

Exercise 3:

Scientific Management in the workplace

The car and computer manufacturing plants, the work environments we go to every day; the hospitals we are treated in, and even some of the restaurants we might eat in all function more efficiently due to the application of methods that come from Scientific Management. In fact, these methods of working seem so commonplace and so logical to a citizen of the modern world that it is almost impossible to accept that they were revolutionary only 100 years ago. Scientific Management was developed in the first quarter of the 20th century; its father is commonly accepted to be F.W. Taylor. Taylor recognized labor productivity was largely inefficient due to a workforce that functioned by "rules of thumb." Taylor carried out studies to ensure that factual scientific knowledge would replace these traditional "rules of thumb." The backbone of this activity was his "time-and-motion study." This involved analyzing all the operations and the motions performed in a factory, and timing them with a stopwatch. By knowing how long it took to perform each of the elements of each job, he believed it would be possible to determine a fair day's work.

Work, he contended, was more efficient when broken down into its constituent parts, and the management, planning, and decision-making functions had been developed elsewhere. As this implies, Taylor viewed the majority of workers as ill-educated and unfit to make important decisions about their work. Taylor's system ensured the most efficient way would be used by all workers, therefore making the work process standard. invariably, managers found that maximal efficiency was achieved by a subdivision of labor. This subdivision entailed breaking the workers' tasks into smaller and smaller parts. In short, he specified not only what was to be done, but also how it was to be done and the exact time allowed for doing it. One theory based on the Scientific Management model is Fordism. This theory refers to the application of Henry Ford's faith in mass production- in his case, of cars- and combined the idea of the moving assembly line with Taylor's systems of division of labor and piece-rate payment. With Fordism, jobs are automated or broken down into unskilled or semi-skilled tasks. The pace of the continuous-flow assembly line dictated work. But Ford's theory retained the faults of Taylor's. Autocratic management ensured a high division of labor in order to effectively run mass production; this led to little workplace democracy, and alienation. Equally, with emphasis on the continuous flow of the assembly line, machinery was given more importance than workers. The benefits of Scientific Management lie within its ability to provide a company with the focus to organize its structure in order to meet the objectives of both the employer and employee. Taylor

found that the firms that introduced Scientific Management became the world's most carefully organized corporations. Scientific Management, however, has been criticized for "deskilling" labor. As jobs are broken down into their constituent elements, humans become little more than "machines" in the chain. Their cognitive input is not required: it is best if they do not have to think about their tasks. Yet the average intelligence of employees has risen sharply; people have been made aware of their value as human beings. They are no longer content to receive only financial reward for their tasks. It has been recognized that productivity and success are not just obtained by controlling all factors in the workplace, but by contributing to the social well-being and development of the individual employee.

Higher levels of access to technology and information, as well as increased competition, present another difficulty to theory of Scientific Management in the 21st century. Modern organizations process huge amounts of input, and employees no longer work in isolated units cut off from the organization at large. Managers recognize they are unable to control all aspects of employees' functions, as the number layers of information factored into everyday decisions is so high that it is imperative employees use their own initiative. High competition between organizations also means that companies must react fast to maintain market positions. All this forces modern companies to maintain high levels of flexibility. In the era during which Scientific Management was developed, each worker had a specific task that he or she had to perform, with little or no real explanation of why, or what part it played in the organization as a whole. In this day and age, it is virtually impossible to find an employee in the developed world who is not aware of what his or her organization stands for, what their business strategy is, how well the company is performing, and what their job means to the company as a whole. Organizations actively encourage employees, know about their company and to work across departments, ensuring that communication at all levels is mixed and informal.

Another weakness in Scientific Management theory is that it can lead to workers becoming too highly specialized, therefore hindering their adaptability to new situations. Nowadays, employers not only want workers to be efficient, they must also exhibit flexibility. In conclusion, it can be seen that Scientific Management is still very much part of organizations today. Its strengths in creating a divide between management functions and work functions have been employed widely at all levels and in all industries. In addition, its strengths in making organizations efficient through replacement of "rules of thumb" with scientific fact ensured its widespread application.

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Source: IELTS Advantage - Reading Skills

Questions 1-6

Complete each sentence with the correct ending A- H.

According to the article:

1 Productivity	A. meant a job was reduced to a number of basic elements.
2 Time-and-motion analysis	B. was considered undesirable in the role of the workers.
3 Decision-making	C. became specialized in certain unchanging work routines.
4 Subdivision of labour	D. measured the exact time it took to do each part of a job.
5 Fordism	E. carefully calculated what was required for the success of a business.
6 A worker	F. was an application of a theory to mass production.
	G. took a critical view of the style of management.
	H. suffered as a result of established inefficient practices.