ABSTRACT

This essay provides a conceptual framework for thinking about the problem of implementing (i.e., getting things done) as part of the larger process of managing. We shall isolate some alternative approaches to that implementing problem and briefly examine the underlying beliefs, the accompanying technologies, and the attendant costs/benefits of those alternatives. We shall then make a few suggestions about appropriate alternatives for the decade ahead.

This is a time when managers throughout the world are worried about getting things done effectively. Productivity, quality, cost are key words in contemporary management circles. American managers are especially concerned about these issues. The reason, of course, is that some other nations, notably Japan, seem to be out-performing American industry in territories they traditionally dominated. The reasons for that American weakness, while multiple, certainly include the American presumption that only highly rationalised and structured organisations can be efficient. This presumption is coupled with the American trade unions' tradition of focusing on work rules and wages rather than on the broader questions of participation, education, and career development.

Since the issue before us is implementing in organisations, we shall begin by looking at the concept itself. Then we shall present two extreme views of implementing which we call Decision First (DF) and Interacting Implementing (II) and whose genesis we attribute to organizational unit size. Within this two-frame notion, we consider the stumbling blocks, tools, and pragmatics for management. Lastly we provide some rules of thumb for both DF and II type managers.

IMPLEMENTING IN ORGANIZATIONS

The very word “implementing” carries some interestingly different connotations. We talk of implementing change in people and in organizations, or of implementing policies, or implementing regulations. When implementing change, the word is almost equivalent to words like persuading or influencing. In implementing policies, implementation carries a more macro-implication of “making it happen” or “getting it into place.” For implementing regulations, implementing means monitoring or policing or, sometimes, enforcing. In all its connotations, however, the word carries, implicitly three important characteristics:

1. From a managerial perspective, it always involves efforts to change human behavior.
2. It always touches upon human emotionality.
3. It is always oriented toward action.

First, consider the issue of changing human behavior. While in some other activities implementing can be a solo phenomenon, in management it never is. In one's personal life, one can often carry out one's own decisions without help from others: we can rearrange our furniture or plant a garden or write a letter. As managers almost nothing important is self-implemented. Indeed that aspect of

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managing has been considered so important that some thoughtful scholars have
defined all of management as the process of getting things done through people.
While this is by no means the only aspect of the managing process, getting things
done through people means changing, modifying, and influencing human be-

Second, we propose that implementing in organizations is largely an emotional
process. Human behavior, that is to say, is changed much more by passions than
by rational analysis. It is fear, love, greed and anger—not cool logic—that drive
humans to get things done in nations and in businesses alike. Nonetheless, we
shall try to show later that while some strategies of implementing in organizations
are built around this emotional-assumption, others are built on the assumption that
reason prevails in matters of organizational behaviour.

Third, the thought that implementing typically means action is perhaps too obvious
to be worth discussing. Still, we do want to emphasize the doing, forward-moving,
getting-to-those-bottom-line connotations of implementing; to point up the distinc-
tion between that aspect of managing and more thoughtful aspects like decision-

DF AND II

The DF view is dominated by the simple but critical belief that implementing must
follow after decision making. The general context of thought is logical and rational,
with a focus on the systematic analysis of problems. The reasoning runs like this:
the step prior to implementing (i.e. acting or doing) is to make high quality deci-
sions (i.e. planning or thinking) about what needs to be implemented. Good deci-
sions are made by gathering and systematically processing relevant information,
and evaluating information against decision-criteria. With a decision now in hand,
the next step is to implement that decision.

This DF view is embedded in a deeply etched, widely consensual, and mostly
Western tradition of thought. The mother faith is the logic of sequential steps. Few
of us could argue with such DF-type assertions as these: “Think before you act.”
“Decide where you are going, before you go.”

A strong top-down flavor accompanies this DF view. The figures of speech used by
DF’ers are “setting targets”, “developing strategies,” “building models” and
“managing by objectives.” All these accept as given the notion of hierarchical
organizational authority. In the design of such hierarchies, human emotionality has
traditionally either been ignored or else viewed as unwanted noise in the system.
Emotion is not perceived as a source of energy and, if it should turn up, it is to be
purged with obedience to authority as the primary catharsis.

In contrast, II’s perspective is the essential proposition that decision-making and
implementing ought to be interwoven and inseparable. The underlying context of
thought focuses on the emotional, not the rational, nature of man. To implement
successfully, people responsible for the implementing must be involved in the
decision-making process: those who are the doers must also participate in the
planning of what is to be done. II’s familiar participation psycho-logic runs like this:

People support what they help to decide. To get things implemented, there-
fore, you need involvement in the process of deciding. A rational decision
doesn’t have much of a chance in a large human organization unless those
who must implement it also love it.

II, then, is not an entirely polar alternative to DF. II begins with the same two build-
ing blocks as DF, deciding and implementing. It just sequences them differently
and builds upon a different belief system to support its view. Both approaches
want to get things done, often the same things. The dispute concerns how to go
about it.