Managerial Work: A Teleological, Social and Quintessential Perspective

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Abstract: *This paper offers a theoretical discourse on managerial work. The content addresses related theories and conceptualizations of managerial work;what it entails and why it is yet imperative, even within the context of today's organizations and changing work interactions. Particular attention is given to three mutually inclusive managerial work categorizations, as put forward by the paper, namely: managerial work as a social, teleological, and quintessential action. The ideas presented herein suggest an approach or perspective to evaluating managerial work that is not constrained by time (based on historical or traditional designs) or structure (hierarchical defined role expectations), but one hinged on relationships (social), purpose (teleological), and representativeness (quintessential). In conclusion, this paper affirms that managerial work is dynamic, relative and transitionary, and that the success or effectiveness of the manager in his work is tied to the possession of certain competencies or abilities in line with his social, teleological and quintessential role expectations.*
Keywords:*Managerial work, social action, teleological action, quintessential action.*

I.   Introduction

In introducing or indulging in the discourse of a topic such as managerial work, we consider it imperative to begin with the description and understanding of the identity and title of "the manager". Who is the manager? The answer to this question we believe would serve to provide the necessary pre-requisites for a clearer and more informed understanding of the work of the manager. It is our position that in understanding managerial work, it is important to first consider the gaps and challenges which make such a role essential within the context of the organization.

The term or title of manager is borne out of the concept of management and deals specifically with the assigned duties of controlling, planning, organizing and decision-making (Fayol, 1949; Johns, 2001; Whitley, 1989). This is as the complexity and complications of human interactions and exchanges are such that require some focal point or referent authority which provides direction and charts the course of relationships, particularly those geared towards specific goals or ends. As observed (Bartlett, &Ghoshal, 2000), it is impossible to extricate the manager from the functionality of management. Hence the manager can be described as that individual who is assigned with the task of coordinating specific human activities, directing these activities towards the attainment of specific goals while at the same time symbolizing and embodying the very precepts this collection of individuals stand to represent. This description of the manager lays the groundwork for our assessment and discourse on the subject of managerial work.

In addressing the concept of managerial work, we find an avalanche of studies and theories beginning from the early 1940's that have been pre-occupied with describing and conceptualizing managerial work.In his study,Mintzberg(1973) summarized managerial work into three fundamental roles: the interpersonal (figurehead, liaison, and leader), informational (Monitor, spokesperson, disseminator) and the decisional (entrepreneur, disturbance handler, resource allocator and negotiator) roles. He argued that the strategy of the organization defined its structure which in turn determined the nature and feature of managerial work. His perspective of the manager centred primarily on the role of the manager and the structures that defined it.

We observe, in line with Willmott (1997) and Gibbs (1994) that managerial work is contingent upon industry, culture and the size of the organization and as such is not static but rather transitional within and alongside most organizations. While some studies have tended to emphasize on the functionality of managers within defined organizational levels (Mosley *et al*, 1985; Watson, 1986);Weare of theviewthat organizational hierarchies and structures are relative, contingent and as such, a consequence of the environment, the goal and

strategy of the business as well as the size of the organization (Mintzberg, 1973; Willmott, 1997; Gibbs, 1994). This is as organizations today operate and function within contexts significantly distinct from those in the past (with emphasis on globalization and the rise of virtual organizations as well as knowledge workers).

