

Łukasz Sułkowski  
Społeczna Akademia Nauk

## The multiple meanings of management

**Abstract:** The purpose of the paper is presentation of multiple meanings of management presented in the theory of organization. First of all, there are analysis of several definitions of management. Then the concept of cultural relativism of management was presented and finally the different meaning of management has been analysed. In conclusion the author presented the concept of plural and multiparadigm understanding of management.

**Kew words:** management, definitions of management, management paradigms

### 1. Introduction

The purpose of the paper is presentation of multiple meanings of management presented in the theory of organization. First of all, there are analysis of several definitions of management. Then the concept of cultural relativism of management was presented and finally the different meaning of management has been analysed. In conclusion the author presented the concept of plural and multiparadigm understanding of management.

### 2. The meaning of management

Management is considered a part of the empirical, social and practical sciences. It is an influential social discipline, combining all aspects of the functioning of modern organisations. However, it faces some basic problems, such as defining the basic study subject, developing a meth-

odology and creating a paradigm. It is a dilemma characteristic of many social sciences and humanities [Sułkowski 2005].

The modern, popular understanding of 'management' has become absolute and very ambiguous. It is possible to manage nearly everything: crisis, security, trust, time, culture, even identity and emotions. Definitions of basic notions of 'management' and 'organisation' are ambiguous in the reference books, and depend on the adopted cognitive stand. The diagnosis of reasons for the blurring of these basic notions points to both cognitive and historical factors. First of all, the concepts of organisation and management are related to numerous other areas of economic, humanistic and technical sciences, which has an effect on the interpretation of the key notions. Similarly to other social sciences, management is multi-paradigmatic, which makes it impossible to develop a uniform dictionary of basic notions. From the semantic perspective, since the beginning of the discipline management has been understood in two ways; the classics were already treating it as both science and art. Also, the historical spreading of the management concept and methods, derived mostly from the Anglo-Saxon culture, contributed to the relativisation of the concept in different countries.

Looking for the essence of the concept of 'management', one can find a great number of definitions, some of which are complementary, while others are contradictory or incommensurable. There is no agreement as to the definition of the study subject, which moves the discipline closer to the humanities. The definition of management can be classified in a number of different ways. For example, the reference books include pragmatic, operationalist, functionalist, structuralist, interactionist and many other descriptions.

The pragmatic definition may treat management as, for example, a question of managing an organisation in such a way that different people who want anything from their organisation support it so strongly that it is able to survive for many years [Watson 2001, p. 18]. The operationalist description refers to Bridgman's assumption that a notion is a corresponding collection of operations, which in its extreme version is identified by the possibility of measurement [Bridgman 1927, p. 5]. From the operationalist perspective, management is considered equivalent to

the possibility to measure economic effectiveness, which is done with the use of, for example, financial parameters (as a subject of accounting) or market parameters (as a subject of marketing and strategic management). The process of management, understood in terms of functionalism, focuses on striving for systemic balance in an organisation, which is achieved by effective management. Structuralism organises management in a sequence of multilevel activities within a formal structure, while interactionism sees management from the angle of social contacts (communication, power, culture, social conflicts). The multiplicity of definitions of 'management' is illustrated in the following table, which includes the most significant ways of defining this basic notion.

**Table 1. Chosen definitions of management from the world's literature**

Author	Definition	Definition core
H. Fayol [1947]	Managing an enterprise in order to achieve its goals, bringing out the maximum abilities in all available resources.	Optimum allocation of resources
W.F. Taylor [1903, s. 21]	Getting to know what one expects of people and then taking care that they do it as well and as cheaply as possible.	Managing people in order to fulfil organisational goals
P.F. Drucker [1998]	Undertaking activities in order to achieve goals.	Deliberate organisational activities
L.R. Brummet, C.W. Pyle and E.G. Flamholtz [1903, s. 21]	A process of acquiring, improving, maintaining and using a combination of resources necessary to achieve the aims of an organisation, where resources include people, items and financial resources the organisation has at its disposal.	Deliberate allocation of resources
W.H. Newman [1956, p. 1]	Management is giving direction, managing and controlling the efforts of a group in order to fulfil a goal.	Managing teams of people
H. Koontz and C. O'Donnel [1969, pp. 25- 26]	The art of including the achievement of goals by people and with people who form groups, as well as shaping an environment where people can act as individuals and, at the same time, cooperate in order to achieve common goals.	Deliberate management of people

Tab. 1.

