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Changed Scenario for Managers

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When we talk of management, we have to remember Frederick Winslow Taylor and Henri Fayol. Taylor is perhaps the first person to look closely at the way work is carried out in organizations. He presented "The Principles of Scientific Management" to the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME) in 1911. Henri Fayol was a contemporary of Frederick Taylor but was from France. Fayol was the first person to publish a comprehensive work on "Management". He published a book titled, "Administration Industrielle et Generale" in 1916. It was later translated into English under the title, "General and Industrial Management". Henri Fayol propounded 14 Principle for management which ring largely relevant even today. From that time onwards the subject of management caught the attention of acedamic researchers and quite a bit of research was carried out in USA on management especially in the auto industry in Detroit. Peter Drucker's work on management more or less set the ground rules for modern thinking about the subject of management.

Most of the research on the subject of management was carried out in the 1960s and the 70s and some in the 80's. After that not much new light was shone on this subject. Some aspects of management have been widely accepted by those in the academia and the industry. The definitions of management as "the art and science of getting things done" and that of the manager as "the one who gets things done" are more or less accepted by all. The activities of managements, as widely accepted are, planning, organizing, staffing, coordinating/controlling and leading/directing. The first three are universally accepted while there is some difference of opinion on the last two aspects.

Present Scenario

Now, this is true no more!

The past research on the subject of management was carried out in the manufacturing organizations of the sixties and the seventies, that too, in very large organizations like the General Motors. This research is no more relevant in the current environment. First, the factories of today are vastly different from those of the seventies. Second, most of the manufacturing activity shifted from most parts of the world to China! Third, large organizations are broken down into smaller organizations. Now there are many SMEs (Small and Medium Enterprises) than large organizations, even those few remaining large organizations are, in fact a conglomeration of small to medium independent divisions or profit centers. Centralization is out. In the present day the largeness of the organization is defined in terms of the revenue but not in terms of the human resources employed or the number of activities carried out with n the organization.

Now there are many organizations which do not manufacture anything. In fact, today more people are employed in organizations that are not manufacturing organizations. Today, the organizations are predominantly in the services sector. These are in:

1. Banking
2. Insurance
3. Transportation
4. Supply Chain Management
5. Retail
6. Communications
7. Information Technology
8. Customer Relationship Management
9. Research and Development
10. Government
11. Consulting
12. BPM (Business Process Management)
13. Quality Assurance
14. Hospitality
15. Healthcare
16. And so on…

Now the management in these organizations is entirely different from the management of manufacturing organizations.

Another aspect of the topics covered under the subject of management including planning, organizing including delegation, and decentralization, staffing, coordinating and controlling have very little relevance to the present scenario of "lean and mean" management. The word "control" has become a taboo in the world in general. Its usage in in technical topics is attempted with trepidation.

Planning is carried out periodically and its occurrence would not be more than 17 times a year (12 monthly plans, 4 quarterly plans and 1 yearly plan) in which the monthly and quarterly plans are subsets of the yearly plan and work involved in preparing them is that of refinement rather than making fresh plans. Then the work of planning has become simplified with the advent of software tools making planning, re-planning, and revising easier and faster. There are still departments in organizations under the umbrella of planning but they have come down in their importance and the number of people employed. We hardly see an advertisement trying to recruit corporate planners any more.

Organizing is not even an yearly event unless the organizational environment is very volatile. It evolves with the organization. Perhaps, a reorganization takes place with a change of guard at the top either because the organization was taken over, or the CEO (Chief Executive Officer) changed. That again is a onetime event and it has

become customary to involve a specialist management consultancy organization in the reorganization exercise. So "organizing" as a function of management has more or less lost its relevance in today's environment.

Staffing again is not daily event. It is carried out when an expansion takes place or when a vacancy arises. Creation of a new position in a running organization is no more as easy as it was in the days gone by. It is not the list of activities that need performance that govern the creation of a position. The two questions to be considered before creating a new position are whether a machine such as, a robot or a computer can perform those tasks or if the job can be outsourced. Only when the answers to both those questions is "no" a new position is considered for creation. Then again, the new position has to have a clear set of measurable results to be produced before it is created. With the general acceptance of self-regulation for the employees, the role of supervisors has been minimized and in some cases totally eliminated. For example, the people in a bank branch are hardly supervised! Many positions in the organizations which were supervised earlier are empowered today. It will be clear to you if you visit a bank and draw some cash. In the olden days of 60s and 70s, a clerk used to handle your check and the payment was authorized by a supervisor and the cash was paid by a third person. Today, all these three roles were combined into one person, the teller. The Industrial Engineers did good work with their tools of work measurement, method study and work simplification to such an extent that those principles are ingrained in management. Today's organizations are significantly leaner than the organizations of the past.

