The Manager's Job: Folklore and Fact
What do managers do? A study of five CEOs and studies of managers conclude that managerial work involves interpersonal roles, informational roles, and decisional roles

by Henry Mintzberg

THE IDEA IN BRIEF

What, exactly, do you do? As a manager, it's difficult to say. The textbook answer used to be: plan, organize, coordinate, and control. But down in the trenches, the manager's job has always been far more complicated. In fact, you play so many roles, it's hard to excel at any one. The pressures of the job can drive you to:

• take on too much work
• operate with constant interruptions
• respond prematurely to complex events
• act rather than think
• make decisions without seeing the big picture.

So, what's a manager to do? How can you overcome these too familiar managerial pressures and demands? Learn to tackle head on the demons of superficiality and fragmentation by stepping back to see the broader landscape in which you operate.

THE IDEA IN PRACTICE

What Managers Really Do

Whether you are a supervisor or CEO, your success hinges first on recognizing the range of roles you're expected to perform.

Interpersonal Roles

• Figurehead—You represent your group to your organization and the community at large.

• Leader—You hire, train, and motivate employees.

• Liaison—You maintain contact with colleagues and stakeholders outside your immediate chain of command.

Informational Roles

• Monitor—You leverage your personal network to scan the environment for vital information.

• Disseminator—You feed information to subordinates who lack your access to critical data.
• **Spokesperson**—You provide information on behalf of your unit to senior management and outside organizations.

**Decisional Roles**

• **Entrepreneur**—You initiate projects to improve your unit's processes or profits.

• **Disturbance Handler**—You manage crises caused by precipitated by employees, customers, suppliers, systems, or accidents.

• **Resource Allocator**—You decide who will get what, coordinate the impact of interrelated decisions, and allocate managerial time.

• **Negotiator**—You use strategic information to resolve grievances, establish contracts, and promote shared decisions.

**Becoming a More Effective Manager**

Navigating such varied roles can leave you feeling fragmented and overwhelmed, jumping from issue to issue without the big picture in mind. You can conquer the challenges of your countless responsibilities with introspection and insight. These guidelines can help:

• Be aware of the roles you naturally prefer. Stretch beyond those you're most comfortable in, depending on what the situation demands.

• Reduce your impossible workload by giving subordinates the information they need to be more self-sufficient.

• Avoid superficial decision making by taking advantage of expert analysts.

• Force yourself to do the things you believe are important. If reflection is critical, schedule it on your calendar. If you value innovation, make sure that those who lead new ventures report back to you.

*Henry Mintzberg is the Bronfman Professor of Management at McGill University. His latest book is Mintzberg on Management: Inside Our Strange World of Organizations (Free Press, 1989). This article appeared originally in HBR July–August 1975. It won the McKinsey Award for excellence.*