

The Nature of Managerial Work: A Book Review of Mintzberg

Willson Gustiawan

Administrasi Bisnis, Politeknik Negeri Padang

E-mail: wgustiawan@gmail.com

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to review an old holy book of management: the nature of managerial work's Mintzberg which originally published since 1973. The book is the answer of the young Mintzberg on what was his father do at the office. Mintzberg then details the kind of managers' activities, managerial work characteristics, managerial basic role, managerial jobs variations, and management science. Briefly, the aim of the book is to develop a manager job description through management science approach. This book review paper emphasizes the last chapter as integrated basic research findings in three previous chapters. In literature review, there is explanation about the outline of the analysis that how theory is developed. The implication for stakeholders around manager and future work as discussed.

Keywords: managerial work, Mintzberg, development of theory

Abstrak

Tujuan dari makalah ini adalah untuk mengulas buku suci tua yang telah diterbitkan sejak 1973 tentang manajemen, yaitu the nature of managerial work dari seorang ahli manajemen Mintzberg. Buku ini adalah jawaban atas pertanyaan Mintzberg kecil tentang apa yang dilakukan oleh ayahnya di kantor. Mintzberg kemudian merinci tentang jenis-jenis pekerjaan manajer, karakteristik pekerjaan manajerial, peran dasar manajerial, variasi pekerjaan manajer, dan manajemen sebagai ilmu. Singkatnya, tujuan buku tersebut adalah mengembangkan uraian jabatan manajer dengan pendekatan ilmiah. Makalah ulasan buku ini lebih menekankan diskusi dari bab terakhir sebagai perpaduan temuan-temuan riset yang dibahas pada tiga bab sebelumnya. Pada tinjauan pustaka, dikemukakan tentang garis besar analisis bagaimana sebuah teori dibangun. Implikasi bagi para pihak yang berada disekitar manajer dan pekerjaan yang dapat dilakukan dikemudian hari juga didiskusikan.

Kata kunci: pekerjaan manajerial, Mintzberg, pengembangan teori

I. INTRODUCTION

Reading through Mintzberg's the Nature of Managerial Work book, it seems to read a holy book which has yellowed in its edge. Not only, because of the age of 46 years old the book has, but also it should be a holy book for managers for such period time. Although until recently, there are so many books containing what is the really job of managers, this book is one of the milestone books in management.

Through this book, Henry Mintzberg simply want to answer his own question that he has been saving for twenty-seven years to the time, when he was a child. At that time, his father was the president of a small manufacturing firm, Mintzberg wondered what his father did at the office (p.viii). As time running, the question became a number of specific questions such as what kinds of activities does managers perform, what are the distinguishing characteristics of managerial work, what basic roles can be inferred from a study of the manager's activities, what variations exist among managerial jobs and to what extent is management a science (p.3). Regarding to begin to answer those questions, that is the purpose of this book. In other words, the aim of the book is to develop a job description that will have a meaning to those who believe that management can be approached as a science (p.4).

This book, actually is based on Mintzberg's empirical behavioral research for a couple of time. His own studies went significantly beyond the earlier work and provide us with a rich storehouse of data that should contribute significantly to our knowledge of what makes an effective manager (Sayles, Colombia University in Foreword).

He hoped that the book will be received as a contribution to the beginning of significant understanding of manager's job, and his investigation will stimulate others to engage in the interesting and important work of researching the job of the manager (p.198). I do agree with that and I hope so too.

I will emphasize my review of the book more in the last chapter regarding the future of managerial work, because as he said that final chapter begins with an integrated review of the basic findings presented in Chapter 3 through 6 (p.165). Therefore, we do not need to linger review those chapters because they contain the findings of the research. Things we need are the implications of this research to develop the concept of managerial work which in accordance with the age of information technology recently. However, before that, briefly I will summarize what are Chapter 3 to 6 are about.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Mintzberg, to present a comprehensive description of managerial work, inevitably he began with describing eight major schools of thought on the manager's job. Those are: (1) the classical school (Henri Fayol cs.) that described managerial work in terms of a set of composite functions such as planning, organizing, coordinating, commanding and controlling; (2) the great man school that take a lesson from great leader of history as managerial work, (3) the entrepreneurship school that deal with the manager exclusively as decision maker, (4) the decision theory school that put the attention to the study of the unprogrammed decision, (5) the leader effectiveness school that study the leadership as the interpersonal behavior between the leader and the led, (6) the leader power school that focus on the leader's ability to use the power to evoke desired responses from subordinates and peers, (7) the leader behavioral school that analyzed the actual content of the manager's job by studying the behavior of the incumbents, (8) the work activity school that believed the work activities of managers are analyzed systematically with the empirical evidence.

