Implementation of Postmodernism in the Futuristic Organization

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Modernism is exemplified by the desire to create one grand scheme for conquering the environment at the direction and benefit of the individual (Borgmann, 1993). This definition of modernism is supported by Alvesson and Deetz (1997) when they note that the rise of reason over authority and tradition marks the modern epoch. Additionally, Alvesson and Deetz (1997) suggest that modernism is the time of enlightenment, and that enlightenment is the enemy of darkness, tradition, ideology, irrationality, ignorance, and positional authority. "Modernism initially represented emancipation over myth, authority, and traditional through knowledge, reason, and opportunities based on heightened capacities" (Alvesson & Deetz, 1997, p. 196). However, this philosophy is being replaced with a new postmodern one, which is primarily characterized by its similarities and differences from modern thinking. Bergquist (1996) indicates that postmodernism is in the midst of being born, but does not have a clear definition other than its origin in and difference from modernism" (p. 578).

Postmodernism differs from modernism by accepting the belief that social reality is constructed. According to Lasch (1992), the most important postmodern discovery is that reality is shaped by human perceptions, and cannot be understood as an objective view of nature (Lasch, 1992). Similarly, Winograd and Flores (1986) suggest that the leading illusion of the rationalistic tradition is the belief that knowledge consists of theories that can be systematically used to make predictions. The postmodern world is characterized by constructivism. The constructivist perspective is postmodern, and the objectivist perspective is modern (Bergquist, 1996).

Nevertheless, all organization and management theory is based on metaphors, and human beings see, act and perceive reality based on them (Morgan, 1998). Thus, it is important for

leaders to realize that many theories, metaphors, or models must be combined and used to provide the best construction and perception of reality. The current world is simultaneously modern and postmodern (Bergquist, 1996). This new world needs a model for understanding that facilitates the ability live in both the modern and postmodern world coincidently. Thus, the following model suggests that both modern and postmodern thinking must be used in organizational leadership.

Recommended Philosophy

Postmodern and modern philosophies can be compared and contrasted on the two dimensions of ontology and epistemology (Reference Philosophy Model, Figure 1). Modern and postmodern philosophies differ in their perspective of ontology. Ontology is the study of existence, or Being. "Being is found in thatness and whatness, reality, the being at hand of things [*Vorhandenheit*], subsistence, validity, existence [*Dasein*], and in "there is" [*es gibt*]" (Heidegger & Krell, 1993). The style of thinking that concerns Being differentiates modernism and postmodernism. Modernists believe that reality exists separate from the individual, and postmodernist believe reality is a social or individual construction. This divide affects all aspects of the being of human beings, and it expresses itself in almost every discipline by opposition between objectivism versus relativism, rationality versus irrationality, objectivity versus subjectivity (Anderson, 1992), and modernism versus postmodernism. In this same vein, epistemology also demarcates postmodern from modern philosophical thought. Epistemology is the theory of knowledge, and philosophers distinguish several different types of human knowledge (Moser & Vander Nat, 1995). Modernist are rationalist and empiricist, and postmodernist are pragmatist and skeptics. Modernism is characterized by a rationalism and belief that it is possible to communicated effectively to other rational beings, and postmodernism rejects this position as being imperialistic

and naïve of the fundamental uncontrollability of meaning (Alvesson, 1995). However, these

philosophical dimensions, whether ontological or epistemological, do not exist in the exclusion

of the others, but instead are coexistent in support and balance of each other. "Different

