Managerial and organizational behavior – office space essay sample

Business, Management

There are four major influences that can impact an organization's structure. With the movie Office Space as an example, the way employees handle change, paradigms, power, and politics will be analyzed. Theories will be cited of what techniques can be initiated to ensure effective organizational management and behavior. Office Space is a great example of irrational management and bizarre human behavior. The executives at the fictitious company in the movie, Initech, do not demonstrate successful managerial organizational skills. Great respect is paid to the impact that organizational change can encompass.

Managerial and Organizational BehaviorOffice Space: A Case StudyOrganizational behavior can be defined as " individual behavior and group dynamics in organizations" (Nelson, Quick, 2006, p. 4). Its study is predominantly composed of the psychosocial, interpersonal, and behavioral dynamics in organizations. Additionally, there are organizational variables that affect human behavior at work. These are also relevant to the study of organizational behavior (Nelson, Quick, 2006). Office Space is a comedy that ridicules work life at a typical software company, Initech. The focus is on a handful of individuals who are fed up with their jobs and the excessive management. The film sympathetically portrays ordinary IT workers, but it also addresses themes familiar to office workers and employees in general. " Organizations have often been described as clockworks in which human behavior is logical and rational, but they often seem like snake pits to those who work in them" (Nelson, Quick, 2006, p. 4).

Office Space is a comical, theatrical version of bizarre and irrational management and human behavior. Soon after the movie begins, two consultants, nicknamed The Bobs since they both have the same first name, are brought in to Initech to help with cutting expenses. The workers at Initech are then interviewed in order to determine which employees will be downsized or outsourced. When word gets out that they are coming, the employees start to wonder who will be the first to go.

Peter Gibbons is a software engineer who spends his days updating bank software to remedy the then-expected Y2K disaster. His co-workers include Samir Nayanajaad, who complains that no one in the US can pronounce his name correctly; Michael Bolton, who is angry that he shares his name with the real-life pop singer whom he hates; and Milton Waddams, a soft-spoken, fixated collator who mumbles to himself incessantly-most notably about his co-workers borrowing his stapler-and is repeatedly harassed by management, especially the callous vice president Bill Lumbergh. Lumbergh is Peter's nemesis – a stereotypical corporate middle-manager who spends most of his time wandering the office with a coffee mug in hand, wearing white-collared shirts, suspenders and a belt, and emotionlessly micromanages his employees while engaging them with trivial small talk.

Peter finds himself stressed, burned out, and ineffective. He feels that he will likely be first on the Bobs' downsizing list. Fortunately for him, something unusual happens during an occupational hypnotherapy session urged upon him by his soon-to-be ex-girlfriend Anne. The obese therapist suddenly dies

of a heart attack before he can snap, or unhypnotize, Peter out of a state of complete relaxation. The newly relaxed and still half-hypnotized Peter announces that he will not work anymore. He will instead pursue his lifelong dream of doing nothing, and finally ask out Joanna, a waitress he's long wanted to date. During his interview with the Bobs, Peter unconditionally speaks his mind about the absurdity of his job and of how Initech is run. The Bobs interpret Peter's candor, easy-going attitude, and lack of regard for his job, as evidence that he is unmotivated in his current position and thus a prime candidate for a managerial position. Much to his surprise, and Lumbergh's dismay, Peter receives a promotion while his friends Samir and Michael, two of the department's best employees, are scheduled to be fired.

There are many factors that influence the work behavior in Office Space. Many of these attributes are present in non-fictional organizations as well. The way we handle change, paradigms, power, and political behavior, will all affect the way a department or company will run. I feel the way we react to change is the biggest issue. Change occurs every day, at work and at home; although, sometimes we are not conscious of it. Sometimes it is not significant enough to make a drastic impact.

Managing ChangeOrganizations are changing nearly daily. It has become the standard in most organizations (Nelson, Quick, 2006). The presence of continuous change appears to be the only constant in organizational life today. One area that continues its transformation of organizations is the design itself. The way in which companies are configured today is changing (Buhler, 2000). Change can be as dramatic as downsizing or a merger, or it

can be as minute as hiring more staff. Either way, it still has an impact on employees.

