

An Excerpt From

Simply Managing
What Managers Do— and Can Do Better

by Henry Mintzberg

Published by Berrett-Koehler Publishers

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What Managers Do—
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SIMPLY MANAGING

**What Managers Do—
And Can Do Better**

HENRY MINTZBERG



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Simply Managing

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Welcome to *Simply Managing*

This book is written for practicing managers, about their practice of management, and for the many other people influenced by and interested in that practice. It may be especially helpful for new managers befuddled by this strange new world of managing. *Simply Managing* is a substantially condensed and somewhat revised version of my book *Managing* (2009), to focus on its essence for busy readers.

The boldface sentences summarize the key points in this book and so serve as a running commentary throughout. (There are no chapter summaries; I believe that these sentences do that job more effectively.) Use them if you are the harried manager described in Chapter 2, and probe around them if you wish to be the reflective manager prescribed in Chapter 5. To help, here is an overview of the six chapters:

- *Chapter 1* opens things up by questioning a number of common **myths** about managing—for example, that leadership is more important than management. This chapter is short but necessary for what follows, so please read it!

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- *Chapter 2* describes the **relentless pressures** on managers—the hectic pace, the interruptions, the disorder that has to be ordered, and more. Slow down and have a look—you may find some surprises.
- *Chapter 3* addresses the basic content of the job—**what managers do and why**. Managing is described as happening on three “planes”: through information, with people, and for action. The boldface sentences may come in especially handy here.
- *Chapter 4* considers the untold **varieties** of managing: in different cultures; at different levels of the hierarchy; practiced as art, craft, and science; and so on. The boldface sentences can direct you to some conclusions you may not be expecting.
- *Chapter 5* goes to the heart of what makes managing difficult: the **conundrums** that force every manager to walk on all kinds of tightropes concurrently. For example: How to connect in a job that is intrinsically disconnected? How to maintain confidence without becoming arrogant? I believe this is the most important chapter of the book: read it to face the unresolvable aspects of the job, rather than trying to resolve them.
- *Chapter 6* looks at what makes managers **effective**. Don’t expect the usual exhortations here. Appreciate, instead, that managers should be selected for their flaws as well as their strengths (and who is to know these better than the people they have managed), that the best managers often prove to be clearheaded and emotionally healthy, and more. Enough of heroic leadership—it’s time for engaging management!

1 Managing Beyond the Myths

What management is and isn't

A half century ago Peter Drucker (1954) put management on the map. Leadership has since pushed it off the map. We are now inundated with great stories about the grand successes and even grander failures of great leaders, but we have yet to come to grips with the realities of being a manager.

This is a book about managing, simply managing—even if the job is not simple. It considers the characteristics, contents, and varieties of the job, as well as the conundrums faced by managers, and how they become effective. My objective is straightforward. Managing is important for anyone affected by its practice, which means not just managers, but everyone. We all need to understand it better, in order that it be practiced better. Some of the questions addressed in the book include these:

- Are managers too busy managing?
- Is leadership really separate from management?
- Is the Internet hindering managers as it helps them?

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- How are managers to connect when the very nature of their job disconnects them from what they are managing?
- Where has all the judgment gone?

For years I have been asking groups of people in this job, “What happened the day you became a manager? Were you offered any guidance at all?” The response has almost always been the same: puzzled looks, then shrugs. You are supposed to figure it out for yourself, like sex, I suppose, usually with equally embarrassing initial consequences. Yesterday you were playing the flute or doing surgery; today you find yourself managing people who are doing these things. Everything has changed, yet you are on your own, confused and overwhelmed. This book is meant to help, not by offering easy answers—there are none—but by encouraging deeper understanding.

SOME SOBERING REALITY

In the late 1960s, for my doctoral dissertation, I observed five managers during one week each. The result was my first book, *The Nature of Managerial Work* (1973). In the 1990s, I revisited that work, spending a day observing each of 29 managers in a variety of settings—business, government, health care, NGOs—at senior, middle, and operating levels, in organizations ranging from 18 to 800,000 employees (see Figure 1). The insights were revealing, and sobering. (Full descriptions of these days, and what I learned from them, can be found on www.mintzberg-managing.com.) I used these findings in my 2009 book *Managing*. ***Simply Managing* is a shortened version of *Managing*, reduced to**

its essence for managers and everyone else interested in management. Here is some of that sobering reality.

