

## **MANAGEMENT AND CHRISTIANITY: THE BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE**

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### **Abstract**

*Modern scientific age seems to have watered down, or entirely rejected the relevance of the divine angle in the affairs of human beings. Many modern management theories like the scientific management theory, conceive human beings as merely one of the factors of production. Invariably, the aim of management is the maximization of profit through effective and efficient allocation of resources. Contrarily, this paper seeks to describe the principles of management as it is applied in the Bible during God's creation of the universe. It is of the view that human beings possess values far beyond being a factor of production as tripartite beings. Unarguably, the bible presents a rich reservoir of managerial techniques. There is perhaps, not one good management principle ever propounded that does not already exist in the Bible. God is the ultimate management genius. Adam, Noah, Abraham, Joseph, David, Jesus Christ, Peter, Paul and others demonstrated adroit management skills which are still most relevant today. This paper adopted the narrative and analytical method and used both primary and secondary sources. It concluded that the commodification of human beings is counter-productive, especially in the long run. Therefore, it recommended that the Biblical Christian approach is most valuable and acceptable.*

**Keywords:** Management, Biblical Approach, Christianity, God, Human Beings

### **Introduction**

Christians should care about the organization they work in and its management styles; if they are managers themselves, they should manage well. Internally, effective management is not first about the nuts and bolts or the details that most people would find uninteresting. Effective management is all about managing from a well thought point of view that is based upon how humans are created and has the supremacy of God as its

ultimate aim. Management is getting things done through people (Onuoha, 1991). There are functions that help managers to get things done through people called managerial functions and they include planning, organizing, directing and controlling.

The purpose of this paper is to ascertain how God implemented these principles of management when he was creating the world. However, as far as the Bible is concerned, there is no seating on the fence, despite all that the Bible had gone through, it has remained indestructible and even those who hated it have been changed while reading it to destroy it. The Bible is above definition but we simply say that it is what has been revealed about God's word. What is revealed belongs to us and what is not revealed belongs to God (Deuteronomy 29:29).

The Bible is a managerial text and a general policy dogma on business ethics and practices. The concept of management can be traced back to the beginning of this planet, Adam and Eve were commissioned to manage the garden (Gen 1:28). Later we read about Noah's building project where he set out to build a structure of a size, shape or function which has not been initiated before (Gen 6). The city where Lot and his family lived had to be managed (Gen: 19).

Management today is a well-developed field of study with a variety of techniques and mechanisms to achieve its purpose. An array of approaches confronts the manager, who is often uncertain about which to pursue for a particular situation. For the Christian manager, the techniques are not as crucial as the framework in which management is practiced. The challenge is to reflect the Christian faith in managing people and resources (Oberholster, 1993).

This research explores the underlying work in which God applied the four principles of management in the bible when He was creating the world and then suggests some directions for the Christian manager.

### **Literature Review**

There is, perhaps no management theory that has been propounded that does not already exist in the Bible. Apparent differences, if any, can only be found in emphasis, details and application.

Management is integral to man. At the moment of consciousness, God instilled in him the capacity and necessity to manage the Garden of Eden and to reap the benefits of his managerial efforts from there. The bible records that God instructed Adam to plan, organize, direct and control all the resources of the earth. That was a clear case of authority to manage (Gen 1:28-30).

It is pertinent to note here that the ultimate and most profound efficient manager is God. The rationale for that assertion is not far-fetched. No one can give what he or she does not possess. Because God is the perfect management being that can ever exist, He was able to impart His divine management skills to Adam. The concept of the influence of the Bible,

and consequently, Christianity on the development and practice of the art and science of management has occupied the attention of many scholars for many decades and continues to do so till now. Spears, Maxwell, Hill and several others have made very incisive and ground breaking inputs in this issue area. Older writers such as Weber, Tawney and Marx had charted the course for these contemporary scholars. Marx Weber had contended that the principles and doctrinal provisions of the Christian faith had a very salutary influence in the emergence, development and spread of capitalism. In his work, *The Protestant ethic and The Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber argued that numerous teachings as contained in the bible promoted thrift and accumulation of private wealth which culminated in modern day capitalistic management of resources.

