

Jethro as the Patriarch of Administration and Management: An Analysis of His Works

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KEYWORDS Admonition. Appellation. Contemporary. Epoch. Pioneering. Postulates. Precepts

ABSTRACT Pioneer theorists in the academic fields of administration and management are known by certain appellations that are reflective of their contributions towards the history, evolution and development of administration and management thought. Resultantly, Robert Owen is called the “Father of Personnel Management” while Frederick Taylor is known as the “Father of Scientific Management;” in same vein, Henri Fayol is called the “Father of Modern Management” and Max Weber is known as the “Father of Bureaucracy.” The paper reviews the admonitions of Jethro (the priest of Midan), to Moses (his son-in-law), within the precepts of contemporary administration, management and organizational theories and practice. The paper posits that Jethro is the “Patriarch of Management;” and this is supported by a detailed analysis of Jethro’s words as contained in the literature of Judeo-Christian theology vis-à-vis the postulates of Owen, Taylor, Fayol, and Weber, which are predated by the words of Jethro by more than three thousand years.

INTRODUCTION

In the academic disciplines of administration and management, various appellations have been ascribed to numerous philosophers and theorists whose postulates were novel, and positively impacted on the development of intellectualism in management thought and practice over the years. For instance, Robert Owen is called the “father of modern personnel management” while Frederick Taylor is known as the “father of scientific management.” In same vein, Henri Fayol is called the “Father of Modern Management” and Max Weber is known as the “Father of Bureaucracy.” These appellations are in recognition of the pioneering intellectual contributions they made in the evolution of administrative and management thought.

This paper seeks to review the works of Jethro, the priest of Midan, whose admonitions to Moses, his son-in-law, predate the postulates of proponents and exponents of the various schools of thought in administration, management and organizational behavior and theory by more than three thousand years. The objective of the effort

is to accord Jethro his rightful place in the history and evolution of administrative and management thought and practice. Towards achieving this, the paper subjects his admonitions, as contained in the literature of Judeo-Christian theology, to critical analysis within the historical backdrop of administrative and management thought, and determine the contemporary application and to what administrative and/or management school of thought his works apply. The admonitions are also juxtaposed with the works of various notables in the evolution of administrative and management thought.

The Works (Words) of Jethro

The literature of Judeo-Christian theology has it that on arriving at the abode of Moses and seeing how Moses ran the Jewish workforce in exile, Jethro reacted thus: “What is this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit and all the people stand before you from morning until evening” for judgment. (Exodus 18: 14) We are additionally informed that Jethro furthered by admonishing thus:

The thing that you do is not good. Both you and these people who are with you will surely wear yourselves out. For this thing is too much for you; you are not able to perform it by yourself...Ye shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do. (Exodus 18: 17, 18 & 20)

In verses 21 and 22, we note that Jethro also recommended that:

You shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. And let them judge the people at all times. Then it will be that every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they themselves shall judge. So it will be easier for you, for they will bear the burden with you. (Exodus 18: 21& 22)

We note that in the first reaction, Jethro expressed disapproval thus: "The thing that you do is not good." This is a typification of the management task of performance appraisal. Again, Jethro expressed surprise as follows: "what is this thing that you are doing for the people?" Then he rebuked Moses by asking: "why do you alone sit and all the people stand before you from morning until evening." Subsumed in these two question-statements is another act of performance appraisal and a strong concern for the well-being of the people, including Moses who subjected himself to sitting "alone." Here, there is a tinge of organizational humanism; an expressed concern and definite action for the welfare of staff. Again, sitting "alone" could be seen from three perspectives:

1. Moses being oppressive and insensitive to the suffering of the people who he subjects to standing "from morning to evening,"
2. Moses was straining himself by sitting in judgment alone when others could be trained and empowered to assist him, and
3. Beyond physical strain, the aphorism "two heads are better than one" is also relevant to that reaction; implicitly therefore, Jethro advocated collectivism and team spirit towards the optimal achievement of the organizational goals.

