

Leadership

The Importance of the Human Behavior Perspective in Organizational Leadership

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There are four basic schools of thought when it comes to organizational structure:

- Classical Management (Scientific Management),
- Human Behavior,
- Integrated Perspectives (functional or cultural), and
- Emerging Perspectives (Postmodern or Critical)

Each one of these can be distinguished from one another by the questions researchers representing each viewpoint seeks to ask about organizations themselves. The Scientific Management school asks *how organizations should be designed, how workers can be trained for maximum efficiency, how the chain of command works, and how division of labor should be determined*. Human Behavior theorists are concerned about *the influence of individuals in organizations, what motivates workers, and how motivation affects the organization*. The Integrated Perspectives school of thought asks *how structure, technology, and people relate to their environments*. And finally, Postmodern Critical Perspective theorists seek to *critique power and domination in organizations*. (Shockley-Zalabak, 2012)

Many large and globalized organizations today, and even the US military, encompass all four of these broad schools of thought in a dynamic, inter-related, and multi-tiered fashion. However, the purpose of our analysis today is not necessarily to discuss each school of thought in detail, but rather to discuss their shared relationships developed out of pure necessity, and further question how that relationship is directly tied to leadership. After all, at the end of the day, what we're concerned with is how we are capable of affecting and influencing an organization more so than we are concerned with a detailed understanding of its structure. However, to do that, we first need to understand a bit about that structure before we can conceptualize those relationships. Make sense?

At a broad organizational level, the US Army (for example) can be thought of in a very scientific management school perspective (classical management). The entire organization can be broken down into recognizably separate organizational levels (in order: Individual, Team/Squad, Platoon/Flight/Section, Company, Battalion/Regiment, Brigade, Division, Corps, Command, Army, DoD, Executive Branch), to which the structure itself forms a completed, clearly defined Chain-of-Command – hierarchical in nature and design. Here, we see the ultimate realization of the scalar chain[1] of communication, and indeed, the largest – and to my professional opinion, vastly overly so – bureaucratic institution in the world, whereby “authority” is not only derived by position, but through bureaucratic[2] decree. For leadership, much of the time spent at nearly all levels within such a massively over-bureaucratic institution is in the activities of planning, organizing, and coordinating, to where the least amount of time spent within the scope of leadership activities is in actual commanding and controlling.[3] Finally, individual responsibilities are subjected to individual competencies, and while there is a clear division of labor and resources, organizational structures are often designed with cross-platform multi-functionality and strategic asset integration in mind. This allows for operational capabilities far beyond those of most other organizations.

Now, as we have just described an organization deeply entrenched in classical management, at the other end of the stick, we see a completely different organization all together. Within the very interpersonal and relationship levels of the military structure and core, do we find a culture uniquely all its own, and one to where Fayol's bridge[4] is the rule, not the exception. The US military has a multitude of forces that act upon is operational success, and while one may be its structure, the other is its culture. This is where we'll find its Leadership Culture, which directly relates to the human behavior school perspective.

Remember that Leadership development is the encompassment of individual self-motivated personal and professional reflection and growth, and within that drive do we see a shared responsibility of all leaders to the Stewardship of Leadership. The activity of aided leadership development includes teaching, counseling, coaching, and mentorship. Here, it is not only the inherent responsibility of all leaders to encourage and aid in the development of subordinates, but it is also their charge. To be active within the growth of the *leaders of tomorrow* not only establishes lines of succession, it also promotes efficiency, increases competencies, fosters esprit-de-corps, lowers risk, increases production, and even increases satisfaction. Leadership interaction within the organization essentially spurs the Hawthorne Effect[5], the result of which is a professional Theory Y[6] culture.

At the organizational and lower levels, we can find it common within groups to by-pass formal structure completely as – regardless of rank or position – flight crews, special operations/missions teams, boat crews, tank crews, and even medical surgical teams interact as equals in the performance of operations, shared responsibilities, and crew coordination – i.e. communication. Such participative management[7] practices are essential to team success as they cast aside needless formalities and divisional statuses in order to save time,

prompt collaboration, and even improve group performance. The overarching rule to remember above all things here is commonly touted in the US military as:

There's a time and place for all things...

So what we are really seeing here within this massive, overly bureaucratic institution, are two completely different sets of schools of thought interacting and integrating themselves together in a near seamless way, and it's all occurring without planned consciousness or external force. Amazing, isn't it? Well, that's human behavior for you, and exactly why the human behavior perspective is so important to organizational success and leadership.

Remember from earlier that Human Behavior theorists are concerned about *the influence of individuals in organizations, what motivates workers, and how motivation affects the organization*. Essentially, these people seek to understand what makes Leadership possible and effective. So when we talk about an organizational structure from the Human Behavior perspective, what we're really discussing is our understanding of relationships and connections, communication and information, and human systems and networks, and how all these things work together within a much larger organizational structure – as in our example, a classical management structure. We discuss and discover these interconnectivities so we can best discover how to motivate and improve, so we can teach, coach, mentor and guide, and so we can provide for mission accomplishment while also taking care of the team.

