

Motivation, Negotiation, Power and Communication

PTOLEMAIC PARADIGM

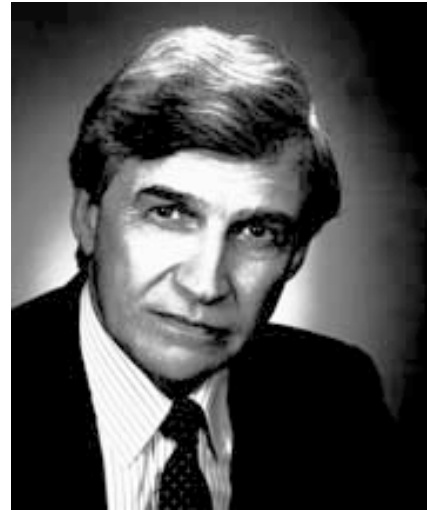
by Terrence Heath

Charlie Chaplin, as the poor, funny little worker from *Modern Times* who walks home after a day at the factory with his body still twisting as if he was at the assembly line turning that one nut on that one piece of that mysterious product being spewed out at some distance down the line, is the summation of what Peter Drucker has recently called the Second Revolution, the application of knowledge to labour. (The First was the application of knowledge to technology and led to the Industrial Revolution; the Third, even now in formation, is the application of knowledge to knowledge.) No civilization has been so efficient in harnessing its labour force and in reaching our level of productivity from its workers. Every year, as I prepare for my course in management at the University of Toronto, I reread Frederick Taylor and skim through Weber, in part just to reconfirm they actually said what they did say. No one today writing on management would dare say what they said, but we are all still working within the paradigm of their thinking. Which leads me to some thoughts I have had about this paradigm and its future.

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One of those momentous books which change our thinking for all time was for me the 1958 publication of Thomas Kuhn, entitled *The Nature of Scientific Revolutions*. Basically, Kuhn argues that scientific advance does not happen smoothly through the slow acquisition of data and the rational and experimental application of objective thought. Rather, it comes from the positing of a comprehensive but basically simple theory which not only replaces previous work emanating from an earlier theoretical paradigm, but also sets out a workplan for generations of scientists. The interesting aspect of this for management theory is some of the ways by which these scientific revolutions in thought occur: as generation after generation of

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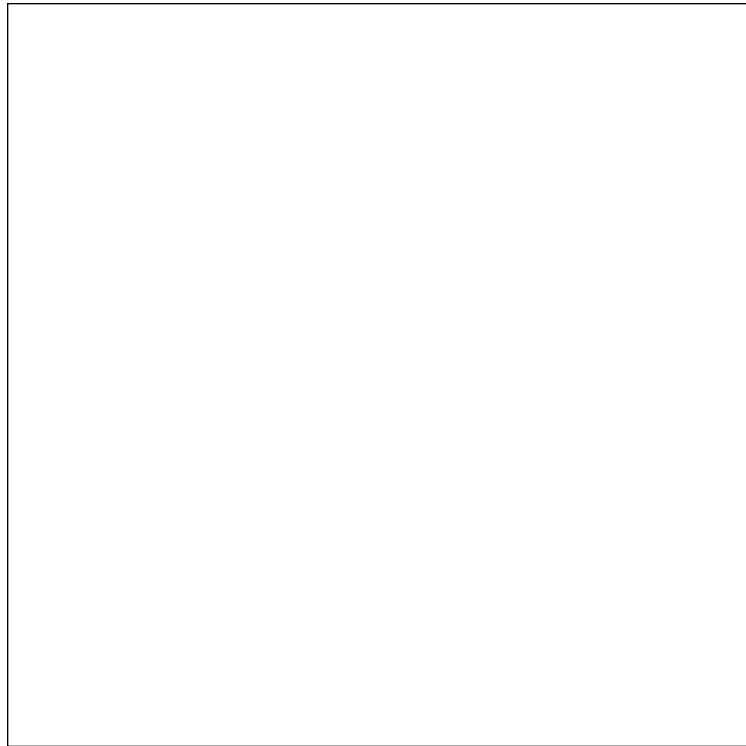
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scientists work on exploring the implications of the theory, modifications and adaptations have to be made to accommodate new discoveries and situations which do not fit comfortably in the paradigm. Witness the Ptolemaic cosmology. The theory of the earth-centered universe with its concentric circles emanating from the planet was posited and for centuries thinkers from astrologers to astronomers to theologians investigated its implications both from observation and faith. One of the characteristic adaptations of the perfect universe presented by Ptolemy was the use of ellipses to “explain” obvious deviations in the actual movements of planets and stars. We have been taught or led to assume that Copernicus was a genius who, with a new scientific (read “good”) mind, saw through the medieval nonsense and righted the situation by declaring the sun the center of the universe. Actually, this picture needs to be balanced by the knowledge that by Copernicus’ time the Ptolemaic theory was so encumbered by ellipses and exceptions that it had really collapsed on its own.

