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The Theory and Practice behind Workplace Behaviour

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ABSTRACT

This paper delves into organizational behaviour which is the study of how individuals and groups act within the organization. It explores the evolution of organizational behaviour from classical management theories, which emphasise structure, efficiency and control, to modern approaches that highlight human motivation, psychological factors and relationships. Key theoretical approaches include classical theory, human relations movement and Contemporary systems. The paper also articulates the role of motivation, personality and group dynamics in organizational effectiveness. The findings from the literature prove that there must exist a balance between technological advancements and human-focused practices to ensure long-term success.

Keywords: *Organizational Behaviour, Motivation, Organizational Structure, Artificial Intelligence, Self Determination.*

INTRODUCTION

“Organizational behaviour is the study of human behaviour in organizational settings, the interface between human behaviour and the organization, and the organization itself” (Griffin and Moorhead 3). It’s about the constant back-and-forth between people and their workplace, each shaping the other, ultimately affecting organizational effectiveness and performance. “Most people are born and educated in organizations, acquire most of their material possessions from organizations, and die as members of organizations that make up our governments. Most adults spend the better part of their lives working in organizations. Because organizations influence our lives so powerfully, we have every reason to be concerned about how and why those organizations’ function” (Griffin and Moorhead 5). Organizational behaviour matters because organizations set the stage for how we live, work, and interact. They shape what’s possible, what’s expected, and what people get out of their efforts. When we study how people think, connect, and get things done in these settings, we give leaders practical tools to communicate better, make smarter decisions, and build stronger workplace relationships. All of that lift’s productivity, boosts employee satisfaction, and stabilizes society. The roots of organizational behaviour go back to classical theories that focused on efficiency, hierarchy, and tight control. Frederick W. Taylor’s Scientific Management formalized managerial practice by advocating that organizations should “develop a science for each element of a man’s work, which replaces the old rule-of-thumb method” (Taylor 47). Taylor argued that management should plan the work and let workers execute it—he said, “fully one-half of the problem is ‘up to the management’” (Taylor 48). Complementing this structural perspective, Weber argued that “the purely bureaucratic type of administrative organization... is capable of attaining the highest degree of efficiency” (Weber 337). He introduced bureaucracy as the gold standard for efficiency, emphasizing rule-based hierarchy and rational authority as the backbone of modern organizations. Motivational thought during this classical period evolved through Maslow’s hierarchy framework, which proposed that “human needs arrange themselves in hierarchies of pre-potency” (Maslow 370), marking a shift toward recognizing psychological drivers of work behaviour. These classical ideas— efficiency, bureaucracy, and motivation became the cornerstones of early organizational theory. Modern motivational research is strongly influenced by Self-Determination Theory, which puts the spotlight on people’s intrinsic motivation—the need for autonomy, competence, and connection, noting that “self-determination theory (SDT) is an empirically based theory of human motivation, development, and wellness” (Deci and Ryan 182). At the same time, the work itself has gotten more complex. Teams are everywhere now, especially for non-routine projects that need lots of different skills and coordinated action. Scholars note that “project teams have become a popular organizational form under circumstances that require coordinated actions directed towards a non-routine goal” (Rickwards and Moger 273). Contemporary organizational theory also conceptualizes organizations as structured yet dynamic systems, describing them as “collectivises oriented to the pursuit of relatively specific goals and exhibiting relatively highly formalized social structures” (Scott and Davis 29). Taken together, these modern perspectives show how organizational behaviour now blends motivation, group dynamics, and evolving structures to explain how organizations succeed in today’s world. Advances in artificial intelligence are redefining organizational decision-making, as scholars note that “organizations increasingly use artificial intelligence (AI) to solve previously unexplored problems” and that the complexity of such tasks “demands a hybrid approach that integrates human intelligence with AI” (Raisch and Fomina 1). These developments indicate that future organizational structures may increasingly rely on hybrid human technology systems in which problem-solving responsibilities are distributed between employees and intelligent technologies. At the same time, emerging digital management systems are reshaping motivational processes in organizations, as research observes that “the management of workers using algorithms is rapidly becoming ubiquitous across many industries” (Gagné 2). Alongside these technological shifts, evolving work arrangements such as hybrid teams highlight the growing importance of psychologically safe collaborative environments, where psychological safety is defined as “the feeling that taking interpersonal risk is safe in the work environment” (Nilsson and Norström 1).

