it as a great communications activity. In reality, it is all these things. That is why the Leadership Grid® has remained popular for over 40 years, helping organizations in over 40 countries and in 17 languages to build outstanding relationships and a sound organization culture.

Founded by acclaimed organization development pioneers Drs. Robert R. Blake and Jane S. Mouton, Grid's work is supported by 45 years of research and experience in the area of human behavior. In the past year alone, over 700 organizations and 250 multinational companies have experienced Grid's passion for people and passion for results.

The Grid approach for making positive change to an organization's culture is not merely to *instruct participants* in the skills necessary to drive exceptional performance, but to *implant behaviors in a unique and intense learning environment*. At the end of a Grid seminar, positive personal growth and change have already occurred and participants have become personally committed to the value of the Grid principles.

The Grid experience is so powerful, it produces not just followers, but cheerleaders with a passion for organization excellence.

Can the Leadership Grid Seminar be modified to better fit our busy schedules?

Because of its length—four days—organizations are often reluctant to explore its benefits. Such organizations want the Grid Leadership Seminar shortened, or offered in “chunks” over a span of several weeks. In fact, the Grid was once a two-week seminar! From the early 60s until the late 90s it was a five-and-a-half day seminar. Extensive research and development has trimmed the seminar to the absolute minimum length it can be and still produce its unique results.

In an age of short-term gains, quick fixes, and management theory “du jour,” a four-day seminar that has been around since the early 60s seems to have no place in contemporary organizations. Yet as more is learned about individual and organization effectiveness, the timelessness of the Grid has become apparent.

Ironically, many trendier seminars incorporate much of the Grid's principles, but try to deliver them in a less intense and time-consuming way. Grid graduates believe that, for the most part, the lasting impact of such seminars has been less substantial than that of Grid.

In the United States in 2003, a strange phenomenon occurred. While unemployment increased significantly, so did productivity. At first, American management credited this to improved processes. But closer examination revealed it was achieved instead by the sweat and effort of American employees who were working 50 and even 60 hours per week.

Attempting to maintain production with a smaller workforce has affected some paradigms. Management has developed a mentality that employees cannot be spared for anything unrelated to task. Unfortunately, this includes time required to develop employees and leaders, unless it can be done in “mini-bites” or some other way that doesn't take a lot of time.

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The biggest barrier to broad implementation of The Leadership Grid is the four intense days needed for the seminar to accomplish its goals. Because of its unique design, these seminar goals cannot be accomplished in less than four days. Gaining acceptance of this truth from someone who has yet to participate is a daunting task. Past experiences often have shaped the perceived value of management seminars, blocking understanding of how Grid can be unique.

While it is difficult to explain the need for four intense days, perhaps the following distinctions about a Grid seminar will help:

- It is not designed to simply impart information, but to bring about a genuine desire in participants to change their behaviors, even before they have left the seminar.

- It strips away self-deception about participants' existing leadership style and offers more effective behaviors.
- It teaches more than how to lead effectively. Grid also addresses how to:
 - Manage conflict
 - Improve decision making and problem solving
 - Manage meetings effectively
 - Manage time more effectively
 - Build a better team
 - Get the *best* answer instead of simply an *adequate* one
 - Be a more effective team member
 - Communicate effectively
 - Manage change effectively

What Are the Grid Principles?

When Blake and Mouton first developed the Grid Seminar, they based it on a model they called the "Three Rs of Teamwork." The model is presented in the figures to the right.

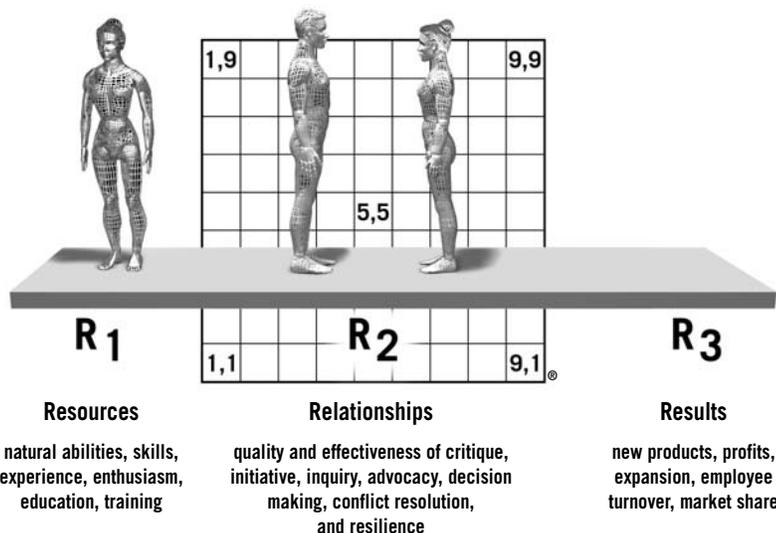
The basic assumption is that the process of converting available team resources (natural abilities, skills, experience, enthusiasm, education, and training) into maximum results (new products and services, process improvement, savings, and profit) relies totally on the quality of relationships. With the focus on the incredible values of human relationships to organizational effectiveness, Blake and Mouton identified seven critical relationship skills:

