

A Historical Review of Efforts in the Area of Management Semantics¹

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An evaluation of efforts designed to aid in the alleviation of the terminological conflicts existing within the field of management is presented in this paper. Included are reviews of both currently available and out-of-print general management dictionaries and glossaries.

The history of the efforts to resolve the terminological conflicts that exist within the field of management is both long and varied. Its longevity may be traced from the 1927 (May 4th to 23rd) meeting of the International (World) Economic Conference to the periodical literature of today. Awareness of the problem of confusion in management terminology has been indicated in a number of works (17, 24, 43, 47, 48, 49). The conflict has spanned the continents of North America, Europe, Asia, and Australia. It is the purpose of this effort to review the development of this conflict and to comment on specific achievements in this area. cursory remarks concerning both currently available and out-of-print *general* management dictionaries and glossaries are offered. A selected bibliography of additional relevant works in the areas of personnel and industrial relations; production, wage, and work study; and general business is provided.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Initial Efforts

The initial efforts to resolve the terminological conflicts present in the field of management resulted from a proposal forwarded by the League of Nations at the International Economic Conference of 1927 (55). As part of this proposal, it was recommended that an international body be established

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to study and spread the ideas of management. In fulfillment of this recommendation, a joint agreement was reached between Albert Thomas, Director of the International Labour Office, and Edward A. Filene, Founder of the Twentieth Century Fund, to support such an undertaking. In mid-1927, the combined efforts of these two groups in collaboration with Theodore Limperg representing the International Committee for Scientific Management (CIOS) resulted in the establishment of the International Management Institute at Geneva, Switzerland (50, 51). Paul E. Devinat, first Director of the Institute, and Percy S. Brown, first Deputy Director, undertook as their beginning task the formation of an International Committee on Terminology. Under the direction of Frenchman Charles de la Poix de Fréminville, national groups were formed throughout Europe to apply themselves to the task of establishing clear definitions and uniform terminology in the field of management (27, 28). However, the Committee was unable to achieve positive results before 1933; and with the elevation of Adolph Hitler to the Chancellorship of Germany and the abandonment of the gold standard by Switzerland, the Twentieth Century Fund withdrew its financial support. As a result, the Institute was forced to close.

Succeeding Efforts

Fortunately, the closing of the Institute did not mark the end of efforts in the area of managerial terminology. During the years 1933 through 1936 alone, at least four similar major projects were undertaken. In 1933, the French Institut D' Organisation Commerciale et Industrielle in collaboration with the Paris Chambre De Commerce organized their own special Committee on Terminology for the purpose of advancing uniform management terms and definitions (15). Expanding upon earlier work performed by the Comité National de l'Organisation Française (16), this undertaking advanced definitions in the areas of general management, work measurement, marketing, manufacturing, accounting, and finance.

The same year the French Committee was formed, the German Reichskuratorium für Wirtschaftlichkeit, under the direction of Otto D. Schaefer, published recommended management definitions (44). Mainly concerned with rationalization, these definitions heavily reflected the reconstruction movement that existed in Germany at that time.

In Czechoslovakia three years later, in 1936, an analogous effort was made by the Czechoslovak Národní Komitet Pro Vědeckov Organísaci (18). Established in Prague, this group earlier had provided much valuable assistance in the initial International Management Institute undertaking.

Perhaps the most fruitful and lasting attempts in the area of terminological conflict have come as a result of work performed by the Advisory Committee on Management. Created in 1936 by the Governing Body of the International Labour Office at its second session held in Geneva on May 28th and 29th, 1937, the Committee unanimously adopted a resolution calling for international attention to the problem of management terminology. At this

same session, definitions for the following terms were advanced: (a) management, scientific management; (b) organization, Organisation scientifique (du travail); (c) rationalization. These definitions were later translated into ten languages and transmitted to the International Committee on Scientific Management (14). At its Seventh International Congress on scientific management held in Washington, D. C., from September 19th to 23rd, 1938, CIOS recommended the definitions to each of the seventeen national committees present (25).

Further review of contributions made by other nations reveals that perhaps none has been as involved in clearing the semantic swamp as has Great Britain. In 1928, under the editorship of John Lee, the *Dictionary of Industrial Administration* (37) the first dictionary of its type, was published in London. Its title page bills it as a "Comprehensive Encyclopaedia of the Organisation, Administration, and Management of Modern Industry." In commenting on the *Dictionary*, Urwick wrote:

The work marked an epoch. Its only fault was to be in advance of its time. A reprint did not prove commercially possible [the *Dictionary* initially sold for \$17.50] and much of the influence it could have had was lost by the fact that copies were not easily to be found. It continues to be used by those fortunate enough to possess it (53, p. 117).

