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Publication Date

2023-12-14

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SOME ADMINISTRATIVE PROBLEMS

IN THE  
OLD TESTAMENT

Joel I. Cooper

" 'Go West, young man!' was Horace Greeley's counsel for success a century ago. Today, in management circles, the common advice is: 'Delegate. Decentralize.'

"Why is this advice so often disregarded? Many management practices are open to uncertainty and debate, but there is substantial agreement in this country on the desirability of delegation. Experience, especially during the last war, has shown a remarkable capacity in people down the line to shoulder responsibility and get results."

So starts Newman's (1963) article on effective delegation.

Modern administrative philosophy is generally in agreement that the problems of administering a firm of any appreciable size are so complex so as to make it necessary for executives to delegate decision making to lower management levels and retain only policy making at the upper levels.

If we examine the administration of the largest firm in history (i.e., the earth), and if we analyze the decision making of the chief executive of the firm, God, we begin to see a myriad of violations of the principles which we consider a must today.

In a sense, God starts off as many executives. He is the sole owner of a small firm and His approach is completely authoritarian--He can hire or fire at will. As He goes on and the firm grows, He finds that He must change, but still resists surrendering His prerogatives.

Initially He violates one principle, that of not making a promise or threat which He cannot or will not back. For He says to Adam and Eve, "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for on the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." (Genesis II-17)

Now the serpent has a good insight into the way God operates for he tells Eve, "Ye surely will not die. For God doth know that on the day ye eat thereof, your eyes will be opened, and ye will be as God, knowing good and evil." (Genesis III-4,5)

So Adam and Eve violate His command and God backs off from His threat of death by prescribing a different punishment: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread till thou return unto the ground, for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and to dust shalt thou return." (Genesis III-19)

It is possible that God realizes the problem He would create for Himself by carrying out His death threat; for having no substitute source for employees, He would have to go through the whole process of creating man again.

But God as the executive fails again, for although He seems to expect certain modes of conduct from men, He does not define either in policy or procedure what He really expects. Examine His handling of Cain. Abel is a shepherd, while Cain is a farmer. Naturally Abel is in a position to offer a nice fat lamb as a sacrifice--while Cain can only offer some grain. When Cain offers his sacrifice, God finds it less than satisfactory; and Cain recognizes that God is not pleased with the sacrifice. So Cain reacts as one would expect, and God has the temerity to say: "Why art thou wroth? And why is thy countenance fallen?" (Genesis IV-6) Cain is frustrated and commits his infamous crime of slaying Abel.

The modern executive would have known how to handle the situation better for he would have said to Cain: "Now look Cain, your work hasn't been quite up to snuff lately, and I know you can do better if you try a little harder. If you want, I can give you a copy of the company policy and objectives for review that you will know what we really expect. I'm sure if you give it a real try, you'll make out okay." There is a strong likelihood with this kind of approach that Cain would not have been nearly as frustrated--thus avoiding one of the great crimes of history.

As the firm grows, more problems begin to arise. All of a sudden God looks around and sees His whole force, with the possible exception of one man, is doing a pretty poor job. The one exception, Noah, seems to be able to "psyche" the things that please God; for even to this point, God has not made a statement of policy and objectives. In fact, He has never even commanded His force to BE good, let alone defining what good or evil are. God causes a flood, getting rid of His whole force save Noah.

Noah's ability to "psyche" God continues--for as soon as the earth dries, he builds an altar and offers burnt offerings. "And the Lord smelled the sweet savour; and the Lord said in His heart: I will not again curse the ground any more for the sake of man; although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done." (Genesis VIII-21)

And here we see the first change in the administrative behavior of God. Whether He really intends to give up His prerogative remains to be seen, but He does have a change of heart as far as His authoritarian concept of punishment is concerned. In fact, He even communicates His intentions to Noah by saying "That I will remember my covenant which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh." (Genesis IX-15)

By this God has made a commitment to the start of the new firm as will be generated by Noah and his three sons. In fact, Noah could very well be led to interpret this to mean that he (Noah) and his future appointees would designate the course of affairs.

