

Chapter 2

Management Methods

Many people probably see organizations as something obvious, like a table, a chair or the moon. They use the word in a generic sense and forget, at least for a while, that there is no organization unless there is somebody to manage it.

The idea of management, in contrast, indicates that there are people involved and that these people are engaged in some activity. Managers are there to help change the activities of their organizations, whether by expanding or reducing a business, introducing new products, entering new markets with old products, creating a strong brand, reorganizing, or simply improving the efficiency of the existing production.

Regardless of how organizations define the changes they want to accomplish, management (and managers) shall help them achieve their goals. Every organization has its own unique goals, but in general terms management shall help organizations become successful. Preferably, they shall survive as organizations for a long time (indeterminably), which means that for many organizations long-term organizational success is a target in its own right (Holmblad Brunsson 2002; Teece 2009). How success and long-term success shall be defined differs from one organization to another: Business firms must charge more for what they sell than they themselves pay for the resources they use; public agencies must deliver services to the citizens that the citizens like, or at least accept; and non-governmental organizations must be active in areas, which members and supporters appreciate.

Organizations may produce transportation, social security payments, robots, hairdressing, or polls. They may deliver products that many dislike like weapons, unhealthy products like pastry, or dangerous activities like motor cross. If only there are enough people willing to pay for, support or contribute to the production of an organization, it may prove successful despite such objections.

A limited number of customers can make a business firm profitable. It need not, nor does it necessarily want to, expand and find new profitable customers. The same holds true for non-governmental organizations; they need only a 'sufficient' number of members. For public agencies, the objective may even be to reduce the number of people they serve. This is true, for example, of hospitals, prisons or employment

offices, where one indication of successful work is a reduction of the number of ‘customers.’

Whether or not an organization was successful depends on the ambitions of those who make the judgment. The higher the ambitions of owners or other stakeholders, the more likely organizations are to fail. It does happen—and is in fact quite common—that growing and profitable business firms find that the price of their shares fall—because those who planned to invest in these firm expected higher profitability.

Depending on the organization, success can be measured as profitability, higher appropriations from parliament, satisfied customers or fewer employees. Whichever the case, the organization itself is its number one stakeholder. Other stakeholders are secondary.

There are at least two explanations for the relationship between management and organizational success: one practical, the other a historically based, almost tautological stereotype. The practical explanation is the following (Locke 1996).

Management is a North American invention, and this is true for the presumption of a relationship between management and organizational success as well. This—typically American—notion was translated from the US to Europe after the Second World War, when the Marshall help made war-torn countries aware of the wealth of the American states. Like the American citizens, the Europeans concluded that there is a relationship between management and organizational success, and that this is true also for individual organizations. Military assistance and management education later corroborated this understanding, which in the US is taken for granted. With time, it has become a natural starting point for discussions about management (Burck 1957, cited from Locke 1996: 29):

The American way of doing business ... is the natural way of doing business.

One possible reason why Europeans and other people believe that organizations become successful (partly) due to skillful management is thus that they were impressed by American business firms and simply copied North American beliefs and arguments.

This explanation is probably related to the other explanation, referred to in Chap. 1 concerning the general understanding that organizations need management. It is difficult to make such an understanding plausible, if management is perceived to be insignificant, even harmful to an organization. There *must* be a relationship between management and organizational success; this is a consequence of the idea that management is important for the idea of ‘organization.’ With this line of reasoning it is irrelevant whether the arguments come from the US or not; the interesting question is if this understanding is at all empirically valid.

2.1 Engineering Views

Two engineers stand out as ‘management forefathers’: Frederick Winslow Taylor and Henri Fayol. Approximately contemporary, active in the early 20th century, but from different parts of the world—the US and France respectively—these engineers both took an interest in management: in creating order, improving efficiency, and handling internal organizational affairs.

Both wrote books where they described and discussed their experience from a long working life. Taylor was 45 when, in 1911, he published the two books *The Principles of Scientific Management* and *Shop Management*, but he started his working life as a young boy; besides had been interested in measurements and calculations from early childhood (Parker and Lewis 1995). Fayol summarized 56 years of working experience, when, at the end of his career, aged 75, he first published *Administration industrielle et générale*. (The book was translated into English in 1930 and 1949: ‘General and Industrial Management.’)

