

GRI-report 2000:3

**Continuity and change
in managerial work**
by
Stefan Tengblad

Continuity and change in managerial work

Stefan Tengblad

Gothenburg Research Institute
School of Economics and Commercial Law
Göteborg University
Box 600
405 30 Göteborg
stefan.tengblad@gri.gu.se

This research project is financed by The Swedish Council for Research in the
Humanities and Social Sciences (HSFR) project: 2420-13-031

Continuity and change in managerial work

Abstract

This article presents a study of the behavior of eight CEOs in Sweden. The purpose is to make a comparison with CEO behavior 50 years ago by using similar methods as the classic study "*Executive Behaviour*" (Carlson, 1951). Both similarities and differences are examined.

Important similarities concern the total working load, the preoccupation with meetings, and the relatively low frequency of decision-making and use of written communication.

Prominent differences concern traveling patterns, the increased use of electronic means of communication and the rise of financial control, but also shifts in stakeholder relations and a decreasing fragmentation in CEO work. Compared to the Carlson study the CEOs worked in a more general manner, monitoring financial performance and communicating values and they were not involved in as many activities of functional character (production, marketing, etc).

Key word: managerial work, managerial behavior, Executive Behaviour, Sune Carlson, management control, stakeholder relations.

Introduction

This report presents results from a study of how eight Swedish CEOs use their time. The scope and methods of investigation are similar to the classic study "*Executive Behaviour*" (Carlson, 1951). Carlson conducted an extensive empirical study of the working situation and

time allocation of nine Swedish CEOs. Many of Carlson's conclusions have been replicated in subsequent studies (Stewart, 1991) and it has retained actuality (Mintzberg, 1991).

The aim is to map similarities and differences between the Carlson study and the current one, 50 years later. The comparison includes both quantitative and qualitative findings. During the 50 years between the two studies the context has changed to a very large extent, but many characteristics in managerial work seem, however, to be stable over time. Mintzberg (1973) for instance states that managers work at unrelenting pace with activity characterized by brevity, variety and fragmentation and that they have a preference for live action and verbal media. The robustness of these kinds of statements is an empirical matter, to what extent and in what circumstances they are valid. The danger of over-generalization is always present, earlier research has shown major differences between the work of top-managers compared with for instance supervisors. This study concerns the behavior of CEOs.

Scope of investigation

Since the purpose has been to do a replicate study, the ambition has been to involve the same kind of participants and to use the same kind of methods and concepts as Carlson did, in order to facilitate comparisons. The length of the research period is the same; all working activities during four weeks have been the scope of the investigation. A standardized diary form, used in all eight case studies, includes the same five main dimensions as in the Carlson study (location, contact pattern, communication technique, functional area and kind of action):

Insert figure one here (The diary form)

The CEOs themselves have filled out the diary forms, normally in cooperation with the secretaries. Also the author has been working as an observer during 26 working days, in four cases during a working week and in the remaining cases during 1-2 days.¹ The method used can thus be seen as a combination of the Carlson study and the Mintzberg study (Mintzberg, 1973). The use of direct observation adds qualities to the study which were not possible to obtain in the Carlson study.

The fieldwork was conducted during March 1998 - August 1999 and covers:

	Working days	Hours of work	Number of activities
Total scope	159	1965	1748
Of which self-recorded	133	1633	1040
Of which observed	26	332	708
Mean value per participant	19,9	246	218

In the following presentation, all working days are treated equal, regardless of the method.

The total figures thus consist of 16% of direct observation and of 84% of self-recording.

Besides the use of direct observation, a few other departures from the original research design and terminology have been done in order to simplify the research work and to enhance the quality of the empirical data.

¹ The field notes gathered during the more than 300 hours of direct observation will mainly be presented in another article due to the aim of this article.

Firstly, in comparison to Carlson the current study does not investigate the relation between the CEO behavior and the shape of the formal organization. Background information about the actual companies and organizations have been gathered, but mainly as a tool for interpreting and coding the CEO behavior. Furthermore, no attempts have been made to measure the frequency of current issues and development issues and the frequency between policy and application issues, since Carlson noted that the CEOs had difficulties to make these distinctions (Carlson, 1951: 106).

Secondly, during the initial phase of the empirical work a need to modernize the classification terminology was discovered. For instance, the participants considered that the term "giving order" was related to an old fashioned and autocratic view on leadership. Instead the term "Assignment of working tasks" was used, which has a similar meaning but a more neutral connotation. The concepts used in a study relying on participant recording need to be contemporary. Finally, modern means of communication such as e-mail and Internet have been added as categories in the present study.

Managerial work as accomplishment of activities

The basic assumption in both the Carlson study and the current study is that a CEO conducts the work through the accomplishment of different activities. The limits and duration of an activity can be more and less clearly defined, and it was up to the participants to judge what was to be regarded as an activity. The instructions to the participants were to fill in one sheet for each activity and then describe the activity as precisely as possible with the use of the

standardized categories. The CEOs were invited to use their own words if they didn't consider the pre chosen categories to be suitable.

In contrast to the Carlson study, the participants were encouraged to mark all relevant categories with regard to the function of activities and to the kind of action. A board meeting, for instance, covers several functional areas and decisions are made as well as information is exchanged. Therefore, these two dimensions were measured both as gross time and as net time with regards to the content and purpose of the activity (each marking being divided by the total number of markings). Since the categories in this section are overlapping, it wasn't possible either for the CEO himself or for the observer to divide a multiple criteria activity into its components in a precise manner. All markings of an activity have thus been given the same weight.

For practical reasons the CEOs were allowed to group together activities of very short duration in one diary form. There is simply not enough time available for a CEO to fill in one form for every small piece of work, which in the extreme case can consist of a ten second conversation with the secretary. A "free" half-hour in his own office is typically used for a variety of short activities such as exchanges of information and assignment of working tasks between the CEO and the secretary, quick telephone calls and skimming mail. Such a half-hour was recorded as one activity when the CEO filled in the diary but when the observer was present a lot more activities were registered. This is the main reason for the difference between CEO self-recording of eight diary forms a day on the average, compared to the average for an observational day of 27 forms. Another reason for the difference in number of activities is that it is more difficult to register activities outside one's own office without support from the secretary and the office facilities (the forms often lay in a stack at the CEO

desk). However, as will be shown later in the article the total distribution of time didn't differ very much between the self-observation and the external observation. The self-recording method was shown to provide a general and perspicuous picture, but without much depth.

