

The scientific management



Introduction

In the following essay I will analyse the extent to which Taylor's "scientific management" principles are present in current organisational management practices. Therefore, I will first introduce the main ideas of scientific management. Then, I will present points of critique that emerged in reaction to Taylor's work. Subsequently, I will concentrate on modern organizations and illustrate examples of applications of Tayloristic ideas. In particular, I will focus on the fast food industry and elaborate parallels between Taylor's principles and the management practices at the McDonald's organization. Afterwards, I will discuss possible reasons for the implementation of Taylor's concepts in contemporary companies. I will end the essay with a conclusion and continuative thoughts.

Scientific Management

The late nineteenth century was defined by an enormous growth in the size of enterprises, the beginnings of the monopolistic organization of industry, and the purposive and systematic application of science to production. These developments launched the scientific management movement that was initiated by Frederick Winslow Taylor (Braverman, 1974, P. 85) and that can be seen as one of the most influential trends for work design throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Thus, scientific management can be described as "the attempt to apply the methods of science to the increasing complex problems of the control of labor in rapidly growing capitalist enterprises" (Braverman, 1974, P. 86).

One of Taylor's basic assumptions was the worker's natural addiction to "soldiering" (Taylor, 1967, P. 6), that is "deliberately working slowly to avoid

doing a full day's work" (Taylor, 1967, P. 13 (3)). Taylor did not believe in an intrinsic drive that motivates worker or a human " need to work" (Lewin, 1999, P. 302). Instead he argued that managers have to offer " some special incentive" to evoke the workers' initiative (Taylor, 1967, P. 25). Moreover, Taylor assumed that a substitution of scientific for the inefficient rule-of-thumb methods was crucial to overcome these systematic under workings of the workers that did substantial harm to the companies. His famous time-and-motion studies constituted a means for the scientific analysis and standardization of work activities. The aim of these studies was the minute examination and analysis of every operation of a given task in order to eliminate unnecessary motions. This should lead to a reduction of production time and a rise in the output, thus to an increase of productivity. Taylor's four principles of scientific management form an essential component of his work and the basis for the later following analysis of this essay. Morgan summarized Taylor's ideas in five principles that are outlined in the following (Morgan, 2006, P. 23).

The first principle claims to " shift all responsibility for the organization of work from the worker to the manager" (Morgan, 2006, P. 23). Thus, Taylors arrogates to separate the head and hand; the planning and controlling from doing. The second maxim relates to the " use (of) scientific methods to determine the most efficient way of doing work" (Ibid). This principle illustrates Taylor's assumption that 'one best way' of doing a task exists. The third axiom postulates to " select the best person to perform the job thus designed" (Ibid). Thus, Taylor acts on the assumption that there is the right man for the job who has to be found. Furthermore, Taylor demands to " train

the worker to do the work efficiently" (Ibid). This training can be understood as the training for the one-best-way. Lastly, the "(monitoring of the) worker performance (plays an essential role in Taylor's work) to ensure that appropriate work procedures are followed and that appropriate results are achieved" (Ibid).

Taylor's scientific management has been discussed controversially. On the one hand, Taylor had agile followers who praised his work most profusely. For example, the physical chemist Le Chatelier, who primarily broadcasted Taylor's ideas in France, spoke of Taylorism as " a genuine science" (Le Chatelier, cited in Friedmann, 1967, P. 39) and Drucker called it " the most powerful as well as the most lasting contribution America has made to Western thought since the Federalist Papers" (Drucker, 1954, P. 280). On the other hand, scientific management has been criticized sharply. In the following I will present some of the major points of critique that mainly came up during the course of the Human Relations Movement.

Criticism

The so-called Hawthorne Studies (Mayo, 1933, Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939) formed the starting point of and an inspiration for the Human Relations Movement and the challenging of Taylor's scientific management concepts (Friedmann, 1967, P. 43-51). Mayo and his colleagues observed in an extensive series of experiments at the Hawthorne Plant of Western Electric the importance of social aspects in organizational settings and demonstrated limitations of Taylor's management approach from an " engineering perspective" (Anderson et al., 2001, P. 350). Prominent examples of these limitations are presented below.