As earlier adumbrated, God is the epitome of managerial excellence. The Bible is replete with narratives of the importance of management in all aspects of human endeavor. The story of the creation of the heavens and the earth demonstrated an adroit management of time and other resources. In his own allocated time of seven days the creative process was effectively and efficiently concluded. In this awesome might, God spoke into existence all that He had already programmed. The sequential order of that divine process is of critical relevance to every managerial activity. What should be created first was first created and what should come next also came next in an ordered pattern of interconnectivity and interdependence.

During the earthly existence of Jesus Christ, He exhibited the highest and greatest level of managerial ability. He managed well and also touted the principles of management excellently. He met only knows the way but He goes the way too. Jesus Christ managed and led by personal examples. This brings up the issue of the often touched dichotomy between management and leadership. While many scholars emphasize that both terms differ, it is the contention of this paper that good managers lead and good leaders manage well. The terms are therefore used interchangeably to imply the something in this work. Sequel to the foregoing assumption, Heller, (1999) observes that without leadership management loses its meaning. For him leadership is the heart of management and all successful managers are cognizant of that claim. A cursory survey of some of accounts of what Jesus Christ did while on earth reveals that He was a managerial genius. Aware of the onerous task before Him, Christ picked twelve young men of diverse background to help Him propagate the gospel and fulfill His mission. Although they were not well learned people, their master was able to make them share in the tenets of the enterprise. Given the size and complexities of modern government and business concerns no one person can accumulate all the specialist knowledge required to undertake every task.

One of the most critical functions of management is to create and present an organizational mission and identity which will be very appealing to the people involved. This was aptly exemplified in the call of Peter and his brother Andrew (Matt 4:18-22). Leveraging on their professional calling as fisherman, Jesus Christ painted for them a glorious picture of fishing for men instead of toiling for mere fishes. Smirch and Morgan

(1982), similarly, observed that management is essentially a process of framing and defining reality for others, they do this by providing strategic leadership direction and creating a pattern of thinking in such a way that makes meaning for those directly involved. Covey (1992) and Ohman (1995) concurred with Smirch and Morgan, further posted that people wanted to contribute to the accomplishment of worthwhile objectives. They want to be part of a mission and enterprise that transcends their individual abilities.

The bottom-top approach management technique which many writers have eulogized the best way to manage people is firmly rooted in the Bible. Jesus Christ taught his disciples that those who must be leaders should be prepared to offer humble service to others. This He demonstrated in John 13:5 when He washed the feet of his disciples despite Peter's initial protest. In the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus Christ through the help of the twelve disciples was able to manage the crowd so that there was no stampede. It is recorded that the five thousand that were fed excluded women and children. Furthermore, the remaining portions of the fish and bread were not allowed to waste as twelve baskets were recovered. This is indicative of management objective to avoid wasteful allocation of resources and the attainment of efficiency. Other statements, stories and miracles of Jesus Christ in the bible which has serious management implications include, but not limited to, preparation for building a house, parables of the Ten Virgins and the Ten Talents, the healing of the blind man and the cleansing of the lepers. In most of the above encounters, Jesus Christ dramatized His activities for maximum effect on His audience. He held their attention and elicited the approval of many corroborating the importance of dramatization in management. Brown (1999) observed that effective and consummate management calls for a certain level of dramatization. The management environment in this sense is the theatre while the workers are the satisfied audience. This conception of management as dramatization was summed up in what Vail (1989) called “managerial artistry”.