<p>H. Steinmann and G. Schreyogg [1995, p. 18].</p>	<p>Steinmann and Schreyogg distinguish two approaches to the notion of 'management': the 'institutional', treating management as a group of people who are entrusted in an organisation with authority to give orders, and the 'functional', referring to actions which are aimed at managing the process of work, i.e. all the activities necessary to perform the organisation's tasks.</p> <p>They also describe management as a set of managerial tasks that have to be made during services in systems based on work division, regardless of the department, managerial level or enterprise. Although situations differ and problems and work to be done are of a diverse character, there is a general catalogue of managerial tasks.</p>	<p>Exercising organisational power, Deliberate management of an organisational system.</p>
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Source: Own work.

The presented examples of definitions of management have several ways of being interpreted. In most cases, management is understood as managing people, exercising power and making decisions, allocating organisational resources or organising a system.

### 3. Language relativism

Cultural relativism, from the angle of understanding management, is well-illustrated by the diversification of the Polish terms *zarządzanie* and *kierowanie*, which is not reflected in the Anglo-Saxon notion of 'management'. The influence of language and culture on the interpretation of the notion of 'management' is also visible in the intercultural studies [Sułkowski 2009]. A model list includes a comparison between English – the source language for the discourse of managerial studies – and two other European languages, in this case, Polish and French:

**Table 2. Language and cultural relativism of the notion of 'management'**

Culture criterion	USA	France	Poland
Etymological root	Management – making organisational decisions	Gestion – holding organisational power	Zarządzanie – holding organisational power Kierowanie – managing an organisation and people
Synonyms	Administration (e.g. in MBA) – management in a normative sense Executive (e.g. in CEO)	Gouvernement, Management (a calque from English)	Administrowanie Rządzenie
Determining social roles	Manager Executive Administrator Supervisor	Gestionnaire Manager	Zarządzający Kierownik Menedżer Przełożony
Intellectual current	Pragmatism, scientific management (Taylorism), instrumentalism, behaviourism	Empirical sociology, political science, depth psychology	Praxeology, economics, logical empiricism
Characteristic problems of management	1. Managerial decisions 2. Enterprise 3. Concrete issues and the operational level	1. Organisational power 2. Organisation 3. Generalisation and theory	1. Organisational system and managerial decisions 2. Enterprise 3. Generalisation used to prevail, today the emphasis is placed on concrete issues
Representatives	F.W. Taylor, L. Gantt, Gilberth, Ch. Barnard	H. Fayol, M. Weber, E. Durkhaim	K. Adamiecki, T. Kotarbiński, J. Zieleniewski, T. Pszczołowski, W. Kieżun

Source: Own work.

The notion of 'management' – and so also the theory and practice of management – is subject to cultural influences, which is a consequence of both cultural differences and intellectual tradition, as well as discourse separation [Koza, Thoenig 1995]. The American interpretation is based, on the one hand, on the instrumentalist and technical perspective of Taylorism, while on the other, it is deeply rooted in the intellectual tradition of the pragmatism of Charles Pierce and William James [James 1907; Hackett Publishing 1981; Dover 1995]. This entails leaning towards the practical understanding of management on a low level of generalisation, emphasis on the problems of an enterprise and focus on managerial decisions. In the French tradition, the understanding of management is closely related to the works of Henry Fayol and the school of humanist sociology. Management is understood very broadly as being mostly the exercising of power and efficient organisation of managerial structure, which is a subject of the interest of the sociologists Emil Durkheim and Max Weber [Jones 1986. pp. 24-59; Weber 1978]. The discourse of management, regardless of the culture, reveals a certain tension between the problems of generalisation and the striving for the operationalisation of narrowed-down generalisations (concrete issues). This dualism can be found in the Anglo-Saxon literature in the form of a dichotomy between the theory of organisation and business management.

Cultural and historical relativisation of the notion of 'management' is a source of much confusion. Some authors postulate a return to epistemological fundamentalism and developing 'the only correct' definition, while others go to extremes and propose full freedom of terms. I believe that the truth lies somewhere in between. The notion of 'management', although it does form a 'family of words' and is historically and culturally relative, focuses on several common ways of interpretation which can be treated as multi-paradigmatic understanding of management.