" The contingency approach to the structure of current organizations suggests there is no ' one best' structure appropriate for every organization" (Buhler, 2000, p. 15). Rather, this approach contends the best structure for an organization fits its needs for the situation at the time. The best structure for an organization may change over time-as the " situation within which the company operates changes and the environment changes" (Buhler, 2000, p. 15). The key is to structure firms such that the level of responsiveness is improved and organizations are able to reduce some of the uncertainty in the environments (Buhler, 2000). Nelson and Quick describe this as unplanned change where change is often unforeseen (2006). Regulatory government changes and economical changes are often unplanned. The responsiveness to unplanned change " requires tremendous flexibility and adaptability on the part of the organization" (Nelson, Quick, 2006, p. 600).

Today's organizations are viewed as open systems. Buhler describes this as firms that " fuel the transformation process by obtaining inputs from their environment and then the output of the transformation process must be absorbed into the firm's environment" (2000, p. 15). This suggests the organization must continually focus on the external environment. The design of the organization must also take into account the need to adapt to this environment and to be flexible. The organization and its stakeholders are linked closer to the external environment than ever before (Buhler, 2000).

Change can be a struggle for many people. Whenever a new way is suggested for doing something, someone is always skeptical. This type of resistance can make it easy to give up on change. Current trends of teambuilding require managers to deal with even more differences of opinion (Preston, 1999). " The pursuit of organizational effectiveness through downsizing, cycle-time reduction, and other efforts" becomes top priority (Nelson, Quick, 2006, p. 600). All members become affected when organizations are in a state of tremendous turmoil and transition. Downsizing can increase shareholder value better aligning costs with revenues, and this is what is stated in Office Space (Nelson, Quick, 2006).

The executives at Initech bring in consultants to do a little reorganizing of the company's structure. Some people get laid off, and some get moved into other positions. It is actually stated that two of the best software people will be replaced with entry level graduates " so Bill Lumbergh's stock will go up a quarter of a point" (Rappaport, 1999). Nelson and Quick state employee layoffs can be accompanied by increases in CEO pay and stock options (2006). Furthermore, Initech, if a real corporation, could suffer public criticism for this (Nelson, Quick, 2006). As Michael and Samir were going to be affected by a layoff, they embarked on an embezzling scheme.

My department is going to be undergoing a lot of changes in the next month or so. We are losing a senior manager, and we already terminated a manager two months ago. Considering the extensive experience the senior manager holds, it is going to be extremely difficult to replace her. We have only had two applicants in the last month, and neither are them were made

an offer. But neither of them had any experience in international tax. However, we just had another applicant come in recently, and she has quite a bit of experience. International tax takes a very long time to understand what is going on. I was informed that the most recent applicant will be made an offer. Though, when and if she accepts the position, many things will change. Her management style will probably be different than what we are used to. But she may bring some valuable knowledge to the organization that can help us all perform our job duties better.

The organizational Aikido described in " Organizational Aikido: Implementing Change Without a Fight" provides several strategies and tactics to help deal with resistance in a way that allows efforts to be focused on growing a business (Preston, 1999). Aikido is a Japanese martial art; " the way of harmony with the energy of those around you" (Preston, 1999, P. 22). The Aikido principles are designed to serve ones interest by putting him or her in control. There are always people in organizations that do not want to change (Preston, 1999). In Office Space, Peter refuses to put in extra effort to make his bosses' stock rise. Furthermore, he has a vast distaste for all his bosses. This is representative of the people opposed to change in Preston's article (1999). These types of troublemakers must be prevented from sabotaging the evolution of an organization (Preston, 1999). Sabotaging the company is exactly what he accomplished when he embezzled over $300, 000. Preston describes three Aikido principles that have proven effective in stopping physical attackers and to neutralize troublemakers (Preston, 1999).