The above eight school of thought of manager's job comprised a variety of approaches and research method and reached variety conclusion. These school became framework of thinking for four aspect of managerial work that constitute as the heart of this book. The first two aspects deal with the basic job: one focus on job characteristics and draw its findings from the work activity studies, the result of which suggest six important sets of work characteristics common to all managers' job, the other described the content of the manager's job in term of ten basic roles. This framework come from Mintzberg's study of the work of five chief executives, but it was supported by evidence of number of empirical studies of the behavior of different type of managers. It draws in particular on the findings of two decision-making and three leadership schools of thought on managerial work.

The third aspect is variation in managers' work, using the common roles and characteristics as a basis for investigation the differences. A contingency theory was suggested in which variation are attributed to the job environment, the job itself – the level and function in organization –, the person in the job, and the situation of the moment. It generates propositions about job differences, drawing on almost all of the empirical studies of managerial work that can be found.

The last aspect is programming the manager's job as suggested in the work decision theory school. It deals with the concept of programming, and presents preliminary descriptions of some of the programs managers apparently use. It discusses at some length the role of the management scientist and those areas in which he can influence the manager's effectiveness (p.26-27).

It can be illustrated the relationship between those four aspects as bodies of theory and the research in Figure 1 Outline of the Analysis – Development of the Theory as an effort to develop the theory of managerial work.

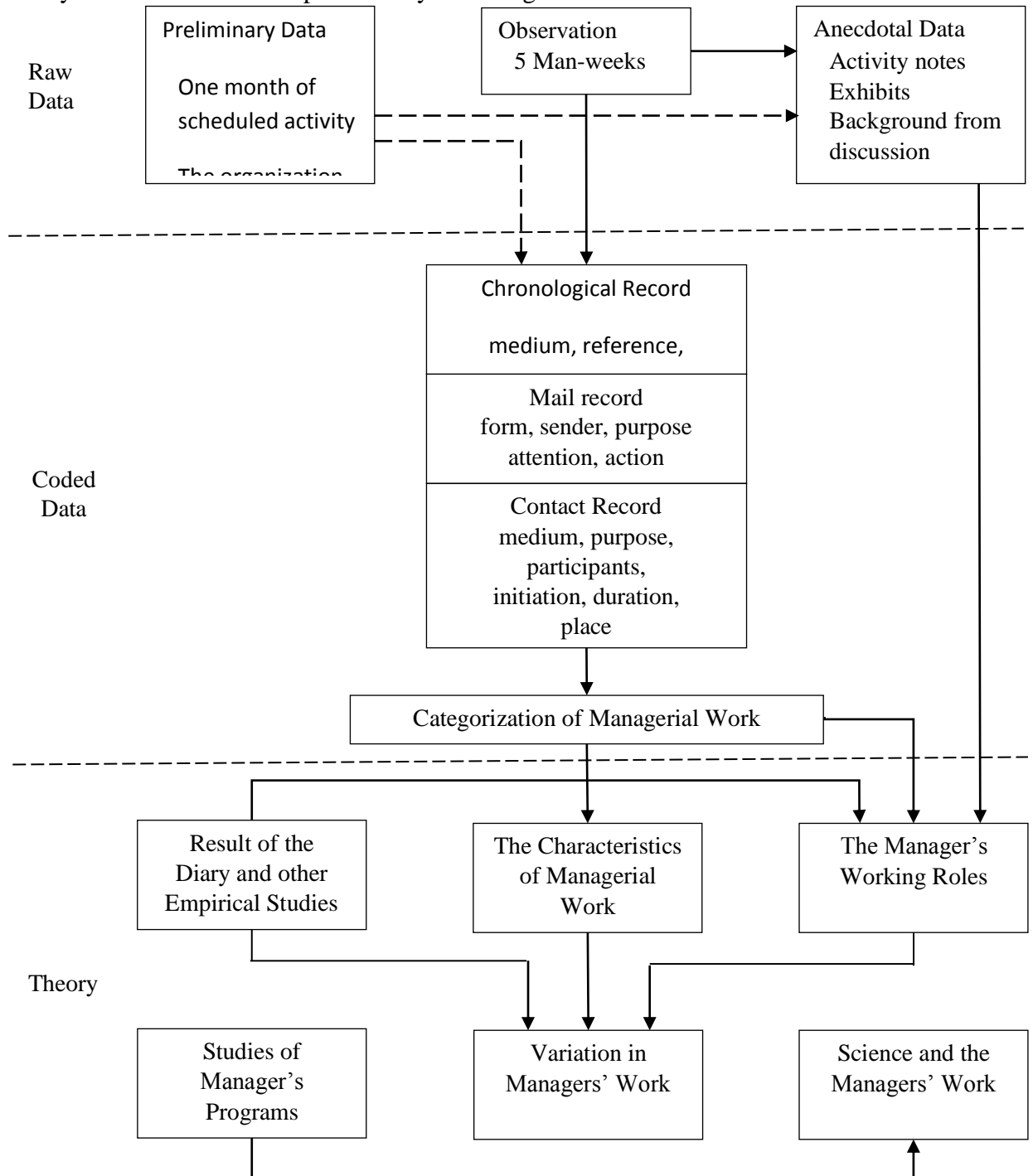


Figure 1 Outline of the Analysis – Development of the Theory (Mintzberg, p.265)

Figure 1 shows the development of the theory of this book. Therefore, where the six sets of job characteristics, the set of ten working roles of manager, the variations in managers jobs and the manager's program come from, should be cleared from now on.