The *Dictionary* is a collection of contributions from over 100 of the then best known authorities in the fields of industrial organization and management. The two volumes (1151 quarto pages) of the *Dictionary* are both comprehensive and complete. Among its "Who's who" of contributors are such authorities as Ralph G. Hawtrey, Clarence H. Northcott, Thomas G. Rose, Oliver Sheldon, and Lyndall F. Urwick. American contributors to the volumes include Harvard Professor Robert F. Forester and Ordway Tead. According to its editor, the *Dictionary* "is primarily a work of reference" and hopefully "indispensable to every industry for day-by-day consultation" (37, p. xii).

In scope, the *Dictionary* covers a large variety of subjects and is supplemented by statistical tables, operating forms, and schematic diagrams. In it one may find a discussion of such topics as: (a) the function of administration and organization (subsections: direction, policy, coordination, master planning, budgets, organization charts, staff and line organization, departmental organization, etc.); (b) education for industry and commerce; (c) eugenics in business; (d) fatigue and monotony; (e) the moral duty of management; (f) repetitive work (subsections: repetitive work as a setting for fantasy, repetition and boredom, review of the literature, attempts to alleviate boredom in repetitive work); (g) industrial and commercial research; (h) distribution of responsibility (subsections: delegation, elements of supervision, job analysis, grading, promotion, executive training and salary standards). More mundane topics covered are: (a) maintenance of factory buildings (subsections: painting and white-washing, window cleaning, yard cleaning, etc.); (b) glare; (c) rest rooms; (d) physical work of

women (subsections: capacity of muscular work, special physiological conditions—menstruation and maternity).

Three of the most interesting sections of the *Dictionary* have yet to be mentioned. First, its coverage of lighting (both natural and artificial) in relation to health and output is strongly reminiscent of the illumination experiments performed at the Hawthorne Works of the Western Electric Company (46). Yet at the date of the *Dictionary's* publication, these studies were only in their beginning phase.

Second, the *Dictionary's* discussion of factory reorganization seems unusually current in thinking. Often analogous to present organizational development (OD) literature, it makes extended reference to the expert organizer (charge agent) and his powers.

The last entry of the *Dictionary* to be mentioned is possibly its most famous. Its discussion of the Principles of Direction and Control, authored by Urwick, has been described by one writer as "at least a generation ahead of its time" (7, p. 506). It is in this presentation that Urwick initially expounded his position on the principles of management, a position he has modified and defended many times since.

The Nineteen-Forties

With World War II, involvement in the question of management terminology slowed considerably. In the United States the Academy of Management was inactive from 1942 to 1946. In England, the *British Management Review*, which was then published in collaboration with the Institute of Industrial Administration, the Institution of Workes Managers, and the former Office Management Association, was not published from June 1940 to September 1943. After World War II the first development of consequence concerning management terminology was the Seventh Series of London Lectures on Higher Management. Held in May and June of 1948 under the auspices of the Institute of Industrial Administration (London Centre); the theme of the lectures was "Management Principles and Their Application" (9). Throughout the lectures, a large portion of the discussion centered upon the question of terminological conflict and the problem of accurate communication (see esp. 52, p. 21). This group of lectures acted both as an opportunity for exploring further the principles of management and as an occasion for reemphasizing the importance of management terminology.

In the same year, the Melbourne Institute of Industrial Management also dealt with the topic of management terminology. The Management Nomenclature Research Group of the Institute prepared for distribution recommended definitions of 92 management terms (26). Divided into four categories, 42 of the terms deal with General Management; 17 with Production Management; 10 with Personnel Management; and 13 with Supply Management. While not exceedingly broad in scope, the definitions offered by the Institute reflect an interesting combination of British and American

management influences. The terms management and administration are identified as being synonymous.

In the following year, from May 5th to 8th, the British Institute of Management held its Seventh Annual Conference Series (30). Under the direction of Urwick, sectional meeting number five of the Conference directed itself to the question whether there was a need for a standard terminology and nomenclature in management. A position paper favoring the question was presented by Winston Rodgers of Acton Technical College (45). Following both pro and con discussion of the issue, a resolution in favor of the question was carried. Presented to the plenary session of the Conference, the resolution read as follows:

The BIM is asked to examine existing terms and to publish their current meanings and to encourage standard usage whenever possible. Efforts should be made to extend this work to the international field, initially to the English speaking countries (45, pp 21-22).

