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MANAGING PROFESSIONAL PEOPLE

Understanding Creative Performance

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华南工学院
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Introduction

THE MANAGEMENT of creative workers has become the most critical area faced by managements in both the private and public sectors. Without a great deal of fanfare, creative workers, or, more strictly, professionals, have come center stage in the United States and in the rest of the developed world. Quantitatively, professionals now surpass all other categories in the work force of the United States. Qualitatively, professionals have a disproportionate effect on all aspects of our society, as the researchers, designers, decision makers, and managers who define and direct much of what is done in society. The quality and extent of what is accomplished in the foreseeable future have become a function of the ability of managements to harness and channel the efforts of creative workers. The difference in success between one effort and another, one organization and another, increasingly depends on whether management understands the differences between the management of professional activities and the management relevant to the assembly line.

An early definition of the term *profession* was "a particular order of monks, nuns or other professed persons" (compact edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary,* 1971). More recent is the definition "a vocation in which a professed knowledge of some department of learning or science is used in its application to the affairs of others or used in the practice of an art founded upon it" (ibid.), and a *professional* is one who "belongs to one of the learned or skilled professions" (ibid.). Social scientists use the term profession to denote "occupations which demand a highly specialized knowledge and skill acquired at least in part by courses of more or less theoretical nature and not by practice alone, tested by some form of examination either at a university or some other unauthorized institution, and conveying to the persons who possess them considerable authority in relation to 'clients.' . . . Such authority is carefully maintained . . . by guildlike associations of the practitioners . . . which lay down rules of entry, training, and behavior in relation to the public . . . and watch over their professional status" (J. Gould and William A. Kolb, eds., *A Dictionary of the Social Sciences,* New York: The Free Press, 1964).

In modern society a professional is usually someone who has completed the equivalent of at least a baccalaureate degree that has the number and mix of courses certified by some professional society. The members of the profession identify themselves in terms of their profession and have expectations of status and treatment on the job that are clearly different from those of people in skilled and unskilled trades and blue-collar and white-collar work. Because of the status attributed to the professions, occupations constantly attempt to be identified as professions by restricting entry through special educational requirements, examinations, licensing, and the establishment of a code of ethics. Furthermore, would-be professions are marked by calling for "more professionalism" and institutionalizing what is considered professional and nonprofessional behavior in the occupation.

To be a professional has very positive social connotations, and members of a profession identify strongly with their profession even when there is an apparent conflict between employer and profession. It is quite in character to call on professionals to "blow the whistle" on an employer when the employer is seen as doing something in conflict with the standards of the profession or contrary to the public good. The word *profession* still carries something of its earlier definition as a religious "order," and the more narrow definitions used today of clergy, medical doctors, and lawyers (the so-called free professions) characterize what all professions reach for.

Where once professionals were few in number relative to the total working population, today they are far more numerous relatively and absolutely. The proportion of the work force that can be designated as professionals is steadily increasing. In 1979 (*Statistical Abstract of the United States*, 1979), over fifteen million workers were classified as professional and technical workers as compared with a little over eleven million in 1970 and approximately seven and a half million in 1960. In 1979, professional and technical workers constituted just under 16% of the total work force as compared with 14% in 1970 and a little over 11% in 1960. If we admit managers and administrators to the ranks of professionals, the numbers go up to twenty-five and a half million and 27% in 1979 as compared with nineteen and a half million and 25% in 1970 and fourteen and a half million and 22% in 1960.

By all measures professionals make up the largest single category in the work force of the United States, surpassing those classified as "craft and kindred workers," "operatives" of all kinds, "service workers," and "clerical workers." Further, the numbers shown above refer only to those employed in industry and do not include the substantial number of professional workers to be found among the self-employed, who numbered over six million in 1979. The self-employed include those physicians, lawyers, other health professionals, and consultants of all kinds who work by themselves or in group practices. The list of those classifiable as professionals includes architects, accountants, engineers, scientists of all kinds, doctors, dentists, nurses, pharmacists, lawyers, designers, librarians, computer specialists, editors, journalists, managers, clergy, dieticians, advertising specialists, statisticians, and on and on.