Although they based their recommendations on their own experience from working in and with large industries, they did not hesitate to claim general applicability for their recommendations. Said Taylor (1911/1998: iv):

... the fundamental principles of scientific management are applicable to all kinds of human activities.

Fayol similarly argued that all kinds of organizations need management; the family, small and large business firms, and, not least, the French government.

Nor did Taylor or Fayol hesitate to moralize. Taylor encouraged friendly relationships between managers and subordinates: the workmen should see their bosses as teachers, even as their ‘very best friends,’ he hoped (1911/1998: 35). Fayol’s (1916/1949) advice to young engineers covered their private lives as well: do not forget to get rest and exercise, to take active part in social affairs, to look out for a worthy spouse ...

Despite these similarities, the two engineers approached the topic of management from radically different directions. Taylor started with the individual employee (workman), studied his physical and mental capacities and tried to find the right man for a specific task. He then trained this person to economize on body movements, but increase the speed at which each movement was performed. Taylor reported on astounding productivity increases; for example:

- skillful bricklayers handled 350 instead of 120 bricks per man per hour,
- ‘Smidt’ handled 47 ½ tons of pig iron, instead of previously 12 ½ tons,
- thirty-five girls inspecting bicycle balls could do the work that formerly required 120 girls.

When employees were left to their own devices, the result was often ‘soldiering,’ Taylor observed. Because they lacked the proper knowledge and, in addition, did not want to lose their job—or make others unemployed—people worked at a much slower than optimal pace. Taylor saw managers as technical experts, each with their

own area of expertise. Consequently, employees could relate to up to eight managers, depending on the issue at stake. Fayol questioned this type of matrix organization. Polemicalizing with Taylor, he insisted on what he called unity of command—every employee should have but one manager, he argued.

Fayol saw management from a top-down perspective. Himself the CEO of a large coal mine industry, Fayol emphasized that managers must understand the technical aspects of the productions of their organizations. But he realized that to expect top managers to have detailed knowledge of the entire production process was unfeasible. Fayol estimated that managers in large firms spent 40–50 % of their time on management. As a result, he insisted on a general management education for future engineers (who were also the future managers of business firms).

According to Fayol, management consists of a number of activities that all organizations engage in, irrespective of what they produce:

- *Planning*—in a comprehensive plan, managers should estimate available resources, the value of the ongoing work, and the technical, commercial, financial and other changes that they expect will take place;
- *organizing*—to organize is to provide the organization with all necessary resources; raw materials, machines and equipment, capital and personnel;
- *commanding*—good managers are well acquainted with their subordinates, and ready to dismiss any employee who does not meet the standards of work;
- *coordinating*—regular meetings among responsible managers is the most effective coordinating mechanism, Fayol believed; and
- *controlling*—every department should be responsible for controlling its own activities and appointed inspectors relied on only in exceptional cases.

Fayol found that these activities dominated the work of managers in large organizations and at the top of an organizational hierarchy. The managers he described were different from those of Taylor. Rather than technical specialists on different parts of the production, Fayol expected managers to specialize in management.

2.2 Bottom Up or Top Down?

The previous section illustrates how even (roughly) contemporary men with (roughly) the same background and with substantial experience of management may come to different conclusions of how to approach this topic. Taylor and Fayol were both highly influential, but in different ways. Taylor was part of a professional movement of mechanical engineers that started in the US in the 1870s and where political conflict was redefined into technical—and ‘neutral’—issues of rationalization, standardization and progress (Shenhav 1999). Had Taylor not existed and published his books, ‘Taylorism’ would probably have appeared under some other name.

But Taylor did exist—as does his views on standardization and efficiency, which a century later form the basis not only of the worldwide mass production of goods, but also—and to an ever larger extent—of the production of various kinds of services. Only when ‘efficiency’ is promoted to such an extreme that it is not efficient anymore—as when human bodies are worn out by monotonous movements, or employee safety is at stake—does some objection to the idea of efficiency seem justified. (This topic is further discussed in Chap. 4.)

