



ANCIENT CIVILIZATION MANAGEMENT PRACTICES: THE CASE OF ANCIENT EGYPTIANS AND THE HEBREWS

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Abstract

Though existed for as long as the man worked the earth, management, as we know it today, came to the limelight in the 1900s and had since garnered respect and prominence both in the secular and academic world. Currently, management had become a significant academic discipline and indispensable to all works of life. Although the concept is relatively recent the practices of management had been around for ages, this article, therefore, traced contemporary management practices and principles to ancient civilizations using the Egyptians and the Hebrews. The study showed through extant literature that some contemporary practices in management had their roots in the ancient Egypt and Hebrew civilizations. The article revealed through the review of existing literature that principles such as span of control, bureaucracy, supervision, organization structure, etc. were common practices among the Egyptians and Hebrews.

Keywords: ancient civilization, management, Egypt, Hebrews, bureaucracy, control

1.0 INTRODUCTION

One of the most fascinating subjects of research for academics, researchers, and scholars has always been the ancient world (Saacti, 2014). Medicine, law, and many other professions can trace their ancestry back to ancient civilizations such as Egypt, Babylonia, China, Greece, Israel, etc. The management concept like many other sciences had been around for ages but understood in terms of administration.

Modern management concepts were coined in the early 1900s to describe ancient administrative practices that indicate a surprisingly deep level of human intellect. Early on, the rise of aristocratic social hierarchies, religion, literacy, and urbanization laid the groundwork for the contemporary fields of study, including management.

It follows, therefore, that management and its inherent practices are almost as old as man. Wren and Bedeian (2009) were thus right to have stated that they “learned over the years that the management discipline’s terminologies, ideas, models, and methodology, as well as its implicit ideals, professional institutions, and scholarly practices, are all derived from its inherited past. As a result, those who are eager to claim credit for a discovery only to realize that others have walked the same intellectual path in the past” (p. xxv). Management plays a pivotal role in the life of every organization and these roles

are made manifest in the primary functions that it plays. Scholars past and present had rendered these functions in a fashion that suits their notions, however, for the purpose of this paper, we will adopt the functions of management presented by Cole and Kelly (2011). They opined that management functions could be best described with the acronym POMC – planning, organizing, motivating, and controlling (Cole & Kelly, 2011. P. 16).

Though these managerial functions in particular and the genesis of modern management thoughts, in general, are traceable to the United States of America after the Industrial Revolution, most of these management functions and practices are traced to ancient times. The practices of management are thus ancient in their entirety, this does not however deny the fact that the formal study of management as a body of knowledge is relatively new (Wren & Bedeian, 2009).

This study, therefore, intends to trace the practice of management to the far past using the Egyptian and Hebrew civilizations.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptualizing Management

There is no universally accepted definition of management, yet, different scholars had provided various descriptions of the concept. Fayol (1916) saw management as an activity saddled

with the responsibility to forecast and plan, to organize, to command, to coordinate, and to control. He, therefore, believed that management is a process whose foremost activity is to forecast and make plans then gather resources together towards achieving those plans. This activity of pulling resources together was labelled organizing by Fayol. After putting all required resources together, leadership is to be provided, this act of leadership he called command. His managerial activities ended with coordinating and controlling; a set of activities that ensures that all parts of the organization function as a unit (coordinating) and that actual performance is commensurate with set standards of performance (controlling). Although not in the same format, a later description of management by Brech (1957) corroborated the description of management by Fayol by stating that management as a process comprised planning, control, coordination, and motivation. Brech agreed with Fayol that managerial activities began at the point of planning, yet, control and coordination cannot come before motivation as plans cannot come to fruition by chance.

Rather than seeing management as an activity or process, a later scholar, Mintzberg (1973) describes management as comprising a set of roles. These roles according to him are interpersonal, informational, and decisional roles.

