# Manager and the Role as a Researcher in the Organization

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Many managers, whether in manufacturing or production industry, in service and hospitality organizations or government sectors, think that research is not relevant to their jobs. Perhaps it is because they see research as a collection of complicated techniques for which they see little application. However, all business activities are subject to changes and uncertainties. Mangers need to understand the nature of these changes and uncertainties in their organizations. Otherwise they would end up making wrong or inappropriate decisions, which can be very costly to their organizations. Recent studies (e.g. Abrahamson 1996; Amabile et al. 2001; Cooper and Schindler 2003) have indicated that managers with the capability to do research will perform better than those who do not. To be a successful manager in a changing world, it is important for him or her to pursue an additional role as a researcher in the organization and know how to go about making the right decisions by being knowledgeable about the various steps involved in finding solutions to problems (Sekaran 2003). Empirical study has shown that managers with research skills who use research findings to help make business decisions are likely to be successful and effective than those who do not. Thus, the objective of this article is to reflect another perspective role of manager as a researcher in the organization. This role can be regarded as one of the most challenging and crucial tasks for managers to be successful in their career path. In this article we will first discuss why managers need to be researchers in an organization. Second, we will discuss how managers can add the role of researcher to his or her regular tasks. Finally, we will

address what are the challenges for managers to perform the additional role as a researcher in the organization.

# 1. What is Research?

In general research is something that people undertake in order to find out things in a systematic way, thereby increasing their knowledge. However, if we talk about research in the world of business, it is defined as a systematic inquiry that provides information to guide business decisions (Cooper and Schindler 1998). It is an organized effort to investigate a specific problem encountered in the work setting, that needs a solution (Sekaran 2003). Business research, therefore, comprises a series of steps designed and executed with the goal of finding answers to the issues that are of concern to the manager in the work environment. In this sense, business research can provide the needed information that guides managers to make informed decisions to successfully deal with problems.

# 2. Why does a Manager Need to be a Researcher in the Organization?

Managers have to make several decisions each day at work. A common experience of all organizations is that managers encounter problems both big and small on a daily basis, which they have to solve by making the right decisions. Assume that you are the manager of a restaurant. You are experiencing significant turnover in your waiter/waitress pool, as well as a drop in sales volume. What should you do? What would help you to make the right decision to solve these problems? Would it come from your experience on the job, your 'sixth sense' or hope for good luck? You have to carefully think about these answers and find out the best way for your organization. Some issues are solved with relative ease, while a few problems may present moderate difficulty. Yet other problems could be quite complex and managers might proceed to seek the help of "research" to study the issue and offer solutions.

Remeny et al. (1998) cite that the need for research is related to the fact that there many issues and subjects about which we have incomplete knowledge. In business and management studies there are perhaps even more unanswered questions than in many other areas of study because of the fast changing nature of the subject (Remeny et al. 1998). Thus, this situation may be one of the important reasons why today's manager needs to pursue the role as a researcher in his or her organization. This task can be regarded as one of the impor-

tant factors to become a successful manager in today's organization. Because the study of the research will provide him or her with the knowledge and skills he or she needs to solve the problems and meet the challenges of a fast-paced decision-making environment (Cooper & Schindler 2003).

Gill and Johnson (1991) state that not only are the findings of research important, but the process of systematic discovery (knowledge) also has clear benefits to a manager's self-development and effective- ness. In addition, Ivancevich et al. (1994) mention that a successful manager possesses certain qualities in applying knowledge and skills to various managerial roles, and one of these includes research skills. Today, managers not only perform the regular mana- gerial tasks, but they also need to be a researcher to help find the best solution and make an appropriate decision. Because the outcome of the research would be the dis- covery helping manager to effectively deal with the problem situation (Sekaran 2003). Moreover, the trend toward complexity has increased the risk associated with business decisions, making it more important for managers to have a sound information base - research knowledge. Therefore, to do well in a competitive environment, managers need to know more and be equipped with an understanding of research methods and the ability to incorporate them into their deci- sion making to make better performance.

