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Over the decades the nature of work has changed. Drucker (1999) suggested that with the emergence of the knowledge worker, management, as we know it, will need to change for organizations to remain competitive. Raelin (2010) resurfaces the issue when he asks the question of whether managerial control has outlived its usefulness in his article "The End of Managerial Control?" in *Group & Organization Management*.

Raelin's key premise is that given that the nature of work has been changing, our ideas about managerial control may also need to change. The author presents a strong argument that new modes of organizing have emerged as firms respond to hypercompetition, rapidly changing technology, deregulation, and globalization, and, as a result, that the nature of organizations has fundamentally changed. Organizations have become flatter, with the implication being that the hierarchical control structures of the past are disintegrating. Work is being done in project groups or teams, many times virtually as members span the globe. Raelin suggests that the implication is that the nature of our social relationships within organizations has changed. Given these assumptions, the author poses the question: "Have we reached a point in which managerial control has not only outlived its usefulness, but has become obsolete as an organizing vehicle of management?" (Raelin, 2010, p. 144).

The author provides a concise primer on managerial control and reviews classical bureaucratic controls of "hierarchal authority and influence based on formal position" as well as the softer post-bureaucratic controls of "broad public standards of performance, flexible peer decision-making processes, and influence based on personal qualities" (p. 141). The author notes that classical bureaucratic controls giving way to softer controls such as culture have advanced the craft of management. Raelin also acknowledges that in today's organizations, managerial control is a blend of both.

To think that an organization can be successful without management having any form of control seems extreme and almost heretical. Raelin proffers that given this fundamental shift in organizational structures and an increased focus on teams, the "managerial role under these new circumstances is not to *control* the process but to serve as a facilitator of the necessary critical discourse among the members of the practice, including its surrounding social network, to build a culture of learning within the organization" (p. 137). I agree that as the context of how work is done in organizations shifts, the tactics of managing people and projects also needs to change.

Raelin also talks about the roles of what he refers to as "boundary managers," those who "work on the system rather than in the system" (p. 148). These managers, or as he later refers to them, "weavers," help organize networks of people and sustain them. These networks are becoming the fundamental unit through which work is done, and the weavers serve to aid in these networks' functioning, filling in gaps such as where communication failures have occurred, where resources are needed, or where specialized knowledge is called for. The weavers' currency is not the control provided through the rules and regulations of bureaucracy or the informal norms associated with culture, but rather the influence they have built from their personal reputation of trust and reliability earned over time.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGERS

I have been a practitioner much longer than I have been an academic, and the thought of not exercising any control over organizational members is at odds with my mental model of management. While I agree that the methods of developing an inspiring vision, creating a common culture that supports the vision, and engaging organizational members to commit to the vision are superior over the rules and regulations that are foundational to bureaucracy, as Raelin points out very effectively, they still are a means of control. Still, for an organization to be effective, the tools, whether they are bureaucracy, culture, or facilitation, are necessary to coordinate organizational activity toward a common goal.

However, as I considered Raelin's article a second and third time, I began to recall some other literature that I read over the decade—literature that at the time informed how I thought about leadership and leading and management and managing. First to come to mind was Margaret Wheatley (1992) in her book *Leadership and the New Science*, where she applied the concepts of the natural sciences to organizational functioning

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and effectiveness. It was her writing that at the time helped me rise above the trees to see the bigger footprint of a forest. What she espoused in 1992 was similar to what Raelin advances today—the ideas of adaptability, self-organizing, and organizational learning.

Raelin's view of organizations as being comprised of "communities of practice" is also consistent with my own. The networks that naturally evolve within and between these communities of practice function as both an information integrator and a coordinating mechanism. Facilitation becomes the primary role of the weaver and has to do with making connections and bringing groups together. Walt Disney, who may well have been one of Raelin's weavers, described his role to an inquisitive child as similar to "a little bumble bee. I go from one studio to another and gather pollen and sort of stimulate everybody" (De Roos, 1963, p. 162). Raelin's weavers are the network managers—making connections and bringing members of these diverse communities into a common conversation.

Warren Bennis and Patricia Biederman pointed out in their book *Organizing Genius* that "every great group is an island—but an island with a bridge to the mainland" (1997, p. 206). Today much of the work in organizations is done on islands, or in communities of practice, where specialized skills reside. The role of the weavers, as advanced by Raelin, is the connection to the mainland with other "communities of practice" as they facilitate the conversations that enable coordination with the broader organization. The weaver is the fulcrum that leverages the work of the teams for the benefit of the overall organization's goals.

So, other than a trip down memory lane, what has Raelin added to what we know about managerial control? First, his question got me thinking. Is the thought of no control so extreme that we automatically discard the idea, like I did? Maybe. But it is at the extremities of ideas that innovation resides. Do we need to relinquish control, as we know it? Is our fundamental notion of organizations changing so significantly that the mechanisms by which they operate need an overhaul also? Raelin suggests that they do, and I agree.

Second, is Raelin just playing a semantic game, replacing the idea of control with the concept of facilitation? No. If we look at the fundamental definition of control, it is "the ability to purposely direct or suppress change," whereas facilitation is "making tasks easier; simplification." These are polar opposites, so what Raelin is suggesting *is* a change from the control-bound approaches of the past. However, whether control or facilitation, the purpose is the same—that is, to coordinate disparate functions toward a common purpose.

Finally, is it realistic to think that we can discard control as an obsolete tool cluttering our management toolbox? In my opinion, the answer is no. Throughout history, management science has evolved. There are times when the control tool is the best alternative. We cannot ignore context. The environment in which an organization operates, that is, the nature of the work, characteristics of its workforce, and technologies employed, influences the type of control required for effective organizational functioning.

In closing, I do have one constructive suggestion for Raelin. The author is provocative and his ideas promote a deeper examination of the role of control in today's organizations. Many leaders and managers could benefit from thinking about how work gets done in their organizations; however, the language and writing style of the author, in my opinion, do not promote this broader dialogue that must occur between academics and practitioners. While there are several references to existing practices, I found that, even with my academic hat on, the reading seemed too focused on academic jargon and did not adequately address what a world without managerial control would look like. To be relevant, academic theory must inform practice, and to do so the narratives must have a common language that encourages dialogue in the broader management audience.

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