

# Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 11, 1984

## MANAGERIAL EDUCATION AND THE REAL WORLD: FOUNDATIONS FOR DESIGNING EDUCATIONAL TOOLS

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### ABSTRACT

Mintzberg's (1973) framework of managerial work was used to examine the correspondence between MBA student's and practicing manager's perception of the roles and skills necessary for job success. Results indicated that there was a strong relationship between what students and managers thought about the relative importance of both the role and skill areas. The results imply that the process of graduate business school education conveys a realistic picture of managerial work. These results, along with Mintzberg's framework, provide useful information for the design and selection of cases, exercises and simulation for MBA students.

Management educators and training and development practitioners traditionally adopt a process approach to management education. This approach views the manager as a reflective planner, organizer, controller, coordinator, etc. The process approach originated from the early work of Fayol [3] and is reflected in the structure of not only our basic management textbooks, but also our management simulations and experiential exercises. Recent evidence [14, 15] however, indicates that practicing managers are anything but the reflective planners that Fayol described. A more recent approach to describing the nature of managerial work was proposed by Mintzberg [11] who takes an action approach to examining the roles and skills necessary for effective performance. The purpose of this paper is to examine the nature of managerial work as reported by practicing managers and business students. A comparison of the students' view of management to what is really happening has invaluable implications for designing simulations and exercises that approximate the real world. In essence, this research looks at the gap between the process and action view of management.

In this descriptive research, Mintzberg [11] delineated ten managerial roles that describe the job activities of senior executives. The roles identified by Mintzberg (see Table 1) consist of three interpersonal roles (figurehead, leader, and liaison), three informational roles (monitor, disseminator, and spokesperson), and four decisional roles (entrepreneur, disturbance handler, resource allocator, and negotiator). Since this research was done on an extremely small sample of managers, subsequent research has focused on the generalizability of these role descriptions to larger managerial samples [7; 8; 9; 16; 17]. Other studies suggest that differences exist in the relative importance of the managerial roles across hierarchical levels and functional specialties [1; 10; 13; 14]. All of these studies support Mintzberg's contention that managers at all levels perform similar roles but with a different emphasis.

### Summary of Mintzberg's Executive Roles

Role	
INTERPERSONAL	
Figurehead	Symbolic head; obligated to perform a number of routine duties of a 1.1.1 or social nature.
Leader	Responsible for the motivation and activation of subordinates; responsible for staffing, training, and associated duties.
Liaison	Maintains self-developed network of outside contacts and informers who provide. envoys and information.
INFORMATIONAL	
Monitor	Seeks and receives wide variety of special information (much of it current) to develop thorough understanding of organization and environment; emerges as nerve center of internal and external information of the organization.
Disseminator	Transmits information received from outsiders or from other subordinates to members of the organization some information factual. some involving interpretation and integration of diverse value positions of organizational influencers.
Spokesperson	Transmits information to outsiders on organization's plans, policies, actions. results, deserves as expert on organization's industry.
DECISIONAL	
Entrepreneur	Searches organization and its environment for opportunities and initiates. "improvement projects to bring about changes; supervises design of certain projects as well.
Disturbance Handler	Responsible for corrective action when organization faces important, unexpected disturbances.
Resource Allocator	Responsible for the allocation of organizational resources of all kinds – in effect, the making or approval of all significant organizational decisions.
Negotiator	Responsible for representing the organization in major negotiations.
Technical Expert	Providing expertise to projects. Serving as a consultant to internal or external projects.

aDefinitions for all roles but "Technical Expert" are based on The Nature of Managerial Work by B.nry Mintzberg (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).

The studies cited above support the generalizability of Mintzberg's framework of managerial work and there is also some information about how these roles contribute to managerial or organizational effectiveness. Several studies have related Mintzberg's roles to some indicator of managerial effectiveness. For example, these studies suggest that significant relationships exist between the measured (or perceived) importance of these roles and promotion rate [10], objective end- result data [4; 12] and performance appraisal of managers [12; 15]. Hence, Mintzberg's approach to managerial work appears to be a good foundation for examining our experiential exercises and simulations.

While there is some information available about the importance of various managerial activities and their relationship to effective performance, there is a paucity of information available concerning the second component of the action view of management required skills, knowledge, and abilities that contribute to managerial success. Several theoretical and empirical studies e.g. 6; 8 have attempted to identify salient managerial skills and abilities thought to be necessary for successful job performance. While these studies describe the types of skills necessary for success, no one has looked at the difference between what we teach in the classroom and what practicing managers think.

