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MODULE 309: SEMINAR IN ORGANIZATIONAL ANALYSIS

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"COORDINATING", A MISSING LINK IN MANAGEMENT

BY

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? In the private sector, don't more organizations actually fail than grow more complex?

Organizations, no matter how small when formed, soon become very complex. This complexity involves the coordination of goods, supplies, equipment, capital, technology, people and events -- political, economic and social. All or some of these things affect organizations continuously during the organization's closed hours as well as when the organization is open for business. The coordination of this complex and ever-growing monster becomes more difficult as the American society and the societies of the world become more advanced (according to western standards) socially, politically and economically. The coordination requires a delicate balance of the above-mentioned entities, keeping them in harmony so as not to disturb their smooth flow in and out of the doors of an organization.

inevitably?

meaning what, exactly?

?? inevitably?

? complex, as you stated earlier?

A

what does this metaphor really mean?

The statements above are certainly not original and are obvious to those acquainted with organizations. Yet, organizations fail to emphasize the need for the development of skills necessary to master this coordinating effort. Business schools likewise fail to emphasize this coordinating role. It is the nature of organizations to look for people who have special skills. In fact, organizations are so specialist oriented they find themselves with a number of high-level specialists but cannot achieve certain organization goals because there is no one to coordinate the work of the specialist, much less the specialist himself. While business schools are effective at exposing future managers to the different aspects of a business organization, emphasis

entirely? evidence for this? statement seems too extreme.

?? in some areas, but not all

technical & professional ones, particularly?

A and directed toward organizational objectives, not just passive "harmony?"

Is the traditional MBA, for example, really as specialist oriented as you suggest?

on the skills needed to coordinate the various activities that a business becomes involved in is lacking.

Organizations are structured to hire specialists and to place a specialist over the specialists to supervise that speciality. This is well ingrained in business and public organizations. To place a "non-technical" person in charge of a "technical" group is not in vogue. "Why she has never sewn a dress in her life, how can she supervise a group of seamstresses?" or, "He has never repaired an engine, how can he manage this department? Put him in sales or personnel." These are cries often heard. They are heard so much that most people believe that one cannot successfully manage a particular function unless one has become technically adept at some skill within that function. I am pleased to see that some computing installations are moving toward hiring people with management know-how to head-up their computer centers. However, these are few, but at least there is some recognition that a manager or director of computing does not need to know how to write a computer language.*

Only some. What kind of "organizations" are you referring to?

these aren't "specialized?"

Sure — this held even by very conventional managers — they substitute "experience" for what you call specialization

Is this in some sense a specialty?

The argument that one does not need to have an understanding of the organization's activities is not the position of the writer. To the contrary, I believe a person should be quite knowledgeable about the organization's activities if that person is to assume a leadership role in the organization. It is the belief that these persons must have certain skills which is my point of departure. Since there appears to be agreement that these persons in leadership

// good pt.

* not all of this has to do naively with specialization as compared to general role identification and credibility. As when frame faculty are Deans, for example.

positions should have skills, what type of skills should they have?

First of all, these people should have considerable understanding of the resources an organization needs to conduct its business. Of course, these people must first of all fully understand the business activities that the organization is engaged in. When the resources, people, money, equipment, time and whatever are understood as an individual entity, they must be understood collectively -- as a whole. Their impact upon each other must be understood and appreciated and must be kept in harmony and balance. These people must have skills in understanding and dealing with the external forces of an organization and be sensitive to the impact of these forces upon the organization. The social, economic and political activities have a great influence on the decisions made by an organization whether the organization's objectives are motivated by profit or social reform. Since we have established that these people need to have a knowledge of the operations of the organization, it is not necessary to state that they should understand the types of skills needed by the people in the organization. Just as it should not be necessary to state that a person who is knowledgeable about economics understands what supply and demand means.