One of the main points held against Taylor was that he apparently saw the worker as an isolated psychological being. Thus, Mouzelis argued that you have to perceive the worker as a "group member, whose behaviour is greatly controlled by group norms and values" (Mouzelis, 1975, P. 99). Mouzelis stated that concentrating on the individual worker was not sufficient because the "determinants of working behaviour (were) sought in the structure and culture of the group" (Mouzelis, 1975, P. 99). Likewise, Roethlisberger and Dickson postulated a "need for reformulating human problems" (Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939, P. 569). They animadverted that the workers were often "considered apart from their social setting and personal history and (were) treated as essentially 'economic men'" (Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939, P. 569).

Furthermore, scientific management was criticized for its one sidedness. Thus, Mouzelis reproached Taylor for neglecting the "psychological aspects of the worker" (Mouzelis, 1975, P. 85). He stated that the workers "needs as a whole being (were) systematically ignored" (Mouzelis, 1975, P. 85) and that a "multi-dimensional approach" considering the "psychological and sociological variables of organisational behaviour" (Mouzelis, 1975, P. 85) was "indispensable" (Mouzelis, 1975, P. 85). This thought was also shared by Lipmann who claimed that "we cannot abstractly cut out from (the whole individual) the working movements and isolate them from the needs of the personality considered as a bio-psychological whole" (Lipmann, cited in Friedmann, 1967, P. 56). In accordance with that, Sandler emphasized the importance of the "mental totality of man at work, who thinks, feels, desires" (Sandler, cited in Friedmann, 1967, P. 56) and Myer objected that "

the mental factors of personality, sentiment, and sympathy are sacrificed to purely physical considerations" (Myer, cited in Friedmann, 1967, P. 58) in Taylorism. Illustrating this concern Lewin used the metaphor of "machines" (Lewin, 1999, P. 299) and described the workers as being "valued (...) as "subjects", as material, as mere objects" (Lewin, 1999, P. 299).

Another major point of critique is the degrading of skilled labour that comes along with Taylor's principles of scientific management. For example, Friedmann accused Taylor of making a worker's intelligence superfluous and turning him "into an automaton and a moron" (Friedmann, 1967, P. 43). The image of an "automaton" was also used by Rose who insisted that it is crucial to see the worker "no longer (...) as an automaton, a more or less productive body, but (...) as a person with subjective and inter-subjective attributes that are pertinent to work" (Rose, 1999, P. 57). It is obvious that accompanied with that "deskilling" of workers the worker himself becomes less valuable and easily replaceable (Friedmann, 1967, P. 43). The consequences of this devaluation of the worker will be discussed later.

A further track of critique references Taylor's opinion about the employee's attitude towards work and the question if something like an internal work motivation exists or not. Taylor's strict rejection of the existence of an internal workforce or comparable concepts ("Men will not work at their best unless assured a good liberal increase, which must be permanent", Taylor, 1911, P. 26) was heavily challenged by several authors. Thus, Rose argued for example that "good work (itself) can be means to self-fulfilment" (Rose, 1999, P. 56). Lewin had a similar point of view. He stated that "life without work (was) hollow and incomplete" (Lewin, 1999, P. 302) and claimed a

human " need for work" (Lewin, 1999, P. 302). Nevertheless, he made clear that a premise for a " fulfilling" job was its' ability to promote " personal development" (Lewin, 1999, P. 304). Thus, he deprived Taylor the ability to provide " fulfilling" workplaces. Taylor's individual incentive plans to overcome the " natural loafing and systematic soldiering" (Taylor, 1911, P. 34) was excoriated by McGregor who spoke of them as " a good example of an attempt to control behaviour which fails to take sufficient account of 'natural law' (McGregor, 1960, P. 9). This natural law includes amongst others the human's necessity to be accepted by their colleagues and the workers ability to overcome " any system of controls devised by management" (McGregor, 1960, P. 9).

