

Foucault's theories of autocrats: management application



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In *Discipline and Punish* (1977) Foucault comments that “ a stupid despot may constrain his slaves with iron chains; but a true politician binds them even more strongly with the chains of their own ideas”. How is this comment relevant for a discussion of work in contemporary organisations?

French philosopher, Foucault’s analysis and ideas are equally used in the contemporary management of companies and organisations. In this essay, I will analyse how his ideas in relation to the changes in the western can be used in the contemporary management of institutions and other managerial positions. Throughout the essay, the research will majorly focus on how autocrats treat their slaves by subjecting them to iron chains. Enchaining by the iron would, in this case, mean how the current leaders and managers subject their juniors to duties and implementation of policies and strategies that were not agreed upon by the employees without considering their contributions towards the formulation of the duties, therefore, considered as imposed by the leaders and managers. Equally, this essay will also evaluate how true politicians, competent and good managers, binds their junior in the chains of their ideas., The chains of their ideas would be taken to refer to either the policies, strategies and terms and conditions that are passed upon the agreement of all the stakeholders or the ideas that would be proposed to the firm by the junior employees.

Michel Foucault in his *Discipline and Punish* book used the term despot to refer to a person who dictates how things would be done without taking into account the contributions of his or her subjects. A despot, in this case, is more than just a dictator, rather, a person who does not respect the opinions of others. In his context, Foucault posited his ideas in relation to his analysis

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of mechanical and social changes that were behind the changes that were posed to the Western disciplinary system majorly based on the historical French documents that were accessed (Foucault, 1977). His analysis was majorly based in the hospital, school, camps and prisons through an in-depth evaluation of how torture, punishment, imprisonment and discipline. In his evaluation, the concept of torture is subjected to the suspects in two ways; one of the major incidents where torture was applied was during the process of investigating the suspect. During the investigation, the suspect was subjected to torture. Inflicting torture to the suspects compelled him or her to provide evidence. In case, torture failed to compel the suspect to produce evidence ascertaining his or her guilty; innocence was pronounced. The second incident where torture was applied was during the punishment of a crime offender with the aim of correcting him or her (Foucault, 1977).

To begin with, in the contemporary organisational management, despotic leadership is bound to reduce the organisation's productivity. In the operation of an organisation, an autocratic manager may not have strategic ideas and insights on how to manage the organisation (Howard, 2007). The employees under him or her may have these strategic ideas on how to operate the organisation in a manner that would increase the productivity and therefore, growth in the long run. To the disadvantage of the firm's growth and productivity, the despotic manager does not take into consideration the proposals of the junior employees, in fact, he or she discourages them from challenging his ideas at all costs. As a result, he or she imposes the ideas and proposals to his or her junior employees for implementation regardless of the consideration of the impacts, both positive

and negative; they would pose to the firm (Howard, 2007). The failure of the manager to count on the ideas and the opinions of the junior members of staff may amount to the implementation of wrong strategies on account that they are not subjected to scrutiny by the implementation team. For instance, for a marketing organisation, the manager may impose old-fashioned marketing ideas for implementation by the junior employees. Based on the fact that the strategies were not subject to questioning or assessment by the necessary stakeholder, the junior members of staff would implement the imposed strategy which would serve no purpose for the firm. The manager should put into consideration the emerging trends in management, such as a rise of technology. His junior members of staff may be conversant with the technology-based ideas. Thus, their contribution would be beneficial to the organisation. As commented by Foucault, a stupid despot who, in this case, refers to an autocratic manager constrains his slaves in iron chains. In this case, imposing foreign ideas to the team of implementation without their stake in deciding on which strategy serves better for the organisation's goals and objectives would be likened by the act of constraining the slaves in iron chains which, they have no knowledge on how to unchain themselves. Constraining the slaves into iron chains would serve no better reason for the despot because the iron chain would weaken their effort and ability towards serving their master.

