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**Question 2 – Mintzberg sets out to introduce the reader to ‘a more supportable, more useful description of managerial work’. How convincing is Mintzberg in his argument that the true nature of the manager’s job is different from that portrayed by classical writers on management?**

Henry Mintzberg sets out to introduce the reader to ‘a more supportable, more useful description of managerial work’. Mintzberg introduces us to four so called ‘folklores’ of managerial work and presents to us what he believes to be the four facts of managerial work. To determine how convincing Mintzberg is in his argument of the true nature of the manager’s job, it is essential to compare and contrast his views to two other classical writers on management. These writers are Frederick Taylor and Henri Fayol who have both written on the topic of management.

Mintzberg divides his argument into four ‘folklores’ and four ‘facts’. Mintzberg states ‘The manager is a reflective, systematic planner’ as folklore. He believes the fact is that managers ‘work at an unrelenting pace’, their activities are characterised by ‘discontinuity’ and they dislike ‘reflective activities’. To back up his argument and to convince the reader, he highlights his key findings in his studies of 5 chief executive, 56 U.S. foremen and 160 British middle and top managers. His studies agree with his view of management. ‘Half the activities engaged in by the five chief executives of my study lasted less than nine minutes, and only 10% exceeded an hour’. It is hard to argue with such a statement that Mintzberg is wrong; however one would question the size of this study. For such an important piece of writing on management his study may be perceived as ‘too small’. However his other study groups are of a larger size making his argument somewhat reputable. The statistics he has gathered from these studies lend weight to his argument for instance: ‘a study of 160 middle and top managers found that they worked without interruption for a half hour or more only about once every two days’. With these studies of a variety of different managers proving his theory correct Mintzberg’s argument is so far convincing. In spite of this we must look at the theories of our other two writers.

Taylor believes management is a ‘true science’ implying that management is indeed planned and systematic. Taylor emphasises developing a science ‘for each elements of a man’s work’ and scientific selection and training of workers. This directly contradicts Mintzberg’s claims. This science is applicable to virtually every organisation. Taylor’s example of the ‘pig iron’ problem presented us with the evidence that his science was successful and achieved a doubling of work completed per man once he was trained. Is this the true role of the manager? Are workers not already trained when entering an organisation? Taylor’s readings are accurate for the 1900’s but the world has changed since then. Over the past century the ‘best’ method of doing each task/job has been perfected. Therefore, Mintzberg’s argument is more convincing that the true nature of the manager’s job is much different from that portrayed by classical writers on management.

Fayol presents us with a predetermined plan of how the manager will manage. Fayol presents the manager as a figure with a definite boundary of control. Everyone has a place and everyone stays in his place under the management system of Fayol. This ideology is forethought reflecting the preponderate systematic approach of Fayol’s management. With ‘unity of command’ and ‘unity of direction’, this is an uninterrupted, continuous style of management. Here, Fayol’s principles repudiate Mintzberg’s claims. Despite these claims, it is Mintzberg who has the research and studies of several different groups to fortify his assumptions. One cannot help but postulate Mintzberg’s argument true as he is undoubtedly more convincing than Taylor or Fayol.

Mintzberg states ‘The effective manager has no regular duties to perform’ as folklore. Rather the fact is ‘managerial work involves performing a number of regular duties, including ritual and ceremony, negotiations, and processing of soft information that links the organisation with its environment’. Mintzberg asserts his argument by using the facts from the study he undertook. One of his studies suggests that it is a natural part of sales manager and other chief executives to see important customers, assuming they want to keep their customers. We often see managers engaging the customer concerning sales and other issues lending weight to Mintzberg’s argument. Managers also have other duties such as meeting visiting dignitaries, giving out gold watches and presiding at Christmas dinners. Mintzberg’s study show the reality of this situation but also another element of managerial work: securing key external ‘soft’ information and passing it to their subordinates. Mintzberg’s studies have disproved the classical view of managerial work having no regular duties. Therefore his argument is convincing that the true nature of the manager’s job is different from that of other classical writers on management.

Taylor states management as a true science suggesting a systematic approach to management. Mintzberg concentrates primarily on managing the workman with no mention of the other possible duties of the manager. However Taylor does suggest a four step algorithm to achieve scientific management that must be completed ritually with each different job/worker. These regular duties involve negotiations with workers and processing of information (studies on science for each element of a man’s work) but there is no mention of ceremonies or processing of soft information. While Mintzberg concentrates on describing the manager on a wider basis, Taylor focuses specifically on managing the workmen. Yet there is a slight overlap between both writers on the topic of regular duties. Taylor’s argument cannot be disregarded completely, but one cannot accept that the true nature of the manager’s job is wholly to manage the workmen. On this point, it is lucid that Mintzberg’s argument is more convincing and accurate in describing the true nature of the manager’s job.

Fayol present us with 14 principles on management. Outside these 14 principles he has declared a number of duties which must be performed by the manager to ensure the success of the organisation. These duties adhere to Mintzberg’s view on the true managers duties. For instance, Fayol believed in meeting of heads of departments and heads of divisions to ensure coordination. Other duties included preparing yearly plans and acting on them and also preparing organisational charts to demonstrate and encourage order. However there is no mention about negotiations or processing of soft information. On a whole, Fayol’s aspect agrees with Mintzberg’s perspective on the true nature of the manager’s job. Essentially Mintzberg’s argument is convincing in describing the true nature of the manager’s job compared to that of Taylor and Fayol.