To implement this resolution, the BIM established an official Committee on Terminology. The result of its efforts—a 174 word multilingual management glossary (8)—was presented at the first European Council of CIOS at Torquay, England, October 20-23, 1954 (40).

The Nineteen-Fifties

The early 1950s saw the first widespread emergence of business dictionaries in the United States (23). The first general management vocabulary, however, was not published until the year 1958. It was entitled, *Common Vocabulary of Professional Management* (COMVOC), and was prepared under the direction of Louis A. Allen, President of Louis A. Allen Associates, Inc. Allen explains the purpose of COMVOC as follows:

Ask any two managers precisely what they mean by "staff," or "decentralize," or "budget." The differences in interpretation will make communication difficult. If we are to develop professional practice of management work, semantics requires first attention (3, p. 1)

Through the three editions (1958, 1963, 1968) of COMVOC, its coverage has expanded from 49 to 194 basic management terms. Its adopters include numerous companies throughout the world, the majority of which have been clients of Allen Associates. Earlier editions of COMVOC are reproduced in two of Allen's earlier publications, *Management and Organization* (1) and *The Management Profession* (2).

Using COMVOC, the reader will quickly note that it follows a functional approach to management. Planning, organizing, leading, and controlling are listed as the four functions of management. In line with this, a manager is defined as "a leader who enables people to work most effectively together by performing primarily the work of planning, organizing, leading and controlling." The majority of COMVOC's entries are annotated; and on its last two pages are presented Allen's "Unified Concept of Professional Management" and his "Principles of Professional Management." For an interesting

comment on COMVOC, see "Language of Scientific Management Spoken Here" (35).

The Nineteen-Sixties

In the first half of the 1960s, more and more practitioners and scholars began working on the theoretical problems of management terminology. Prepared by Karl E. Ettinger for the Office of Industrial Resources in the International Cooperation Administration, *Management Glossary* was published in 1960 (22). Designed to supplement the Administration's Management Primer Series, "Principles and Practices of Productivity," the 370 terms and definitions contained in the *Glossary* are drawn freely from all areas of business and economics.

In March of 1961, *Factory* carried an article designed "to clear the smoke" and aid in eliminating management meetings that produce "more heat than light because of confusion on terms" (6, p. 208, editor's comment). In this article, Eugene J. Benge of Benge Associates defined and commented upon 25 management terms.

Nine months after the publication of Benge's article, Harold D. Koontz authored an article in the *Journal of the Academy of Management* entitled "The Management Theory Jungle" (31). It was reprinted with minor modifications in the *Harvard Business Review* as "Making Sense of Management Theory" (32). Combined, these two articles provided the stimulus that has carried the issue of management theory and terminology to its present position. They resulted in a symposium being held under the auspices of the McKinsey Foundation and the Western Management Sciences Institute on November 8th and 9th, 1962 at the Graduate School of Business Administration of the University of California, Los Angeles. The summarized proceedings of the symposium were published in book form in 1964 under the title, *Towards a Unified Theory of Management* (33). This work has been referred to by Urwick as "one of the most stimulating and exciting books about management that . . . I have seen in the last decade" (54, p. 92).

The initiative provided by Koontz's work has resulted in a host of commentaries regarding management lexicon. Even *Business Week* noted the babel (41).

In 1966, the first dictionary of general management terminology, *Dictionary of Management Terms*, was compiled by Albert J. Lindemann, Earl F. Lundgren, and H. K. von Kaas (39). Its introduction states that it was prepared for two primary classes of users:

- a. the professional manager in business as an aid to communication and the development of a common language.
- b. the student who has a need to develop a better understanding of management literature (39, p. iii)

The *Dictionary* is 81 pages long and contains 139 terms and their associated definitions. A unique feature of the *Dictionary* is that much of the information in its entries is footnoted. Though not stated, it appears that the authors were greatly influenced by the third edition of Koontz and O'Don-

nell's *Principles of Management: An Analysis of Managerial Functions* (34). Of the 43 footnotes that appear in the *Dictionary*, 17 refer to this source; in addition, the authors subscribe to the same functional classification as that advanced by Koontz and O'Donnell, i.e., planning, organizing, staffing, directing, and controlling. At present, the *Dictionary of Management Terms* is out-of-print, and according to its senior author "less than two dozen copies are now in existence," all of which are in his private possession (38).