Strengths and weaknesses of the chosen method

In order to secure as high quality as possible in the self-recorded material, the diary forms were sent to the author weekly and regular follow up interviews (mainly by phone) were held with the CEOs and the secretaries. The interviews mainly concerned the "gaps" in the recorded material, such as lack of information of one or more of the dimensions of diary and the occurrence of work outside the companies and outside office time. With the use of supplementary information it was possible to close a rather large proportion of the gaps.

Mintzberg (1973) considered the method of self-observation as unreliable at least when it concerns the content of managerial work, and he therefore only conducted an observational study (25 days). The results from this study, however, indicate that self-observation is a useful method, at least if it is combined with interviews. The self-observation method is not suited, however for investigating the fragmentation and the pace of managerial work. Direct observation, on the other hand can be used both for analyzing fragmentation and to represent genuine episodes of managerial work in a much richer way, for instance to capture dialogues. The major drawback of the observational method is access, which restricts the possible scale of the investigation. Securing access for observation of one week was difficult enough, some of the participants accepted only to be observed during one or two

days. No one, I think, would have accepted to be shadowed for a longer period than one week. The use of two methods provides a fruitful combination; the depth of 26 days of observation gives a good complement to the scale of 133 days of self-recording and vice-versa.

The Carlson study adheres to a functionalistic view of management by focusing on his (all the CEOs were men) role as a decision maker and information handler. Of course, the Carlson categories are only one of many possible ways of describing managerial work, but the functionalistic perspective has merits for examining complex phenomena in management (Carroll & Gillen, 1987: 48ff). Another advantage with the functionalistic perspective is that it is closely related to the thought world of the CEOs: The CEOs had no difficulties to conceive the meaning of the concepts and they could relate them to their working activities. Abstract but scientifically elaborated concepts such as institutionalization or domination, which most obviously have relevance for managerial work are not suited for self-recording since the typical CEO is not familiar with them. The same is probably true also for some of the ten managerial roles of Mintzberg (Mintzberg, 1973).

The purpose of the current study is not trying to reach a *true* or exact picture of what CEOs do but to reach as good an approximation as possible – the goal is a *fair* picture. In a pragmatic spirit, a combination of self-recording and direct observation appears to be well suited for this purpose.

A transforming context

The changes that have occurred during 50 years are of course very large and it is only possible to describe these changes with a broad brush. The CEOs in the Carlson study operated in a national context. Only a few of the companies were involved in larger export activities, and all manufacturing was carried out in Sweden. Also, the wartime administration had not yet loosened its grip. The economy was tightly regulated by the government and also by different industry organizations, quotas of scarce resources and export sales had often to be negotiated with other representatives within industry (Höglund, 1953). As a consequence, the CEOs had to be engaged in many external relations activities in order to take care of company interests. The Swedish economy has during the last half century become liberalized. Corporativistic arrangements have more and more become replaced by market solutions, at least in the private sector.

The Swedish economy expanded rapidly during the Carlson study, the industrial production grew approximately by 7% annually (Bentzel, 1967). The growth rate that surrounded the present study was much lower; the rapid growth of some of the represented companies was due to acquisitions. Also the structure of the Swedish economy has changed since the forties; information technology and the service sector are more and more replacing traditional manufacturing and the primary industries as the backbone of the economy.

During the last 50 years a communication revolution has taken place (and it is still continuing). Commercial air traffic has made the whole world reachable within hours and not weeks. The world has also become much smaller by the expansion of telecom and computerized communication. Much of the routine communication in the companies is

exchanged through a computerized information system. These changes (and many more) have increased the possibilities for creating truly global business operations enormously. Three of the participating CEOs are in charge of companies in which more than 90% of the employees works outside Sweden.

Also a dramatic change for the CEO work is the focus on shareholder value and the increasing transparency of the public companies. At the time of the Carlson study the shareholder once a year received a rather rudimentary annual report. The business press in Sweden of that time consisted of the weekly magazine "Affärsvärlden", which covered the companies mainly by summaries of the annual reports. The CEOs today are critically examined in a wide range of business-oriented newspapers, magazines, newsletters and Internet news groups. The companies have to publish detailed reports four times a year often including group strategies, goals and outlooks.

Lastly, but not least, the conceptions of effective leadership and management have changed during the period of time. The Carlson study took place in a milieu dominated by scientific management, rationalization and Fayolian administration (the author, forthcoming).

The participants in the present study

The ambition was to engage CEOs from the same industries as in the original study. However it turned out to be difficult to involve a sufficient number of participants both because of the large structural changes of the Swedish economy (some represented industries are almost gone) and also because many of "the similar" CEOs chose not to participate in the study. Four

of the participants belong to the same kind of industries as represented in the Carlson study, the remaining four are in other industries. The industries are:

Manufacturing (CEO 5 and 7)
 Banking and insurance (CEO 2 and 8) *
 Forest industry (CEO 6)
 Media production (CEO 1) *
 Retailing (CEO 3) *
 Energy services (CEO 4)

*) Industries also in the Carlson study

Six of the companies are listed on the Stockholm exchange, one is jointly owned by the industry and the last is a large private company. The combined market value of the listed companies in 1999 was close to 200 billion SEK (25 billion USD). Some of the companies have most of their operations within Sweden, while other companies were very internationally oriented. The median company in this respect had 40% of its employees and 75% of its sales outside Sweden. Compared to the Carlson study the represented companies are generally larger, more international and more oriented towards services:

	The Carlson study	The present study
Mean number of employees	2100	4390
Industrial companies	5	3
Service companies	4	5
Head office in Stockholm	5	4
Head office in rest of Sweden	4	4
Mean age of the CEOs	53	48

All the participants were men, despite efforts to include female CEOs. Compared to the Carlson study, the present participants had more often an educational background in business

administration (five of them), while two had university degrees in engineering and social science respectively and one had joined his industry at an early age (he had worked more than 50 years (!) in his sector).

