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For the past two years, we have been using a different approach to the introductory management course. Our basic assumption is that knowledge alone does not make successful managers (see Figure 1). That is, managers must act or behave in a way that facilitates objective accomplishment. We therefore sought to develop behavioral skills in the introductory management course. In addition, we recognized that the job of a manager is really that of a problem solver. Thus, we defined the manager's job as behaving in a manner which facilitates solving an array of organizational problems and set as our course objective the development of behavioral skills conducive to managerial problem solving.

Second, we decided that the pedagogy to accomplish these objectives would be experiential, based on the assumption that skills are developed when students are confronted with real problems. Third, we assumed that knowledge of management concepts, literature, and jargon would increase as a result of attempting to solve managerial problems. The management course is therefore designed around a series of experiential skill-building exercises presented as real management problems which students are to solve.

The course begins by introducing students to traditional management functions such as planning, organizing, directing (leading and motivating), and controlling in order to give an overview of the manager's job (see Figure 2). Students are told that they will be confronted with a series of problems in each of these areas and are expected to resolve these problems (either individually or in groups). The assumption here is that students, once confronted with problems, will go to textbooks and other data sources seeking information critical to the solution of the problem.

However, before students face the problems in these functional areas, they are given experiences in basic managerial skills. For us, basic skills such as communication, group problem solving, conflict resolution, and organizational diagnosis seem to transcend most managerial issues. Experiential exercises are presented in each of these areas also. Once these basic skills are acquired, students are presented with the functional area problems (see Figure 3).

This is a very different way of teaching the introductory management course. It is not strictly an experiential, self-learning, personal growth approach, nor is it a traditional knowledge acquisition (memory) approach. What it intends to do is provide a general framework for building skills around problems which students presumably will confront when they leave the university and enter managerial jobs.

FIGURE 1
Levels of Learning and/or Change Expected
of University Students

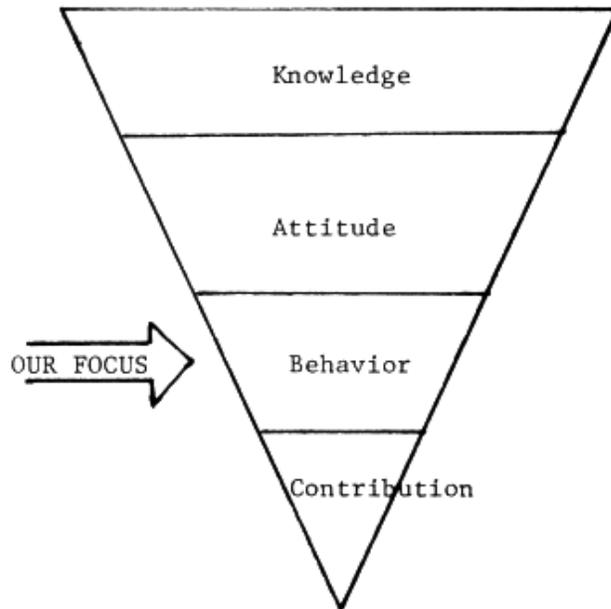


FIGURE 2
Functions of Management

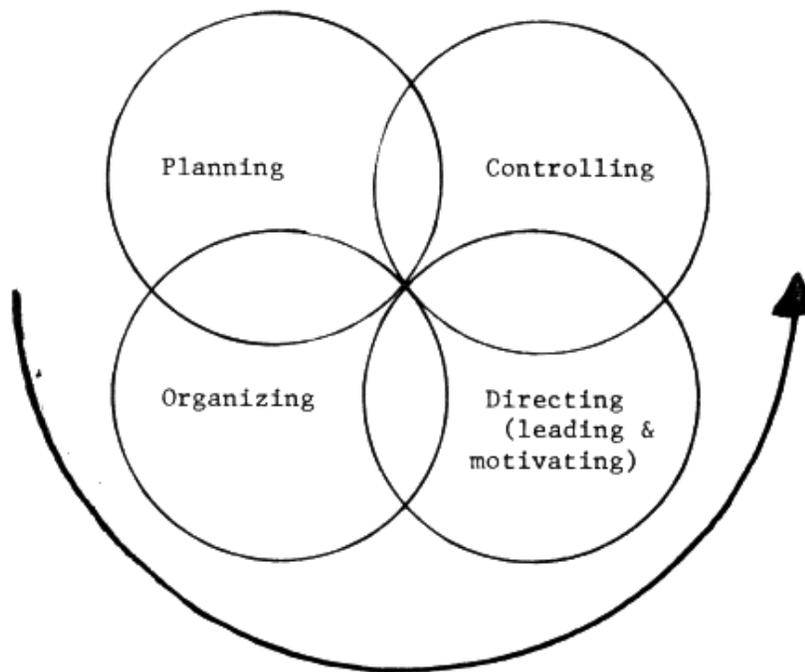


FIGURE 3

Basic Managerial Problems/Skills

Basic Skills

1. Communicating in an organization (talking, listening, writing).
2. Developing group problem solving skills.
3. Developing skills in conflict resolution.
4. Diagnosing Organizational Problems - A critical management skill.