The principal skill that is needed, however, is the skill of "coordination" -- coordinating people with things. But, first there must be a realization of the fact that coordinating has its own set of skills. These skills are

not the understanding of people, equipment, money, supplies and the external factors of social, economic and political activity. They do, however, include that understanding. But, the coordinating skill is being proficient in understanding and manipulating the "interrelationships" of all those entities mentioned above. One must be trained not only in understanding people, but must also be trained in understanding the relationship between people and the many things that impact people, which are present both within and outside the walls of the organization. Likewise, one must understand politics and economics to be trained in how to deal with the interrelationship of the two.

Good point — but several brief illustrations are needed so that we can understand the point clearly.

Organizations tend to desire a flow of interrelationships throughout the organization. And, an attempt is made at coordinating the various activities of the organization with the things surrounding those activities. However, there are not sufficient personnel to do that job adequately. Those who are skilled at it acquired those skills by accident. There has been little training to produce that type of person. The cry in big business is "what we need is a trained psychologist", or, "what we need is an economist", and so on. The point is that when they have the economist and the psychologist and the sociologist and political scientist, it is my belief that the business will not have anyone to coordinate them and their work. And, they probably will hardly talk to each other. So, in order to increase the probability of successful achievement of the organization's goals, the concept

how do we know? maybe, as you suggest elsewhere, it's because they perform poorly.

interesting point

what precisely is a "flow of interrelationships?"

Isn't this "coordination" what general managers, particularly near the top, think they do?

of training persons in relationships and producing people who are capable of making decisions based on the understanding of those relationships must become generally accepted by professional schools and business organizations.

The move toward specialization has reached the point of over-specialization. This has resulted in a situation where organizations have so many specialists that they now have a need to coordinate the specialists. The specialists are at high levels and apparently no one has ever told them that the organization is more important than their special skills. Those who know that find they are ill-equipped to deal with the coordinating efforts that are so obviously needed. The discussion of specialization ultimately involves the terms "technical" and "non-technical". The term non-technical is used by many to raise themselves; those who are "technical" above others who are "non-technical". This negative connotation has ~~weaved itself~~ become woven* into the organization's fabric. I suppose many people have had guilt feelings resulting from perceiving themselves as non-technical people.

low status feelings you mean? Or feelings of inadequacy?

who should stop? managers?

It is time now to stop over-emphasizing specialization and begin to recognize that we are producing numbers of specialized people and producing no one who is trained in coordinating all these specialized people with the goals of the organization. We need to recognize that the acceptance of the concept of training people to coordinate people and activities will most likely result in the specialists realizing the importance of the coordinating role. If the

* a connotation can't "weave." People "weave!"

what would be one example of a part of such a curriculum? but, I presume, a course in "coordination"!

concept is accepted in our schools and it becomes part of the curriculum, those who would become specialists in the future will most likely be a new breed of specialist. An exposure to the importance of coordinating could go a long way in helping to reduce the resistance that many so called specialists have to cooperating with others in various activities for the purpose of achieving the organization's goals.

As this writing reaches its conclusion, I would like to remark briefly about the coordinating concept and the behaviorist theory of management. The behaviorists have certainly placed a challenge at the doors of all organizations. Better results and more productivity will take place if people within the organization are perceived properly by management and treated appropriately, say the behaviorists. It might be said that this theory is on the lips of many but in the hearts of few. If there were people within the organization who understood and accepted the coordinator concept and if there were some who were trained to coordinate, and if these people supported the behaviorist theory, the theory would be much more widely practiced than is presently the case.* Thus, the coordinating skills are lacking in this instance and would certainly be valuable to the organizations that want to connect their various departments to the behaviorist concept of management. I am convinced that the coordinating skills have been overlookd and serious attention should be given to this oversight.

Are "behaviorist theory" and an emphasis on coordination the same?

(over)

You are on to an important point here but the statement seems over-generalized and non-specific. Illustrations are needed — not to prove your point of view but to tell the reader more precisely what you mean.

Are all organizations much alike? Or are you talking here about one type of organization?

What exactly is coordination? What have general managers been doing if not this? Your statement is in some ways so extreme as to constitute a straw man.

But you are onto something! More analysis is needed.