MANAGEMENT CONCEPTS AND ARCHIVAL ADMINISTRATION

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Your program chairperson has given me some rather broad instructions. Generally speaking, she wishes me to discuss "management principles and techniques applicable to archival administration, in particular personnel and organizational goals and objectives." More specifically, she has asked me to cover such topics as participatory management, communications, attitudes and motivation, measurement of managerial effectiveness, delegation of authority, the duties and responsibilities of leadership, and methods of planning and organizing. So that I might not feel too constricted, she has graciously allowed that I may want to add other topics, but she made it clear that my emphasis should be "management principles of personnel and goals in archival administration."

Now that is a rather large order. Many weighty tomes have been written on each of these subjects, and graduate students at schools of business across the country spend two years in earnest endeavor to earn advanced degrees by mastering them. Soberly assessed, however, my assignment is rendered practical by two considerations: its limitation to archival administration, and the over-complexity and superfluity of modern management literature.

The focus on archival administration allows me to eliminate or briefly dismiss a number of items that would require attention in a general discussion of management principles. Most archives are units within a larger institution: a university, a museum, a governmental bureau, a corporation, or some other body concerned with the preservation and utilization of historical documents. Under these circumstances, many aspects of management are "givens" for the archival administrator; they are matters to which the administrator must adapt but over which he or she has little or no control.

The host organization will have a body of personnel policies, including requirements for the selection, placement, compensation, and disciplining of personnel, whether in the archives or in its other constituent units. Budgetary and accounting procedures, as well as many other "givens," are usually matters to which the archivist must simply conform. Thus, with respect to a considerable portion of modern management theory, the task of the archivist is to learn, and learn to live with, the rules of its host organization. I do not counsel an attitude of "ours not to reason why." Rather, I urge upon you the importance of mastering the policies and procedures of your host organization in order to foster smooth relationships and enhance your ability to use those policies and procedures to the advantage of the operation for which you are responsible.

While they may be parts of large complex structures, most archives themselves are relatively small and simple. Your program chairperson informs me that while there are "great differences among budgets, resources, administrative organization, and work quarters," for the most part those in my audience today "will represent an archives with less than five professionals supported by clerical and student or volunteer staff and a budget of less than $50,000." Not only does this greatly simplify my task; in terms of management, it is exceedingly fortunate for you because it enables you to focus on essentials. In fact, if you are serious about wanting to improve your managerial skills, you will have to concentrate on a few central ideas and brush aside a great deal of what has come to be incorporated in modern management literature but what to my mind is not only superfluous but downright misleading. Let me illustrate with three examples: management by objectives, participatory management, and performance evaluation.

These ideas are among the most popular and most widely discussed in managerial circles today. There are few management conferences which deal in any way with personnel matters that do not include these subjects prominently on their agenda, and several five-foot shelves of books have been written on each. In each case, the underlying idea is simple. "Management by objectives" is based on the rather elementary notion that people will collaborate more effectively if each knows how his work contributes to the achievement of a common goal. "Participatory management" is based on the equally elementary thought that people will work better if they have some voice in setting the objectives of their own jobs and in determining how to reach them. "Performance

evaluation" rests on the hardly exotic principle that people should be judged by their achievements.

All three precepts are fairly sensible. Peter Drucker, who gave the first specific formulation to the concept of management by objectives, states the matter succinctly: "Each member of the enterprise contributes something different, but all must contribute to a common goal. Their efforts must all pull in the same direction, and their contributions must fit together to produce a whole . . ."[1]

Douglas McGregor, an early exponent of the idea of participatory management, talks of the need for "creation of an environment which will encourage commitment to organizational objectives and which will provide opportunities for the maximum exercise of initiative, ingenuity, and self-direction in achieving them."[2]

Marvin Bower, guru of professional management consultants, urges that people be judged "on the basis of their actions and achievements, not their personal qualities and skills . . . by what they do and how well they do it."[3]

An amazingly voluminous body of literature has grown up on how to put these rather straightforward ideas into practice. In part this is a reflection of the fact that a fair number of people make a good living out of writing textbooks for students and "how to" books for practicing managers. In producing a book, they have to fill up a certain amount of space, and all too often this calls for tedious elaboration of detail, in the course of which the main thrust of the central idea may be lost.

