

Most Influential Management Books of the 20th Century

ARTHUR G. BEDEIAN DANIEL A. WREN

AUTHORS' NOTE

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Correspondence concerning this manuscript should be addressed to Arthur G. Bedeian, Department of Management, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803-6312, USA. E-mail address: *abede@lsu.edu*.

Arthur G. Bedeian is a Boyd Professor at Louisiana State University, where he specializes in the study of workplace behavior. He is a former president of the Academy of Management and past dean of its Fellows Group.

Daniel A. Wren is the David Ross Boyd Professor of Management-Emeritus, and curator of the Harry W. Bass Business History Collection at the University of Oklahoma. He is a fellow of the Academy of Management and a Founding Fellow of the Southern Management Association.

As we turn the last page of the century, it is time to take a step back from the mundane and reflect on the path that the management discipline has followed. In the best tradition of management scholarship, we may thus continue to learn from the past as it informs the present and, perhaps, discern where our discipline ought to be going. To

this end, a list of the Twentieth Century's most influential management books offers a compelling basis for understanding the heritage from which we will build our common future.

By "influential," we mean those books that had a major impact on management thinking at the time of their publication. Some influential books of the past are rarely mentioned today, but at the time they were published had a profound influence on the management discipline as a whole. Nonetheless, their ideas, unlike their authors, live on and on in the received knowledge of contemporary thinking. In a very real sense, the identification of such "influential books" forces us to go beyond the obvious and consider the illumination these books offered their original readers. The exercise likewise serves to challenge what C. S. Lewis called the "snobbery of chronology"—the belief that because we live after those who went before us, we must be wiser, better, and different. Moreover, as heirs to an inherited intellectual legacy, it is good to remember, in the words of Sir Issac Newton, "If we have seen a little farther it is by standing on the shoulders of the giants who have gone before us."

The preparation of a "most influential" list is thus a challenge of our contemporary assumptions and selection skills. To assist in this task, we initially sought the advice of a panel of consultants from various subject areas. They were asked to review a "starter" list we had prepared and then to nominate additional books they believed merited fur-

ther consideration. We then polled the 137 members of the Fellows Group of the Academy of Management, asking them to judge 50 titles and vote for the books they believed were “the 25 most influential books of the 20th century.” Respondents were also invited to identify any additional titles they believed we might have failed to consider. Every system has a bias. This system tilts toward the judgments of an admittedly more established group of scholars. Yet, it does tap the insights of a group formally recognized for its outstanding contributions to the management profession and who have collectively witnessed and contributed to the epoch’s tremendous growth in management knowledge.

Prominent on the “most influential” lists are numerous volumes of extraordinary insight and reflection. We expect that some of the titles will provoke ire and others agreement. More important, we hope that the following list brings its readers years of pleasure, illumination, and, even, revelation. “Some books are to be tasted, others are to be swallowed,” observed philosopher Sir Francis Bacon, and “some few are to be chewed and digested.” So, go taste, chew, and digest!

THE 25 MOST INFLUENTIAL MANAGEMENT BOOKS OF THE 20TH CENTURY

1. **Frederick W. Taylor**, *The Principles of Scientific Management* (1911)

The most influential book on management ever published. Although Taylor remains the favorite bogeyman of the popular press, the fundamental principle of Taylor’s philosophy—the rule of knowledge as opposed to tradition and personal opinion—is as valid today as it was in his time.

2. **Chester I. Barnard**, *The Functions of the Executive* (1938)

Celebrated as the first “paradigmatic” statement of the management discipline. Written

by a former American Telephone and Telegraph executive, this book yet inspires succeeding generations of both scholars and practitioners, remaining a wellspring for contemporary thinking.

3. **Peter F. Drucker**, *The Practice of Management* (1954)

Written by perhaps the most influential and widely read authority on modern organizations, this book is a seminal contribution, full of ideas that remain fresh and provocative decades after first appearing in print.

4. **Douglas M. McGregor**, *The Human Side of Enterprise* (1960)

Popularized the idea that managerial assumptions about human nature and human behavior are all-important in determining managers’ styles of operating. McGregor’s Theory X and Theory Y remain an indelible part of contemporary management thinking.

5. **Herbert A. Simon**, *Administrative Behavior: A Study of Decision-Making Processes in Administrative Organizations* (1947)

A groundbreaking work in which Simon applied his pioneering theory of human choice to administrative decision-making. One of the most referenced works in the social sciences.

6. **Paul R. Lawrence and Jay W. Lorsch**, *Organization and Environment: Managing Differentiation and Integration* (1967)

Questioned the existence of regularities in organizational characteristics as described by classical management theory, making the argument that there is no one best way to organize. Implanted the term “contingency theory” in the vocabulary of all those studying the nature of organizations.

7. James G. March and Herbert A. Simon (with the assistance of Harold Guetzkow), *Organizations* (1958)

Draws on contemporary empirical research to develop a theory of formal organizations replete with a series of propositions about organizational behavior. The *summa* of modern organization theory.