The amount and the location of CEO work.

The first dimension of CEO behavior concerns the physical location. All the registered work during the investigation period has been divided by the number of regular working days (work on holidays and weekends has been transferred to the working days). All cases but one consist of 20 working days and the last study consists of 19 days.

The present study: The location of CEOs

	Hours per day	of total	Max	Min	Observation
Own office	3: 49	31%	52%	18%	43%
Elsewhere within own company	2: 06	17%	32%	5%	19%
Within own company	5: 55	47%	70%	28%	62%
Working at home	0: 31	4%	11%	1%	3%
Transportation	2: 33	21%	27%	9%	16%
On visit outside own company	2: 03	17%	32%	6%	9%
Elsewhere outside own company	1: 19	11%	22%	2%	11%
Total	12: 22	100%	15: 09	9: 17	12: 47

The total amount of registered work of 1965 hours during 159 working days represents 12 hours and 22 minutes per day or almost 62 hours per week. Since the CEOs have been repeatedly asked if they have conducted other work except the registered activities, this figure appears to be rather reliable. Of course work of the kind "thinking about a subsidiary when jogging" cannot be included in the figures. Being a CEO can be more or less 24-hour a day

work, even if the participants stressed the importance to have a private sphere of hobbies, friends and relaxation.

The "hardest working" participant worked more than 15 hours per day while one participant who very thoroughly registered his working activities managed to work only 9 hours per day. Typically the participants considered fully 60 hours a week to be a normal workload.

The most likely place to find a CEO at work is of course in his own office (including the nearest conference room), and the amount of time spent in own office ranged from 18 to 52% of total working time. The second largest category is traveling, approximately one fifth of the time was used for that purpose, even if there were large differences between the participants. On the whole the analysis of physical location revealed large differences in work habits, the total time spent on work outside the company ranged from 30% to 72% and time spent on external visits ranged from 6 to 32%. Some of the participants worked regularly at home, while some others almost never did that.

The figures from the direct observation provide a similar behavioral pattern, but had somewhat higher value on internal activities because some of the CEOs preferred to be shadowed at periods when they didn't conduct so many external visits. The total figures therefore give a more representative picture of where the CEOs were located.

A comparison with Executive behavior: The location of CEOs

	A CEO in the pre- sent study (No. 8)		A CEO in the Carlson study*	
Own office	5: 21	39%	4: 48	41%
Elsewhere within company	1: 59	16%	1: 45	15%
Within company	7: 36	55%	6: 34	56%
Work at home	0: 05	1%	0: 57	8%
Transportation	3: 05	23%	0: 22	3%
On visit outside company	1: 59	15%	3: 46	33%
Elsewhere outside company	0: 56	7%	0: 00	0%
Total	13: 38	100%	11: 42	100%

* The figures are based on Figure 3, page 62 (Carlson, 1951)

Carlson did not present average figures for all the CEOs in his study. Instead he showed the time allocation of a CEO who he considered to have a typical behavior. In the present study the typical CEO is the participant whose behavior deviated the least from the mean value.

Firstly, it can be noted that the time at their own office and within the company was approximately the same between the typical CEOs. Carlson discovered that disturbances in the administrative work easily occurred when the CEOs were out of office (Carlson, 1951: 64ff). However it seems to be the case that these kinds of disturbances were due to the organization of the administrative work more than the amount of time spent outside the office. The largest problem of "CEO absenteeism" in the present study was experienced in the two companies where the CEOs had the highest proportion of time in their office. These were the two most centralized organizations, with respect to how closely the CEOs were involved in the business operations.

Secondly, the differences in time spent outside the firm are partly related to coding techniques. Carlson included conferences in the visit category but in the present study, for

instance internal conferences at an external site are coded as "elsewhere outside company" - a category which was not used in the Carlson study. Other examples of " elsewhere outside company" are work conducted in hotel rooms, airport lounges and at business lunches and dinners.

The most interesting difference between the two studies is the large increase of time spent on traveling despite the emergence of faster means of communication. However, it is most likely that the typical CEO of Carlson had his office in central Stockholm and therefore many of his visit sites lay within a short walking distance at that period of time. The typical CEO in the present study also had his office in central Stockholm, but 95% of the revenues was earned outside Sweden. In the 1998 annual report of his company addresses were given of 37 units in 22 countries. This CEO spent over 60 hours on pure transportation during the investigation period. The different travel pattern is a striking illustration to the globalization of economies and organizations, which has occurred since the Carlson study.

The CEOs in the present study had similar priorities for choosing means of transport. They all went to the office driving their company car. If air traffic provided the fastest means of transport they took a flight. If not, they used the car. No CEO traveled by train, which marks a difference compared to the CEOs of Carlson. They also used their cars regularly, but since Swedish roads at that time were in poor condition, cars were mainly suited for local transport.

The differences concerning travel pattern between the CEOs in the present study were primarily related to destinations. The CEOs of international firms (defined here as more than half of the employees outside Sweden) traveled a lot more abroad. No less than 38% of their total working time was conducted abroad compared to 5% for the CEOs of the Sweden

oriented firms. The CEOs of the international firms were also spending more time on transportation totally (24% compared to 17%). Carlson's observation that geography was an important factor of determining CEO behavior is still valid (Carlson, 1951: 96). The CEOs traveled primarily to the places where the companies have operations or have important stakeholders.

The present study: Means of transport*

	CEOs of Swedish firms (4)	CEOs of international firms (4)	Total
Domestic car travels	11	6	17
Domestic air travels	12	6	18
International air travels	3	15	18
Car travels abroad	0	2	2
Total traveling	26	29	55

* The table includes all conducted travels during the investigation period with duration more than one hour, single way.

The most frequent destinations for the domestic travels were Stockholm (13 times) and Göteborg (5 times). The international travels went to Great Britain, Norway and USA (3 times), to Germany, France and Switzerland (2 times) and to Denmark, Finland and Italy (once).

