

Henri Fayol and Zero Tolerance Policies

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Abstract

Zero tolerance policies have been increasingly popular in both education and business. Henri Fayol was the one of the earliest and influential thinkers in modern management theory. He defined management as a body of knowledge and defined his 14 administrative principles. It is an interesting exercise to apply Fayol's teachings to the theory of zero tolerance and attempt to determine what Fayol would think of this new management technique.

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Introduction

Zero tolerance is a management technique that is finding its way into many of the administration policies of organizations, including the school systems in the United States. Administrative decrees declare that this organization will have zero tolerance for weapons or illegal drugs, or sexual harassment. Administrators often endorse zero tolerance as it makes a strong statement of organizational discipline and takes little discretion which may be criticized. Critics of zero tolerance claim it is ineffective and leads to random punishments such as 10 year olds suspended for 365 days because her mother packed a knife in her lunch to use to cut up her apple. When she opened her lunchbox she immediately turned it in to her teacher but was still suspended' (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force).

What would the early theorist of management thought think of this? The man that first defined management, indeed that there was a special skill we could call management, was a French mining company executive from the 1800's named Henri Fayol. Fayol's work was not translated until mid-twentieth century but he is given credit for both defining management and proposing 14 Administrative Principles which should be considered by organizational managers. We shall apply Fayol's management thought to the concept of zero tolerance.

The origin of the philosophy of zero tolerance needs to be understood to following its popularity into administrative practice, including the school systems. Skiba and Peterson (1996) track the term zero tolerance to the federal drug enforcement policies of the 1980's. After a few harsh penalties that seemed out of

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proportion to the activity, the US Customs Service rescinded the implementation of zero tolerance but its implementation had moved to public schools. In 1993, as a response to two students murders, San Diego proposed a zero tolerance for bringing weapons to school (Vail, 1995). Any violators would be arrested and expelled. In 1994 the gun-Free Schools Act became the Drug-Free Schools Act of 1994 and expanded by President Clinton. This act requires local education agencies to expel for a minimum of one year any student “who is determined to have brought a weapon to school. Furthermore, these violators are required to be reported to the criminal justice system. Federal education dollars were tied to this Act to ensure compliance and forcing it to be adopted by all 50 state education systems (Insley, 2001). Many states were relieved to limit administrative hearings and procedures, making their jobs easier (Cerrone, 1999). Zero tolerance relieves the officials of the tasks of judgment and interpretation, they simply apply the stated penalties, regardless of the circumstances. There is no opportunity to debate or second guess their enforcement because there were no decision to be made. One of the most often-cited criticisms of the zero tolerance philosophy is the lack of administrative discretion these policies afford (Henault, 2001).

School systems are not the only organizations adopting zero tolerance policies, it has made its way into management of businesses. Phomphakdy and Kleiner (1999) claim human resource departments should enforce a strict policy of zero tolerance towards sexual harassment. They discuss the advantages of such a policy but admit that they have no data to support that it reduces the occurrence of harassment. Due to the increased use of zero tolerance policies, it is appropriate to examine their philosophy and compare them to classical management theory.

This paper will describe the management theories of Henri Fayol and the implementation of zero tolerance. The two will be compared and contrasted with an effort made to suppose if Fayol would approve of the modern management trend of zero tolerance.

Henri Fayol was named managing director of a steel producing company headed for bankruptcy and 10 years later left it a successful organization (Wren, 1994). He said the turnaround was not due to his technical abilities but his skill at handling men and ability as an organizer. He used the same resources and personnel with much improved result. Fayol was put in charge to shut down the firm’s coal mines and steel production. He presented a plan to restore the firm to profitability and the board agreed to let him try and the firm is still in production today (Wren, 2001).

Fayol set his concepts of management into 14 subjects he referred to as his Administrative Principles. These are defined in his General and Industrial Management published in 1916. He used the term principle reluctantly for he did not want to suggest any formal rigidity for he knew there is nothing rigid about the practice of management. Principles must be applied in proportion to the situation and allowance must be made to changing circumstances. Principles are flexible and should be adapted to each situation. The manager must judge the situation by acquiring intelligence, experience, decision, and proportion. There is no upper limit

to the number of rules which might be added to the body of management. A change in the state of affairs can be cause for a change in the principles of administration. As we review these 14 administrative principles, remember, they are starting points and not fixed dictates. These principles were first described by Fayol in *General and Industrial Management* and latter summarized by management historian Daniel A Wren (2001).

