

Lessons for Media Management Science and Practice
from Six Pioneers of Management Theory

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The field of media management is still relatively young and lacks a distinctive theoretical foundation. This lack has also been frequently remarked as the basis for encouraging theory development as an essential requirement for the field to become a discipline. In this paper, the author draws on six influential pioneers in management theory to establish a contemporary importance that has potential to contribute to advancing the benefits entailed by cross-innovation. In chronological order of historical importance, the six pioneers are:

- Frederick Winslow Taylor
- Henri Fayol
- Mary Parker Follett
- George Elton Mayo
- Lyndall Urwick
- Chester Barnard

The substance is based on a close reading of six chapters from an anthology published in 2013 and titled *The Oxford Handbook of Management Theories*. This is supplemented by readings from works credited to the six pioneers. This paper will address two gaps in the literature.

First, there is little evident scholarship in the field of media management that draws in any significant way on any of the six pioneers of management theory. Second, the little that has been published about the work of these pioneers is truncated and typically treated as distant, dusty history. It is only important to know about, not for generating contemporary insights or in application to media management. This is evident, for example, in the two editions of the *Handbook on Media Management and Economics* (2005 & 2018). The introductory chapter authored by Alan B. Albarran sketches a brief history of management science that is useful but only a handful of pages that briefly touch on the work of several pioneers (Taylor, Fayol and Mayo) but excludes others (Follett, Urwick and Barnard). What is said is not directly applied to media management science or practice. This is not intended as a criticism of Albarran's work, the purpose of which is to contextualize the rest of the contributions that are directly relevant to the field's scholarly and practical concerns. It is to illustrate the gap I have indicated and to suggest the potential value that could be derived from a more expansive treatment seeking to identify concepts and insights that remain as valid today as when first articulated by these pioneers. Two examples will illustrate.

Frederick Winslow Taylor is considered the 'father of scientific management.' In the early 20th century he pioneered applying new scientific methods to the study of work practices and processes. He believed science could reveal opportunities for making significant improvements in both labor and management that would produce significant gains in productivity and efficiency – the twin cornerstones for enhancing profitability. His perspective has been fiercely criticized for reducing workers to numb automatons consigned to the grinding repetition of factory work, and for championing the managerial role as the locus of brainpower with an authoritative right to command and control the subordinate brawn of workers.

Those criticisms are valid to the extent that they are uncritically accepted and applied, which has sometimes been the case in the factory approach of mass production. But his concerns about how to get the most and best output from both workers and managers who are jointly responsible for production remains as pivotal a concern for companies today as then. They continue to benefit consumers, as well, because gains in productivity and efficiency allow for improvement in competitive pricing that fuels economic development. His advocacy of detailed planning and continual monitoring of work activities, and the application of scientific methods to validate conclusions on an empirical basis are no less important today than in the early 20th century.

While much that is particular to his perspective on workers and managers (1949) is not relevant to media companies in the creative industries, several aspects have been important. The first is his recommended focus on efficiency and productivity. While it is true that making media is unlikely to achieve the degrees of either that manufacturing industries can achieve, both are significant objectives of persistent concern. Being as efficient as possible under the constraint of also being effective matters for every media company, and improving productivity provides as great a competitive advantage for media companies as for any type of firm in any category of industry. While media firms probably need to endure higher degrees of waste in the application of scarce resources due to the uncertainties inherent in creative work, that doesn't mean waste is desirable. Figuring out how much waste is acceptable and how to achieve optimal degrees of efficiency to enhance productivity benefits from the application of scientific principles and methodologies. If not, we are in the wrong field. Moreover, in some areas of media production the emphasis on routinization and factory-like approaches make more sense than one might think. An example is news production, which happens on a cyclical basis with tight deadlines and requires the persistent achievement of sufficient quality that depends on adhering to established standards of professional journalistic and editorial practice.

Henri Fayol was a contemporary of Taylor. He worked in France in the early 20th century as the CEO of a coal mining company. He emphasized the importance of "administrative abilities," which equally apply to commercial enterprises and public agencies. His observations of the French military during World War One convinced him of the need for excellence in the administration of organizations, whatever the type and size. Fayol divided managerial responsibilities into six "abilities": administrative, technical, marketing, financial, safety and accounting. He further assigned proportionate degrees of these abilities to different categories

of management, starting with what we call C-Suite positions down through division and department levels to the line level of production.

Fayol was more focused on the practice of management than Taylor. While Taylor was most keenly interested in the results, Fayol's experiences encouraged a tighter emphasis on managerial competencies needed to secure those results. He elaborated a taxonomy that proposed five "elements of management": 1) forecasting and planning, 2) organizing, 3) coordinating, 4) commanding, and 5) verifying. Planning involves developing informed expectations of future conditions and preparing to meet the challenges and opportunities. This is what we call strategic management. Organizing is the work required to secure the necessary resources of all types to accomplish what should be done. We call this acquisition and logistics. Coordinating is the work needed to ensure a company performs as an integrated and orchestrated unity. Michael Porter's 'value chain' concept is a relevant contemporary example of the importance this entails. Commanding is required to manage daily operations, which necessarily involves leadership that goes beyond merely giving orders to focus on motivating workers. Verifying is the work of continually monitoring and measuring what is done and what the activities produce. Today, we refer to this as quality control.

Fayol published many articles, papers and books. The seminal encapsulation in English is a 1949 publication that serves as a distillation. His ideas are as pertinent for understanding the roles and dimensions of management today as in the early 20th century. Many of the specializations noted in the example, such as strategic management and supply chain management, can trace their roots partly to the taxonomy first proposed by Fayol. And all of this is relevant to the management of any media company. Managers need to be competent in forecasting, planning, organizing, coordinating, commanding and leading and should be held accountable for results. However, as Fayol observed, all managers don't necessarily need to have equal competence in all aspects. The priorities of one's position determine the proportionate balance of essential competencies – i.e., what is 'core'. Managers of media firms are challenged to develop these competencies, as many scholars in our field have noted, because the degree to which they have become core has grown considerably since the digital turn that has fueled rising competition and higher economic stakes.

This paper will elaborate on more insights from Taylor and Fayol, and continue with the same for the other four pioneers of management theory and science. The paper contributes to the conference theme in two ways. First, it provides checks the tendency to get carried away with speculation that innovation changes everything. It is certainly important for industrial and market advances, but essential requirements for excellence in the practice of media management are nothing new per se – even if sometimes new for some practitioners in industries that long enjoyed relatively low degrees of competition. However new and improved the products media firms produce, and the evolution of markets for those goods, the work of managing and leading is much the same and as pertinent to media companies as any other company or industry. Second, the paper provides food for thought about the potential fruitfulness of cross-innovation in approaches to managing media firms based on seminal work in management science that has continuing relevance for contemporary practice. The cross-

innovation at issue here is not between things, but rather in linking contemporary thought with important pioneers of management theory.

References

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