8. Abraham H. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality* (1954)

Presents a general theory of human motivation whose influence remains enduring in management education and theory. Maslow's hierarchy of needs remains a "classic among classics."

9. Michael E. Porter, *Competitive Strategy: Techniques for Analyzing Industries and Competitors* (1980)

A defining work that presents an overview of competitive industry analysis following Porter's Five-Force Model. Transformed the theory, practice, and teaching of business strategy.

10. Fritz J. Roethlisberger and William J. Dickson (with the assistance of Harold A. Wright), *Management and the Worker* (1939)

The official account of the Hawthorne Studies conducted at the Western Electric Company in Cicero, IL; the most famous, but also the most criticized, studies in the history of management. Gave credence to the then nascent human-relations movement that persists today with the contemporary study of organizational behavior.

11. Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., *Strategy and Structure: Chapters in the History of American Enterprise* (1962)

A tour de force of U.S. business history that explains how production advances in the lat-

ter half of the nineteenth century led to the growth of large corporations. Its main deduction is that keeping structure in tune with strategy plays a vital role not only in corporate effectiveness, but also in corporate survival and growth.

12. Richard M. Cyert and James G. March, *A Behavioral Theory of the Firm* (1963)

Delivered a major blow to the accepted economic fiction of the "theory of profit-maximizing firms" by presenting a positivist theory of the behavior of individual businesses. A harbinger of the behavioral revolution in economic thought that dominates today.

13. Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (1922)

The most complete general statement of Weber's sociological theory of economic and social order, outlining the systematic requirements of rational (i.e., bureaucratic) organization.

14. Daniel Katz and Robert L. Kahn, *The Social Psychology of Organizations* (1966)

Applies open-systems theory to the study of organizations and champions the use of social psychological principles for understanding all forms of collective action. Known as the "bible" of organizational psychology.

15. Chris Argyris, *Personality and Organization: The Conflict between System and the Individual* (1957)

Argues that a basic incongruity exists between the needs of healthy, mature individuals and those of formal organizations. Unless harmony between these sets of needs can be achieved, the predictable and inevitable results will be high turnover and absenteeism, together with low productivity and organizational commitment.

16. Henri Fayol, *General and Industrial Management* (1916)

An extraordinary little book that offers the first theory of general management and statement of management principles. Fayol's ideas so permeate modern management thinking that they have become an unquestioned part of today's received knowledge on how organizations should be designed.

17. Rensis Likert, *New Patterns of Management* (1961)

One of the century's most distinguished social scientists draws on an impressive array of studies, many conducted during his tenure as director of the University of Michigan Institute of Social Research, to establish the benefits of participative management as a means for developing a system that integrates the interests of organizations and their employees.

18. Joan Woodward, *Industrial Organization: Theory and Practice* (1965)

The first major attempt to view organization structure from a technological perspective. Although many of Woodward's ideas have been subsequently qualified, they are still cornerstones in our knowledge of organizations.

19. Elton Mayo, *The Human Problems of an Industrial Civilization* (1933)

A thoughtful exposition on the role of emotional factors in determining employee behavior, contending that the most powerful influence on productive efficiency is the degree to which employees receive social satisfaction in the workplace.

20. Tom Burns and George M. Stalker, *The Management of Innovation* (1961)

The first major attempt to deal with the nature of organization-environment relations and identify the types of organizational structure and managerial practices that are appropriate for different environmental conditions. Introduced the mechanistic-organic polarity (never a dichotomy) to the management lexicon.

21. W. Edwards Deming, *Quality, Productivity and Competitive Position* (1982)

Introduced the "Deming Management Method," featuring his now famous 14 imperatives for improving quality and their use as a competitive weapon; a biting critique of contemporary American management practices.

22. James D. Thompson, *Organizations in Action* (1967)

A masterpiece on the behavior of organizations, incorporating an open-systems perspective to explore the influence of technology on the manner in which work systems are structured for task accomplishment.

23. George C. Homans, *The Human Group* (1950)

An intellectual inquiry into the nature of small groups, this work develops a broad model that strives to understand the interworkings of social entities by analyzing the interaction between forces that impinge upon groups from outside, and those that operate inside a group's boundaries.

24. David C. McClelland, *The Achieving Society* (1961)

Identifies achievement motivation as an important psychological foundation for economic development and explains how the motivation needed for entrepreneurial suc-

cess can be promoted in underdeveloped nations.

25. Frederick Herzberg, Bernard Mausner, and Barbara B. Snyderman, *The Motivation to Work* (1959)

Revealed for the first time how employee satisfaction comes primarily from such factors as achievement, recognition for accomplishment, challenging work, increased job responsibility, and opportunities for growth

and development. Set the stage for the ensuing job redesign movement and quality-of-working life revolution.

... And the Rest of the Best

Others books receiving a significant number of votes include: Philip Selznick, *Leadership and Administration* (1957), Victor H. Vroom, *Work and Motivation* (1964), Karl E. Weick, *The Social Psychology of Organizing* (1969), and Geert Hofstede, *Culture's Consequences* (1980).