- Critique
- Initiative
- Inquiry
- Advocacy
- Decision Making
- Conflict Resolution
- Resilience

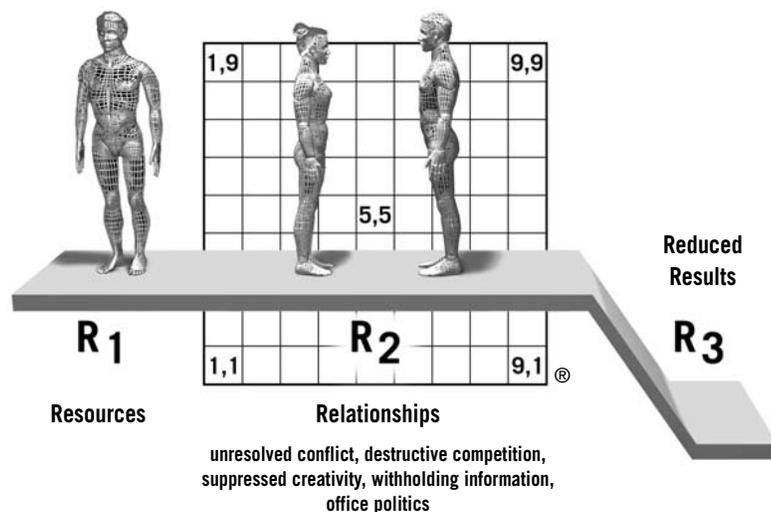
They believed that whenever an organization ignores the application of the seven R2 skills, they would not achieve maximum results.

Many organizations ignore the development of the R2 skills in favor of concentrating attention on improving resources. This typically doesn't get the results that improved R2 skills can attain. Others focus on process improvement, yet without R2 skills, their efforts seldom yield desired results. Many companies have begun Six Sigma efforts only to later contract consulting firms to conduct seminars based on Grid principles in order to maximize process improvement.

The 3Rs of Teamwork



Unsound Teamwork



Blake and Mouton believed that open, honest communication is essential in successfully applying R2 skills. And further, they believed that without candor there could be no openness and honesty. Throughout the Grid seminar, there is an emphasis on developing and using candor.

Consider this quote from a report analyzing the Columbia Space Shuttle incident which states that among the organization cultures traits that contributed to the loss was

*...the presence of organizational barriers that prevented effective communication of critical safety information and stifled professional differences of opinion.*¹

Leadership at NASA discouraged dissenting views on safety issues, ultimately creating “blind spots” to risks in the shuttle program. Although this is an extreme example of the dangers of a lack of candor, it illustrates an important point. Absence of candor and the open, honest communication it produces can lead to bad decisions.

In his book *Good to Great*, author Jim Collins identifies one of the characteristics of great companies:

*All good to great companies began the process of finding a path to greatness by confronting the brutal facts of their current reality...A primary task in taking a company from good to great is to create a culture wherein people have a tremendous opportunity to be heard and, ultimately for the trust to be heard.*²

In his new book, *Winning*, Jack Welch says this about candor.

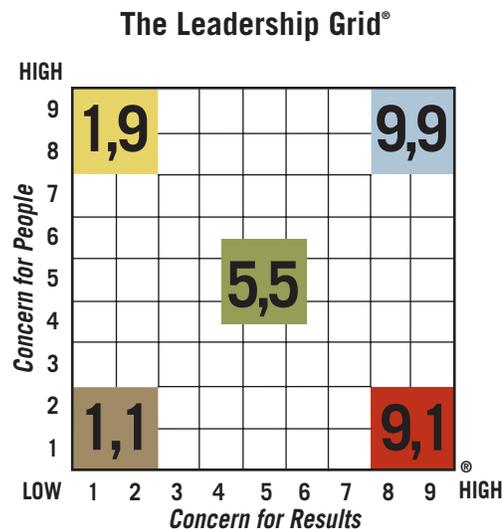
*I would call lack of candor the biggest dirty little secret in our business. What a huge problem it is. Lack of candor basically blocks smart ideas, fast action, and good people contributing all the stuff they've got. It's a killer.*³

Blake and Mouton had figured this out years ago. No other management seminar addressed the issue of candor as aggressively or as effectively as Leadership Grid.

The Leadership Grid Seminar advocates “one best way to manage,” what Blake and Mouton call the 9,9 leadership style. This style is based on a set of principles that guide the behaviors of the leader. It is the principles to which Blake and Mouton refer as being the “best.”

Blake and Mouton’s Managerial “Grid” shows the source of the principles for what they consider major leadership styles as determined by the degree of concern for both people and results. The 9,9 style, located in the upper right corner of the Grid represents the highest concern for results as well as the highest concern for people.

The values of a 9,9 leader are rooted in respect for the individual, a passion for maximizing results, and the



knowledge that these concerns are complimentary, not contradictory.