Thus, taking into consideration the historical evolution and cultural relativism of the notion of 'management', one can point to several of the ways of defining management which are most often seen in the reference books, and which refer to: making managerial decisions, coordinating the activities of people in an organisation, exercising organisational

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power, allocating organisational resources and organising and managing a system.

#### 4. Management as making decisions

A decision is the choice of one action out of a number of possibilities that can be performed within a specific time. The decision-making process assumes reflective or creative actions, i.e. there has to be the act of making the decision. Decisions are based on the assumption of free will and may be treated as a quantum of human behaviour. In social groups, decisions are a result of holding a specific range of power, which is demonstrated by making decisions. Management interpreted as a concept of decision-making processes is inspired by a rich output of mathematical, psychological and sociological theories. The game theory is also used in the concepts of a rational choice of strategy [Barney 1995]. Psychological and social aspects of decisions include both rational and irrational motives behind actions.

Management can be described as a series of decisions made in possibly the most optimal way for the purpose of achieving the aims of a given organisation. This process is multidimensional and teleological. The essence of management from this perspective is decision-making, although there are other important factors such as questions about the aims, motives and values of decision-makers and interested parties, as well as the possibility of efficiently acquiring and processing credible information. The choice of a certain variant by the manager influences the way the organisation functions. Wielding influence, communication, exercising power and learning require a volitional act – making a decision.

At the core of management are rational actions, which make it closer to the assumption of *homo oeconomicus* being the epistemological basis for classical economic sciences. However, an increasingly important role in the theory of organisation is played by the perspectives pointing to the relations between the aims of actions or even the criteria and values of rationality. Modern management also increasingly often focuses on the

issue of limitations on decision-making rationality, related to limited access to information [Simon 1972], the construction of the human cognitive apparatus, and social and cultural conditions [Bourdieu, Wacquant p. 113]. The subject which gains knowledge and acts cannot be examined without its social, market or even biological context [Pritchard 2002]. Taking into consideration the lack of universal criteria for truth and rationality, one can assume that the produced social values direct cognition. This axiological entanglement leads not only to the correction of the *homo oeconomicus* model and acceptance of the limited rationality assumptions [Simon 1978, pp. 1–16], but in the case of many conceptions it questions the rationalist approach in management. For example, the modern concepts of decision irrationality [Brunson 2006], narcissistic leadership [Czarniawska (ed.) 2006], management of meanings [Smircich, Morgan 1982, pp. 257–273], secret and intuitive knowledge, do not limit the motives and aims of human actions within organisations to the rational sphere. Also different kinds of continuation of the rational choice current are more and more often including subjectively understood interests, perceptions and limitations on the information horizon in the decision-making model [Abell, Elgar (ed.) 1991].

## 5. Management as a coordination of human activities in an organisation

Many definitions emphasise the aspect of organising people's group work in order to fulfil the objectives of the collective activity. The coordination of people's work is aptly described by the Polish term *kierowanie*. A *Kierownik* (director) in Poland is usually a person who coordinates the activities of people, so he should by definition have subordinates. A manager can focus on managing structures, projects or processes, while a director is often identified with the whole organisation or one of its functional or structural departments. Directing people's activities in organisations is, on the one hand, rooted in the classical discourse of management through the concepts of managerial functions, while on the other, it is located in a sub-discipline focusing on the human resources function in organisations. Directing people's activities, for instance in the

understanding of the administrative current, includes the processes of planning, organising, leading and controlling, which make up the coordination of the work of people, resulting in the achievement of set goals.

## 6. Management as exercising power

Power is an indispensable element of all social relations. Power is produced as a result of collective acceptance of social institutions, ties and relations. An organisation, an enterprise, a workplace, a manager, an organisational structure, leadership and even cultural patterns and strategies in this meaning can be processes producing power. The process of management, and an organisation understood functionally, also involve the distribution of power. Management seen from the perspective of power covers a wide range of research concerning organisations, enterprises and teams. The key notions allowing determination of the scope of the issues are the purposefulness of exercising power and the striving for the improvement of a process, understood as development or the growth of efficiency.

