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Systems Approach to an Optimal Organization

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ABSTRACT

Antoinette Ryan's "A Systems Approach to Career Education" exemplifies systems approach to an organizational success. This paper provides a theoretical review on the principles of wholeness, systematization, compatibility, and optimization as elements in an organizational process. The paper reveals that optimization is an undertaking that entails both management and members of an organization to work as a team with the conscious effort of bringing the organization to its desired plan. Optimization is not only realized when big plans are achieved but specific targets need to be met as well.

INTRODUCTION

Antoinette Ryan's "A Systems Approach to Career Education", written in 1974 is a classic paper that exemplifies systems approach to an organizational success. Applying the principles of wholeness, systematization, compatibility, and optimization, the interrelatedness of these elements is critical for sustainability. The following deciphers the principles aforementioned:

Principle of wholeness

Antoinette Ryan (1974) asserts that a system deals with interrelated elements that integrate to the overall or holistic functioning of the system as explained in systems thinking. In other words, elements are not isolated or fragmented parts that work independently. As a vital component in organizational process, learning disciplines highlight systems thinking (fifth discipline) in ascertaining holistic functioning of the different elements within an organization (Olobia, 2022).

An important implication of its wholeness is that a system is not just an aggregate summation of the different functions of its elements, but rather it incorporates functions of the interdependent parts as well as its own functions as a system. For example, a human organism consists of different parts (hands, brain, etc.) that perform functions related to the overall function of the human being. The function of a hand by itself, separate from the rest will not be realized, only as it relates to the other parts of the body, the hand serving its functions to the overall human organism.

Next, wholeness of the system means that elements perform their functions in an organized arrangement as opposed to disorganized complexity that characterized previous scientific thinking where elements of randomness, chaos prevailed as expressed in the analogy of a closed system in physics where gaseous elements interact in a disorganized arrangement of molecules escaping in air. General systems theory explains organized arrangement of the elements within a system that conform to the standards set by the system as a whole. This is an important implication of an organized functioning of components.

Furthermore, when holistic principle is applied in an organization, isomorphic ideas and principles are applied in other systems because of the generally similar principles that govern different systems. What this means is that what governs in one system (holistic principle of interconnected functions of its parts plus the system's function itself, in this instance) is also true to other systems outside of its own, supra-system, hence, isomorphism is an active ingredient in structural similarities that implicitly relate to wholesomeness of systems.

Finally, wholeness principle argues that elements within a system cannot be analyzed as individual units as what traditional reductionism implies. What this means is that addressing elements as isolated parts remove their functional relationship with each other which suffers the total function of the system as explained in the previous analysis of a human organism.

Efficiency in systems operations is carried out because of generalities, totalities of solutions to problems of an organization as they affect them as a whole not in terms of the parts in the same way as growth resulting from efficient operation translates to organizational success and sustainability.

Principle of systematization

Efficient operation of the system is due largely to the strong relationships among functional elements within an organization. First of all, systematization is grounded on

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modernist organizational theory that defines organization as scientific, rational and follows certain rules and standards in accordance to its structure and plan. Functional relationship as articulated in systematization connotes standard, systematic and ordered functions of elements as they relate to the overall system, described by specific roles and responsibilities. For instance, workers in a labor system have specific functional duties that have impact on organizational goals, such duties follow a system of order that tends to be replicated by other workers of the same job category. This systematic procedure allows constant process that is projected to yield constant outcomes. Standard operations, systematic procedures make organizations "organized". However, "faster is slower" applies in systems approach. As applied in organization, when all efforts are done to accelerate growth, output tends to slow down in the long run as systems have a natural tendency to 'cool off' as in the case of natural systems (Olobia, 2022). This means that the tendency to accelerate towards optimal performance leads to slowing down once the system reaches its peak as a natural reaction. In the context of knowledge management, leadership is key to success because in any of the aforementioned strategies and activities, human communication pervades in KM and leaders should possess communicative, interactive skills to manage knowledge flow (Olobia, 2023).

Some modern critics of systematization assert dangers of the process as it puts people in a box with repetitive tasks that deny them the opportunity to be more creative, to get out of their comfort zones, and to venture into some new ideas that have not been done before – all for the reason that systematization has made their duties fixed. Although there is veracity to the claim, it must also be noted that systems are susceptible to changes both internal and external. Such changes call for adaptation of the systemic process to adjust to changing conditions. Dynamic organizations especially those in expansion will be encountering problems that call for some adjustment to the systematized rules otherwise the organization will lose its existence. Now, when newly adapted system of doing things is in place, it is followed up until a new wave of experience alters the process and a paradigm shift offers new systematic procedures. This implies that systematization principle takes some historical point of view of experience before it becomes a standard practice. Meaning to say systematization is largely due to a collected experience from previous people that have carefully been studied, analyzed so that the patterned flow has made it a standard procedure for present members to replicate.

