

Analyzing theory and research in industrial and organizational psychology



Introduction

As Industrial and Organizational Psychology isn't exactly a new branch of science, there is plenty of research and theory readily already available to future researchers. These theories span from behavioral theories, to leadership theories and beyond. Behavioral theory is most commonly applied however in Industrial and Organizational Psychology.

Theory is simply a term used to describe a set way that facts can be interpreted. Theory is meant to create a framework for observation and facts that can be applied in real settings (Rogelberg, 2017). Therefore in the area of Industrial and Organizational Psychology, the setting would be the workplace. The theories that are most relevant are theories that can be applied within organizations to explain why staff and leaders do what they do, and why specific outcomes occur (Rogelberg, 2017).

Theory plays several important roles in furthering research. First, theory provides researchers with a fresh perspective or a novel lens through which to observe empirical phenomena, allowing a better understanding and prediction of the processes and outcomes under study (Rogelberg, 2017). Second, theory has the potential to elicit interest among various academic circles and solicit further research endeavors, by turning attention to a specific set of constructs or phenomena (Rogelberg, 2017). Third, a cross-disciplinary theory may be able to serve multiple contexts, explaining empirical phenomena in potentially different settings (Rogelberg, 2017). Ultimately, theories should drive empirical research. Sound theory serves as the foundation for testing ideas as well as for developing new ones in every

field of scientific research. This is central to the unfolding process of knowledge development (Rogelberg, 2017).

This paper will cover some of the main theories that are applicable to Industrial and Organizational Psychology and describe how they are applicable to specific situations. Specifically, it will outline theories that help explain existing research, and will affect future research, in the areas of work life balance and work life conflict.

Work life balance and work life conflict are two areas of Industrial and Organizational Psychology which provide a large opportunity for future research and application. Therefore as research continues to be done in this area, theories of the past will be evaluated against future findings to provide more directions, applicability and validity to results and conclusions.

The Job Characteristics Theory

Greg Oldham and Richard Hackman developed their Job Characteristics model as a build on to existing theories regarding employee motivation, the difference was that previous theories of motivation discussed human behavior in general and this model meant to specifically cover motivation factors in the workplace. The theory is based off the concept that there are five main factors to job design that will lead to increased employee motivation. These factors are:

1. Skill variety: This includes using a variety of different skills of importance to the worker;

2. Task identity: There should be a high degree of task identity, defined as including a distinct sense of a beginning and an ending, as well as high visibility of the intervening transformation process itself, the manifestation of the transformation process in the final product, and a transformation process of considerable magnitude;
3. Task significance: This characteristic is defined as involving the degree to which the job has a substantial impact on the lives or work of other people, either in the immediate organization or in the environment external to it;
4. Autonomy: Autonomy is said to be an indication of the degree to which individuals feels personally responsible for their work, and thus that they own their work outcomes;
5. Feedback: Finally the job should provide feedback on the level of accomplishment. Such feedback may be built into the task itself or it may stem from external sources (e. g., supervisors and coworkers). In any case it is the perception of feedback, just as it is the perception of variety, task identity, significance, and autonomy, which makes the difference (Hackman & Oldham, 1980).

Hackman and Oldman's model may be older, but it is still considered relevant today in Industrial and Organizational Psychology. The theory states that when these five factors are present within job design, workers will be more engaged and motivated within their jobs. Industrial and Organizational Psychology involves overseeing and evaluating Organizational Structure, of which job design is an element. This theory also proposes that behavioral outcomes are tied to job design and job satisfaction.

This theory is applicable to the area work life balance in an interesting way. The key is perception. As the concept of work life balance is also based on perception, meaning each employee may have a different threshold to achieve that balance, this theory then becomes more applicable. Several of the five factors are based on feelings of the employee. The employee should perceive they get enough feedback, and the employee should feel they have autonomy, it is then reasonable to hypothesize that an employee that feels, or perceives that they have balance between the different aspects of their life will also be more satisfied and motivated. Akinbode and Ayodeji (2017) conducted a study that particularly keyed in on perception as an under lying determinant as perception was believed to be related to the actual experience of work life balance. Their study did show that work life balance is experienced differently by different individuals validating their theory regarding perception (Akinbode & Ayodeji, 2017).

Self-Leadership Theory

Self-leadership is a process wherein humans use specific sets of behavioral and cognitive strategies to better lead themselves in the direction of both motivating and not normally motivating tasks (Ulrich, 2017). Self-leadership theory specifically offers behavioral, natural reward, and thought methods to help people better self-manage. Behavior self-leadership strategies focus on creating new ways that employees can increase their self-awareness to better manage their behaviors (Ulrich, 2017). Natural self-leadership strategies are aimed at increasing a person's own internal motivation to accomplish a certain task by either changing the task itself, or by rewarding

or changing one's perceptions of the task by focusing on its more rewarding aspects (Ulrich, 2017).

