

Scientific management 18315



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' The increasing application of Scientific Management principles of work organisations to services is, despite its limitations, inevitable and irreversible'. Discuss.

I Introduction

From the outset of this essay it is necessary to define the basic principles of Scientific Management in order for the statement to be fully understood and why if at all such a practice is ' inevitable' and indeed ' irreversible' within a service industry context.

The underlying belief that scientific management, or rationalisation= , is able to provide the basis for separating management from the execution of work.

' The rationalisation of work has the effect of transferring functions of planning, allocation and co-ordination to managers, whilst reinforcing the managerial monopoly of decision-making, motivation and control'. Hales (1994).

Taylor (1856-1915) has been referred to as the father of Scientific Management. He believed that management, not labour, was the cause of and potential solution to problems in the industry. Taylor concluded that workers systematically ' soldiered' because they believed that faster work would put them out of a job and because hourly or daily wages destroyed individual incentive. Taylor believed that in order to discourage, and indeed halt, this ' soldiering' a ' mental revolution' was required. He believed this could be achieved via four vital principles: (1) the development of the best work method, via systematic observation, measurement and analysis; (2) the scientific selection and development of workers; (3) the relating and bringing

together of the best work method and the developed and trained worker; (4) the co-operation of managers and non-managers which includes the division of work and the managers responsibility of work.

From this five key facets have evolved that lie at the foundation of scientific management. Hales (1994) has summarised these as follows:

- systematic standardised work methods via mechanisation and standard times.

- a clean functional division between managers and non-mangers.

Braverman (1974) described this as the ' separation of conception from execution'.

- centralised planning and control.

- an instrumental, low-involvement employment relationship due to the requirement of the individual employee being that of just carrying out their specified low-skilled task.

- an ideology of neutral technical efficiency.

Industries that have embraced such scientific management methods have essentially deskilled the workforce, often by menial, repetitive tasks, and have attempted to replace workers with machines wherever technically feasible and economic. A classic example of such an application is the Fordist principle of the production line. The remainder of the essay concentrates on the two key aspects of the statement, i. e. that of inevitability and irreversibility.

II Are Scientific Management principles inevitable and irreversible within the service industry ?

It has been suggested that the principles of scientific management have been widely adopted throughout industry.

" The orientation of larger firms towards professional managers, engineers and consultants additionally provided a supportive framework for the rise of Taylorism".

Thompson and Hugh (1990)

Although this rise has certainly been evident within manufacturing industries the service industry has been slower to utilise the principles of rationalisation. The question must therefore be asked why has the sector been slow on the uptake of these beliefs and could the reason for this provide an argument against the suggestion of the ' inevitability' of the principles within the service industries.

For rationalisation to be applied three prerequisite conditions are required: clear and single objective (for example maximising profit); hard data (for example accounting information); and no more than limited and measurable uncertainties (for example normally distributed machine parts). In general these three conditions do not hold in the service sector. Furthermore the quantities and the types of resources differ greatly from manufacturing industries. Within the service sector there is often more labour and less capital. This ' human emphasis' greatly limits the application of scientific management principles.

Targett (1995) has identified seven distinctive characteristics that highlight the limitations of applying scientific management principles and therefore raising doubts over the 'inevitability' of such management practices being used in the service sector.

- Measurement of output and performance is difficult. Quality of service cannot be measured solely by easily quantifiable data, such as revenue and sales volume alone. For example, the performance of a health care organisation is a combination not only of financial results and patient throughput but also of quality of care, the effectiveness of preventative measures and many other factors

- The 'product' is not tangible. Amongst the many effects of this are that quality control is not straight forward. For example checking the quality of car manufacture is a lot clearer task than checking the quality of service given at a hotels reception desk.

- Production and consumption are usually simultaneous. A particular implication of this is that there can be no inventory of the service itself, therefore not allowing 'systematic observation' nor measurement. For example, a shop assistant's advice to a customer cannot be stored. Hales (1994) has suggested that where the end-product is tailored to specific customer wants, the option of 'one best way' is even more difficult to sustain.

- The 'product' is time perishable. If a service is not used it is likely to be wasted, again making 'systematic observation' very difficult.

- Site selection is governed by customers demand. This means that operations tend to be decentralised therefore preventing the scientific management belief that planning and control should be centralised.

-The industry is labour-intensive. This is a key characteristic and especially important due to consumer/ employee contact in the delivery of a service. Consequently this makes it very difficult to replace people with machines. In addition people tend to be more unpredictable than machines and are therefore harder to encapsulate in a rationalisation model.

These distinctive features somewhat limit the usefulness and effectiveness of scientific management in the service sector as opposed to other sectors. This therefore questions the assumption of the 'inevitability' of the management practices being applied in the sector.