The first Aikido principle is called " whoever fights, loses" (Preston, 1999, p. 22). Preston (1999) describes one situation: At a department meeting, the sales manager presents a plan to automate field sales. When she is challenged by two veteran salesmen who are unfamiliar with computers and resistant to change, she criticizes their performance and their lack of support for the team. An argument ensues, the agenda is abandoned, and the plan is not implemented; the meeting fails to meet its objective. (p. 22)Change can provide a wonderful opportunity to reconsider the ways in which we deal with the people around us. We all know how computers can help us today. However, to the two men who were unfamiliar to them, it was a bad situation. Nelson and Quick state that technological advances are another force for change in organizations (2006). The secret of Aikido and organizational success is harmony. Harmony does not mean that everyone has to agree all of time. However, it does mean that disagreement and change have their place.

They take place within the context of a shared mission and professional respect. If two Aikido practitioners are in the same room, they will not fight. When an individual decides to fight or become antagonistic, he or she breaks the harmony of the organization and expends his or her energy. When you fight, you provide a barrier for an eager antagonist to push against. Instead, find something on which you can agree, and build a bond. Then use that bond as a lever to persuade your would-be opponent to join you. " You conserve your energy, and you gain consensus-specifically, the understanding, approval and participation of your opponent-in the process"

(Preston, 1999, p. 22). I feel that Initech should try to achieve harmony within the organization. There is so much built up anger and hatred towards different people that only a few get along with each other.

The Aikido approach in this situation is very simple. When the salesmen object to the new automated system, the manager should listen attentively. She must not take the comments personally. Recognizing the time and effort that learning the new system will entail, she should use the staff's comments to support the value of appropriate training and performance evaluations in the process. This ensures that the plan goes forward, and the meeting has achieved its objective (Preston, 1999).

The second Aikido principle is called " when pushed, pull" (Preston, 1999, p. 22). Imagine two brothers who work together and must decide the future of their business. They disagree, and the older brother accuses the younger brother of being selfish. Afraid of losing face in the view of their family or their employees, the brothers become fixed in their positions, never come to an agreement, and ultimately destroy the business. We must resist the impulse to respond right away when someone disagrees with us (Preston, 1999). According to Nelson and Quick, " when work groups have different goals, these goals may be incompatible" (2006, p. 424). They further state that these types of conflicts often occur because individuals are not aware of the other person's goals or objectives (2006).

There are several ways to argue, but the key is to be constructive. Preston states that " you can fight fire with fire, gasoline or water" (1999, p. 23). You

want to choose the right approach to coincide with your goal. If you fight fire with fire, than you are establishing that you are a person who won't back down. This is useful if you need to save face. Fighting fire with gasoline, however, establishes you as a motivator. This is useful if you need to whisk someone into action. For the purpose of " diffusing conflict and removing ego-based distractions in the change process, there is nothing like water" (Preston, 1999, p. 23).

Identifying and acknowledging the value of feedback is optimal when someone attempts to undermine you at a meeting. Now that you know where the person stands, wither that he doesn't understand your proposal or that he doesn't support it, you can develop an approach to deal with him. Peter begins to fight fire with fire from the moment he leaves the hypnotist. He aggressively pursues the waitress that he has liked for some time. He also seems to do his own thing in regard to his job duties. He plays Tetris on his computer when he is supposed to be working, and he disregards any and all comments and assignments from his bosses.

Preston (1999) describes the following Aikido approach to the situation with the two brothers: After asking some questions and listening to the answers, the older brother realizes that the company is not the issues: his younger brother really wants to establish himself as a decision maker in the family and the business. So, without giving in on this particular issue, the older brother acknowledges the value of the younger brothers input, and actively involves his younger brother in the implementation of the new policy. (p. 23)The final Aikido principle is called " words without practice have little

meaning" (Preston, 1999, p. 23). Imagine the CEO of a start-up technology firm. He decides to reposition the product and target network providers. So he calls a meeting and tells the staff what to do. As nothing changes, the CEO is baffled. He assumed that a start-up firm would adapt easily to change (Preston, 1999). The CEO's unplanned change requires tremendous flexibility and adaptability (Nelson, Quick, 2006).