There are many reasons for the growth in the professional work force, among which are (1) the steep growth in technology requiring specialists, (2) the growth in large organizations requiring the services of many technical specialists, and (3) the sharp increase in the number of educated people who generate a demand for professional status.

Ours is the era of the "knowledge society" or of the "information revolution." Increasingly our society and economy are shaped by special bodies of knowledge, and by those who possess them—these are the professionals, and their management is the subject of this book.

HOW PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES DIFFER FROM OTHER ACTIVITIES

Mapping the world of work in terms of the types of activity carried out and the types of human resources required, the results can be roughly depicted as in Figure I–1. Work activities can be distributed along a dimension of increasing uncertainty. At one extreme are those activities that are denoted by being essentially routine. They are predictable, stable, and specifiable. Consequently, they are relatively easy to plan and budget. They lend themselves to long-run operations. All of the conditions describing routine activities tend to make them process-dominated. To meet the conditions of predictability, stability and specifiability over time managers must understand and control the process.

At the other extreme of the dimension are the activities that are most unpredictable, those that can be described as one-of-a-kind. One-of-a-kind activities are essentially unspecifiable or predictable and are least amenable to the arts of estimation and budgeting. Such activities are inherently human-dominated, for when one is unable to predict the nature of a process one inserts a human, a substitute for oneself, to do what is needed within the unpredictable context. If it is to be done at all, a one-of-a-kind activity will be dominated by a human.

The types of human resources required by different kinds of work activity are distributed along a dimension of knowledge

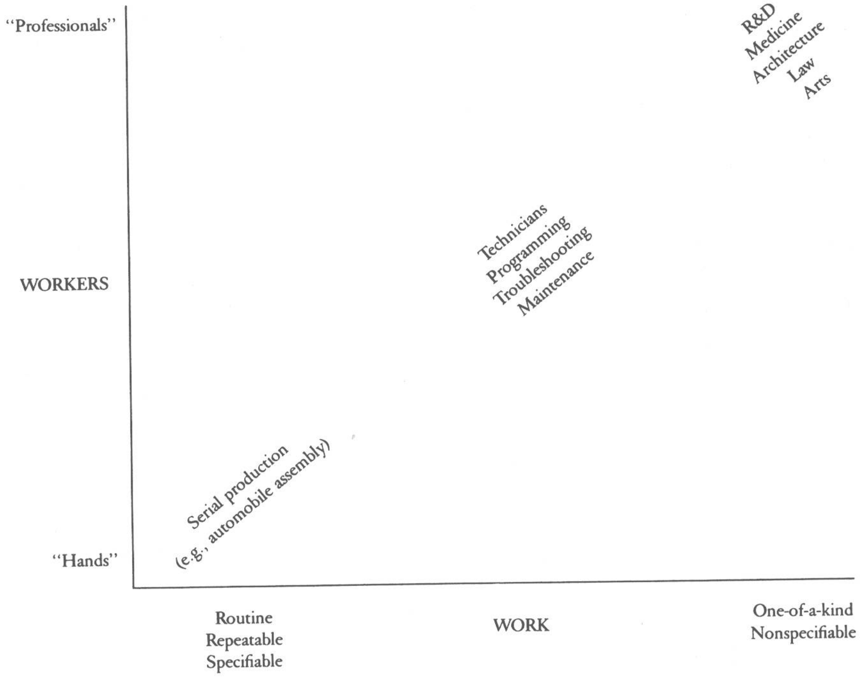
"Professionals"
WORKERS
"Hands"
Routine
Repeatable
Specifiable
WORK
One-of-a-kind
Nonspecifiable
Serial production (e.g., automobile assembly)
Technicians
Programming
Troubleshooting
Maintenance
R&D
Medicine
Architecture
Law
Arts

FIGURE I–1. A Map of the World of Work

required and decision-making. At one extreme of the dimension are found those referred to as "hands," those who essentially perform motor activities with a minimum of autonomous decision-making. At the other extreme of the dimension are those referred to as "professionals," who have a special body of knowledge and who are called upon for significant judgment and decision-making in carrying out their work.

