A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON MANAGERIAL LEADERSHIP

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Abstract

Increasingly, Christians are discovering that the secular philosophy of management and leadership frequently conflicts with their Christian values. Many Christian leaders (both in Christian organizations and secular ones) are looking for another perceptive on management. This paper is an attempt to provide this perceptive. It argues that even though traditional management viewpoints cannot entirely be faulted, they seem to deviate significantly in their dealing with people from God's original purpose of creating man in His own image.

Introduction

The concept of leadership and management can be traced to the beginning of creation, when Adam and his partner, Eve, were commissioned to manage the Garden of Eden (Gen 1:28). Later there is the account of Noah's building project where he set out to build a structure of a size, shape, or function never before imagined. The city where Lot and his family lived had to be managed (Gen 19). Furthermore, surviving monuments like the Egyptian pyramids clearly indicate the results of the practice of managing resources. According to Griffin (1999), Socrates discussed management practices and concepts in 400 BC; Plato described work specialization in 350 BC; and Alfarabi listed several leadership traits in AD 900. In spite of this history, however, management by itself was not given serious attention for several centuries.

Management is applied to every facet of human life. People manage their lives, families, and finances. Management is practiced in the church and in government. Nevertheless, management is frequently perceived in the context of the business organization, which is a fairly new phenomenon. Indeed the study of management did not begin until the 19[h] century, an obvious outgrowth of the industrial revolution.

Contemporary management is a well-developed discipline with various techniques and mechanisms to achieve its purposes. The manager is exposed to myriad of approaches, and often seems lost in the labyrinth as to which course to pursue in a particular situation. For the Christian manager, Steven Covey would argue, the techniques are not as critical as the framework in which management is practiced as a discipline. The challenge, as we see it, is to reflect the Christian faith in the management of people and available resources.

This paper attempts to explore the underlying tenets in many managerial perspectives showing their anti-Christian bias (albeit innocuous); and then endeavor to suggest some directions for the Christian manager.

What is Management?

It is often difficult to say precisely what is meant by the term "management." Is it a set of tools or techniques? Is it a way of getting things done with people and through other people? Is management a matter of problem solving and decision-making?

This paper argues that management could be all of these, and indeed more. When participants in many of my management development seminars and workshops are asked to define the term, most of them typically respond by stating in textbook fashion, that management "is the process of achieving organizational goals by engaging in the four major functions of planning, organizing, leading, and controlling of organizational resources." (Bartol and Martin, 1998:5). The essential components in the definition are (a) the functions, (b) goals, (c) the resources, and (d) the

processes. Obviously, this is a good broad definition, but surely it is not the only one.

In seeking an answer to the apparently simple question of what is management, a variety of views can be discovered which have been expressed over the past seven decades or so during which management, as a field of study, has sought to map out a turf for itself. Koontz (1980) in the "Management Theory Jungle" identifies eleven approaches to the question, indicating the spectrum of responses:

❏ The empirical approach states that we can understand what management is by determining what contributes to success or failure in specific cases.

❏ The interpersonal behavior approach is based on getting things done through people and, therefore, management is centered in understanding relationships (psychology).

❏ The group behavior approach emphasizes the behavior of people within groups and thus tends to rely on sociology, anthropology, and social psychology. Often this interest in group behavior is named "organizational behavior."

❏ The cooperative social system approach (organizational theory) combines elements of interpersonal and group behavior approaches into a system called the organization where the primary purpose is cooperation.

❏ The socio-technical systems approach adds to the previous approach the dimension of technical systems. It is believed that the machines and methods have a strong influence on the social systems and that the task of the manger is to ensure harmony between the social and technical systems.

❏ The decision theory approach believes that management is characterized by decision-making and therefore a systematic approach in decision-making essentially outlines management.

❏ The systems approach to management, like biological systems, views management's role within an assemblage of subsystems, inputs, and processes within an environment, all of which are interconnected and/or interdependent. This may not be a different approach but is a holistic view of management providing place for elements of the other approaches to be incorporated.

❏ The management science approach believes that problems can be described within a mathematical model – basic relationships – in such a way that the goal may be optimized.

❏ The situational approach states that management action depends on the situation, taking into account the influence of given actions on the behavior patterns of individuals and the organization. This is a practical approach, which hints at the art of management.

❏ The managerial roles approach is based on research by Prof Henry Mintzberg as to the roles managers fill.

