

MGMT20001 – Organisational Behaviour

Study Notes

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1 Organisational behaviour as a field

A night-fill crew in a supermarket, a longwall crew on a FIFO mine, a trauma team in a public emergency department, a casework team in a homelessness NGO, and a five-person product squad in a start-up are all organisations in miniature. They differ in legal form, technology and purpose. They share a problem: people think, feel and act in patterned ways that no job description fully captures, and those patterns either serve or sabotage the organisation's ends.

■ Definition

Organisational behaviour (OB) is the systematic study of how people think, feel and act *in and around* organisations, and of how the organisation in turn shapes those thoughts, feelings and acts. It draws on psychology, social psychology, sociology and, more lightly, anthropology and political science. The unit of analysis is not “the manager” in the abstract. It is behaviour at three nested levels: the individual, the group or team, and the organisation (including its structure, culture and environment).

First-year management maps the work that has to get done – planning, organising, leading, controlling. OB asks a different question: given that work, why do particular people, in particular teams, under particular structures, produce effort, silence, conflict, learning, or harm? A mine can have an excellent production plan and still have a crew that will not report a near miss. A hospital can have a quality framework and still have a ward where junior staff will not challenge a senior clinician. Those are OB problems. They are not solved by another planning cycle.

1.1 Micro, meso and macro

The *micro* half of the field concerns individuals and small groups: personality and values, perception and attribution, motivation, teams, communication, leadership, conflict and negotiation. The *macro* half concerns the organisation as a social system: power and politics, culture and climate, structure, strategy as it shapes behaviour, change, and the ethical and inclusion climate in which all of the above occur. The meso level – the team, the ward, the shift, the project – is where micro and macro meet. A hospital's culture (macro) is experienced as “how we talk on this ward at 3 am” (meso), which then shapes whether a particular nurse speaks up (micro).

■ Key concept

A case that stays at one level is usually incomplete. Individual “attitude” problems are often role-clarity or justice problems. Team “personality clashes” are often structural (dual reporting, competing KPIs, a faultline). Culture change programs that never touch incentives, hierarchy and daily talk are theatre. Diagnosis moves across levels on purpose.

The field is *contingent*. There is no one best personality, leadership style, or team design. Fit is the recurring claim: fit between person and job, leader and situation, team design and task interdependence, structure and strategy, culture and the environment the organisation actually faces. Contingency is not a licence to say “it depends” and stop. It is a requirement to name *what* it depends on, and to recommend accordingly.

1.2 Evidence rather than common sense

Much of what passes for workplace wisdom is common sense after the fact. “Birds of a feather flock together” and “opposites attract” cannot both be general laws; both can be made to fit a story. OB’s claim on a professional’s attention is that some regularities survive contact with evidence, and some popular models do not.

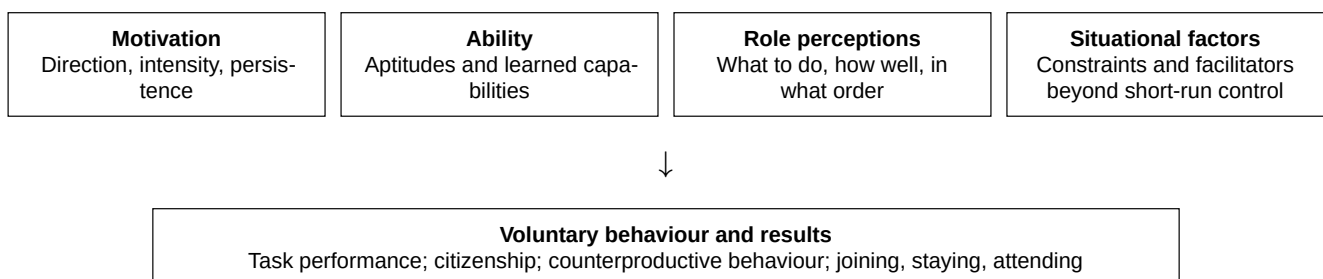
■ Key concept

Evidence-based management (Pfeffer; Rousseau) treats managerial practice as something that can be informed by the best available research, organisational data, professional judgement and stakeholder values – not by the last airport book or the last consultant’s slide. Evaluating research is itself an ILO of this subject: a named finding is not a law. Sample, design, level of analysis and boundary conditions have to be read before the finding is exported into an Australian ward, pit, store or NGO.

Classic cautions, used throughout these notes: laboratory studies with students may not travel to a night shift; single-source self-reports inflate correlations; a US professional sample is not a FIFO crew; a team-level construct (psychological safety) cannot be measured validly by asking one person; a cross-sectional survey cannot prove that “engagement causes performance” rather than the reverse. Section 13 sets out a method for evaluating a paper. The rest of the notes model that method in miniature each time a famous finding is invoked.

1.3 The MARS model of individual behaviour

McShane’s MARS model is a compact account of why a particular person, in a particular role, does or does not perform. Behaviour and results are a function of four factors, any one of which can be the constraint.



MARS. Performance is a weakest-link function: high motivation cannot compensate for an ability gap, a confused role, or a situation that makes the work impossible.

■ Definition

Motivation is the internal force that affects direction (what a person tries to do), intensity (how hard) and persistence (for how long). *Ability* is the combination of natural aptitudes and learned capabilities required for the task; competencies are bundles of those that predict superior performance. *Role perceptions* are beliefs about which tasks are required, their relative importance, and the preferred behaviours for accomplishing them. *Situational factors* are conditions beyond the person’s short-run control: time, tools, budget, staffing, physical environment, legal constraints, and the behaviour of others.

The mechanism is multiplicative in spirit, even if it is not always written as an equation. A store supervisor who is highly motivated (M) and skilled (A) but who has been given three “number-one priorities” by three different regional managers (weak R) will look unmotivated. A junior doctor who knows what to do (R) and wants to do it (M) but who is in the eighteenth hour of a shift with no registrar on the floor (S, and eventually A as fatigue destroys capability) will make errors that a trait story will misattribute. FIFO work is saturated with situational factors: isolation, roster design, contractor interfaces, heat, and statutory roles that the individual cannot redesign from the crib room.

■ Formula / method

Diagnostic sequence for a performance problem: (1) specify the behaviour or result that is missing; (2) test M, A, R and S as rival constraints, with evidence, not with a favourite story; (3) intervene on the actual constraint; (4) re-measure. Do not start with “they don’t care.” That is a motivation hypothesis, and it is the most socially convenient one.

1.4 Five types of workplace behaviour

OB does not treat “performance” as a single number. Five overlapping types of voluntary behaviour matter in almost every Australian workplace:

- *Task performance* – proficient, adaptive and (in some jobs) proactive execution of the role’s technical core. A charge nurse’s task performance includes triage judgement, not only courtesy.