Taking into account these arguments, a departure from Taylor's scientific management principles and a shift in the direction of a more social orientated approach seems consequential. Instead of seeing the worker as a pure " machine" (Lewin, 1999, P. 299) organizations should regard the psychological and social processes that emerge from work environments. Thus, Mayo hoped that " other large companies will set themselves as intelligently, and with as unmistakable a social purpose, to discover something of the human situations that exist in factory and workshop" (Mayo, 1933, P. 122).

Nevertheless, as Friedmann stated " Taylorism has entered many factories in America and Europe" (Friedmann, 1967, P. 64). He claimed that " its technician influence circulates there, under other names, in the shape of all the systems of industrial organizations derived from it" (Friedmann, 1967, P. 65) and that the developed criticism " often did not get beyond the circle of

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specialists" (Friedmann, 1967, P. 65). Furthermore, Hodgetts argued that although a part of Taylor's " concepts of the past are proving useless because of changing paradigms brought about by technology, competition, and international trade agreements (...) his four principles (...) have value for organizations seeking to improve their competitiveness and remain viable in these closing years of the twentieth century" (Hodgetts, 1995, P. 222).

Hodgetts based his argumentation on research data of U. S. companies that " were given quality awards by their respective states" (Hodgetts, 1995, P. 218) and comes to the conclusion that " for all intents and purposes Frederick Taylor is alive and ready for the 21st century" (Hodgetts, 1995, P. 222).

Similarly, Butler stated that " many of Taylor's ideas, concepts, and rules seem even more appropriate today than at the time he promulgated them" (Butler, 1991, P. 23).

Indeed, you can find elements and modifications of Taylor's work in modern organisations nearly everywhere. Thus, most big organizations consist of several departments; each specialized on a specific topic. Besides this representation of Taylor's idea of a divided labour, the impacts of his notions about the selection and training are enormous. Nowadays, whole industries deal with the development of techniques to find the most qualified applicants and to provide efficiency maximizing employee trainings. The aviation industry with its complex assessment centres and training programmes is just one example that demonstrates the meaningfulness of these aspects of Taylor's work in the 21st century. Furthermore, you can argue that some management interventions, such as total quality management (TQM) or Management of objectives (MBO), are rooted in

Taylor's scientific management. Considering MBO, that was first outlined by Drucker in his book "The practice of management" in 1954, you see that it contains the four key components objective or goal setting (1), subordinate participation (2), implementation (3) and review and feedback (4) and is characterized by its' focus on goal alignment (Handbook of industrial work and org. psychology). However, Waring argues that Drucker "proposed new Taylorist techniques" (Waring, 1992, P. 207) rather than presenting a "genuine alternative" (Waring, 1992, P. 207) to scientific management. For example, he claims that Drucker presumes that the managerial will should overturn the will of the individuals which can be compared to Taylor's idea of the manager who thinks and the worker who does. Moreover, even Drucker himself emphasizes Taylor's success in his essay "The Coming Rediscovery of Scientific Management" (Drucker, 1981, P. 103) and states that "the need is to do for knowledge work and knowledge worker what Taylor (...) did for manual work and manual worker" (Drucker, 1981, P. 106).

In the following I will elaborate the presence of Taylor's "scientific management" principles in current organisational management practices with the help of the example of the McDonald's organization. I will do this by illustrating how unequivocally you can apply the key aspects of Taylor's scientific management to McDonald's organisational management practices. First, I will examine the principles' existence by adhering to Morgan's summarized five principles. Afterwards, I will compare the McDonald's pay system with Taylor's proposed individual incentive plans.

McDonald's

I chose the example of McDonald's to demonstrate the existence of Taylor's principles in modern organizations, because of McDonald's outstanding role in the food industry. Thus, " McDonald's is the leading global foodservice retailer with more than 31, 000 local restaurants serving more than 58 million people in 118 countries each day" (www. aboutmcdonalds. com). Furthermore, it's influence on the restaurant culture is unique. Hence, Love concluded that " no one has had more impact than McDonald's in modernizing food processing and distribution in the last 3 decades" (Love, 1987, P. 119).

