

21512 Understanding Organisations: Theory and Practice

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Only those questions that are in principle undecidable, we can decide.”	71
Heinz Von Foerster (2007, p.293) - Von Foerster, H. 2007, Understanding understanding: Essays on cybernetics and cognition, Springer Science & Business Media, Berlin.	71
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1. Introduction

Topics

- Classic business approach to organisation — description and evaluation
- Classic theorising about why organisations take particular forms
- Limitations of, and problems arising from, the classic business approach — learning to critique through different lenses as applied to 'organisation'
- Organisation as a social construction, and the part theories play in this construction
- Managing and organising — what understanding of theory means for a manager
- Persistence and change in the context of organising

Organisational theory - Three main perspectives

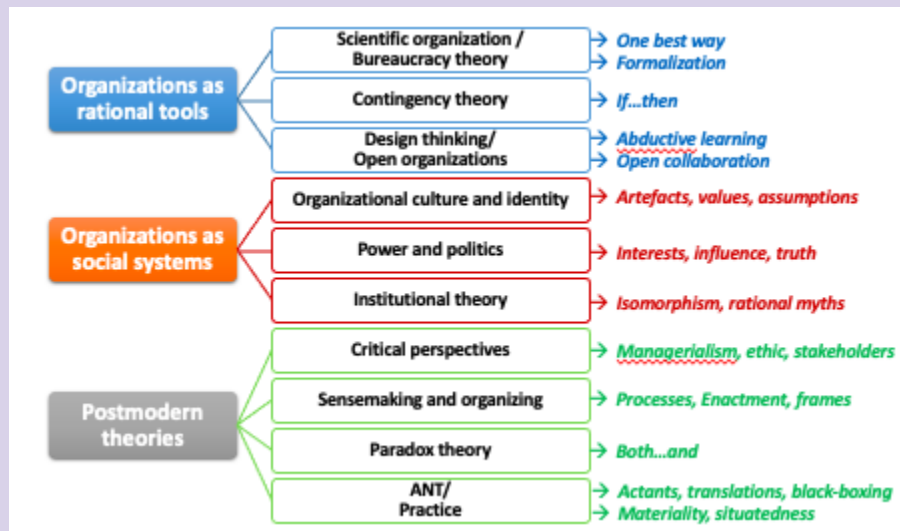
1. Org = rational tool - prescribe
2. Org = social systems - dynamics of relationships - capture dynamics
3. Org = manifestations of postmodern belief systems

Transition of paradigms

Pre-modern	Modern	Post-modern
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reality is immutable and unknowable• Superstition and myth• Social order is static	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reality can be understood through scientific inquiry• Constant progress• Technical rationality	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reality is socially constructed• Power shapes knowledge• Self-Referentiality and Performativity of language

- Pre-modern -
 - sense of awe and magic and only God knew how the world functions
 - Religion was the only attempt to make sense of reality
 - Static - hierarchies that were well defined and lack of change in position in society.
 - Challenged by enlightenment of modern
- Modern
 - Constantly progress to more accurate representations.
 - Create models of the world that allow us to predict the consequences in the world
 - Technical rationality - Technology will improve - Contingency etc based on modern understanding
 - Still quite dominant
- Post-modern
 - More than being able to be represented by logics of scientific models.
 - Constantly recreated by our thoughts and actions so we cannot perfectly apprehend reality as a social phenomenon
 - Language is instrumental - self referential - defined by itself - cyclical logic that makes it difficult to agree on fundamental principles.
 - Circular chain of references
 - Also performative - can describe but also change reality. E.g. can incite consequences wanted or unwanted.

Overview of all theories



Organizations as rational tools

- Assumption: org = rational tool - common
 - Managerial tools
 - best/suitable when dealing with predictable organisations and establishing the basic principles of management
 - Contingency - large but structured (mid 20th century)
 - Most aligned with the need of designing and improving knowledge based organisations and tech based
- Not that modern orgs don't need bureaucracy but need that amongst other thing
- Limitation: Treat people as tools - replaceable and compliant; submissive to orders
 - Does not capture the complexity that emerges when you put people together - positive and negative.

Scientific organization / Bureaucracy theory

- 1910/20s
- SO - try to define and assert the one best way to organise people towards a particular task
- BT - Is a dominant form of organization that emerged in 19th C and became dominant in 20th and 21st century
- Standardisation and formalisation of tasks - written rules to make collective and individual behaviours more predictable
- ONE MOST efficient and effective way of organising
- Social dynamics behind organisation
- Making organised behaviour - predictable.

