

## **INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY WITH MANAGEMENT AND RESPONSIBILITY**

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Responsibility is probably one of the most important and defining notions for managerial work. Every manager is responsible for his or her company, department, etc. More specifically, she has responsibility for the quality of the product or service. The responsibility also extends to employees, customers, and the general public. Furthermore, most managers would probably say that they feel responsibility for their personal lives, their families and a general responsibility as a member of society and a citizen of their state.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

This short list shows that responsibility is a many-faceted notion containing numerous roots and meanings. The different sorts of responsibility have always been prone to conflicts and are an old source of moral and legal problems. Nowadays the use of computers and information technology has added a whole new order of magnitude to the potential for responsibility but also to its possible problems. The purpose of this article is therefore to investigate how the use of information technology influences the manager's capacity to assume responsibility. Not surprisingly we will come to the conclusion that the increasing use of IT opens new avenues for responsibility but at the same time poses new threats. Threats and opportunities, however, are not equally distributed. Opportunities are often clearly visible and frequently talked about. IT is a tool that allows greater measures of control and of knowledge about the organization. Managers can respond better and quicker, which facilitates the discharge of responsibility. The threats, on the other hand, are frequently hidden in conditions and assumptions of IT that seem so natural to us that they are rarely discussed. Management has to take these threats seriously because they can endanger the legitimacy of the use of IT and in some case even the legitimacy of management. In this paper we will demonstrate that IT promises to facilitate management work. Good management, however, that looks at more than just the immediate financial bottom line will in many cases become harder to achieve than it used to be.

### **MANAGEMENT AND RESPONSIBILITY**

In this section we will give a brief overview of the notion of responsibility, followed by a definition of management. We will demonstrate that management should pay attention

to ethical matters and continue to show that management and responsibility are closely related for several reasons.

### **RESPONSIBILITY**

Even though most managers would probably say that they know their responsibilities and that they have no problem seeing what exactly the term means in their day-to-day work, the notion is anything but clear. The term originally stems from the judicial realm, where it stands for the answer that the accused has to give to the judge. This points to the etymology of the word, the answer, which can be found in several languages such as the English. This stem of the notion pointing towards the "answer" is one important clue leading us to possible meanings.

This in turn refers to the communicative structure of responsibility. The ascription of responsibility can have several meanings. It can stand for the construction of a causal relationship as mentioned before. Related to this but different is the meaning of responsibility at which we take a closer look here, the ascription of moral judgments to someone or something on account of the results of their action. This process of ascription can in turn be realized in different ways. It can be done reflexively as in "I take full responsibility for the actions of the company" or transitively as in "you are responsible for the actions of the company." There are also two different temporal aspects, which have to be taken into account. Responsibility can be attributed ex post for facts, actions, or deeds that lie in the past or ex ante for facts that are still to come. One last distinction that needs to be mentioned is the fact that there are different sorts of responsibility apart from causality. There are legal responsibility, moral, task responsibility and a whole host of others. For the purposes of this article we will concentrate on the moral aspect of responsibility, which is the most comprehensive type since it comprises at least some aspects of all the other types.

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The idea of sanctions as an incentive for intended behavior is certainly compatible with management's responsibilities. In economic contexts, however, the negative side is less important than the positive side. Managers are supposed to fulfill their roles and if they fail to do so they may be subject to punishment, blame, loss of reputation, etc. More importantly, there are many incentives in management that lead to positive performance. Among them are high remuneration, respect, reputation, power, etc. The distribution of these positive and negative sanctions is only possible on the basis of the ascription of actions and results to individuals. Responsibility is thus a central theme of management.

#### MANAGEMENT

One can hold two possible views of managers. The first one is the managerial functions approach that describes the processes and functions in organizations such as planning, organization, leadership, control. The other view is the managerial role approach that concentrates on the persons who fulfill management tasks and their characteristics. We will mainly concentrate on the latter approach because this is where individual morality and responsibility are to be found.

There are several reasons why managers might want to act morally. The first and most common reason is probably private morality. Most of us think of ourselves as moral beings and it would require a serious amount of schizophrenia to be a moral citizen, husband, and father while being an immoral manager. The other reason that is of more interest here is that there seems to be an increasing social awareness of morality of company decisions. Managers must appear open to new developments and knowledge and business ethics is one of them. The idea that "good ethics is good business" is now widely recognized. "Ethics is a prime requisite for long-term success in whatever we are trying to accomplish". If one accepts this then it is clear that managers have to adopt the idea of morality and to act accordingly. A large part of the academic discipline of business ethics deals with the question of how managers can do that. One suggestion as to how management can take moral matters into account that has been widely discussed lately is the stakeholder approach to management. The idea is that all of the relevant stakeholders of a firm and a specific decision are included in the process of decision making. This, of course, is a task for management and a rather difficult one. We will not discuss the stakeholder approach in more detail but suggest that it is a good example of managerial morality discharged by responsibility. Considering the parties that are affected means that one has to communicate with them, that one has to answer their question, thus that one is responsible. If one accepts that managers should act morally, whatever the reason, then one must ask how this

can be realized. A frequent answer to this is that they should be responsible. At this point it makes sense to ask why responsibility as a moral notion might appeal to management.