Going further from these views and even Brech's (1957) view of management as a social process, Koontz and O'Donnell (1984) described management as an operational process. They argued that this operational process is best dissected by analyzing its functions. They stated that the process of management involved five basic functions of planning, organizing, staffing, directing and leading, and controlling. Their description of the managerial functions also corresponds with the functions given by Fayol (1916). The foregoing shows that it is difficult to arrive at a comprehensive, yet not over-generalized definition of management. Struggling with this thought, Stewart (1994) argued that to define management succinctly, one should look at what the job of a manager involves. According to her, the job of a manager is affected by three things – the core of the job; the constraints of the job, and the choices available to the job holder. Thus an understanding of these issues will buttress understanding of the concept of management.

Although difficult to conceptualize, the foregoing had shown that management for the most part is an organizational process, a process that ensures the achievement of set organizational goals. Fittingly, Wren and Bedeian, (2009) defined "management as an activity that performs certain functions to obtain the effective acquisition, allocation, and utilization of human efforts and physical resources to accomplish some goal" (p. 3). Wren and Bedeian's definition of management shows that the concept is used to describe every aspect of an organization beginning from the point of conception of an organization to the achievement of its purpose and mission. It shows that management as an activity focuses on what objectives are to be achieved at a future period (planning), what human or other resources are required to achieve these objectives, how best to acquire these

resources and how these acquired resources are to be optimally allocated to every unit of the organization to ensure that set goals and objectives are achieved.

A keen look at the definitions and description of the concept of management presented above shows that management within the ambit of an organization is a process that begins with planning and ends with control and coordination. Above all, all the activities or functions in the managerial process is aimed at ensuring the achievement of set organizational goals. Going by these submissions, we will for the purpose of this study conceptualize management as machinery for organizational goal achievement.

2.2 Management Functions and Activities in Ancient Civilization

We will at this point trace contemporary management functions and practices to ancient civilizations using the Hebrews and the Egyptians. We will discuss management the four main functions of management earlier adopted in this article as presented by Cole and Kelly (2011) as they were undertaken by the Egyptians and the Hebrews.

2.2.1 The Egyptian Civilization

Egypt was a dominant world power in ancient times and was known for its exploits in building pyramids that wondered at the time and irrigation projects that were used to control the effects of the annual flooding of the Nile River. Wren and Bedeian, (2009) stated that these engineering exploits of the Egyptians were even superior to those of the Greeks and Romans centuries later. It follows therefore that these activities were done in a formally organized pattern following management principles that are in use even today. In fact, without management of some kind, these pyramids and canals of Egypt could not have been built (Stewart, 2009). There is ample historical and archaeological evidence that the Egyptians practised the art and science of management in their social and engineering exploits (Parkinson, 2002; Bard, 1999). Bard (1999), Parkinson (2002), and Wren and Bedeian, (2009) posited that the Maxims of Ptahhotep, (2400 BC), the Instructions of Amenemope (1300 and 1100 BC), etc. provided direction on how leaders should behave and maintain interactions with subordinates.

The big question then is what contemporary management functions, principles, and practices are traceable to ancient Egyptian civilization? Of course, all functions of management viz planning, organizing, motivating, and control were inherently practised in the construction of the pyramids and canals. However, such practices as the span of control, delegation, bureaucracy, organization and departmentalization, control, and human resource management were equally practised by prehistoric Egypt. We will now look briefly at each of these concepts in the parlance of ancient Egypt.

2.2.1.1 Span of Control

In contemporary management parlance, the span of control measures the number of employees or subordinates that are answerable or reports to one supervisor or manager (Cole & Kelly, 2011). Thus span of control was the sum or totality of

subordinates a superior can handle effectively at a given time. Wren and Bedeian (2009) posit that the Egyptians had a clear understanding of this limit and customarily assigns 10 workers or ushabtis to a supervisor. This practice was commonly known as the 'rule of ten'. Today span of control is an important aspect of management in organizational life as it gives managers a sense of direction. This also agrees with Fayol's principles of unity of command and unity of direction. The Egyptians understood that if one man is answerable to two bosses, then there'll be no unity of command while it will also be taunting to achieve group objectives as subordinates will be having conflicting objectives.