A distinguishing principle of Taylor's work was his demand to use scientific methods to determine the most efficient way of doing work. Taylor stressed that a scientific study and analysis was crucial to find the 'one best way'. McDonald's adopted this assumption and became famous for its scientific approach towards the preparation and serving of food. Thus, Love stated that McDonald's was the first corporation that " had attempted to make a science out of the preparation of the one restaurant meal that had mass appeal" (Love, 1987, P. 119). Furthermore, he reported that McDonald's reformed the fast food business by " showering the lowly hamburger, french fry, and milk shake with more attention, more study, and more research than anyone had dreamed of doing" (Love, 1987, P. 120). McDonald's minute standardization and " systematic planning of each job, broken down into the smallest steps" (Transnational Information Centre, 1987, P. 4) become clear in a report from the Transnational Information Centre from 1987. It said that " the company's industrial engineers measuring in seconds of time, used

computerised time-study methodology to plan the equipment layout and work scheduling" (Ibid). Their aim of taking out " the guesswork (...) of food preparation" (Ibid) is consistent with Taylor's beliefs to a great extent.

A further basic principle was Taylor's claim to shift all responsibility for the organization of work from the worker to the manager, which is often recapitulated as the separation of the head from the hand, respectively of the planning and controlling from the doing. The implementation of this idea in the McDonald's organization can be noticed in the numerous manuals that were set up by the management and provide precise rules of conduct for the workers. For example, Love describes such a manual, that " told operators exactly how to draw milk shakes, grill hamburgers, and fry potatoes" (Love, 1987, P. 141). Besides definite cooking times and temperature settings for all products and equipment, the manual offered specifications about the standard portions on every food item and the way french fries had to be cut. Furthermore, Morgan reported that " every action (is) preplanned in a minute way, even in areas where personal interactions with others are concerned"(Morgan, 2006, P. 13) for example the appropriate way of smiling or greeting. In addition, Royle stated that " rules and procedures (covered) everything (and eliminated) decision-making for workers" (Royle, 2000, P. 59). For example, cooking decisions were made by the machinery (Royle, 2000, P. 58) through " lights and buzzers (that told) workers when to turn burgers or take fries out of the fat" (Royle, 2000, P. 58). Accordingly, Braverman concluded that these techniques and procedures were " separating the hand and the brain in classic scientific management style" (Braverman, cited in Royle, 2000, P. 58).

The third postulated principle referred to the selection of the best person to perform the job thus designed. Given McDonald's beforehand mentioned standardization and precise guidance the matching of this principle might not seem as obvious as the former. Indeed, the simple and repetitive tasks allow McDonald's to hire primarily untrained workers with a lack of prior restaurant experience (Royle, 2000, P. 81; Love, 1987, P. 120) with accordingly low wages. In the report of the Transnational Information Centre foreign visitors, women, students and ethnic minorities are listed as main groups of McDonald's recruits who " are forced to accept the poor wages and conditions" (Transnational Information Centre, 1987, P. 9). Furthermore, it is stated that " fast food workers (were) among the worst paid in the (UK)" (Transnational Information Centre, 1987, P. 11). Nevertheless, McDonald's pays great attention to its recruitment practices. The best person to perform a job at McDonald's has to have " the 'right attitude'" (Royle, 2000, P. 61). According to Fred Turner, an ex-CEO of the corporation, " having the " right attitude" is the most important attribute to obtain employment at McDonald's" (Royle, 2000, P. 61). He looked for " that one-hundred percent compliance" (cited in Love, 1987, P. 429) that he observed at/with Japanese workers. Thus, the McDonald's management is aware of the fact that " even unskilled workers" have the power to perturb the corporation's efficiency, for example through/by " withdrawing co-operation from the production process, disrupting the process or by (...) leaving the organization" (Royle, 2000, P. 61). McDonald's obsession of selecting the best fitted person even lead to a routine use of an half-hour lie detection test in some American restaurants as part of the application process until the 1970s with the main goal of identifying applicants with a sympathy for trade unions (Royle, 2000, P. 61).

The next element, the scientific training is one of the most important principles of Scientific Management. In Taylor's opinion it was crucial for an organization to train the workers for the one best way scientifically rather than passively leaving them to train themselves. McDonald's realized that scientific training in form of the Hamburger University. The Hamburger University was formed in 1961 and constituted the " first full-time training centre in the business" (Ritzer, 2008, P. 38). Today, more than 5, 000 students attend Hamburger University each year and since the university's opening more than 80, 000 restaurant managers, mid-managers and operators have graduated from it. Thus, the university offers scientific training for all levels of the organisation, including the so-called crew, restaurant managers, mid-managers and Executives (www. aboutmcdonalds.com).