If we don't understand the importance of the change, than we will not change. TheAikido approach to this situation is a little more complex. The CEO needs to communicate his message effectively in order for his people to get the message. He must also write a description of the plan with visuals. This is in addition to the meeting. The staff should be challenged with a short-term goal, and they must be encouraged to try their own methods to meet it (Preston, 1999). All of the Aikido approaches described by Preston can be modified for any organization. Initech should utilize these to create harmony in their organization.

ParadigmsParadigms are models that help one understand how things are, or at least how one perceives things to be. Paradigms help define ones individual way of thinking and ones actions. Everyone functions with a set of paradigms; some we are aware of and others are operated at a subconscious level. Ones paradigms are influenced by many factors including upbringing, education, and job and life experiences (Gasaway, 2005). Paradigms come into play when we judge people and/or things just based upon appearances. When we see a person walking down the street in black from head to toe with black nail polish and black lipstick wearing lots of long chains we

typically stereo-type them as a certain type of person. This can be a result of the way we were raised or our personal experience (Gasaway, 2005).

The paradigms that we hold as individuals and organizations have a significant influence on how we receive things. We must be open minded to new ideas, new information, and new knowledge in order to learn and grow. The environment we create and support will significantly influence our personal success and the success of our organization(s). However, many people are conditioned at a young age to abide by all the rules, to sit quietly until spoken to, and to always color within the lines. This is what " creates paradigms – models of behavior that are considered then to be normal" (Gasaway, 2005).

Paradigms can have a negative effect on your thinking. Gasaway uses an exercise with students to display the powerful force that paradigms have on thinking. He instructs the students to put nine dots on a piece of paper in a particular pattern. Four straight lines are to be drawn to connect all the dots without lifting the pencil off the paper. This is one of those brain busters you see in the back of a random magazine. It sounds simple, and it looks simple, but you just can't figure it out. This is because we are all bound by the limitations of our own paradigms. There is something in the mind that prevents you to be open minded enough to see the (simple) solution. When paradigms are applied to the large organizations we work in, the challenge is immense. It is difficult to break through the normal ways of thinking to find new and creative solutions to problems. When an entire organization thinks the same way, it's difficult to think outside the box (Gasaway, 2005).

Bill Lumbergh is faced with his own paradigms. He doesn't think there is anything odd in his behavior or his monotone voice. His paradigms are probably at the subconscious level so that what he sees and hears is considered normal to him. Furthermore, managers like this organizations could have been raised in an environment where there parent(s) always questioned everything they did and only communicated what was done wrong – never what was done right. Peter Gibbons also has his own way of looking at things. He views any kind of work to be meaningless, and he relates an office environment as sitting in an enclosed cubical filling out useless paperwork (Rappaport, 1999). Nelson and Quick state that you must take charge of your professional career with an intentional and purposeful commitment in order to manage a new career paradigm (2006).

PowerThere are many forms of power that individuals can use in their work settings. Some are used in interactions with others and are classified as interpersonal. " One of the earliest and most influential theories of power comes from French and Raven, who tried to determine the sources of power managers use to influence other people" (Nelson, Quick, 2006, p. 356). There are five forms of interpersonal power that French and Raven identified that managers use. They are coercive, expert, reward, legitimate, and referent power.

Coercive power can be profound in some organizations. Coercive power is based on a manager's ability to cause an intolerable experience for an employee (Nelson, Quick, 2006). Bill Lumbergh employs this power towards Milton throughout the film. He asks him to move his desk three times

throughout the movie, and finally making him work from the roach infested basement. Furthermore, Bill keeps taking Milton's stapler that he loves.

The knowledge and skill that someone else requires is known as expert power (French, Raven, 1960). Michael illustrates expert power by acting as the agent who has the specialized knowledge that is needed to create a virus, while Peter acts at the target needed to install the software that the virus is on. However, three conditions must be in place for expert power to work. The target must trust that the expertise from the agent is accurate. The knowledge involved must be applicable to the target. Finally, the target's perception of the agents' expertise is crucial (Nelson, Quick, 2006). Although Michael's knowledge on the virus was immense, his precision was off when he put a decimal in the wrong place which resulted in the virus to deposit large sums of money to the account.