A second and very practical influence is the administrator who wants to see a good idea widely adopted within his organization. Consider the company president who has read Drucker and wants to convert his executive staff to the use of management by objectives; or the general manager well schooled in McGregor who wants to encourage participatory management; or the personnel vice president seeking more equitable ways to recognize and reward accomplishment. How does one go about implementing even fairly simple ideas in large and complex structures (and here let it be noted that most of the literature deals with large and complex structures)? How does one change the behavior of a fairly large number of executive and supervisory staff who have been brought up in certain ways, who are accustomed to forms of behavior sanctioned by tradition, and who may in fact feel threatened by the prospect of forced imposition of new ideas? I assure you, the task is not easy.

Action may be taken along any of several lines, or along a combination of lines. One is by administrative fiat—usually not very effective. Another is through training courses, a time-consuming and often expensive process. Still another is by the installation of a "program," usually with someone made responsible for overseeing it and reporting on its progress. I imagine everyone in this audience has been exposed more than once to all three types of measures to promote the adoption of an administrative practice that someone higher up has wanted to introduce.

Common characteristics of all such attempts to change behavior are a set of forms and some kind of reporting system. But the heart of the problem is that the kinds of ideas we are talking about really involve attitudes. Attitudes are inherently difficult to change, and how is one to know whether a change has actually occurred? The purpose of forms is usually to provide leverage for enforcing changes in practice, but they are poor instruments for reaching or influencing the mental attitudes that underlie the practice. The purpose of reports is usually to assess the extent of change, but too often they distort and corrupt the entire endeavor.

These are very practical problems facing the administrator of a large and complex organization. They are major reasons for the seemingly endless elaboration of procedural detail, and for the voluminous body of literature that has grown up around these and other basically straightforward managerial concepts. Responsible professionals in organizations such as yours are fortunate indeed in that they are in positions that enable them to grasp and apply creative managerial ideas in their essentials and without the excessive detail that people in more complex organizations often feel it necessary to employ.

To put the matter directly, we are dealing with attitudes, and the important attitude you have to change is your own. That may not be easy, but you can change your own mind much more easily if you want to than if someone else wants you to do so. It is also a lot easier to change your own mind than to change the minds of a lot of other people you may want to persuade to your way of thought and practice.

I have dwelt at some length on what I consider to be the redundancy and over-elaboration of much of what currently passes for managerial theory. But I have done so with a dual purpose. On the negative side, I do not wish you to be discouraged or turned off by the sheer volume of stuff—I use the word deliberately—you find on library shelves or on

reference lists. On the positive side, I want to emphasize that in modern management theory there are a number of creative and highly productive ideas that can be applied with particular effectiveness in archival administration. These ideas include: knowing the job, setting objectives, organizing to meet objectives, managing by objectives, managing by participation, and evaluating performance. In the course of discussing these subjects, I shall deal incidentally with such matters as communication, attitudes, motivation, and the working climate.

I want to begin by making a point that is seldom made in the standard literature of management: the importance of *knowing the job.* I am not being facetious. I mean simply that if you are going to be a successful manager, it is a great help to know what you are managing. This may seem rather obvious, but there is a widespread notion that management is management, and that if you know how to manage one thing you can manage almost anything. There is a germ of truth here, but not much more than a germ. Granted, it is by no means unusual for people to move between apparently quite different organizational environments. But those who do so successfully—and many do—are those who are able to grasp the essentials of their new jobs within a reasonable period of time.