The difference between the manager who uses common sense alone to analyze and make a decision in a given situation, and the manager who uses a scientific method (research), is that the latter would have higher possibility to become a successful manager, who can do a systematic inquiry into the matter and proceeds to describe, explain or predict phenomena based on data carefully collected for the purpose (Sekaran 2003). Managers without analytical proficiency and research capability, in turn, have little hope for long-term career success (Ivancevich et al. 1994).

Recent studies (e.g. Abrahamson 1996 ; Amabile et al. 2001; Cooper and Schindler 2003) indicate that managers with research skills will have a higher chance of career success than those who do not. This is simi- lar to what Cooper & Schindler (2003) have argued, managers who are unfamiliar with research methodology and use their com- mon sense to make decisions will more vulnerable and less successful, when com- pared to managers who are familiar with research methodology and know how to do a research will be far more valuable to the organization.

### 3. How does a Manager Add the Role of Researcher to His or Her Managerial Roles in the Organization?

Organizations have people who are responsible for directing the efforts aimed at helping them achieve their goals. These people are called **Managers**. Managers are responsible for working with and through others to achieve objectives by influencing people and systems in a changing environment (Cook and Hunsaker 2001, p.15). This implies that managers must understand the totality of their organization and then influence system components such as tasks, technology, structure or people in order to achieve desired goals. Additionally, managers must be aware of the environment in which their systems operate and how external forces alter the performance of internal subsystems and process (Cook and Hunsaker 2001, p.15).

Henry Mintzerg (cited in Cherrington 1994, p. 24) identifies ten roles managers perform in doing their jobs. A role encompasses the task activities or behaviors required of an individual performing a job. These roles are grouped according to three major classifications as follows:

### 1) Interpersonal Relationship Roles

*Figurehead:* represents the organization to the outside world.

*Leader :* maintains contact with people and groups outside the organization.

*Liaison :* hires, trains, motivates, evaluates, and supervises subordinates

### 2) Informational Roles

*Monitor :* collects and analyzes data from outside and inside the unit.

*Disseminator :* circulates vital information to members of the unit.

*Spokesperson :* circulates relevant information to outside parties.

### 3) Decisional Roles

*Entrepreneur :* innovates, initiates change, designs new products.

*Disturbance handler :* resolves non-routine problems.

*Resource allocator :* distributes money, materials, time and other resources

*Negotiator :* secures resources and arranges favorable conditions from others.

Mintzberg's categorization of managerial activities into roles provides some insight into what managers actually do during their workday. The roles also give us clues about the kinds of skills that managers are likely to need to carry out their work effectively.

In addition to these managerial roles, managers may need to perform the role of researcher in the organization when he or she needs to identify and effectively solve

the problems in the work setting (Sekaran 2003). Since managers have to be responsible for the whole operations of the organization which include decision-making and problem-solving, the manager-as-researcher will be better able to successfully deal with the problems and make right decisions.

All organizations depend on information as the basis for making decision and taking action. Sometimes when managers perform the informational role, they have to seek and receive a variety of information and develop it through understanding their organization and its environment. The management of the information process from gathering to reporting can be integrated as a part of any manager's job (Cooper & Schindler 2003). Thus, it is not surprising to see that nowadays many mangers do their own research, at least part of the time. The higher a manager is in the position of decision-making, the more likely he or she is to do most of his or her own research (Remenyi et al. 1999). Furthermore, managers also perform the decisional role to be responsible for corrective action when their organization faces an unexpected disturbance. Sometimes managers may be called upon to do a research activity for a higher-level executive. Such a task can be seen as a

career boosting opportunity; this extra research activity can be his or her chance to make a favorable impression on that executive role (Cooper & Schindler 2003).

Today, managers in organization constantly engage themselves in studying and analyzing issues and hence are involved in some forms of research activity as they make decisions at the workplace (Zikmund 2000). Therefore, it is important for managers to additionally perform the role as a researcher to help their organization find out the best solution. Furthermore, another reason for managers to do research in the organization is to fulfill their need for career advancement and success (Zikmund 2000).