approaches co-existed in the past and continue to do so today" (Clegg, Hardy, & Nord, 1996,
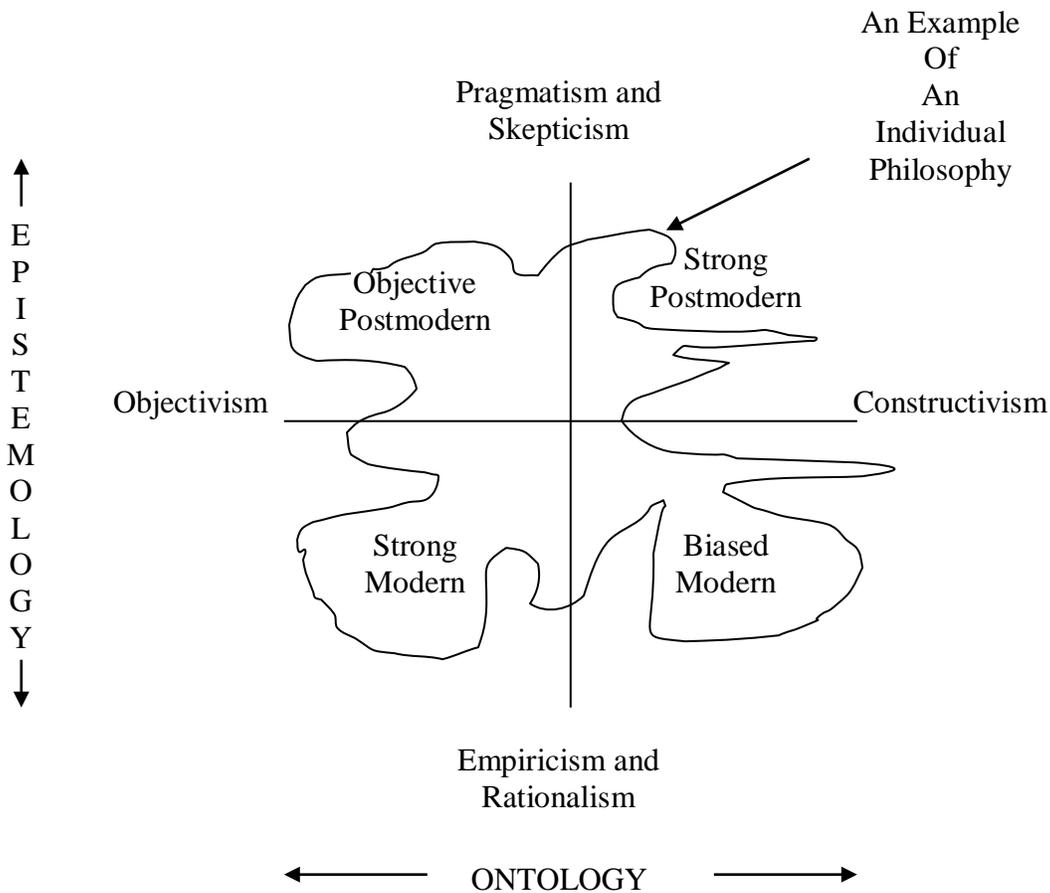
p.47).

Figure 1. Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Comparison and Contrast Model

This holistic approach to thinking is modeled in figure 1, which shows that "strong postmodern" philosophy is characterized by the belief in constructed realities, and in practical and skeptical approaches for research. Diametrically opposed to this position is the "strong modern" philosophy, which consists of the belief that reality can be perceived objectively, and the preference for rational and empirical processes for research. However, as modeled, these are purist positions, which neither the postmodern or the modern employee keeps untainted in his or her activities. Rationality is a concealment of its own inner workings because it is grounded in the unconsciousness (Cooper & Burrell, 1988), and the proposition that language cannot adequately convey reality is posited by postmodernist using rational discourse (Alvesson, 1995).

Thus, this model depicts two other perspectives that demonstrate this balance and support: "biased modern" or "objective postmodern". As modeled, the biased modern thinker believes that reality can be studied rationally through empirical research, but that perception (reality creation) is biased through metaphors and other constructions for developing understanding. The objective postmodern position suggests that reality must be viewed skeptically and judged on its pragmatic value, and that this can be accomplished without bias if adequate rigor is employed.