God, however, never quite gives this final decision authority; for long after the Noah regime, God has found a new manager in Abraham. Abraham has already proved his worth by accepting circumcision for himself and his son Ishmael at age ninety-nine and thirteen respectively. But even with this show of employee loyalty, God hesitates allowing Abraham into His confidence on affairs of the firm and executive intention. "And the Lord said: Shall I hide from Abraham that which I am about to do?" (Genesis XVIII-17) But He finally decides to tell Abraham, and He does so in a small group meeting. "And the Lord said: Because the cry against Sodom and

Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous, I will go down now and see if they have done according to the cry against them, which is come unto me, destruction (shall come upon them); and if not I will know. (Genesis XVIII 20-21)

For the first time in the course of the firm, one of the subordinates has the audacity to challenge a top management decision. For while the others leave, Abraham walks closer and says; "Wilt thou then destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there are fifty righteous within the city; wilt thou then also destroy and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous that are therein? Far be it from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked, that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be this from thee; shall the judge of all the earth not exercise justice?" (Genesis XVIII 23, 24, 25)

God is willing to meet Abraham's request and a complete change occurs in the group dynamic process. For once Abraham gets this concession, he successively bargains Him down to forty-five, forty, thirty, twenty, and finally down to ten. Now even though God has been willing to bargain with Abraham and thus give up some management prerogatives, one must be aware of His previous commitment to Himself not to "again smite any more everything living, as I have done." It is true He has not smitten everything living, but He has wiped out a pocket of resistance in the firm. It seems a likely way to prevent a spread of resistance, but it is still a renewal of the complete authoritarian control.

The firm continues to grow and we have new chief subordinates in the firm, Moses and his staff-man Aaron. Even though they are brothers, the choice seems to be made on capability not nepotism. God recognizes that Moses and his group are having problems in the Egypt division because of Pharaoh, so He decides to let Moses take his group and establish a new division in a land of milk and honey. But even after He has worked out the travel and release details from the Egyptian division, God fails to support His own transfer decision by leaving Moses the problem of getting his group to the destination on his own. Moses believes that God has some responsibility for this and calls him to task by saying: "Wherefore hast thou done evil to thy servant? And wherefore have I not found favor in thy eyes, that thou layest the burden of all this people upon me. Have I conceived all this people? Or have I begotten them? That thou shouldst say unto me: Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father beareth the suckling child, unto the land which thou hast sworn unto their fathers?" (Numbers XI 11-12)

Even here God refuses to shoulder the responsibility--for He tells Moses to gather seventy men and says: "And I will come down and speak with thee there: And I will take some of the spirit which is upon thee, and I will put it upon them; and they shall bear with thee the burden of the people, and thou shalt not bear it by thyself alone." (Numbers XI-17)

Notice that He doesn't offer to take on the responsibility Himself, or split it with Moses, or give Moses the authority to work a few miracles, but rather splits Moses' responsibility with a group of other employees. But even after He has placed this responsibility with Moses and the group, He ignores operating through Moses and says to him: "How long shall this people provoke Me? And how long yet will they not believe in Me? With all

the signs I have shown in the midst of them? I will smite them with a pestilence, and destroy them, and I will make of thee a nation greater and mightier than they." (Numbers XIV-11,12)

This statement almost seems like a bribe to top management--I'll destroy them, but I'll make you the progenitor of a bigger firm. He does back off from His position somewhat when He pardons the people because of Moses' pleadings. But He still insists on asserting His power by saying: "I have pardoned according to thy word. But as truly as I live, and as all the world is filled with the glory of the Lord:--That all men who have seen My glory, and My signs, which I have displayed in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tested Me these ten times, and have not hearkened to My voice, shall surely not see the land which have I sworn unto their fathers, yea all those that have provoked Me shall not see it." (Numbers XIV 20,21,22,23)

There is no doubt that God's management attitude is slowly changing. Bit-by-bit He is giving up His prerogatives, but it seems He is doing it grudgingly. He finally seems to be ready to turn over the reins and retire from active control when He says: "Judges and officers shalt thou appoint unto thyself in all thy gates, which the Lord thy God giveth thee, throughout thy tribes, and they shall judge the people with just judgement. (Deuteronomy XVI-18)

But even at this point He makes the final management control decision--for He says to Moses: "Ye shall die on the mount wither thou goest up, and be gathered unto thy people; as Aaron thy brother died on the mount Hor, and was gathered unto his people; because ye committed an offence against Me in the midst of the children of Israel at the waters Meribath Kadesh, in the wilderness of Zin; because ye sanctified Me not in the midst of the children of Israel. For thou shalt see the land from afar; but thither shalt thou not go unto the land which I give the children of Israel!" (Deuteronomy XXXII-50,51,52)

So God refuses to allow the judges which He Himself has ordered, to make the final judgement on Moses; and makes His final authoritarian gesture before He finally retires from active control of the firm.