Planning

5. Setting objectives, establishing priorities, and determining alternative methods of accomplishing objectives (e.g., MBO)
6. Using organizational resources (financial, material, human)
7. Designing methods of evaluating objective accomplishment and resource utilization
8. Balancing an organizational system

Organizing

9. Allocating resources from a macro perspective -- Organizational Structure
10. Allocating resources from a micro perspective -- Job Design

Directing

11. Organizational structure and leadership style.
12. Leadership style, job design and the costs and rates of productivity.
13. Organizational rewards and the costs and rates of productivity.

Controlling

14. Evaluating organizational and individual effectiveness -- Objective accomplishment
15. Evaluating organizational and individual efficiency --Resource utilization

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COURSE CONTENT

To give a better understanding of the approach, we would like to explain in detail the content of each of the four functional management areas that are taught.

Planning

When we talk about planning we discuss forecasting and the determination of organizational needs, which become objectives to be accomplished. Resources are then required (financial, material, and human) to accomplish objectives. Also, problems exist in determining how well an organization (or individual) is progressing in attempting to accomplish objectives. The question finally becomes, what kind of resource mix seems appropriate for the accomplishment of the objectives. Thus, we ask students to look into the future and ask themselves, “What do we want to do?” and “What is needed to get there?” “How will we know how well we are progressing?” Hopefully students can then plan ways of answering these questions. In resource requirements planning we discuss the financial structure of the organization (short term requirements versus long term requirements). In material requirements planning we discuss acquisitions such as plant, raw materials, machinery, equipment, plant layout, communication devices, etc. In human resource planning we discuss labor supply, wages, skill types available, benefits, compensation, etc.

Organizing

Under organizing we explore how the actual organization is structured to accomplish an objective, dealing with those resources we have planned to use. Both the design of the organization and the design of individual jobs are explained. Students may be asked to design organizational structures with differentiation! integration problems, design a plant layout, and design the operation of a specific task.

Directing

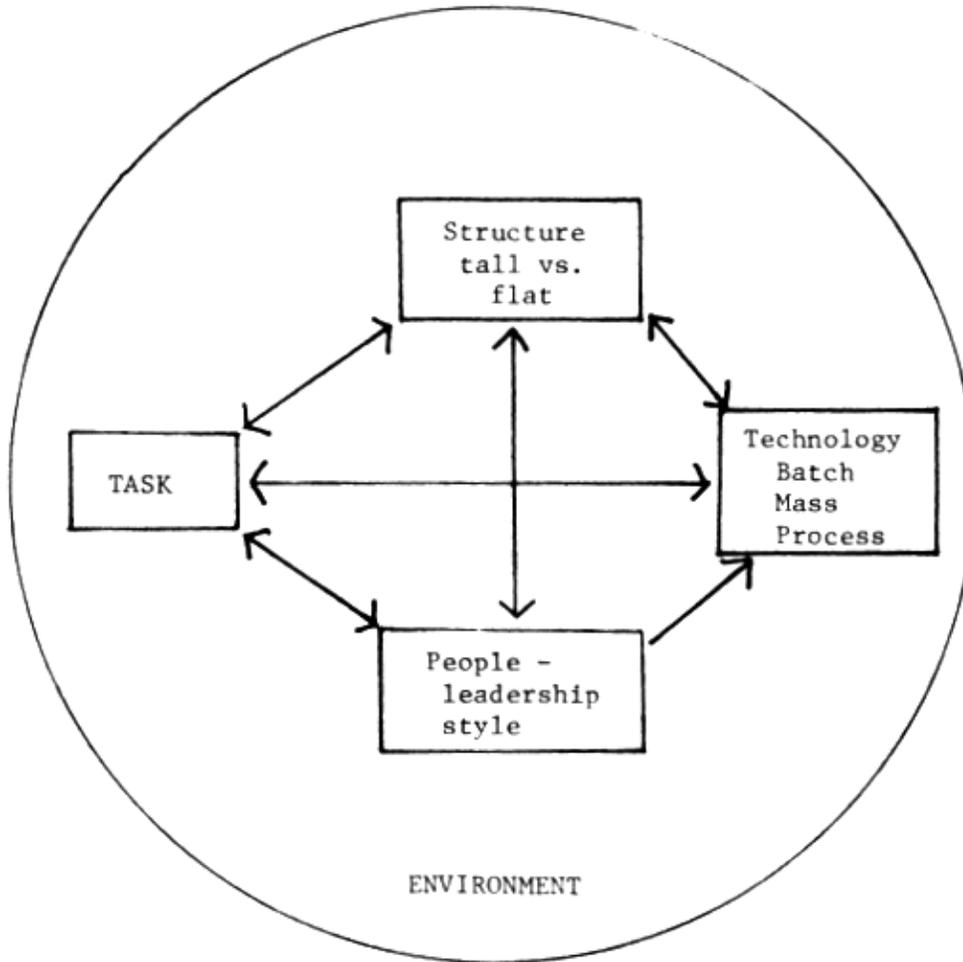
After the class has learned to plan what they want to do they must begin to implement the task. We call this phase directing and divide it into two distinct aspects: leadership and motivation.

