

Moderism and postmodernism



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Organisation is a dynamic and important field of studies as it holds an entire structure of a company.

With a well structured organisation, this will help align employees' interest to work towards company's goals. An organisation will also save the company time and resources as work can be delegated among the departments based on specialisation which will allow unnecessary movements to be eliminated. Without an organisation, there will be disorder in a workplace which will eventually lead to the fall of a company. There are four different theory perspectives of organisation which are modern, symbolic-interpretative, post-modern and critical theory and each theory has a different understanding of power, control and resistance. In this essay, I will be looking at two different theoretical perspectives, modern and post-modern and discuss how each perspective's differs based on their ontology and epistemology.

Next, I will analyse and look into their understanding of power, control and resistance in organisations and lastly, I will end this essay with a conclusion on their overall views in organisations. Power, Control & Resistance Before I begin my analysis of the two different perspectives, I would first like to define what is power, control and resistance. Power plays a huge part in an organisation as it has the capacity to bring about change and influence individuals. It also holds the role of having control over people and resources such as information, decision making and politics which would affect an organisation. (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006) Both power and control plays an indispensable role as it directs people to reach organisation goals with

efficiency and effectiveness. With power and control, resistance in an organisation is unavoidable as it is a part of the organisation structure.

Criticisms and conflicts are also bound to exist as there might be different goals of the organisation and each individuals, hence, employees might resist structural constraints which will lead to more tension and politics.

(Jaffee, 2008) Modernist & Post Modernist on Ontology & Epistemology

Before being able to do a comparison between the both theories, it is essential to first understand the assumptions of each perspective and I would begin by comparing their ontology and epistemology. In terms of ontology, modernist take an objectivist stand that that reality is objective and independent of those that live in it. In other words, it can also be considered as an interpretative approach as they define and perceive what is “ real” based on their own assumptions and beliefs through senses experiences from an organisation life as they believe that what they see or hear is the fact.

(Burrell & Morgan, 1979) Whereas, the post modernist argues against the modernist’s perception as they define what is “ real” by facts. They also believe that each individual has different experience and there are no accurate facts in this world. In other words, they also form a kind of anti-ontology. (Hammerstedt & Loughin, 2009) In terms of epistemology, modernist believes that they can gain knowledge of organisations from scientific experiments, of which, data is pitted against external reality to test their accuracy.

They believe that this method can be used as a basis to provide factual explanations on how an organisation functions. Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006) On the other hand, post modernist strongly rejects the modernist's notions as they believe that knowledge derived from scientific methods cannot be defined as the truth as there are no facts but only interpretations from one's own judgement and the post modernists would not relate words and concepts to reality. (Rosenau, 2002) Modernist's Perspectives From a modernist's perspective, they take on a stand that an organisation is a formal structure and strongly believe in efficiency and effectiveness to reach organisation goals which resulted in a mindset that is extremely profit driven. They view an organisation as being a " machine" where it is all about productivity and results and also focus on how to maintain power within organisations through the various mechanisms of control. As such, they believe that organisations should be designed to achieve definable goals to develop competencies to meet up with external and internal pressures from the environment. (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006) Bureaucracy Theory This is the reason to why the modernist adopted Max Weber's theory of bureaucracy.

According to Weber, power creates a form of obedience through force or the threat of force which induces individuals to adhere to regulations. Thus, authority and power must be executed by the superiors in an organisation and it has to be readily accepted and unquestioned by individuals. This led to how modernist views power in a traditional way whereby power is based on a vertical hierarchical structure in a top-down flow of power and holds a formalisation structure whereby one has to constantly report to their superior. (Skyttner 2005) Modernist views resistance as an interference and

disturbance to an organisation and deem it as unnecessary. This is the reason to why the modernist chose to follow a top-down line of authority based on a hierarchical channel as by doing so, people in an organisation would have to report to the level above them accordingly to prevent uncertainties.

They have the mindset that authoritative power has the ability to influence an individual which would ensure efficiency and order in an organisation. However, due to the different channels in an organisation, there are also bound to be differentiation such as different interests of each individual which might lead to resistance in an organisation. (Jaffee, 2008) Despite these contradictions, the modernist still chooses to hold on to their stand that power must be exercised from the higher authority in order to minimise resistance and to deal with any unwanted behaviours. Scientific Management Having said that, it is important to understand that power and control is co-relational, as such, they believe that control should also be passed down from the upper hierarchy who possesses the most power as they hold more knowledge due to either specialisation in a particular field or past experiences as mentioned in the earlier part of the ontology.

