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My View: What is an Organization?

Why study Organization Theory?

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Abstract

The following paper will define organization and explain why it is important to study organizational theory. Because there are seven core concepts that each perspective has given multiple theories for explaining the organization, this paper will show by the example of one core concept, the social structure, how understanding organizational theory is important.

My View: What is an Organization?

Why study Organization Theory?

An organization, simply stated, is a managerial and purposeful structure as well as the personnel of the structure. In addition, an organization is made up of its ontological and epistemological assumptions that govern the way any particular organization is designed and managed.

It is necessary to study and to understand organizational theory in order to better comprehend one's own existence within an organization and the disposition's of the other personnel, as well as how each and all function together and as one unit. Understanding organizational theory, and the ontological and epistemological assumptions, will assist one in becoming more theoretical in their approach toward an organization and in management style.

There are three primary perspectives that attempt to explain the phenomenon of interest, the organization. They are the modern, symbolic-interpretive, and postmodern perspectives. Each perspective houses certain theories. The theories were developed due to each perspective and because of multiple core concepts. The core concepts include issues such as the environment an organization works in and is a part of, the social structure, the technologies available, the culture of the organization, the physical structure, and the organization's politics. Understanding each perspective, core technology and theory helps one to understand what makes up an organization.

Defining the organization means understanding the organizational boundary. There are many correct answers; however, the boundary definition is determined by one's own reasons for conducting an analysis. For example,

in modernist organization theories, the environment lies outside the boundary of the organization, providing the organization with raw materials and other resources and absorbing its products and services. (Hatch, 2006, p.63)

However, symbolic-interpretivists see the environment as a social construct consisting of shared beliefs and the expectations that are thus created. As for the postmodern perspective, there are many theories approaching environment. One idea is that of a boundaryless and virtual organization. Another idea critiques modernist theories on environment by saying they are anti-environmental by exploiting limited natural resources as well as human beings. By understanding which stance an organization adheres to, one can then go on to make decisions accordingly.

Due to how there are seven core concepts that each perspective has given multiple theories for explaining the organization, this paper will show by the example of one core concept, the social structure, how understanding organizational theory is important.

Take for instance the Mountain View Public Library. This library has been operating under the city government. However, the Mountain View Public Library will now be placed under the Parks and Recreation governance. The library itself has been operating under a very modernist perspective which will now become more post-modern in its values, along with some symbolic-interpretive twists.

Operating under a modernist view, the Mountain View Public Library has been very hierarchical in management, specific jobs and titles per person, little to no crossover in duties with decisions being made only by the higher-ups, and well-defined rules and policies with no room for gray areas. It has been recognized that operating this way has left the library with little recognition or value in the community. The library was operating as though it existed in a stable environment offered by environmental

contingency theory, when in fact; the library exists in an organic, seasonal environment due to tourism, ski season, and the local university.

By placing Mountain View Public Library under parks and recreation, a restructuring took place. The library is now a flat organizational structure with several departments, with a high degree of horizontal differentiation and low vertical differentiation. What this means, is that management acts as a facilitator and staff have specific job titles but are encouraged to cross-over where necessary and to make decisions as seen fit. Standard procedures still exist but act more as guidelines. The library has been decentralized so that decision making devolves to all levels of the hierarchy. The standard procedures are still modernist, but the outlook has switched to a very postmodern handling of the procedures.

Hatch (2006), states that “postmodernists encourage you not to be rigid in your use of categories (p.97). Operating under a post-modernist perspective allows Mountain View Public Library to deconstruct categories and to become more creative, dealing with situations as they arise. Postmodernism allows the librarians and management to think as they go as to what will be the best way to respond to the community and their needs, for instance seasonal programming instead of cyclical programming.

The new postmodern perspective for Mountain View Public Library has a symbolic-interpretive approach. This approach includes people interacting with each other and material resources around them in making their decisions. The approach has routines with organization improvisation and stability with leeway. These qualities lend themselves to a more malleable library that fits well with Mountain View’s flow of tourism and changing school year. By acting as a community of practice, the managers

integrate, and develop coherence in order to enable organizational action and innovation. By doing so, the library stays fresh and up-to-date, and therefore, relevant to its community.

Conclusion

In conclusion, understanding organization theory is important because it helps management and staff to better understand how to operate in their environment, and to better serve their clientele. When an organization better serves their clientele, they remain relevant and able to provide a service, or sell a product. Understanding organization theory keeps an organization afloat.

References

Hatch, M.J. & Cunliffe, A. L. (2006). *Organization Theory: Modern, symbolic, and postmodern perspectives*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press Inc.