In verses 18 and 19, the objective of Jethro's reaction becomes more explicit when he holds that: "the thing that you do is not good. Both you and these people who are with you will surely

wear yourselves out. For this thing is too much for you; you are not able to perform it by yourself." Here, there is the concern for effectiveness, health of the workers and a call for division of labor and delegation of responsibilities.

Verse 20 is compact as it recommends so much administrative and management functions in the following twenty-five-word sentence: "Ye shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do." This admonition succinctly counsels Moses to perform three major administrative and management functions of educating, ethical orientation, and training; we shall discuss these briefly:

1. "Teach them the statutes and the laws":

This calls for the education of the Israelites in the letters of the law. "The Statutes and the laws" imply a differentiation in meaning of the two key words—"statutes" and "laws." While "laws" is natural and self-explanatory, "statutes" is taken to refer to the rules and regulations that govern the operation of the system—work relationships etc.

2. "Show them the way in which they must walk": The impartation of high moral standards and value judgment to ensure good behavior is the focus here. In this regard "walk" is understood not to be in reference to gait, as in way of walking, or social standing, rather "walk" is relevant to the moral posture of the individual, his ability to discern and chose between right and wrong and therefore walk upright in society, and

3. "Show them...the work they must do."

Simply, this addresses the management function of training for effectiveness and specialization and consequently enhanced productivity. In other words, it calls for adequate training of the workforce in their respective duties, the functions they must perform and the jobs they must do.

In verses 21 and 22, Jethro skirts scientific recruitment, hiring ("select from all the people able men,") and, thereafter, re-echoes the earlier mentioned moral high grounds ("men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness,") before introducing an organizational hierarchy and effective delegation of authority:

Place such over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. And let them judge the people at all times. Then it will be that every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they themselves shall judge.

Restated, we can decipher, from the above, standards for selection (“select from all the people able men”), moral standards and behavioral expectations from the workforce (“men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness,”) and division of labor and delegation of authority (“then it will be that every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they themselves shall judge”.) And implicit in the division of labor and delegation of authority, there is obvious organizational humanism (“so it will be easier for you, for they will bear the burden with you”). Perhaps a better understanding and appreciation of the extent to which Jethro’s recommendations are contemporary is by making a pictorial presentation of the organizational structure he recommended—“place such [able men] over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens.” This creates a five-layer pyramidal organization hierarchy, which is akin to what is observable in government bureaucracies and most large-scale organizations in business communities across the world.

RELATIONAL ANALYSIS AND CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION OF ADMONITIONS

In this section, we shall take a studied look at the admonitions of Jethro vis-à-vis the postulates of Owen, Taylor, Fayol and Weber. This approach would allow for specific treatment of the conceptual relationship or similarities between Jethro’s words and the works of the administration and management theorists listed above.

Jethro and Robert Owen

From what Jethro inadvertently proposed, we can identify organizational humanism from the point of view of Robert Owen, (the father of personnel management), who was concerned about the evils and inhumanity that was prevalent in the production process of his era and therefore advocated devoting more attention to the human beings that he adjudged the more wonderfully constructed vital machines of the production process. The extent to which that perception was pervading during the classical era of management thought is epitomized by the averment of Robert Owen, which held that:

Many of you have long experienced in your manufacturing operations the advantages of

substantial, well-contrived and well-executed machinery. If then, due to care as to the state of your inanimate machine can produce beneficial results, what may not be expected if you devote equal attention to your vital machines, which are far more wonderfully constructed? (Koontz et al. 1983)

In the above two-sentence posit, Owen expresses deep appreciation of the human factor and the limitless dividends derivable from a satisfied and well-motivated workforce. Owen’s management philosophy is based on the belief that good personnel management pays dividends to the employer and is an essential part of every manager’s job. We note that Owen’s advocacy for attitudinal transformation on the part of industrialists in relation to workers is an echo of Jethro’s assertion that: “the thing that you do is not good. Both you and these people who are with you will surely wear yourselves out. For this thing is too much for you; you are not able to perform it by yourself.” A critical analysis of these opening sentences of Jethro’s admonitions shows that the statement encapsulates the whole essence of organizational humanism.