Collectively, these emerging developments suggest that the future trajectory of organizational behaviour will increasingly focus on technologically oriented decision-making, adaptive organizational structures, and psychologically safe team environments. Hence, the aim of this research paper is to discuss in detail the various stages of organizational behaviour alongside the psychological foundations and structures affecting various organizations.

THEORETICAL APPROACHES

The study of organizational behaviour has been shaped by several major theoretical perspectives that attempt to explain how organizations function and how individuals behave within them. Different scholars have proposed frameworks to understand the relationship between organizational structures, managerial practices, and human behaviour in the workplace. Early management theories primarily emphasized efficiency, formal structure, and managerial authority. Over time, however, researchers recognized that human motivation, social relationships, and psychological factors also play a central role in organizational performance. As a result, organizational behaviour research developed through several important theoretical perspectives that offer different explanations of workplace behaviour. Four major theoretical approaches are influential in the development of organizational behaviour research: Classical Theory, the Human Relations Movement, Contemporary Theoretical Approach and the Behavioural Science Approach. Each of these perspectives provides insights into how organizations should be structured and how managers should understand employee behaviour.

Classical:

Classical organizational theory emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in response to the challenges posed by industrialization and the rapid growth of large organizations. Early management thinkers sought systematic methods to improve efficiency and productivity by establishing clear structures, defined managerial responsibilities, and standardized work procedures. One of the most influential contributors to classical management thought was Henri Fayol, who developed a framework describing the primary functions of management. Fayol defined management as: "To forecast and plan, to organise, to command, to co-ordinate and to control" (Edwards 49). Fayol's work emphasized the importance of administrative coordination and managerial authority in ensuring organizational efficiency. His framework established the foundation for later studies of managerial roles and organizational structure. Similarly, Frederick Winslow Taylor introduced the concept of scientific management, which focused on improving efficiency through systematic analysis of work tasks and standardized procedures. Taylor argued that management should apply scientific principles to determine the most efficient way to perform work, stating: "The management take over all work for which they are better fitted than the workmen, while in the past almost all of the work and the greater part of the responsibility were thrown upon the men." (Taylor 47). Taylor believed that productivity could be maximized through careful measurement of work processes and strict managerial supervision, noting "scientifically select and then train, teach, and develop" (Taylor 47) is much more efficient than the old plan. However, later scholars criticized classical management theory for focusing primarily on structural efficiency while neglecting the human and social aspects of work. As later analysis of administrative theory explains, classical management approaches often adopt "a mechanical approach... [and] does not deal with some of the important aspects of management such as motivation, communication and leading" (Edwards 49). These limitations encouraged researchers to explore psychological and social factors affecting workplace behaviour, leading to the development of alternative theoretical perspectives.

Human Relations Movement:

The Human Relations Movement developed during the 1920s and 1930s as scholars began to recognize that employee productivity depends not only on technical efficiency but also on social relationships and psychological satisfaction within the workplace. One of the most influential figures associated with this perspective was Elton Mayo, whose research on workplace behaviour emphasized the importance of social interactions in organizational settings. Mayo argued that employee productivity is strongly influenced by group dynamics and social recognition. He emphasized that: "The desire to stand well with one's fellows, the so-called human instinct of association, easily outweighs the merely individual interest and the logical reasoning upon which so many spurious principles of management are based." (Mayo 43). Mayo's research suggested that organizations should consider employees' emotional and social needs in order to improve morale and productivity. The Human Relations perspective was further supported by psychological research on human motivation. The work of Abraham Maslow provided a theoretical framework for understanding employee needs and motivation. Maslow proposed that human behaviour is driven by a hierarchy of needs, explaining that: "If both the physiological and the safety needs are fairly well gratified, then there will emerge the love and affection and belongingness needs" (Maslow 370). This idea highlights the importance of psychological and social needs in influencing employee behaviour. The Human Relations Movement therefore shifted the focus of management theory from purely structural efficiency toward a broader understanding of human motivation, social relationships, and psychological factors within organizations. While the Human Relations Movement emphasized social relationships and employee motivation, scholars later sought a more systematic and scientific understanding of human behaviour in organizations, leading to the development of the Behavioural Science Approach.

Behavioural Science Approach:

The Behavioural Science approach emerged during the mid-twentieth century and expanded the ideas of the Human Relations Movement by integrating research from psychology, sociology, and organizational studies. Scholars within this perspective focused on employee motivation, leadership behaviour, decision-making, and group dynamics. A major contributor to this perspective was Douglas McGregor, whose Theory X and Theory Y explained how managerial assumptions influence employee behaviour. McGregor argued that traditional management practices were based on negative assumptions about workers. According to Theory X: "The average human being has an inherent dislike of work and will avoid it if possible." (Douglas 5). This view suggested that employees require strict supervision and control. However, McGregor proposed an alternative perspective known as Theory Y, which assumed that employees are capable of creativity and self-direction. He stated that: "The capacity to exercise a relatively high degree of imagination, ingenuity, and creativity in the solution of organizational problems is widely, not narrowly, distributed in the population." (Douglas 5). This theory emphasized participative management and the importance of creating supportive organizational environments. Later organizational scholars further expanded behavioural approaches to management. For example, Henry Mintzberg analysed managerial behaviour and demonstrated that managerial work involves complex interpersonal roles rather than purely administrative functions. Mintzberg observed that: "managerial roles emerged according to the wider characteristics of managerial work: namely brevity, variety and fragmentation." (Chareanpunsirikul and Wood 551).

This insight highlighted the dynamic nature of managerial work and emphasized the importance of interpersonal communication and decision-making in organizational leadership. Similarly, modern organizational scholars such as Jeffrey Pfeffer emphasize the importance of human resources as a source of organizational success. Pfeffer and Veiga argue that organizational performance depends heavily on employee knowledge and skills, stating that: "Companies which place workers at the core of their strategies produce higher long-term returns to shareholders than their industry peers" (Pfeffer and Veiga 39). This perspective reflects the continued influence of behavioural science in modern organizational research.

Contemporary Theoretical Approach:

Contemporary organizational theory emphasizes the complexity and interdependence of organizational elements. Rather than viewing organizations purely as formal structures or collections of individual behaviours, modern scholars increasingly conceptualize organizations as systems composed of interconnected components. From this perspective, elements such as structure, technology, people, and the external environment interact continuously, meaning that changes in one component affect the functioning of others. As organizational analysis explains: "Organizations are, first and foremost, systems of elements, each of which affects and is affected by the others... And no organization can be understood in isolation from the larger environment" (Scott and Davis 25). This systems perspective integrates earlier theoretical traditions by recognizing that organizational effectiveness depends on both structural and behavioural factors. In addition, contemporary theory highlights the dynamic processes through which organizational structures are created and maintained. Anthony Giddens' theory of structuration emphasizes the relationship between human action and social structure. As Giddens states: "Every process of action is a production of something new, a fresh act; but at the same time all action exists in continuity with the past, which supplies the means of its initiation." (Scott and Davis 25). Together, these perspectives provide a more integrative understanding of organizational behaviour by emphasizing the interaction between individuals, organizational structures, and the broader environment

PSYCHOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

While theoretical perspectives explain how organizations are structured and managed, organizational behaviour also draws significantly from psychology to understand how individuals behave in the workplace. Psychological foundations help explain how employees are motivated, how they interpret situations, and how they interact with others within organizations. Concepts such as motivation, personality, perception, and group behaviour therefore provide important insight into how individual behaviour contributes to overall organizational effectiveness.