In his ruminations on the successful management of resources, especially financial resources, Clason (2007) propounded what he called the five laws of gold theory to retain, maintain and sustain accumulated wealth. This is a secular confirmation of the biblical story of the rich fool. Although he was right but poor management cost him his wealth and his life. Moses displayed great managerial ability in the leadership of the Israelites out of Egypt. In Gen 18:21-22, his father-in-law, Jethro, pitied Moses for the poor manner he was managing his people Jethro's cogent advice that Moses should appoint assistants to help him in managing the affairs of the Israelites, probably saved Moses from burning out from exhaustion. Jethro understood that management was a collective endeavor that thrives on the inputs of subordinates for the good of all concerned.

The managerial prowess of Joseph saved Egypt, the then center of the universe from a destructive famine and catapulted the slave boy to a Deputy Pharaoh. Joseph managed the surpluses of Egypt properly and through that saved his own people of Israel from starvation. Noteworthy also, was his ability to broker a restoration of peaceful

relationship with his estranged brothers without creating new challenges.

The death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ imposed the challenge of the nurturing of the gospel on Peter. He held the fledgling church together in its most turbulent period. Peter managed the persecutions, the replacement of Judas Iscariot, the Pentecost, and election of the seven deacons, the council at Jerusalem, the conversion of Paul and Cornelius, and many others. Paul was a great missionary strategist who had three successful missionary expeditions which paved the way for the incorporation of a multitude of nations into the Christian faith. Some of his notable strategies included focusing on the large cities with a metropolitan character (Athens), targeting influential members of any city he visited (Sergius Paulus), being spontaneous in the use of favorable opportunities (the conversion of the Jailor, Acts 6:30).

Other management principles with Biblical significance and background include the concepts of reward, reprimand, warning, suspension and Christian forgiveness. The faithful servant who was given five talents as generously rewarded and the bad steward who failed to make effective use of the resources made available to him was reprimanded (Matt 25:23-28). The paralyzed sinner in Mk 2:25 received forgiveness from Jesus Christ and were completely healed. Similarly, the prodigal son despite his thrift attitude that made him to squander the resources of his father, who signifies an organization of his father, who signifies an organization, was forgiven and called back to duty when he genuinely repented and was ready for productive and efficient application of organization resources (Luke 15:20-24).

It has been observed that modern management techniques and practices seem to have effectively ignored the possibility of the decisive intervention of divine celestial powers in human affairs. Oberholster (1993), summed it up succinctly when he observed that “the God factor has largely been melted down or even in several instances, totally ignored” in the scheme of modern management. The importance of the spiritual dimension in management cannot be overemphasized because man is a tripartite being possessed of spiritual longing and motivations.

### **Defining Management**

It is difficult to pin down precisely what is meant by the term management. Is it a set of techniques? Is it a way of getting things done through other people? Is management a matter of decision making? For the sake of this research work management is of all these. And literally, management is getting things done through people (Onuoha, 1991). A good manager is the one who gets things done through people. The intricate manipulation of men, money, material, machines and information to get objectives fulfilled for the benefit of an organization is what management is all about. There are functions that help managers to get things done through people called management functions and they include; organizing, directing and controlling (Imaga, 2005)

### **Management and the Bible**

The bible is a management text and God, Himself, is a manager. For instance, God made all things therefore owns all things and this vast creation of God; men, money, materials, machines and information has to be properly managed for everyone to enjoy God's work. God also achieved His objectives by working through people (and other beings he made like angels). For the management approach, the Christian manager has a purpose of his or her own, and sees to that purpose by the means which God demonstrates.

### **Meaning of Management in the Bible**

Management is another word for stewardship. “Stewards” or managers are responsible for something entrusted to them by someone else. As believers each of us is the manager of spiritual resources with which God has entrusted us.

### **Bible and Business Management**

A helpful Biblical principle on which to build a business is found in Luke 6:31. This verse which is known as the Golden Rule, states that we should “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Many great businesses use this principle as the foundation for their success.

### **God and Managerial Functions**

The Bible speaks about the managerial functions (planning, organizing, directing and controlling) which is the basis for this research, on how God implemented the four principles in the Holy Bible.