No CEO in this study believed that he could carry out his duties effectively just by being at his office and handling visitors, telephone calls and letters. They perceived a need for being close to the operations and with their own eyes seeing facilities, machines, products and meeting employees at the basic levels. Traveling, to a large extent being viewed as a source of disturbance to administrative processes by Carlson (1951) and as a kind of a non-work activity by Mintzberg (1973) (travels were excluded from the work analysis by Mintzberg), in this study stands out as a central activity of managerial work.

Too heavy a work load?

The median working day in the Carlson study was around 9 hours and 45 minutes (Carlson, 1951: 63). However at that time, Saturdays were regarded as working days and the investigation period thus included 24 days. If Saturday is regarded as a free day as we do today, the median figure rises to 11 hours and 42 minutes. Despite the fact that Saturday has become a free day the CEOs in the present study worked an average of five hours more per week.

Carlson was of the opinion that the CEOs in his study had a too high workload (pp. 75ff). The CEOs in the present study generally did not complain about the long working hours. Rather they enjoyed work and particularly they liked the CEO work. One participant who worked more than 60 hours a week said that he never had felt tired when his working day was finished. But, of course the CEOs had to sacrifice their private life to a rather large extent. A normal family life is only possible during weekends and during the summer holiday. The work has the top priority, which this typical episode illustrates:

A participant planned to begin the Easter holiday by taking a half day off on Maundy and have lunch with his wife. However a problem with a subordinate manager had emerged and the CEO wanted to remove this manager before an approaching management conference. He therefore asked the secretary to book a meeting with the leaving manager at one a clock and the intended new manager at two-o'clock. During the lunch hour he prepared himself for the meetings. It wasn't until 4:30 that he arrived home.

Observer: "I didn't really believe that he would leave by twelve-o'clock"

The secretary: "Neither did I, They haven't had lunch together in two years."

Fragmentation in CEO work

One of the most recognized results in "Executive Behaviour" is the fragmented nature of managerial work, also highlighted by Stewart (1967) and Mintzberg (1973). Carlson perceived undisturbed work alone at one's office as crucial for making careful decisions. But because of frequent interruptions due to visitors and telephone calls, the average duration of undisturbed work was eight minutes for a typical CEO. Carlson argued that periods shorter than 10 minutes were of little value for working purposes (Carlson, 1951: 73).

Since the method of self-recording does not capture fragmentation properly, it is much better to compare the Carlson's figures on working alone with those of all the CEOs during the direct observation.²

A comparison with Executive behavior: Fragmentation of CEO work

	The CEOs in the present study		A CEO in the Carlson study	
	No. of minutes	of total	Minutes	of total
Time per day of alone office work *	74	9%	94	13,5%?
Number of alone work periods per day	4,1		12	
Mean time of alone work periods	18		8	

* Calculated on 20 working days for the Carlson study and 26 days in the present study (the total number of observational days). The information about the Carlson CEO was gathered from Figure 6 (Carlson, 1951: 73).

² The data for the Carlson CEO was gathered by the secretary and by telephone operators.

Insert Figure 2 here

The figure above shows that the CEOs in the present study do not work as fragmentally as the Carlson CEOs. None of the participants was close to being more or less constantly interrupted working alone at the office. The corridor outside was generally quiet and only the very close co-workers made spontaneous visits. Actually, the CEOs created most of the fragmentation themselves, when, for instance, with short intervals they conducted different telephone calls or when seeking advice from a nearby co-worker.

In nearly half of the time alone at office the CEOs in the present study worked undisturbed for 28 minutes and more. The long period of undisturbed work was however not mainly used for reflection and planning but for preparation of speeches, board meetings and negotiations, and in some cases for reading acquisition reports or formulating a monthly letter to the employees. Planning and thinking were more taking place in discussions with key employees compared to when the CEOs were alone, and particularly alone at their own office where there almost always was paper-work and telephone calls that had to be taken care of.

The impression from the field observation was that the CEOs made good use even of very short periods of "alone" work. Such periods were used to skim letters, reports, to answer e-mails and to prepare the following meeting.

Communications patterns

The CEOs in this study were mostly communicating. Approximately 90% of the total working time was used for meetings, reading, writing and talking on the telephone. The

methods chosen for communication thus provides important knowledge about the nature of managerial work and the behavior of CEOs.

The present study: Tools of communication

	Hours per day	of total	Max	Min	Observation
Telephone	1: 08	9%	18%	2%	7%
E-mail	0: 26	3%	10%	0%	2%
Internet	0: 12	2%	9%	0%	1%
Electronic communication	1: 46	14%	22%	8%	10%
Mail/facsimile	0: 23	3%	6%	2%	4%
Reports/periodicals	0: 49	7%	21%	2%	5%
Written communication	1: 12	10%	25%	4%	9%
Meeting with one person	1: 35	13%	20%	6%	16%
Meeting with several persons	5: 45	47%	56%	34%	50%
Personal communication	7: 20	59%	68%	40%	66%
No communication, not defined	2: 04	17%	24%	11%	15%
Total	12: 22	100%	15: 09	9: 17	12: 47

The results from the self-recording and the direct observation are congruent, an indication that the diary method is reliable with regard to this particular dimension of managerial work. Meetings, particularly with more than one person are the dominant form of communication and telephone calls are far behind in second place. The use of telephone, e-mail and the Internet differed to a large extent between the participants, which is an illustration of differentiated leadership styles. Consider the following usage of time:

The present study: Electronic communication, hours per day

	CEO 1	CEO 2	CEO 3	CEO 7	Mean
Telephone	0: 37	0: 14	1: 13	2: 23	1: 08
E-mail	1: 11	0: 13	0: 00	0: 34	0: 26
Internet	0: 00	1: 05	0: 00	0: 00	0: 12
Total	1: 48	1: 32	1: 13	2: 57	1: 46

CEO 1 worked in an e-mail culture and he received several dozens of mails during a normal office day. He stated bluntly: *"If you don't communicate by e-mail here, you are in trouble"*. CEO 2 on the other hand, was the only participant who made an extensive use of the Internet for keeping himself well-informed about Swedish and international business life. He made sparse use of telephone and e-mails. CEO 3 represents the "conservative CEO" who had not learned to use computers as a means of communication. He clearly preferred personal meetings, which he carried out to an astonishing extent (on average 10 hours and 15 minutes per working day!). Finally, CEO 7 was one of two CEOs who used the telephone extensively in order to control globally dispersed business operations.