2.2.1.2 Organization and Departmentalization

The contemporary management concepts in prehistoric Egypt appeared in their building of the famous pyramids, temples, and water canals. Saacti (2014) observed that the Egyptian palace had several departments that assisted in the administration of their redistributive economy (p. 349). The departments were controlled by the central authority that oversaw the inflow and outflow of grains. Kemp (1989) argued that this expedited the state's bureaucracy-related operations.

2.2.1.3 Bureaucracy

Bureaucracy refers to a management style in which a hierarchy of authority is used to control work processes and corporate operations through a set of formal, reasoned rules and procedures. (Cole & Kelly, 2011). The modern-day practice of bureaucracy is more than often credited to German sociologist Max Webber, yet records show that the idea of bureaucracy was practised in ancient Egypt. Wren and Bedeian (2009) opined that under the strict watch of the supervisor (vizier as it were), an elaborate bureaucracy was developed.

Bureaucratic control was done in the form of crews through which the population was divided into distinct units or groups (Saacti, 2014). Roth (1991) stated that each crew had an internal structure that consisted of two gangs which were further divided into four or five phyles of 10 individuals. This practice created the rule of ten discussed above and as shown earlier, each phyle is headed by the vizier or supervisor.

With this bureaucracy, Wren and Bedeian (2009) stated that the "Nile River's annual increase was measured to forecast the grain crops and revenue, which were allocated to various governmental divisions under the vizier's, as well as all industry and trade, under the vizier. A "professional" full-time administrator was put in charge of the state enterprise to coordinate and supervise the different departments and divisions of the government, as well as forecasting and planning work" (p. 16-17). Hence, before Webber could come up with his ideas on bureaucracy, ancient Egypt had already practised it.

2.2.1.4 Delegation

Delegation is another vital aspect of contemporary management. It is a concept that illuminates the process whereby a manager gives subordinates the responsibility and authority to make certain decisions that were previously made

by him (Cole & Kelly, 2011). Colquitt, LePine, and Wesson (2011) stated that to delegate implies a manager's turning of key behaviours to employees or subordinates. They stated further that delegation is also a leadership style that involves a leader giving personnel the responsibility to make decisions under a certain set of specified boundary situations. Delegation in ancient Egypt was done on the appointment of a supervisor known as the vizier. The viziers were not only given responsibilities but were also given the required amount of authority to ensure compliance among the ten subordinates working under them. Wren and Bedeian (2009) showed that the office of the vizier was recorded as early as 1750 before Christ. The role that the vizier played is synonymous with the role of a professional manager nowadays. The vizier is vested with the responsibility to plan, organize, direct, coordinate, control, and make decisions. The Hebrew Joseph as indicated in the Holy Bible was made a vizier by the Then Pharaoh of Egypt because of his God-given ability to forecast. Today, the concept of delegation is practised all over the world by organizations large or small, even in governmental agencies.

2.2.1.5 Control

The control function in contemporary management is very significant. Control ensures that plans are properly executed while ensuring that the organization together with all its units' functions as planned. Cole and Kelly (2011) showed that the primary function of control is to measure progress and take corrective action by correcting deviations where necessary (p. 18). Control, therefore, begins at establishing standards of performance, checking actual performance against set standards to take corrective action. Control, therefore, acts as a feedback mechanism for every managerial activity (Cole & Kelly, 2011, p. 18).

Control as we know in contemporary management was pivotal to the success of the engineering activities of prehistoric Egyptians. This prompted Wren (2005) to acknowledge that the methodology used in ancient Egypt was "managing via forecasting, work planning, work division (which later came to be known as division of labour) among the people and departments and creating a full-time bureaucrat to oversee and administer the enterprise of the state.

