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MANAGEMENT - A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

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Introduction

The concept of management can be traced back to the beginnings of this planet. Adam and Eve were commissioned to manage the garden (Gen.1:28). Later we read about Noah's building project where he set out to build a structure of a size, shape, or function never before witnessed (Gen. 6). The city where Lot and his family lived had to be managed (Gen. 19). Furthermore, the results of the practice of managing resources are obvious when we view surviving Egyptian monuments like the pyramids. Management practices and concepts were discussed by Socrates in 400 BC; Plato described job specialization in 350 B.C.; and Alfarabi listed several leadership traits in AD 900 (Griffin:40,41).

Management is applied to every aspect of human life. We manage our own lives: We manage our families and our finances. There is management of the church, and of government. However, management is usually perceived in the context of the organization, which itself is a fairly new occurrence - an outgrowth of the industrial revolution.

Management today is a well-developed field of study with a variety of techniques and mechanisms to achieve its purposes. An array of approaches confront the manager, who is often uncertain about which to pursue for a particular situation. For the Christian manager, the techniques are not as critical as the framework in which management is practiced. The challenge is to reflect the Christian faith in managing people and resources.

This essay explores the underlying currents in many management perspectives, showing their anti-Christian bias; and then suggests some direction for the Christian manager.

Defining Management

It is difficult to pin down precisely what is meant by the term "management." Is it a set of techniques? Is it a way of getting things done through other people? Is management a matter of decision-making?

I will argue that management is all of these, and more.

When asked to define the term, a college student characteristically responds by stating, in textbook fashion, that management is "a set of activities, including planning and decision making, organizing, leading, and controlling, directed at an organization's human, financial, physical, and information resources, with the aim of achieving organizational goals in an efficient and effective manner" (Griffin:6). The essential components in the definition are a) the functions, b) the

resources, c) the goal/s, and d) the method. This may be a good broad definition, but is not the only one.

In seeking an answer to this an apparently simple question, we discover a variety of views which have been expressed over the past fifty years during which management as a field of study has attempted to demarcate a territory for itself. Koontz (1980) identifies eleven approaches to the question which demonstrates the spectrum of responses:

- a. **The empirical approach** states that we can understand what management is by determining what contributed to success or failure in specific cases.
- b. **The interpersonal behavior approach** is based on getting things done through people and therefore management is centered in understanding relationships (psychology).
- c. **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 patterns is named 'organizational behaviour'.
- d. **The co-operative social system approach** (organizational theory) combines elements of the interpersonal and group behavior approaches into a system called the organization where the primary purpose is co-operation.
- e. **The sociotechnical system 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 system and that the task of the manager is to ensure harmony between the social and technical systems.
- f. **The decision theory approach** believes that management is characterized by decision-making and therefore a systematic approach to decision-making essentially outlines management.
- g. **The systems approach** to management, like biological systems, views management's role within an assemblage of sub-systems, 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.
- h. **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.

- i. **The situational approach** states that management action depends on the situation, taking into account the influence of given actions on the behaviour patterns of individuals and the organization. This is a practical approach which hints at the art (viz, science) of management.
- j. **The managerial roles approach** is based on research by Mintzberg as to the roles (functions) managers fill.
- k. **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 complexity and variedness of what is expected of the manager.

None of the above approaches is sufficiently comprehensive to describe management in its entirety. The use of any single approach is therefore discounted by many, as too great an emphasis is placed on a single element thereby creating an imbalance (eg. use of mathematical models exclusively). As Christians we can learn from each of these views and can implement those aspects that contribute positively. But this is not sufficient to distinguish a Christian's perspective on management. What, then, will distinguish Christian management? Before addressing this question, let us first view management from a biblical perspective.

