

Methods of management

Management has been described as getting things done by other people. Managers have responsibility for enabling an organisation to achieve its objectives. They are therefore responsible for planning, organising, and controlling organisational activities. Managers set budgets, monitor those budgets, and identify ways of making sure that the budget is kept to. In addition managers manage resources - people, plant, time, materials, finance, etc. People sometimes think that management is a very precise science. However recent research has shown that this idealistic picture is often quite different from the reality.

In the real world, managers operate in a whirl of activity, constantly having to switch their attention from one subject, problem or person to another. They live in an uncertain world, where relevant and useful information is often mixed up with gossip and speculation.

Management by objectives

A popular method of management is what is referred to as 'management by objectives'. This involves setting objectives and targets for different aspects of the organisation. The managers job is then to make sure that these objectives are achieved given an allocated amount of resources. The objectives will either be achieved, exceeded, or fallen short of - requiring remedial action where appropriate.

Another form of management is an autocratic approach where managers set targets and objectives for others and supervise the performance of their work. The problem with autocratic managers is that they can be intimidating and often fail to encourage employees so that they do not use the human resource as well as possible.

Consultative managers consult with others to find out their views and ideas before making decisions.

Democratic managers encourage others to make decisions for themselves.

Self managing teams are ones where management is devolved to members of a team, which does not have to wait for instructions from above.

The style of management that is most appropriate is often dependent on the situation e.g. the nature of the industry, the speed with which decisions need to be made, the familiarity of managers and others with the management style etc.

Problems of management

Management has been described as getting things done through or by other people. The effective manager therefore needs to be able to inspire and motivate others at work. However, management is not an easy task and some people fail to make good managers:

- * because they lack the personality and drive to organise well
- * they fail to inspire others
- * because their style of management does not fit in with their organisation, or the people that they are expected to manage
- * because they have not been provided with appropriate training.

There is an important distinction between proactive and reactive management. A proactive manager is someone that makes things happen through the actions and decisions that they make. The proactive manager shapes the future rather than waiting for the future to happen.

Typical characteristics of a proactive manager are that:

1. They plan ahead
2. They anticipate change and identify appropriate ways of dealing with change
3. They clarify aims and objectives for team and individual behaviours
4. They encourage team members to state their views and respond to these views and suggestions
5. They seek to maintain high levels of team morale.

In contrast, the reactive manager reacts to change when it happens rather than anticipating and shaping change.

Typical characteristics of the reactive manager are that:

1. They respond to changes that have occurred
2. They defend the aims and objectives taken by groups/teams
3. They seek to defend the team against criticisms.