



MANAGEMENT – IS IT AN ART OR SCIENCE?

Arthur Bwalya

Arthur Bwalya is pursuing a master's degree program at ZCAS University, Lusaka – Zambia, PH-01-12-345-6789. E-mail: arthur.bwalya@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Every organisation needs management – why? Specifically, because all organisations have to co-ordinate their activities, operations and employees towards achieving organisational goals. Organisations employ managers to carry out management activities (planning, organising, leading and controlling). The question then is: as managers go about managing their respective departments and organisations, should they be scientific or artistic in their approach?

INTRODUCTION

Organisations today are operating in a very delicate environment as the business environment is ever changing. Management practices and applications too are rapidly progressing in response to the ever-evolving environment. This calls for managers to be agile enough, while possessing necessary abilities and skills, and sufficient experience acquired overtime.

There has been an ongoing debate among academicians, scholars and researchers on whether management should be classified as a science, an art or both. Several scholars have written on this long debate in the field of management studies. Some scholars argue that management is an art, while others believe it is a science. There is yet another view, that management is a combination of both art and science.

DEFINING MANAGEMENT

Bwalya (2023), stated that management involves planning, organising, leading and controlling activities, operations and employees of organisations to attain organisational goals and objectives. Williams (2017), summarized management as getting work done through others. Managers' therefore are responsible for getting work done in the organisations and departments they manage, but they have to do it through others. This demands for managers to skillfully and professionally manage others using scientific or artistic means.

MANAGEMENT AS AN ART

Art is the systematic and personalised application of theoretical principles and personal skills to achieve desired results (Anthony, 2015). Basically, art is a personalised application of knowledge, because every artist has their own way of expressing their creativity and skills.

Robbins et.al (2017), stated that art has characteristics, which include:

Perfection through practise – Continuous practise leads to tremendous improvement. Artists need a lot of practice to perfect their art.

Personalised application – art is highly personalised because every artist has their own style of how they do things.

Creativity – every artist has a great deal of creativity in them. All artists are creative.

Presence of practical knowledge and principles – art assumes the presence of specific practical principles.

Goal- Oriented – art is result oriented; it aims to produce tangible results.

Management is essentially an art because it shares all the characteristics of an art, such as:

Perfection through practise – Like art, management improves with continuous practise. Management requires judgement and skill application, which can be refined with continuous practise of the management theories and principles. The more a manager applies the theories and principles of management, the better they become at it.

Personalised application – just like art is highly personalised, management is also highly personalised. Managers operate in varying environments and are faced with varying circumstances and conditions. This entails that managers have to apply the same management principles in different circumstances and situations. The principles of management may be the same for all managers, but how they apply them is a personal matter.

Creativity – Management, just like art, is creative. A manager needs creative ways of bringing the best out of every situation and every person to make resources more productive and achieve goals and targets.

Presence of practical knowledge and principles – Like art management assumes the presence of theoretical knowledge and principles. There is already a rich existence of principles of management, which are available at the managers' disposal.

Goal- Oriented – Just like art, management is directed towards the accomplishment of pre-determined goals. With the organisation making resources available to the manager, it is expected that the manager will produce tangible results.

According to this school of thought, managers require creativity, flexibility, intuition and a deep understanding of human behaviour to manage effectively. Proponents of the art aspect contend that management is not something that can be learnt from textbooks or classrooms, but rather something that can be honed through practice and experience (Mintzberg, 2004).

MANAGEMENT AS A SCIENCE

Science is an organised body of knowledge pertaining to a particular field of enquiry, which accommodates general facts explaining a phenomenon (Stoner et.al, 2015). Science is systematized in the sense that it establishes a cause-and-effect relationship between various variables. Beasley (2014) and Luthans (2011) observed that science is characterised by the following features:

Universal Acceptability and Validity – Scientific principles and conventions have global genuineness and are capable of universal applications. These principles typify basic truths that are capable of being applied at any time, any where in the world in any prevailing situation.

Organised body of knowledge – Science contains concepts, theories and principles which help explain past events and can also be used to predict the future outcome of specific actions.

Experimenting and Observation – scientific conventions (fundamental truths) are derived through empirical results. These truths are developed through scientific methods of continuous experiments, observations and testing.

Cause and Effect Relationship – Scientific principles identify, establish and explain a cause-and-effect relationship between two or more variables.

Management is a science because it meets all the characteristics of science;

Universal Acceptability and Validity – Management principles are capable of universal application. These principles are accepted universally. For example, managers across the globe conduct annual performance appraisals to establish whether their employees are performing as expected, and if not take appropriate action such as arranging for additional training - if need be. This is a world-wide practise in Human Resource management.

Organised body of knowledge – Management, like science, already has a systemaized body of knowledge. Principles of management are virtually available in every function of management.

Experimenting and Observation – The principles of management existing today have been developed through continuous observations and empirical verification. These have been developed by studying large numbers of managers' practical experiences, views and approaches.

Cause and Effect Relationship – Scientific principles identify, establish and explain a cause-and-effect relationship between two or more variables. The same is true for management. For example, if management gives workers better conditions of service, they will work hard and productivity will increase. However, treating employees unfairly will reduce company productivity arising from demotivation.

Those who believe in this school of thought view management as a set of principles and techniques that can be studied and applied systematically. There is an emphasis on the importance of data-driven decision making (Koontz and Wehrich, 2006) and use of empirical evidence to guide managerial decisions (Williams, 2017). Proponents of the science perspective submit that management can be taught through formal education and managers can use scientific methods to improve organisational performance.

It is worth noting however, that management as a science is not as exact as other sciences – such as Biology, Physics and Chemistry (Daft and Marcic, 2016). It deals directly with human beings and studies have shown that it is very difficult to accurately predict their behaviour. Therefore, management is a social science.

MANAGEMENT IS BOTH A SCIENCE AND AN ART

Management is both a science and an art.

Essentially science and art are not mutually exclusive but are complementary to each other. Infact they can be seen as two faces of one coin. Management is more effective when there is a combination of both science and art (Robbins et.al, 2017). Many scholars have noted that in management, science provides the knowledge while art deals with application of the knowledge and skills. Therefore, successful managers are likely to be those who have mastered the 'know-how' – from science and the application of 'doing' – from art.

CONCLUSION

Based on the arguments above, management is both an art and a science. The trick lies in separating the good ideas from the bad ones and knowing when to be scientific or artistic. Today's managers need a blend of acquiring the knowledge of science and the art of applying it. Managers should be both scientific and artistic – as the situation dictates.

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