“Top” managers take the long view, see the “big picture”; “lower”-level managers deal with the narrower, immediate things. So why was Gord Irwin, front country manager of the Banff National Park in Canada, so concerned with the environmental consequences of a parking lot expansion at a ski hill, while back in Ottawa, Norman Inkster, commissioner of the whole Royal Canadian Mounted Police, was watching clips of last night’s television news to head off embarrassing questions to his minister in Parliament that day?

And why was Jacques Benz, director-general of GSI, a high-technology company in Paris, sitting in on a meeting about a customer’s project? He was a senior manager, after all. Shouldn’t he have been back in his office developing grand strategies? Paul Gilding, executive director of Greenpeace International, was trying to do just that, with considerable frustration. Who had it right?

One of the managers I studied was Alan Whelan in Global Computing and Electronics at BT in the U.K. Because he was a sales manager, you might have expected him to have been meeting customers, or at least working with his people to help them sell to customers. On this day, Alan was selling, all right, but to an executive of his own company, who was reluctant to sign off on his biggest contract. To use the conventional words of managing, was Alan planning, organizing, commanding, coordinating, or controlling?

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FIGURE 1 The Twenty-Nine Managers Observed*

| | BUSINESS | GOVERNMENT |
|------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Management Overall ("Top") | <i>John Cleghorn</i> CEO Royal Bank of Canada | <i>John Tate</i> Deputy Minister, Canadian Department of Justice (Ottawa) |
| | <i>Jacques Benz</i> Director-General, GSI (Paris) | <i>Norm Inkster</i> Commissioner, Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP, Ottawa) |
| | <i>Carol Haslam</i> Managing Director, Hawkshead Ltd. (film company, London) | |
| | <i>Max Mintzberg</i> Co-president, The Telephone Booth (retail chain, Montreal) | |
| | | |
| Management in Between ("Middle") | <i>Brian Adams</i> Director, Global Express, Canadair (Bombardier, Montreal) | <i>Glen Rivard</i> General Counsel, Family and Youth Law, Canadian Department of Justice (Ottawa) |
| | <i>Alan Whelan</i> Sales Manager, Global Computing and Electronics Sector, BT (London) | <i>Doug Ward</i> Director of Programming CBC Radio (Ottawa) |
| | | <i>Allen Burchill</i> Commanding Officer, "H" Division, RCMP (Halifax) |
| | | <i>Sandra Davis</i> Regional Director-General, Parks Canada (Calgary) |
| | | <i>Charlie Zinkan</i> Superintendent Banff National Park (Alberta) |
| Management at the Base ("Bottom") | | <i>Gordon Irwin</i> Front Country Manager, Banff National Park (Alberta) |
| | | <i>Ralph Humble</i> Commander, New Minas Detachment, RCMP (Nova Scotia) |

*Note: Full descriptions of these days, with interpretations, can be found

| HEALTH CARE | PLURAL SECTOR |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><i>Sir Duncan Nichol</i> CEO, National Health Service of England (NHS, London)</p> <p><i>“Marc”</i> Hospital Executive Director (Quebec)</p> | <p><i>Paul Gilding</i> Executive Director, Greenpeace International (Amsterdam)</p> <p><i>Dr. Rony Brauman</i> Président Médécins sans frontières (Paris)</p> <p><i>Catherine Joint-Dieterle</i> Conservateur en chef, Musée de la mode et de la costume (Paris)</p> <p><i>Bramwell Tovey</i> Conductor, Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra</p> |
| <p><i>Peter Coe</i> District General Manager (NHS, North Hertfordshire)</p> <p><i>Ann Sheen</i> Director of Nursing Services, (NHS, Reading Hospitals)</p> | <p><i>Paul Hohnen</i> Director Toxic Trade, Forests, Economic and Political Units, Greenpeace International (Amsterdam)</p> <p><i>Abbas Gullet</i> Head of Subdelegation, International Red Cross Federation (N’gara, Tanzania)</p> |
| <p><i>Dr. Michael Thick</i> Liver Transplant Surgeon St. Mary’s Hospital (NHS, London)</p> <p><i>Dr. Stewart Webb</i> Clinical Director (Geriatrics), St. Charles Hospital (NHS, London)</p> <p><i>Fabienne Lavoie</i> Head Nurse, 4 Northwest, Jewish General Hospital (Montreal)</p> | <p><i>Stephen Omollo</i> Manager, Benac and Lukole Camps, International Red Cross Federation (N’gara, Tanzania)</p> |

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Fabienne Lavoie, head nurse on 4 Northwest, a pre- and post-operation surgical ward in a Montreal hospital, was working from 7:20 a.m. to 6:45 p.m. at a pace that exhausted this observer. At one point, in the space of a few minutes, she was discussing a dressing with a surgeon, putting through a patient's hospital card, rearranging her scheduling board, speaking with someone in reception, checking on a patient who had a fever, calling to fill in a vacancy, discussing some medication, and chatting with a patient's relative. Is managing supposed to be that hectic?