In an overall look at the type of management that has occurred through these five books of the history of the firm, we must admit that there were a series of incidents which had no precedent, and decisions were necessary at the time. However, the reluctance to share authority and the persistence on personal decision making led to behavioral problems with the working troops. True, from Adam to Abraham there was a complete lack of attempt on the part of the immediate subordinates to influence God's decisions. Whether it was fear or the attitude of God we do not know, but we do know that the first attempt was Abraham's challenge on Sodom and Gommorah. But if God expected the organization to react favorably, He had to take into consideration Likert's (1959) statement:

"A supervisor, to function effectively, must have sufficient influence with his own superior to be able to affect the superior's decision when required. Subordinates expect their supervisor to be able to exercise an influence upward in dealing with problems on the job and in handling problems which affect them and their well-being....When a supervisor

cannot exert sufficient influence upward in the hierarchy to handle problems constructively, an unfavorable reaction to the supervisor and the organization is likely to occur."

If God expects the organization to operate through one man, as is the case throughout, then He must provide an unequivocal chain of command through His immediate subordinates. Where He violates this with Abraham and Sodom, and with Moses and the trek through the desert, His organization behaves improperly. Dubin (1959) would clearly insist that this type of organization control is ambiguous--for he says:

"In any organization system, certain units occupy a crucial function. The cruciality of the function is the fact that it serves as a point of articulation among units.

"Whole units are crucial when they control, coordinate, direct, or innovate for other units....Where one unit directs others, the connection should be immediate and unequivocal. This rules out a circular linkage system which is equivocal because no single unit is dominant."

Though many would violently disagree as to the success or failure of the organization which God has created, it seems fairly evident that few modern firms would hire someone with this decision record as chief executive--unless it was in a staff position where he could say, "Let there be profit."

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## APPENDIX A, DEFINITIONS

Wroe Alderson and Paul E. Green, Planning And Problem Solving In Marketing (Homewood, Illinois: Richard D. Irwin, Inc., 1964)

Staff personnel might be said to provide the connective tissue in an organization in which line personnel constitute the skeleton.

Louis A. Allen, "Identifying line and staff"; in Organizations: Structure And Behavior, Joseph A. Litterer, ed. (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1963)

Line functions are those which have direct responsibility for accomplishing the objectives of the enterprise. It follows, therefore, that only line functions have the power or authority to initiate and carry through the primary activities which are necessary to reach the stated goals of the company. This is the cardinal point which distinguishes line from staff. The specialized staff advises, counsels, assists, and serves all line and other staff components in a functional capacity. The specialized staff thus becomes a reservoir of special knowledge, skills, and experiences which the entire organization can use.

Melville Dalton, "Conflicts between staff and line managerial officers", in Organizations: Structure And Behavior, Joseph A. Litterer, ed. (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1963)

It is specifically a report on the functioning of two major vertical groupings of industrial management: (1) The staff organization, the functions of which are research and advisory; and (2) the line organization which has exclusive authority over production processes.

Burleight Gardner and David Moore, Human Relations In Industry (Homewood, Illinois, Richard D. Irwin, Inc., 1952)

The line organization of any company is usually thought of as that department or set of departments which is involved with the principle function of the company. The members of these departments (advisory and staff) are regarded as advisory experts from outside the immediate shop organization who come in either when difficulties arise or when changes are contemplated. However valuable and necessary they may be, therefore, they are not the ones who ultimately have the responsibility for getting the work out.

Mason Haire, "Growth of organizations", Modern Organization Theory, Mason Haire, ed. (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1959)

Here the distinction is made as follows: The "line" includes those who directly make and sell a product; the "staff" includes those who provide specialized support, advice, and help.

Franklin Moore, Manufacturing Management (Homewood, Illinois: Richard D. Irwin, Inc., 1953)

Line and staff form of organization has come to be practically the only form used by all but the smallest companies. It retains a line organization which, as it operates in the manufacturing division, is responsible for making the products. In addition to the line organization, there are staff departments which serve the line organization and help line officers do their work.

Charles A. Myers and John G. Turnbull, "Line and staff in industrial relations", in Organizations: Structure And Behavior, Joseph A. Litterer, ed. (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Ind., 1963)

Probably the most widely held view is that it (industrial relations) is a staff function. This means giving advice, assistance, and counsel to the line organization in the formulation of industrial relations policies and in the handling of industrial relations problems--but not taking from the line the responsibilities for making decisions affecting people.

Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary (Springfield, Mass: G. & C. Merriam Company, 1965)

- Staff:
- The officers chiefly responsible for the internal operations of an institution or business.
  - A group of officers appointed to assist a civil executive or commanding officer.
  - Military or naval officers not eligible for operational command.
  - The personnel who assist a director in carrying out an assigned task.
- Line:
- The combatant forces of any army distinguished from the staff corps and supply services.
  - Officers of the Navy eligible for command at sea distinguished from officers of the staff.