Second, autocratic management lowers the morale of the employees in the organisation. In this case, there are two types of employees. To begin with, the employees who are ready and willing to conform to the directives issued or imposed by the management. To this type of employees, it does not

matter how beneficial the policies or strategies may be to the firm, therefore; they are loyal to the organisation regardless of the direction of may be taking concerning growth. The second type of employees are the employees who are concerned with the operations of the firm. Despite working for pay, these types of employees are concerned about the impacts of the strategies that are imposed by the management may pose to the organisation.

Therefore, in a situation where the management has proposed strategies that may hurt the reputation and the performance of the organisation, they would challenge the strategies and propose the alternative strategies that would help the organisation regarding increasing the productivity and the growth of the firm. In the context of an autocratic leadership, the concerned employees would try to challenge the policies and strategies to the management and perhaps propose the alternative following their analysis of the situation. As usual, a dictatorial manager would reject their challenge and proposal and in fact, discourage them from challenging his or her in the future (Depaul, 2008). In some cases, the manager may issue sacking or dismissal threats to them. In such a case, the concerned employees' morale would be lowered. In some cases, they may even resign to seek a better workplaces that would appreciate their contribution to the firm through encouraging their opinions whether challenging or supporting the proposed strategies. Working with the employees whose morale is lowered by the organisational culture significantly reduces the productivity and the reputation of the firm. Employees whose morale is low would have no motivation of working towards the organisational goals and objectives, rather, they would only conform to the imposed strategies (Depaul, 2008). In

this case, the employee with low morale would be working for the <https://assignbuster.com/foucaults-theories-of-autocrats-management-application/>

organisation just because they need to earn a living. As commented by the Foucault, a stupid despot enchains his slaves to the iron chains which serves him to his disadvantage. The slaves are likely to be demotivated in serving their master, owing to the harsh working conditions.

Third, as commented by Foucault, a stupid despot enchains his or her slaves to the iron chains. In this case, the slaves are not encouraged to make a proposal on the best ways of enchaining. Communication is thus, is a one-way type in disseminating information. In the contemporary organisational management. The employees and the employer are two important stakeholders that determine the success of the firm. The communication between the two levels ensures that the employees are presented with a platform to air their feedback towards the policies or strategies proposed to them by the management. In the context of a dictatorial management, communication is in a one-way structure. Communication applies only when the manager wants to impose or to give directives to the junior employees. The structure of communication, does not allow the employees to give their feeling, opinions, and feedbacks towards the implementation of the strategies that have been proposed and mostly, the feedback that may appear to challenge the decision made by the management. Therefore, the management loses touch with the junior level or management (Tatnall & Davey, 2015). The management may never learn about the negative impacts of the strategies and possible occurrence of a failure in the management in the future. In case, the employees may need to something from the management as an additional requirement for the implementation of the policy or strategy; the management may appear either reluctant or directly

reject the request. There lacks a mutual relationship between the employees and the management. Instead, the organisation faces a power relation problem that in, this case, skewed towards the management. Unfortunately, the management works towards discouraging a possible equilibrium of the power relation between the two levels. In the long run, the organisation is bound to perpetually suffer from management challenges and perhaps a collapse in the future resulting from perpetual losses.

Contrary to a stupid despot, Foucault commented on how a true politician should behave. In his comment, he posited that a true politician binds his slaves more strongly with the chains that come with their ideas. In this case, enchaining the slaves in their ideas would contemporarily mean managing the slaves, according to the management and ideas that they propose. Instead of grilling them with iron chains, a true politician should enchain them with their ideas to ensure that they are beneficial to him. Logically, if one manage people according to their ideas, despite being their boss, he or she will benefit from their labour owing to the increment in their morale based on the appreciation of their ideas in managing various situations. Therefore, both the organisation and the employees would equally benefit.