Exploring the map, it is easy to locate all work activities and the kinds of management they require. In the corner of the map, where routine activities performed by "hands" are located, we find serial production activities typified by the automobile assembly line, parodied by Charlie Chaplin in the classic movie *Modern Times.* At the other extreme corner of the map, where one-of-a-kind activities performed by "professionals" are located, are a host of diagnostic, consultative, prescriptive activities characterized by the knowledgeable transformation of information from one form into another. In the center of the map are those activities clustered under such terms as "semiprofessional" or "technician activities"; these include equipment maintenance, trouble-shooting, programming, and other jobs combining high motor skills with special knowledge.

There is an implicit assumption in most writing on management that management is the same for all activities. However, any close examination of both successful and failed managerial practices quickly establishes the fact that the management appropriate for assembly line operations is inappropriate to professional activities, if not downright harmful. Managing the routine activities exemplified by an automobile assembly line includes:

1. The layout of the entire process before beginning operations with all subprocesses specified
2. Decision as to how each part of the process is to be done, including all input and output characteristics
3. Where humans are to be used in the process, the requisite human and physical characteristics are specified and distributed, including dexterity levels, non-color blindness, physical size restrictions—for example, during World War II, the Douglas Aircraft Company used human midgets to work on aircraft nose-wheel assembly and inspection operations because they were of a size to ride the wheel up into the fuselage conveniently
4. The development of very explicit job descriptions in which the requisite human activities are distributed and clustered into human-sized packages to which are assigned titles, compensation levels, and positions in the organizational hierarchy
5. The hiring of people with the requisite skill and physical characteristics and in appropriate numbers to operate the process—testing and other forms of measurement are used in this step to make sure that those hired "fill the bill" of specifications
6. Training those hired to perform the work required to the specified standards

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7. Developing and applying incentives of various kinds to assure performance of the work required by the process in the appropriate time
8. Continuing supervision of the process to assure that it is being performed as specified; the techniques that fill management magazines are clustered here, including flextime, suggestion systems, piece rates, production prizes, quality circles, and foreman training in interpersonal skills; production line quality control is dedicated to measuring and taking steps to assure that the process works within the prespecified limits. Personnel practices are used to assure that the assemblers will maintain their quantitative and qualitative production within prespecified limits.

The qualities that are most desired in assembly line activities are dependability, predictability, and steadiness. About the last quality desired is creativity. The creative assembler is the person who puts the proverbial soda bottle in the automobile door to rattle and tantalize the owner. The creative operator in the middle of a petroleum refinery can be a dangerous person if the urge to try out something new finds expression in new valve settings.

By contrast, when it comes to the one-of-a-kind activities performed by professionals, the management described for assembly line activities is clearly inappropriate. First of all the process cannot be specified. Any professional who has taken over a project or patient or operation in mid-stream knows that the first thing to be done is to change the way the process is conducted. Changing the process is not a product of the perversity and egotism of individuals. It is simply that to reach a specified output from a specified starting point each professional carries out the process differently. After the desired results and the general kind of human capabilities required are given by the manager, the professional doing the job is in control of the specifics. To intervene is to slow and confound the process.

For professional work, management must hire someone with the requisite general capabilities, and then let go of the details of the process. Anyone who has had experience as a professional or manager of professionals has heard the exasperated response given to detailed supervision, "Look! Either you're going to do it or let me do it!" There is really no way successfully to apply the personnel practices appropriate to mass production to the management of professionals. As long as the process cannot be specified in detail it is not possible to spell out the specific requisite skills and to train people for them. In the context of professional work, job descriptions are at best glittering generalities; "Do science in a scientific manner, and answer the phone in the absence of the boss."