Jethro and Frederick Taylor

Taylor’s basic philosophy can be stated in the following principles:

1. The development and use of the scientific method in the practice of management, to replace the old method of rule of thumb,
2. Scientific approaches to select employees who are best suited to perform a given task,
3. Providing the employee with scientific education, training and development, and
4. Encouraging harmonious relationships between management and employees.

These principles were the pillars of Taylor’s scientific management, which, Taylor contends, is a philosophy rather than a mechanism. Based on the essence of this postulate, Taylor was bestowed the title of “Father of Scientific Management” in recognition of his pioneering and epoch-making efforts in attacking the traditional approach to management by the substitution of more systematic and analytical methods. Granted that scientific management represented a complete mental revolution on the part of both management and the workers towards respective duties and toward each other, it is common knowledge that scientific management was not a

sudden ‘invention’; it is, therefore, generally agreed that Taylor served as the catalyst in the codification and stating in coherent and logical form the practice that had been evolving in the well-organized factories for some time. However, to understand and appreciate the significance of Taylor’s contributions, we must assess his works within the timeframe he and his associates existed.

In summarizing the quintessence of Taylor’s scientific management, Wren (1972:34) offer that:

Taylor’s scientific management approach sought to analyze existing practices, study them for standardization and improvement and bring expertise to planning and supervision. On the human side, Taylor sought the highest degree of individual development and reward through fatigue reduction, scientific selection to match individual’s abilities to their jobs, and wage incentives.

In comparison with Jethro, we note that the process of “select[ing] from all the people able men” requires a competence analysis of each job seeker vis-à-vis the specific assignment; this system is the essence of scientific selection of personnel, which found further expression and elaboration in principle two above. In recommending that the worker be taught the statutes and laws (“teach them the statutes and the laws”), Jethro referred to education, training and development, which are the essence of Taylor’s principle three. While we can find explicit correlation between Jethro and Taylor in principles two and three, Taylor’s principles one and four are implicit in Jethro’s admonitions. “Teach them” and “show them” as admonished by Jethro sought individual development regarding work process and on-the-job practices towards the reduction of fatigue. Scientific management sought to “select...then train, teach and develop the worker.”

A critical analysis of Jethro’s admonitions vis-à-vis the above shows that there are obvious commonalities. To pronounce his recommendations, Jethro analyzed the existing practices in the Jewish workforce in captivity, studied them for standardization and improvement; he, thereafter, recommended a planning process and supervision. The fact remains that, like Taylor, Jethro was empirical and analytical.

Jethro and Henri Fayol

As a contemporary of Taylor, Fayol conducted his works in France virtually during the same era. While Taylor focused on improving the workers’ output, Fayol was more concerned with

training the worker for overall effectiveness and prospects of upward mobility in the organization. In proposing that the people should be taught (“Ye shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the...work they must do”) Jethro laid the intellectual and theoretical substructure on which Henri Fayol, the “Father of Modern Management,” built his superstructure that emphasized training and retraining, towards upward (functional) mobility in the organization.

Jethro and Max Weber

Finally, as Father of Bureaucracy, Weber is known for the concept of formalistic impersonality and the forms of bureaucracy. Jethro’s concise suggestion is also a treatise on delegation of authority as it goes into the formalistic impersonality and decisional latitude necessary for effective utilization of the authority so delegated. (Weber 1922) In “then it will be that every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they themselves shall judge so it will be easier for you, for they will bear the burden with you,” we hear the voice of delegation of authority, which echoed in the works of Max Weber. It is noteworthy to mention that Weber did not broach the explicit and detailed organizational structure that Jethro graphically recommended.