Managing people according to their ideas reduces the communication gap. Through managing the people according to their proposals and ideas in the contemporary organisational management, the organisational manager creates a working environment that encourages the contributions of the employees at any point in the course of management (Iqbal, Anwar & Haider, 2015). Therefore, the employees feel free with the management to

contribute their ideas in the firm management whether it opposes or
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supports the strategies proposed by the management. Logically, the proposals may not necessarily be the best in the organisational management regardless of the position of the proposer. The reduction of the communication gap thus, creates a platform that encourages the discussions from all the stakeholders on what is the best for the firm (Tatnall & Davey, 2015). The input of all the stakeholders is likely to come up with the best strategy that would ensure organisational growth and increase the reputation and the productivity of the firm. Additionally, the reduction of the communication gap creates a platform where all the employees can easily communicate with their manager regardless of their job position. In this case, the management levels would easily learn about the challenges that are faced by the junior level employees, thus, resolving them as soon as they arise. Managing employees in the context of the organisational management, according to their ideas and opinions is, hence, beneficial for the organisational growth.

Similarly, the management that appreciates the contribution of all employees in an organisation significantly reduces the employee turnover. In an organisation, most employees despite working with the aim of earning a living, they also work to develop their career (Valcour, 2014). An organisation that appreciates the contributions of the employees regardless of their position at the organisation motivates the employees towards working to develop their careers. Employees would feel motivated if the organisation has implemented his idea as part of the solution to a certain problem or as a strategy to maximise their output and minimising the inputs. In the long run, appreciating the contributions of the employees and the act

of involving them in making critical decisions for the organisation enables them develop loyalty towards their employer. For an employee who has been hardworking and has been contributing positively regarding the strategy, formulation may be promoted from one job position to another. In this regard, the employees will have advanced his careers at the firm. The loyalty reduces the extents of employees resigning and dismissals due to a mutual relationship between the two levels of operation.

Notably, managing the employees in their ideas creates a concept of teamwork. One of the ideas in which organisations should strive to achieve is the culture of teamwork. Through teamwork, the organisation is in a position to solve complex managerial situations. Through teamwork, the employees can combine their knowledge, skills, techniques regardless of their positions in the organisation and come up with the best strategy that would enable the organisation to solve the problems that are faced. In the context where management encourages works within the principles of democracy, employee develop loyalty towards the organisation; therefore, they are ready to work with other employees regardless of their level in the rank of job positions to contribute to the ultimate success of the organisation (Rosen, 2014). Unlike in the management context where the manager has the final say, the democratic organisational management encourages the employees to contribute to the ideas to the management or hold discussions within themselves or together with the levels of management to come up with the best ways of managing certain situations. It should be noted that in the context of a dictatorial leadership, there is often a cycle of a dictatorial level of management. For instance, most of the levels of management

receive directives from the senior management for implementation.

Therefore, even if the junior level employees who are expected to implement that strategy report negative impacts to their immediate boss, he or she cannot report back to the senior manager because he or she would not take the challenge. Therefore, organisational management should encourage democratic leadership that creates an enabling environment for teamwork.

In conclusion, as commented by Foucault, a stupid despot who, in this case, is the organisational manager enchains his slaves with the iron chains, therefore, barring them from serving him efficiently. On the other hand, a true politician chains his or her employees with their ideas and opinions which, hence mean that he manages them according to their ideas. In the contemporary organisational management, there are two types of organisational leader just as posited by Foucault in his stupid despots and true politicians analogy. The two types of organisational managers are dictatorial and democratic. Majorly, democratic management is advantageous to dictatorial management. Through democratic management, the employees are empowered to make their contributions to the management on how they believe the firm would achieve the goals and objectives. In this case, the management creates a platform of contribution, therefore, it is an inclusive type of management. Dictatorial management, on the other hand, is a scenario where one man runs the show. Most of the employees are discouraged from making their contributions which to a larger extents affects their morale negatively, thus, reducing the productivity of the organisation in the long run.

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