

Mintzberg and Managing

Overview

Born in 1939, Henry Mintzberg is a distinguished professor and author of management studies. Mintzberg received an undergraduate degree in Mechanical Engineering from McGill University in Montreal, earned a Master's degree and PhD in management from MIT, and worked at the Canadian National Railways in Operational Research. He is currently the Cleghorn Professor of Management Studies at McGill. In addition, he has taught at universities throughout the United States, France, and England. He is also a founding partner of CoachingOurselves.com, an organization whose mission is focused on improving manager's skills and leadership abilities.

Mintzberg is the author of numerous works on management including *Managers Not MBAs*, *Tracking Strategies*, and *Managing*. He is currently working on a study called *Managing the Myths of Health Care* and a series of electronic pamphlets titled *Rebalancing Society...Radical Renewal beyond Left, Right, and Center*.

He has collaborated with other management educators in Canada, England, France, India, Japan, China, and Brazil to develop new approaches to management education and development. His programs include the International Masters in Practicing Management, the Advanced Leadership Program, and the International Masters for Health Leadership. Each of these programs enables managers to improve their knowledge of managerial practices, which often builds upon their own past experiences.

Overall, Mintzberg has published over 150 articles and books. He was selected for the Academy of Management's Distinguished Scholar in 2000 and received two McKinsey prizes for articles published in the *Harvard Business Review*. A discussion of his viewpoints on management will be discussed in this reading.

Education and Management

Considered to be one of the world's top business management thinkers, Mintzberg has long-believed that management education needs to be overhauled. As a graduate student at MIT, he was astonished to discover that so little attention was given to management studies and practices. To further the idea that management education was important, he based his first book, *The Nature of Managerial Work* on his thesis.

Mintzberg has been critical of traditional MBA programs and as a result, he has worked to develop several management education programs including the IMPM (International Masters Program in Practicing Management), where individuals who are already managers come to share their knowledge and experiences and seek new ways of improving their managerial skills. Participants sit at round tables for easy discussion and

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what he calls *friendly consulting*. Mintzberg's involvement in the IMHL (International Masters for Health Leadership) at McGill provides management programs for those involved in the healthcare field worldwide. His eRoundtable program provides educational opportunities for students from around the world.

Mintzberg's independent study program, CoachingOurselves.com builds upon his previous educational ventures. This program enables groups of experienced managers to assemble with or without coaches, discuss their managerial issues, learn from each other, and address topics of relevance. This international program is used by hundreds of organizations and has been a major catalyst in transforming managerial education practices throughout the globe.

Mintzberg's Theory of Management

On a daily basis, managers are faced with numerous interruptions requiring constant decision-making and action. When Mintzberg first pointed this out, everyone felt that his comments were obvious. The difference was that no one else had thought to write it down. He observed that a majority of managers are just trying to keep things steadily moving without having to deal with the traditionally defined approach to management which combines aspects of planning, organizing, coordinating, and controlling. He believes that managers just do not have the time for such a rigidly defined approach. Management is "neither a science nor a profession. It's a practice." On any given day, the content of what a manager faces changes at a rapid pace, requiring the manager to make decisions based on the task at hand.

Mintzberg believes that technology and email have had a negative impact on our abilities to manage effectively. The proliferation of these tools, he feels, actually creates more pressure on workplace leaders and business executives. He posits that the recent financial crisis is at least partially rooted in the increased pressures placed on managers that have coincided with technological developments. He insists that we are actually dealing with a crisis of management, and that if left untreated will continue for years to come.

These problems cannot be solved by simply implementing a strategic planning process. Mintzberg's view is that business problems should be addressed as they occur. Just as in life, we learn how to solve managerial issues through experience. He believes that strategies emerge as problems are solved. In a recent interview, Mintzberg discussed the way in which IKEA's business model came about. He talks about how some of IKEA's managers were attempting to transport a table that would not fit into a vehicle. They decided to remove the legs to make it fit. One of the managers then realized that if they were unable to transport the table, then their customers would not be able to transport it either. This observation resulted in a company-wide strategy of selling all of IKEA's furniture disassembled and in boxes.

Focus and the Bottom Line

When managers only focus on the bottom line, an organization will lose its sense of community. Companies are made up of people at all levels and when the focus is solely on a goal that a leader or manager must meet, then the importance of community is lost.

Mintzberg firmly believes that managers should not be given huge salaries or bonuses. Asking for excessive compensation is one of the reasons why they should not be hired in the first place as it illustrates that they are not actually team players.

Summary:

- Mintzberg was the first to observe and document that managers' daily actions are based on the problems they face rather than on a formalized strategic plan.
- Mintzberg believes that strategies for problem solving will emerge as a result of a manager's experiences.
- A rigid focus on the bottom line will result in an organization losing the importance of community.
- Managers who ask for large salaries and bonuses are not team players and should not be hired.