The fifth principle claimed to monitor worker performance to ensure that appropriate work procedures are followed and that appropriate results are achieved. This monitoring or control plays a fundamental role at the McDonald's management's principles and is exercised at several levels. Thus, it is achieved by direct supervision and the kitchen facilities that do not leave much room for creativity. Furthermore, the physical layout of the restaurant that leaves the workers " few hidden places" (Royle, 1987, P. 62) gives the worker the feeling of a permanent surveillance. Control is also implemented through the detailed prescription of rules and procedures that has been discussed before. In this context Morgan called the management observation checklists " the perfect illustration of Taylor's approach to management"(Morgan, 2006, P. 24). Besides, the recruitment processes that

have a strong monitoring impact, the customers can put an immense pressure on the workers. They can act as "informal supervisors" who "(reprimand) workers for behaving rudely, dawdling or avoiding work" or complain about the workers at their supervisors. (Royle, 1987, 61f)

According to the report of the Transnational Information Centre this multidimensional system of constant monitoring leads to "competitiveness" and distrust among the workers (Transnational Information Centre, 1987, P. 14).

Furthermore, parallels to Tayloristic concepts can be clearly found when considering McDonald's pay system which holds great similarities with Taylor's proposed individual incentive plans. McDonald's exhibits a "pay for performance" philosophy with a base pay and an incentive pay that is paid when an employee's performance "meets and exceeds goals" (www.aboutmcdonalds.com). Moreover, McDonald's praises its "Long Term Incentives", "Recognition Programs" and "Company Car Program" to encourage the employees to "strive for promotion and take on responsibility" (Royle, 1987, P. 64). However, this system is not accepted uncritically. Thus, a training squad reported that the employees were "all brainwashed by (the company's) little procedures and incentives" (Royle, 1987, P. 65). Furthermore, he compared McDonald's incentives with "little carrots" (Royle, 1987, P. 65) that were offered. In addition, the Transnational Information Centre report described how difficult it was to achieve these incentives (Transnational Information Centre, 1987, P. 11).

Why

Reviewing the specified arguments against the use of "scientific management" principles the current practice of them in modern organizations might seem surprising. Thus, addressing the question why so many organizations implement these principles nowadays is consequential. In the following I will outline two ambitions that are present in modern companies and can help to explain the widespread emergence of Taylor's concepts in the 21st century.

First, one of the most distinguishing characteristics of modern organizations is their aim for efficiency. Schachter defines efficiency as "the maximization of output/ input or results/resources" (Schachter, 2007, P. 800) and states that it nowadays forms "an important component of a practice-oriented productivity improvement literature (e. g., Berman 2006; Holzer and Lee 2004)" (Schachter, 2007, P. 800). The significance/ accentuation of efficiency seems omnipresent in modern organizations. Thus, just to name a few examples, the consulting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers states that "finance needs to find more and more innovative ways to ensure process and organisational efficiency" (http://www.pwc.co.uk/eng/issues/finance_function_efficiency.html) and KPMG claims that "there is a greater need to achieve efficiency and cost optimization" (http://www.kpmg.de/docs/20090820_Issues_Monitor_Healthcare_August_2009.pdf) in regard to healthcare system. To meet these requirements companies often resort to Taylor's principles. Thus, Hodgetts reports of an organization that "was able to achieve substantial increases in efficiency and cost savings (...) by

training, teaching, and developing their personnel" (Hodgetts, 1995, P. 220). Furthermore, Schachter claims that " contemporary definitions of efficiency owe much to the scientific management and principles literature (Schachter, 2007, P. 801) and calls Taylor " an early advocate of efficiency" (Schachter, 2007, P. 801). Similarly, Friedmann describes Taylor's scientific management as a " system of increasing the efficiency of equipment and labour, (which is) directed at the maximum, immediate output of both" (Friedmann, 1967, P. 65).