Debates have occurred on whether or not self-leadership is really a different concept than just from particular personality traits. Researchers have pointed out that people with certain personality traits may just naturally display these self-leadership behaviors (Ulrich, 2017). Meaning this may not be a theory at all, just simply a description of particular personality traits. Some people are naturally better self-problem solvers or better self-starters than others (Ulrich, 2017).

Self-leadership strategies positively influence variables such as mood, stress, and satisfaction, which are often considered mediators of performance and organizational outcomes such as absences and turnover (Ulrich, 2017).

Self-Leadership is a theory that is very applicable to the concepts of work life balance and work life conflict. According to this theory, employees will self-lead in the manner that it is beneficial or helps them achieve the reward they seek. Therefore, it proposes that employees will work more efficiently if it allows them to achieve work life balance. If working too many hours causes work life conflict, then according to this theory, workers will naturally work quicker or more efficiently in order to work less hours and decrease that conflict.

Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory is one of the most influential conceptual paradigms for understanding human behavior both in and out of the workplace. Over

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the years, differing perspectives on social exchange have evolved, bridging disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, organizational theory, and social psychology (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2017). As a result, social exchange theory cannot be thought of as only one single model; but instead it is a general framework or conceptual point of view about how resources are valued and exchanged (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2017).

The purpose of social exchange is to maximize benefits and minimize costs. According to this theory, developed by sociologist George Homans, people weigh the potential benefits and risks and when the risks outweigh the rewards, people will terminate the action (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2017). This theory is often used in psychology to determine when and why humans will enter into or maintain relationships with one another, but in the area of Industrial and Organizational Psychology it can also be used to determine when and why workers enter into or maintain commitment to their employers (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2017). When the reward outweighs the risk, employees are more likely to continue their employment. When the risk outweighs the reward, turnover increases (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2017).

In terms of work life balance and conflict, this will be a useful theory to evaluate. Humans work to meet basic needs, both financial and otherwise. They seek to earn an income to provide food and shelter to themselves and their families. They also seek to fulfill other needs such as recognition or advancement. Workers will work to fulfill those needs as long as the benefit of meeting the needs outweighs the risk. If by working to meet those needs, a large amount of work life conflict arises, a worker may determine that the risk is too great and abandon the quest for reward (Cropanzano & Mitchell, <https://assignbuster.com/analyzing-theory-and-research-in-industrial-and-organizational-psychology/>

2017). This could mean lack of engagement at work or even termination of employment. Therefore in order for employers to decrease turnover they should recognize and consider these risks and make sure the path to rewards outweighs the related risks (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2017).

Beddoes and Pawley (2014) studied an issue with the under representation of female faculty members in STEM disciplines, the underlying theme being that work life balance played the biggest role in this under representation. The most prevalent issues to emerge from this study were family related such as childcare and housework (Beddoes & Pawley, 2014). A common theme from the participants was that faculty positions were too demanding to achieve balance between work and home life. Therefore, the inability to achieve work life balance was determined to be the number one reason women in these faculty positions are more difficult to retain, showing that the participants determined the risk to outweigh the reward (Beddoes & Pawley, 2014).

Path Goal Theory

The path goal theory is very similar to the social exchange theory however it takes the concept onto the next step and looks at the leaders (Dyer & Wallace, 2017). Path-goal theory holds that the major function of a leader is to enhance the likelihood that employees see the rewards as outweighing the risks, manage their expectancies and make sure they see the attractiveness of the rewards, in an effort to increase motivational effort. Thus, although the theory is a leadership theory, it relies heavily on the work motivation literature (Dyer & Wallace, 2017).

The theory further states that a leader might display any or all of the four different types of leadership styles, depending on the situation, to maximize employee effectiveness. More effective leaders simultaneously incorporate all four styles because of the unique effects of each style across varying work tasks and conditions (Dyer & Wallace, 2017). An employees' acceptance of a leader's style increases their motivation, thus assisting in goal attainment for them and leading to performance gain for the organization. The four styles are as follows:

1. " Directive leadership. Effective leaders should provide specific guidance of performance, set acceptable standards of performance, and provide explicit performance expectations to subordinates. Generally, this approach is best when work is unstructured and complex and/or the subordinates are inexperienced. Such an approach tends to increase subordinates' sense of security and control." (Dyer & Wallace, 2017 pp. 1166)
2. " Supportive leadership. Effective leaders should be friendly to subordinates and demonstrate concern for each subordinate's well-being by considering each individual's needs. Generally, this approach is best when work is stressful, boring, and/or hazardous." (Dyer & Wallace, 2017 pp. 1166)
3. " Participative leadership. An effective leader consults with subordinates by (a) soliciting ideas and suggestions from subordinates, (b) soliciting participative decision making affecting subordinates, and (c) valuing and considering subordinates' suggestions. Generally, this

approach is best when the subordinates are experts and their advice is necessary for achieving work goals.” (Dyer & Wallace, 2017 pp. 1166)

4. “ Achievement-oriented leadership. Effective leaders set moderately difficult and challenging goals, continuously emphasize work performance improvements, and expect subordinates to achieve high levels of performance. Generally, this approach is optimal for complex work, but research suggests that it is important across all types of work.” (Dyer & Wallace, 2017 pp. 1166)

Since the goal of Path- Goal Theory is to minimize obstacles and help workers achieve their goals, this plays nicely off the Social Exchange Theory. If a leader helps minimize the risks, a worker is more likely to stay committed to reaching the rewards they derive from work (Dyer & Wallace, 2017).

