

Mintzberg H. *The nature of managerial work*. New York: Harper & Row, 1973. 298 p.
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In contrast to the traditional description of managerial work as planning, organizing, coordinating, and controlling, this book depicts the manager as working in "calculated chaos," "controlled disorder" (to quote one newspaper review of it). The job is characterized by its unrelenting pace; its brevity, variety, fragmentation, and interruption; the extensiveness of contact (especially of a peer and lateral nature); and its orientation to live action and oral communication. The content of the work combines interpersonal roles that feed informational roles that feed decisional roles. Dilemmas of planning and of delegation as well as problems of superficiality plague its execution. [The *SSCI*® indicates that this book has been cited in over 595 publications.]

Origins of *The Nature of Managerial Work*

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I applied to do a PhD in management policy at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Sloan School of Management at a time (1965) when there was no professor of management policy there, let alone such a field of study in the doctoral program. They let me in and allowed me free rein, so I was able to fashion the program to my own needs and interests.

My interests from the very beginning focussed on the strategy-making process (in fact, my very first article, published as a doctoral student, was entitled "The science of strategy making"). Thus, when the time came to write a thesis, I proposed to do one within the mainstream of the field. Igor Ansoff had just published *Corporate Strategy*,¹ which presented an elaborate planning model for making expansion/diversification decisions in an enterprise. I wished to extend the model to strategic issues in general and to nonprofit organizations. But my proposal to study the closest organization at hand was turned down (the new dean at the Sloan School, Bill Pounds, did not find the idea opportune!), and my lack of effort to find a more distant one (did I "know"

something that I only "learned" later on?) left me groping for a thesis topic for about six months.

A short time earlier (in 1966, as I recall), James Webb, who was running NASA, had approached the faculty at the Sloan School about being studied himself as a manager. He felt that NASA had to justify its existence by its spin-offs and believed that its management processes were among those things worth copying. As the only student in this school of *management* interested in management at the time (as opposed to computers or mathematical modelling, T groups, or whatever), I was approached to do it. While benefiting from a wonderful tour of NASA with several MIT professors, I finally declined the offer as far too risky for a doctoral student in that bastion of science called MIT.

Sometime later a conference was held at the Sloan School to discuss what impact the computer would have on the senior manager.² Here I found a distinguished group of people unable to come to grips with the issue because they had no *conceptual* basis to consider managerial work. They all knew what managers did—indeed a number of them were or had been successful managers—but they could not abstract that knowledge to consider issues such as the impact of the computer on managerial work. I realized there we needed something more than Gulick's old POSDCORB (planning, organizing, staffing, directing, coordinating, reporting, and budgeting) to describe managerial work. So I ended up with that thesis after all.

Webb was no longer available, and I proposed to study five chief executives. Fairly early on I wrote to General James Gavin, who headed up Arthur D. Little (and who had become quite well known as a war hero who turned early against the Vietnam War). He agreed immediately, without even meeting me, which made a great difference when I approached others. And so I got to spend some delightful time with General Gavin; Bernard O'Keefe, who ran EG & G; Harry B. Henshel of the Bulova Watch Company; Charlie Brown of the Newton Public School System; and John Knowles, who headed the Massachusetts General Hospital. I guess I got at least some of it right because Knowles wrote to me a few years later about a colleague who put an article of mine about the study on his desk with the comment: "John, this sounds just like you!"

1. Ansoff I. *Corporate strategy*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965. 241 p. (Cited 50 times.)

2. Meyers C A, ed. *The impact of computers on management*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1967. 310 p.