Jethro and the Organizational Chart

The structure of every organization is generally encapsulated in the organizational chart, which every staff is expected to be familiar with. This instrument of formal relationships in the organization displays the organizational hierarchy and stipulates the line and staff relationships and, in a nutshell, the roles and responsibilities of staff and management. We note that the five-layer pyramidal organizational chart proposed by Jethro is the precursor of what is currently in use in every major public and organized private sector (OPS) organizations, globally.

This organogram, which is basically a block presentation of what Jethro proposed, indicates that Moses is the overall boss taking reports from the Rulers of Tens, who supervise the rulers of Fifties. The Rulers of Hundreds take instructions from their immediate bosses in the hierarchy i.e.

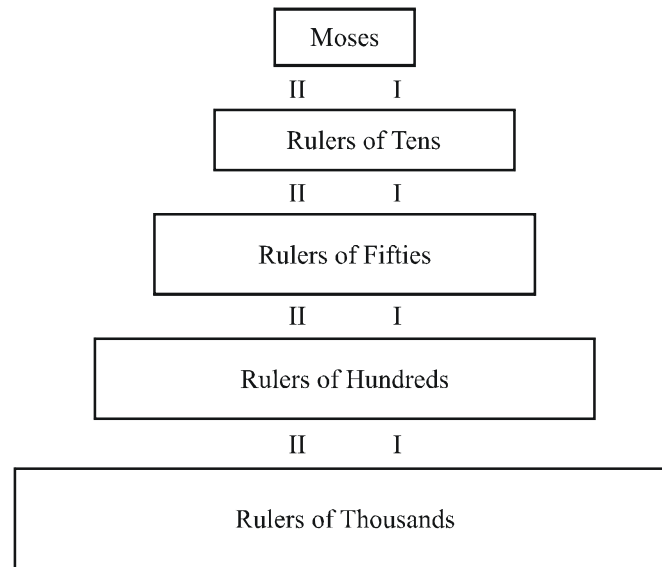


Fig. 1. A depiction of Jethro's organogram

the Rulers of Fifties while the Rulers of Thousands take instructions from them (Fig. 1). As a result of limited space vis-à-vis the enormity and complexity of the organization as proposed, the organogram has been presented in block form. The up and down arrows between the boxes indicate the flow of communication; the primary (single) arrows pointing down indicate line of instructions while the secondary (double) arrows pointing up stand for reportage and feedback.

CONCLUSION

The titles “father of personnel management,” “father of scientific management,” “father of modern management,” and “father of bureaucracy” bestowed on Robert Owen, Frederick Taylor, Henri Fayol, and Max Weber, respectively, are in recognition of their pioneering and epoch-making efforts in substituting the traditional approach to administration and management with systematic and analytical methods. In this effort, we have furthered the historical backdrop of administrative and management thought to predate these proponents.

The essence and contemporary global application of Jethro's admonitions to Moses speak volubly and eloquently of the universality and transferability of management and administrative

theories and practice. For instance, a critical analysis of the five-layer pyramidal organizational structure prescribed by Jethro shows that it is being utilized today, globally, in organizations of various sizes. Therefore, beyond the philosophical postulates of the fathers of administrative and management thought discussed above, whose postulates are derivatives of Jethro's works, Jethro made another fundamental recommendation which has stood the test of time. Succinctly put, the admonitions of Jethro is a concise yet comprehensive treatise on administration and management—a treatise that covered recruitment, training, delegation of authority, supervision, motivation, staff welfare etc.

Other than being referred to as the Priest of Midan, the Bible gives away nothing else on the background of Jethro. So we ask: What experience informed such knowledgeable averment? Where is Midan, in contemporary geography? What society or civilization produced such in-depth erudition on organization? Authoritative answer to these questions can only be a product of further research, multidisciplinary effort by historians, archeologists etc.

In view of the above, it is offered that the contributions of Jethro towards the history, evolution and development of administrative and management thought should be given the

recognition it deserves and that Jethro should, therefore, be given his rightful place in the philosophy of administration and management by being acknowledged as the “Patriarch of Management.”

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