

Modern symbolic  
interpretive and  
postmodern  
perspectives  
commerce essay



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In what ways does the use of a multiple perspective approach assist us in achieving a more comprehensive understanding of complex organisational phenomena?

Discuss with specific reference to modern, symbolic-interpretive and postmodern perspectives and how each perspective provides different ways to think about organisational phenomena (e. g. organisational structure, physical structure, culture and/or power within organisations).

An organisation will usually start off as a small operating business with a few staff working towards the same goal and perhaps sharing the same interest. What draws them together in the first place was the commonality of interest or purpose. As a small operation organisation, it allows staff to communicate to each other more frequently as it lacks the complexity of a big operation organisation. Which will also means that they will work towards the common goal as it has a higher degree of pf centralization of authority. When the company become more successful over time, they will expand and need more staff. When they recruit, these new staffs are from all walks of life with different demographic. These newly joined employees might not share the common interest or understand the goal. This might lead to crisis as there might be in-fighting among the various departments within the organisation, profit may fall and the initial spirit of the organisation will disappear when the founder or pioneer group of staff leave. As such, a mechanism, cultural is required to guide the staff towards a common path.

Culture exists in all organisations even though some may be fragmented or difficult for outsider to see. Culture is the values, norms, beliefs and

assumption embraced by the employees. Culture is important because it pervades and influences all activities in an organisation. Culture is something that is shared among the employees. It embedded in the employee, affecting all that they do or think. This provides them with a common viewpoint and binds them together as a group. (Howard W. Oden, 1999) Schein believes that the core of basic assumption will give people its values and behaviour norms who will in turn make choices base on it and eventually coming up with artifacts. The following diagram base on Schein's Levels of Organisation Level will explain more (Mary Jo Hatch, 2006)

Level 1

Artifacts

Visible Organisational Features (Eg Company names, uniform or brand images)

Level 2

Values

Non-visible facets of organisational culture (Norms and beliefs)

Level 3

Basic Assumption (Core)

Largely unconscious and tacit frames that shape values and artifacts formed through and out of particular social relationships. (Truth or what they believe is reality)

## Figure 1 Schein's three levels of culture

Sub-culture within organisation are just as important as it allows the employees to identify themselves as a distinct group within the organisation. The sub-culture will be formed based on the organisation core culture and value. This enables them to move towards the same direction and have a better understanding of their task within the organisation.

Modernism perspective mentions that organisations are objectively real entities operating in a real world. They are well-designed and managed systems of decision and action driven by norms of rationality, efficiency, and effectiveness for stated purpose (Hatch and Cunliffe 2006). Modernists believe that cultures are real and they help to shape an identity of the company. Modernists believe in using proven theory. With a strong culture, the company can achieve a better result by improving organisation efficiency and effectiveness therefore achieving better results. However, a culture might also constrain the company's progression. A Japanese company culture believes in respecting seniority. As such, staff are evaluated based on their year of service in the company over their performances. This does not encourage staff to work hard, which will in turn affect the efficiency of the organisation.

Using Botak Jones, a western food outlet as an example. It has its own cultures. The employees will wear uniform which is casual, jeans with the company t-shirt. Its slogan "Damn good food at a damn good price" might seem offensive in the context of Singapore culture, but it's actually a very common way of speech between the westerners.

Studies and research had been conducted to ascertain the link between strong culture and high performance within an organisation. American researchers John Kotter, James Hestter and Dan Denison adopted a quantitative modernist approach by conducted a survey with 200 corporations to investigate of cultural strength on organisational performance (Hatch and Cunliffe 2006). The result was there is a positive correlation between the strength of corporate culture and organisation performance. They also realise that by aligning these with the changing environment, it allows them to react faster to the changes. As such, modernist believes that if we can understand organisation culture, management can use that knowledge to achieve certain outcome such as improving efficiency and effectiveness.

Symbolic Interpretive researcher believes that cultures are real but they focus in find out the meaning behind the culture instead. They believe that the organisation is like a theatre and the employees each have a role to play while the world is the stage. The employee's role not only performs to external customer, but internally as well. A company success will base on how well the employee understands its role and how good they play it.

Other than physical labour, there are also additional criteria required from the employee which was defined as 'emotional labours' by Hochschild. This requires the employees to suppress his/her feeling to portray certain image or expectation for others. The similarity between the emotional labour and physical labour is that the employee might become alienated from an aspect of themselves - either a part of the body or the margins of the soul that is use for the work.

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Using Singapore Casket as an example, the employees do not show their feelings as it is inappropriate for the business. They cannot smile or laugh despite how happy they are feeling. They could only show a solemn face when facing customer. On the other hand, air stewardess can only show a friendly and cheerful image. They are supposed to make customer feel welcome. They cannot throw their temper or show unhappiness during the course of work no matter how demanding or unreasonable the customer is. And for both cases, the employees will have to suppress its feeling, making them the emotional labour for its organisation.

To understand more about the organisation, researcher will participate in the organisation themselves (eg work in the organisation) instead of just doing survey. Alternatively, they can conduct observations or in depth interview. This enables them to understand the culture better and to understand the jargons or symbols used by them. The method of thick description Geertz advocated is a form of ethnography which shows how cultural members interpret the symbols and its context. (Mary Jo Hatch, 2006) This helps to understand the culture better as the culture from one organisation will not mean the same at another organisation. By understanding the culture meaning, they are able to communicate with others more effectively as they know that each of them are just fulfilling their roles and it is nothing personnel. This knowledge also enable the organisation to better plan its training for each role player as well as better control over them.

As the study of modernist culture provides knowledge that is already translated into prescriptions for management, they are restricted by the objective of the study dimension which is defined by the researcher (Hatch <https://assignbuster.com/modern-symbolic-interpretive-and-postmodern-perspectives-commerce-essay/>)

and Cunliffe 2006). As such, symbolic interpretative researcher has a benefit over the modernist researchers as they enter cultural territory and is able to relate better.

Postmodernist are sceptical and challenges the idea that organisation have a culture. They think that culture are unreal, it's a dream, an illusion and created in the mind of the employees. Post modernist feel that the cultures are created by people so that they can exert power over others. This is use as a tool to contest power or power struggle. This is like a soap opera whereby there are no fixed rules but constant changes in the organisation. They do not focus on culture but the way power and control is exerted thru narrative.

When a new management took over, they will change the vision statement or goals or set certain rules or regulation. This is to exhibit their powers and to marginalise other voices. This changes does not necessary communicate ideas, train them or even increases effectiveness or efficiency. These changes are just to find out who its supporters are and who isn't. This allows the management to identify power struggles, fragmentation, points of instability and dissatisfaction within the organisation. This also helps to marginalised employees and uncover multiple and competing interpretations.

IBM for instances, had a very strong culture however it isn't just one aspect of the game; it is the game. In the end, the organization is nothing more than the collective capacity of its people to create value. (Louis V. Gerstner, Jr, 2002) This culture prevents the organisation from processing and keeping up

with the current environment situation. Through deconstruction, changes were made and new cultures were introduced. This made IBM return from near-collapse to market leaders.

Traditional organisation values will be challenged by postmodern values if they are influenced by economic, social and political values of today's workforce (Green, 2007)

Though there are 3 different perspectives that organisations can use to understand the culture, each perspective varies from another. There is no specific perspective that is more useful than the other. It will need to depend on the organisation's situation as well as the external environment to decide which perspective will be more appropriate.