

The Manager's Job: Folklore and Fact

By Henry Mintzberg, Harvard Business Review, July-August, 1975

Managers work at an unrelenting pace. They are strongly oriented towards action and dislike reflective activities. Managerial work involves a number of regular duties like collecting and processing information. Managers often prefer verbal means of communication, telephone calls and meetings to formal MIS reports. Management is less of a science. It involves a lot of judgment and intuition.

Managers play three kinds of roles:

- Interpersonal
- Informational
- Decisional

Interpersonal roles

- Managers play the **figure head** role and perform ceremonial duties such as taking a customer out for lunch.
- Managers are also **supervisors** and responsible for the work of people within their department.
- Managers have to **liaison** with peers and other people outside their units.

Informational roles

Processing information is a key managerial role.

- As a **monitor**, the manager is perpetually scanning the environment for information, questioning contacts and subordinates and often receiving unsolicited information through informal networks
- As a **disseminator**, the manager sends information to team members.
- As a **spokesperson**, the manager sends information to people outside the unit.

Decisional roles

The manager has a major role to play when it comes to taking decisions for the unit.

As an **entrepreneur**, a manager must try to improve the working of the unit and help it to adapt to the changing environment. This role is tied to the monitor role where the manager is constantly looking out for new ideas. In the entrepreneurial role, the manager is voluntarily initiating change.

In the **disturbance handler** role, the manager involuntarily responds to pressures. A customer escalation, or supplier not meeting his commitment are examples of such disturbances.

As a **resource allocator**, a manager decides who gets what including his/her time. The manager also prepares the org chart, defines roles and responsibilities and lays down how work will be divided and coordinated.

As a **negotiator**, a manager plays a mediatory role in resolving disputes. For example, there may be a negotiation with the labour union or a star employee demanding a big salary hike.

The ten roles mentioned above are not easily separable. Managers must reflect on their work and keep looking for ways to improve.

Managers need to share information with the team in a systematic way, rather than depending exclusively on informal and verbal mechanisms.

Managers tend to take on too much work, encourage interruption, respond quickly to any situation, focus on tangible and abstract issues and make incremental decisions. Managers must learn to prioritise and spend more time on the more important issues. They must learn to step back and look at the bigger picture. Managers must learn to take inputs from specialists while taking decisions.

Managers are always hard pressed for time. To gain control of their time, they must learn to convert obligations into advantages. A speech is a chance to lobby, a meeting a chance to reorganize the department and a customer visit is an opportunity to gain useful information and meet peers. Managers must learn to convert their priorities into obligations. If innovation is important, they must initiate projects and obligate team members to report to them regularly.

To be effective, managers need various skills- developing peer relationships, carrying out negotiations, motivating subordinates, resolving conflicts, establishing information networks, making decisions in uncertain situations and allocating resources. Classroom training alone cannot impart such skills. People have to be put on the job and given feedback on their performance. Business Schools must find ways to put students into situations where managerial skills can be practiced and developed.