Essentially, to develop an understanding of the shared relationships between the Human Behavior school, and any other school of thought, is to gain deeper insights into the realm of leadership effectiveness. And as we all know, if leadership isn't able to be measured as *effective*, it isn't worth much or of much use.

Sound Off!

Critical Thinking Exercise

Take a few moments to carefully consider each of the four broad schools of thought discussed above,

- Classical Management,
- Human Behavior,
- Integrated Perspectives (functional or cultural), and
- Emerging Perspectives (Postmodern or Critical),

Then choose an organization you are familiar with and describe that organization in terms of one of those four broad schools. Next, select a different school of thought and describe the organization in terms of that approach too.

In what ways do you think both different schools of thought compliment each other? How do you think they negatively affect the effectiveness of the other? Can you think of any methods to overcome those negative effects? How can your leadership benefit from this new perspective or understanding?

Finally, consider what other people think. Find at least one comment from someone else where you might be able to offer your own perspective or experience, and see if you can build on their thoughts too.

Post *YOUR* thoughts in the **Comments Below**. Open discussion helps everyone learn and grow.

Featured Image:

Newly commissioned Navy officers celebrate by throwing their Midshipmen covers into the air as part of the U.S. Naval Academy class of 2005 graduation and commissioning ceremony in Annapolis, Md., on May 27, 2005. The “hat toss” originated at the Naval Academy in 1912 and has become a symbolic and visual end to the four-year program. President George W. Bush delivered the commencement address and personally greeted each of the 976 graduates during the ceremony. The men and women of the graduating class were sworn into the Navy as ensigns or into the Marine Corps as 2nd lieutenants. DoD photo by: Petty Officer 1st Class Kevin H. Tierney, U.S. Navy. (Released)

References:

Shockley-Zalabak, P. (2012). *Fundamentals of Organizational Communication: Knowledge, Sensitivity, Skills, Values*. Eighth Edition. Allyn and Bacon, Pearson.

[1] Ref. Henri Fayol’s “Scalar Chain” (1949). – A chain of communication connecting superiors to subordinates where authority is derived directly from position within the chain, and to where communication travels up or down without skipping levels. Shockley-Zalabak, 2012, p. 73.

[2] Ref. Max Weber’s “bureaucratic authority” (1947). – The formulation of rules, regulations, and procedures that make authority “rational-legal”. Shockley-Zalabak, 2012, p. 74.

[3] Ref. Henri Fayol’s “Five Basic Activities of Management” (1949). – The five basic activities of management include planning, organizing, commanding, coordinating, and controlling. These activities are seen as an encompassment of all Fayol’s principles of administration. Shockley-Zalabak, 2012, p. 74.

Interesting note here on Fayol’s “Five Basic Activities of Management”: There is a clear distinction in the amount of time spent in these activities correlating directly to position within the chain. The higher the level of responsibility (authority), more time is spent on the first three and less time is spent on the second two. The lower the level of responsibility (authority), less time is spent on the first three and more time is spent on the second two. Now, I (the Author) can’t tell you if there is already a rule or theory in place to describe this phenomenon at the exact time of writing this, but within a bureaucratic system and environment, the observation holds true.

[4] Ref. Henri Fayol’s “gang plank” (Fayol’s Bridge) (1949). – The idea of by-passing a strict, vertical Chain-of-Command structure in favor of more horizontal communicational freedoms. Shockley-Zalabak, 2012, p. 73.

[5] Ref. Elton Mayo’s “Hawthorne Effect” (1945). – The idea that individual and group motivation and morale are directly and indirectly influenced by human interaction and presence. Shockley-Zalabak, 2012, p. 78.

[6] Ref. Douglas McGregor’s “Theory Y” (1960). – The idea that workers can be self-directed and self-controlled; and assumption to human behavior. Shockley-Zalabak, 2012, p. 78.

[7] Ref. Rensis Likert’s “Participative Management” (1961). – A management process designed around the performance of participative groups that maintain an overlapping individual membership between them, and within the confines of the larger organization. Shockley-Zalabak, 2012, p. 79. In a leadership context, a Participative Leader collects subordinates’ ideas and perspectives and integrates them into the decisions.

Fayol's Bridge Gang Plank Globalized Leadership Hawthorne Effect Leadership Leadership Development Organizational Leadership Scalar Chain Schools of Thought Theory Y

About the author



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AJ is a retired U.S. Army NCO who served in both the U.S. Navy and U.S. Army. He is a combat veteran, and has participated in contingency operations around the world. AJ is the Owner of Veteran Leadership Solutions, the Founder and Editor in Chief of The Warfighter Journal, and is a published Sociological Analyst, Researcher, Guest Lecturer, and Public Speaker. He is a graduate of Pennsylvania State University with a focus on Sociology and a science degree in Organizational Leadership, and is published in the field of sociology. AJ is an inductive analyst; public figure; researcher/writer; aviator; a certified advanced operational diver; professional instructor, trainer, mentor, and adviser; snowboarder; motorcycle rider; world traveler; he enjoys long distance endurance events, and much more.