M. Armstrong points to the fact that management means making decisions and then implementing them by influencing people [Armstrong 1999, p. 67]; management includes all activities aimed at making other people and things function in accordance with the goals of the person who manages them [Zieleniewski 1981]. This broad definition emphasises the aspect of power-holding by a rational individual who can fulfil his goals through conscious management. The key functions of management focus on exercising power [Steinmann, Schreyögg 1998, p. 18]. From the semantic point of view, this refers to the element *rząd* or *zarząd* present in the Polish term *zarządzanie* (management). Exercising power in its broad sense is related not only to the possibility of putting direct pressure on others through sanctions and rewards, but also of using different forms of 'symbolic violence' [Bourdieu 1987, pp. 147–166]. Examples of such subtle kinds of power include using the authority of an institution (e.g. a research facility), a social group (e.g. family, nation) or communication full of values and judgments [Becker 1999].

Organisation and management interpreted in functional terms are usually equated with exercising power which may come in a more or less disguised form. Coherence is produced by power mechanisms which lead to the vision of coercive organisation, i.e. organisation unified by coercion ('naked power', negative power) or an integrated organisation which is the result of an agreement ('symbolic power', positive power) [Sułkowski 2002, pp. 40–44; Dahredorf 1969, p. 159]. In the material sense, organisation can be interpreted as a collection of power areas and the interest groups fighting over them, who are perceived by society as a whole.

The perception of management as a process of exercising and distributing power seems to be a promising direction of research, opening new possibilities to reinterpret notions and concepts, including the managerial processes and organisational structures, strategies and culture [Sułkowski 2002; 2002a; 2004]. Apart from the political and corporate governance approach, there is a need to carry out research on the relations of micropower and symbolic violence [Dixon, Dogan 2002].

## 7. Management as using organisational resources

Resources are the basic goods necessary for the organisation to function, as processed by the given organisation. They can primarily be found in the environment, from which they are assimilated and then transformed by organisations. They include human, knowledge, financial, technical and natural resources [Aldag, Stearns, 1995, p. 8; Sułkowski 2002, p. 28]. Management can be described as a set of activities aimed at organisational resources, performed in order to achieve the organisation's goals in an efficient way [Griffin 1990, p. 6]. Efficiency understood praxeologically is the ability to act and the effectiveness of actions of both individuals and groups, not limited to economic effectiveness [Kotarbiński 1958, pp. 7–9]. Management leads the achievement of organisational aims through the processes of coordination, integration, transformation and effective utilisation of resources [Kozłowski (red.) 1985, p. 7].

Describing management as a control over the flow of resources by making decisions necessary to achieve the organisational aims, one can see the elements of the three previously mentioned ways of understanding this basic notion [Zieleniewski 1981, p. 477]. A unique configuration of organisational resources is related to the possibility of achieving a competitive advantage [Castro, Guerin, Lauriol 1988, pp. 75–88]. Assuming a specific way of understanding the process of management brings about significant epistemological consequences. Looking at these subjects from the economic and social perspective may be treated as an attempt to generalise and simplify. The economic perspective, interpreting management as making decisions and as a resource flow, is based on the assumptions of limited rationality and a striving for the functional balance of the organisational system [Kozmiński (ed.) 1985, p. 354]. The social perspective perceives management from the angle of power distribution processes, cultural patterns and values that cannot go beyond the canons of economic rationality, and lead towards a socially constructed organisation, developed as a result of interactions between organisational actors. If one could assume that these are complementary approaches, then the management science could be treated as their synthesis.

## 8. Management as an organisation and controlling a system

The concept of systemic management stems from a systemic paradigm, which is one of the most important ways of defining an organisation. The systemic concept places management on the level of integrating subsystems into a whole, and was the dominant paradigm of the Polish praxeological school from the 1970s and 1980s. The idea assumes perceiving the managerial process in a holistic way, which is based on functionalism and the classical school of economy, and so it draws on the general theory of systems and Morgan's organismic metaphor. In this case, the managerial process is a striving for balance, which allows achievement of the positive effects of exchanging and processing organisational resources.

## 9. Conclusion

To sum up, it can be said that the notion of 'management' forms a vast 'family of words', which is a base for the epistemological, methodological and institutional development of our scientific discipline. The notion has several semantic roots which change with time and are culturally relative. Apart from those already mentioned, there are also other common ways of understanding management, such as management as leadership, management as a process or management as a process of social stratification. Thus, 'management' is an ambiguous and open notion, constructed socially. However, it is also worth noticing that despite the different distribution of emphasis, it is not a thoroughly contradictory or blurred notion. The existing differences between paradigms, perspectives and schools of management do not exclude a certain limited area of agreement between researchers and practitioners, and these common points include deliberate organisational activities carried out by making decisions and exercising managerial power.

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