

The Roles Managers Play

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about the roles managers play in organizations. You will be introduced to the three core management roles in an organization: Interpersonal, Informational, and Decisional. Each role is then broken down into specific characteristics that further define the nature of duties performed within them. Specifically, this lesson will cover:



BEFORE YOU START

In Mintzberg's seminal study of managers and their jobs, he found the majority of them clustered around three core management roles: Interpersonal, Informational, and Decisional.

1. Interpersonal Roles

Managers are required to interact with a substantial number of people in the course of a workweek in the **Interpersonal Role**. They host receptions, take clients and customers to dinner, meet with business prospects and partners, conduct hiring and performance interviews, and form alliances, friendships, and personal relationships with many others. Numerous studies have shown that such relationships are the richest source of information for managers because of their immediate and personal nature (Mintzberg, 1990).

Three of a manager's roles arise directly from formal authority and involve basic interpersonal relationships.

Interpersonal Roles	Description
The Figurehead Role	As the head of an organizational unit, every manager must perform some ceremonial duties. In Mintzberg's study, chief executives spent 12% of their contact time on ceremonial duties; 17% of their incoming mail dealt with acknowledgments and requests related to their status.
The Leader Role	<p>Managers are also responsible for the work of the people in their unit, and their actions in this regard are directly related to their role as a leader. The influence of managers is most clearly seen, according to Mintzberg, in the leader role. Formal authority vests them with significant power and influence. Leadership determines, in large part, how much power they have (Mintzberg, 1990).</p> <p>Examples include the return of Starbucks founder Howard Schultz to re-energize and steer his company, and Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos and his ability to innovate during a downturn in the economy (McGregor, 2008).</p>

The Liaison Role	Popular management literature has had little to say about the liaison role until recently. This role, in which managers establish and maintain contacts outside the vertical chain of command, becomes especially important in view of the finding of virtually every study of managerial work that managers spend as much time with peers and other people outside of their units as they do with their own subordinates. Surprisingly, they spend little time with their own superiors. In Rosemary Stewart's study, 160 British middle and top managers spent 47% of their time with peers, 41% of their time with people inside their unit, and only 12% of their time with superiors.
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TERM TO KNOW

Interpersonal Role

One of three major roles identified in Mintzberg's seminal study of managers in which managers form and maintain professional relationships both within and outside the organization.

2. Informational Roles

In the **Informational Role**, managers are required to gather, collate, analyze, store, and disseminate many kinds of information. In doing so, they become information resource centers, often storing huge amounts of information in their own heads, moving quickly from the role of gatherer to the role of disseminator in minutes. Although many business organizations install large, expensive management information systems to perform many of those functions, nothing can match the intuitive power of a well-trained manager's brain.

Informational Roles	Description
The Monitor Role	As monitors, managers are constantly scanning the environment for information, talking with liaison contacts and subordinates, and receiving unsolicited information, much of it as a result of their network of personal contacts. A good portion of this information arrives in verbal form, often as gossip, hearsay, and speculation.
The Disseminator Role	In the disseminator role, managers pass privileged information directly to subordinates, who might otherwise have no access to it. Managers must not only decide who should receive such information, but how much of it, how often, and in what form. Increasingly, managers are being asked to decide whether subordinates, peers, customers, business partners, and others should have direct access to information 24 hours a day without having to contact the manager directly.
The Spokesperson Role	In the spokesperson role, managers send information to people outside of their organizations: an executive makes a speech to lobby for an organizational cause, or a supervisor suggests a product modification to a supplier. Increasingly, managers are also being asked to deal with representatives of the news media, providing both factual and opinion-based responses that will be printed or broadcast to vast unseen audiences, often directly or with little editing. The risks in such circumstances are enormous, but so too are the potential rewards in terms of brand recognition, public image, and organizational visibility.

**Informational Role**

One of three major roles identified in Mintzberg's seminal study of managers in which managers gather, collate, analyze, store, and disseminate many kinds of information both within and outside the organization.

3. Decisional Roles

In the **Decisional Role**, ultimately, managers are charged with the responsibility of making decisions on behalf of both the organization and the stakeholders with an interest in it. Such decisions are often made under circumstances of high ambiguity and with inadequate information. Often, the other two managerial roles—interpersonal and informational—will assist a manager in making difficult decisions in which outcomes are not clear and interests are often conflicting.

Informational Roles	Description
The Entrepreneur Role	In the role of entrepreneur, managers seek to improve their businesses, adapt to changing market conditions, and react to opportunities as they present themselves. Managers who take a longer-term view of their responsibilities are among the first to realize that they will need to reinvent themselves, their product and service lines, their marketing strategies, and their ways of doing business as older methods become obsolete and competitors gain an advantage.
The Disturbance or Crisis Handler Role	While the entrepreneur role describes managers who initiate change, the disturbance or crisis handler role depicts managers who must involuntarily react to conditions. Crises can arise because bad managers let circumstances deteriorate or spin out of control, but just as often good managers find themselves in the midst of a crisis that they could not have anticipated but must react to just the same.
The Resource Allocator Role	The third decisional role of resource allocator involves managers making decisions about who gets what, how much, when, and why. Resources, including funding, equipment, human labor, office or production space, and even the boss's time are all limited, and demand inevitably outstrips supply. Managers must make sensible decisions about such matters while still retaining, motivating, and developing the best of their employees.
The Negotiator Role	The final decisional role is that of negotiator. Managers spend considerable amounts of time in negotiations: over budget allocations, labor and collective bargaining agreements, and other formal dispute resolutions. In the course of a week, managers will often make dozens of decisions that are the result of brief but important negotiations between and among employees, customers and clients, suppliers, and others with whom managers must deal (Mintzberg, 1990).

**Decisional Role**

One of three major roles identified in Mintzberg's seminal study of managers in which managers make decisions on behalf of both the organization and the organization's stakeholders.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about the roles managers play in organizations. You were introduced to the three core management roles: Interpersonal, Informational, and Decisional. Each role was then broken down into specific characteristics that further define the nature of duties performed within them. For instance, the **Interpersonal Role** comprises how managers form and maintain professional relationships both within and outside the organization, in the roles of figurehead, leader, and liaison. In the **Informational Role**, managers are required to gather, collate, analyze, store, and disseminate many kinds of information. This type of role involves managers playing the part of a monitor, a disseminator, and a spokesperson. Lastly, in the **Decisional Role**, a manager is responsible for making decisions on behalf of both the organization and its stakeholders; this role may involve decisions made by a manager through the lens of entrepreneur, crisis handler, resource allocator, or negotiator—and often with the assistance of the Interpersonal and Informational Roles.

Best of luck in your learning!

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- Mintzberg, H. (1990, March-April). The manager's job: Folklore and fact. *Harvard Business Review*, 68(2), 166–168. hbr.org/1990/03/the-managers-job-folklore-and-fact



TERMS TO KNOW

Decisional Role

One of three major roles identified in Mintzberg's seminal study of managers in which managers make decisions on behalf of both the organization and the organization's stakeholders.

Informational Role

One of three major roles identified in Mintzberg's seminal study of managers in which managers gather, collate, analyze, store, and disseminate many kinds of information both within and outside the organization.

Interpersonal Role

One of three major roles identified in Mintzberg's seminal study of managers in which managers form and maintain professional relationships both within and outside the organization.