### **Planning**

In Luke 14:28-30, the Bible (Jesus Christ) says “for which of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not just sit down and CALCULATE THE COST, to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying “this man began to build and was unable to finish”. Planning means pre-determining a course of action and the Bible has given us many reasons why we must plan.

### **God is a Planner**

The task God gave to the children of Israel was things that required great planning to accomplish. Despite being an enslaved people that had just been delivered, God commanded the building of a tabernacle in the wilderness with little or no resources. These people depended on only one meal – the manna- and had one set of cloths and had no water etc (Exodus 26:31). The details for building the tabernacle, the way to raise the resources, the different task, the manning of the tasks and the logistics required were simply mind-blowing. These men accomplished the task.

- God commands us to live a planned and orderly lives I Corinthians 14:33, 40;
- Jesus Christ taught us to plan ahead–Luke 14:28-32
- Luke 14:31-32 – the man who builds a tower must plan to finish it.

- Luke 14:31-32 – the king who contemplates war must plan to win or seek peace.
- Paul the apostle was a man with a plan because the Lord gave him an objective for living – Acts 26:16-18
- Examples of anointed men of God who planned and blessed their generation
  - o Moses – Exodus 18
  - o Nehemiah – 1-3
  - o David – I Chr 22

### **Organizing**

Organizing is the process of placing people into a definite structure that will make them accomplish objectives. We can see a wonderful example in the Bible. Moses was in charge of two (2) million Jews and he was leading them to the Promised Land. He was the only one that judged their cases as well but Jethro his father-in-law gave him a better plan. He was to divide the work among selected leaders who will see to it that the work was properly done – Exodus 18:13-23

- Romans 12:4-6 clearly teaches that the body of Christ that is the church has different parts that function synergistically to see that the objective of the body is fulfilled.
- David organized Israel in such a way that Israel achieved God's programmes for the nation – I Chr 23:29
- Solomon was able to build the great temple because of the organized way he went about it – II Chr 2:3
- Solomon's organized way of running the nation was what impressed the queen of Sheba – II Chr 9:1-12.

### **Directing or Leading**

- Directing is influencing people to take effective and efficient action that would accomplish objectives. The major word in directing is influence. The Bible is full of men and women who influenced others to fulfill God's objectives for their lives.
- In Genesis, we read about Noah, the man God used to build an ark to the saving of his house. We also read of Abraham through whom the whole world has been blessed. What of Isaac, Jacob and Joseph? These were all directors or leaders who influenced their generation for beneficial permanence.
- In Exodus, Moses became the influential leader of the nation and led them through the wilderness.
- Then came Joshua, the man who led Israel into the Promised Land and settled them there.
- After Joshua, we read about the judges, the prophets, the kings. These were all leaders. God showed us the difference between good leadership and the bad ones. Those who feared God and followed His words did very well and the people under them enjoyed great abundance and divine protection. The bad ones only brought calamity to their people. It is still the same today.
- Jesus is the greatest leader of men. He raised other leaders whom He called

disciples. They took over from him and spread His message throughout the world. The need of the world today is godly leaders.

- The leadership style of Christ however is different from that of the world. (Matt 20:27; 23:11; Php 2:7; Matt 25:21)
- Jesus Christ, a leader with a servant heart who remains faithful and committed to the fulfillment of a task and is influential enough to motivate others to fulfill that vision.

### **Controlling**

This is the action the manager takes to ensure that performance conforms to plan. Controlling involves feedback (Imaga, 2007). Since in an organization the vision is specific and the tasks have been properly manned, there is need to monitor performance to make sure that the objective is achieved. The Bible is full of such activities. Examples of where God performance the activities of controlling as a management function in the Holy Bible are:

- In Luke 10:1-24, Jesus Christ sent out seventy disciples to go and preach, teach, heal and cast out demons. When they finished that task, they reported back (feedback) and Jesus Christ commended them for the work well done and gave them rewards. See also II Cor 8:10-11
- God is interested in results; results that can be properly evaluated, Acts 2:41; 4:4; 5:14; 11:24; 6:1, 7; 9:31; 16:5.
- In most of the parables, performance was very vital and rewards were given based on what people were able to achieve – Matt 21:28-32; 33-44; 22:1-14; 24:45-51.