❏ The operational approach is an attempt to combine elements of all of the above-mentioned approaches, taking what is applicable, discarding that which is not, and developing an approach to management that indicates the complexities and varied nature of what is expected of the manager.

Many therefore discourage the use of any single approach. Too great an emphasis placed on a single element will invariably create an imbalance. Christians can learn from each of these views and can implement those aspects that contribute positively. According to Rush (1983) this is not sufficient to distinguish a Christian's perspective on management. What, then, will distinguish Christian management? Before attempting to

address this question, a view of management from a biblical perspective will be prudent.

Biblical Philosophy of Management

The notion of management, as introduced in the Bible, according to theologians, centers on the concept of stewardship. Central is the steward, the manager, of the household, the one entrusted to administer the master's property effectively (Walsh and Middleton, 1984). In Gen 1:26 (NKJV) God indicates "Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on earth." He assigns man the work… "then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it." Thus, although we have the function of authority (right to decide) over resources like the earth and the things of the earth, we also have the responsibility of attaining a goal, which is to develop, improve, and cultivate it in harmony with all that is on the earth, guarding it against decay and deterioration. White (cited in Oberholster) describes a steward as follows:

"A steward identifies himself with his master. His master's interests become his. He has accepted the responsibilities of a steward and he must act in the master's place doing as the master would do if he were presiding over his own goods. The position is one of dignity in that his master trusts him." (Oberhoslter 1993:5-6)

From the "Parable of the Talents", about the servants who were entrusted with talents (Matt 25:14-30), Oberholster discerns the following thoughts on stewardship:

- God expects a return on the capital with growth (investment).
- Each steward has his own work.
- The capital (talent, gift, responsibility) is loaned to the steward for investment – it is not his property.
- The steward is accountable – he has to give an account.
- After giving an account, the steward is rewarded or punished.
- The reward or punishment is based on his attitude and creativity.
- The steward must maintain a balanced view of all factors.

By being appointed by God, the Christian steward has received a tremendous honour. Nonetheless, this authority must be carried and displayed with a measure of humility, as the steward is but a servant. Stewardship balances authority with servanthood what Greenleaf calls servant-leadership (Spears, 2004). It is quintessential to note that the attitude of Christian servanthood displayed in the Christian manager necessarily distinguishes him from the non-Christian manger.

All humans, both as individuals and communally, are commissioned with the task of management – the duty of stewardship. A few have also been given the additional responsibility of serving others through leadership in selected areas. Contemporary management scholars tend to make differences between 'management' and 'leadership' in an attempt to stress that management is 'taking care of' and leadership is 'the giving direction to; leaders 'doing the right things' and managers 'doing things right.' The impression is often given that management tends to perceive its actions as short term (dull, routine, laborious) whereas leadership tends to view its direction giving actions as long term (charismatic, creative, innovative) and that both – managerial ability and leadership – are seldom found in one person (Oberholster, 1993).

Articles in management journals such as Harvard Business Review further support the distinction being made. For example John Kotler (1990; 1999) distinguishes between leadership and management opining that leadership focuses more on the creation of the right attitudes while management is concerned more with making sure the right occurs. Others even quote Psalm 119:105 "Your word is a lamp to my feet and light to my path,"

as indicating the concept of management and leadership. Managers being the lamp at the feet; leaders being the light at the path.

This distinction is made despite the generally accepted "definition" of management, which states that leadership is, but one of the functions of management ((Bartol and Martin, 1998:5). A case can be made that excessive emphasis placed on differentiating between management and leadership is counterproductive as it encourages the subtle erosion of the servanthood ingredient of Christian stewardship and creates an aura around the leader at the expense of the management elements. Koontz (1980) ostensibly believes that the study of leadership should not be separated from the study of management because, for management to be truly effective, managers must be effective leaders. Closely bound to the larger meaning of stewardship is the concept of leadership. The concept of stewardship is synonymous with the role of management. It incorporates long term visioning as well as short-term operational activities.

Understanding the Individual – A Christian Scrutiny

Although it is possible, and often happens in practice, that managers manage resources without having to manage human resources, it is normally considered that management includes the management of people. As the biblical view of the person clashes with that of contemporary management thought, we need to understand what the Bible has to say about man, as created by God, in order to grasp the concepts related to Christian management thought.

