Advantages and disadvantages of a multi perspective management essay

Organization theory is the study of the design and structure of organization which describes how the foundation of every organization is structured and recommends how their effectiveness and efficiency can be improved (Griffin 2012).

Theory alters the methods that organizations systematize their notions and understanding while offering different perspectives of viewing the world as to why different organization performs differently from one another (Robbins & Barnwell 2002). The purpose of this essay is to comprehend the different theories used in organizations which will produce different results in the field of power, control and conflict and structure in an organization and discuss how organizations can use multiple perspectives simultaneously to achieve their goals and objective without being too rigid or flexible. As different perspectives generate different opinions and information, we will explore the key perspectives presenting how each is supported by different assumptions that define the way organizations are understood and interpreted. In this essay, we will discuss the different perspectives and the theories and concepts underlining them and the advantages and disadvantages of using a multi-perspective approach to understanding organizations. The perspectives that will be discussed and contrasted are modernism, critical theory and postmodernism.

Literature review of perspectives

Ontology

Ontology is the analysis and study about reality and agency. The former question whether there is an objective reality that is already out there or is it just plainly subjective that existence is only in our mind while the latter

covers the characteristic of agency which explains the act of free will (Hatch & Cunliffe 2006).

The ontology assumption of modernist and critical theory takes a stand on " objectivism" which suggests that the existence of a subject matter is out there regardless of one's awareness or experience which leads to a foreseeable behaviour in people as they distinguish their conduct to be connected towards the material world they are in (Bryman & bell 2003).

The ontology assumption for symbolic interpretivism is of subjectivism. Subjectivists believe that reality is constructed and is agreed upon by experience and giving it meaning by the individual or group whom subject it to their interests.

On the other hand, the ontology assumption for postmodernism is where they view reality as a delusion created by discourses, such as through discussions and communication. Hence, existence is a text to be understood or performed (Hatch & Cunliffe 2006).

Epistemology

Epistemology concerns with how knowledge and information can be gathered and interpreted. The argument has always been of how knowledge is generated as well as whether it is good or bad. Epistemology relates closely to ontology because how everyone thinks will affect how knowledge is interpreted and obtained through various methods. Modernists are positivists. They presume that knowledge is discoverable in an organization through categorization and reliable measurement of the actions of the people and the systems. For example, good and accurate knowledge and

information is created by developing propositions and hypotheses, obtaining and evaluating data through scientific methods (Bryman & bell 2003). In contrast, critical Theory supports subjectivism which they believe that knowledge is in relation to individual values and perceptions. Symbolic interpretivism advocates that the complete knowledge is relative to the knower and will only be understood from the individuals who are directly involved while postmodernism backs the epistemology that there stand no facts and interpretations brings about individual's understanding of the knowledge.

Organizational Power and control

According to Giddens (1985), power is the capacity of an actor to intervene in a set of events given and alter or influence the actions of another actor. There are many sources of power such as formal authority, expertise, coercion and personal characteristics just to name a few. Different perspectives contribute to different thoughts about the usage and limitations of in an organization. In an organization, authority and power could be maintained by management by controlling the staffs. Employees are enforced by control to conform to goals and objectives of the organization. Its process includes the use of sanctions and rewards, internalization of values and norms.

In the modernism perspective, power is managed to improve effectiveness and efficiency of an organization. Modernists focus on maintaining and controlling power. They have also come up with various methods of control to keep power, conflict and resistance in place. Some modernist theories of

power and control are bureaucratic, agency and clan control theories (Huglin 2003).

Bureaucratic theories use regulations, rules and formalized procedures and the authority hierarchy to regulate and control employees' behavior and also to assess performance (Daft 2009). The point is to create standardization of employee behavior to line up with the interest and goals of the organization and compliance to these standards by employees will be rewarded. Modernists believe that managers and supervisors will be given power to rational-legal authority that resulted from departmentalization and hierarchal organizational. Employee's compliance to rules and procedures will be closely monitored and supervised by those with legitimate authority. Therefore, from a modernist perspective, organization success and goals can be achieved through bureaucratic control (Levina & Orlikowski 2009).

Agency theory assumes mechanisms of contract, surveillance and rewards to make sure actions from the managers are always in the best interest of the company. The authority of managers is used to accomplish the goals of the organization instead of their own interests. This process involves signing contract with managers which specifies goals and measure and performing surveillance by collecting data and supervising the compliance of managers to meeting contractual duties and awarding them for desirable behavior and for accomplishing terms of contract (Hatch & Cunliffe 2006).

Clan control theories depend upon the social system such beliefs, shared values and commitment to keep employees in control and eliminate goals incongruence among them (Daft 2009). This can be exercised in the form of

creating desirable culture in the organization by socializing employees and influencing group behavior in expectations, cultural values and norms. A case study is that DHL adopted clan control by picking and employing candidates who matches the DHL culture and developing activities as a socialization tool strengthen common values and goals among the employees (Chan 1997).