III. METHOD

This paper utilizes library research which involve a series of study in collecting data from secondary library through comparing, contrasting, criticizing, synthesizing and summarizing. This paper belongs to basic research to explore the nature of management work.

Mintzberg arranged the book in seven chapters to answer the specific questions what do managers do. After introducing, he invites us in advance to visit some scholars in contemporary views of the manager's job chapter. Then, he stated some distinguishing characteristics of managerial work, the manager's working roles, variations in manager's work and science and manager's job in the next four chapters. To summarize his research and offer some implications for manager, teacher of managers, management scientist and researcher, he ends the book with the last chapter under the title of the future of managerial work.

IV. DISCUSSION

I think, we must go through some concepts that Mintzberg developed in his book. First of all, the various characteristics of the manager's work as the first step toward a comprehensive description. It shall examine the six sets of job characteristics that dealing with (1) the quantity and pace of manager's work, (2) the pattern in his activities, (3) the relationship, in his work, between action and reflection, (4) his use of different media, (5) his relationship to a variety of contacts, and (6) the interplay between his right and duties.

The second concept is the ten working roles of manager. A role is defined as an organized set of behaviors belonging to an identifiable office or position. Thus, actors, managers, and others play roles that are predetermined, although individuals may interpret them in different ways (p54). The ten roles divided into three groups: interpersonal, informational and decisional.

Interpersonal group: manager as figure head, as symbolic head, obliged to perform a number of routine duties of a legal or social nature; as leader, responsible for the motivation and activation of subordinates, responsible for staffing, training, and associated duties; as liaison, maintains self-develop network of outside contact and informers. Informational group: manager as monitor, seek and receives wide variety of special information to develop thorough understanding of organization and environment; as disseminator, transmits information received from outsiders of from other subordinates to members of the organization; as spokesman, transmit information to outsiders on organization's plan, policies, action, result, and serve as expert on organization's industry. Decisional group: manager as entrepreneur, searches organization and its environment for opportunities and initiates improvement project to bring out the change and supervises design of certain project; as disturbance handler, responsible for corrective action when organization faces important, unexpected disturbances; as resources allocator, responsible for the allocation of organization resources of all kind; and as negotiator, responsible for representing the organization at major negotiations.

The third concept is related to variations in manager's work, which deal with a contingency theory of managerial work, the job and the environment, the level and the

function of the job, the person in the job, the job over time, and eight managerial job types. All the concept can be found more detail in Chapter 5 of the book.

The last concept is manager's program that discuss the two necessary components for a science of managing – precise description of managerial work and systematic improvement of managerial work. This science and manager's job section, Mintzberg brought to us about programming the manager's work, studies of the manager's programs, role of the management scientist at the policy level, reprogramming scheduling activity, and reprogramming the strategy-making system.

In ten managerial roles, the manager must design the work of his organization, monitor its internal and external environment, initiates change when desirable, and renew stability when faced with a disturbance. Manager must take the broad view, do the unprogrammed work, and buttress the system where it is imperfect is only partly correct, and also do his share of regular work and must involve himself in certain ongoing organization activities (p.169-170).

Mintzberg believed that manager is overburdened with work, with increasing complexity of modern organizations and their problems, he is destined to become more so, is driven to brevity, fragmentation, and superficiality in his tasks, yet he cannot easily delegate them because of the nature of his information, he can do little to increase his available time or significantly enhance his power to manage, he is driven to focus on that which is current and tangible in his work even though the complex problems facing many organizations call for reflection and a far-sighted perspective. That why the manager is caught in a loop – work pressures lead to pronounced job characteristics that lead to increased work pressures – and he has been able to do little about it. To break the circle, manager must better understand the nature of his work and its problem and alter his working habits to deal with them, and the classroom must be used to teach the skill of managing and to develop insight into the job and better means of coping with its complexity.

So that, what are implications of this study? There are some implications that we can infer from Mintzberg's managerial work book. As he stated the implication for manager himself, for teacher of manager, for management scientist, and for researcher.

