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Business as a Calling The Calling of Business

MANAGEMENT IN A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

By George Ticehurst

Injustice and the response of management

Now that we all live in a vineyard of international dimensions⁽¹⁾, global communications ensure that Dives can no longer remain unaware of Lazarus at the gate, and that Lazarus becomes increasingly aware of Dives *'feasting magnificently every day'* ⁽²⁾. In this paper I seek to show how Christians and like-minded people of goodwill, in their own self interest and in that of the common good ⁽³⁾, can co-operate with the creator's purpose for mankind in using *'what earth has given and human hands (and minds) have made'* ⁽⁴⁾ to continue to *'fill the earth and subdue it'* ⁽⁵⁾. So far from being *'guilty men (sic) demeaning themselves morally in the wealth creating process'* ⁽⁶⁾, I see such people as the saints of our day. I see them as *'doing theology'* ⁽⁷⁾ of some profundity, providing a pastoral challenge to young people of all cultures for advancing the Kingdom on earth, and as a living instrument for the Church's Mission for Justice and Peace throughout the world ⁽⁸⁾. Progress need not for ever be accompanied by poverty ⁽⁹⁾.

A wealth creating organisation's management is its most important single resource. Without requiring any great changes to current practices, nor undermining productivity, the full potential of organisations in all their variety can be harnessed, developed and used by their managements to the greater benefit of their individual members and to that of the common good, providing thereby some of the 'circumstances which allow people to attain more fully and freely their own perfection' ⁽¹⁰⁾. This can come about through **three main sources**: the quality of the leadership of a **chief executive**; the contribution by managers, and a wide range of employees, of their specialist knowledge, and of their values, in developing the organisation's **key management policies**; the integration of agreed policies with **key management job responsibilities** throughout the organisation.

The Chief Executive

The Chief Executive occupies a necessarily lonely role which requires a person of great business ability, tough single-mindedness and energy. To provide the leadership to which people respond, a successful chief executive also demonstrates integrity, courage, self-control and wisdom - the four classical moral virtues. In these days of extreme competitive pressures and of legislative constraints, a chief executive can also feel sustained by a degree of faith, of hope and, (in the sense of service to others ⁽¹¹⁾) of love - the three Christian virtues - from whatever inner resource these may be drawn. The role is a unifying one exercised with legitimate authority. Unifying is a continuing process, aiming at wholeness, never fully attained, as important to business as to the Church - the joining of the ideal with the practical - an application of the realisation that *'the parts belong to the whole so that the whole becomes more than the sum of the parts'* ⁽¹²⁾. There is an echo here of the vine and its branches with, let it be remembered, the chief executive's lonely responsibility for pruning ⁽¹³⁾.

Such a chief executive attracts to an organisation similar minded managers and other employees who will have their influence on the decision-making, communicating and information handling activities that make up management work. By extension, **the authority of the chief executive** is the 'guiding will' which runs the organisation and from which all subordinate authority is derived. *'Where a person's activity in its own sphere of responsibility contributes to that authority, it adds interest and dignity to the most common-place and routine of jobs and work. Its abuse is especially evident in close and bureaucratic societies and organisations'* ⁽¹⁴⁾. We know that Jesus admired and respected **true authority, correctly delegated and properly used** ⁽¹⁵⁾. Further, the way in which authority is exercised is often called 'style', e.g. in the statesman, artist, sportsman, actor. It is *'the performance of an act without waste, the exclusive privilege of the expert, the product of specialist study, the contribution of the specialist to culture, the ultimate morality of the mind - a spiritual value. It is true professionalism'* ⁽¹⁶⁾.

Many chief executives are church-going Christians or potentially so, and influential in church circles. To support their efforts in our industrialised and commercialised society, their faith needs to be more explicitly and consistently reinforced by the Church, and made relevant through the sacraments and its liturgical year. At the same time there is a role for some Church leaders, who have an intimate knowledge and experience of business and organisational life, in providing to business leaders professional consultation and advice on the ethical and moral aspects of decisions, as is the case with any other type of professional service.

Key Management policies

Management policies relate to seven key basic resources of an organisation ⁽¹⁷⁾: its finances; its people; its products or services; its materials or information; its machinery and equipment; its land and buildings; and its organisation. Such policies, formally expressed or informally understood, govern the acquisition and procurement, storage and movement, use and maintenance, improvement and development, and the disposal of these resources. Within an overall policy statement, basic ethical and moral issues surround such decisions as for example: the fairness of periods for creditor payment; the provision of special conditions for employees with special needs; the priority to be given to the total process of product or service quality and customer satisfaction; the equitability with which materials or information are acquired and procured; the methods used for disposal of scrap and waste; the relationship of buildings to their environment; the appropriateness of the organisation's public image; the use to which the organisation's technical know-how and financial resources may be put to aid developing countries.

Through determining management policies in this way, subject to the chief executive's overriding accountability, 'the mind of the organisation' can be given expression which helps the unifying process. In the processes of producing wealth of any sort, the relationships needed, particularly for management and in general for any sort of work, are *'as important as the product itself'* ⁽¹⁸⁾ *'Man (sic) is both the object and the subject of work and as such is the true employer of capital, itself the product of generations'* ⁽¹⁹⁾.

Key Management responsibilities

But policy is not practice. Intentions require action before they can become results. Management has to do with the organisation and use of resources to achieve end **results** which will ensure the continuing effectiveness of the organisation in meeting its market needs ⁽²⁰⁾. It is no coincidence, and should not surprise us, that these end results, derived from practice, are themselves ethical, moral and certainly not un-Christian in their purpose. They require in people not only the specific capabilities to undertake their jobs but the **attitude of mind and personal behaviour that promote effective and efficient work**. Ends and means are reconciled in an organic whole.

All of this may be illustrated by observing the effects of **failure by management to maintain results** in the following categories: the condoning of poor product and service quality which leads to loss of market share; the use of impersonal, illegal, non-moral, wasteful methods of working that are an insult to people's feelings and intelligence; the imposition of sudden changes in the rate and rhythm of work that cause distress both at work and at home; the lax control of costs that breeds cynicism and dishonesty; the waste of material and human resources which lead to bankruptcy; the failure of an organisation to adapt when it does not restructure jobs and develop people's capabilities in response to inevitable change; the failure to supervise work which may have been done wrongly, negligently, not done at all, or not checked to standards of quality or method; finally, the failure to investigate and report on all these matters in a regular and systematic way

The Churches' role

Jesus was continually setting standards. His method of teaching in parables and similes, so many of them drawn from the world of work around him, remain incomparable. He knew that wealth needed to accompany welfare in caring for one's neighbour. He recognised the need to control expenditure, and the relationship between cost and value. He wasted nothing, and no one's abilities. He fitted his disciples for their mission and enlarged the understanding of their roles. He accomplished his mission on earth in under three years with no sense of rush, and with lasting influence, authority and power ⁽²¹⁾.

Church leaders can help ordinary people in ordinary jobs by showing a knowledgeable as well as a sympathetic understanding of the effects of the stresses and strains of organisation life on human nature and abilities. But they also need to be able to analyse failure, to speak out locally, regionally, nationally where gross examples of mismanagement in the wealth creating process become known to them and to point to the opportunities for change. In the same spirit they may need to review their own affairs and put their own house in order.

REFERENCES

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