The History of Management

The concept of management has been around for thousands of years. According to Pindur, Rogers, and Kim (1995), elemental approaches to management go back at least 3000 years before the birth of Christ, a time in which records of business dealings were first recorded by Middle Eastern priests. Socrates, around 400 BC, stated that management was a competency distinctly separate from possessing technical skills and knowledge (Higgins, 1991). The Romans, famous for their legions of warriors led by Centurions, provided accountability through the hierarchy of authority. The Roman Catholic Church was organized along the lines of specific territories, a chain of command, and job descriptions. During the Middle Ages, a 1,000 year period roughly from 476 AD through 1450 AD, guilds, a collection of artisans and merchants provided goods, made by hand, ranging from bread to armor and swords for the Crusades. A hierarchy of control and power, similar to that of the Catholic Church, existed in which authority rested with the masters and trickled down to the journeymen and apprentices. These craftsmen were, in essence, small businesses producing products with varying degrees of quality, low rates of productivity, and little need for managerial control beyond that of the owner or master artisan.

The Industrial Revolution, a time from the late 1700s through the 1800s, was a period of great upheaval and massive change in the way people lived and worked. Before this time, most people made their living farming or working and resided in rural communities. With the invention of the steam engine, numerous innovations occurred, including the automated movement of coal from underground mines, powering factories that now mass-produced goods previously made by hand, and railroad locomotives that could move products and materials across nations in a timely and efficient manner. Factories needed workers who, in turn, required direction and organization. As these facilities became more substantial and productive, the need for managing and coordination became an essential factor. Think of Henry Ford, the man who developed a moving assembly line to produce his automobiles. In the early 1900s, cars were put together by craftsmen who would modify components to fit their product. With the advent of standardized parts in 1908, followed by Ford's revolutionary assembly line introduced in 1913, the time required to build a Model T fell from days to just a few hours (Klaess, 2020). From a managerial standpoint, skilled craftsmen were no longer necessary to build automobiles. The use of lower-cost labor and the increased production yielded by moving production lines called for the need to guide and manage these massive operations (Wilson, 2015). To take advantage of new technologies, a different appro[illegible] organizational structure and management was required.

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With the emergence of new technologies came demands for increased productivity and efficiency. The desire to understand how to best conduct business centered on the idea of work processes. That is, managers wanted to study how the work was performed and the impact on productivity. The idea was to optimize the way the work was done. One of the chief architects of measuring human output was Frederick Taylor. Taylor felt that increasing efficiency and reducing costs were the primary objectives of management. Taylor's theories centered on a formula that calculated the number of units produced in a specific time frame (DiFranceso and Berman, 2000). Taylor conducted time studies to determine how many units could be produced by a worker in so many minutes. He used a stopwatch, weight measurement scale, and tape measure to compute how far materials moved and how many steps workers undertook in the completion of their tasks (Wren and Bedeian, 2009). Examine the image below – one can imagine Frederick Taylor standing nearby, measuring just how many steps were required by each worker to hoist a sheet of metal from the pile, walk it to the machine, perform the task, and repeat, countless times a day. Beyond Taylor, other management theorists including Frank and Lilian Gilbreth, Harrington Emerson, and others expanded the concept of management reasoning with the goal of efficiency and consistency, all in the name of optimizing output. It made little difference whether the organization manufactured automobiles, mined coal, or made steel, the most efficient use of labor to maximize productivity was the goal.