Implication for manager: the manager can study his own job and come to know the impact he has on his organization, and he can make changes in the way he manages. Mintzberg's study suggested ten points for more effective managing, those are: sharing information, dealing consciously with superficiality, sharing the job if information can be shared, making the most obligation, freeing self from obligations, emphasizing the role that fits the situation, seeing a comprehensive picture in terms of its details, recognizing own influence in organization, dealing with a growing coalition, and using the management scientist.

Implication for teachers of managers that they recognize that although the management school gives student degrees, it does not in fact teach them to manage, the degrees can hardly be considered prerequisites for managing. So they have to develop the skill of the managers such as in peer, leadership, conflict-resolution, information-processing, decision-making under ambiguity, resource-allocation, entrepreneurial, and skill of introspection.

For management scientists, this study implied that they must study and understand the work of the man for whom he designs system and solves problem, they must gain access to the manager's undocumented information to design useful system, management science must become once again the application of basic analysis that clear systematic thinking with a reliance on explicit data to the problem of management.

Finally, there some implications and also suggestions for researcher in terms of open-ended studies, follow-up studies, studies of job differences, studies of special aspects of the job, studies of manager effectiveness, and programming the job.

Here, we have completed our reading of Mintzberg's phenomenal study in the nature managerial work. For me, this study is an open and wide opportunities for us to do much more. There are some reasons as follows:

1. The lag of time, because this study was conducted in more than 40 years ago. During that long period of time, there has been so much taking place in the area of management and managers' job.
2. Rapid development in information system could be one factor that we can consider regarding the current managerial works and what really managers face today.
3. An open worldwide perspective of business will lead managerial works become much more hectic and complicated.

Therefore, there will be more thing to do. And, we have to thank to Mintzberg for seeking to encompass and integrate that small body of behavioral research relating to his study. His study went significantly beyond the earlier work and provided both student and manager with a rich storehouse of concepts that should contribute significantly to the knowledge of what makes an effective manager (p.xiii). Now, only one thing remains whether we want to continue this work.

In my own opinion, to continue in finding the theoretical framework of managerial work, I emphasize on seeing the manager as a human. I look at the human side of manager. It is not in interpersonal, but more in intrapersonal matters. As we known that, human consist of three major parts: body, brain, and soul. Body parts of human do all the job physically. While brain help to find the best way to do the job. But, the most important part in doing job is the soul part. I emphasize on soul part of human. It will be related to the value system such as belief and faith that human has.

The Mintzberg study has dealt with that body and mind part of human in identifying the job characteristics, the working roles, the variation of the work and programming the work. This study is rather poor with the value system that managers believe and hold. I think it become an interesting topic to discuss and it will be a potential question for future research in managerial work.

V. CONCLUSION

As conclusion, Mintzberg summarized his basic propositions about managerial work developed in the book in an integrated description to show the interrelationship among the manager's purposes, roles, and characteristics, and the influence these have on the development of a science of managing.

The manager, he stated as the person in charge of a formal organization or one of its subunits who is vested with formal authority over his organizational unit, and leads to ensure that his organization produces specific product efficiently, and that his organization serves the ends of the influencers (p.166). I think in this definition, besides efficiency, the manager also deal with effectiveness.

REFERENCES

- Alexander, L.D., 1979 , "*The Effect Level in the Hierarchy and Functional Area have on the extent Mintzberg Roles are Required by Managerial Jobs*", Academy of Management Proceedings, pp. 186–189.
- Chapter 3 The Nature of Managerial Work. (2015, September 20). Retrieved from Narotama:

[http://ebooks.narotama.ac.id/files/Leadership%20in%20Organization%20\(7th%20Edition\)/Chapter%203%20%20The%20Nature%20of%20Managerial%20Work.pdf](http://ebooks.narotama.ac.id/files/Leadership%20in%20Organization%20(7th%20Edition)/Chapter%203%20%20The%20Nature%20of%20Managerial%20Work.pdf)

HIB150 Week9. (2015, 09 20). Retrieved from PB Works: <http://hib510week9.pbworks.com/f/The+Nature+of+Managerial+Work,+Mintzberg+1973.pdf>

Lau, A.W., C.M. Pavett and A.R. Newman, 1980, "The Nature of Managerial Work: A Comparison of Public and Private Sector Jobs", *Academy of Management Proceedings*, pp. 339–343.

Mintzberg, H. (1973). *The Nature of Managerial Work*. New York: Harper Collin Publisher.

Pavett, C.M. and A.W. Lau, 1983, "Managerial Work: The Influence of Hierarchical Level and Functional Speciality", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 26 No. 1, March, pp. 170–177.

Synder, N.H. and T.L. Wheelen, 1981, "Managerial Roles: Mintzberg and the Management Process theorist", *Academy of Management Proceedings*, pp. 249–253