The notion of management, as introduced by the Bible, centers on the concept of stewardship. Central is the steward, the manager of the household, the one entrusted to administer the master's property (Walsh & Middleton:59), obviously with the idea of effectiveness¹ in mind. In Gen 1:26 and 2:15 (TEV) God indicates that man "will have power over the fish, the birds, and all animals domestic and wild and all the earth" and assigns to man the work "to cultivate (develop) it and guard (preserve, take care of) it". So, although we have the function of authority (right to decide) over resources like the earth and the things on 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 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 stead 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." (White:1940:113)

¹ Economy with the emphasis on effectiveness in contrast to efficiency. 'Taking care of a household with efficiency would insinuate management with short-term benefits in mind so that the saying 'penny wise, pound foolish' would become true. Whereas, effectiveness refers to movement toward a long-term purpose keeping all relevant elements in balance.

In Jesus' parable of servants who were entrusted with talents (Matt 25:14-30), the following thoughts on stewardship emerge:

- a. God expects a return of the capital with growth, ie. development.
- b. Each steward has his own work.
- c. The capital (talent, gift, responsibility) is loaned to the steward for development - it is not his property.²
- d. The steward is accountable - he has to give a report.
- e. After giving an account, the steward is rewarded or punished.
- f. The reward or punish is based on his attitude not the result.
- g. The steward is expected to be proactive and innovative.
- h. The steward must maintain a balanced view of all factors.

The Christian steward has received a tremendous honor (been appointed by God). Yet this authority must be carried and displayed with a large measure of humility, as the steward is but a servant. Stewardship "balances authority with servanthood" (Walsh & Middleton:1984:59). It is important to note that the attitude of Christian servanthood displayed in the Christian manager distinguishes him then from the non-Christian manager.

All humans, both as individuals and communally, are commissioned with the task of management (the duty of stewardship). A few have been given (called to) the additional responsibility of serving others through leadership in selected areas. Frequent reference is made in management literature³ to the differences between "management" and "leadership" in an attempt to stress that management is 'the taking care of' and leadership is 'the giving direction to'. The impression is often given that management tends to perceive its actions as short term (dull, routine) whereas leadership tends to view its direction giving actions as long term (charismatic, creative, innovative) and that both - management ability and leadership - are seldom found in the same person. This distinction is made despite the generally accepted "definition" of management which mentions

² "We are obligated to God in every possible way. Were it not for his decision to have made us, we would not be. Everything we are is His." (Sire:54).

³ Covey, Stephen R. in his book The 7 habits of Highly Effective People p.101 illustrates the difference by the story of a work team that is cutting a path through the jungle with great efficiency until a 'leader' climbs a high tree and notices that they are working in the wrong jungle. Articles in management journals such as Harvard Business Review further supports the distinction being made: Kotter, John P. What Leaders Really Do Harvard Business Review, May-June 1990, No.3. p.103-111. Even Myron Rush (1989: p.114) distinguishes between leadership and management and states in contradiction to earlier statements (Rush 1983: p.13) hinting at the importance of attitude in the minds of workers: "Leadership focuses more on the creation of the right attitudes while management is concerned more with making sure the right actions occur, regardless of attitude."

that leadership is but one of the functions of management (Griffin:6)⁴. A strong case can be made that the excessive emphasis placed on differentiating between management and leadership is dangerous as it encourages the subtle erosion of the servanthood ingredient of Christian stewardship, when it creates an aura around the leader at the expense of the management elements. Closely bound to the broader meaning of stewardship is the concept of leadership.

The concept of stewardship is synonymous with the role of management. Stewardship is management. It incorporates long-term direction-giving decisions and actions as well as short-term daily operational activities. How can a wise steward ignore long-term environmental effects, and be concerned only about printing bibles with ozone harmful inks?

Understanding the Individual - a Christian View

Although it is possible, and often happens in practice, that managers manage resources without having to manage 'human resources'⁵, 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' implying at best that humans are ranked equally with other resources such as money, land, raw materials and machines. Even the human resources school of thought, which is prepared to consider more than the physical and/or social needs of the worker, continues to give opportunities for intellectually challenging tasks only in the interests of gain for the organization (extracting their pound of flesh). The prevalent consideration is to keep workers satisfied, happy, and challenged so that they can contribute to a greater degree toward the organization's goal achievements. At worst, the implication of viewing people as human resources is that people are exploited, as other resources are exploited by business and industry in the pursuit of materialistic gain.