The third of Mintzberg’s four managerial folklores: ‘the senior manager needs aggregated information, which a formal management information system best provides’. The fact according to Mintzberg is ‘managers strongly favour verbal media, telephone calls and meetings, over documents’. To support this argument Mintzberg presents the reader with a wide array of facts concerning the breakdown of the manager’s time and the handling of documents. ‘In two British studies, managers spent an average of 66% and 80% of their time in verbal communication’; the figure for American chief executives was 78%. It is hard to ignore these statistics when assessing the convincingness of Mintzberg’s argument. The 5 chief executives treated mail as a burden. They skimmed over most of the mail almost ritualistically. Another interesting fact presented by Mintzberg was the manager’s preference of soft information – gossip, hearsay and speculation. This verbal information leads to the arising of another problem, does the manager de brief the subordinates to do a task or do it himself taking much less time. This leads to delegation problems. Once again Mintzberg’s emphasis on the facts and figures he has collected has introduced the reader to a more supportable, more useful description of managerial work.

For Taylor’s scientific management to succeed a combination of hard and soft information is used. Firstly the manager needs to study the work process and create a science. Much of this information is gathered in hard form. To implement this hard information, the manager verbally communicates with the worker to ensure clear and direct instructions are given to ensure success. In this form of management the worker will verbally communicate with the manager is a problem or issue arises. This reading is much older than Mintzberg’s which could explain why there is no information given about letters, telephones or external communication with other managers or members in privileged positions. Taylor’s view on managerial communication agrees to an extent with Mintzberg’s argument. With certain parts of Taylor’s reading being omitted because of the advancement in technology, Mintzberg present us with a more convincing view on the true nature of the manager’s job.

Similar to Mintzberg, Fayol was a big believer in verbal communication over written communication where possible. Fayol found written letters cause animosity and unease within the workplace because of ‘misunderstandings’ cause by improper communication. Fayol stated ‘there is a way of putting an end to this deplorable system and this is to forbid all communication in writing which could easily and advantageously be replaced by verbal ones’. This view conforms to Mintzberg’s studies of various groups of managers. Verbal communication is much faster than written communication which inevitably brings clarity quicker to the organisation. Here, Mintzberg has given us a more supportable, more useful description of managerial work following on from Fayol’s earlier discoveries of the inefficiency of written communication. Therefore Mintzberg is convincing in his argument that the true nature of the manager’s job is different than that portrayed by classical writers on management.

The final of Mintzberg’s folklore and fact is the most controversial concept which directly contradicts Taylor’s concept of management. Stated as folklore, ‘management is, or at least is quickly becoming, a science and a profession’. The fact according to Mintzberg is; ‘the managers’ programs – to schedule time, process information, make decisions, and so on – remain locked deep inside their brains’. Mintzberg found in his studies that the information needed by managers varies but one thing is similar, they seek it out by word of mouth. Their procedures for gathering information have not changed since the 19th century; the computer has apparently no influence on the work procedures of general managers. Brevity, fragmentation and verbal communication characterise their work. These are the characteristics Mintzberg believes have impeded scientific attempts to improve it. The only part of management which is scientific is the specialised function of the organisation, where it is easier to analyse the procedures and quantify the relevant information. Mintzberg has gathered this information through his studies which add to the convincingness of his theory. He also disproves Taylor’s view on management, showing that scientific management is concentrated on quantitative functions. Mintzberg certainly offers us a more supportable, more useful description of managerial work. By taking the manager as a whole his argument is hard to dispute. Therefore his argument is positively convincing that the true nature of the manager’s job is different from that portrayed by classical writer on management.

Taylor created scientific management to cut out the great losses suffered through inefficiency in almost all of our daily acts. The supposed solution lies in systematic management. Mintzberg’s idea was to create a science for each element of a man’s work thereby eliminating inefficiency and providing a more effective work force. However there is one major difference between Mintzberg’s and Taylor’s model of the effective manager. In Mintzberg’s description we are given a comprehensive overview of the managers including managing people, interaction with other managers and the processing of information. Taylor provides us with only the information of how to control the workforce; he is missing the other attributes of the manager. For this reason alone, Mintzberg’s argument is more reputable and convincing. Mintzberg has already stated that scientific management is specifically for elements of work which are quantitative, managing as a whole is not a science. Mintzberg has introduced the reader to a more supportable, more useful description of managerial work which is convincing that the true nature of the manager’s job is different from that portrayed by classical writers on management.

Fayol presents us with a theory of management not a science. For this reason (in general), Fayol is of the same opinion regarding scientific management as Mintzberg is. Fayol outline his fourteen principles of management but does not mention any scientific management regarding his model. Fayol was not in accepting of Taylor’s concept of scientific management as it broke his own principle of unity of command. Fayol’s style of management does not coincide with Mintzberg’s but on the topic on scientific management there is a similarity in views; managing is not a science. Therefore Mintzberg’s argument has been proven more convincing in describing the true nature of the manager’s job.

Taking Mintzberg’s reading as a whole it is quite clear he has introduced the reader to a more supportable, more useful description of managerial work. Through his four folklores and facts, he has convinced the reader that his argument is indeed more convincing that the true nature of the manager’s job is different from that portrayed by classical writers (Taylor, Fayol) on management. As Mintzberg says himself*: ‘Managerial work is enormously complex, far more than so than a reading of traditional literature would suggest. There is a need to study it systematically and to avoid the temptation to seek simple prescriptions for its difficulties’*

**References:**

The manager’s job: folklore or fact? – Henry Mintzberg.

The principles of scientific management: part 1 – Frederick Taylor.

General and industrial management – Henri Fayol.