Motivation:

Motivation is the inner desire or willingness that drives a person to take action and achieve a specific goal or outcome with which they pursue organizational goals. Early psychological explanations of motivation focused on identifying the fundamental human needs that influence behaviour. Maslow explains that "if both the physiological and the safety needs are fairly well gratified, then there will emerge the love and affection and belongingness needs" (Maslow 381). These statements highlight that individuals are motivated not only by basic survival needs but also by social and psychological desires. Contemporary research on motivation has expanded these ideas by examining intrinsic motivation and psychological development. Self-Determination Theory provides a framework for understanding modern motivation. Deci and Ryan explain that "satisfaction of the needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness do indeed predict psychological well-being in all cultures" (Deci and Ryan 183). This approach emphasizes that "The concept of human needs turns out to be extremely useful because it provides a means of understanding how various social forces and interpersonal environments affect autonomous versus controlled motivation" (Deci and Ryan 183)

Personality:

Personality also plays an important role in organizational behaviour because individuals bring different behaviour tendencies into the workplace. Personality research attempts to explain why people behave differently even when they face similar situations. Funder explains that "'dimensions of individual differences in tendencies to show consistent patterns of thoughts, feelings, and actions'" (McCrae and Costa Jr 235). These enduring tendencies influence how employees interact with others, respond to challenges, and perform their work tasks. Modern organizational studies frequently analyse personality through the Big Five personality model. Barrick and Mount found that personality characteristics are related to performance across occupational groups, explaining that "one dimension of personality, Conscientiousness, showed consistent relations with all job performance criteria for all occupational groups" (Barrick and Mount 3). Their findings further emphasize the importance of personality traits in understanding individual differences in workplace behaviour.

Perception:

Perception refers to the way individuals interpret and make sense of information in their environment. In organizations, employees constantly interpret events, actions, and interactions with others. These interpretations influence attitudes, behaviour, and decision making in the workplace. Organizational behaviour scholars define perception as "process by which individuals organize and interpret their sensory impressions in order to give meaning to their environment" (Robbins and Judge 166). Because individuals may interpret the same situation differently, perception can influence workplace relationships and communication. Robbins and Judge further explain that "people's behaviour is based on their perception of what reality is, not on reality itself." (Robbins and Judge 166) This insight highlights the importance of understanding perceptual processes in organizations, since misunderstandings and biases can arise when individuals interpret situations differently.

Group Behaviour:

Although organizational behaviour often focuses on individual psychology, much work in organizations occurs within groups. Early studies demonstrated that social relationships within groups can strongly influence productivity and employee morale. The Hawthorne studies were among the first to highlight the importance of group dynamics in the workplace. Later analysis of these experiments notes that "the atmosphere was one of a new employee-supervisory relationship marked by a spirit of cooperation... group morale improved... and production soared" (Brannigan and Zwermer 57). These findings suggested that social relationships and group belonging can significantly affect employee performance. Modern organizations increasingly rely on teams to accomplish complex tasks that require coordinated effort and diverse expertise.

Contemporary research on team leadership emphasizes the growing importance of collaborative work structures. Scholars studying project teams observe that “project teams have become a popular organizational form under circumstances that require coordinated actions directed towards a non-routine goal” (Rickwards and Moger 273). Research further indicates that effective team interaction can enhance creativity and innovation within organizations (Rickwards and Moger 275).