The fact that efficiency ideas were—and still are—carried out to an extreme has given ‘Taylorism’ a bad name. To be classified as a ‘Neo-taylorist’; a Taylorist disguised in modern rhetoric, is certainly no compliment.

Fayol fared differently. People do not go around accusing each other of being ‘Fayolists,’ most likely because they are all Fayolists, but unawares (Holmblad Brunsson 2007). Though perfunctorily mentioned in many management textbooks, Fayol as a person did not make much impact—he was put in the ‘rubbish bin’ of management history (Parker and Ritson 2005: 1351). But his ideas are taken for granted—to the extent of being cited more or less verbatim in management accounting or management control textbooks (Harding 2003). In order to remember what management is all about, British students are asked to memorize the acronym POSDCORB—planning, organizing, staffing, directing, coordinating, reporting, budgeting—prescriptions which are only slightly different from Fayol’s account (Watson 2001).

Like Taylor, Fayol engaged in professional discourse where he related his managerial experience and ventilated his views on the training of engineers. His views on management were not as clearly related to a ‘movement’ as those of Taylor, but perhaps Fayol, too, articulated views that somebody else might otherwise have published. There is a striking similarity between Fayol’s conclusions and those of Florence Nightingale fifty years earlier.

2.3 Nursing Views

More often than not, Florence Nightingale is portrayed as the self-sacrificing nurse, who cared for sick and dying soldiers during the Crimean war in the middle of the 19th century; she was ‘an angel made human’ (Moberg 2007: 15, translated from Swedish). But Nightingale was a clever manager and organizer, whose great interest lay with economy and statistics. Due to this interest she succeeded in radically reducing the mortality rate among the British soldiers (Wendt 1989).

Nightingale focused on nursing and health care; nevertheless, her observations and conclusions resemble those of Henri Fayol fifty years later. Like Fayol, Nightingale appreciated planning and organizational hierarchy (cited from Ulrich 1997: 20):

The very essence of all good organization is that every body should do her (or his) own work in such a way as to help and not hinder every one else's work.

Like Taylor and Fayol, Nightingale emphasized that managers must observe and encourage their subordinates. Routines should be installed to guarantee that organizational activities be carried out even if the responsible manager was absent. Like the two engineers, Nightingale argued that her recommendations were generally applicable. But whereas Fayol asked for a general management education, Nightingale saw experience as the decisive factor for good nursing. Nurses must learn to closely observe their patients (Dock 2007, cited from Wendt 1989: 9):

This is the reason why nursing proper can only be taught by the patient's bedside, and in the sickroom or ward. Neither can it be taught by lectures or by books, though these are valuable accessories, if used as such; otherwise what is in the book stays in the book.

Despite many similarities with later management ideas, Nightingale's management recommendations were all but forgotten—perhaps because Nightingale was a woman who claimed to have her calling from God; perhaps because she was seriously ill and spent almost thirty years in bed (Moberg 2007). An important additional reason is probably her loose connection with any existing organization. Taylor and Fayol both referred to the positive effects of their recommendations on organizational efficiency, which Nightingale could not do.

Whichever the case, the ideas of another woman interested in management—Mary Parker Follett—were similarly ignored.

2.4 Social Views

When, in the early 1940s, management expert Peter Drucker first became interested in management, he asked knowledgeable colleagues about the most influential people in the field. No one mentioned Mary Parker Follett. Only ten years later, when Drucker was already professor of management, did he hear her name for the first time (Drucker 1995/2003).

Yet in the late 1920s and early 1930s Mary Parker Follett was a well-known management writer. She had no business experience, but businessmen in the US, Great Britain and Japan appreciated her ideas nevertheless (Kanter 1995). Her book *The New State* (1918/1998) was published only two years after Fayol's *Administration industrielle et générale*, but described an altogether different type of management than that of either Taylor or Fayol.