(Simon, 1997) In other words, it can also be said the modernist follows their concept of control closely to the scientific management strategies and that modernist “sees” that power and control comes from de-skilling and the division of labour based on Taylor’s philosophies of scientific management. (Jaffee, 2008) As mentioned earlier on, modernist places the organisation’s interest before anything else, therefore, it can be argued that they adopted the scientific approach of division of labour for various reasons. One of the

reasons would be to save cost as power will be centralised at one area which also means that there is less control for other individuals and the company is not obligated to pay them at high rates. Another reason is to minimize resistance as staff would have to constantly report to their superiors due to the division of labour which argues back to the point on the bureaucracy theory to overcome resistance.

To add on, modernist has also adopted Taylor's "de-skilling" and they believe that by taking thinking out of the process, production rate and efficiency will increase and company will reduce labour cost at the same time which meets the organisation's objective. (Taylor, 1923) This argument can be also be supported by the different modernism control theories such as the clan control theory, market theory, agency theory and bureaucratic theory. Though each of the theories has different approaches towards control, the outcomes for all are similar in a sense that it aims to align individual's interests to the organisation's goals. (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006) Another theory that Taylor came up with was the "differential piece pay rate system".

By having this system implemented in the modernist's organisation, workers would be motivated to work harder and the more they produce for the company, the higher they get paid, thus, reducing resistance in the organisation as workers will now be satisfied. Taylor, 1923) Post Modernist's Perspectives The post modernist holds an entire different perspective from the modernist in terms of power, control and resistance and they are extremely sceptical and have several criticisms over the way organisation is managed under the modernism theories. From a post modernist's

perspective, they take on a subjectivist stand and believe that power cannot be reduced to a single-dimension as it is multi-dimensional which embraces social, political and the organisational world. As such, the post modernists base their structure of organisation on a horizontal level of hierarchy. (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006) This means that they perceive power to be relational based on a social relationship and employees are able to voice out their opinions and have a say in the organisation unlike the practices in modernism.

With regards to power and control, they believe that power should not be seen as a single power dominating people and does not agree with the modernist that knowledge over others or specialisation should give them the entity to make decisions in an organisation. The reason to why they view power in a different direction is because they feel that the approach taken by modernism is overly rigid and strict. Instead, they choose to build their system based on flexibility whereby there is no fixed “ truths” or fixed methods of working. (Jackson, 2000) They believe that anything can happen anytime and one should not make a permanent ontology and epistemology as mentioned earlier on. Disciplinary Power & Self Surveillance This is why the post modernist holds the concept of disciplinary power which was came up by Michael Foucault, a French philosopher. They believe that by having disciplinary power, in other words, allowing individuals to work in teams and monitor their own performance without being constantly controlled and instigated, employees in the organisation will learn to become more docile and self-discipline.

The post modernist also understands the idea of how self management and self surveillance will eventually led to self motivation as individuals will have

the mindset to work harder, make sure their work is of quality and to complete the given task on time. This is a useful method for control to ensure goal directed behaviour in every employee in the organisation so as to achieve its main objective. Hence, it can be argued that the post modernist believes that with disciplinary power, it will eventually lead to self control in individuals. In the post modernist's views, power and resistance is inter-related and resistance is bound to occur. However, instead of trying to avoid it, the post modernist believes that resistance can be useful to a certain extent. As mentioned earlier, organisations in a post modernist's perspective are based mostly on social integration and individuals are given the responsibility to make their own decisions.

They are also given great trust to control and monitor their own performance whereby a formal authority and punishment would cease to exist. Thus, should there be any resistance, this would drive them to solve the conflict by evaluating themselves and to also get them actively involved with problem solving to work on their own behaviour and performance. (Jaffee, 2008)

Conclusion In this essay, I have attempted to show how power, control and resistance are viewed by the two different perspectives of modernism and post modernism. Each perspective approaches the concept of power differently and as such, represents a unique way in which people can use power to control resistance within organizations. Modernist's perspectives tend to rely upon formal organizational structures and positions within those structures as ways of acquiring and using power.

In this perspective, power is often exercised through authority for the purposes of productivity and they are often defined as rationality. Whereas,

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the post modernist's perspective tend to view power as a equal source of level in organisation which can lead to irrationality and they believe that power can be have both a positive and negative effect in an organisation.