Contemporary management thought often refers to people as 'human resources'. This implies, at best, that humans are ranked equally with other resources such as finance, land, material, and machinery. Even the human resources school of thought, which is prepared to consider more than

physical and social needs of the worker, continues to give opportunities for intellectually challenging tasks only in the interests of gain for the organization (what's in it for me), virtually extracting their pound of flesh. The pervasive consideration is to keep workers satisfied, happy, and challenged so that they can contribute in a greater degree towards the achievement of organizational goals. At worse, the implication of viewing people as human resources is that people are manipulated and exploited as other resources by business and industry in pursuit of bottom-line materialistic gain.

Oberholster opines that a biblical view of man is a fourfold view. Man is (a) created by God to be "Godlike" with both individuality and communality. However, man (b) chooses to sin, to separate himself from God, and now has a fallen nature. But God provides (c) a way through Jesus to restore man to that which he was originally. This restoration process (d) is God's cause in the world and He invites man to participate.

Man is a created being – created in the image of God as espoused in Gen 1:26-27. As such, he has value. That we are created in the image of God ostensibly means that we are significantly different than the rest of creation. From this notion derives our human dignity (Sire, 1990). David in Psalm 8 aptly supports this with the statement in versus 5 and 6:

"You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor.
You have made him to have dominion over the works of ur hands;
You have put all things under his feet."

God created us as individuals and as communal people. "The world view avoids the fatal traps of both individualism (western) and collectivism (eastern). It declares from the outset that each of us is unique and created in the image of God, but that the God in whose image we are made is communal.

That is, at our core, we are social beings. We are made for God; we are made for each other" (Sire, 1990:64). Many narratives in the Bible refer to individuals: Abraham, David, Jesus, and Paul. We also find several references in the Bible to support the communal aspect: "I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people" (Lev 26:12), and "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9).

The second aspect of the fourfold view of man is that man, using the power of choice given to him by God, chose to disobey his Creator (Gen 3) and thereby make himself subject to sin. Man chose to break some of the principles, which governed his appointment as steward. Instead of obeying the master's directives, he chose to serve self: "…you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen 3:5). "Selfishness is the essence of depravity, and because human beings have yielded to its power, the opposite of allegiance to God is seen in the world today. Nations, families, and individuals are filled with a desire to make self a center. Man longs to over his fellow men. Separating himself with his egotism from God and his fellow beings, he follows his unrestrained inclinations. He acts as if the good of others depended on their subjection to this supremacy" (White, 1940:24). "If people are 'looking for number one' and 'what is in it for me', they will have no sense of stewardship – no sense of being an agent for worthy principles, purposes, and causes. They become a law unto themselves, a principal" (Covey, 1991:53).

Third, man's value in the sight of God is increased to a large extent by the sacrifice of the life of Jesus in order to free man from sin. Humanity is now doubly precious – not only created, but also bought back. Now that there is a way (Jesus said "I am the way") for humanity to be freed from sin and its effects, there is a choice given to every individual to accept or reject the offer. Upon acceptance of

the gift, redemption takes place (Oberholster. 1993).

Lastly, the plan of redemption provides for restoring the damage done by sin to the person created in the image of God. Although the task will not be completed in the world, we as stewards have an important part in it. Our part is not only in the context of ourselves (individually), but also or fellow man (communally) – family members, colleagues at work, fellow church members, society at large. We are to be participants in God's cause in the restoration of God's image in man physically, mentally, spiritually, relationally, and socially. Ultimately, until people have the spirit of service, they might say they love a companion, company, or cause, but they often despise the demands these make on their lives (Covey, 1993; Oberholster, 1993).

"Therefore, the whole scheme of human life can be summed up in four terms: creation, fall, redemption, and glorification. We are created good; we fell from our close relation with God; we have been redeemed by Christ; we are being glorified by the Holy Spirit" (Sire, 1990: 71). Christian managers, as stewards, have the challenging task of participating in God's cause in this world, in being coworkers with God in this process with regard to their associates (so called subordinates).

Perspectives on Management

Serious modern study of management originated during the early 1800s with the recognition of the importance of organizing factory workers to improve their efficiency. Conditions in factories were gloomy. Work was organized in such a way that it was dehumanizing. There was little room for choice, tasks were routine and monotonous, and little socialization took place. Remuneration was based on the concept of the "least the market would bear." In some cases, conditions deteriorated further as managers pursued goals at the expense of the worker by the introduction of child

labor, unhealthy work environments, and the exploitation of the environment and other resources.

