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Competitive Exams: Management Skills & Approaches

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A manager's job is varied and complex. Hence, managers need certain skills to perform the functions associated with their jobs. During the early 1970s, Robert K. Kalz identified three kinds of skills for administrators. These are technical, human and conceptual skills. A fourth skill the ability to design solutions was later added to the above mentioned skills.

Technical Skills

Technical skills refer to the ability of a person to carry out a specific activity. In order to do so, one needs to have knowledge of methods, processes and procedures. Engineers, computer specialists, accountants and employees in manufacturing departments all have the necessary technical skills for their specialized fields. Technical skills are essential for first-level managers. For example, employees at the operational level work with tools, and their supervisors must be able to teach them how to perform the tasks assigned to them using these tools. First-level managers spend much of their time in training subordinates and clarifying doubts in work-related problems.

Human Skills

Human skills or interpersonal skills refer to the ability of a person to work well with other people in a group. It is the ability to lead, motivate, and communicate with people to accomplish certain objectives. Human skills are of paramount importance in the creation of an environment, in which people feel comfortable and are free to voice their opinions. These skills aid employees during interaction with their supervisors, peers and people outside the work unit such as suppliers, customers and the general public. These skills are important for all levels in the organization.

Conceptual Skills

Conceptual skills refer to the ability of a person to think and conceptualize abstract situations. It is the ability to understand and coordinate the full range of corporate objectives and activities. These skills are most important at the top management level, as top-level managers have the greatest need to see the big picture, to understand how the various parts of the organization relate to one another and associate the organization with the external environment.

Design Skills

Design skills refer to the ability of a person to find solutions to problems in ways that would benefit the organization. Top managers should not only recognize a problem but also suggest ways to overcome them. If they only see the problem, they become mere problem watchers, and will prove ineffective. Managers at upper organizational levels should be able to design a rational and feasible solution to the problem by considering the various internal and external factors.

The relative significance of these skills varies at different levels in the organizational hierarchy. We can briefly summarize them as follows:

Approaches to Management

1. **The empirical or case approach:** In this approach, one tries to understand management principles with the help of cases. It also identifies the situations, wherein organizations have either succeeded or failed by following this approach.
2. **The interpersonal behavior approach:** This approach is based on individual psychology and focuses on interpersonal relationships.
3. **The group behavior approach:** This approach is based on sociology and social psychology. It stresses on the behavior of people in groups.
4. **The cooperative social systems approach:** It advocates a system of cooperation using both interpersonal and group behavioral aspects.
5. **The sociotechnical systems approach:** It realizes the impact of technical systems on personal attitudes and group behavior. This approach focuses on areas involving close relationships between technical systems and the people involved such as production, office operations, etc.
6. **The decision theory approach:** The focus in this approach is on the decision-making process and people involved in it.
7. **The systems approach:** It considers organizations to be open systems as they interact with the external environment. It recognizes the importance of the inter-relationship between planning, organizing and controlling.
8. **The mathematical or management science approach:** This approach treats management as a logical process, which can be expressed in terms of mathematical symbols and relationships.
9. **The contingency or situational approach:** In this approach, the main assumption is that there is no hard and fast rule for all situations. Managerial practice depends upon circumstances. Different circumstances may necessitate the use of different methods.
10. **The managerial roles approach:** This approach had been developed by studying the work methods of five chief executives. The study identified ten managerial roles,

which were grouped into three categories interpersonal, informational and decisional roles.

11. The McKinsey's 7 – S framework: The seven S's used in this approach are strategy, structure, systems, style, staff, shared values and skills.
12. The operational approach: This approach attempts to develop the science and theory of management by drawing upon concepts, principles, techniques and knowledge from other fields and managerial approaches.

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