We talk about five basic styles of leadership to demonstrate what the concept means: passive, hard boiled autocrat, benevolent autocrat, consultative, and collaborative. During the explanation of these styles or patterns of leadership we also discuss the various organizational consequences that might result from each style as well as the subordinate and superior behavioral patterns that might be expected to evolve over time. Later, students confront situations which differ as a result of differing leadership styles. The impact of organizational structure on leadership style is also explored, using Leavitt's (1973) model (Figure 4).

We talk about motivation as a separate issue and show two ways for understanding motivation (extrinsic and intrinsic). Extrinsic motivational factors are external factors, or what we call job consequences while intrinsic motivational factors are

FIGURE 4

Leavitt's Model of Organizations



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related to actual job content. When we look at job consequences as a motivator, we discuss the organizational outcomes of individual performance. We discuss three types of consequences: tangible, social, and self. We believe that the management of consequences in an organization is a very powerful motivational tool, primarily for influencing the rate of productivity. Generally, we say that if we have problems in terms of productivity, the best approach to that is to focus upon how job consequences are being managed -- if job consequences are being managed effectively.

The second approach to motivation is through intrinsic motivators, the job content factors, or things within the job itself. The issue here is whether or not the work is challenging, interesting, requires responsibility, builds self-esteem, and so forth. Job content can be motivational also and often affects the costs of productivity (e.g., absenteeism, turnover, quality of work, sabotage, waste of materials, etc.). The costs of productivity are important because the manager as a systems balancer is always confronted with volume and cost considerations.

Controlling

In controlling, we focus on how to provide feedback to organizational units, operations, and individuals and how to make the appropriate adjustments in such activities. Besides dealing with the basic questions of the controlling function, we also stress the type of responses to be made with control information. Students must decide whether they can develop control processes to deal with variations as an ongoing process (on line, real time), or whether they are only able to perform a postmortem evaluation control which they must plan to keep from happening in the future. If a postmortem is the only alternative available, then new plans must be made to correct problem variations. This process brings the management process full circle, back to the planning process and stresses the ongoing nature of the management function.

CONTENT PROBLEMS AND STUDENT EVALUATION

While we have been successfully using various exercises to improve basic managerial skills and skills in the four functional areas previously described, there are obvious time problems. Using this problem solving/skill building approach to teaching the basic management course is time consuming and does not always fit into the neatly compartmentalized time segments allotted by universities. Some exercises must be spread over several class periods, often causing a loss in enthusiasm for the task that is difficult to recapture.

A second time problem is simply the scheduling of many skill building exercises in the time allotted to the class. There has not been time to adequately practice the skills being introduced so that students become sufficiently proficient in their use. This problem could be overcome by reducing the skill areas covered, but this solution is difficult because of the wide variety of topics that are covered in an introductory management course.

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Another problem in using a problem solving approach is the continued reinforcement of skill development that is required. Students must practice previously learned skills, especially the basic skills, throughout the course. This is difficult to do as students may need to “relearn” basic skills at various points in order to be successful in resolving a newly confronted problem. Thus, we may need to build in “checks” of previously learned skills in subsequent exercises. Finally, perhaps the most difficult problem with this approach is the measurement of skill development. While we have output measures from a few of the exercises, others have little output or output that is not indicative of a single, discrete skill. To overcome this problem we have turned to general problem solving exercises in the form of case analysis. Student cases are of two forms. The first is three written case analyses which are evaluated on four criteria, (problem identification and problem statement, alternative solutions generated, decision made and rationale provided, plans for implementing and evaluating the decision’s effectiveness). The second form of student evaluation is an outside project with an actual organization in which student teams prepare a report which 1) identifies and attempts to solve a problem for the organization, 2) diagnoses the organization’s managerial effectiveness, and 3) analyzes the student teams effectiveness in performing as a group (both in terms of process and in terms of content). It is difficult to identify individual skills in this manner and we continue to search for more direct methods of evaluating skill development. Effective evaluation is necessary not only for student assessment, but it is also critical in identifying inadequate methodology and exercises in order to revise or replace them.

So, while this approach to teaching the beginning management course has been well received by students, and we are excited about its possibilities, many problems remain. We are confident, however, that as these problems are solved the skill building approach to teaching management will prove to be an effective method and that it will hold appeal for a number of educators who are not entirely satisfied with only knowledge- based teaching methods.

REFERENCES

Leavitt, H. J., Managerial Psychology, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973)