The ability to give other people the things they want is known as reward power (Nelson, Quick, 2006). However, [managers] will ask for things to be done in exchange (French, Raven, 1960). If the employee sees a clear link between performance and rewards, than reward power can lead to enhanced performance (Nelson, Quick, 2006). This type of power is not demonstrated in Office Space. There are never any rewards being offered for the extra overtime that Peter is asked to perform, except for the possible increase in Lumbergh's stock. But that has no effect on Peter as he does not have any stock options in the company.

Legitimate power is based on position and mutual agreement. It is similar to authority. Employees must believe that managers have the authority to tell them what to do in order for legitimate power to be effective (Nelson, Quick, 2006). This is often the case with kings, policemen and managers (French, Raven, 1960). Although Bill Lumbergh is in a management role at Initech, there is no mutual agreement. Since the employees do not respect him, they do not feel that he has the right to tell them what to do.

Referent power is based on interpersonal attraction (Nelson, Quick, 2006). It is the power of charisma from another person liking you or wanting to be like you. This type of power is wielded by celebrities and social leaders (French, Raven 1960). There is no superiority required for referent power (Nelson, Quick, 2006). Since no one particularly likes Lumbergh, he does not possess referent power.

The biggest challenge on organizations is the effectiveness of power. Coercive power is of three of the most used types of power. Although legitimate and reward power are among the most widely used by managers, Lumbergh employs coercive power the most throughout the movie. These power bases come naturally to managers when they accept a supervisory role.

Political BehaviorThe same issues that cause problems in government-selfishness, greed, bickering, lust for power-can creep into an organization and interfere with productivity. The political process is unfavorable to real, beneficial progress. You must keep a sharp eye out for such political

problems in your people and in yourself (Sujansky, 2007). " Failures to understand power and politics can be costly in terms of your career" (Nelson, Quick, 2006, p. 356). Unfortunately, there is no cure for the politically hampered organization; humans are humans. The best bet is to become a Vibrant Entrepreneurial Organization, or VEO. This is a culture in which politics can't take hold and thrive. They are comprised of people who feel that elusive sense of ownership that drives them to innovate constantly, execute relentlessly, and work with passion to stay ahead of the competition (Sujansky, 2007).

There are nine warning signs of an overly political organization. To become a VEO, the warning signs must be recognized. Once the symptoms are acknowledged, they must be corrected (Sujansky, 2007).

The first of the nine is when people are loaded with paperwork, red tape, and oppressive rules, their work progress is impeded. This type of bureaucracy can be remedied by clarifying the decisions individuals can make on their own, those that they need to get input on, and those that they need to defer to others. Laziness and clockwatching is when people just put in their time and go home. If managers take a personal interest in these employees and share their enthusiasm with them, their motivation will like rise. Oftentimes when employees have problems with their coworkers, they complain to supervisors and/or talk to other coworkers behind their backs. This indirect communication often thrives in closed-door environments.

Corruption is also apparent in many organizations, although we rarely hear all the details. Employees embezzle, fudge reports, and engage in other unethical or illegal behavior more often than we here (Sujansky, 2007). The problem is that the employee usually quits before he or she is caught. In a recent study by Francesca Gino and Max Bazerman " Ethical misconduct is frequently so insidious that it escapes notice until the damage is done" (Pomeroy, 2007). The other symptoms include gridlock, brown-nosing, the two-faced two-step, passing the buck, and pork-barreling (Sujansky, 2007).

Initech is representative of a political organization, and I have found that many corporate organizations are also guilty of this type of atmosphere. Peter Gibbons' character in Office Space is criticized on miniscule tasks. Three of his eight bosses bring to his attention that he used an incorrect cover sheet on a TPS report. The issue was raised in such a way that it was a vital issue. Organizational politics is the application of power and influence in businesses. Organizational conditions such as unclear goals and ambiguous lines of authority can actually encourage political activity (Nelson, Quick, 2006). Initech portrays this type of organization.