All routine, specifiable tasks are theoretically automatable, and it is no accident that robots are replacing people on the automobile assembly line. On the other hand professional work is unspecifiable, it is dependent on situation and problem, and requires the judgment, ingenuity, and creativity of an individual possessing a particular body of knowledge. Whenever a professional is doing routine and specifiable work you can be sure that it is nonprofessional work, e.g., the physician giving shots, the engineer doing routine testing, the professor administering multiple-choice tests, the accountant doing set-piece bookkeeping.

The techniques developed for managing assembly lines are not appropriate to the management of professional activities. Most management literature is written to explain and advise on the management of routine and specifiable jobs, and is consequently inappropriate to the management of professional activities. In their efforts to improve performance, professional societies often advocate the use of so-called modern management techniques by their membership, and many consultants with business administration backgrounds have sincerely sold their repertoires of techniques appropriate to General Motors to organizations concerned with professional activities. In most cases, the attempts to apply techniques developed for the routine and specifiable to professional activities make little difference since, according to Shapero's Second Law, "No matter how you design a system, humans make it work anyway." Elaborate job description systems are devised that have little effect except to encourage political skirmishing. "New" organizational structures are elaborately installed, such as Matrix organization. ZBB, MBO, OR, Quality Circles, and Theory Z (courtesy of the Japanese who learned their management techniques from the Americans), are sold, installed, modified, and forgotten in rapid sequence. In some cases the application of inappropriate management techniques to professional firms has been disastrous, particularly for smaller firms that lack the resources to survive large perturbations.

If professional activities are not specifiable and humans make all systems work anyway, why should we even bother to talk about "management" of professional activities? The foregoing is a good question, and the answer is definite: we can do far better than chance, and we can do far better than depending on the natural skills and expensively acquired lessons of experience. A better understanding of what is known about the nature and management of professional activities can provide us with the knowledge and tools to do more than cut and try, and systematically to improve the overall performance of the professional activities for which we are responsible.

The available literature is scattered throughout several fields under a variety of classifications. It is the purpose of this book to bring the available data together and to organize it in terms of the processes and structures critical to this particular world of management. The information used here is drawn from such diverse areas as information science, the diffusion of innovations literature, personnel research, advertising research, the history of science and technology, the psychology and sociology of creativity, the history of art, the physiology and sociology of age and aging, labor economics, organization behavior, and the psychology of work, as well as the traditional fields of business administration and the occasional offerings to be found in trade and professional journals of the professions.

This book is concerned with the management of professional activities in organizational contexts. It is intended for use by those charged with managing professional activities in large and small firms, whether they are primarily concerned with professional outputs (as is true of architectural and other design-related firms, advertising, consulting, the health professions, and the like), or serve as functional parts of organizations delivering non-professional products and services (such as the R & D, design, and advertising functions in an industrial or consumer products company). The book is also aimed at that broader category of professional activities called "management," and is concerned with providing useful information for the management of managers.

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1

Hiring: The Most Important Management Decision

THE PROFESSIONAL WORKER is *the* critical resource in any professional activity. All other resources, without exception, are far down the list in terms of importance in the achievement of professional outputs. Further, the most important management decision in the conduct of professional activities is hiring. All other decisions have far less effect in determining the capabilities, productivity, quality, and quantity of output achieved by a professional organization than the apparently simple task of hiring.

The importance of the hiring decision cannot be overemphasized. Professional activities are person-dependent, and consequently the quality of the work produced is dependent on the qualities of those hired. It is possible for management to influence the quality and quantity of output of those hired, but management is severely constrained by the capabilities and outlooks of those hired. If one hires well, the chances are that the organizational output will be more than satisfactory. If one hires badly, no matter what management techniques are used

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