The movement toward making organizations to be driven by a well-defined and continuously improving process has more or less eliminated the need for coordinating. Coordination was needed when the communication was predominantly paper or meeting based and the defined process was not as comprehensive as today. Seniors needed to step in and resolve issues. Now with organization-wide networking, excellent software, and modern tools like video conferences, smartphones and tablet computers, communication became much easier. Improved communication coupled with defined process assets accessible by all in the organization has minimized the need for coordination in organizations.

The word "control" has become a bad word. If at all, that word can be used only in respect of work or progress of a project but not in respect of human beings. Now, the control function metamorphosed into a measurement, correction and improvement function. Some organizations have a separate department to carry out the measurement and analysis to provide the findings by exception to the managers to take corrective actions. Some organizations let the managers do this activity. The measurements are carried out periodically for a variety of attributes such as productivity, quality, schedule and effort in addition to traditional financial metrics.

Now with personal efficiency improvement software packages like the word processing, spreadsheets, personal databases and project management software packages, the positions of typists, stenographers, secretaries and assistants are shunted out of the organizations. The managers of today work with their own hands instead of getting the work done by others.

The advent of email in the organizations in a big way has changed the way work is carried out in the organizations. Either internal or external correspondence on paper has more or less evaporated and its place was usurped by email. Now most executives spend about half their time on reading, or drafting emails. Work allocation and instructions are also given through email or through a specialized work management tool. Now email is all pervading and it has also taken away the jobs of typists and stenographers.

Enterprise wide implementation of software tools such as ERP (Enterprise Resources Planning), SCM (Supply Chain Management), CRM (Customer relationship management) and EAI (Enterprise Application Integrations), BI (Business Intelligence) and other decision support systems, the activities that were once dreamed about are now realized. Using these tools require a knowledgeable person and cannot be delegated to an assistant with lesser education.

Flexible manufacturing work centers, the jobs of less qualified technicians are eliminated and in their place qualified engineers work on these new work centers performing a variety of tasks. The role of a human being for ensuring quality work is eliminated and it is taken over by the machining center.

The outsourcing has increased beyond belief. Activities such as research, development, and design that were once considered strategic are being outsourced in addition to manufacture of components and products. Now there is no more a constraint that we need to recruit a junior when work increased; we can simply outsource the additional work. As you travel across USA in states like the New Jersey, you can see closed factories dotting the landscape as a result of outsourcing.

Thus the function of management has metamorphosed. In physical sciences such as physics and chemistry, the research and invention precede practice. In social sciences such as economics and management, the practice precedes research and discovery. Now, in the subject of management, the practice moved forward. It is now time for the body of knowledge on the subject of management to catch up and update itself. This is an attempt in that direction.

Management Levels

Now there are only two levels of management and these are top management and middle management. The top management consists of the board of directors, owners (in privately held organizations), the CEOs (Chief Executive Officers) and the heads of the profit centers. All the rest are middle managers. Middle managers may be managing blue-collar or white-collar or professional workers or managers junior to them or the organization to which our work was outsourced.

Managers in the top management would be managing other managers only, with the exception of personal staff that assists them in making analyses or through secretarial help or other personal assistants like chauffeurs, helpers and so on.

Top managers handle issues of strategic nature including -

1. Arrange funding for the organizational operations

2. Selection and upgrading the products or services offered by the organization

3. Manage profitability

4. Manage stakeholder expectations especially of those outside the organization

5. Interface with statutory authorities including the government, stock exchanges, other regulatory bodies, industry associations and so on

6. Set the framework for other managers which includes

the definition of the organizational structure, processes for various organizational aspects, organize and maintain a knowledge repository, define productivity and quality baselines for adherence in the organization, standards of organizational behavior and conduct and so on.

7.   Setup the infrastructure, including selection of equipment and workplace layout, necessary to run the operations, provide resources to maintain the same, and expand it as and when necessary

8.   Upgrade the technology whenever necessary to remain competitive in the market place

9.   Facilitate other managers by providing funding, resolution of issues with outside world, resolve internal conflicts, provide access to expert assistance, and so on

10.   Raise additional funds as and when necessary to meet the needs of working capital or to handle additional work to service additional customers during peak load times and so on.

11.   Determine the slot for the organization in the marketplace such as the top tier (high quality, high service and high price), bottom tier (lowest price, minimum acceptable quality, minimum service) or the middle tier (medium quality, medium service and medium price). In other words, determine the target market and its demographics.

The middle managers work within the framework defined by the top management and produce the results desired by the organization. They manage the resources, receive the targets from top management and derive their own targets as well as those for the people or suppliers working with them. They derive their own plans and schedules from the organizational plans and schedules. They work as well as get the work done mostly by the outsourced agencies. They integrate the effort and produce a whole product or service to be delivered to the customers of the organization.

What do Managers do All Day?

What do managers, in today's context, do every day, to spend their time at work? Plenty! Here is a list of the activities they do. Please note that this list is by no means comprehensive. Also, all these activities are not performed every day. But they are carried out some day in the year. Also note that these activities are besides the main activity entrusted to them.

1.   Attend to email, reading, writing, and sending as necessary to receive as well as provide information, work allocation, assignment, and instructions and so on.