On an average the CEOs spent little more than one hour per day reading and writing (except on the PC), but with huge variation (from four to 25 percent). Carlson's observation that the CEOs *"desire and capacity to consume reports seems to vary considerably"* (p. 89), remains most valid. Likewise, Carlson was surprised that his CEOs seldom wrote letters (p. 83). In the present study the CEOs primarily wrote letters on special occasions, but they often asked their secretaries to write letters, for instance in order to reply to external requests, so that they themselves could avoid extra telephone calls.

The majority of the CEOs in the present study didn't regard the regular mail as a particularly important source of information. It was mainly skimmed and often immediately trashed or re-distributed to someone else in the organization. One CEO who returned to his office after being away for two days liquidated his mail stack rapidly by trashing all of it and made a comment: *"What crap one gets. It would take me my whole life just to read it. I'm busy just as it is without it."*

17% of the total working time is not defined according to tools of communication.

The main part of this time consists of occasions when the CEOs are not communicating. For instance, a large part of the traveling time is "unproductive" with regards to the specified tools of communication. Also some part of the unspecified time is due to gaps in the recorded material.

A comparison with Executive behavior: Tools of communication

	A CEO of the present study (no. 8)		A CEO of the Carlson study*	
Telephone	1: 20	10%	0: 17	2% [^]
E-mail	0: 50	6%	-	-
Internet	0: 04	0,4%	-	-
Electronic communication	2: 13	16%	0: 17	2%
Personal communication	8: 07	60%	7: 29	64%
Written/ no communication/ not defined ³	3: 18	24%	3: 58	34%
Total (Hours per day)	13: 38	100%	11: 42	100%

* Constructed based on information at pages 62-63 and 72-73

[^] Only with regard to telephoning in the office

The largest difference between the CEOs from the two studies is the increasing use of telephones and computers. The use of other means of communication is however robust, it is not being replaced by electronic communication, it is rather complemented by it. The use of computers in the present study seemed also to be related to age, those CEOs who were born during the fifties and sixties used e-mail and Internet twice as much as those who were born during the thirties and forties (6% of total working time compared to 3%). A likely prediction

³ The information about the extent of different means of communications in the Carlson study is not complete concerning the use of written communication.

for the future is that meetings will remain as the dominant means of communication, but that the use of computers and telephone will continue to increase.

Meetings

Since meetings are the most frequent activity, it is of interest to examine which and how often the CEOs meet different categories of people.

The present study: The distribution of meetings

	No. of meetings	No. of minutes	of total	Max	Min
Own secretary	9	138	1,6%	4%	0,4%
Directly reporting managers	42	2.642	30,5%	58%	9%
The owners, the board	3	359	4,1%	10%	0%
Personnel/union meetings	3	451	5,2%	11%	0%
Field visits, inspection tours	4	676	7,8%	24%	0%
Other internal meetings	15	827	9,6%	18%	4%
Internal meetings, totally	78	5.093	58,9%	79%	24%
Meetings with customers	1	111	1,3%	5%	0%
Meetings with suppliers	4	405	4,7%	8%	0%
Competitors/colleagues	3	402	4,6%	16%	0,4%
Governmental agencies, trade associations	3	323	3,8%	30%	0%
Press contacts	2	216	2,5%	8%	0%
Meeting with investors, analysts	3	350	4,0%	12%	0%
Other public relations	3	264	3,1%	5%	0%
Board meetings in external companies	2	651	7,5%	18%	0%
Other external meetings	6	838	9,8%	24%	3%
External meetings, totally	27	3.561	41,1%	76%	21%
Summary of meetings	105	8.655	100%	13.300	4900

On average, the CEOs had 105 registered meetings during the investigation period. The time spent on each category varied considerably between the participants. The most externally oriented CEO spent only 9% of the total meeting time on the "directly reporting managers" and just 24% on internal meetings totally. This can be compared with the most internally

oriented CEO who spent 59% of the time on the directly reporting managers and no less than 79% on internal meetings.

The "directly reporting managers" were the largest category for six of the eight participants, which together consumed nearly one-third of the total meeting time. Carlson noted that there existed large differences with regard to the function of the top-management team in the companies (p. 57ff). This was exactly the same in the firms in the present study. The frequency of executive meetings ranged from a couple of times per week to a couple of times per year! Some of the CEOs were striving to create a closely united team with collective decision making and thus emphasizing group commitment and consensus. On the other hand there were CEOs who instead stressed the importance of individual accountability and wanted to see all of the directly reporting managers as personally responsible for the performance of their units.

Likewise the different functions of top-management teams, Carlson noted that the amount of time spent on inspection tours varied considerably between the participants (p. 69). In the present study the time spent on field visits/inspection tours varied from 24% to nil of total meeting time. The participant who did not carry out a field visit during the investigation period, commented when he saw this figure "*Oops, that isn't good.*" The "*diary complex*" – Carlson's observation that what is not put in the calendar seldom took place spontaneously (p. 71) - seems still to be of relevance for the CEOs in the present study. But some of them had made it a policy not to schedule more than half of their working time in advance, in order to maintain flexibility and thus be able to work with the for the moment most important task.