1. Principles of Administration

Division of Work: This is the familiar idea of specialization of labor with the advantages of increasing output, easing training, and reducing waste. This specialization is not only for manual tasks, but may also be applied to managerial duties. Conversely, Fayol also supported the concept of enlarging some tasks to motivate employees to a higher effort level. As an example, he had crews in the mine install their own support timbers rather than have special crews install the safety supports.

Authority: Defined as “the right to give orders and the power to exact obedience.” (*General and Industrial Management*, pp. 19-21) Fayol described the formal, positional authority derived from job rank in addition to the personal authority which comes from power earned by “intelligence, experience, moral worth, ability to lead, past service, ect.” A good manger should have both. The formal authority should be supported by his personal power as he earned the respect of those he led. In conjunction with authority, responsibility was understood to be associated whenever authority is used. One cannot use authority without assuming the responsibility for the outcomes of those actions. These two facets, authority and responsibility, have been locked together through the courses of management literature.

Discipline: Derived from the obedience and respect between the firm and its employees. It is important that it is grounded in respect and not fear. Poor discipline is the result of poor leadership and good leaders develop good discipline with clear agreements between management and labor in setting and enforcing rules and the penalties associated with breaking them. Enforcement of rules and administration of penalties should be understood as the natural consequences of breaking the rules and not the random whims of a weak leader.

Unity of command: Every action must be ordered by only one boss. This single principle drives the organization and should be supported by the other principles of administration. It should propel strategy down through the firm for its successful implementation. What happens with more than one boss? Dual command was a risk to authority, the command structure, and organizational stability. It is nearly impossible that two bosses would have exactly the same understanding of a situation and order the exact same course of action from their employees. Each manager might have a successful solution, but they are probably not exactly the same. This diverging direction to employees results in confusion, stress, and lowers both output and moral. Furthermore, it usually results in conflict

between the two managers setting up trouble for future issues. Often, one of the managers is removed from their situation to correct the implementation issues, restoring the unity of command for better performance.

Unity of Direction: In simple terms, the crew of the boat must all be rowing in the same direction. A group of activities should support the same objective with a clear commander and structure executing the same plan. Unity of Direction should be supported by an appropriate organizational structure that leads to "unity of action, coordination of strength, and focusing of effort."

Subordination of individual interests to the general interest: Fayol believed the entire organization should strive to support the implementation of the corporate strategy. Success in the markets would be shared with all participants, owners, managers, and employees. As such, individual interest had to be secondary to the interests of the organization. Personal ambition, selfishness or laziness were detriments to the performance of the organization unless factors such as ambition could be harnessed to support organizational goals.

Remuneration: Pay comes in many forms such as day wages, piece rates, bonuses, and profit sharing. The goal of these payments is to make the employee more valuable and more motivated by the application of proper compensation and incentive. Proper remuneration reinforces the employee behavior to subordinate their interests to the general interest.

Centralization: Centralization of management decisions is not a factor to be considered for its use or rejection, it is always present in an organization but at different quantities, it is a matter of proportion. What is the correct amount of centralization? It depends on the circumstances. Small businesses with the owner speaking directly to the employees typically have a large level of centralization; most orders come "from the top." Larger organizations, with a long scalar chain, have orders and goals passed down through the organization through multiple intermediaries. These intermediaries, whether intentionally or not, will include some of their own judgment into the orders as they are relayed downward. Fayol understood the centralization debate as a continuum. Everything which increases an employee's role is decentralization; everything that decreases it is centralization. Each firm must find a practical solution.

Scalar Chain: The chain of command reaches from the top of the organization down to its lowest ranks. It is the line of authority and the channels for communication both down and up the organization. The unity of command principle may lead to communication lapses so Fayol described his "gangplanks" which allowed communication to cross scalar lines if it was agreed upon by the parties involved and management was kept informed. This gangplank permitted swift lateral communication to allow the organization to respond in a timely fashion. Fayol did not want the scalar chain to hinder execution or to be used as an excuse for inaction.

Order: Assuring a place for everything and everything in its place improves efficiency and may be applied to materials, workshops, tools, and

personnel. People should be assigned task and these tasks should be structured and in line with the employee's skills and abilities.

Equity: Justice should prevail to provide a dependable foundation for employee relations. A sense of fairness should include personnel at all levels of the organization.

Stability of tenure of personnel: Orderly planning of human resources will add stability to the personnel and to the organization. Furthermore, a stable workforce is required to allow other management principles to take root and come to fruition.