## 4. What Difference does this Approach Imply?

Some academic researchers (e.g. Amabile et al. 2001; Rynes et al. 2001) reveal that business research would be substantially strengthened by effective collaboration between academic researchers and practicing managers. Boehm (1980) and Campbell et al. (1982) argue that practitioners (managers) can be excellent sources of important and stimulating problems, when combined with those from an academic perspective, that can stimulate important and new scientific discoveries. This implies that

collaboration between academic researchers and managers would help increase research productivity and quality (Rynes et al. 2001).

Nevertheless, we have learned that creating a successful collaboration is likely to be difficult and academic-practitioner research collaborations are rare (Amabile et al. 2001). The study of Amabile et al. (2001) reveals that between January 1994 and June 1999, only 4 percent of the articles published in the Academy of Management Journal and less than 1 percent of the articles published in Administrative Science Quarterly listed academics and practitioners as co-authors. Furthermore, there is a substantial body of evidence suggesting that executives typically do not turn to academics or academic research findings in developing management strategies and practices (Abrahamson 1996; Mowday 1997; Porter & McKibbon, 1988). Similarly, researchers (academics) rarely turn to practitioners (managers) for inspiration in setting their research questions. Furthermore, some studies indicate that there are notable differences of these two groups with respect to their goals, social systems and time frames (Johns 1993; Powell & Owensmith 1998; Thomas & Tymon 1982) as well as a diversity in cognitive styles and professional background and cultures (Amabile et al. 2001).

Given this situation, would it be better and more effective if a company recruited someone who can perform both functions as a manager and a researcher at the same time? This approach, in my opinion, could help overcome the lack of collaboration between academics (researcher) and practitioners (managers) as well as minimize individual differences. Moreover, it would make a difference in capacity of managers to learn and make a significant contribution to research and management practice. Sekaran(2003) argues that managers with knowledge of research have an advantage over those without. Pelz and Andrews (1976) find that corporate researchers who spent at least part of their time working on assigned problems and who took boundary-spanning roles (management) in addition to conducting research were also the most productive.

Charles et al. (1995) mention that an organization without appropriately skilled managers who can adapt themselves and their organizations to change, will continue to find it difficult to maintain their competitiveness. To do well in business, companies need multi-skilled managers with capacity to learn his or her own roles as well as research knowledge to increase the company's competitive advantages.

According to Charles et al. (1995), five key challenges (levers) have been identified for managers to improve their management skills and to be successful managers. One of these is to achieve the best practice management development. This means that managers must ensure that the skills they develop will support their company strategies. This, certainly, includes managers' skills to be able to develop their research tasks to support the company strategies.

Today, management's demand for more, better and quick information is bringing many changes to the research profession (Cooper & Schindler 2003, p. 24). It would be much better and even more effective if managers can combine their role as a researcher with his or her daily tasks. This additional role as a researcher will enable him or her to better understand, predict, control and help management make better decisions. Furthermore, he or she will learn how to develop their organizations through research. What they learn from any research they conduct will be a major contributor to the knowledge of their work and they would find it valuable in many situations (Remenyi et al. 1999). This approach will shape the organization and change the way managers have traditionally worked. Cooper & Schindler (2003) postulate that managers who

are unfamiliar with research methodology and who rely on research information to decrease decision-making risk are all the more vulnerable. In contrast, managers who are familiar with research methodology and who know how to make good research are far more valuable to their organization (Cooper & Schindler 2003). Moreover, this challenging task can be regarded one of the important qualifications that today's manager needs to posses.

## 5. What Challenges does this Present?

Research involves a series of well-thought-out and carefully executed activities that will enable managers to know how organizational problems can be solved, or at least considerably minimized (Sekaran 2003, p.5). Research encompasses the process of inquiry, investigation, examination, and experimentation. These processes have to be carried out systematically, diligently, critically, objectively, and logically (Sekaran 2003, p.5). In addition, managers need to understand the nature of the research process required to create knowledge (Remenyi et al. 1998). Therefore, managers with additional role as researchers have to learn to think differently from the way they used to and need to develop a number of qualities and skills necessary to do research.