Supportive leadership is instrumental when employees are trying to achieve work life balance. Oludayo, Falola, Obianuju, and Demilade (2018) showed that managers that encourage and support employees in achieving work life balance will help inspire acceptable workplace behaviors and decrease turnover rates. Therefore having a flexible leader, as with this theory, could be instrumental in work life balance issues.

Demands–Control Model

The demands–control model was developed by Robert Karasek during the late 1970s however, it has since been modified based on a number of research findings (Matthews & Ritter, 2017). The basic idea put forth in this model is actually very simple; the most stressful situations for employees are

those in which they are subjected to high job demands yet have little control over decisions concerning their work. This means that this model proposes that workers will feel more stress when they are not just working in high demanding conditions, but when they have no control over their situations; if they have some control over how they do their jobs or interact with the organization, the stress would decrease (Matthews & Ritter, 2017).

This theory is very applicable to research in the area of work life balance. Various research into the effects of alternative schedules on the perception of work life balance have concluded that an alternative schedule alone is simply not enough to increase the perception of work life balance, employees need to have some control over their schedules in order for an alternative schedule to increase this perception. Wadsworth and Facer's study (2016) studied the effects of an alternative work schedule on employees for the state of Utah that were put on a four day work week. Alternative work schedules can be a productive way to combat work life conflict, however there are some exceptions (Wadsworth & Facer, 2016). For one, simply enacting an alternative work schedule for employees does not guarantee a more positive work life balance (Wadsworth & Facer, 2016). The factor that affected the work life balance relationship regarding alternative schedules appears to be control (Wadsworth & Facer, 2016). The results showed no positive effects on work life balance as a whole. However, the results also showed that when employees had control over their alternative work schedule, there was a positive effect on work life balance (Wadsworth & Facer, 2016). Therefore simply enacting a shorter work week didn't bring about improvement, allowing the employees to have input on what schedule

would best effect their lives did (Wadsworth & Facer, 2016). Duncan and Pettigrew (2012) concluded that at least for women, being able to somewhat control their work schedule had a strong effect on their perception of work life balance (Duncan & Pettigrew, 2012). The study detailed how perception of work life balance can be altered based on various working arrangements such as flexible schedules, shift-work, and self-employment. Also it is discussed how respondents in these situations rate their satisfaction with their work life balance (Duncan & Pettigrew, 2012). The author's again showed that there is a strong relationship between work arrangements and work life balance. It also showed that various working arrangements affected work life balance differently for men than women (Duncan & Pettigrew, 2012). For instance, this study showed that for women, being able to somewhat control their schedule had a strong effect on their perception of work life balance.

Laurijssen and Glorieux (2013) showed that women tend to change career trajectories after they have families, including changing positions and even employers. Using the control model of Karasek, the authors defined jobs with a better outcome for work life balance. The results indicate that once women have children they often seek to improve their work life balance by changing the kinds of jobs that they want to work (Laurijssen and Glorieux, 2013). The study found that women choose less demanding jobs, more commonly women seem to choose part time positions as a means of altering career objective to meet increased family demands (Laurijssen and Glorieux, 2013). Numerous antecedents of work-life conflict have been studied. However,

clearly research indicates that lack of control is associated with greater work-life conflict (Major, 2017).

Summary

Evaluating these theories against some of the existing research in the area of work life conflict allows future researchers to better understand when studies might get the results that they do. Theories help researchers test, validate and refine new theories as they emerge from new research. Not only that, but existing theories help define hypothesis for future studies.

The theories discussed in this paper have been theories that have been relevant to much of the existing research in work life balance. As future research is done, more theories may be relevant or new theories may develop. However, these theories help researchers understand why workers are facing many of the challenges that they are currently facing in the areas of work life balance and work life conflict.

Industrial and Organizational Psychology is meant to research and explain why humans act the way they do in the work setting. By isolating a certain issue or phenomenon such as work life balance, they can explore why this certain issue is dealt with the way it is, by both the workers and the organization. Not to mention new ways of better managing the issue can be developed.

In order to fix an issue, you have to understand it deeply, such as why and how it occurred. This is the purpose of theory. Theory is interesting and inspiring. It makes researchers more inquisitive in new areas so that future

research can be directed. This holds true with work life balance and work life conflict. These theories help explain existing research, but they certainly leave room for future research as well.

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