<p><i>Contingency theory</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 1960s and dominant in 1970s ● Best way of organising based on a set of contingencies or conditions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ E.g. environment that org is operating in i.e. more predictable then formalised organisations work best (bureaucratic). More dynamic then more organic organisations. Technological advances require different types of organisations, level of interdependence of tech i.e. autonomous work does not need to be closely coordinated - rules are enough but if different groups have type of task that is sequentially interdependent then (assembly line) then in addition to rules and hierarchy need tech to coordinate; strict coordination or interdependence - durgeous - need more sophisticated forms of coordination ● Depending on the task at hand/challenges then different types of organisations can be more or less efficient - ● Tried to define these rules so org can adapt to different environments.
<p><i>Design thinking/ Open organizations</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 1980s to now ● Flat organisations dealing with wicked problems and open collaboration - no org boundaries ● Abductive learning - learning by doing and experimenting - no one best way but can constantly improve and experiment new ways and learn together ● Collaborative - not proprietary individual ● Be ahead by collaborating - enablers of learning rather than guarding IP
<p>Organizations as social systems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Assumption - org = social system <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Not just rational tools but are a group of people and tend to develop particular dynamics i.e. culture ○ Understand variety and similarities ○ Understand irrational behaviour. 	
<p><i>Organizational culture and identity</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Phenomenon developed within organisations. ● Useful to understand that it is possible to do things to adjust but cannot fully change <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ E.g. orgs that become too competitive or very individualistic and not sufficiently involved in the mission of the organisation. ○ Can become embedded in expressions of values etc. deeply seated tacit assumptions; ways of understanding the organisation
<p><i>Power and politics</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Orgs tend to require the use of power but are arenas for organisational politics and diff expressions of power ● Emerges in relationships ● Power has many different faces - people have different interests ● May try influence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Explicit - coercion ○ Implicit and subtle - manipulation - not discussing certain issues ● Can be embedded in structures such as hierarchy ● Take for granted that manager has duty to order and duty to obey orders ● Operates through knowledge - power establishes ways of knowing or describing things - those in power shape knowledge ● Shape and define relationships ● Multifaceted

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orgs Need power to enable collab and behaviour but also negatively affected by powerplays that emerge • Not all power may be concentrated in top management; others can resist power and exercise autonomy.
<i>Institutional theory</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orgs are expression of unwritten general norms and principles by society • Certain ways of behaving and rational myths that define what is the correct way of behaving. • E.g. Banks tend to be similar not because they want to be but because they are part of the same institution. • Number of rational unwritten rules that all banks tend to apply - may become written in regulations to protect consumers • But others are unwritten but still followed by all orgs in ths institution • Similarity • Peple managing bank etc - what they learnt is managing particular types of organisations and thus repeat behaviour. • All unis imitate each other • Make diff categories of orgs similar to each other and influence their bheaviour • Make sense of the reasons why orgs despite the availability of ideas (rational tools) can be different but similar • Culture and power - in contrast show why orgs not all are exactly the same within the same institutional field •
<p>Postmodern theories</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Account for complexity that characterises orgs 	
<i>Critical perspectives</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criticising mgmt and ways of thinking about ethics for example.
<i>Sensemaking and organizing</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orgs as constantly emerging outcome of organizing efforts - cognitive processes • Real through constant labouring of all components of org • People come together with particular ways of making sense of reality • Enacting different ways of thinking and applying different conceptual frames • Orgs are constantly emerging manifestations of particular ways of thinking talking and acting
<i>Paradox theory</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paradoxical nature of rational behaviour • Orgs are characterised by contradictions - inherent oppositions and multiple logics an drequirements of doing different things • Learning new ways but trying to be tsnadardised to be efficient. • Efficiency requires predictcability but = more rigid and less capable of learning and adapting to new conditions • Flexible and adaptable • Nee dto be able to cope - nagivate osilate between dfferent requirements

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Many paradoxes and situations● Orgs need to be both and● Help us to figure out the most effective way to maintain balance - equilibriums of requirements
<i>ANT/ Practice</i>	<p>Practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Paradoxes and processes● Bundles of practices (do and rules and instruments)● Artefacts, technologies, buildings and spaces shapes the way we do things - e.g. zoom at uni now - COVID● Does Not help to have an effective conversation <p>ANT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Network - constantly evolving network of interactions between people and things● Manipulated by our devices etc.