Perhaps the most important of these is the ability to persevere, especially when managers are faced with a setback (Collis and Hussey 2003). There should be many exciting and challenging tasks for managers to cope with when they are conducting the research. These may include, but not limited to:

*1) Communication skills* - the ability to communicate the understanding of manager's research area: Managers should be able to demonstrate both written and verbal communication skills. Because these skills may be needed when they conduct a personal interview, design a questionnaire or write a report.

*2) Intellectual skills* - the ability to develop critical thinking skills: Managers must posses the knowledge skills, comprehension of the data, application of the knowledge to the situation, as well as develop analysis, synthesis and evaluation skills.

*3) Information technology skills* - the ability to develop word-processing skills: Managers should know how to use information technology (IT) to help them with their research tasks.

*4) Organizational skills* - the ability to manage time appropriately: Managers would find that some research tasks are very time consuming such as investigating sources of data, analyzing the data or writing the final report. Thus, the ability to manage time effectively is one of the challenging tasks for which managers need to be prepared.

*5) Motivation* - managers need something to motivate them to accomplish the research tasks and it is essential to the successful completion of the research project. Whenever they conduct a research, they have to ask themselves whether it is powerful enough to see them through to completion. They have to make sure that their motivation is maintained and stable during the time they are doing the research.

*6) Independence* - managers need to be self-motivated and highly independent. Sometimes they find conducting a research project a lonely process because it requires considerable self-discipline. At the same time managers could find support from their colleagues and peers to help them adjust their role as an independent researcher.

*7) Personal strengths and weakness* - managing research projects is both management and an intellectual challenge. Thus, whenever managers decide to take in a new research project, they should appraise their personal strengths and weaknesses in order to check their chances of success. The following is a table summarizing the quali-

ties of competent researcher. These may be regarded as additional challenges for managers as they need to have both knowledge and skills as well as special personal qualities to accomplish the research tasks.

**Table 1:** Qualities of Competent Researchers

| Knowledge | Skills | Personal Qualities |
|---|---|---|
| Awareness of different assumption about the world | Ability to plan, organize and manage own time | Awareness of own strengths, weakness and values |
| Awareness of methods of data collection | Ability to search libraries and other sources | Clarity of thoughts |
| Awareness of different methodologies | Ability to gain support and cooperation from others | Sensitivity to events and feelings |
| Knowledge of immediate subject of study argue | Ability to structure and a case in writing | Emotional resilience |
| Knowledge of related subjects/disciplines | Ability to defend and argue views orally | Flexibility |
| Knowledge of key networks and contacts in chosen filed | Ability to learn from experience | Creativity |

Source: *Adapted from Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe (cited in Collis and Hussey 2003)*

*8) Knowing the characteristics and type of research* - in addition to the above qualities and qualification as the researcher, managers should also know the types of the research they will be conducting as well as understand its characteristics and the differences of each research as shown in table 2.

**Table 2:** Classification of Main Types of Research

| Type of Research | Basis of Classification |
|---|---|
| Exploratory, descriptive, analytical or predictive research | Purpose of the research |
| Quantitative or qualitative research | Process of the research |
| Deductive or inductive research | Logic of the research |
| Applied or basic research | Outcome of the research |

Source: *Adapted from Collis and Hussey (2003, p. 10)*

9) *Finally, the Research Process* - to get research done, managers need to learn and understand the research process to start his or her journey by: first, identifying research topic; second, defining the research problem; third, determining how to conduct the research; forth, collecting research data; fifth, analyzing and interpreting the research data; and finally, writing a final research report.

The business word is constantly evolving. Managers of tomorrow will need to know more than their predecessors. Research will be a major contributor to that knowledge. Managers will find knowledge of research methods to be of value in many situations. They may need to conduct research either for themselves, for others, or for the organization. Therefore, managers in the 21st century will not only perform their managerial roles and routine tasks, but they also need to perform the role as a researcher in the organization and learn from research methods to help them stay competitive in the world of business. In the future, research-based decision making will be more widely used by many organizations. Thus, managers who are not prepared for these changes will be at a severe disadvantage, while managers who are able to do and use research to help make better decisions will have a higher chance of being successful in the organization.

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