Ezzemel (2004) stated that to achieve effective control, the Egyptians used several distinct criteria. He summarized these into four namely:

1. The use of output: these forms included the location, quantity of stones needed, quantity delivered, and the balance required for the day for each workman.
2. The use of control notes: these notes provided information about the transportation procedures for stones, the workmen to be involved, and the dates the stones are to be delivered,
3. The use of team marks: these enabled the identification of the particular phyle, gang, or division that is responsible for the job, and
4. The use of assembly or setting marks: these were targeted at ensuring that the stones were assembled in the appropriate order.

Although these criteria for ensuring control does not perfectly reflect contemporary control measures, they did ensure that activities were executed according to plans.

2.2.2 The Hebrews

The history of the Hebrews is contained mostly in the old testament of the Bible, founded by the Patriarch Abraham who was asked by God to live in his homeland to move to a land He (God) would show him. Abraham's descendants were forced to go to the land of Egypt during a period of famine in the land of Canaan to meet their brother Joseph who was sold into slavery by his brother and at the time was not only a vizier in Egypt but was also the prime minister appointed by the Pharaoh of the time. Most managerial activities recognized among the Hebrews came to the limelight in their sojourn out of Egypt under the leadership of Moses who was an adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter but now commissioned by the Almighty God to lead His chosen people out of slavery to Egypt.

During this period Moses had applied certain management concepts and principles. As shown in the Bible, leaders in ancient Hebrew was selected by God. Wren and Bedeian (2009) posit that after the death of Hebrew's great leaders, the task of leading was handed to the judges who led with the God-given spiritual power known today as charisma. Wren and Bedeian (2009) argue that some of the management concepts used in the Bible likely germinated from the experiences of the Hebrews in Egypt.

Notable contemporary management principles applied by the Hebrews include but are not limited to leadership, delegation, the span of control or management, organization structure, the basic management functions, remuneration, and conflict resolution. We will at this point review some of them.

2.2.2.1 Delegation

The Holy Bible indicated that governing at some point became hectic for Moses who had to settle all cases among the Israelites during their time in the Wilderness. In Exodus 18:13 we read that "Moses sat down, as usual, to serve as a judge for the people, and the people kept standing before Moses from morning until evening" (NWT, 2013). This shows how exhausting it was for Moses to serve as both judge and leader to the Israelites. Thus his father-in-law Jethro gave a piece of advice to Moses which birthed the idea of delegation among the ancient Hebrews. He asked Moses to "choose capable men out of all Israel and appointed them heads over the people, as chiefs of thousands, chiefs of hundreds, chiefs of the fifties, and chiefs of tens. So they judged the people when cases arose. A difficult case they would bring to Moses, but every minor case they would judge" (Exo. 18:25-26, NWT, 2013). Wren and Bedeian (2009) stated that this act made Jethro the first known management consultant.

Moses therefore effectively applied the principle of delegation by giving the responsibilities such capable men with the required level of authority. This act eased the job of Moses which gave him extra time to attend to other issues. More so,

Wren and Bedeian (2009) also stated that by this act of delegation, Moses also employed the principle of management by exception which allowed subordinates to use their discretion in solving minor issues while reporting major issues to the boss.

2.2.2.2 Organization Structure

To organize implies that work is arranged and distributed among the different members of the organization. The structure of an organization reflects how the different parts making up the total organization are connected to one another and interrelated. Njoku and Nwosu (2010) noted that the outcome of the organizing process is a framework of relationships among departments and positions (p. 118). While the structure is the arrangement of parts and relationships among activities and people, organizational structure is the framework of formal relationships within her organization. Thus, Cole and Kelly (2011) referred to organization structure as the way in which the interrelated groups within an organization are constructed. It defines the way in which an organization's activities are divided, grouped, and coordinated into relationships between managers and employees, managers and managers and employees and employees (Njoku & Nwosu, 2010). Organization structure shows how authority and responsibilities flow in the organization showing the different layers or hierarchy of authority in the organization.

