Mintzberg on organizations

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Abstract: *Henry Mintzberg is considered as one of the most representative writers in management. Until now, he has written more than 140 monographs and articles, and 13 books, mostly in the manage - ment field. On the basis of his research findings, Mintzberg proposed a typology of organizations. Taking into account their structure, he discovered seven major types of organizations.*

Keywords: Mintzberg, organization, planning, structure

Introduction

Widely known for his numerous articles and books on almost every management topic, Henry Mintzberg is one of the most popular management thinkers of the world. With an easy style and refreshing approach, he is one of the most accessible management writers. Until now, Mintzberg has written more than 140 monographs and articles, and 13 books, mostly in the management field. His reputation is high among people who study organizations and strategic management.

Henry Mintzberg: a short biography

Born in 1939, Henry Mintzberg is a Ca - nadian professor of management at McGill University in Montreal (Canada) and at IN-SEAD in Fontainbleau (France). Originally an engineering graduate of McGill University, he later studied at the Sloan School of Management, Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He received a Ph. D. from MIT with the thesis 'The Manager at Work-Determining his Activities, Roles and Programs by Structured Observation' in 1968. His honors have included election as an Officer of the Order of Canada and of l'Ordre national du Que - bec, and selection as Distinguished Scholar for the year 2000 by the Academy of Management (10).

Mintzberg worked in the filed of oper - ational research for the Canadian National Railways between 1961 and 1963. After that, he became professor at McGill in 1968 and visiting professor with several universities and business schools around the world. He was elected as president of the Strategic Management Society between 1988 and 1991. Due to his multicultural teaching work, he has supervised a co-operative venture by five busi-

ness schools in Canada, United Kingdom, Japan, France and India. Also, he is consultant to a large number of organizations.

One of the leading management guru, Mintzberg has written more than 140 mono - graphs and articles as well as 13 books (e.g., Strategy Bites Back, The Strategy Process, Strategy Safari etc.). His influential work comprises the following three main catego-ries (1):

• strategy-making;

• what managers actually do with their time, and how their mental processes work;

• how organizations design themselves to satisfy their needs.

Published in 1973, The Nature of Mana-gerial Work represented the result of a sys-tematic research of five middle- to large-sized organizations: a consulting company, a tech-nology firm, a hospital, a consumer goods company and a school. Mintzberg observed how chief executives officers of these orga-nizations spent their time and found that a manager's time is constantly being fragment-ed by interruptions. As managers are hostag-es to interruptions in a pressing managerial environment they are not encouraged to de-velop a strategic thinking. In an environment of stimulus-response Mintzberg considered that managers develop a clear preference for live action. In this book, he exposed many of the myths surroundings top managers and stated that they are rather creatures of the moment than farsighted strategist. In sum, Mintzberg called for a clear understanding of the way managers spend their time and of what they do.

In The Rise and Fall of Strategic Plan - ning: Reconceiving Roles for Planning, Plans, Planners, published in 1994, Mintzberg pro - vided a deep insight in organizational plan - ning and strategy. In his opinion, there are several formal definitions of planning (7):

1) Planning is future thinking.

2) Planning is controlling the future.

3) Planning is decision making.

4) Planning is integrated decision making.

5) Planning is a formalized procedure to produce an articulated result, in the form of an integrated system of decision.

He argued that planning is mandatory for any organization because:

• Organizations must plan to coordi - nate their activities.

• Organizations must plan to ensure that the future is taken into account.

• Organizations must plan to be "ratio - nal".

• Organizations must plan to control.

Much of his work has focused on trying to classify organizations taking into account the perspective of structure and the perspec-tive of power.

Mintzberg and organizations

In his influential early work, Mintzberg had to do with the structural configuration of organizations (8). In The Structuring of Or - ganizations, published in 1979, and in Pow - er In and Around Organizations, published in 1983, Mintzberg analyzed the main attri - butes of organizations and proposed several types of organizations (Table 1). On the basis of research findings made with some of his colleagues at McGill University, he identified six basic parts of an organization as follows:

• the operating core, comprising people who perform the basic work;

• the strategic apex, occupied by at least one full-time manager;

• the middle line, as a hierarchy of au-thority between the strategic apex and the operating core;

• the technostructure, comprising ana-lysts who perform administrative du-ties;

• the support staff, putting together staff units who provide various inter-nal services;

• the ideology, encompassing the traditions and beliefs of the organization.

In his opinion, the structure of an organization is "the total of the ways in which its labor is divided into distinct tasks and then its coordination achieved among those tasks" (5). In order to coordinate their work, organizations use the following coordinating mechanisms:

• Mutual adjustment.
• Direct supervision.
• Standardization of work processes.
• Standardization of outputs.
• Standardization of skills.
• Standardization of norms.

All these coordinating mechanisms represent the most basic elements of structure.

Table 1 - Types of organizations (5)

No.	Type of organization (configuration)	Prime Coordinating Mechanism	Key Part of Organization	Type of Decentralization
1.	Entrepreneurial	Direct supervision	Strategic apex	Vertical and horizontal centralization
2.	Machine	Standardization of work processes	Technostructure	Limited horizontal decentralization
3.	Professional	Standardization of skills	Operating core	Horizontal decentralization
4.	Diversified	Standardization of outputs	Middle line	Limited vertical decentralization
5.	Innovative	Mutual adjustment	Support staff	Selected decentralization
6.	Missionary	Standardization of norms	Ideology	Decentralization
7.	Political	None	None	Varies

The entrepreneurial organization has a simple, informal, and flexible structure. The chief executive exercises the power personally and controls personally through direct supervision. The decision-making process is flexible, allowing for rapid response. The entrepreneurial organizations are often young and aggressive organizations.

The machine organization has a highly specialized structure, based on a centralized bureaucracy and formal procedures. The operating tasks are simple and repetitive, and require a minimum of skill and training.

The professional organization has a bureaucratic yet decentralized structure, dependent on training to standardize the skills of its operating professionals. This type of organization relies for coordination on the standardization of skills, which is achieved through formal training.

The diversified organization has a divisionalized structure, in which market based divisions are coupled together under central administrative headquarters. In the 1920s, A. P. Sloan Jr. introduced this type of structure to General Motors in order to successfully compete with Ford Motors.

The innovative organization has a fluid, organic, and selectively decentralized structure. This type of organization is known as adhocracy in the business world. The adhocracy innovates and solves problems directly on behalf of its customers.

The missionary organization has a highly integrated structure. This type of organization is based on the standardization of its

norms. In other words, the sharing of values and beliefs among its members is very strong. The Japanese corporations (type J0 represent a good example (Table 2).

Table 2- Type A versus type J corpora - tion (9) .

The political organization is character - ized by a lack of the forms of order found in conventional organizations. This type of or - ganization is based on the fluidity of infor - mal power.

Table 2 - Type A versus type J corporation (9)

Type A (American corporation)	Type J (Japanese corporation)
Short-term employment	Lifetime employment
Individual decision-making	Consensual decision-making
Individual responsibility	Collective responsibility
Rapid evaluation and promotion	Slow evaluation and promotion
Explicit, formalized control	Implicit, informal control
Specialized career path	Nonspecialized career path
Segmented concern	Holistic concern

Conclusions: One of the top manage-ment thinkers in the world, Henry Mintz - berg has written prolifically on the topics of strategic management and organizations. He concluded that most organizations fall into several basic categories. Trying to clas-sify organizations, first from the perspective of structure and later from the perspective of power, Mintzberg discovered seven types of organizations.

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