

Is the classical approach to management obsolete? essay

[Business](#), [Industries](#)



There have been many different approaches to management over the past few centuries; autocratic, which causes dissatisfaction for employees due to authority being in the hands of one person; paternalistic, in which the authoritative leader cares for his employees more than his profits; democratic, in which the management allows the employees to voice their opinions and laissez faire in which the management stays, for the majority, out of its employees business. These approaches are ever changing due to developments in modern day society. (Khilawala, 2002). The classical approach to management is typically known as the scientific or autocratic approach. I intend to investigate three of the original classical management theorists; Taylor, Weber and Fayol, and discuss their principles coming to my own conclusion as to whether their views are still relevant in today's society.

Frederick Taylor 1856-1915 - Scientific Management. In a time of Industrial Revolution where there were new scientific discoveries being brought to light every day, Taylor was well placed to imagine that science could also influence the way in which managements were run. Taylor aimed to improve economic efficiency and maximise productivity by optimizing the way in which tasks were performed and preventing the 'soldiering' (slacking) of workers. The name of this new era of modern management was to be Scientific Management. To reverse this soldiering, Taylor began a series of 'time studies' hoping to find the optimal way in which to perform particular jobs.

The conclusions of these studies resulted in Taylor's principles of scientific management; the 'rule-of-thumb' - in which workers decided personally how

to perform their jobs - was to be replaced with the task the worker was best suited for - the 'one best practice' meaning a short learning curve therefore maximum efficiency in minimum time. Worker's would be trained and observed ensuring the scientific methods were being carried out, and workloads were to be split evenly between manager and worker; if the manager planned efficiently enough there would be no interruptions. There can be no doubt that Taylor's approach to management greatly impacted on the world's economy; his principles were implemented in many factories often increasing productivity three times over. However there were many complaints about Taylorism; it increased the monotony of work resulting in the lack skill variety, autonomy and employers took no feedback. Taylorism has been described as 'dehumanising'. Aspects of Taylorism, such as the 'one best practice' are still being used today, for example in corporations like McDonalds, though with much opposition.

I think that whilst Scientific Management may have revolutionised industry at the turn of the 19th century, present day organisations would have trouble managing employees using Taylor's principles; the workforce is generally better educated and are therefore better placed to question the managerial techniques. Workers rights have also increased significantly over the last century and employers must now recognise employee expectations and rights; not treat them as machines. Max Weber 1864-1920 - Bureaucracy Weber was interested in studying authority within organisations; he believed in authority over power and distinguished three types of legitimate authority;

charisma, tradition and rational-legal, which he considered the most important. (Miller, 2008) .

From this he developed the bureaucracy; an organisation based on the principles of rational-legal authority. Although Weber wasn't personally in favour of the bureaucracy he saw it as the only form of organisation that could cope with the massive rise in business that came of the Industrial Revolution. Characteristics of the bureaucracy include: management by rules; division of labour; a formal hierarchical structure; employees hired due to technical competence; managers are salaried officials; written documents for decisions, rules and actions. All of these make for a very fair and in principle efficient approach to management. (Miller, 2008).

Although in the main, bureaucracies do offer a stable and hierarchical approach to the management of an organisation, it sometimes happens that employees/managers of the organisation will look out for their own interests, wanting to defend their positions, and so ideas such as promotion based on merit don't get fulfilled. Weber's bureaucracy could also be limited due to the rigidity of the system which implies a lack of flexibility to respond to demands of change in business environment (Miller, 2008). For example, due to the rigid structure proposed by Weber in sectors such as division of labour, the system is not time efficient. It is true that bureaucracies are still used today; organisations such as the army still adopt its principles. However I believe the bureaucratic system is a much less common approach to modern day management due to its rigid structure which: lacks innovation to drive the business forward, creates an impersonal environment and

inefficient time scales. This is no use for modern organisations that have to be flexible and prepared to deal with anything thrown at them, e. g. the oil spillage in the Mexican Gulf where the flexibility to draw on technical specialists at all levels irrespective of a hierarchy became important.

Henri Fayol 1841-1925 - Administration Fayol's approach to management was much more directed towards discovering the elements it took to be an effective manager than Taylor or Weber. The findings he deduced came from his own personal experience as a director of mines and focuses on the structure of management. He constructed five major obligations which he believed every manager should undertake. These were to forecast and plan, to organize, to command, to co-ordinate and to control. He believed that in order for an organisation to operate efficiently these principles must be implemented. Brooks, 2009). Fayol further developed fourteen principles of administration which he thought should cooperate with the five primary roles. It is obvious from these principles that Fayol believed that an 'ideal' organisation would include personal effort and team spirit; quite different from Taylor and Weber's views.

Fayol's ideas were revolutionary in regard to management theory in that they were the first principles to be acknowledged as to what a manager should actually do, however when it comes to putting his principles into practice we see that they are somewhat idealistic. In reality they are largely restrictive, at least in modern day managerial work. They don't allow for people-oriented tasks, i. e. the advancement of a company, merely set a structure to plan and carry out work. Although many of Fayol's principles are

still used in organisations today I think that due to contemporary developments some of his rather rigid principles, such as the division of labour, are being challenged.

Conclusion In conclusion, classical management theorists believe organisational efficiency can be gained through: formal processes; structures; specialization; authority; hierarchy; rules and regulations and monetary rewards sanctions. I don't believe the classical theories to be obsolete as such because they can be adapted to suit the present day environment and it is obvious they have influenced modern organisations today, but I think much of what they originally practiced has been made redundant. This is due to the constantly modernising economy in which factors against which success is measured are ever changing. For example the success of a business today may be determined by employee satisfaction, not merely profit.

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