The Classical Viewpoint – This perspective on management emerged during the 19th and early 20th centuries. The factory system that began to appear in the 1880s posed management challenges that earlier organizations had not encountered. Problems arose in organizing managerial structures, training employees, scheduling manufacturing, and dealing with increased labour dissatisfaction.

Consequently, management pioneers like Frederick Taylor attempted to improve the lot of the worker through introducing methods that took their economic needs into consideration. Techniques and methods were developed that allowed the worker to become more productive (efficient), and at the same time increased his economic reward for his cooperation. In this approach, the worker is assumed to be a cog in the machine, and his behavior is as predictable as any machine's function based on its design. Motivation was based on the philosophy that the worker is energized by economic security. The manager is firmly in control of the people. He knows what is best always, and therefore he is the one to make all the decisions – authoritarian management style. The emphasis on finding and using the most efficient method – whether it was in organizing a factory, in selecting workers, or in doing a task – earned this management perspective the title of scientific management. Management tools often used in conjunction with this approach include mathematical models, decision models, time and motion studies, piecework pay incentives, etc. it should be reiterated that the use of these tools are not inherently wrong, but the purpose for their use needs questioning.

The Human Relations Viewpoint – The human relations school of thought considers that truly effective control comes from within the individual worker rather than from strict, authoritarian control. This school of thought recognized and directly responded to social pressures for the enlightened treatment of employees. The early work on industrial psychology and personnel selection received little attention because of the prominence of scientific management. Then, a series of studies at a Chicago electric company, which came to be known as the Hawthorne studies, changed all that.

The Hawthorne studies (1927-1932) pushed management into realizing that 'man does not live on bread alone', but also had a social dimension – the need to be liked and respected, the need to belong. It was found that workers responded to the social context of the workplace. Attempts were made to discover the make-up of people based on the assumption that worker happiness leads to improved performance. Management's dealings with workers were adjusted accordingly – kindness, courtesy, civility, and decency became the order of the day. Still, the manger is the one who knows best, and therefore makes decisions – he is now just a benevolent dictator. Attempts are made to develop team spirit. Although complexity of human is recognized to some degree, it is grounded in a secular setting with no provision make for God's viewpoint on human potential. There are also practical problems as leaders managing on these assumptions may become directionless as their decisions are based on their intense desire to belong. An obvious dichotomy arises – the 'soft' manager who must make 'tough' decisions (Oberholster, 1993).

To resolve this dilemma, many managers have become kind, paternalistic managers – the kind father who knows what is best for his children. Management terms with this approach include human relations movement and organizational behaviour, but the perspective is usually called behavioural management. Again many of the techniques (treating people with kindness, building team spirit) of behavioural management

cannot be faulted, but questions can be raised as to the motive for management's apparent kindness toward workers. The attitude of management, frequently displayed when the manager finds that worker behaviour or performance is not as expected, is: "Look what I get after all that I have done for them."

The Human Resource Viewpoint – The human relations movement initially espoused what Daft (1997) calls a 'dairy farm' view of management – contented cows give more milk; so satisfied workers will give more work. Gradually, views with deeper content began to emerge. Contemporary management attempted to put together what was learnt from both scientific management and behavioural management, and realized that placing too much emphasis on one perspective or approach does not optimize results. Several attempts have consequently been made to provide a comprehensive model – contingency approach, systems approach, and situational leadership. These attempts have endeavored to provide the manager with a framework in which the worker is seen as a valuable resource, which must be considered on an equal basis as other resources. As a resource, a new dimension of the worker was being considered. He is no longer a being with just physical, economic, and social needs, but he also has psychological and intellectual needs. He has talent, resourcefulness, inge-nuity, imagination, and is able and eager to use these innovatively and to be recognized for using them.

Management then attempts to tap this vitality and use it in furthering management's agenda because it has realized that people will do what is necessary if they are committed to a goal. Management delegates and explores ways to create an optimal environment; a culture that taps their talents and releases their creative energy. A strongly humanistic philosophy is present as management sees people as bundles of latent talent and capacity. Their goal would be to identify and develop this capacity to accomplish the vision of the organization (Covey, 1992; Oberholster, 1993; Daft, 1997). This enlarged perspective of humans is referred to as human resource management. As before, we find a broadened view of people involvement in an organization of which some of the ideas can be incorporated within a Christian perspective. However what must be questioned is the worldview within which these techniques and management tools are used.