Laziness and low work ethic is another issue raised in the movie. Peter and his fellow colleagues come to realize that the managers do not appreciate what they do. Peter starts his day at the normal starting time and procrastinates throughout the day. He is never approached with challenging yet realistic goals related to his interest and skills. If he was provided with ongoing feedback on what he does well, as opposed to nit picky remarks

when he messes up, he may be more incline to take his job more seriously (Sujansky, 2007).

Indirect communication is heavy at Initech. When consultants are brought in to evaluate the company's performance, rumors start flying about who will be laid off first. The employees are never really told that the consultants are there to downsize. They are only told they will be " making sure things go a little more smoothly" (Rappaport, 1999). Companies can be very secretive about the goings on, especially when it comes to promotions and job transfers. Managers should be up front with all employees; it eliminates the rumor mill and gossip train. At Initech, the consultants are actually hired to "…do a little (finger quotes) housecleaning with some of the software people" (Rappaport, 1999).

Finally, corruption is the last of the nine symptoms of a political organization that is revealed at Initech. Throughout the movie, Milton Waddams threatens to burn down the building several times because his desk keeps getting moved and his stapler gets taken away. He is strangely fond of his red Swingline stapler. Also, Peter, Samir and Michael engage in an embezzling scheme. They decide to infect the accounting system with a computer virus, which will round down fractions of a cent from accrual of interest and transfer the leftovers into their own account. However, the plan backfires when a bug in the virus program's code causes it to take $305, 326. 13 in one day.

The problems of the three friends are solved when Milton finally snaps. Milton sets the Initech office building on fire-as he had threatened to do several times-destroying all the computers and the virus code. The interpersonal and behavioral dynamics at Initech are humorous at the least. Although fictional, there are several real companies that operate in a similar manner.

I have outlined the major aspects of organizational behavior and how it relates to the characters and plot of Office Space. The use of the theories and practices discussed can help organizations achieve a more harmonized and passive workplace. Managers at all levels, with the work of their employees, can work at improving the structure of an organization. It is sometimes hard to realize the impact that change can create. Furthermore, our own personal paradigms, power, and politics all play an important role in an organization. Initech could benefit from training in organizational behavior management. Bill Hopkins, emeritus professor of Auburn University, states that the success of an organization depends on the effectiveness of the processes. He goes on to further state that " the effectiveness of your processes depends on the behaviors of your people" and " the behaviors of your people depend on the skill of your managers" (Managers section, n. d.).

References

Buhler, P. M. (2000). Managing in the new millennium. Supervision, (15)4.

Retrieved July 26, 2007, from MasterFILE Premier database.

French, J. P. R. Jr., and Raven, B. (1960). The bases of social power. In D. Cartwright and A.

Zander (eds.), Group dynamics (p. 604-623). New York: Harper and row.

Gasaway, Richard B. (2005). The influence of paradigms. Minnesota Fire Chief, (41)5.

Retrieved July 18, 2007, from MasterFILE Premier database.

Hopkins, Bill (n. d.). For Managers and Executives: Why should I use OBM? RetrievedAugust 1, 2007, from http://www. obmnetwork. com.

Nelson, D. L. and Quick, J. C. (2006). Organizational behavior: Foundations, realities &challenges (5th ed.). Mason, OH: Thomson South-WesternPomeroy, Ann (2007). Beware the ' Boiling Frog Syndrome'. HRMagizine, (52)5.

Retrieved July 20, 2007, from MasterFILE Premier database.

Preston, D. R. (1999). Organizational Aikido: Implementing change without a fight. Manage,(22)2. Retrieved July 26, 2007, from MasterFILE Premier database.

Rappaport, D. (Producer), & Judge, M. (Director). (1999). Office Space [Motionpicture]. United States: 20th Century-Fox Film Corporation.

Sujansky, Joanne G. (2007). Corporate Politics. Leadership Excellence, 24(6).

Retrieved July 19, 2007, from MasterFILE Premier database.