Finally, what about the famous metaphor of the manager as orchestra conductor, magnificently in charge so that the whole team can make beautiful music together? Bramwell Tovey of the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra stepped off his podium to talk about the job. "The hard part," he said, "is the rehearsal process," not the performance. That's less grand. And how about being in charge? "You have to subordinate yourself to the composer," he said. So, does the orchestra "director" actually direct the orchestra—exercise that famous leadership? "We never talk about 'the relationship.'" So much for that metaphor.

Before proceeding, it will be helpful to revisit three other prominent myths that get in the way of seeing managing for what it is: somehow separate from leadership; a science, or at least a profession; and that managers, like everyone else, live in times of great change.

ENOUGH LEADERSHIP— TIME FOR “COMMUNITYSHIP”

It has become fashionable to distinguish leaders from managers. One does the right things, copes with change; the other does things right, copes with complexity (Bennis 1989; Kotter 1990; Zaleznik 1977). So tell me, who were the leaders and who the managers in the examples just mentioned? Was Alan Whelan merely managing at BT and Bramwell Tovey merely leading—on, and off, the podium? Was Jacques Benz of GSI doing the right things or doing things right?

How would you like to be managed by someone who doesn't lead? That could be dispiriting. Well, then, why would you want to be led by someone who doesn't manage? That could be disengaging: how are such “leaders” to know what is going on? As Jim March of the Stanford Business School put it: “Leadership involves plumbing as well as poetry” (in Augier 2004:173).

I observed John Cleghorn, chairman of the Royal Bank of Canada. He developed a reputation in his company for calling the office on his way to the airport to report a broken ATM machine, and such things. This bank has thousands of such machines. Was John micromanaging? Maybe he was setting an example that others should follow: keep your eyes open for such problems.

In fact, today we should be more worried about “macroleading”—from people in senior positions who try to manage by remote control, disconnected from everything except “the big picture.” It has become popular to talk about us being overmanaged and underled. I believe **we are now overled and undermanaged.**

Instead of distinguishing leaders from managers, we should be seeing managers as leaders, and leadership as management practiced well.

Moreover, leadership focuses on the individual, whereas **this book sees managing together with leadership as naturally embedded in what can be called *communityship*.**

MANAGEMENT AS A PRACTICE, NOT A PROFESSION

After years of seeking these Holy Grails, **it is time to recognize that managing is neither a science nor a profession.**

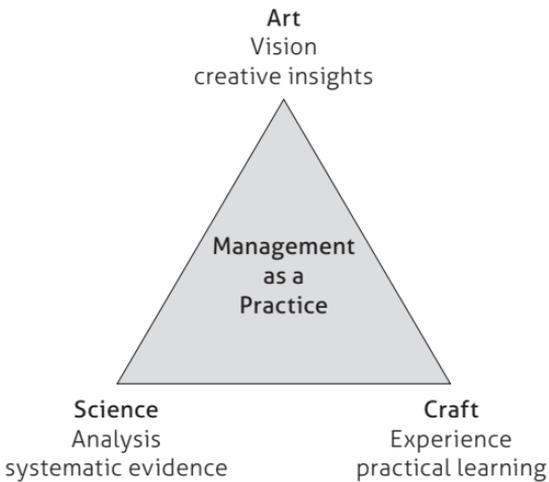
Certainly Not a Science

Science is about the development of systematic knowledge through research. That is hardly the purpose of management, which is about helping to get things done in organizations.

Management certainly *applies* science: managers have to use all the knowledge they can get. But effective managing is more dependent on art and is especially rooted in craft. Art produces “insights,” and “vision,” based on intuition. (Peter Drucker wrote in 1954 that “the days of the ‘intuitive’ manager are numbered” [p. 93]. Sixty years later, we are still counting.) And craft is about learning from experience—working things out as the manager goes along.