A biblical view of man is a fourfold view. Man is (1) created by God to be "God like" with both individuality and communality. However, man (2) choose to sin, to separate himself from God, and now has a fallen nature. But God provides (3) a way through Jesus to restore man to that which

⁴ Koontz (1980) believes that the study of leadership should not be separated from the study of management. For management to be truly effective, managers must also be effective leaders.

⁵ People are not resources, as one of the common concepts that is associated with resources is that they get used up. People do not get used up - unless they are exploited.

he was originally. This restoration process (4) is God's cause in the world and He invites man to participate.

Man is a created being - created in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27). As such he has value. "That we are made in the image of God means that we are significantly different from the rest of creation. From this notion derives our human dignity" (Sire:1990:55). Psalm 8 supports this with the statement

You made him a little lower than heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.
You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
you put everything under his feet: (NIV)

God not only created us as individuals (He knows the number of hairs on one's head) but also as communal people. "The Christian world view avoids the fatal traps of both individualism and collectivism. 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 were made for God; we were made for each other" (Sire:1990:64). Many narratives in the bible refer to individuals: Abraham, David, Jesus, Paul. We 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 his wonderful light." (1 Pet 2:9) "The image of God is not expressed in the individual alone but in the corporate male/female complex, in other words, in community....Our very diversity as men and women is a reflection of God's nature....God himself is characterized by multiplicity" (Sire:1990:56). Humans also require multiplicity. They require a community for a sense of belonging. A contrast to this is the individualism of Western views which Robert Bellah describes as follows: "the individual is prior to society, which comes into existence only through the voluntary contract of individuals trying to maximize their own self-interest" (Bellah: in Sire:1990:58). The image of God involves human dignity, sexual differentiation, family, corporateness, and individuality (Sire:1990:67). The second aspect of the fourfold view is that man, using the power of choice given to him by God, chose to disobey his Creator (Gen 3) and thereby made 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 and know what is good and what is bad" (TEV:Gen 3:4). "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 rule over his fellow men. Separating himself in 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 his supremacy" (White:1940:24). Selfishness destroys the image of God in man. The manager/steward must realize this in working with other people and himself.

Third, man's value in the sight of God is increased considerably by the sacrifice of Jesus' life in order to free man from sin. Humanity is now doubly precious - not only created, but now 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.

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 this world, we as stewards have an important part in it. Our part is not only in context of ourselves (individually), but also our 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. The steward may become discouraged as 'results' are seldom seen. However, encouragement is found in that his reward is not based on results but on the motive, the attitude in which the task was done.

"The whole scheme of human life, then, can be summed up in four terms: *creation, fall, redemption, glorification*. We were 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/ stewards have the challenging task of participating in God's cause in this world, in being co-workers with God in this process with regard to their associates ('subordinates').

Perspectives on Management

Serious study of management originated during the early 1800's with the recognition of the importance of organizing factory workers to improve their efficiency. Conditions in factories were grim. Work was organized in such a way that it was dehumanizing. There was little room for choice, tasks were routine and monotonous, and little social interaction took place. Remuneration was based on 'the least the market would bear'. In some cases conditions deteriorated further as managers

pursued economic goals at the cost of the worker by the introduction of child labor, unhealthy work environments, and the exploitation of the environment and other resources.

Classical Perspective - Management pioneers like Frederick Taylor attempted to improve the lot of the worker through introducing methods that took their economic needs into consideration. Management had ignored these and concentrated only on economic gains. 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 co-operation. In this approach the worker is assumed to be a cog in the economic machine, and his behavior is as predictable as any machine's function based on its design. Motivation is by the carrot-and-the-stick method (carrot in front, stick from behind), ie., the worker is motivated by economic security. The manager is firmly in control over 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 name **scientific management**. The world view displayed is based on materialistic, scientism and economistic ideologies. Management tools often used in conjunction with this approach include mathematical models, decision models, time and motion study, piecework pay incentives, etc. It must be made clear that the use of these tools are not inherently wrong, but the purpose for their use must be questioned.

