An Analysis of Theory of Organisational Typologies and their Application in Higher Education Institutional Settings

Muftahu Jibirin Salihu1*

1National Higher Education Research Institute, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia.

Author’s contribution

The sole author designed, analysed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

ABSTRACT

This research examined the different theories of organisational typologies and their conceptualised application to higher education institutions. The paper is divided into two main parts. The first part is the literature review which discusses each of the organisational typologies and their basic characteristics. Specific examples are also given for each of organisational typology alongside the proponent of each type. Four different types of typologies presented by Miles and Snow [1], Burns and Stalker [2], Morgan [3] and Hoy and Miskel [4] are discussed in the review section. The second part practically synthesised how each of the organisational typologies could apply to the higher educational institutions. A mind map was created to prove how a specifically higher institution may be classified as a ‘defender’ type of organisation.

Keywords: Theory; organization; typologies; higher education; institutions.
1. INTRODUCTION

Schuler and Jackson [5] stated that the theory of strategic human resources management indicates the primary role of a human resource (HR) manager as that which revolves around acting as the interface between the institutions’ goal achieving strategy and having the capacity and right tools to implement such strategies. This specific definition is one of the strongest and most dominant strategies applied by many institutions alongside the rise of the strategic human resource management (SHRM) which improved and widened the definition of the human resource management (HRM) function as well as the main responsibilities of an HR manager.

Nevertheless, many are still wondering about what could be the possible reasons why the theory of strategic human resources management arose in line with today’s demands for the institution. Interestingly, Nankervis, Compton and Baird [6] provided their insights into why there is a need to seek better alignment and integration of HR functions with an institution’s overall goal-achieving strategy. The constant changes in the external environment are what pushed the organisation to function as an adaptive mechanism that responds to the needs and demands of the 21st century environment. As supported by Drucker [7], the organisations today are within an era called ‘the age of social transformation' which requires such organisations to innovate and adapt to the changes in the environment. In line with this present context wherein organisations are challenged to thrive into, this paper will be conducting a brief review of the literature that is related to the typologies of the organisations to depict the current status or state of thinking in this area of HRM. The review will also be exploring the current thinking in terms of the similarities and differences between the various theories of organisations.

2. THE ORGANISATIONAL TYPOLOGIES

The different theoretical typologies presented by the different authors through their seminal works provide extremely useful frameworks of reference which are relevant and significant, especially when discussing the complex issues which are inherent in the HRM. Nevertheless, such theoretical typologies were claimed as ‘do not exist' in the actual context and that there may be specific boundaries between each of these theoretical typologies that may likely be blurred. Based on the literature review, such theoretical typologies may only prove to be useful as they highlight the need to integrate and align all HR functions to the articulated strategy and long-term goals of an organisation. The following are the specific theoretical typologies as defined and described by the succeeding authors:

2.1 Miles and Snow [1]

Miles and Snow [1] presented their seminal work and identified four organisational types which they claimed may be used to classify the organisations. The types are as follows:

2.1.1 Defenders

According to Miles and Snow [1], defenders are organisations which demonstrate a secure and stable position because of too little available competition. One consequence of this is that they do very little adjustment in terms of their culture, technology, methodology, and structure [8]. Moreover, defender organisations simply focus on their quality enhancement approaches. These may be supported by certain HR policies that advocate a philosophy which focuses on working smarter.

2.1.2 Prospector

Miles and Snow [1] defined the prospector organisations like the ones which are in constant search for new ideas and better opportunities for the entire company. Such organisations love to experiment, diversify, innovate, and adapt to change. Their philosophy is ‘work differently'.

2.1.3 Analyser

The analyser organisations are a combination of the dominant characteristics of the defender and prospector organisational types [1]. Such organisations operate in both unstable and stable environments and are watchers of their competitors, especially for new and better ideas [8].

2.1.4 Reactors

Finally, Miles and Snow [1] defined the reactor organisations as those organisations which either have no strategy at all or have one strategy but are identified to be quite inconsistent. Compared to the previous organisational types, the main strategy that is pursued by a reactor organisation...
may be characterised by various inconsistencies as well as a ‘reactionary’ and ‘knee-jerk’ response to environmental change. Because of this, reactors are considered to be relatively weak organisations given their inconsistent strategies.

2.2 Burns and Stalker [2]

Burns and Stalker [2] emphasised the basic differences between organismic organisations and mechanistic organisations. Mechanistic organisations insist on conformity and loyalty; suit stable environments; are comprised of hierarchical structures; have vertical top-down communication, precise job descriptions, and roles; possess creativity directed towards internal problems only; and maintain status quo. On the other hand, organismic organisations suit unstable and changing conditions; are fluid and flat; have high-level employee commitment, flexible structure, vertical and horizontal communication, and networked infrastructure; are comprised of teams and problem-solvers, and regularly reinvent themselves.