#### WHY MANAGERS CAN RELATE TO RESPONSIBILITY

We believe that the affinity of management to responsibility is a direct result of some structural similarities between the term responsibility and the way managers in modern corporations work. The three characteristics of responsibility as we have seen are: openness, affinity to action, and consequentialism.

All three of these points can explain the appeal of the notion to businesspeople because they point in directions that management usually feels comfortable with. The openness is certainly a defining feature of management because the very nature of managing jobs is that they cannot be confined by strict delineations but change constantly with changes in markets, the firm, organizations, competition, etc. An affinity for action is another point that would strike most managers as sympathetic since activity is seen as one of the hallmarks of good and successful management. In order to survive in today's business environment a business not only has to have the openness to react to new and unexpected challenges but it also has to take the initiative and initiate change in the direction it wants. Responsibility as a social construction based on communication is furthermore a figure of thought that mirrors the daily work experience of managers of most levels. Modern management is an activity that consists mainly of communication with superiors, employees, colleagues, customers, competition, the general public, etc. It is mostly based on teamwork where only the successful moderation of the team can lead to promising results.

#### THE IMPACT OF IT ON MANAGEMENT AND RESPONSIBILITY

Information technology (IT) is another term that is hard to define. A purely technical definition such as "all technologies whose base is digital circuits and microelectronics" is certainly too narrow. More fitting but also more difficult to handle are definitions of the following kind:

Information technology is the tangible means by which information is manipulated and carried to its ultimate users. An information system is a collection of information and information technology—including hardware, software, people, data, and procedures—designed to deliver services intended to improve a social system.

Information technology has developed to such extent in the world of business that it is in many cases hard to distinguish between the two. Computer and information systems can be found in all functional areas, on all levels

of management and in businesses of all sizes. IT is an important tool used by most managers to fulfill their tasks. IT is more than just a tool. It reflects the structure and organization of a company. On the other hand it stabilizes these same structures and holds them in place. IT is more than a tool of management also in the sense that its common form prejudices a certain sort of organization. Hierarchical structures with centralized decision organizations seem to be a direct result of the improved capacities for information processing that comes with computers and. This leads us to a first and fundamental point concerning how the use of IT influences the discharge of managerial responsibility.

#### ADVANTAGES OF IT FOR MANAGERIAL RESPONSIBILITIES

One of the most obvious and least controversial pros of IT for managerial responsibility is their structural similarity. Both are based on communication and can be understood to have as their aim the advancement of connections between people. Both, too, are means rather than ends. Neither IT nor responsibility nor management in general are ends in themselves. All of them need a certain kind of environment in order to be understandable and useful.

In this case management would face completely new responsibilities that result simply from the desire to facilitate responsibility.

This leads us to the next problem, which is based on the sometimes difficult relationship between humans and computers. While information technology allows the increase in communication, which is to be judged positively from the point of view of responsibility, this communication is often lacking crucial components that are necessary for responsibility. Human communication is by its very definition ethically charged. As several branches of contemporary philosophy, especially the German discourse, have shown, all communication is based on presuppositions that can directly be translated into moral terms. If a human communicates, that means that he puts forward three claims of validity without which the communication is meaningless. The three claims are truth, normative rightness, and veracity. That means that every sentence we say is accompanied by the implication that the speaker holds it for true, for normatively right and that he is honest in saying it. These presuppositions are necessary regardless of the factual truth, rightness and veracity of the speaker. Even a lie only makes sense when we usually suppose that people speak the truth. Without going any deeper into the subject of discourse ethics, we want to state that these presuppositions run into problems as soon as we start to apply them to communication via IT. It is one of the problems of the Internet that we cannot judge the information by reference to its author. Here is also one root of problems of electronic communication

which is caused by the lack of vital components of communication. Returning to the question of managerial responsibility we can state that computer communication cannot replace human communication. Especially in morally charged situations such as the ascription of responsibility it quickly runs into problems.

Additionally there are the many new objects of responsibility caused by the use of IT that management has to take into account and be constantly aware of. These are the legal and ethical challenges that arise from the use of IT. Here one can distinguish between three possible relationships between responsibility and IT. Management can be responsible for IT, because of IT, and through IT.

#### CONCLUSION

Drawing to a close, one can summarize the central thesis of this paper as follows: Managers have manifold responsibilities. These responsibilities, however, are often unclear, among other reasons, because of the ambiguities of the notion of responsibility. The clarification of this notion shows us that it is a social construction with the purpose of ascription characterized by openness, closeness to action and the emphasis on consequences. This concept is intrinsically close to management and at the same time has a great affinity to information technology. This then leads us to the topic of the book and we can state that information technology has several impacts on the manager's responsibility. In some respects the assumption or ascription of responsibility can be furthered by IT; in other respects it creates additional difficulties. Since it is imperative for a manager to live up to his or her responsibilities, it is important for him or her to think about the notion itself and its opportunities, but also about its limitations. This is all the more true for the genuinely new opportunities and problems that information technology and its use in business pose.

Managers who fail to realize this intellectual and practical challenge can easily be drawn into situations where this lack of responsible handling of responsibility can have serious personal and economic consequences. This article should be understood as one contribution to the process of building awareness of these complex problems. Essentially it is supposed to give managers a starting point from where to regard their own specific problems and applications of responsibility.

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