The Ptolemaic-Copernican example is useful, I think, in our trying to look at the present situation in management theory. For we are in a very advanced stage of the paradigm, perhaps even witnessing its collapse. The post-industrial, post-capitalist, post-modern time we proclaim as ours may, in fact, be more correctly described as post-paradigmatic. But where is the new theory? I don’t think it has made its appearance, in spite of all the



The Ptolemaic universe, showing the earth at the centre surrounded by the elements of water, air (in the form of clouds) and fire. From G. Reisch, *Margarita Philosophiae*, Heidelberg, 1504.

“clover leaf” organization, leadership razzmatazz, matrix management, flattening hierarchies, and the much heralded information revolution. No one has as far as I know, brought it all together. I think, however, it is possible to describe some of the ellipses encumbering the old, scientific management paradigm.

The first set of ellipses comes from within management thought itself even though they have been borrowed from other fields of inquiry. These are: Motivation; Negotiation, Power and Communication. Perhaps no field of management theory has been so profoundly rethought as the field of motivation. It is, of course, a result of the extraordinary growth of psychological research. The investigation of motivation has expanded from the very limited assumption that people are motivated by money to the birth-to-death, whole-person hierarchy of motivational factors of Maslow and others. Every stage in the motivational schemata modifies the basic tenets of scientific management, from the double flow of authority and accountability to the development of efficiency.

Negotiation is an area in which the ellipse is a bit harder to define. The system I work with in public service is called Results Management. One of the central acts in the planning process which

The old paradigm came from engineers ... the new one may come from anthropology.

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is designed to focus managerial efforts on getting results (outcomes rather than just outputs in the jargon) and to support a move toward empowerment is the signing of managerial contracts. These are agreements between one level of management and another on the desired results and the bases for monitoring and measuring accomplishments. Basically, however, the entire system rests on the central role of negotiation from the initial devising of strategic plans to the monitoring of tasks. The hierarchy of responsibility is still in place but the hierarchy of authority has been modified sufficiently that the operations of the organization are radically different from the paradigm of scientific management.

The third ellipse has always been there but usually unnamed or left to the non-theoretical part of the workplace. This ellipse is what I would call a Power ellipse. It is the constant struggle to assert dominance in the workplace. Power has of late become a pejorative or, at least, suspect term. However, “power” comes from the same root as “potential” and I would argue that the exercise of power is one of the most fundamental acts of any organization both externally and internally. I would also quickly add, that I am not talking about the misuse of power, which comes in many forms and needs to be dealt with in any well-managed organization. In the case of power, it is very much present in the scientific management paradigm but the form it takes there—decision-making at the top, exercise of authority from the top down, ranking of tasks—is, I think, in the process of dramatic rethinking.

The last ellipse, of Communication, is the most baffling and difficult to grasp of them all. It seems to me that although we claim to be living in the Information Age, the least well developed aspect of management is communication. Either we talk of it in terms of technology or we present a list of platitudes about being a good listener. I have a special interest in the cybernetic ellipse of the sixties which led, I think, to the advocacy of more holistic approaches in the management literature of the 1970s. Its negative and positive feedback loops are easily taught and it modifies the paradigm by providing the concept of a feedback system for the unidirectional implementation system of the original. The ellipse was most often presented in terms of a mechanical metaphor—the heating system. Any communication ellipse for managing an organization in this age of rapid change has to have a feedback system, but I wonder if the mechanical metaphor is the one we want or whether an organic one is not more appropriate. This is a huge subject but one small example, with which I have had the privilege of working with recently (again, with the development of a Results Management system), is the use of the Internet for measuring and monitoring results. Here, at least in theory, changes can be entered, assessed and modifications to activities implemented on an ongoing basis, like, let us say, a tree. The tree responds to changes in light, water and food on a continuous basis.

Taken together, these four ellipses (and there may be more) seem

to me to point to an impending collapse of the entire paradigm of scientific management. I do not have the new theory and do not know where it might appear, but working in a United Nations agency over the past two years, I suspect one of the phenomena it will have to accommodate is cultural differences. The old paradigm came from engineers (at least, Fayol and Taylor); the new one may come from anthropology. Often there seems to be an underlying assumption among management consultants when they work in the global arena that other cultures simply need to learn our systems of management. My experience is that this is naive, bordering on masochistic.

Where do we go from here? I am not sure, but it does occur to me that the New Management Network is a rather promising place to pursue some of these issues. If such seems the case to others in the network, I would be interested in hearing the experiences of other consultants in their attempts adapt theory to practice in the workplace.

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