In order for systematization to lead to great results, leaders have important responsibilities to monitor and evaluate such standard procedures in terms of their effect to the organization so that any departure from desired results will have to be scrutinized and changed if necessary.

Finally, the phrase "parts of the organization must interact and work together for a common goal" (Ryan,1975) means that leaders and members have to embody team learning (Senge, 2009) through collaborations, consultations and cooperation in the achievement of a common goal. This common goal unites the members, it makes their tasks follow a systematized order, integrated within the shared vision of an organization. In another light one way leaders can demonstrate to employees that they're taking action is to put some of the power to impact culture back into employees' hands (Baumgartner, 2020).

Principle of compatibility

Organizations are efficient when they are compatible with their environment. First, the statement is an assertion of open systems that interact with the environment providing feedback for any adjustment it has to make based feedback. The interaction is not just any form of interaction but there should be a fit, a match with organizational needs based on interactions with the environment. This can be done through environmental scanning during a strategic planning that will investigate trends, issues, market analyses in order to provide impetus for creating a desired plan. Compatibility is accentuated in systems thinking that implies integrative relationships, perspective and interdisciplinary thinking where managers will look at the system as part of a larger scheme of relationship outside of its own. The surrounding environment, as articulated, provides the force that will determine an organization's sustainability. The aforementioned ideas are explained in Organizational Systems Theory that asserts that organizations are shaped by their environment. It is also worth noting that an organization should also adjust to changes that occur in the environment, such dynamic process is an important consideration so that the organization does not lose its vitality, hence, compatibility is ensured.

The other side of the argument contends that the organization should also consider how it impacts the environment. This entails consideration of 'externalities' or effects of an organization's growth, for instance, to the environment. A number of industries fall into this trap where spillover effects of growth take a negative toll to the environment in terms of pollution, environmental degradation, among other issues. Hence, compatibility should be a two-way process of mutual understanding that benefits both parties.

The realization of systems thinking that ensures compatibility between organization and its environment is made possible with systems design as articulated in the words of Laszlo and Krippner, "we take responsibility for the creation of our future in co-evolutionary interdependence with our social and physical environment." This simply states emergent systems and organizations must grow together with the environment. Feedback mechanisms that the environment provides are essential tools for organizational direction. Also, compatibility contends internal fit between management and its internal environment –people and subsystems accentuated by an organizational culture that binds people in encapsulating overall stability of the organization

headed by a leader who embodies personal mastery of knowledge and skills, challenges mental models, employs systems thinking, practices team learning and cultivates shared vision (Senge, 2009).

Finally, Bertalanffy (1954), in his general systems theory contends the presence of a flow of energy, matter and information between the system and its environment. This statement construes a synergy of compatibility that if applied in an organization, efficiency in interactive process ensures realization of organizational plans.

Principle of optimization

Optimization entails achievement of specific tasks which will lead to achieving the organization's mission. Based on views of strategic planning, an organization's objectives are specific statements on what it should do to achieve its overall mission. It will be noticed that strategic planning may take a long period of time in its implementation so that shorter-period action plans, operational plans under the big plan that cover all aspects of implementation procedures must be done efficiently. In some case action plans have derivative plans that serve as options but they also affect in the achievement of the overall plan. These sub-tasks are done in order to address certain uncertainty of strategic plans that are way ahead in the future. Efficiency in such productive endeavors make room for changes, trends, performance enhancements that will not only be effective in short-term goals but for long-term visions as well. Doing so requires robust leadership imbued with skills in management, monitoring and evaluation of projects and one that consults with members to achieve optimal results.

Following the new modernist philosophy of organizational theory that places humans at the center of organization, consultation must adhere to company's desired goals in addressing various individuals so that leaders must articulate beta level points of view to save time and to have a more holistic approach in generating good ideas for the company. Due to the complexity of KM processes, it can be argued that organizational learning, systems thinking, and community of practice are examples of KM strategies that require knowledge for the most part (Olobia, 2022).

Furthermore, organizations that meet specific targets are bound to create new ideas that will compound and in time organization's mission is achieved. In doing so, an organization must consider that competition breeds success and it levels up performance thereby surpassing targets. Other organizations doing the same task will always try to offer something new and better to surpass its competitor, thus, an organization must look ahead and at the same time be grounded on articulating objectives that are specific, manageable, achievable, realistic and time bound.

Finally, optimization is an undertaking that entails both management and members of an organization to work as a team with the conscious effort of bringing the organization to its desired plan. Optimization is not only realized when big plans are achieved but specific targets need to be met as well.

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