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A search of the literature discloses that no empirical studies have examined the importance, as compared to managers, that business students attach to the managerial roles described by Mintzberg. Moreover, few studies have compared student ratings of the importance of various skills, knowledge, and abilities to ratings by managers. For example, Bass [2] compared MBA students with middle level managerial on what social and political skills it takes to get ahead in large organizations. Heisler and Cemmil [5] compared the perceptions of chief executive officers and MBA students as to the behaviors and personal characteristics that are important in attaining promotions.

The present study utilizes the action view of management, as conceptualized by Mintzberg [11], to compare the perceptions of MBA students and managers as to the importance of managerial activities (roles) and managerial skills, knowledge, and abilities. Specifically, research questions in two basic areas guided the present study.

1. Do MBA students and managers perceive that the same managerial activities are required for success? What is the correspondence between the absolute and relative importance of Mintzberg's roles between the two groups?
2. What types of skills are perceived as important for success by MBA students and by the practicing managers? What is the correspondence between the relative and absolute importance of these skills between the two groups?
3. Do both groups agree on the characteristics that describe a manager's job?

The study has implications for the development of management education tools in both industry and universities. Many exercises and simulations are based on a process approach to management. These programs may not explicitly focus on the managerial roles or skills that are essential to career success or performance in an organizational setting. As argued by Mintzberg [II] one way to determine what skills managers need is to analyze the roles they perform. He also suggests that management schools have given little attention to the development of basic managerial skills (e.g., peer skills, leadership skills, information processing skills), and that skill training will probably be - or should be - the next revolution in management education. Thus, in order to develop the tools to adequately train managers, there is a need to identify the roles performed and the skills required to successfully manage.

### METHODS

#### Subjects

One hundred and sixty-eight MBA students at three major universities in Southern California participated in the study. The students were asked to indicate whether they were full or part-time students, whether or not they had held a managerial position, and whether they were currently employed in a managerial position. Individuals who had never been employed in a managerial position served as the "student" group (N=90). Sixty-three percent were full-time students and 31% of the students reported working in a career- path jobs. The 78 managers, who were also MBA students, represented the

various hierarchical levels within an organization. Twenty-two percent were upper level managers; 48% mid-level; and 30% lower level. They had been in their positions for an average of 3-5 years and 83% reported working in career-path jobs.

It should be noted that the managers were significantly ( $p < .05$ ) older ( $M=33.7$ ) than the students ( $M=29.8$ ).

#### Measures

**Managerial Roles--**Based upon the work of Mintzberg [II] McCall and Segrist [10], and Lau, Newman and Broedling [8] 54 items were developed to measure each of Mintzberg's ten managerial roles (plus an 11th technical expert role). An average of four items measured each of Mintzberg's roles. Respondents rated each activity according to its importance for managerial success. Responses range from "not at all important" (0) to "very important" (7). MBA students (who were never in a managerial position) were asked to rate how important the described activities should be for managerial success.

**Managerial Skills--**Using the work of Katz [6] and Mintzberg [II] 43 items were developed to measure the perceived importance of managerial skills for successful job performance. Items measured the importance of the following areas: (1) leadership, (2) peer relationships, (3) conflict resolution, (4) information-processing, (5) decision making, (6) resource allocation, (7) entrepreneurial skills, and (8) technical skills. The importance of each of these skills was rated on a seven-point scale ranging from "of no importance" to "very important." Again, managers rated how important the item was to managerial success while students rated how important the item should be.

**Job Characteristics--**Based upon Mintzberg's descriptions of the characteristics of managerial jobs, 9 items were composed. Respondents were asked to indicate the level of agreement with each statement. Responses ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

#### Analysis

The 54 job content items were combined according to Mintzberg's a priori framework of managerial roles. An average of 5 questions assessed each role. The mean ratings of MBA students and managers on each of these eleven roles were compared via t-tests. The same procedure was used for the 43 skills items that measured 8 skill areas. The average scores of the managers on both the skills and the job characteristics questions were then compared to the average responses of the MBA students.

### RESULTS

The data in Table 2 indicates that practicing managers rated the roles of leader, resource allocator, entrepreneur and disseminator as being important for managerial success. These roles were ranked one through four respectively. The MBA students reported that the resource allocator, entrepreneur and leader roles should be important for success. Of the eleven roles, significant differences between the group's ratings were found for three role areas. The students felt that resource allocation, monitoring and negotiating should be significantly more important than did the managers. While in all three of these roles produced significant t-values, the absolute difference in ratings is minimal. This conclusion is supported by the magnitude of Spearman's rho (.92;  $p < .01$ ) indicating the rank orderings of role importance between the two groups is virtually the same.