Another pivotal ambition of modern organizations is their longing for control that might be achieved by applying Taylor's postulated principles. Because uncertainty is perceived as strongly aversive managers seek control and predictability. The sociologist Richard Edwards even asserted that " managers saw advantages in written directives, narrow job descriptions, and close supervision even if it came at the cost of lower performance and less commitment." (cited in Waring, 1992, P. 224). As an explanation of this phenomenon of preferring " predictable performance to peak performance" Edwards suggested its attributes of being " more easily controlled and less risky" (cited in Waring, 1992, P. 224). Moreover, Hodgetts describes the organizations aim for control. He says that in spite of letting employees develop " their own approach" of doing a job, firms try to teach them " how to do the job the right way" (Hodgetts, 1995, P. 218). Amongst others, they do this by " focusing (the workers') efforts" through precise guidelines about the " purpose and mission of (the respective) work" and " its vision (...) or statement of purpose" (Hodgetts, 1995, P. 219). These attempts are to allow the organization " to determine precisely what need to be done by each of its

employees" (Hodgetts, 1995, P. 219). In addition, he depicts the firm's use of " feedback systems to monitor how well things were going and compare and evaluate progress to ensure that the work was continually being done properly and consistently" (Hodgetts, 1995, P. 221). The importance of gaining control also becomes apparent in Wilkinson's work " Total Quality Management and Employee Involvement in Practice" where an " increased control over the work process" is identified as a " cornerstone of TQM" (Wilkinson, 1997, P. 799).

Conclusions and perspectives

This essay analysed the extent to which Taylor's " scientific management" principles are present in current organisational management practices. Therefore, I briefly introduced Taylor's main concepts and outlined significant points of critique. Then, I investigated the situation in modern organizations and took a closer look at the McDonald's organization. Afterwards, I discussed possible reasons for the emergence of Taylor's contemporary companies.

It was revealed that Taylor's principles are still applied in current organisational management practices to a great extent. Aside from the minute implementation of the " scientific management" principles in the McDonald's organization you could find numerous realizations and modifications of Taylor's ideas in all kinds of areas of managerial practices, be it in form of management intervention programmes or complex assessment centres. Thus, Morgan summarized that " the principles advocated by Taylor and perfected by McDonald's and other fast-food restaurants have found their way into the organization of hospitals, factories,

retail outlets, schools, universities, and other institutions seeking to rationalize their operations" (Morgan, 2006, P. 24).

As possible reasons for the prevalent usage of Taylor's scientific principles in the 21st century the aims for efficiency and control were discussed that are expected to come along with the postulated axioms. However, it is obvious that the implementation of Tayloristic ideas also entails negative effects. Thus, additional problems arise besides the already discussed issues, as the "deskilling" of labour and the neglecting of the psychological aspects of the worker. For instance, Taylor's proposed individual incentive plans might goad the workers to focus on the quantity of their labour. Therefore, the danger of a reduced quality of the respective work emerges. Furthermore, it is crucial for contemporary organizations to survive in this fast moving environment to be able to adapt quickly to new situations. Hence, Morgan argues that "21st Century employers not only want workers to be efficient (...) They must also exhibit flexibility" (Morgan, 2006, P. 29). Another major problem that might accompany a Tayloristic treatment of the worker is the development of "deviant behaviour (...) as frustration, boredom (and) revenge" (Royle, 2000, P. 60). Thus, Royle reported incidents of McDonald's personnel that contaminated food on purpose before serving the customer (Royle, 2000, P. 60). In accordance with this observation is the fact that the fast-food industry, as a prime example of users of Taylor's principles, "is well known for its high levels of labour turnover" (Royle, 2000, P. 70; Transnational Information Centre, 1987, P. 10).

Summing up you can say that Taylor's "scientific management" principles are still present in current organisational management practices to a great

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extent. As seen before, the application of Taylor's principles might lead to advantages that are required or desired in the 21st century, as an increase in an organisation's efficiency and managerial control. Nevertheless, we must pay close attention to the manifest dangers and risks that might come along with the utilization of the principles of Taylor's scientific management.

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