2.3 Morgan's Metaphors [3]

Morgan [3] presented eight organisational metaphors via a concept map which summarised the main features of each. The first metaphor was the organisation being likened to bureaucratic machines, possess tight control, have defined roles, are ingrained in a traditional mindset, and possess limited utility in the 21st century. The second metaphor was the organisation being likened to brains which possess value thinking and learning and may be considered to possess a learning organisation mindset. The third metaphor was the organisation being likened to cultures which possess values, ideas, beliefs, norms, and rituals [3].

The fourth metaphor was the organisation being likened to psychic prisons which possess control, Freudian ideas, and hidden meanings. The fifth metaphor was the organisation being likened to instruments of domination which are characterised by exploitation and possess an impact on global corporations. The sixth metaphor was the organisation being likened to organisms which exercise ‘best fit’ or contingency models and possess an open system that is sensitive to the external environment and are characterised by the interdependence of subsystems. The seventh metaphor was the organisation being likened to political systems which possess power conflicts and unitarist or pluralist perspectives. Finally, the eighth metaphor was the organisation being likened to flux and transformation which suggests about four frames to study change management and seeks to understand forces at work during change [3].

2.4 Hoy and Miskel [4]

The last typology for organisations is in the work of Hoy and Miskel [4] who introduced a framework indicating the complexities of organisational culture and provided at least four types of organisational cultures. The cultures are rational, ideological, consensual and hierarchical. Rational culture is characterised by centralisation of power, integrated activities, and an external focus that produces competition with the other organisations. Ideological culture is marked by a decentralisation of power. In this type of culture, the organisation's focus is on the external concerns of growth and competition. Also, its broad purposes generate the organisation's commitment and values. This organisation also uses innovation and invention to compete for resources and external support throughout its quest for transformation and expansion. Consensual culture is characterised by decentralisation of power, differentiation of activities, and internal focus on system maintenance. Finally, hierarchical culture is a type of organisational culture that is characterised by centralisation of power and integrated activities including internal focus concerned with maintaining the system.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 The Organisational Typologies and their Basic Characteristics

Based on all the four different types of typologies presented by Miles and Snow [1], Burns and Stalker [2], Morgan [3] and Hoy and Miskel [4], the authors of this paper believe that each type of organisational typology represents the basic ideas and perceptions of organisations according to the era or period in which the authors themselves saw the evidence in how organisations functioned and what their basic composition or structures were. This paper also ascertained that such typologies presented in the text were quite useful, especially in terms of identifying the typologies of every organisation that exist today. Another interesting fact is that
3.2 Examining the Application of the Theories about Higher Education Institutional Settings

The authors of this paper selected a particular institution to describe the application of the typologies for better understanding and conceptualisation. As teachers in a higher education institution, the authors considered the specific institution selected as a defender type of organisation (Fig. 1).

The selected institution is considered a pretty stable and secure institution which has been tried and tested and has been in existence for more than 30 years. Nevertheless, the institution’s existence for over 30 years has been made better by the fact that there is very little local competition available for the institution. In its rank, there are very few best Malaysian colleges which it is currently competing with and that is why this college has an edge as one of the first and best institutions in Malaysia.

The institution’s strategic focus remains to be ‘doing the same things better’ in terms of the institution’s structure, culture, technology, or methodology. The authors noticed that it remains relatively the same for the past 30 years. Year after year, the culture, technology, methods, and structure remain the same for this institution. It would be quite difficult to always change, adjust, and adapt to a new technology and organisational culture year after year. The little adjustment was therefore quite necessary and advantageous on the part of the educators.

Moreover, the institution is also focused on quality enhancement not only in the teachers’ teaching methodologies and level of knowledge but also on the students’ curriculum. This explains why in the organisation, there is a yearly curriculum enhancement programme intended to streamline and improve the curriculum of the institution to increase the relevance and necessity of the subjects being taught to the students. Finally, the ‘work smarter’ philosophy is one of the most important guiding principles in the institution as it enables the teachers to not focus on the quantity but the quality of their work. The challenge of the institution to the teachers is how to balance out their work based on the quantity and quality equation set by the institution. Through this guiding principle, the teachers are constantly reminded that the focus on quantity and quality must be balanced and the most important priority is the students’ level of learning and progress.

3.2.1 The organisational typologies and use in the selected institution

Schuler and Jackson [5] noted that the theory of SHRM is undoubtedly linked to the typologies of organisations as depending on the type of organisations that exist. This would determine the type of SHRM strategies that are applied by an organisation. The theory of SHRM arose in line with today’s demands for the organisation. This would indicate that it is the changes and needs of the organisation which dictate the type of SHRM principles, standards, and strategies that will be applied by an organisation [9]. Nankervis et al. [6] claimed that changes in the business and organisational environment these days provided for the need to seek better alignment and integration of HR functions with a company’s overall business strategy. Also, in this age of social transformation, organisations certainly do not have a choice but to constantly innovate and adapt to the changes in the environment.