It is evident from the above discussion that there have been two different types of emphasis in management thought. First, there are those that see management as consisting primarily of managing things, or resources, where mechanistic techniques and methods are the primary tools used toward efficiency. Even the way decisions are made is structured according to scientific (rational) method with recognized steps. No mention is made of or consideration given to the possibility of divine intervention or consultation with God. As a result, "the ubiquitous use of technique to solve all problems has taken from us our heart and soul: (Sire, 1990:126).

Second, there are those that have emphasized the human element and who have shifted their perspective of management to reflect the changes in beliefs managers have held regarding the worker as a person. They have shifted from seeing the person in a physical context to seeing him in a social context, and finally to seeing him in an intellectual context. Management thought is striving to 'use the human resource effectively and efficiently toward goal attainment.' It is the managing of people that management has been doing awkwardly. Arguably, the techniques, the quantitative tools, and the computer models that are applied to the resources (with the obvious exemption of human resources) can facilitate efficiency drive toward achievement of objectives. However, management techniques which attempt to make efficient use of 'human resource' is likely to fail. As Covey cogently puts it "you simply

cannot think efficiency with people. You think effectiveness with people and efficiency with things" (Covey, 1989:169-170).

Toward A Christian Perspective

So far, in unfolding a Christian management perspective, we have outlined the flaws of historical and current management thought. We have explored the meaning of stewardship, and we have investigated the significance of what man is. What then should be a Christian's approach to stewardship with or of other people? What is Christian Management?

Oberholster proposes that a Christian approach to management should understand the role of management as that of steward (servant leader in a special sense) who, together with other God created people (fellow stewards created in God's image), take care of resources (also God-created and owned, and over which God has given man authority) that have been entrusted to them for development toward God directed purposes and to the glory of God. In this definition, one can discern (a) the function, (b) the collaborators, (c) the resources, (d) the purpose, and (e) the method.

This definition, in essence, establishes that just as every individual and family is placed on this earth to play a role in the plan of salvation, so every organization - whether business, manufacturing, agriculture, or nonprofit - has a similar role to fulfill. This provides the Christian business executive with a higher purpose than profit maximization. He, as a steward, has an integral part to play in God's scheme in this world. It provides such an executive a much higher meaning in life than material gain.

The manager, as steward in the role of servant leader, can now provide spiritual dimension in the workplace. Workers are not seen merely as physical beings with social and psychological needs, but as fellow stewards (not to be bossed

over) who have the same purpose in life – playing a role in the plan of salvation. This provides the worker, in turn, with real meaning in life. This Christian manager has become a co-worker with God. At the same time, his attitude toward his workers has changed as they are partners and fellow workers with God. The resultant 'managerial' style may not be different from the participative managerial styles currently promoted by management theorists and consultants, but the crucial difference will be the motive behind the approach and the attitude prevalent in the organization.

The following diagram (adapted from Stephen Covey's Principle-Centered Leadership) attempts to summarize the prevalent philosophies of management as evidenced over the past century (scientific, behavioral, and human resource) together with a suggested Christian perspective (spiritual) as underscored below.

Needs	Metaphor	Management Viewpoint	Focus
Physical/Economic	Stomach	Classical	Power & Control
Social/Emotional	Heart	Human Relations	Teamwork
Psychological	Mind	Hu man Resource	Talent Development
Spiritual	Soul	Christian	Stewardship Mission Directed

Adapted from Stephen Covey's Principle-Centered Leadership discussion of four management paradigms, p. 176

Conclusion

Christian management is working for people within a system, which meets their psychological, social, intellectual, aesthetic, and spiritual needs while addressing economic, technological, societal, and environmental concerns in harmonious response that benefits all and brings glory to God.

Frequently, we limit the measurement of results to quantitative success measures (be it financial, market share, baptisms, student passes etc.) to determine success, but we need to understand that the true measurement of success for the biblical steward is his attitude – a more exacting criterion:

"The reward is given to the steward entrusted with the talents, not because he has done so great a work, but because of his fidelity over a few things. God measures not according to results, but according to the motives. If the steward is faithful he is successful, and is sure of the final reward, however small may have been his mission." (Kress Collection: Cited in Oberholster (1992:17)

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All Bible quotations from New King James Version "We are obligated to God in every possible way. Were it not for his decision to make us, we would not be. Everything we are is His." (Sire 1990:54)

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