

The Work and Aims of the Taylor Society¹

An Open Forum for Open Minds Seeking by Methods of Science
the Solution of Industrial Problems¹

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IT was among engineer-trained executives that consciousness of the management problem first began to find expression in what has come to be known as "the management movement." During the '80s the development of big-scale industry was under way and brought with it problems centering about the supervision and control of operations. The analytic engineer-mind first perceived and attacked the problem. In 1886 Henry R. Towne clearly set forth its nature in the famous paper before the American Society of Mechanical Engineers, *The Engineer as Economist*, and for nearly a decade thereafter meetings of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers and technical engineering journals, offered the only forum for study and discussion of the management problem, in which there was a growing interest. This was a natural center for the beginning of interest in management. The problem had been created by big-scale enterprises utilizing labor-saving machinery under division of labor, and it was one of learning how to manage the use of machines—of production. It was not then a problem of selling, for America was uncovering abundant new resources, population was increasing rapidly, purchasing power was increasing more rapidly, and there was a continuing sellers' market. The management problem first took the form of complications in the utilization of machinery, and it was inevitable that the first group to be challenged by it should consist of the very men who were inventing and installing equipment, and endeavoring to teach industry how to manage it.

Origin and Lineage of Taylor Society

But all engineering sciences were growing rapidly during this period, and by 1910 the American Society of Mechanical Engineers was confronted by the prob-

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lem of settling the scope which its resources and facilities would permit its work to take. It was decided that the greater service would be rendered by emphasizing pure engineering, and consequently study and discussion of management found its opportunity restricted.

There being no other forum, a small group of about a dozen members of the A. S. M. E., led by such men as James M. Dodge, Frank B. Gilbreth, Robert T. Kent, Conrad Lauer, Carl G. Barth, Morris L. Cooke and H. K. Hathaway, began to meet regularly for continued, more intensive, discussion of management. There was at the beginning no formal organization of a "society," but in the winter of 1910-11 the organization was made formal and the Society to Promote the Science of Management came into being. This formal organization was stimulated by the marked general increase of interest in management caused by testimony concerning the achievements of scientific management at the Eastern Rate Case Hearings, and more particularly by the fear that, because of the sensational nature of the testimony concerning results, there would be a grand rush by industry to "get efficient quickly," and the very engineering technique which had brought the results would be neglected and eventually lost. The group decided that it was a service obligation for them to strengthen their position as defenders of the engineering point of view.

The Society to Promote the Science of Management continued to hold meetings of a more formal nature, and in December, 1914, began the publication of a periodical bulletin. The quality of its discussions and published articles attracted some attention and caused a gradual and unsensational increase in membership, so that by the outbreak of the war, in 1917, the membership was something over 100. No campaign for membership increase was undertaken, the policy being to preserve the homogeneity of point of view and technical approach towards management problems,

and to let membership increase be the result of natural attraction of like-minded executives and engineers.

During the war nearly all the members became absorbed in one way or another into the war machine, and the society became quiescent. But immediately after the Armistice activity was resumed and on a larger scale. Perceiving the magnitude of the industrial problems which would inevitably result from maladjustments left by the war, and believing it had something to contribute to the solution of those problems by emphasis of the engineering approach, whatever the area of the field of management in which the problems might arise, the society organized deliberately for larger service, established a New York office with a full-time executive, and, in honor of the pioneer of engineer-executives who had died in 1915, changed its name to the Taylor Society. Since that time its membership has gradually increased to some 800.

Purpose and Range of Interest

The above account of the origin and lineage of the Taylor Society is important, as it makes more understandable the purpose and methods of the society. In the first place, it is the descendant in direct line of that group of engineer-executives—such as Henry R. Towne, Oberlin Smith, James M. Dodge and Frederick W. Taylor—who first perceived the emergence of a management problem in American industry. In the second place, it inherited from that group and cherishes the engineering point of view and method of attack on management and other social problems. In the third place, descended from men who had been trained as scientists and who valued the search for truth for its own sake, it is without ulterior motive or special interest, and is not afraid to consider any problem within the scope of its general interest, and particularly to consider all facts, whatever their source, bearing upon any problem which falls within its field. These three things, I believe, together with certain features of organization and methods of work resulting from them, are the outstanding characteristics of the Taylor Society.

Faithful to these traditions, it has fearlessly searched for, appraised, and put on record the most progressive and noteworthy thought and practice with respect to every phase of management which has assumed importance as changing industrial conditions have defined importance. Its first inquiries were con-

cerned with production, for on a sellers' market that was then the important problem of management, and the Taylor Society believes that fundamentally and in the long run production will always be the most critical management problem. But when complications of big-scale industry caused industrial relations to become a problem of outstanding importance, the society considered it in a characteristic manner. It was the Taylor Society which promptly gave such progressive thinkers as Robert Valentine and Robert Wolf a forum, and which more recently established real contact between psychologists and industry. And when the buyers' market generated by the war came upon American industry, the Taylor Society promptly made inquiry into two phases of management which emerged as of major importance—general control and selling. Nowhere are there to be found records of more searching inquiry and more fruitful suggestions concerning the function and technique of co-ordination and the function and technique of selling than in the published bulletins of the Society.

What may result from the engineering method of approach to such a problem as that of industrial relations? That method, distinguished by insistence upon ascertainment and measurement of all the facts pertinent to any problem, as applied to the problem of industrial relations, has unmistakably established two conclusions: that the human element is as real a factor in management as is the mechanical and cannot be disregarded in any adequate system of management; and that the regard for the human element in any system of management must itself be upon a factual and not an emotional basis. Too many of the studies of industrial relations during the past ten years have been dominated by emotionalism and have resulted in ill-considered methods of personnel management. In too many instances personnel management has been assumed to be something separate from operating management, and personnel departments have been plastered onto instead of incorporated into operating organizations. Fortunately most of these mushroom-growth personnel departments were eliminated by the depression following the war, and industry is now able to approach its problem of industrial relations anew along those sounder lines which make good or bad industrial relations a function of good or bad policies and methods of operating management. It is in the process of engineering its policies and methods of operating that an enterprise is engineering its conditions of human relations. This