This blend of respect and passion is evident in 9,9 leadership behaviors:

- Developing a shared vision
- Seeking input on critical decisions
- Trusting employees to do their jobs
- Encouraging risk-taking in the pursuit of better ways
- Confronting unsatisfactory performance
- Recognizing outstanding performance
- Utilizing conflict to make better decisions
- Using critique
- Using candor to help people and the organization succeed

As prework to the Leadership Grid seminar, participants are asked to respond to questions about various leadership values. Invariably they choose 9,9 values as the best foundation on which to base a leadership style. Also as prework, participants are asked to rate their own leadership behaviors. Again, invariably, most rate themselves as 9,9. At the end of the seminar, participants are asked these same questions. Support for 9,9 values as the “best” always increases, but the telling statistic is the dramatic drop in the number of participants who believe their own leadership style is 9,9. In fact, the norms for the exercise are:

- Going into a seminar, almost 80% believe they lead in a 9,9 way.
- Coming out of the seminar, that number drops to less than 18%.

1 Columbia Accident Investigation Board final report, Vol. 1, August 2002, p. 9.

2 Jim Collins, *Good to Great* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001).

3 Jack Welch, *Winning* (New York; HarperCollins Publishers, 2005).

The reason for the significant change is that during the seminar, participants get the most candid feedback they are likely ever to receive. Candid and constructive feedback enables them to strip away self-deception and develop a plan to move toward more effective leadership.

Throughout the Grid seminar there is a huge emphasis on teamwork. Grid strongly advocates the concept of synergy and helps participants and their teams to learn techniques for creating synergy in decision making and problem solving.

Blake and Mouton believed that each person brings information of value to a team. The challenge is to create an environment where everyone is comfortable sharing this information. Brad Anderson, CEO of Best Buy, agrees:

*I just have this overall theory that there's a lot of folks who have an enormous contribution to make who either don't know how or can't find a way to get into the right place to be able to make the contribution.*⁴

The Grid Seminar teaches both how to make that contribution (advocacy, initiative, resilience) and how to create an environment to help reach synergy (inquiry, decision making, conflict resolution, and critique).

Grid® Gets Results

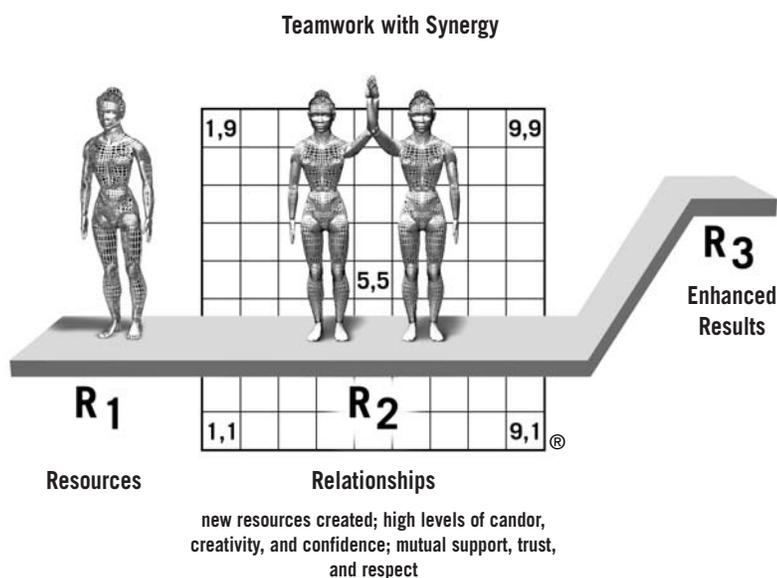
In our contemporary zeal for quick fixes, we too often apply band-aids to organizational issues. We address resource and process issues while ignoring critique and R2 relationship issues. Then, in spite of not getting the results we desire, we continue to focus efforts on increasing resources and improving processes.

To explore R2 skills and their impact on organization success is truly to take the road “less traveled.”

Leaders who have chosen to implement Grid seldom express regret. More often, they credit Grid as a significant milestone in their own and their employees' personal development. In addition, they often cite Grid implementation as the turning point in the transformation of their organization's culture to one of high performance.

In *Winning*, Jack Welch relates that he has come to the conclusion that there are four principles that underlie his approach to business. In brief, the four principles are: the importance of a strong mission and concrete values; the absolute necessity of candor in every aspect of management; the power of differentiation (meaning a system based on meritocracy); and the value of each individual receiving voice and dignity. Three of these four principles are stressed throughout the Leadership Grid Seminar and the fourth, meritocracy, is dependent on the other three.

These ideas, first proposed by Blake and Mouton over 50 years ago, are still relevant today. The Leadership Grid® Seminar gets results because it creates a passion for excellent performance by instilling time proven, fundamental principles that lead to a sound organizational culture.



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Grid The Power to Change.®

⁴ “Competing on Company Culture.” Interview with Brad Anderson. *Fast Company*, Issue 92, March 2005.