Most importantly, Follett outlined prerequisites for democratic society in its totality. To her, industrial organizations were but a means to a true democracy, where interests were to be integrated, and neither the power of capital, nor that of labor should dominate.

In contrast to Fayol, Follett did not describe coordination as a managerial activity; instead she stressed *reciprocal adaption* and *general agreement* as coordinating mechanisms. Divergent opinions within a group should spur a creative

process and be understood as an experiment in cooperation, Follett maintained. And a diversity of groups should be understood as a token of civilized society. Progress was not primarily an effect of economic conditions, Follett argued; it should follow from genuine cooperation.

Follett saw *the neighborhood group* as the primary basis for organizing society. Individuals do not exist in isolation, she emphasized: there is only ‘self-in-and-through-others’ (1918/1998: 8). Not only do individuals depend on others for their self-realization, but they are most ‘real’—and creative—when they meet others face to face.

Contrary to organizations (but similar to the idea of individuals), neighborhood groups have no preconceived objective. Instead, the evolvment of groups becomes learning processes, where objectives emerge and change according to circumstance. Nor did Follett (1927–28/1941) expect any preconceived center of group authority; she expected the members of a group to work together and to solve problems together (‘power-with,’ not ‘power-over’). Control should be the responsibility of everyone, not left to a limited number of officials, as a Fayolist type of management presumed.

Follett was ahead of her time in many respects and was later called ‘The prophet of management’ (Drucker 1995/2003: 9). For example some of her ideas are similar to those of stakeholder theory some sixty years later (Shilling 2000). Her ambition was challenging: it implied a fundamental change of the existing social order. But Follett seems to have underestimated peoples’ mobility and the precariousness of the neighborhood groups on which she based her organizing ideals (Mattson 1998).

Neither Follett, nor Nightingale explicitly addressed *organizations*, but as it turned out, organizations became all the more robust—and the most attractive loci for ever-new ideas of management.

2.5 Management Fashions

An increasing number of organizations worldwide helps explain an increasing number of management ideas (Alvesson 2006; Røvik 2008). Neither academics, nor other management writers or management consultants are content with sticking to the Fayolist conclusions they teach to university students. Instead, they want to go beyond this ‘traditional’ approach to management and propose something new, hopefully more insightful, and hopefully more productive in terms of organizational success.

Over the years, different approaches to management were given different names, as they dominated managerial discourse (Table 2.1).

As seen from this exposition, ideas of (arguably) functional management methods come and go. At one time focus should be on the employees; at another on the ‘culture’ of the workplace. Because many ideas are popular only for a limited period of time, scholars coined the phrase ‘management fashions’ (Abrahamson 1996).

Table 2.1 Some popular management methods

1950s	Management by objectives (MBO), program evaluation and review technique (PERT), employee assistance programs (EAPs)
1960s	Sensitivity training and T-groups
1970s	Quality-of-worklife programs, quality circles
1980s	Corporate culture, total quality management (TQM), international standards organization 9000 (ISO 9000), benchmarking
1990s	Employee empowerment, horizontal organizations, vision, reengineering, agile strategies, core competencies

Carson et al. (2000: 1144)

Table 2.2 Attributes of excellent business firms according to Peters and Waterman

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|---|
| 1. A bias for action—the excellent firms were not paralyzed by analysis. Instead, the standard operating procedure was: ‘do it, fix it, try it’ |
| 2. Close to the customer—the firms became excellent because they got their best product ideas from their customers |
| 3. Autonomy and entrepreneurship—the firms were innovative because they encouraged practical risk taking and supported good tries |
| 4. Productivity through people—the excellent firms treated the rank and file people as the source of quality and productivity gains |
| 5. Hands-on, value driven—the basic philosophy and a close relationship between managers and subordinates proved to be decisive for excellence |
| 6. Stick to the knitting—excellent performance was more likely for firms that stayed close to the businesses they knew how to run |
| 7. Simple form, lean staff—the excellent firms had a small top-level staff, none used a matrix organization structure |
| 8. Simultaneous loose-tight properties—the excellent firms were both centralized and decentralized; centralized around a few core values, but allowing product teams or the shop floor a great amount of autonomy |

Peters and Waterman (1982: 13–16)

2.6 Some Success Recipes

In the early 1980s, a study of 43 large—and ‘top performing’—US business firms from various industries led to a widely spread ‘success recipe’ of eight recommendations (Peters and Waterman 1982, Table 2.2).

