Chapter 10
Management as a Supportive Practice: The Complexity of Management Unraveled

Maarten J. Verkerk
University Maastricht, The Netherlands.

ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the nature of the management practice is investigated. The scene is sketched by telling a couple of stories from the experience of the author. Then, it is argued that an organizational approach is needed to understand the thinking and behavior of managers. It is shown that practice approaches are very suitable because they take their starting point in the daily activities, do justice to the nature of different activities, and make underlying ideals, values, and basic beliefs explicit. The Triple I model is used to investigate the practice of management in detail. It is shown that practices and management practices are intimately intertwined. The author’s conclusion is that management is a supportive practice that is disclosed by the intrinsic values of the specific domain.

INTRODUCTION

I have been a manager for more than forty years. I have managed factories in the Netherlands, Taiwan and Germany. I have managed professional organizations like psychiatric hospitals and innovation networks. The smallest organization that I managed employed about ten people and brought in less than one million Euros
Management as a Supportive Practice

per year, the largest one had more than 900 employees and generated three hundred million Euros of revenue per year. I have also managed voluntary organizations like churches, study centers, and reflection networks. These organizations varied in size from about 10 to 300 people and the budget varied from hundred to hundred thousand Euros per year. For all these different organizations and contexts, the words ‘manage’ and ‘management’ are often used. The nature of voluntary organizations is quite different of that of professional organizations. Despite that, also in voluntary organizations I used my managerial capabilities for policy discussions, making multi-year plans, evaluations of progress, chairing meetings, and so on. Last but not least, I experienced in voluntary organizations the same type of stress as in professional organizations.

The idea of ‘management’ raises a lot of questions. One set of question refers to the different contexts. What are the similarities and differences between managing professional organizations like factories and hospitals? What are the similarities and differences between managing voluntary organizations like churches and study centers? What are the similarities and differences between managing professional and voluntary organizations? Another set of questions refers to the nature of the managerial activities. What is management? How to understand the complexity of management? Is management a practice? If yes, what type of practice?

The research question of this chapter is: What is the nature of a management practice? To answer this question we first have to address three sub questions:

1. What type of approach to management is required?
2. What type of philosophical approach is required?
3. How to understand the relationship between a practice and the management of an organization in which this practice is embedded?

This chapter has the following outline. First, we explore the managerial scene by telling stories. Then, we investigate the first, second and third sub question respectively. Finally, we return to the research question: What is the nature of the management practice? We discuss the results and draw some conclusions.

STORIES FROM THE MANAGERIAL PRACTICE

A pitfall in studying management is to focus on theoretical and philosophical ideas and to lose sight of the real practical questions and challenges. This pitfall can only be avoided by taking the daily activities and experiences of managers as a starting point for philosophical reflection. This section is mainly based on Verkerk (2015).
A Novel Evolutionary Algorithm for Multidimensional Knapsack Problem
[www.igi-global.com/article/a-novel-evolutionary-algorithm-for-multidimensional-knapsack-problem/125659?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/a-novel-evolutionary-algorithm-for-multidimensional-knapsack-problem/125659?camid=4v1a)

Data Envelopment Analysis with Fuzzy Parameters: An Interactive Approach
[www.igi-global.com/article/data-envelopment-analysis-fuzzy-parameters/55860?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/data-envelopment-analysis-fuzzy-parameters/55860?camid=4v1a)