At the same time as the introduction of the first dictionary of *general* management in the United States, similar progress was being made in Great Britain. Compiled by Hano Johannson and Andrew Robertson, *Management Glossary* is described by its publishers as "the first glossary ranging over the whole field of management to be published in Britain" (29). Within its format, the *Glossary* attempts to include:

- (a) Fundamental management terms normally associated with management principles and theory.
- (b) The more significant and commonly used terms from each of the specialist areas, such as marketing, finance, production, personnel.
- (c) Terms describing management techniques, though with no attempt to cater to the specialist
- (d) Terms from such allied subjects as economics, law, statistics, and sociology, in as far as they are closely associated with management (29, pp. iv-v)

While realizing that their work was a pioneering effort, the authors also recognized that management concepts are in an evolutionary stage and thus must be treated in a dynamic rather than static manner.

It may be concluded from the previously stated format of the *Glossary* that its coverage is widespread. In addition to the inclusion of such traditional management concepts as "chain of command," "span of control," and "centralisation," the reader may find the meaning of such concepts as the Bedaux (Point) System or the Brisch System of parts classification and coding. Discussion may also be found for such terms as *bürolandschaft*, CAPSTAN, EVOP, rhochrematics, and synectics.

While broad in approach, *Management Glossary* is often incomplete in its specific presentations. Absence of the term "unity of command," for example, and the failure to mention Douglas McGregor in its discussion of Theories X and Y or Wroe Alderson in its discussion of rhochrematics are a few instances of this lack of completeness.

Current Conditions

During the past fifty years, a number of glossaries and dictionaries have been published in the field of management. Practically all of these fall into one of two categories. The first is the full-scale book type which attempts to cover all the terms of management and its related functional business areas, e.g., *The Dictionary of Industrial Administration*, *Dictionary of Management Terms*, and *Management Glossary*. The second category is made up of word listings and glossaries in the back of textbooks e.g., Alvin M.

Brown's two texts, *Organization: A Formulation of Principle* (10) and *Organization of Industry* (11) or, more recently, Ralph C. Davis' *Industrial Organization and Management* (20), Wilfred B. D. Brown's two texts, *Exploration in Management* (12) and *Organization* (13), Ernest Dale's *Management: Theory and Practice* (19), and Donnelly, Gibson and Ivancevich's *Fundamentals of Management* (21).

This review of literature has concentrated mainly upon contributions belonging to the first category while totally excluding those of the second category. The reason for doing so is as follows: The major and disqualifying criticism of these second group compilations is that they were developed to serve the need of a specific text and, as is true in the majority of cases, the terms supplied are so applied as to make their definition questionable from a general usefulness point of view. Also, if a definition other than those specifically appearing in such a text were needed for a word, another reference would have to be used. This largely nullifies any general application such a compilation might have.

It is believed that all major attempts at the solution of the terminological conflict within the field of management have been reviewed. At this point, brief mention will be made of three closely allied efforts. The first concerns the work of Adrian M. McDonough. In his 1963 McKinsey Award-winning book, McDonough developed a computerized retrieval guide for classifying and coding 21,000 elements of the grammar and vocabulary of management (42). Along these same lines, but nonquantitative in application, are two attempts at the creation of a taxonomy of management theory and work. The first, by Laufer, was hopefully designed "as a means of assisting in the development of a unified theory of management" (36, editor's comment). Within his article, Laufer constructed a taxonomic management matrix fashioned after the Periodic Table with subdivisions for each of the five functions of management, i.e., planning, organizing, staffing, directing, and controlling.

A second similar effort by Allen proposed "a system for sorting, categorizing, labeling and defining management information" (4). His effort in this area closely parallels the ideas presented in his aforementioned *Common Vocabulary of Professional Management*.

CONCLUSION

An overview and appraisal of efforts designed to aid in the alleviation of the terminological conflict within the field of management shows an increasing amount of interest, study, and analysis in this area. While the previous works reviewed deserve much applause for their attempts to break the semantic barrier, they all have failed to gain universal acceptance. If this acceptance is to come, more than simple definitions are needed. A clear understanding of the origin, background, and evolving usage of the terms and concepts to be defined is necessary. A recent effort by this author

specifically traces and outlines the origin, background, and twentieth century evolving usage of selected management terms (5).

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