Macmillan Business Masters

Management

Third Edition

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Third Edition

Roger Oldcorn

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Introduction

In that classic book *Mrs Beeton's Cookery and Household Management* the introduction to the first edition states: 'What moved me in the first instance to attempt a work like this was the discomfort and suffering which I have seen brought upon men and women by household mis-management.'

It is sad to have to report that, well over a hundred years later, mismanagement in all walks of life is still causing an excessive amount of discomfort and, sometimes, suffering. Fortunately the scene is not all bad; much good management can be found these days and a great deal of good thinking about it is taking place. The aim of this book is, therefore, to help along the process of improving the quality of management by introducing the reader to those aspects of management which have come to be regarded as good ideas or good practical advice.

This book is intended for use, first, as an introductory textbook by students who are just embarking on a course of study in management. Hopefully it will provide enough insights into the many aspects of the subject for them to be encouraged to develop their interest in it.

The book is also intended for use by practising managers (or would-be managers) who have not had the benefit of much formal management training outside their own areas of expertise. The book is offered with the message: You are not alone with your problems; others have faced similar problems and been successful. Here are ideas, thoughts and practices that can help.

To the teacher of management a special word or two needs to be said. First, the world of the practical manager is in danger of becoming too far removed from the world of management theory. Having seen management from both sides, I deplore this division. It seems to me to be very wrong for the practical manager to regard theory as a waste of time and energy. Yet the view is often expressed that 'when you are up to your waist in alligators, there isn't time to study a map of the swamp'.

The opposing end is the cynical view of the practical manager provided by the management theorist as 'out of date, out of touch, managing by the seat of the pants and gloriously inept'.

Both extreme points of view are untenable and this book tries to bridge the gap, showing how and where theory can help improve managerial effectiveness.

Two limitations have emerged in writing this book. First, although management is a universal activity, present in all organisations from the smallest shop to the largest corporation, and from the public service to the private sector, it is impossible to discuss in detail aspects of the management in all types of organisation. Second, space also limits the amount of text related to specific management techniques, and in this connection the use of 'information technology' and the management of information has had to be limited.

The scope of management as a subject is nowadays so wide that deciding what should be included and how much stress to put on each topic was a major issue in the early days of writing. No doubt there are some who would prefer more or less of this or that, but in the end the balance I have chosen is how I see it. This does not make any other opinion wrong; that is the good thing about management – there is always room for another view.

Introduction to the Professional Masters edition

In the six years since this book was first planned there has been a rash of books that have taken a look at the world of the manager from a different perspective than hitherto.

The emphasis now is on describing successful or 'winning' organisations and providing useful lessons to all managers who are striving for excellence. Unfortunately they make it sound easy, whereas the message that this book implies is this: that to be a successful manager today requires a great deal of effort – especially thinking! Therefore the temptation to go overboard with references to super-companies has been resisted except in the final chapter.

Other changes in this edition are either cosmetic or to bring the statistics up to date, and to incorporate the section of 'Policy' within the overall heading of 'Getting organised'.

Again, it is a matter of regret that insufficient space has been devoted to management in local and central government. However the principles are largely universal and I trust that managers outside the commercial sector – whose problems often dwarf those of business managers – will be able to relate most of the ideas in this book to their own environment.

Introduction to the third edition

A few months after the first edition of this book was published, I checked a university's microfiche catalogue to see if this book was on their shelves. Happily it was, but the next entry after OLDCORN, Roger was 'OLDE TALES NEWLY TAUGHT', which gave me pause for thought as well as some amusement. It is fair comment that this book contains masses of

information on what others have written, said and researched about management. In some sense, therefore, the book is telling old tales again, but on closer inspection it becomes apparent that the stories I have related are themselves repeats and re-runs of even older tales. In management, there is very little that is genuinely new – what happens is that most of us miss some of what is, or has been, written on the subject. So a trawl from time to time is no bad thing.

Moreover, if we go back far enough and study the wisdom of the ages, management is about common sense and learning from the experience of others. These days, many of these conventional wisdoms cannot be taken at face value, but have to be researched and proved to have validity and there is no doubt that it is indeed comforting to know that one's beliefs and views can be supported by objective evidence.

So we find such gurus as Henry Mintzberg in his latest book, *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning*, making out that something is missing, that somehow we've got it wrong and that there is too much rationality in managerial activity. He believes that intuition should play a much greater role than it does. If he is right nobody would have made money during the 1991–2 recession, although maybe everyone would have made more. Agreed, intuition and gut-feel have a place in management, but unless these come out of knowledge and experience (of others as much as oneself) then you won't get good results in the long run.

I hope that this book is more than just a story-telling exercise, but a comprehensive, if superficial introduction to management. What managers should do, how they should behave, how they should operate – it's all well-documented – but making it happen still isn't easy. What is different from 1980 when this book was originally conceived is the world in which we live; no more cold war, global markets a real possibility, the opening up of Africa, China, India and Russia, information technology, global transferability of money, hands-off governments with less money to give away, to name just a few. So managers have to be more and more efficient to justify their existence. There are no guaranteed jobs any more – just as you cannot guarantee that yesterday's success story will be tomorrow's success as well, nor what you are selling today will be demanded tomorrow. Managers have to be multi-talented and the best will be those who have taken the trouble to learn. Here's a start.

How to use this book

Throughout the book you will find questions which you are encouraged to answer before reading on. There are three types of question:

Self-checks. Usually short questions requiring quick answers. They either help to prepare you for the text which follows, or they provide a means for you to test for yourself whether you have understood a particular principle or technique. Answers almost invariably follow directly after the questions.

It is obviously best for you to try to answer the question before reading on, but, whether you think you've got it right or wrong, read the answer before moving on to the next topic. If you have somehow made a mistake, the answer will usually tell you where you might have gone wrong.

You can, of course, 'cheat' and read the whole book from beginning to end without attempting to answer the questions at all. But if you do, there is only one person you are cheating. Guess who?

Reviews. Similar to the self-checks in purpose, but usually placed at the end of a chapter or at the end of a section, and intended to review your understanding of several principles or techniques.

Activities. Again, designed to test your understanding of the text, but they usually ask you to use some information which you will not find in the text. To answer these questions you have to use your own experience or discover some fresh facts for yourself. Sometimes an activity is simply an opportunity for you to stop and think about an important point raised in the text.

Acknowledgements

Many people have contributed to the writing of this book. First there are the many writers whose names have been quoted in the text; without these there would be no form to the subject. (Details of writers and books cited will be found in the section Further Reading on page 306). Second, and more important, are the many managers (good and bad) I have met over the years in large and small organisations. There have been very few really poor managers, and not all that many really good ones either. Most have been hard-working and conscientious, but it has been possible to learn from them all. Third, are the colleagues past and present who have provided many of the ideas in the book, verified or questioned many of the points mentioned and who have provided the stimulus to keep on writing. Those who have helped are too numerous to name; they know who they are. Fourth, the task would have been immensely difficult if it had not been for the efforts of Wendy Green in turning my scribble into meaningful text originally and to Margaret Bushill for putting this new edition on to disk. And finally, without the encouragement and enthusiastic support of my wife Dorothy there would have been no book at all.

ROGER OLDORN

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