In contrast it can be argued that the service sector can embrace scientific management successfully and indeed may well be unavoidable. Two central elements to this ideology is the 'MacDonaldisation' of society and the trend of franchising within the sector. Furthermore Targett (1995) has identified techniques now being employed to help apply rationalisation within service industries, such as Data Envelope Analysis (DEA), enabling efficiency of staff to be measured.

MacDonalds has successfully taken the rationalisation concept, down to a 'production line' of burgers level, and successfully applied these within a service industry context. MacDonalds scientific management style is apparent in that it offers:

- efficiency.

- food and service that can be easily quantified and calculated. Ritzer (1993) suggests that some MacDonaldised institutes have come to combine the emphases on time and money. For example Pizza Hut will serve a personal pan pizza within five minutes or the pizza is free. Taylor would have surely eaten in a such a restaurant.

- predictability of the food and service due to standardisation

- control through the substitution of non-human for human technology. The humans who work in fast-food restaurants are trained to do a limited number of tasks in precisely the way they are told to do them. Managers impose their control by ensuring these tasks are carried out correctly. MacDonalds has successfully introduced mechanisation so as to reduce the unpredictability of the human element.

Ritzer (1993) has argued that the success of MacDonalds

"...has influenced a wide range of undertakings, indeed the way of life, of a significant portion of the world. And that influence is destined to continue to expand in the foreseeable future".

Such a statement therefore appears to add weight to the argument of 'inevitability'. MacDonaldisation can now be seen in many service industries including retailing, for example Toys R Us, or budget hotels, for example Motel 6.

Additionally scientific management is being applied by the franchiser sector within the hospitality industry. Franchisers stress the importance in standardised work methods, via centralised control, so as to ensure that each franchisee provides the same product and service. Some hotels, such as Choice Hotels, have installed front desk computers that provides the receptionist with information that can be supplied to the guest, thereby standardising the service offered and reducing staff training, thereby reducing costs. This is especially useful in hotels whereby high turnover of labour often results in high staff training costs. From such an example it can be seen that the 'technological revolution' has greatly aided, and indeed encourages, the application of scientific management in the service sector implying that such management is inevitable.

Turning to the 'irreversibility' aspect of the statement the motives of wanting to reverse rationalisation must be questioned. Ritzer (1993) has argued that the critics of rationalisation within the service sector view the past with rose tinted spectacles with an impossible desire to return to world that no longer exists. Such critics conveniently forget the liabilities associated with a pre-MacDonalds world. Furthermore Ritzer (1993) states "The increase in the number of people, the acceleration in technological change, the increasing pace of life - all this and more make it impossible to go back to a non-rationalised world, if it ever existed".

p. 13

MacDonaldisation has become so entrenched in society that customers expectations have risen to such a high level that certain sectors of the service industry, such as fast food outlets, could not be decentralised.

Other factors that could prevent companies reversing rationalisation include the enormous costs involved in 'demechanising' the company. For example an increasing amount of budget hotels are introducing costly automated self check-in consoles. Additionally decentralising companies would also involve massive management engineering. Therefore, in light of such factors, the statement can be partially supported in that it would be unlikely that rationalisation could be reversed.

On the other hand some industries have reversed scientific management principles to relieve monotony, improve morale, job satisfaction and ultimately increase efficiency. Hales (1994) has noted that there has been a growing trend in decentralisation via job rotation, enlargement and enrichment as well as 'task forces' and project teams being more widely established. There has also been increasing emphasis on increased employee participation in companies. Such a notion has been further developed and supported by the ideology behind Blair's Stakeholder Society. Therefore such change suggests that it is possible to reverse the application of scientific management principles.

III Conclusion

To conclude it can be suggested that scientific management, in its extreme form, applied in a hospitality context would result in something of a '

MacDonalds' experience. For example receptionists dealing with guests' enquiries would be unable to treat them on a personal level as they would almost be reading some script pre-written by central office. My own belief is that this could not be applied in the luxury end of the market as this undermines the actual product that is expected. This therefore opposes the ideology that scientific management is inevitable to the whole service industry.

There is also a growing awareness of the dehumanising experience of a fast-food restaurant or budget hotel. This has resulted in an increased desire for a more personalised service and therefore an indication that some industries could decentralise.

Furthermore the service sector, most notably hospitality, thrives on the multi-faceted individuals that are attracted to the industry. But the deskilling due to rationalisation means that such people are 'strait-jacketed into one dimensional jobs' (Hales 1994) stifling variety and creativity. Therefore such a sentiment tends to argue against the notion that scientific management principles are inevitable.

In summary to return to the original statement it can be argued against the belief that scientific management is inevitable and irreversible throughout the entire service industry, although certainly some areas of the industry could benefit from utilising such a management strategy - notably in the budget sector.

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