

What Do Managers Do?

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about this course and what managers do to help organizations achieve top performance. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. [About Principles of Management](#)
2. [Introduction to Managing and Performing](#)
3. [Managers in Action](#)

1. About Principles of Management

So, you're in this course and you may have pondered, or discussed with others, what this course will be about. Principles of Management is an introductory course that uses the leading, planning, organizing, and controlling approach to management. Management is a broad business discipline, and this course covers many areas such as human resource management and strategic management, as well behavioral areas such as motivation. Finally, we all made an effort to present a balanced approach to gender and diversity throughout the challenges in the use of the terms "male" and "female" when referring to generic managers or employees. Additionally, most lessons contain vocabulary terms and reflection questions learners can use to assure themselves that they have mastered the chapter concepts.



HINT

In this course, you will complete a final Touchstone assignment that illustrates your comprehension of the course material and demonstrates application of knowledge. You will select an organization (for-profit or non-profit) that you are familiar with to perform an internal and external analysis. Hints like this one have been added throughout the lessons to indicate when the content you are learning applies to your final assignment.

You probably have some preconceptions of what management is and what managers do. You have probably had a job where you had a manager whom you had to report to. You may have followed news reports on successful managers like Jeff Bezos of Amazon or Sheryl Sandberg of Facebook and want to learn what made them successful so you can emulate their practices in your career. You may have the impression that

management is basically just common sense and that you really don't need to take this course except that you must meet your degree requirements.

You may be an accounting or marketing major who is taking this class because it is required for completion of your degree, but you don't think you will ever need what you learn in this class during your career since you don't plan on applying for HR jobs upon graduation. But regardless of where you are in your career, what you get out of this course will be very valuable. If your first job out of college is or will be as an accountant, sales representative, or another entry-level position, you will appreciate the roles that your managers, both direct and senior level, play in an organization and the behaviors and actions that will get you recognized and appreciated as a valuable member of the team.

2. Introduction to Managing and Performing

Most management textbooks would say that managers spend their time engaged in planning, organizing, staffing, directing, coordinating, reporting, and controlling. These activities, as Hannaway found in her study of managers at work, "do not, in fact, describe what managers do" (Hannaway, 1989, p. 39). At best they seem to describe vague objectives that managers are continually trying to accomplish.

The real world, however, is far from being that simple. The world in which most managers work is a "messy and hectic stream of ongoing activity" (Eccles & Nohria, 1992, p. 47). Managers often spend far more time reacting to issues that arise in the moment than following prepared plans or protocols. You will never be bored as a manager! A manager's tasks vary greatly throughout each day, and management positions often come with a great deal of responsibility. As you go through this course, consider some of the challenges of being a manager and how you might apply what you are learning to your own career aspirations.

3. Managers in Action

Managers are in constant action. Virtually every study of managers in action has found that they "switch frequently from task to task, changing their focus of attention to respond to issues as they arise, and engaging in a large volume of tasks of short duration" (Hannaway, 1989, p. 39). Mintzberg observed CEOs on the job to get some idea of what they do and how they spend their time. He found, for instance, that they averaged 36 written and 16 verbal contacts per day, almost every one of them dealing with a distinct or different issue. Most of these activities were brief, lasting less than nine minutes (Mintzberg, 1973).

Kotter studied a number of successful general managers over a five-year period and found that they spend most of their time with others, including subordinates, their bosses, and numerous people from outside the organization. Kotter's study found that the average manager spent just 25% of his or her time working alone, and that time was spent largely at home, on airplanes, or commuting. Few of them spent less than 70% of their time with others, and some spent up to 90% of their working time this way (Kotter, 1999).

Kotter also found that the breadth of topics in their discussions with others was extremely wide, with unimportant issues taking time alongside important business matters. His study revealed that managers rarely

make “big decisions” during these conversations and rarely give orders in a traditional sense. They often react to others’ initiatives and spend substantial amounts of time in unplanned activities that aren’t on their calendars. He found that managers will spend most of their time with others in short, disjointed conversations. “Discussions of a single question or issue rarely last more than ten minutes,” he notes. “It is not at all unusual for a general manager to cover ten unrelated topics in a five-minute conversation” (Kotter, 1999, p. 145-159). More recently, managers studied by Sproull showed similar patterns.

⇒ **EXAMPLE** During the course of a day, they engaged in 58 different activities with an average duration of just nine minutes (Sproull, 1984).

Interruptions also appear to be a natural part of the job. Stewart found that the managers she studied could work uninterrupted for half an hour only nine times during the four weeks she studied them (Stewart, 1967). Managers, in fact, spend very little time by themselves. Contrary to the image offered by management textbooks, they are rarely alone drawing up plans or worrying about important decisions. Instead, they spend most of their time interacting with others—both inside and outside the organization.



DID YOU KNOW

If casual interactions in hallways, phone conversations, one-on-one meetings, and larger group meetings are included, managers spend about two-thirds of their time with other people (Eccles & Nohria, 1992). As Mintzberg has pointed out, “Unlike other workers, the manager does not leave the telephone or the meeting to get back to work. Rather, these contacts are his work” (Mintzberg, 1973, p. 37).



BIG IDEA

The interactive nature of management means that most management work is conversational (Pondy, 1978). When managers are in action, they are talking and listening. Studies on the nature of managerial work indicate that managers spend about two-thirds to three-quarters of their time in verbal activity (Mintzberg, 2009). These verbal conversations, according to Eccles and Nohria, are the means by which managers gather information, stay on top of things, identify problems, negotiate shared meanings, develop plans, put things in motion, give orders, assert authority, develop relationships, and spread gossip. In short, they are what the manager’s daily practice is all about. “Through other forms of talk, such as speeches and presentations,” they write, “managers establish definitions and meanings for their own actions and give others a sense of what the organization is about, where it is at, and what it is up to” (Eccles & Nohria, 1992, p. 47-48).



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that **Principles of Management** is an introductory course that uses the leading, planning, organizing, and controlling approach. You also learned about what managers do to help organizations achieve top performance. Despite common preconceptions of what managers do and the link between **managing and performing**, understanding the wide variety of tasks, range of responsibilities, and challenges associated with being a manager will be valuable in your own career path, whatever that may be. One key characteristic you learned about is that **managers are always in action**, engaging in a large number of tasks of short duration every day. Successful managers spend most of their working hours with other people, talking with and listening to others on a breadth of

topics, encompassing both unimportant issues as well as important business matters.

Best of luck in your learning!

Source: Access for free at <https://openstax.org/books/principles-management/pages/1-introduction>

REFERENCES

Eccles, R., & Nohria, N. (1992). *Beyond the hype: Rediscovering the essence of management* (pp. 47-48). The Harvard Business School Press.

Hannaway, J. (1989). *Managers managing: The workings of an administrative system* (p. 39). Oxford University Press.

Kotter, J. (1999). *What effective general managers really do* (pp. 145-159). Harvard Business Review.

Mintzberg, H. (1973). *The nature of managerial work* (p. 37). Harper & Row.

Mintzberg, H. (2009). *Managing* (pp. 26-28). Berrett-Kohler Publishers.

Pondy, L. R. (1978). "Leadership is a language game," in M. W. McCall, Jr. & M. M. Lombardo (Eds.), *Leadership: Where else can we go?* Duke University Press.

Sproull, L. S. (1984). "The nature of managerial attention," in L. S. Sproull (Ed.), *Advances in information processing in organizations*. JAI Press.

Stewart, R. (1967). *Managers and their jobs*. Macmillan.