Human Relations Perspective - The Hawthorne studies (1927-1932) jolted management into realizing that the human being consists of more than just a full stomach, but that he 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 (Maslow, McGregor's X and Y theory) based on the assumption that worker happiness (the heart) leads to improved performance. Management's dealings with workers were adjusted accordingly - kindness, courtesy, civility, and decency became the order of the day. Yet, the manager is the one who knows best, and therefore makes decisions - he is now just a benevolent authoritarian. Attempts are made to develop harmonious teams or *esprit de corps*. Although the complexity of the human is recognized to some degree, it is grounded in a secular setting with no provision made for God's viewpoint on human potential. There are also practical problems as managers managing on these assumptions may become directionless as their decisions are based on their intense desire to belong. A dichotomy arises - the manager is 'soft', but must make the decisions in an authoritarian

manner. To resolve this, many managers have become kind, paternalistic managers - the kind father who knows best for his children. Management terms associated with this approach include human relations movement, and organizational behavior, but the perspective is usually called **behavioral management**. Again many of the techniques (treating people with kindness, building team spirit) of behavioral management cannot be faulted, but question can be raised as to the motive for management's apparent kindness toward the worker/s. The attitude of management, often displayed when the manager finds that worker behavior or performance is not as expected, is "Look what I get after all that I have done for them."

Human Resources Perspective - Contemporary management has attempted to put together what was learnt from both scientific management and behavioral management, and come to realize that placing too much emphasis on only one perspective or approach brings poor results. Several attempts have been made to provide a comprehensive model - operations management, systems approach to management, situational management. 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 (such as financial, environmental, raw materials, machinery, information systems). 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, ingenuity, imagination, and is able and eager to use these innovatively and to be recognized for using them. Management attempts then 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" (Covey:1992:178). A strongly humanistic ideology 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 objectives of the organization" (Ibid.). This enlarged perspective of humans is referred to as **human resource management**. Terminology associated with this perspective include: Management by Objectives, Japanese approach to management (Theory Z), managing for excellence (Thomas Peters), participative management, quality circles, etc. 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, but what must be questioned, is the world view within which these techniques and management tools are used.

It is evident from the above discussion that there have been two emphases in management thought. First there are those that see management as consisting primarily of managing things, or resources, where techniques and methods are the primary tools used toward efficiency. Ellul elaborates on the idea of *technique*. He views it as a mindset or a way of thinking. Sire (121) illustrates how the drive to efficiency has restricted our thinking into set approaches to all aspects of life. Even the way we make decisions is structured according to the scientific (rational) method (Griffin:1990:131)⁶. No mention is made, or consideration given regarding 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 p.126). Caution should be exercised so as not to discard all technique but to view it in proper relation to other elements in the sphere of management.

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, to seeing him in an intellectual context. Yet management thought is striving to 'use the human resource efficiently and effectively toward goal attainment.' It is in the management of people that management is fumbling. The techniques, the quantitative tools, the computer models that are applied to the resources (with exception of human resources) can facilitate the efficiency drive toward objectives, but management techniques which attempt to make efficient use of the 'human resource' is likely to fail. As Covey quite rightly states "you simply can't think *efficiency* with people. You think *effectiveness* with *people* and *efficiency* with *things*" (Covey:1989:169-70).

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 investigated the significance of what man is. What then should be a Christian's approach to the stewardship with/of other people? What is Christian management?

⁶ The rational decision-making process consists of the following six steps:

Step 1:	Recognize and define the decision situation;
Step 2:	Identify appropriate alternatives;
Step 3:	Evaluate each alternative in terms of its feasibility, satisfactoriness, and consequences;
Step 4:	Select the best alternative;
Step 5:	Implement the chosen alternative;
Step 6:	Follow-up and evaluate the results of the chosen alternative.