I would therefore say that the first and most important qualification for the successful archival administrator is a firm grasp of archival functions and procedures. No amount of knowledge of human relations or principles of organization or techniques of planning will be of much avail unless the would-be administrator knows what archives are supposed to accomplish and how they function. These things, of course, can be learned; my point is that they *must* be learned, and here the experienced archivist is a far better guide than the most sophisticated management theorist. Professional meetings are probably the most important single means for raising the standards and improving the effectiveness of archival management.

The second requirement is *setting objectives.* Precious as its well-being may be to those responsible for its care, no archives exists for itself alone; its raison d'etre is to serve larger purposes. This is obviously true of archives that are parts of larger host organizations where they perform some function considered important enough to merit the investment of the resources required. But it is also true of free-standing archives, although here the larger purposes may not be so unambiguously discernible. A great presidential library exists not merely to

preserve and protect the papers of a former president; that could be done perhaps more effectively in a sealed underground vault. Its purpose is also to organize these papers and make them accessible to scholars and others who may need them to serve the general society, both now and in the future.

Therefore, when we talk about setting objectives for archival administration we must begin by clearly defining the purposes for which the archives was established. This is obviously something that must be done in close collaboration with the host organization; or, in the case of a free-standing institution, with its board of trustees or other body that represents the larger community the archives is intended to serve. In a very real sense, of course, this larger community becomes the host organization.

An intimate reciprocal relationship exists between the archives administrator and the host organization. While the needs of the latter must be served, it may not clearly perceive what its real archival needs are. The archivist's duty as a professional is to assist in identifying and defining these needs. In this respect, the archivist's role is not essentially different from that of any other functional specialist in a larger organization. His first responsibility as a professional is to employ the conceptual resources at his command to assist the host organization in determining the specific means by which his specialty may best serve its purposes—whether the host is a manufacturing concern, a university library, or a scholarly community.

The key here is the purposes of the host. Anyone with a major in personnel management from a good school of business can recite all of the things a well-run and well-supported personnel department, for instance, "ought" to do; all one needs is access to any reasonably adequate (and reasonably recent) textbook on personnel administration. But the personnel department of a company does not exist to provide a stage upon which the well-trained personnel administrator can demonstrate his virtuosity; it exists to bring a specialized body of expert knowledge to the service of the larger needs of the company. The professional archivist has a comparable responsibility.

The first principle in setting objectives for archival administration is therefore close collaboration with the host to identify and define the ways in which the archival function can serve its particular needs. This is a task that requires the archivist's professional skills, but in which those skills must be related to the special characteristics of the host.

The second principle in setting objectives is selectivity. Resources are always limited. There is never enough money or enough people or enough space or enough time to do all of the things that would be well worth doing—or, indeed, all of the things there might well be an urgent need to do. Aside from the danger of failing to establish the archives' relevance to the host organization, the greatest menace to successful archival administration is failure to establish realistic priorities. It is so easy to try to cover too much ground, to try to do too many things. If anything significant is to be accomplished in any area—archival or other—there must be a concentration of resources on a few well-defined ends. Activities that do not contribute meaningfully to those ends must be forsworn, no matter how important or appealing they may be from a personal or professional viewpoint.

Here again, close collaboration with the host is essential. For resources to be concentrated, the central purpose of the archives must be identified, defined, and agreed upon. This central purpose must not only be relevant to the needs and interests of the host, but also achievable in terms of the resources it is able and willing to make available. And these resources must then be concentrated on the limited number of things most directly essential to the central archival purpose.

I would make only one more point under the general heading of establishing objectives: it is a good idea to put them in writing so they can be referred to as needed and can serve as guidelines for future action. The statement must be something more than a set of pious hopes or broad generalities; it must set forth objectives of sufficient precision to provide a workable frame of reference for both the archivist and the host.

Organizing to meet objectives is really not a complex matter and can be dealt with quickly. Once objectives have been clearly defined and agreed upon, and priorities to serve them have been established, the task of organization is easy. All that is necessary is to divide the tasks to be accomplished among the staff available for their accomplishment. This is greatly simplified by the fact that the great majority of archival operations are relatively small so far as numbers of people are concerned; beyond fairly broad allocations of responsibility, little detailed division of labor is necessary.