Initiative: While other principles stress authority and control, Fayol strongly believed in rewarding those who took initiative in the support of the organizations goals. Such behavior is to be encouraged and rewarded. This is hardly the strict organizations as described in some textbooks. "Be bold and enthusiastic...be enterprising and even daring" (Fayol, 1949 p. 92).

Espirit de corps: Management should act in such a way as to build harmony and unity in the organizations. Fayol makes a reference to military tactics "Dividing enemy forces to weaken them is clever, but dividing one's own team is a grave sin against the business." (p. 40). Managers should not abuse written communications which slowed down communications but should use oral communications to increase speed and clarity while raising the spirit de corps.

2. Discussion

Fayol works were presented in several professional conferences and later written in French in *General and Industrial Management* to be translated and revised by Irwin Gray. Fayol begins by defining management and moves on to introduce his now-famous 14 Administrative Principles to outline the organization structure for a firm and he discusses his use of the word principle (p. 61):

"This term should be dissociated from any suggestion of rigidity, for there should be nothing rigid or absolute in management affairs. Adhering to a principle is simply a question of proportion. Seldom is the same principle applied twice under identical conditions; allowance must be made for different circumstances and for highly variable elements in the total organizational picture." "Principles that are established should be viewed as flexible, capable of adaptation to every need. It is the manager's job to know how to make use of them, which is a difficult art requiring intelligence, experience, decisiveness, and, most important, a sense of proportion."

Fayol is inventing the theory of management as a discipline but from the very beginning he is acknowledging that it is part art and any statements must be taken with the assumption they are guidelines, not concrete requirements. Before he states his principles, he takes it clear that they should be considered flexible. I argue that this is the opposite of zero tolerance. He views every situation as unique and to be analyzed by management to determine the optimum solution. There is no standard play book which fits all scenarios. Management must use their experience

and judgment to determine the correct response and this response must be measured.

Fayol expands on his thoughts about a measured response to a situation. He says “a sense of proportion is one of the key attributes of a manager; this sense determines which of the infinite number of principles of management are to be applied to any situation and to what degree.” It is a manager’s job to figure out what to do; it cannot be predetermined and handed to him.

Fayol discusses discipline as a management principle. His probable opinion of zero tolerance and its blind application of penalties without regard to the situation is revealed in the following quote; “the qualities of the individual involved and attendant circumstances must be taken into account” (Fayol p. 65). Furthermore, “the employee should be given the chance to correct the mistake.” Fayol states “the plan should be flexible enough to bend before whatever adjustments were advisable to introduce.” (p. 16). These quotes leave little doubt that Fayol would be against zero tolerance as he taught the application of judgment and wisdom in managerial decision-making.

Fayol preached that principles are guides and should not be ruthlessly enforced. They are situationally dependent. Fayol stated that this is the skill of management. They must be adapted to the circumstances. Many of these practices were in place in many different organizations, it was Fayol that codified and published them. He was interested in the inputs of other managers to further develop these principles of management to aid in the understanding of improvement of management and the training of its newer practitioners. He did not claim to invent them, he organized and recorded them for the use of others.

Conclusion

We have shown that Fayol probably would have been against zero tolerance policies but the question remains, are they effective? There are continued reports in the media of inadvertent consequences of zero tolerance policies, consequences that most disagree with, that is what attracts the media attention. Gorman and Pauken (2003) report the a six year old was suspended for kissing a classmate, a second grade girl is sent to an alternative school for a month for bringing her grandfather’s pocket watch to school with a one inch pen-knife attached. School board members and administrators often cite the policy to support the out of touch punishments, implying the policy made them do it. They claim their judgment and choices are controlled by a policy they may not alter or interpret, in short, there is no management or judgment being used. By the logic of the administrators, they cannot be held accountable for the punishments, it is the policy that decides and they are only being good soldiers for implementing it. Anecdotal evidence suggests implementation issues with zero policy, what do the statistics reveal about their effectiveness?

Henault (2001) reports zero tolerance policies do not deter offenders in the school systems. The United States Department of Education reported zero

tolerance increased the number of suspensions and expulsions from schools. This is not unexpected if we are suspending third graders for bringing in grandpa's pen knife. These scenarios are the consequences of zero tolerance policies. They were meant to improve the lives of school children but instead have criminalized them. What earlier would have been handled with in-school discipline as required, are now matters for the police. It is not the serious and dangerous infractions that are the concern, these can still be handled as criminal matters, it is the minor infractions that trip the machinery into action and bring down the full force of discipline of often unwitting transgressors. This is the part of zero tolerance the Henri Fayol would be greatly disturbed by and clearly goes against his teachings.

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