A comparison with Executive behavior: Distribution of meetings

	A CEO (No 6) in the present study		A CEO in the Carlson study*	
	No. of meetings	Share of time	No. of meetings	Share of time
Own secretary	16	4,0%	30	2,8%
CEO assistant	-	-	22	7,2%
Directly reporting managers	27	36,3%	42	30,1%
The owners, the board	0	0,0%	4	2,8%
Personnel/union meetings	1	0,6%	1	1,7%
Other internal meetings	23	19,0%	28	8,0%
Internal meetings	67	60,0%	127	52,5%
Meetings with customers	0	0,0%	2	4,6%
Meetings with suppliers	3	5,6%	7	4,4%
Competitors/colleagues	3	11,2%	5	2,1%
Press contacts	0	0,0%	0	0,0%
Governmental agencies	0	0,0%	9	8,2%
Trade associations	0	0,0%	14	19,1%
Meetings with investors/analysts	2	6,4%	0	0,0%
Board meetings in external companies	4	13,9%	1	1,7%
Other external meetings,	3	2,9%	11	7,5%
External meetings	15	40,0%	49	47,5%

* The figures are based on information in Figure 9 and 10 (Carlson, 1951)

Also similar to the Carlson study, meetings with his own secretary were not particularly time-consuming in the present study even if they interacted frequently. The majority of those interactions were quick exchanges of information and giving of orders, interactions of a kind that should not be considered as meetings. The secretaries often complained that the time for exchanging information and planning the calendar was far too scarce. Actually the CEOs met their secretaries less than seven minutes per day on the average - regardless of the method of measurement. But the observation showed that CEOs usually phoned the secretary regularly when there was time left over during travels.

At the time of the Carlson study a CEO generally had a junior executive as a personal assistant, doing preparation and liaison work and other managerial tasks that weren't necessary for the CEO to do himself. One of Carlson's recommendations was that the CEOs should make better use of the assistants, and thus create more time for reflection, planning and decision making (p. 74/91). However, none of the CEOs in the present study did have an assistant, and when the question "*What has happened to the CEO assistants?*" was put in a feedback discussion with the participants they became somewhat irritated: "*It doesn't work this way in a modern company, you have to delegate such tasks to others*", said one CEO. The participants saw the presence of a CEO assistant as a sign of centralism. This reaction illustrates a shift in the perception of good management. The CEO function should according to the participants not be expanded by the use of assistants, rather should more top management matters be delegated to the executive group or to individual managers.

Carlson was struck by the low frequency of contacts between the CEO and customers and suppliers (Carlson, 1951: 84). In the present study meetings with customers were even rarer, only seven meetings were registered all together, corresponding to just little more than one percent of total meeting time. It is also the case that the CEO engagement in trade associations, employer's federations and governmental committees has decreased substantially compared to the Carlson study. Only three of the eight participants had a meeting with these stakeholder groups. Badly organized external committee work (Carlson 1951:84ff) is no longer an important problem for the Swedish CEOs.

Compared to the Carlson study more time was spent on external board meetings, on meetings with investors/analysts and with competitors/colleagues. The latter meetings primarily concerned acquisition negotiations. Five of the participants were deeply engaged in

acquisition activities at the time of the study. In some companies acquisition activities were seen as current operations.

The actors of the stock market are probably the stakeholder group that has most increased its influence. Carlson does not mention anything about shareholders, investors, brokers, and analysts; a condition which indicates the relatively low influence from the stock market of that time. The Carlson CEOs were primarily concerned with relations to key suppliers in order to secure the provision of scarce resources and to maintain good relations with the state and to the laborers. The CEOs (of the listed companies) in the present study were to a large extent concerned about how to generate shareholder value; many of them watched the share price several times a day. Meetings and presentations for investors and analysts consumed a rather large proportion of the working time. One of the CEOs spent no less than 12% of total meeting time with stock market actors. All the public companies also recently had implemented stock option programs for management and employees. Shareholder value has thus become a motivational tool.

The functions of CEO work

The measurement of what kind of functional areas the CEO activities are related to is more difficult to do compared to earlier sections. It is both difficult to draw demarcation between categories and to determine the duration of a certain functional element within an activity. However, efforts trying to measure the frequency and duration of certain kinds of activities can provide interesting results, especially if one is adopting a pragmatic approach and is aware of the approximate character of the figures.

The present study: The functional area of activities

	Hours per day	of total	Max	Min	Observation	Gross time
Finance, legal	3: 05	24%	45%	13%	21%	38%
Accounting	0: 14	2%	5%	1%	2%	6%
Purchasing	0: 19	2%	7%	0%	2%	6%
Production	0: 58	8%	13%	3%	5%	20%
Product development	0: 31	4%	7%	1%	3%	11%
Marketing, sales	1: 16	10%	15%	5%	11%	23%
Personnel	1: 19	11%	21%	4%	13%	20%
Public/ investor relations	1: 35	13%	23%	3%	21%	19%
Organizing, planning	1: 05	9%	14%	4%	6%	17%
Private	0: 17	2%	5%	1%	1%	3%
Others, not defined	1: 42	14%	21%	9%	15%	19%
Total (hours per day)	12: 22	100%	15: 09	9: 17	12: 47	181%

It was possible to use the Carlson categories for describing 84% of the CEO work in the present study (86% for the direct observation). The remaining time consisted of various other kinds of activities (environmental and IT-issues for instance), short activities such as skimming letters and other kinds of gaps.

The most frequent category, by far, was finance, legal. It was the number one activity for 5 CEOs, the second for another two and the third for the last participant. The reasons for this category's exceptional position will be discussed in a moment.

The second most time-consuming activity was public relations, which was the top activity for the three CEOs who didn't spend most the time on financial and legal matters. The CEOs' engagement in public relation activities varied however considerably; from three to 23 percent.

Large differences in behavior were also revealed in the third largest category, which was personnel (from four to 21 percent). The reasons for this were both due to specific events (such as an ongoing replacement of a manager) and to how often the CEOs met employees at lower rank. Carlson observed that the personnel function had a special character since matters

of personnel were a concern for all managers regardless of function (Carlson, 1951: 101ff). Therefore, the CEOs were often engaged in personnel matters without the presence of representatives from the personnel department. This was also the fact in the present study. In the three companies which had a personnel manager at the headquarter level, only 38 of 105 activities with the CEO which concerned personnel matters took place in the presence of the head of personnel. The four international companies did not have a personnel manager at the group level and in one company, this position was vacant during the time of the investigation.

The figures from the observation column do not differ substantially from the total figures except the public relations activities. But since public relations is a relatively distinct and well-defined activity, the reasons for this is most likely a coincidence and not due to different methods of measurement.