Alternatively, post-modernists challenge the modernist concept of power and control. They view power and control existing in a person or in a particular position. They see power and control being rooted in all social relations and in the routine practices of surveillance and self-surveillance in the organization (Hatch & Cunliffe 2006). From the perspective of post-modernists, discourse produces counter discourse and therefore power generates resistance in an organization. Foucault (1978) states that power is multidimensional and happens everywhere thus even as employees try to oppose to power, they could never be free from power as they will be faced by other forms of power that is already existing in the social structure of the organization. Post-modernists rebuke the modernist methods of control and view the three modernists control theories mentioned earlier as routine practices of surveillance that will give rise to self-surveillance by members of organization because of the anticipation of control and fear of " spot-checking" which will lead to self-disempowerment (Hatch & Cunliffe 2006). This led to employees being abided by working mechanistically as they were bounded by contracts with the organization to meet certain criteria of performance and to get good performance evaluation by the management; they suffered from high level of stress and a robotic lifestyle which involves

losing their creativity, commitment and restrict them from thinking ' out of the box' and hence not being able to perform to their fullest potential in their roles.

It is difficult to co-exist modernists and post-modernists perspective in relation to power and control as both oppose each other in their ideology and having coexisting them might cause confusion, conflict and counter-productive within the organization as a disadvantage.

On the other hand, critical theory perspective aligns with modernists on the ontological stand for ' Objectivism' but upholds the epistemological position of subjectivists. Modernists and critical theorists may co-exist hand in hand in an organization although there may be some differences. One example of an organization which fuses both modernist and critical thinking is Apple co. Apple's late CEO Steve Jobs practices a very tight control and has a firm secrecy policy where it places employees into precise areas of expertise and not exposed to tasks outside their scope of duty which resulted in a focused and disciplined attitude Apple has developed for its staffs and operation, reason being to implement the right to control knowledge and information flow across the organization. It follows the basis of power and control of the modernism perspective such as the bureaucracy theory where compulsory meetings are held on a weekly basis led by late CEO Steve Jobs and department heads are to report and update him on the progress of the company (Lashinsky 2011). On top of that, employees at Apple are coerced to embrace their roles and responsibilities that they are given and adopt a positive attitude towards their work. Due to the firm ideology that Apple has imposed onto its organization, the mindset and mentality of its employees

have been altered to allow a basis of control and dominance over them which is described by critical theorists as the state of ' false consciousness' on them as they willingly accept the power and control that is imposed on them (Hatch & Cunliffe 2006). By doing so, it is brings greater efficiency and productivity to an organization and its employees are more focused about their roles and responsibility.

Physical structure of organization

The physical structure of an organization consists of three elements which are its organizational geography, layout and architectonic design of buildings (Kyvik 2009). From a modernist viewpoint, the physical structure of an organization can be an influence to the behaviour of its employees and hence achieve its organizational efficiencies. It affects the communication of ideas and information and also the coordination of activities across the organization (Hatch & Cunliffe 2006). For example, having an open office encourages more interaction and the bonding of relationships between employees which allow them to work better and more effectively in teams.

Post modernists criticize modernists' point of view on the physical structure of an organization as material expressions of implanted power relations where it is used by those with authority to uphold power over others (Hatch & Cunliffe 2006). For instance, the CEO office being located on the highest level of the building, the location and size of the executive offices and the access rights of executives within the building reflects the relations of power in an organization. Therefore, post-modernists have suggested de-differentiation by redesigning the space and layout of the organization to

open-planned concept as to provide voice to the marginalized employees and therefore contribute to a democratic organization.

Google uses a post-modernism perspective in the design and layout for its building, the Googleplex. In Googleplex, both the founders, Page and Brin share an office situated at the second floor near to the regular employees which does not reflect a strong sense of authority and with no bureaucracy structure to filter their visitors. Furthermore, Googleplex follows an open-plan office layout that is fitted with very few solo offices. From the modernists' point of view, the design of organization space and layout are also intended to stimulate the behaviour of the employees in Google such as the installation of cubes, huddle rooms and yurts around Googleplex as venues for meetings (Google 2012). By doing so, it encourages more interactions and exchanging of ideas and knowledge among its employees and thus promoting relationship bonding. This is a major advantage of having a multi-perspective view in an organization.

Google is a successful organization that although is very much leaned towards a post-modernism way of thinking, it still keeps modernists perspectives in check in some way to enrich and enhance its productivity and efficiency. For example, certain decisions and policies are still made by the top management in Google.

Conclusion

In conclusion, although different perspective contribute to different ways of seeing and understanding organizations and also affects how they are being run, they are nevertheless a rejection between each other but instead, it

allows us to have alternative views from the other perspective. There might have been disadvantages in using a multi-perspective but there are certainly more advantages. Successful and big organizations like Apple and Google both uses multiple perspectives in their operations and have since achieved efficiency and productivity.