As it turned out, however, only a few years later the ‘top-performing’ firms performed below average. The authors of the excellence recommendations did not take into account that success often makes firms change averse, while competition

increases—or that rapid environmental change is often difficult to predict (Ansoff 1987; Clayman 1987). So the search for a success recipe continued.

Some twenty years later a study of 28 successful US business firms with a history of long-term mediocre and long-term (at least 15 years) exceptional performance concluded that these firms combined a strong belief in the value of their business and concentration on their unique competence (Collins 2001). The ‘hedgehog’ concept required discipline: disciplined people, disciplined thinking, and disciplined action. Business firms should be simultaneously change averse and change prone; they should keep a core of fundamental values, but be open for changes of goals, strategy or culture. Careful analysis should precede any important decision.

And ten years after that, a similar study of seven exceptionally successful US business firms, which, in addition, experienced turbulent environments, found discipline, creativity, and paranoia to be hallmarks of success (Collins and Hansen 2011):

- *Discipline*: the top managers of the successful firms were individuals who stuck to their long-term goals and fundamental values, irrespective of any external pressure or social norms.
- *Creativity*: the successful firms did not trust authorities or conventional wisdom in times of uncertainty; instead, their decisions and actions were empirically based, which reduced risks and provided for creativity based on self-assurance.
- *Paranoia*: the successful firms were extremely cautious; even when things were running smoothly, they reckoned with potential failure, therefore systematically built slack into their organizations.

The authors of these ‘success recipes’ all emphasized that management must adapt to the unique premises of individual organizations; in this sense they combined Tayloristic and Fayolist viewpoints. Their general and prudent recommendations further indicated that they were anxious to be politically correct and popular with many.

In contrast to Taylor and Fayol, who based their conclusions on their own experience—and seem convinced that they were right—later management writers based their recommendations on studies. Interviews and documents were their main sources of information, and this is probably one reason why these writers preferred to phrase their ‘new’ management methods in a cautious and ambiguous manner.

Besides outlining their recommendations in a non-specific way, many authors of popular management books (also referred to as the ‘Heathrow organization theory;’ Burrell 1989) simplify: they disregard managerial practice and refer only to the change that they find urgent, they make subordinates into predictable, easily manipulated, submissive and fairly uninteresting figures, and they deal with managerial attitudes, rather than technical or organizational aspects of management (Holmblad Brunsson 2007). Yet they claim to propose new modes of management, which are bound to lead to organizational success.

2.7 Evidence-Based Management

All too often, managers allow management fashions to substitute for thinking, or finding out what actually works in their organizations, say the authors of a book on evidence-based management, copying an idea from the field of medicine (Pfeffer and Sutton 2006). Arguably, evidence-based management is no new management method: It is a new approach to management, a new mind-set.

Evidence-based management should not build on emotions, or the personal charm of the manager, but on experience. It questions the predominant Fayolist view on general management and proposes a modern, politically correct, version of Taylorism.

‘Half-truths’ rather than specific advice to managers tend to dominate. The proponents of evidence-based management question, for example, presumptions to the effect that:

- the best organizations have the best people—while, in fact, talent is difficult to identify; it is not stable over time but can be developed; besides, the ‘best’ people are likely to move on to some other organization,
- financial incentives drive company performance—while, in fact, incentives are blunt signals of what is important; less may be as effective as more,
- strategy is destiny—while, in fact, competitive advantage comes from having—and using—rare and valuable resources, not from having the right strategy,
- change is always necessary for organizational survival—while, in fact, change should not be undertaken for its own sake, but only after careful scrutiny of its advantages over the existing mode of production.