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Table 2

Average Scores on the Importance of the Managerial Roles for Success

Leader Resource Allocator	Mean	Managers		Students	
		Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean
Entrepreneur	5.02	14.83	24.79	4.94	3
Disseminator		34.75	44.62	5.19	
Disturbance Handler		54.33	64.23	5.06	24.58
Monitor"		74.04	83.79		6
Liaison		93.62		4.10	
Technical Expert		1.03.62	11	4.77	44.42
Negotiator					73.91
Figurehead					94.13
Spokesperson					83.69
					113.8
				2	10

aN 78 - 90 Average scores differ at 2-tail t-test.

Rho - .92 p<sup>lm</sup>.01

An examination of the actual and normative importance of the skill areas yields much the same results as above. Table 3 indicates that there is almost perfect agreement between practicing managers and MBA students on the importance of all skill areas. Both groups rated conflict resolution, information processing, entrepreneurial and leadership skills as being the top four important skills for success. Actually, none of the skills areas were viewed as unimportant. As indicated by Spearman's rho (.99; p<.01), the two groups agreed on what is and what should be important

Table 3

Average Scores on the Importance of the Skill for Managerial Success

Skill Area	2Mean	Rank	Students b Mean
Conflict Resolution	5.96		5.87 15.61
Information Processing	15.85		2
Entrepreneurial	35.54		5.43 35.33
Leadership	4		5.45 5
Resource Allocation	55.27		5.21
Decision Making	64.93		4.81 74.45
Technical Peer Relations	74.55		8
	8		

78 90 \*Average scores differ • t p^\_.05; 2-tail t-test

.99 p~.01

Lastly, the two groups agreed with each other and with the statements that "the majority of information necessary to do the job comes from sources other than the formal management information" system and "managers place the major emphasis on the present job and devote insufficient time to self-development." The managers differed significantly (2-tail t-

test; p<.05) from the students on 2 of the 9 job characteristics. Specifically, managers agreed more than the students that (1) their daily work routine is fragmented and (2) it is virtually impossible to set a work schedule and stick to it.

## DISCUSSION

As argued by Mintzberg 11 and Paolillo 13 , the field of management has matured since the early work of Fayol 3 • There has been a gradual shift away from the process view of managerial work toward the action view which emphasizes the required roles and skills needed by managers to effectively perform their jobs. The primary thrust of the present study was to first identify the roles performed and the skills required to successfully manage. The second phase of the study was a comparison of the perceptions that MBA students have of the importance of these roles and skills as compared with practicing managers.

The data indicated that there was a surprising correspondence between what the students think should be important and what practicing managers report as being important for success. The broad implication here is that the action view of management is somehow being conveyed to our MBA students through sources other than the process oriented textbooks. Since the present sample of students had not held managerial jobs, it appears that the action view is being related in the classroom through lecture materials, simulations and exercises. All three of the universities that were used in this study, employed cases, experiential exercises and simulation in the MBA program.

The present study serves as a foundation for selecting and/or designing simulations, exercises and cases that will prepare the student for his/her experience in the business community. For example, the data indicated the roles of leader, resource allocator and entrepreneur were considered important for success. The behaviors associated with these roles are things like: motivating subordinates, making staffing decisions, training subordinates, (leadership); allocating plant equipment and funds, assigning people to projects, formulating budgets (resource allocation); and evaluating improvement projects, finding ways to improve performance, developing improvements in work-flow (entrepreneur). Given these specific behaviors, what kind of simulation will be useful? What exercises will help people learn how to find ways to improve performance. The data from the skills questions emphasize much the same sorts of behaviors. For example, information processing, conflict resolution and entrepreneurial skills were considered as being important for success. These skills areas include skills like: working under stress, ability to get needed information, ability to determine the utility of information, ability to communicate (verbally and En writing); persuasiveness, ability to recognize and carry out improvements. What types of role playing will enhance one's ability to communicate? To be persuasive? To work under stress?

The present study is exploratory in nature and inferences must be tempered by the self-report and descriptive nature of the data. Further studies are needed to clearly identify the managerial roles and skills that predict objective criteria such as job performance and organizational effectiveness. The combination of more research with the information collected in the present study would be extremely valuable to educators, researchers, and practicing managers. This information would not only help in designing courses but also be invaluable for selecting and designing exercises, cases and simulations.

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