Actually, the key to effective organization is *management by objectives.* This is true in a general and rather abstract way for all organizations of whatever size, but it is specifically and concretely true for

archival operations.

If objectives have been clearly defined and realistic priorities established, and if necessary tasks have been broadly allocated, the objectives themselves become the organizing principles that direct the application of human endeavor. If the objectives are clear, limited, and specific, each individual—because the staff is relatively small—can readily see how his or her work relates to the achievement of the objectives and how the work of each relates to and supplements that of the others. Problems of communication are minimal because relationships are direct and face-to-face; the communication process does not have to be mediated by impersonal means or distorted by passing through too many connecting links. And so long as all concerned understand the objectives toward which their combined efforts are directed, collaboration can be largely spontaneous and little specific coordination of individual efforts on the part of the administrator is required.

The habit of working together has been bred into human behavior by scores of millenia of biological and social evolution, and by and large people work well in small groups where they can relate to each other as individuals and where there is an understanding of common purposes. Problems arise, of course, as organizations grow larger and more complex, as relations between people become more tenuous and abstract, and as common purposes become obscured by parochial concerns. But these are not characteristics of organizations such as yours, and for that you may be thankful. I only urge that you capitalize on this inherent human capacity of people to work together. And this, I emphasize, is the essential meaning of that now fashionable term, "management by objectives."

Which brings me, quite logically, to *managing by participation.* Here again, the essential meaning of the concept is simple, although its application has been subject to incredible obfuscation. Shorn of the barnacles that have affixed themselves to it, the principle is simply that people work better—by which I mean more happily for themselves and more effectively for the organization—if they have some say in how the work is done.

In some interesting studies done years ago at Sears, Roebuck, two types of store managers were identified. One type we called "*means oriented*" because they not only set the sales and profit goals for each department but issued detailed instructions to the department managers as to the precise means by which these goals were to be achieved.

The other type we called *"ends oriented"* because they set goals in consultation with the department managers and then left it largely up to them to figure out how to reach the goals. There were significant differences in the way the organizations run by the two types of managers worked. The ends oriented managers were less burdened by detail and thus able to concentrate their attention on really important matters. But the most striking difference was the much greater sense of responsibility evidenced by subordinates in the ends oriented organizations. Because the "tactical details" of their jobs were left largely to their judgment, the subordinates felt much more responsible for making them work. Their counterparts in the means oriented organizations felt much less personal responsibility because, after all, the boss had figured everything out and if things didn't work it was his responsibility, not theirs. Not surprisingly, morale was higher and results superior in the ends oriented stores.

Now, I do not mean to imply that people should be left wholly on their own, free to do their own thing in their own way and in their own good time. There must be a viable frame of policy within which people work, procedures that must be followed, and standards that must be maintained. Yet within these constraints, there is usually a fair amount of room for the exercise of individual discretion and judgment. Careful analysis of work to determine what elements are fixed and require strict adherence, and what elements can be modified without impairing results, is likely to disclose greater leeway for variation than might at first appear. The wise manager seeks means to enlarge rather than restrict room for the exercise of initiative. As long as the ends to be served by a particular activity, as well as the applicable constraints, are clearly understood by superior and subordinate alike, the ends oriented manager is likely to be more successful than his means oriented counterpart. This is one aspect of participatory management.

A second aspect has to do with the ends and constraints themselves. Just as employees will feel a greater sense of responsibility for work in whose design they have participated, so too will they feel more personally obligated to achieve goals they themselves have helped set. It is well to remember, too, that policies, procedures, and standards are not always rigidly predetermined. To the extent that employees can help shape constraints, they are likely to feel more committed to observe them—more likely to see them, in fact, as aids rather than as restrictions.