The institution selected for this study is one of the best examples of an organisation which exists today and is being compelled to not only adapt to the changes in its environment but also to identify its typology and nature as an organisation to facilitate effective adoption and utilisation of the various SHRM strategies. This paper has previously indicated that the institution may fall in the category of a defender organisation, which according to Miles and Snow [1], demonstrates a secure and stable position because of too little available competition in its industry. According to Miles and Snow [1], a prospector is an organisation which is in constant search for new ideas and better opportunities for the entire company. It is an organisation that loves to experiment, diversify, innovate, and adapt to change. This paper ascertained that as a college which has been around for over 30 years, this would seem to be too much work, not to mention too costly. Besides, adopting to change would entail a quarterly or yearly change.
for the college’s technological tools. This would therefore not be practical for them.

If the institution adopts an analyser organisational typology, the authors opined that its main SHRM implications for the college would be that its employees may have the chance to work on both extremes. This means that the employees of the institution will either experience an extremely stable environment with high job security or an extremely unstable environment with low job security. Needless to say, unstable institutions are characterised by high employee turnover while stable organisations are characterised by low employee turnover. If this was the case for the college, it would not be a pleasant environment to work in, especially if it proves to be quite unstable [10]. Furthermore, if the institution is classified as a reactor, then the authors of this paper viewed that the college will be considered a rather weak type of organisation or institution.

Moving on to the theoretical typologies of the organisation identified by Burns and Stalker [2] who emphasised the basic differences between organismic organisations and mechanistic organisations, the institution selected for this case is considered as a mechanistic organisation. This was the case in the institution where it is characterised by conformity and loyalty among its employees which includes the teachers and the school administrators. It also suits stable environments as the institution itself is stable and secure. Similar to other kinds of institution, it is also comprised of hierarchical structures with a vertical top-down ‘communication’. Its employees have precise job descriptions and roles, the same with its administrators and it maintains the status quo. One important SHRM implication of this type of organisation, specifically within the context of a college, is that it would have a relatively low employee turnover due to its stable and secure organisational characteristics [11].

On the other hand, organismic organisations do not fit the institution selected for this case as organismic organisations best suit unstable and changing conditions which are not the main nature of the institution although there is a relatively high level of employee commitment. This shows that the fluid, flat, flexible structure does not fit an institution system due to its relatively stable organisational atmosphere which does not require a change from time to time. Besides, institutions do not have to regularly reinvent themselves. One important strategic implication if the college will be categorised as organismic will be possible confusion among its employees as to what specific roles and functions are to be expected of them, which may eventually result in many employees quitting their jobs.

In terms of Morgan [3] and his eight organisational metaphors, it was presented via a concept map which summarised the main features of each. It is possible for the institution to be classified as a rather bureaucratic organisation which possesses tight control, has defined roles among its members, is ingrained in a traditional mindset, and possesses limited utility in the 21st century.

In many ways, the institution may also be considered an organisation likened to cultures which possess values, ideas, beliefs, norms, and rituals based on the institution’s new employees. It is quite distinct from other institutions they may have experienced teaching at. According to them, this institution has incredible work philosophies, possesses work-life balance credo, and has a unique family-type of environment wherein all employees would enjoy working.

This institution may not be likened to psychic prisons which possess control, Freudian ideas, and hidden meanings because if the university happens to be of this type of organisation, then it will certainly be not an enjoyable workplace to go to. Psychic prisons build on the view of the debate between humanists and materialists [3]. Also, the fifth metaphor of Morgan [3] which was the organisation being likened to instruments of domination, characterised by exploitation, and possesses an impact on global corporations, is certainly not the institution which is selected for this case. It may most likely fit into the category of an organisation being likened to organisms which exercise ‘best fit’ or contingency models, possesses an open system that is sensitive to the external environment, and is characterised by the interdependence of subsystems. As a matter of fact, by this characteristic, the institution is known as one of the best institutions in Malaysia and for this reason, a high sense of employee commitment and loyalty may deeply be felt and experienced in this college. Furthermore, concerning its SHRM implications, there will be lesser work for the HRM department as few employees will most likely leave the college every year while more employees will most likely be interested to enter the college and work there as well [12].
4. CONCLUSION

The assessment and application of each of the organisational typology theories are important for an organisation to know how it may best function. More importantly, the theory of SHRM is significantly linked to the typologies of organisations as depending on the type of organisation which exists. This determines the type of SHRM strategies which are applied by an organisation [13]. Therefore, an organisation or institution may not be able to apply and execute the most appropriate and applicable SHRM strategies without first knowing its organisational typology [14]. However, [15] argue that it takes great understanding of leadership theories and frameworks in higher education for institutional leaders to comprehend, understand and operationalized institutional component which organizational typologies is one of them.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

REFERENCES

12. Newmann FM, Wehlage GG. Successful school restructuring: A report to the public


© 2019 Salihu; This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Peer-review history:
The peer review history for this paper can be accessed here:
http://www.sdiarticle4.com/review-history/53985