### **Christianity – The Biblical Perspective**

The central tenet of Christianity is the belief in Jesus as the son of God and the Messiah (Christ). Christians believe that Jesus as the messiah was anointed by God as savior of humanity and hold that Jesus coming was the fulfillment of messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. (<http://en.m.wikipedia.org>). Christianity is a religion that focuses on belief in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. They believe that Jesus is the son of God who was born in the Middle East in Bethlehem over 2000 years ago. The key religion tests are the Old Testament and the New Testament, which together make up the bible.

The biblical worldview (or a Christian worldview) is a worldviews based on God's unchanging worlds since God is the creator of everything in heaven and earth; He is the standard for truth. God is all powerful, all – knowing and unchanging. (Drunker, 1986).

### **Towards a Christian Perspective in Management**

In unfolding a Christian management perspective, we propose that a Christian approach to management should understand the role of management as that of a steward (servant leader) who together with other God created people (fellow stewards created in God's image) take care of resources (also God- created and owned and over which God gave man authority) that have been entrusted to them for development, toward God- directed

purposes and to the glory of God. The need for a Christian perspective on management has long been recognized by management scholars. Covey (1992) described the designs of people as they want to contribute to the accomplishment of worthwhile objectives. They want to be part of a mission and enterprise that transcends their individual tasks. They do not want to work in job that has little meaning even though it may tap their mental capacities. They want purposes and principles that lifts them, enable them, inspire them, empower and encourage them to their best selves, On the other hand, Ohman (1955) also highlights the perceived need for a spiritual dimension to management when he wrote; I am convinced that workers have a fine sensitivity to spiritual qualities and want to work for a boss who believes in something and in whom they can believe. Ohman further illustrated his point by citing two real life examples of a business man who had managed with a Christian perspective.

Needs/Met	Metaphor	Management Perspective	Focus
Physical/Economic	Stomach	Classical	Power & control
Social/Emotional	Heart	Human Relations	Team work
Psychological	Mind	Human Resources	Development of talent
Spiritual	Soul	Christian	Stewardship mission directed.

The above diagram attempts to summarize the prevalent philosophies of management as evidence over the past century (i.e. scientific, behavioral and human resource) together with a suggested Christian (spiritual) perspective. The “production orientation” as suggested by Hawrylyshy (1978) and Koontz (1980) essentially combines the first three perspectives into a model for management. The Christian orientation combines all four perspectives into a model based on the concept of stewardship.

### Conclusion

God in his infinite wisdom utilized the four principles of management in His time of creating the world. Christian management is working with people within a system which meets their psychological, social, intellectual, aesthetic and spiritual needs while addressing economic, technological, societal and environmental concerns in a harmonious response that benefits all and brings glory to God. It is believed that without God's interventions any management responsibility is impossible to shoulder successfully. Consequently, we have to realign our measurements of success to the biblical perspective. However, it must be understood that the true measurement of success for the Biblical steward was his attitude. Management has everything to do with the steward's worldview and his relationship with God.

### Recommendations

This paper having x-rayed the concept of management and Christianity; the Biblical perspective recommends the following:

- (i) Modern management must imbibe the consciousness of the divine in all of its activities.
- (ii) Management must recognize that elevating economic success above the spiritual and social values of the people could counter-productive at the long run.
- (iii) The apparently inclination of modern management to commodify humanity and effectuate a moral indifference to human suffering must be jettisoned.
- (iv) There is an urgent need for modern management practitioners to recognize that a financially attractive option may, in human terms be morally unthinkable.

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