There is no neat formula for managing by participation. Basically, it

is an attitude of mind, a recognition that all group effort is by definition team effort, which in turn depends upon a sense of personal responsibility on the part of each member of the team. It is an elementary axiom of human behavior that people feel more responsible for what they themselves have had a voice in determining. The means by which participation is achieved will vary widely from one type of work to another, from one manager to another, and even from one time to another. The common element is an attitude on the part of the manager that recognizes the importance of employee involvement and that seeks to create a work environment in which a sense of personal involvement can flourish.

This sense can never be a matter of administrative contrivance. It depends on the way the manager himself approaches his job and conceives of his relationships with his employees. If he sees himself as a team member—as a playing coach, if you will—and if he sees the members of his team as persons willing and able to take responsibility, participatory management will evolve spontaneously and take on a form compatible with the particular set of people and circumstances.

This brings me to the final item on my agenda: *evaluating performance*. Here again we are dealing with a subject around which an extensive literature has grown and on which weighty—if horribly dull—conferences are frequently held. And yet the underlying concept is one of extreme simplicity: people are best judged by what they actually accomplish. Its corollary is that people work better if they know how well they are doing.

As a very practical matter, those of you whose units are parts of larger organizations probably have a set of performance evaluation procedures that you are obliged to follow. Typically, you are required to rate your subordinates once or perhaps twice a year, using forms criteria that are specified by administrative fiat over which you have little control and in which you probably have little interest. These will appear in a number of differrent guises and exhibit varying degrees of complexity. The one characteristic most of them have in common is that they are not very effective. This is because too often performance evaluation is looked upon as a discrete function with little relationship to the vital processes of management; it is usually an add-on, something you are required to do because someone says so but extraneous to the real job of running a good archives.

Nothing could be further from the truth. There are no functions more

central to managing—whether an archives or a steel mill—than making judgments about people and letting people know where they stand. And the principles underlying these two functions are related in the most intimate and integral way to the central task of management.

Regardless of the format for performance evaluation established by your host organization and to which you must adhere, the process can be greatly facilitated and its usefulness for your administrative purposes greatly enhanced if the principles I have previously laid down have been conscientiously applied. If the archivist is professionally competent, if objectives have been clearly defined and realistically set, if the tasks necessary to accomplish the objectives have been rationally allocated among available staff, if the efforts of the group are coordinated toward achieving unambiguous goals, and if each member of the team has had some personal involvement in setting goals and determining how work is to be done, then it becomes a relatively natural and simple matter to reach an understanding as to what is expected of each individual. The central task of performance evaluation then becomes a matter of determining whether or not these expectations have been realized and, if not, the reasons for the deficiency. If these preconditions have been met, the individual probably knows how he or she is doing without being explicitly told. But this is something the good administrator never takes for granted and is at pains to make certain is explicitly understood.

The formal system of performance evaluation established by your host organization may be utilized for this purpose, but people should not have to wait for the semi-annual or annual evaluation cycle to be told how they are doing; rather, this should be a continuing process, and it can be if the principles previously enunciated are in continuing and effective operation. Prescribed formal procedures—usually so sterile—can take on life and vitality and be applied with striking effect if utilized in the spirit and within the context I have tried to set forth.

My thesis is that in spite of a formidable body of literature and an endless array of obfuscating detail, the important principles of management are essentially simple and straightforward and their application is largely a matter of common sense. But this thesis rests on an even more elementary foundation: the essential requirement that the manager have character and integrity, a genuine respect for fellow workers, and a commitment to fairness and justice in all relationships down, up, and across the line. Without these, the principles of manage-

ment, even in their pristine form, are empty and sterile. With them, the relatively few central concepts can be the means for greatly improving the effectiveness of organizational effort and for materially enriching the quality of human life at work.

FOOTNOTES

1. Peter F. Drucker, *Management Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 430.
2. Douglas McGregor, *The Human Side of Enterprise* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1960), p. 132.
3. Marvin Bower, *The Will To Manage,* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1966), pp. 35, 37.