The last column in the table presents the gross figures of time usage. On average 1,81 categories were chosen to describe the functional areas of an activity. The categories most often occurring together with other categories were accounting, purchasing, and production. Finance, legal and public relations on the other hand were often used as a single attribute of the activities.

A comparison with Executive Behaviour: The functional area of activities

	A CEO in the present study (no. 7)		A CEO in the Carlson study*	
	No. of activities	Percent	No. of activities	Percent
Finance, accounting, legal	54	24%	12	10%
Purchasing	6	3%	9	8%
Production	18	8%	24	21%
Product development	19	8%	13	11%
Marketing, sales	41	18%	19	16%
Personnel	37	16%	17	15%
Public/ investor relations	31	14%	15	13%

Organizing, planning	20	9%	8	7%
Total number of activities	226	100%	117	100%

* Information gathered from Figure 11 (Carlson, 1951). Gross figures were used.

A difference between the Carlson CEO and the CEOs of the present study is the declining occupation with production items: This is not related to the shift in the Swedish economy towards services since the forties. Production used as a category metaphorically in the service companies in the present study scored for nine percent of the working time in the service, compared with five percent for the manufacturing companies.

The CEOs in the present study, especially in those (international) companies which were organized in business areas were more engaged in general financial control and not that much in functional areas (purchasing, production, product development, marketing and personnel), compared to the other participants who were in charge of functional organizations:

	Functional organi- zations (CEO 1-4)	Business area organi- zations (CEO 5-8)
Finance, accounting, legal items	18%	32%
Functional items	42%	31%
Other activities	40%	37%

The figures above could be compared with the Carlson CEO who was engaged in financial/legal matters only ten percent and 70 percent in functional matters. The most functionally oriented CEO in the present study spent 13% on financial/legal activities and 50 percent on functional activities. The CEOs nowadays run their companies in a more general way, thus delegating functional items to subordinates to a larger extent.

The kind of action in CEO work

The last dimension of CEO work concerns the kind of administrative action taken in the activities. Similar to the dimension of content it is rather subjective and ambiguous. Carlson noted that what one person would regard as merely exchange of information, could be interpreted as decision making by another person or even as receiving of orders (Carlson, 1951: 117ff). This dimension is also fragmentarily presented in Executive Behaviour, which is a restricting factor when comparing the results of the two studies.

The present study: The nature of activities

	Hours per day	of total	Max	Min	Observation	Gross time
Getting information	2: 49	23%	39%	14%	23%	42%
Processing information	1: 31	12%	20%	5%	13%	28%
Decision-making	0: 52	7%	13%	4%	6%	19%
Confirming or correcting decisions of others	0: 17	2%	6%	0,3%	1%	7%
Assignment of working tasks	0: 31	4%	7%	2%	5%	11%
Informing, advising	2: 04	16%	26%	9%	16%	30%
Inspecting, evaluating	0: 40	5%	14%	1%	2%	12%
Executing	2: 19	19%	23%	14%	22%	27%
Personal development	0: 04	1%	1%	0%	3%	1%
Others, not defined	1: 15	10%	15%	4%	9%	11%
Total (hours per day)	12: 22	100%	15: 09	9: 17	12: 47	187%

The most common activity was, as in the Carlson study, getting information. The frequency spanned from 14 to 39 percent. For three participants it was the number one activity, and the second most frequent for two other. Getting information occurred in many different locations and means of communication. The four participants who spent most time on getting information spent less time on all of the other categories, in total more than three hours less per day on these activities. They were working in a more decentralized way and were executing control by being well-informed of both internal and external affairs.

The second largest category was execution, which means to carry out activities decided (other than informational and the other categories on the list). To a large extent it can be for categorizing many different kind of activities in managerial work. It was not so much used by the CEOs themselves but appeared to be relevant to use for categorizing (unproductive) traveling, ceremonial activities, dinners, preparation work, etc. With the use of the term executing it was possible to categorize 90% of the total working time, even if the concepts express a rational and functionalistic role of management. The symbolic role of management is not well expressed in the terminology; a concept worth including in future studies is not least motivating, which the following episode illustrates:

A CEO of an international company makes a visit to the Norwegian subsidiary. The main part of the visit is devoted to a presentation in which the local management team describes ongoing projects. The description is very rich in details and in a pause, the CEO told his Norwegian manager:

"I just can't understand why we can not present the whole thing at once."

Subsidiary CEO: "But it is extremely motivating for them to be able to present their work for the group CEO. This is very valuable for them, even if it is too detailed."

CEO: "That is of course true."

The third largest category was informing, advising. It would have been in second place, just as in the Carlson study, if executing had not been interpreted so broadly by the author. All the CEOs had to inform both internal and external actors regularly and the time recorded varied from nine to 26 percent.

It can also be noted that the figures from direct observation only differ slightly from the CEOs' own coding, and that the gross figures indicate that some of the categories are much intertwined with other categories. The most intertwined of the categories were confirming or correcting decisions of others, decision-making and assignment of working tasks and the least intertwined were personal development, executing and getting information.

Centralized and decentralized leadership style

The only figures given in the Carlson study about kind of action concerns the different usage of time in centralized and decentralized organizations respectively (Carlson, 1951: 108). CEO 1 in the present study who most often made decisions and gave orders, is the best representative of a centralized leadership style. CEO 2 on the other hand was the participant who spent the least time on decision-making and the most time on getting information, is the best opposite.

Kind of action in centralized organizations

	A CEO (No 1) in the present study		A CEO in the Carlson study	
	Number of items	Percent	Number of items	Percent
Getting information	68	20%	143	38%
Decision-making	50	15%	55	15%
Assignment of working tasks	42	13%	52	14%
Informing, advising	51	15%	60	16%
Other activities	123	37%	67	18%
Total number	334	100%	377	100%

Even if the method of comparison is somewhat crude, it can be noted that the behavior of CEO 1 and the Carlson CEO has much in common: three out of four categories had similar frequency.

