

THE ROLE OF THE MEDICAL MAN IN THE PRACTICE OF MANAGEMENT*

BORIS SEREBRO, B.A., M.B., B.CH., B.A.O.(T.C.D.)

Johannesburg

Dr. Serebro referred to the great industrial development that had taken place in South Africa in recent years, and stated that in 1953, 775,000 people of all races were employed in secondary industry alone,¹ with an annual wage bill of £445 million² and an industrial output to the value of £1,140 million¹ (exclusive of the mining and agricultural industries, and the activities of central and local government, who were employers of labour on a vast scale). He said the aftermath of World War II had seen a gradual normalization in the industrial picture, and that competition both from within and from overseas was making itself felt. With this came the realization that an apparently cheap and plentiful labour supply was in reality not so cheap and in the main was unskilled. He referred also to other weaknesses in the supportive and para-industrial structure, and mentioned particularly defects in the educational system from the industrial point of view.³ Dr. Serebro spoke of the necessity of conserving man-power and using it to the best advantage,⁵ and went on to say:

We are beginning to understand the methods whereby the best use can be made of our manpower. This is possible by the application of management techniques, where the ultimate targets are efficiency and productivity, acquired by methods which do not produce physical or mental fatigue or frustration in our workers. This goal is reached by a management which has the knowledge and the skills necessary to achieve its purpose, without recourse to the blood-sweat-and-tears or the carrot-on-a-stick techniques. The work of Elton Mayo⁶ in his experiments at Hawthorne with the Western Electric Company together with his earlier work in a mule-spinning department of a textile mill are classic examples of what management can achieve if it is ready to apply itself to the various industrial problems with human relations as the starting point.⁷ For even with the best tools, with high-grade equipment, good working conditions and reasonably skilled workers, the results at times, if measured even in terms of efficiency and productivity alone, are sometimes most disappointing. This applies not only to the factory, but to any undertaking whether private or public, under central or local government, as well as hospitals, clinics, laboratories and even educational institutions. Such failure is an indication of defective management.

The care and the maintenance of the health of the individual, in both the preventative and the therapeutic aspects, is often referred to as personal health. This personal health is the business of the medical man in general practice. The care and maintenance

of optimum working conditions, such as lighting, ventilation, working comfort, environmental humidity and temperature, together with personal health, is known as occupational health, and is the concern of the medical man in industry. However, it is not enough to maintain occupational health alone; for today the doctor in industry must solve problems of a more complex nature concerned with inter-personal behaviour. Among these, priority is given to the understanding and the practice of active human relations which facilitate communication, and assists in worker co-operation, resulting in such a low rate of sickness absenteeism and improved or increased productivity. These results are an indication of efficient management.

The medical man in industry is the person concerned with the sickness absenteeism figures. He it is who, in matters relative to occupational health, is the arbiter between the worker and management. He is in a privileged and unique position from which he is able to judge whether management is shepherding its industrial flock smoothly and without hitches. The medical man does not gauge only with instruments of glass, steel or mercury, but rather by his skilled observation of human behaviour under specific conditions. These are reflected in his medical certificates. Using this type of gauge, the medical man can watch the fluctuations in the sickness rate, and decide to what degree it is real or apparent. The doctor cannot usually stem an apparent or artificial absenteeism rate. He cannot compete against nor diagnose from mere symptoms. It is essential to realize that a rising rate of sickness absenteeism is not necessarily indicative of an impaired standard of medicine or bad doctoring, but commonly points to some inherent weakness in labour-management relationship. Management chooses its labour force and creates the working environment; hence the responsibility for any failure rests entirely with management. Apart from certification, the medical man is capable of pointing out to management stresses and faults in its other industrial relations and environment and giving relative advice.⁸

The doctor in industry is in contact with workers all the time and becomes aware of their likes and dislikes in relation to management. With discrimination he can sort the facts from the fantasies, and again can give management definite indications of structural managerial defects. 'The actions of the medical man in industry, his decisions and his responsibilities are far-reaching, and have management implications.'⁹

During the last two decades, management has developed practical techniques based on knowledge derived from economics, mathematics, psychology and sociology. To develop these techniques it drew from the fundamental as well as from the applied sciences, and carried out experiments which were not always

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successful. Yet, out of these successes and failures, with the experience of the years, new concepts arose and principles were elaborated which today constitute the standards of management.

In the welter of a multiplicity of techniques, well-trying procedures have been arrived at for getting things done. Management made this possible by its reliance on expert guidance by the statistician, the engineer, the industrial psychologist and the works accountant. Through all this progress there has been one dominant difficulty, and that lay in the field of human behaviour. To help unravel the complexities of human nature was needed an expert in human structure and function, with his understanding of all the phases of man from babyhood to old age. Thus the medical man takes his place, with those other experts who can advise management in the industrial field.

Medicine, like Management, has throughout its existence borrowed from the arts and appropriated from the sciences. It has modified, adapted and used methods and techniques and equipment from the chemist, the physicist, and recently the atomic technologist. Management experts from the Old World and New World as well as those of this country have already entered the arena of improved human relations, and have staked their claims in this field. Here we find other professional men intimately concerned with good human relations,¹⁰ who invite the cooperation of the medical man in this field. Medical men who are interested in these activities are invited to participate in some measure of inter-professional education which will assist them in dovetailing with their fellow experts in the Management team.

As medical men, by reason of our training and outlook, we have a direct interest in human beings, and it is right and proper for those of us who are connected with industrial organizations to assist management by taking an active part in the personnel-management aspect of those undertakings; and at the same time to take part in the inter-professional exchange on common and yet overlapping matters. This will assist the doctor in Industry in acquiring the knowledge and the necessary tools which are essential for his own work as well as for the integration of his orbit in the wider sphere of Management.

There is already in existence an ideal forum in this country in the form of numerous management and supervisory meetings which take place throughout the year. These are organized by such bodies as the National Development Foundation, the Institute of Personnel Management and the Institute of Production Engineers. It is at this level that the doctor in Industry can make inter-professional contact on a worth-while and practical basis.

Finally, the industrial management experts are in contact with all types of people connected with Industry, and are fully involved in the problems of human relations. It therefore seems logical to assume that medical men in industry and the management experts have a common purpose. There is scope for a close liaison and symbiosis, for the formation of a team that will have as its main

object the furtherance of good Labour-Management relations of real value to Industry.

SUMMARY

South Africa has developed her secondary industry, and as an industrial producer must compete in the various commercial markets. In order to do this it must have a skilled labour force, which in the main is lacking. Management techniques assist in the conservation of our existing manpower.

The medical man in industry must not only concern himself with personal and occupational health problems, but must solve problems of inter-human behaviour. The doctor can assist management in its functions as well as indicating to management weaknesses in itself and in its programmes, by the mechanism of medical certification and sorted opinions of the workers. These opinions can give management indications of managerial defects.

Management experts are already active in the field of improved human relations, but invite the co-operation of the medical man in this field as well as in the aspect of inter-professional education.

There already exists a forum in this country in the form of management and supervisory meetings, which are held throughout the year, organised by various bodies interested in personnel management. On a practical basis the medical man in industry can make the necessary contacts and acquire the knowledge that will equip him further, and make him the appropriate person to take an active place in the management team.

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