I propose that a Christian approach to management should understand the role of management as that of steward (servant leader⁷ 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 gave man authority) that have been entrusted to them for development toward God directed purposes and to the glory of God. In this definition we find a) the function, b) the collaborators, c) the resources, d) the purpose, and e) the method.

This definition, if one could call it such, 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, manufacturer, farmer, or non-profit organization, has a similar role to fulfill. This provides the Christian businessman with a higher purpose than to make a profit. He, as a steward, has an integral part to play in God's cause in this world. It provides the businessman a much higher meaning in life than material gain.

As steward in the role of servant leader, he can now provide a spiritual dimension in the work place. Workers are not seen merely as physical beings with social and psychological needs, but as fellow stewards (not to be lorded 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. The 'manager'⁸ has become a co-worker with God, and at the same time his attitude toward 'his workers' has changed as they are partners and fellow co-workers with God. The resultant 'managerial' style may not be different from the participative managerial styles currently espoused by management theorists and consultants, but the crucial difference will be the motive behind the approach and the attitude prevalent in the organization (organizational culture). Covey (1992:179-180) describes the desires of people as follows:

People want to contribute to the accomplishment of worthwhile objectives. They want to be part of a mission and enterprise that transcends their individual tasks. They don't want to work in a job that has little meaning, even though it may tap their mental capacities. They want purposes and principles that lift them, ennoble them, inspire them, empower them, and encourage them to their best selves.

The need for a Christian perspective on management has long been recognized by management scholars. Covey is cited above, but Ohmann (1955) also highlights the perceived need

⁷ Note that although mention is made of the role of the manager as servant-leader, I do not attempt to differentiate the meaning of these terms to the extent that contemporary literature attempts to do.

⁸ 'Manager' is now placed in quotes as its enlarged meaning must be differentiated from the usual meaning of manager.

for a spiritual dimension to management when he wrote: "I am convinced that workers have a fine sensitivity to spiritual qualities and want to work for a boss who believes in something and in whom they can believe....There are some indications that our people have lost faith in the basic values of our economic society, and that we need a spiritual rebirth in industrial leadership....How can we preserve the wholeness of the personality if we are expected to worship God on Sundays and holidays and mammon on Mondays through Fridays?...Quite evidently our religion of materialism, science, and humanism is not considered adequate." Ohmann then continues to illustrate his point by citing two real life examples of businessman who have managed with a Christian perspective.

The following diagram⁹ is an attempt to summarize the prevalent philosophies of management (three of which were described in the previous section) as evidenced over the past century, (ie. scientific, behavioral, and human resource) together with a suggested Christian (spiritual) perspective as outlined above.

Need/s Met	Metaphor	Management Perspective	Focus
Physical/Economic	Stomach	Classical	Power & Control
Social/Emotional	Heart	Human Relations	Team Work
Psychological	Mind	Human Resource	Development of Talent
Spiritual	Soul	Christian	Stewardship Mission Directed

The 'production orientation' as suggested by Hawrylyshyn and Koontz essentially combines the first three perspectives into a model for management. The Christian orientation combines all four perspectives into a model based on the concept of stewardship.

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 a harmonious response that benefits all and brings glory to God.

⁹ Adapted from Stephen Covey's Principle-Centered Leadership description of four management paradigms, p.176.

If your response to this definition is: "Impossible, no human agent can then successfully exercise management," then I have succeeded in making clear that without the Holy Spirit any management responsibility is impossible to shoulder successfully. Take further encouragement from the fact that we have to realign our measurements of success to the biblical perspective. We often limit the measurement of results to quantitative success measures (be it financial, market share, baptisms, student passes) to determine success, but we need to understand that the true measurement of success for the biblical steward was his attitude - a more exacting criteria:

"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 the 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." (White:Kress Collection:7)

Management has everything to do with the steward's worldview and his relationship with God.

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