2.   Carry out the work which needs to be performed personally. It includes preparing documents/drawings, reviewing documents/ drawings, approving documents/drawings, compiling status of work progress, reporting work progress and so on.

3.   Attend meetings as required. These meetings may be various review meetings, strategy meetings, problem resolution meetings, price negotiations, planning and scheduling meetings, budgeting meetings and so on.

4.   Review applications to shortlist candidates for conducting interviews for recruitment.

5.   Conduct interviews for recruitment of new personnel and for promoting individuals from within the organization.

6.   Conduct training sessions for training programs as required by the organization to upgrade skills of existing employees or new recruits.

7.   Resolve bottlenecks in work progress and ensure that the work moves along smoothly.

8.   Review the work allocation of all the individuals reporting to him/her and allocate work where necessary.

9.   Take the artifacts of completed work back from the individual completing it and pass them on to the next stage.

10.   Induct personnel as and when they are allocated to the team by conducting induction training as necessary and allocating work to the new team member.

11.   Raise material procurement requests as necessary for the execution of work carried out under his/her charge.

12.   Carry out the performance appraisals of the juniors as and when required.

13.   Counsel, coach and mentor juniors as needed.

14.   Grant leave of absence to the juniors as required.

15.   Make arrangements such that the absence of the juniors on leave does not affect the smooth flow of the work

16.   Review the information proposed for inclusion into the organizational knowledge repository when requested.

17.   Add information into the organizational knowledge repository.

18.   Receive process improvement suggestions from the juniors and raise process improvement requests on the organizational process group.

19.   Assist the organizational quality assurance group by carrying out quality assurance activities as necessary.

20.   Assist the organizational audit group in conducting the process audits. This involves auditing peers as well as submitting to an audit by peers. It also involves participation in the planning and closure of the audits.

21.   Spare time for the definition and improvement of the organizational process assets as and when required.

22.   participate in organizational initiatives for selecting or defining or improving technical standards for the organizational entities.

23.   Participate in the organizational initiatives in setting up baselines/norms for various organizational parameters including productivity, quality, efficiency and so on.

24.   Keenly look for the opportunities for improvement in any activity and give suggestions to top management for improving the efficiency of the organizational functioning.

25.   Receive grievances from juniors, resolve some of them and escalate the remaining to the next higher level conforming to the defined organizational process.

26.   Perform general and confrontational counseling to identified employee as and when required in association with a specialist in HR.

27.   Assist the organization in firing employees when necessary

conforming to the defined organizational process in association with the HR department.

28. Assist the finance department in budgeting and consolidating the organizational performance for the preparation of financial statements.

29. Assist the marketing department in order acquisition by preparing the technical content of the proposal/quotation as well as making technical presentations.

30. Assist the finance department in setting prices by performing the cost estimation of the products/processes carried out in the organization for making or approving proposals for order acquisition.

31. Assist the materials department in identifying the subcontractors for the work proposed to be subcontracted by technically evaluating the candidate subcontractors.

32. Assist the materials department in setting the prices for subcontractors by performing the cost estimation of the work being subcontracted.

33. Assist the marketing and top management in building confidence in the visiting prospective customers by offering technical clarifications and answering any technical questions asked by the prospective customers either personally or through correspondence.

34. Assist the field service teams in resolving technical issues faced by them in the field.

35. Receive feedback from the field service teams as well as the customers and effect improvements in the product/service design as required from time to time.

36. Problems are more or less a daily occurrence for the organizations. The manager keeps resolving the problems thrown at him/her by the organizational working environment to the best of his/her ability. The objective of problem resolution is to ensure that the organization keeps running and at no time does it halt.

I am stopping hers as I think that you get the idea. There could be many more activities in this manner that a manager performs. A manager is like the head of a family who takes responsibility for the family and does whatever is required or whatever is thrown at him/her by the environment. So is a manager who takes responsibility for a set of activities in the organization and does whatever is required to ensure that those activities are performed as efficiently as humanly possible to produce the desired results. And that is what a manager does all day!

In short, top management handles all strategic issues. The middle managers use the framework set up by the top managers and produce results desired by the organization.

Now, the manager is not focused on just getting things done. (S) he works with his/her own hands using appropriate tools. The manager is now responsible to produce results but not by any method. The manager cannot produce results either by hook or crook. The manager needs to produce results working within the framework set up by the top management, complying with all the laws of the land and respecting the individual freedoms. The only freedom a manager enjoys in today's context is to either do it or to get it done by outsourcing the work!

My New Definition of Management

In my humble opinion, here is the new definition of management, thus, "Management is producing the desired results in uncertain conditions, with constraints on resources (time, materials, cost, equipment and human resources), with inadequate information on facts and by either working personally or through others working within a defined framework". And the new definition for a manager is "the manager is an employee in the organization who is vested with the responsibility of performing a set of activities to produce the desired results within the framework of the organization accepting constraints on the availability of resources and methods".