Thus, as shown in Figure 2, managing can be seen as taking place within a triangle where art, craft, and the use of science meet. Art brings in the ideas and the integration; craft makes

FIGURE 2 Managing as Art, Craft, Science



the connections, building on tangible experiences; and science provides the order, through systematic analysis of knowledge.

Managers deal with the messy stuff—the intractable problems, the complicated connections. This is what makes their work so fundamentally “soft” and why labels such as experience, intuition, judgment, and wisdom are so commonly needed to describe it. **Put together a good deal of craft with the right touch of art alongside some use of science, and you end up with a job that is above all a *practice*, learned through experience and rooted in context.** There is no “one best way” to manage; it depends on the situation.

Nor a Profession

Engineering, too, is not a science so much as a practice in its own right (Lewin 1979). But engineering uses a good deal of science, codified and certified as to its effectiveness. And so it can be called a profession, which means that it can be taught in advance of practice, out of context. In a sense, a bridge is a bridge, or at least steel is steel, even if its use has to be adapted to the circumstances at hand. The same can be said about medicine. But not about management. Little of its practice has been reliably codified, let alone certified as to its effectiveness. That is why Linda Hill, in her study of new managers, found that they “had to act as managers before they understood what the role was” (2003:45).

Ever since Frederick Taylor (1916) dubbed his work study method the “one best way,” we have been searching for the Holy Grail of management in science and professionalism. Today that lives on in the easy formulas of so much of the popular literature, such as “strategic planning,” and “shareholder value” (both oxymorons). Time and time again, the easy answers have failed.

In engineering and medicine, the trained expert can almost always outperform the layperson. Not so in management. Few of us would trust the intuitive engineer or physician, with no formal training. Yet we trust all kinds of managers who have never spent a day in a management classroom (and we have suspicions about many who have spent two years in an MBA programs [see my book *Managers, Not MBAs* [2004]]).

The true professional knows better, as does the true scientist. But managers who believe they know better get in the way of their practice, because it has to be largely one of facilitation.

The manager, by the definition used here, is responsible for an organization or some unit in it. To use that old saying, managers get things done largely through other people. Managers have to know a lot, especially about their specific contexts, and they have to make decisions based on that knowledge. But, especially in large organizations and those concerned with “knowledge work,” **the manager has to help bring out the best in other people, so that they can know better, decide better, and act better.**

MANAGING'S NOT CHANGING

This book draws on research from deep in the last century into our new millennium. My own twenty-nine days of observation took place in the 1990s. Books these days are not supposed to do such things—they are expected to be terribly up-to-date.

Let's try the reverse: terribly up-to-date can get in the way. We risk being mesmerized by the present and biased by the stories we “know” all too well. A little time between us and events can be a good thing.

Attend some speech on management. It is likely to begin with the claim that “we live in times of great change”—a mantra of so many managers. As you hear this, look at the clothes you are wearing. Notice the buttons, and ask yourself why, if we really live in times of great change, we are still buttoning buttons? Indeed, how come you drove to that speech in a car powered by an internal combustion four-cycle engine? Wasn't that used in the Model T Ford?

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Why didn't you notice those buttons when you dressed this morning or that old technology when you drove to work? After all, when you arrived there, you did notice some change in the operating system of your computer. **The fact is that we only notice what is changing. And most things are not.** Information technology has been changing; we all notice that. Same with the economy of late. How about managing?

“For all the fashionable hype about leadership, it is unfashionable management that is being practiced and its fundamental characteristics have not changed” (Hales 2001:54). Managers deal with different issues as time moves forward, but not with different managing. If you doubt this, rent a good old movie about people managing a business or a war. Or look at the examples from the 1990s presented earlier in this chapter: did any of these strike you as out of date?

In this book, I draw on many years of research about managing, some of it going back almost a century. I do this simply because I wish to use the best insight we have, and, as you shall see, some of the oldest are among the best. Managing is managing.

As I hope has become evident in this opening chapter, I have written this book not to reinforce conventional wisdom—to add to all that stuffy managerial correctness—but to open up perspectives, so that we can all probe, ponder, and wonder about managing. I don't want you to leave this book knowing. I want you to leave it, as I do, imagining, reflecting, questioning. **Managers are only as good as their ability to work things out thoughtfully in their own way.** As you will see in Chapter 5,

this is a job of paradoxes, dilemmas, and mysteries that cannot be resolved. The only guaranteed result of any formula for managing is failure (including this one of course).

So off we go, to the delights, duties, and distresses of the ancient and contemporary practice of managing.

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