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A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A CHIEF EXECUTIVE

THE REAL-TIME USE OF SIX CHIEF EXECUTIVES IN THE NZ PUBLIC SERVICE

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Business Studies in Human Resource Management

at Massey University

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1997

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ABSTRACT

The research involved a structured observation real-time use study of six New Zealand government chief executives, and examined Mintzberg's 1973 theory of managerial roles in practice. Mintzberg's theory of ten management roles was found to be relevant in 1997, but with the addition of the risk manager role, which is essential in a changing environment.

Similar patterns of work to those described by Mintzberg were found; that is, chief executives jobs were "activity characterised by brevity, variety, and fragmentation." The NZ chief executives appeared to have a reactive orientation, being driven by external events and stakeholder and spent over 65% of their day in meetings. They never gave direct orders; and never finished a task that they started without interruption. They worked long hours, took short lunch breaks and spent some of their time fire-fighting with other agencies or the media. They also spent most of their time in the leadership, role exhorting staff to do more with fewer resources, for the good of society.

This time use study gives a snapshot of the chief executives' role in the NZ public service in 1997. It has implications for the recruitment, retention and development of chief executives in the public sector and will be of interest to their employers, staff, information technology specialists, professional developers and researchers of management. It illustrates Mintzberg's managerial roles in practice.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Two very important partners need thanking for their part in this thesis:

Peter Barker, my wonderful life partner who fed me physically and intellectually.

Carolyn Lane, my business partner, challenged and inspired me.

Phil Ramsey, my supervisor, for his insightful questioning and challenging.

Finally I wish to thank the 6 chief executives who allowed me to observe them and put them under the microscope of research. It is their constant commitment to society that inspires their staff and others.