In this paper, we address the concept of managerial work from three premises or perspectives: managerial work as a social action (controlling, coordinating and concerned with significant others), as a teleological action (purposive, planned and goal-oriented) and finally as quintessential (symbolic, figurative and as an embodiment of the standards, values and precepts of the organization). This tallies with our earlier definition of the manager as that individual who is burdened with the task or function of coordinating specific human activities (social action), channelling or directing these activities towards the attainment of specific goals (teleological) while at the same time symbolizing and embodying the very precepts this collection of individuals stand to represent (Quintessential). It is therefore the purpose of this paper to provide a distinct yet accommodating description of managerial work as can be applied within a variety of industries, culture and organizational sizeand to discuss the various actions which describe managerial work in line with its social, teleological and quintessential perspectives. This would also entail the identification of related managerial competencies or abilities which best serve the manager within these three perspectives (social, teleological and quintessential)
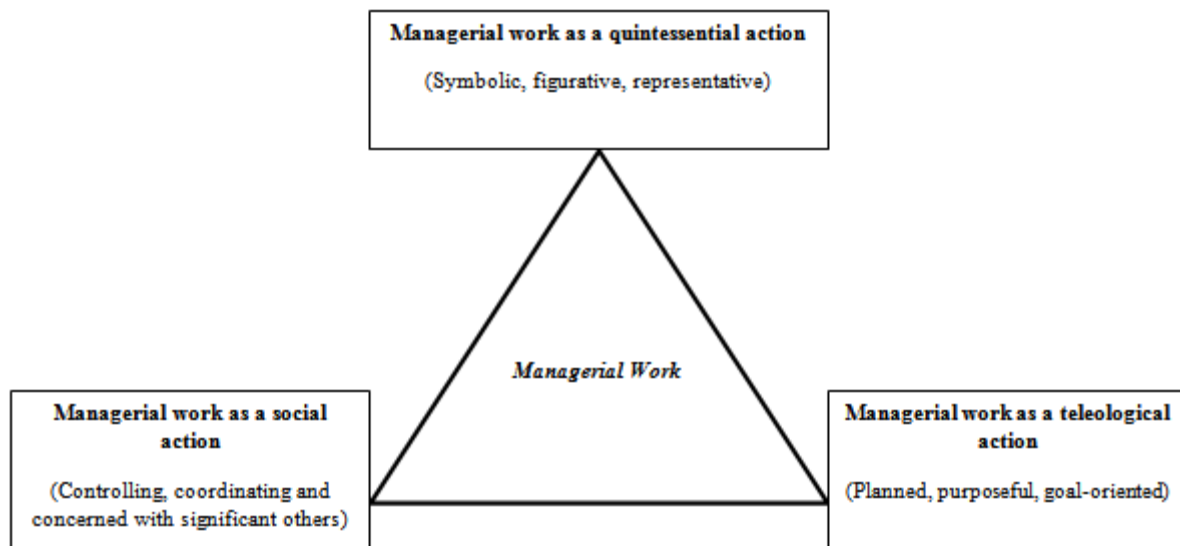

Figure 1: Managerial work model adapted in the study

Source: Conceptualized by the authors, 2018

II. Managerial Work As A Social Action

A key theme in management is its reliance on other people, mostly subordinates through whom it pursues specific goals and objectives. In order words, the need for managers exists as a result of the need to control and coordinate human actions. As such it would be inappropriate to call a sole proprietor who doubles as both owner and front-man of his business as a manager, given the most important ingredient of management, which is "people". Jaja and Zeb-Obipi (1999) support this position in their assertion that managers are not doers. Their category for doers comprise of actual front-men and technicians who have to deal directly with the technicalities of operating a machine, or processing a service or product or even dealing directly with the customers/clients of the organization. This line of thought is further supported by Lundquist (2013) and Svenningsson (2011).

In describing the position of the manager, Svenningsson (2011) opined that the manager ought to be considered as the servant of the employee given its resulting necessity from the need to manage and coordinate the employees of the organization. However, one may equate such a relationship (between the manager and the employee) to the causality dilemma of the "egg and the chicken". These features of interrelatedness, subjectiveness, and placement within the organization are what define the social actions of managerial work (Zeb-Obipi, 2007). It does not and cannot exist in a vacuum but rather is premised on the preconditions of the existence of significant others. Hence, it suffices then to describe managerial work as a social action; one which is expected to be both pro-active, reactive (based on guts and intuition) and also responsive (based on mindfulness, thoughtfulness, calculated facts and a review of the situation) to events and circumstances.

In describing managerial work as a social action, we refer to those activities carried out by the manager which concern the control, harmonizing and coordination of human activities and behaviour within the organization (Jaja, 2003). These include the practice of emotional reflexivity (Kpakol & Zeb-Obipi, 2017), the minding of others (Ahiauzu, 2006; Zeb-Obipi, 2007), expression of authority (Kpakol &Okpu, 2016; Goncalves, 2013), and the harnessing of organizational members efforts (Yesufu, 1984). Within the framework of activities afforded the manager through the elements and members of the organization, the work of the manager can therefore best be described as that cohesive activity that binds, sustains and moderates all other elements within the organization, thereby placing the manager at the centre of the organization.