The ancient Hebrews also had a well-defined organizational structure. The issue of the chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, the fifties and tens stated above is a case in point. And by this Wren and Bedeian (2009) stated that Moses was able to establish an orderly organizational structure for tribal management.

2.2.2.3 Remuneration

Remuneration is a significant aspect of the ancient Hebrews. The relevance of the payment of wages to workers was repeatedly mentioned in the old testament of the Bible. "You should give him his wages that very day before the sun sets because he is in need and his life depends on his wages" (Deut. 24: 15, NWT, 2013). This scripture emphasized the need for employers to promptly pay the wages of their employees. Also, the employer "should not withhold the wages of a hired worker all night until morning" (Leviticus 19:13, NWT, 2013).

For the Levites who were to work full-time in the temple, a special provision was made to take care of them. In this regard, the Bible says "for I have given to the Levites as an inheritance the tenth part contributed by the people of Israel,... that is why I have said to them, 'In the midst of the Israelites, they should not take possession of an inheritance'"(Number 18:24, NWT, 2014).

Today, it is a common practice to compensate employees accordingly, where the employee perceives any form of injustice in their wages there will be issues of conflict among the employer and the employees.

2.2.2.4 Conflict Resolution

Conflicts are offshoots of a clash of goals, Colquitt et al. (2011) posits that conflicts arise when two or more individuals perceive that their goals are in opposition (p. 462). However, in the event of a conflict, the conflicting parties often seek means to resolve it. Cases of conflicts and how they were resolved are recorded in the Bible. Notable among these conflicts is the one between the Ancestor of the Hebrews Abraham and his nephew Lot. This conflict arose because of space for grazing for their livestock. The herdsmen of Abraham and Lot were in conflict which disturbed Abraham greatly. In Genesis 13:9-11, the Bible recorded the technique Abraham adopted to resolve the conflict between himself and Lot. The account reads thus "Is not the whole land available to you? Please, separate from me. If you go to the left, then I will go to the right; but if you go to the right, then I will go to the left." "So Lot raised his eyes and saw that the whole district of the Jordan was a well-watered region (before Jehovah destroyed Sod'om and Go'mor'rah), like the garden of Jehovah, like the land of Egypt, as far as Zo'ar. Then Lot chose for himself the whole district of the Jordan, and Lot moved his camp to the east. So they separated from each other" (NWT, 2013). A keen look at this account will reveal that Abraham adopted both the avoiding and accommodation techniques to resolve the conflict. These techniques are among contemporary conflict resolution techniques that are effective.

There are several other contemporary management principles and concepts that were used by the Hebrews and are penned down in the Bible. Some of them showed the importance of consultation in decision-making. Thus, Wren and Bedeian (2009) stressed this when they quoted Proverbs 15:22 that says "Plans fail when there is no consultation, but there is an accomplishment through many advisers" (NWT, 2013). Today, this advice of consultation is an effective tool in organizations and had contributed to organizational goal achievement.

Apart from the ones enumerated in this article, several contemporary managerial practices such as planning, organizing, directing, etc. were found among the ancient Hebrews.

3. CONCLUSION

This study explores a small but substantial piece of mighty ancient civilizations to show how contemporary management concepts and principles were applied among prehistoric Egyptians and the Hebrews. The evaluation of these ancient civilizations revealed that in the administration of their states such administrative or managerial practices of planning, organizing, directing, leading, control, and coordination, as well as concepts like the span of control, supervision, organization structure, departmentalization, and bureaucracy, was practised by the Egyptians and Hebrews. The article had thus, shown that modern organizational or management concepts such as division of labour, bureaucracy, and many more were all established at that time.

For this reason, modern trends in management popularized, advocated, and pushed by managers nowadays can be viewed as intelligence that has been handed down through the years and originates from our ancient civilizations.

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