

Notes on the many meanings of Management

by
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In the process of defining "management" it is easy to become entangled in a semantic jungle. Unlike some entities in certain fields of knowledge and human endeavour - for example in physics - there is no authoritative definition which is universally recognised throughout the world. Any definition of a word such as management is, in effect, a proposition. Moreover it is a proposition which need not be accepted by others, who may prefer their own equally valid meanings. However, although it is open to each individual to use the word management in whatever manner is appropriate to the occasion, it is helpful, for heuristic reasons at the least, to state a conceptual pragmatic definition i.e. one which embodies fundamental concepts and is useful for some purpose. It is also of value to establish a framework which facilitates the determination of the sense in which "management" is used on any particular occasion.

"Management" is accorded a variety of meanings which may be classified as:

- different in kind
- restricted versions of the same kind
- associative or selective versions for purpose of influence or change

Three different kinds of meanings are:-

1. Management as a group of people

This is generally the sense in which the media use the word e.g. management as distinct from labour, management in contrast to unions. It implies "the group of people in overall control" or "the top people".

Restricted versions of this group kind of meaning are:

- the users of a particular company dining room
- the people with the word "manager" in their job title

Management in the group sense is often distinguished from Council, Authority, directors, owners.

2. Management as a process

In this sense management is regarded as an activity or set of activities, for example: management is the judicious use of means to achieve ends

- management is the act of converting unorganised resources into useful enterprise
- management is the process of organising the use of resources to achieve objectives.

Restricted versions of this process kind are:-

- management is a social process entailing responsibility for the effective and economical planning and regulation of the operations of an enterprise, in fulfilment of a given purpose or task, such responsibility involving:-
 - (a) Judgement and decision in determining plans and the development of data procedures to assist control of performance and progress against plans;
 - (b) the guidance, integration, motivation and supervision of the personnel composing the enterprise, and carrying out its operations.
- management involves getting things done through and with people.

Management in the process sense is often distinguished from administration, supervision, stewardship.

3. Management as a subject

Many educationalists attach a subject meaning to management. In this sense management:

- consists of several schools of management theory which give rise to very heterogeneous knowledge
- is a confluence or lake of related theory contributed to by several rivers of knowledge.

A restricted version of the subject kind is:

- management is psychology, law, economics, statistical method.

It is worth noting that a manager can be considered in terms of the first two kinds of meanings of management, i.e. a member of a management group or a person carrying out the process of management. It is, however, difficult to envisage a manager in relation to the third kind i.e. a person is not a manager by virtue of subject knowledge alone.

The word management is sometimes used simply because it has favourable or unfavourable connotations in a particular context and will therefore exert an influence or help an argument. Meanings are also sometimes attached to "management" or its associated "manager," which are in the nature of slogans to bring about change or alter the balance of a situation, for example "vision and responsibility define the manager".

References

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