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Building on the psychological foundations of organizational behaviour, organizational structure provides the framework within which these behaviours operate. Traditionally, organizational structures were designed to ensure efficiency and coordination, where “the purpose of organisational structure is the division of work among members of the organisation, and the co-ordination of their activities so they are directed towards the goals and objectives of the organisation” (Maduenyi et al. 354). Such structures emphasized on hierarchy, specialization, and control. This was reinforced by managerial systems that “involved separating thinking from doing and creating a new function staffed by specialists” (Mintzberg 107), thereby limiting employee autonomy despite growing recognition of psychological factors such as motivation and group behaviour. However, as organizational environments became more complex, these rigid structures proved insufficient. Research highlights that “static and hierarchical organisational structures may not provide the necessary flexibility to sustain organisational competitiveness” (Gaspary and Moura 133), depicting misalignment between traditional structures and evolving organizational needs. Consequently, modern organizations have shifted toward more adaptive forms, recognizing that they “must be able to continuously reorganise themselves in order to respond rapidly to a challenging business environment” (Gaspary and Moura 133). This transition is evident in structural changes “from hierarchies to networks, from specialised departments and units to temporary project groups, and from vertical lines to lateral communication” (Gaspary and Moura 134), which support collaboration and flexibility. Furthermore, technological advancements are redefining structural arrangements, as modern organizations recognize that structures must support innovation, where “organisations require flexibility and innovative strategies to maintain competitiveness” (Gaspary and Moura 133). Thus, while past organizational structures emphasized control and formalization, present structures increasingly align with psychological insights by promoting flexibility, collaboration, and technological integration in dynamic work environments.

FUTURE OF ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOUR

The future of organizational behaviour is shaped by the integration of advanced technologies with human capabilities. Artificial intelligence is transforming traditional roles, as “AI enables artificial agents to perform cognitive functions, such as decision-making and problem-solving, previously only associated with humans” (Raisch and Fomina 1). This indicates shared decision-making between humans and intelligent systems. AI systems can “automatize, provide predictions of outcomes, and discover patterns in massive amounts of data” (Krogh and Roberson 367), leading to more analytical and evidence-based decision making within organizations. However, despite this potential, technological transformation remains complex, as “AI, like many technological innovations before it, promises to revolutionize organizations” (Bérubé et al. 6702), yet requires significant adaptation at both individual and organizational levels. Organizational structures are also evolving due to technological integration. It is observed that “the technology platform model at the core of the digital economy has gained extraordinary strength” (Faraj and Pachidi 2), reflecting a shift towards more flexible forms of organizing. In parallel, managerial functions are being redefined, as “algorithmic systems are integrated into organizational operations to automate tasks typically carried out by managers” (Gagné 3). Despite these changes, human factors remain essential. Psychological safety continues to influence performance, even in hybrid environments where “These behaviours further confirm the measured high team psychological safety for both teams” (Nilsson and Norström 59). Additionally, societal changes, including globalization, contribute to evolving work environment, shaped by “the destabilising forces imbued in nascent globalisation” (Meriton II). In conclusion, future organizational behaviour will involve technology, flexible structures, and human centred considerations, requiring organizations to balance innovation with psychological and social needs.

CONCLUSION

Organizational behavioural its core, reflects a simple yet an important idea: organizations function better when they understand and respond to people within them. Beyond theories and structures, it is the everyday experience of individuals which includes motivation, interactions and sense of belonging. This ultimately shapes the organizational outcome. Theoretical perspectives and organizational structures provide an essential foundation for this understanding. While theories offer frameworks to interpret behaviour and guide managerial practices, structures create the environment in which these behaviours unfold. Their evolution from rigid and hierarchical forms to more flexible systems reflect the need to balance stability with the ability to adapt to change. As workplaces continue to evolve, especially with the growth of technology and changing work patterns, the challenge lies not just in adopting new systems but in ensuring that these changes remain aligned with human needs. The future of organizations will depend on the ability to remain adaptable while preserving trust, cooperation, coordination and engagement among employees. Thus, organizational behaviour remains essential not only as an academic field but as a practical guide for creating workplaces that are both effective and humane.

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