

## Extension Material 1.3

### Management

Countless books and articles have been written on, and about, management, to the point at which it can be difficult to identify and to make sense of the myriad of different approaches and traditions. Our advice is that you select a number of authors, whose work is recognized as distinctive, insightful, and original, and become familiar with their ideas and contributions. We have been particularly influenced by such people as Peter Drucker, Tony J. Watson, David Ulrich, Jeffrey Pfeffer, and Henry Mintzberg in recent years, but earlier works by Weber, Barnard, Elton Mayo, and McGregor also stand out for their distinctive contributions to our understanding of how organizations function and how people are, and should be, managed. Consistent with our view that students need to take control of their own learning and development, it is recommended that you agree a personal 'contract' to engage with some of this literature, and to reflect on its relevance and value to your own understanding of what management is about.

Consider, for example, the building of the Pyramids in Egypt, and of England's canals and railways. Would 'managers' have been found there, doing the same kind of things that today's managers do? Even though the word 'manager' may not have been used, the functions that are generally associated with management—directing and controlling resources—would almost certainly have been understood. As a function, defined as 'what needs to be done' or the 'nature of the contribution required to achieve stated objectives', management, despite its complexities and different traditions, can be understood as being about:

- clarifying objectives;
- planning and organizing;
- directing and controlling.

According to Clegg et al. (2008), this functional and rational approach to management, associated with such people as F. W. Taylor, Henri Fayol, and Henry Ford, not only identifies key management activities and responsibilities, but also explicitly excludes employees from any meaningful part of what management does. Organizations based on hierarchy, centralized decision-making, and a belief that employees were incapable of anything more than following orders produced managers and an approach to management that is associated with scientific management and Fordism, significant elements of which are still influential today.

The historical emphasis on functionality and rationality needs to be put into a more contemporary context, in which:

- as change and increasing complexity become the norm for those organizations exposed to competition and a dynamic external environment, these core functions may, in themselves, be insufficient to deliver the required outcomes, and so new management activities may emerge (e.g. the need to communicate, to consult, and to motivate);
- because these functions are essentially technical in nature—they demand specialist knowledge and skills to carry them out to the required standard—who carries them out (i.e. who is seen to or can act managerially) becomes a question of competency rather than of hierarchical position. This conception of management, reflected in the concept of 'empowerment', means that, as the workforce becomes better educated and technically equipped to manage, there is less need for people in formally designated management positions. Such a realization is associated with the notion of self-management, self-direction, and self-control;
- challenges emanating from postmodernists raise questions about the effectiveness of traditional approaches to management in delivering sustained economic success in the context of rapidly changing environments. One of the important outcomes of this debate has been the realization that understanding what management involves requires us to accept not one, but several types of rationality.

What these points mean is that the 'old' ideas that management is the province of only those with managerial responsibilities, that it is only done 'to people', and that employees can easily be organized, directed, and controlled, while still retaining some support, are not the only ways of understanding what management involves. For those with responsibility for managing organizations, it is important to consider the limitations of the first conceptualization, and the implications of the second.

As an example of this more 'unconventional' thinking, Cloke and Goldsmith (quoted in Mullins, 2005) claim that 'managers are the dinosaurs of our modern organizational ecology' and that 'the age of management is ending'. They base their argument on the rapid advances in IT and knowledge growth, increased environmental influences, and the

continuing search for improvements in productivity, which are forcing organizational leaders to find alternative and more effective ways of controlling activities and regulating behaviour. They believe that organizations which do not understand the need to respond to these dynamic forces, and to share decision-making power and responsibility with their employees, will lose those employees; they also believe that the biggest changes in the history of management are the decline of hierarchy and bureaucracy, autocratic management, and the expansion of collaborative self-management and organizational democracy (see Mullins, 2005).

In his influential books, *In Search of Management* (2001) and *Organising and Managing Work* (2002), Tony Watson reaches similar conclusions to those of Cloke and Goldsmith, but by a different route. In the first chapter of his ethnographical study of a manufacturing company, Watson offers a powerful and persuasive analysis of the meaning and practice of management that is derived from his own observations, from discussions with managers in the company, and from his own theoretical insights. One of his more interesting conclusions is that, however much conventional thinking about management is based on the belief that what needs to be managed can, in some mysterious way, be completely captured and appropriated from the working environment and packaged into management jobs, this belief is a fiction.

Support for many of the conclusions reached on the changing nature of management in the twenty-first century is given by the findings of the Tomorrow Project (Moynagh and Worsley, 2001), which reported on conditions of work and employment until 2020. It found that:

- there will be more self-management;
- outsourcing will create these opportunities;
- higher-skilled jobs will increase employee discretion;
- managers will develop new ways to supervise and delegate work;
- people will want greater responsibility;
- more mundane jobs will be transformed to make employment feel more like self-employment.

To support their conclusions, the authors quote the example of a just-in-time car plant at which many middle-manager jobs have been taken over by assembly workers, who manage day-to-day scheduling, machine setup, work, discipline, and quality control. They also refer to Toyota's Takaoka plant, at which individual workers can stop the assembly line if they see a problem with the production process.

This brief and necessarily limited analysis of the nature of management and its relevance for the management of people at work does, however, allow us to conclude with the following observations.

- The traditional divide between those who manage and those who are managed is becoming narrower, increasingly blurred, and, in certain cases, reversed, with the number of managers being reduced and their responsibilities passed to individuals or groups of employees.
- Changes in the nature of work, illustrated by the growing number of knowledge-based jobs, make traditional ideas of what managing involves increasingly inappropriate. The knowledge owned by such workers cannot be easily appropriated or replicated, and this means that organizations cannot control and motivate the workers as easily as they believed they could when dealing with a less skilled and more dependent workforce.
- Social and technological changes have resulted in much more complex and varied working patterns, with an increasing number of employees working from home or away from the office for long periods.

Inevitably, such changes have resulted in managers and HR specialists having to redefine what managing such staff involves.

But the point that, without a viable business, any talk of managing people, either well or badly, becomes irrelevant, is still fundamental to this introductory exploration of HRM. It has this status because it locates people in a particular type of relationship with employers and the employing organization. Managing people is not the primary aim of managers; managing the business or organization successfully is what managers will be judged against, and according to Robert Heller (2008) this means:

**In the final analysis, management comes down to three simple words: revenues, costs and quality.**

A focus on core business outcomes doesn't mean that people are not important—far from it—but it does mean that understanding and addressing the needs of people as human beings is critical to their status as productive economic resources and their ability to contribute to these business goals. However difficult it is for some people to accept,

people are not an end in themselves but a means to an end. Although a humanist, psychologist McGregor understood this role and relationship. According to Heil et al. (2000):

**McGregor believed that organisations would be far more effective when managers offered employees the opportunity to align their individual goals with those of the business. His thinking reinforced the pragmatic message at the core of the famed psychologist Abraham Maslow's work: People are capable of extraordinary accomplishments if they are able to meet their own self-fulfilling needs while pursuing the goals of the organisation.**



## REFERENCES

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