The general proposition—to base management on experience and facts—concurs with ideas of formal rationality, which appear similarly sensible, but are unrealistic with regard to managerial practice (see Chap. 5 for a detailed explanation of this argumentation). Some more specific advice may be questioned: Is it actually efficient to let subordinates organize their own work? Is it true that cozy work environments promote efficiency? Are meetings where people stand more efficient?

The fact that evidence-based management is based on highly general, but unrealistic, and specific, but doubtful, recommendations indicates once more that there is no certainty as to which management methods actually make organizations successful. It is easier to find and attack management ‘half-truths’ than to replace them with generally accepted truths.

2.8 Process Organizations

While Fayol (1916/1949) saw organizing as one way for managers to create a special kind of order in their organization, later scholars used the gerund form of ‘organization’—organizing—to describe organizations not as fixed entities, but as

natural, non-hierarchical phenomena, constantly changing and adapting to various circumstances (Weick 1969/1979; Czarniawska 2003, 2004). (Gerund is a hybrid between a verb and noun; Jespersen 1933/1954.) The organizing idea has little room for people. Management becomes unimportant, even problematic (Weick 1969/1979).

Though allegedly based on the notion of organizing, the idea of process organizations again makes a distinction between management and organization, however.

Like the idea of organizing, the idea of process organizations refers to nature, and changes that are embedded in everything natural but independent of human interference. In both cases, organizations are seen to make ‘discoveries,’ rather than construct man-made order (Weick 1969/1979; Hammer 1996). (The connotations of ‘process’ are different from those of ‘procedure,’ an arrangement to create order, which clearly involves people. The literature on organizations and management has been much attracted by process ideas, while finding procedures to be boring, bureaucratic inventions.)

Despite an explicit mistrust of hierarchical managerial arrangements, descriptions of process organizations nevertheless include hierarchies. In these organizations there are peer reviews, ‘process owners,’ ‘coaches’ and ‘business leaders’ (Hammer 1996). Perhaps ‘process owner,’ or ‘coach,’ or ‘business leader’ are more attractive titles than ‘manager,’ because they signal something new and different from the previous—old and boring—Fayolist view on organizing. But other than that the idea of process organizations was yet another attempt at finding the optimal management method. When operationalized, the idea of organizing turned into yet another success recipe.

2.9 No Winning Formula

In 1999, thirteen scholars from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) wanted to find out which managerial practices succeed and which fail in globalized society. They took a bottom-up perspective on this question, and spent five years studying industries where technologies had been changing rapidly, such as electronics and software, and industries with slow change, such as autos and auto parts, and textile and apparel industries. Their conclusions were based on 500 interviews in twelve countries across the world (Berger 2006: 24, italics added):

... there's no winning formula for success.

The MIT scholars found that few business firms do well forever. Whether or not firms are seen to be successful depends on when they were studied. Despite ‘mountains of information’ (p. 144) research cannot identify long-term winners. A variety of management methods may prove viable in the same environment.

2.10 Belief in Methods

One might expect that an extensive and careful study, such as that of the MIT scholars, would bring an end to the idea that certain management methods are more likely to lead to organizational success than others. But that does not seem to be the case. Instead, new methods appear, not only in slender popular books in airport bookstores, but also as widespread beliefs that a different management focus—change—will truly benefit the future of the organization. There are at least three possible reasons for this:

- (i) Managers who find that they spend their days solving all sorts of mundane but urgent problems become frustrated; they never find time to manage (Hill 1992). By adopting a new management method, they hope to come closer to an ideal view on management.
- (ii) Managers who have difficulties relating their work to the (relative) success of their organization feel uncertain about their own management approach. It is safer to do as others do and copy some popular method. Besides, this behavior proves that managers are up to date and change prone.
- (iii) Managers who are appointed as managers by an organization must do something. If they implement—or try to implement, or talk about implementing—a new management method, it becomes apparent that they meet expectations of being hard-working, change prone and modern managers.

Managers may be well acquainted with the idea of management fashions; they know that there is no winning formula for success. Yet they adopt ever-new management methods, because, they must believe that there is a relationship between the way they manage and organizational success.

Can managers perhaps base their next adoption of a new management method on some solid management theory? That is the question for the next chapter.

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