As earlier stated, in this paper we try not to emphasize on the structure of the organization as a criteria or predictor of managerial work as used by previous scholars (Mosley *et al*, 1985; Watson, 1986). Our reason being that organizations today have evolved and currently adoptand emphasize a hybrid of structures and related work-based interactions defined primarily by functionality and relevance, such as obtainable in virtual organizations or other forms such as flatarchies (somewhere between the flat and hierarchical organizational structure). As such, we argue that the apportionment of roles or managerial work based on structural formsdraws substantially from the role of the manager as a social actor; one fully functional and defined by his actions and placement within the framework of the organization.

As a social action, managerial work concerns itself with those activities and functions which seek to harmonize individual subordinate values with those of the organization. It is concerned with the formulation of policies and regulations which control, coordinate and guide human behaviour within the organization. It is also concerned with those functions that drive and seek out the best in the workers as regards reward and support systems, growth opportunities for subordinates, mentoring and training as well as recruitment and selection practices. Furthermore, we find the role of managers as interfaces between the organization and various external environmental constituents such as customers, suppliers, distributors, the government, competitors, host communities and other stakeholders as falling within thedescriptionof a social action given the imperative for the manager's effective mapping and satisficing of all significant stakeholders of the organization in furtherance of its survival and performance.

Subsequently, one finds that the effectiveness or success of managers from this perspective of being a social action is tied especially to competencies which can best be described as being social or emotional in nature (Goleman 1998; Kpakol & Zeb-Obipi, 2017).This is given the fact that within the organizational framework which defines the manager, there is the tendency for the manifestation of behaviours by subordinates or significant others which could be regarded as supportive or deviant; positive or negative; encouraging or sabotaging. As noted in an earlier study (Kpakol & Zeb-Obipi, 2017), the social actions of the leader or manager should not aim at silencing or suppressing opposition, but rather harmonizing and creating a platform where seemingly opposing views or opinions can reach a compromise and cooperate. Such a feat would require significant adeptness at self-management (self-control and self-confidence), social awareness and relationship management (Goleman 1998). The social capacities of the manager from this perspective further reiterate the management relationship orientation by Tabernero et al (2009).

III.   Managerial Work As A Teleological Action

Organizational actions are purposive. These actions are moderated by rules and policies geared towards streamlining activities, behaviour and aligning values in such a way that enhances the organization's attainment of its goals and objectives (Zeb-Obipi, 2009). As a central component of the organization, it is the work of the manager to design and pattern the organization in such a way that it attains its goals and objectives through the effective maximization of its opportunities and efficient minimization of its resources. In describing organizational action, Zeb-Obipi (2009) identified two fundamental but distinct constructs which define the concept, namely purposiveness and mentalness. Where purposiveness describes the goal-orientation of the organization, mentalness is what distinguishes it from other non-human purposive actions (such as those of machines), giving it consciousness, thoughtfulness and spirit (Zeb-Obipi, 2009; Jaja, 1996).

Within the context of this paper, we argue that managerial presence, functions and work imbue organizational actions with mentalness. It is the managers within the organization, these decision-makers, which provide the organization with its consciousness and the capacity for thoughtfulness. As a teleological action, managerial work is both retrospective and prospective. It learns, adapts, polices and consciously modifies other related actions and behaviour in such a way that they are harmonized, focused and in line with the purpose and goals of the organization.It is as earlier observed, transitionary, as it also involves progression through the clear identification and benchmarking of attained goals and objectives.

Jaja and Zeb-Obipi (1999) described managerial acts as functions of goals. According to them, the effectiveness of managers was proportional to their goal achievement. This view is in line with our assertions of the purposiveness and teleology of managerial work. However, goals are relative and as noted by several scholars (Jones & George, 2000; John, 2006), they are not specific to only economic or financial ends but

covera range of non-financial pursuits and endeavours. We are therefore inclined to agree with Whittington (1992) that managerial actions need not be viewed from the rather myopic premise of capitalism, for despite its development and emergence within the capitalist relations of production, it is yet still mediated, enabled as well as streamlined by the culturally distinctiveconfigurations of components or factors of business systems. Hence as regards the goals and purposiveness of managerial work we identify with the ends put forward by Kaplan and Norton (1996). These comprise of standards to service or product quality, learning, profit maximization, organizational development, and the satisfaction of constituents(employees and customers) etc. As such, managerial work such as planning and decision-making provide the designs, formats and systems through which these goals are attained through the collective effort of members of the organization.