Kind of action in decentralized organizations

	A CEO (No 2) in the present study		A CEO in the Carlson study	
	Number of items	Percent	Number of items	Percent
Getting information	129	41%	76	40%
Decision-making	16	5%	12	6%
Assignment of working tasks	25	8%	13	7%
Informing, advising	37	12%	28	15%
Other activities	109	34%	63	33%
Total number	316	100%	192	100%

The CEOs of the decentralized organizations showed remarkable similarities. It clearly would have been interesting to be able to compare the behavior of these CEOs also in other dimensions. But no other information is given in Executive Behaviour. In the table above the CEOs appear to be almost doppelgangers, which of course they are not. Or...?

Conclusions

An obstacle in making comparisons with the Carlson study is the large differences in behavior between the participants within each study regarding leadership styles, usage of time and organization of the top management function. What is a typical behavior when for instance the share of meetings with directly reporting managers range from nine to 58 percent of total meeting time? A lack of strong norms and external constraints in these areas, provide the

possibility to the CEOs to make choices about how to work (Stewart, 1982). Areas where there are larger differences between the participants *within* each study than *between* include:

- Conducting of field visits and inspection tours within own company
- The proportion of activities taking place outside own firm
- The function and organization of the top management-group.
- The existence and importance of central staff units
- The use of written reports as a source of information
- The occupation with decision-making and assignment of working tasks

Not least the last point is worth emphasizing as a finding. In both studies a centralized and a decentralized leadership style are identified. The first style has an emphasis on decision-making and assignment of working tasks, while the latter represents a style much more oriented on receiving and sending information. CEOs with a decentralized leadership style put a lot of energy into communicating norms and values. One CEO defined his task mainly as *"to tell the history of the company"*. The CEOs with a decentralized leadership style were monitoring the performance of the different units, but had no ambitions to take an active part in the local implementation of strategies.

The existence of differences in work behavior indicates that there exist several roads that can lead to good leader performance. All the eight CEOs in the present study can be regarded as good managers and not a few of them have received prestigious distinctions such as *"The leader of the Year"* (in Sweden). It is therefore not easy to regard the differences as pathologies, as Carlson tried to do. The good CEO behavior can be constituted in an indefinite

number of ways with regard to personality of the CEO, to company characteristics and to strategic objectives. One maybe should regard a balanced distribution of activities according to the different dimension of CEO work to be preferable, but the knowledge about what kind of combination of activities that will lead to success are extremely insufficient.

Despite the large differences of behavior between the CEOs in the present study it is, however, possible to identify a couple of important changes in the form and content of CEO behavior that have occurred over this period of time. The CEOs in the present study travel more often, faster and longer. The geographical space within which the firms operate are expanding over the globe. The CEOs are also more and more utilizing new electronic means of communication, even if the impact of modern technology has not been revolutionary; personal meetings continue to be the dominating form of activity.

With regard to stakeholder relations, the CEOs in the present study are more engaged in contacts with stock market actors and colleagues on external boards and in acquisition negotiations and less with trade associations and governmental committees. The company growth has mainly become a matter of performing acquisitions, compared to the days of the Carlson study, when the organic growth was strong.

But perhaps the most important change is that the CEOs of the present study exercise control in a more general way, by concentrating themselves on the overall financial and business performance and less on the solving of technical, organizational and commercial problems. This shift in behavior is even more pronounced in the (international) business area companies. When not so many items from the current operations reach the CEO desk, the CEOs are able to work in a less fragmented and reactive way, just as Carlson recommended

them to do (Carlson, 1951: 74). Angry customers and production disturbances are now handled at lower levels in the hierarchy.

There are also similarities in behavior between the studies, which reflect conditions that have not been influenced much by spatial, technical and commercial changes. The total workload of a CEO is still very demanding and the work tasks are challenging. The CEOs in both studies had a preference for personal meetings and were reluctant to use letters as an important source of information. Also, they seldom meet customers, and decision-making is not as central as popular views on top management suggest.

The message of the ever-increasing speed of change appears almost everywhere. Businesses, managers and professionals are urgently requested to make fast adoptions of all kind of (dramatic) changes. But if the message of the rapidly changing world it is true, then work behaviors appear to be an inert phenomenon. Certainly the context of managerial work has changed more than its form and content.

Managerial work appears to be a relatively stable and evolutionary phenomenon mainly reflecting the life biography of generations of business leaders. The many striking similarities between the work behaviors of Swedish CEOs during the forties and those of the nineties indicate the importance of traditions rather than modern technology or fashions in management for deciding the where, when, how and why of their work.

References

- Author (1999) Executive Behaviour Revisited. Submitted paper.
- Bentzel, R. (1967) Den industriella utvecklingen under efterkrigstiden. (The industrial development during the postwar period) In: Federation of Swedish Industries (Ed.), *Svensk industri* (The Swedish Industry). Stockholm: Federation of Swedish Industries.
- Carlson, S. (1951) *Executive behaviour*. Stockholm: Strömbergs.
- Carlson, S. (1964) *Företagsledare i arbete*. (Executive behaviour) Stockholm: Bokförlaget Prisma.
- Carroll, S. J. & Dennis J. Gillen, D. J. (1987) Are the Classical Management Functions Useful in Describing Managerial Work? *Academy of Management Review*, 12(1): 38-51.
- Höglund, R. (1953) *Företaget i samhället*. (The Company in the Society) Stockholm: Företagsekonomiska forskningsinstitutet.
- Mintzberg, H. (1973) *The nature of managerial work*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Mintzberg, H (1991) Managerial work: Forty years later. In: S. Carlson, *Executive Behaviour*. Reprinted with contributions by Henry Mintzberg and Rosemary Stewart. Uppsala: Studia Oeconomiae Negationum 32, Uppsala universitet.
- Stewart, R. (1982) Choices for the manager: A guide to managerial work and behaviour. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Book Company Ltd.
- Stewart, R. (1991) Role sharing at the top: A neglected aspect of managerial behaviour. In: S. Carlson, *Executive Behaviour*. Reprinted with contributions by Henry Mintzberg and Rosemary Stewart. Uppsala: Studia Oeconomiae Negationum 32, Uppsala universitet.