From this perspective, we argue that the manager's ability to actualize the goals of the organization would rely a great deal on its ability to effectively balance its relationship orientation with its task orientation (Tabarnero et al, 2009). This is as the focus shifts from just managing people or relationships, to directing such for the actualization of specific goals. The teleological perspective of managerial work identifies the purpose behind managerial social action. The role of the manager within this perspective is premised on the identification of a future, an end, and a reason for managing. Consequently, while it is important that relationships are maintained; policies and regulations are formulated and implemented to streamline and channel the emerging social "resources" from these relationships towards the achievement of the goals of the organization.Tabarnero et al (2009) describe this form of social resource as a function of the shared phenomena which according to them, ensues from the collective value, belief system and resulting norms of reciprocity captured and embodied in the psychological contract. Hence, we argue that a major requirement for managerial success from the teleological perspective is focus.

IV. Managerial Work As A Quintessential Action

Managers are considered as actual representatives of the organization (Mintzberg, 1973; Jaja& Zeb-Obipi, 1999; Jaja, 2003). It is their function and work to format, control and project the organization towards its projected destinations. This means that as captains of the "ship" they bear the emblem of the organization and can be considered as authorized"mouth pieces" of the organization.Their actions can therefore be considered as being that of the organization and hence quintessential or representative. This implies that their decisions and opinions are primal to those of other members of the organization as they are considered as the "voice" and "figure heads" of the organization. It also implies that their actions and work are also substantially symbolic asthat of the organization and binding on members of the organization.

Given their constituent positions as representatives and agents of the organization, it is therefore within the manager's power and work scope to develop and define a variety of exchange relationships and systems within the context of the organization that are best suited to the achievement of the organization's goals (Whittington, 1992; Willmott, 1997). For as Willmott (1997) opined when managers engage in meetings with stakeholders on behalf of the organization, recruit workers, define organizational priorities and formulate policies, they invariably shape the relationship between the organization and it's internal as well as external factors. This reaffirms their status and work as quintessential actions and as a basis upon which the organization can be appraised.

A major preconditioning factor for managerial excellence and quality leadership is its ability to learn and constantly develop itself in line with the organization's values and times. This implies constantly staying abreast of change events and the implications of such for the organization. By leading or managing, the manager symbolizes the ideals of the organization, consequently, providing exemplary behaviour and actions for other members of the organization. Hence, knowledge and character can be considered as fundamental to the manager's functionality and repute. This is position is best captured by Goodall and Robert's (2002)conceptualization of managerial knowledge-ability; implying a tendency and inclination for knowledge acquisition and application.Thispromotes constant learning and development, and allows managerial preparedness and adaptability to changing times and expectations.

It is important to note that in addressing the concept of managerial work in this paper, we treated managers on a single and general platform (as authoritatively recognized figureheads and agents of the organization). We have tried to avoid the constraining apportionment of managerial work in line with levels (upper, middle or lower) or the burdensome attempt of describing these tasks based on functionality (operations, departmental, branch, or regional). This is because we view managerial work as relative and contingent on the interplay and dynamism of industry, culture and organizational size. Consequently, it was the intent of this paper to describe managerial work without the constraints of time and structure but to offer a rather holistic, more embracing and elastic model of managerial work based on the perspective of their social, teleological and quintessential actions.

V. Conclusions

The discourse presented in this paper offers an approach towards the nature and description of managerial work based on three main categories of actions: the social, teleological and quintessential. Within the context of this paper, an attempt was made to de-emphasize perceptions and descriptions of managerial work based on structure and organizational historical-designs. The argument follows that the work of the manager can be elasticated to cover a variety of relative functions which are primarily concerned with getting results through the efforts of others (social), harnessing and focusing activities on the achievement of a particular goal or objective (teleological) and serving as figure heads and representatives of the organization (quintessential). Going by this, we also identified certain competencies and skills (social, emotional, task, learning) suited to enabling the manager function effectively within the capacities of the social, teleological and quintessential roles. In conclusion, we state that the role of the manager is highly susceptive and relative to change. This is as managerial work is defined by the dynamics of the events, context and conditions which define the organization and the reason for its existence; as such, its imperatives are solely as a result of the relationships it must manage, the goals it must achieve and the ideologies it must symbolize.

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