Nevertheless, no single theory or metaphor is completely accurate, and leaders must remain flexible in their ability to use them all. Any situation can have multiple interpretations, and managers must remain open and flexible in this regard (Morgan, 1998). Chaos rules in the contemporary world. Even though a large amount of information is available, leaders are unable to make informed and objective decisions. The complex nature of cause and effect relationships prevents the manager from knowing the correct answer (Shafritz & Ott, 1996). Thus, the manager or leader must exploit all perspectives and thinking to obtain the best results, and this

foundation must be used to apply modern and postmodern thinking in an organizational environment. The contemporary and futuristic leader must exploit all thinking in leading his or her organization, and this requires working across the continuum of both the ontological and epistemological perspectives of modernism and postmodernism.

Most leaders are well founded in the ways of objective approaches, rationalism, and empiricism. The modern society has created the subject that understands the scientific methods of modernism. The contemporary leader will require going beyond those modern foundations without destroying them.

Recommended Application Plan

    Constructivism

Caring environments must be constructed so organizations built upon networks and interrelationships can succeed, and communication is the key to this construction. Language is a social creation, and not just the transmission of information (Winograd & Flores, 1986), and to create caring organizations, language must transpire cognitively and emotionally on the solid foundation of love.

Leaders must show empathy for others while being true to his or her core beliefs. Although detailed actions cannot be adequately specified in this regard except, a leader must *know* that she or he cares for others and the organizations (networks) that they create. A leader can manifest empathy in many regards and many actions, but this empathy must originate in the demonstration of integrity. Leaders must be true to the "golden-rule", and encourage others to effect similar traits. In doing so, a leader will facilitate the creation of equity that promotes creative problem solving and caring relationships.

Leaders must construct organizations that encourage and enable power equity if they are to attract and keep the most talented individuals. This requires leaders that foster the equal distribution of power. Leaders must create an environment that allows workers at all levels in the organization to effect their powers, and in doing so, facilitate an organization where participation is maximized. Workers must reward their subordinates, peers, and superiors when they have performed outside their normal sphere of duty, and to accomplish this empowerment, the leader can implement a spot-award program that permits everyone in the company not only to nominate others for an reward, but permits them to effect it. Guidelines can be established, budgets determined, and everyone empowered. Each employee can be given the equivalent of one day's pay each year to "spend" on others as they choose. Proper accounting must be required, but trust and empowerment will be the foundation of this policy. This accounting must be handled in the same manner as any expense, and anyone determined to have "cheated" the company by funneling money to themselves must be immediately terminated for cause. As Frankl suggests, "freedom is only part of the story and half of the truth. Freedom is but the negative aspect of the whole phenomenon whose positive aspect is responsibleness" (Frankl, 1984, p. 155). Employees can be given the freedom to reward those who they determine deserve it, but they must also be held responsible for applying this reward system in accordance with the company's guidelines.

Skepticism/Pragmatism

People are not perfect and it is only practical to assume that people need to be "backed-up" in order to ensure seamless operation when people are absent for whatever reason. Some people will be absent for no reason and abuse the system, and others will do everything they can to support it. Nevertheless, a model must be constructed that allows a pragmatic collection of knowledge distributed throughout a network of alternates.

The key in implementing this network is the requirement that the alternate will assume the responsibility of the primary employee when the primary is absent from work, and that the organization will accept that knowledge and performance must be judged pragmatically. When the primary employee is absent from work, the alternate must be able to perform the work of the primary in his or her own, albeit imperfect, way. This performance must be judge on pragmatic grounds. The leader must accept the views of Clarence Irving Lewis' when he states:

> The truths of experience must always be relative to our chosen conceptual systems in terms of which they are expressed; and that amongst such conceptual systems there may be choice in application. Such choice will be determined, consciously or unconsciously, on pragmatic grounds. When this happens, nothing literally becomes false, and nothing becomes true which was not always true. An old intellectual instrument has been given up. Old concepts lapse and new ones take their place. (Moser & Vander Nat, 1995, p. 244).

The leader must accept that performance and knowledge must be judge pragmatically, and alternates must not be expected to perform in the same manner as the primary.

To perpetuate the model of networks, the leader can create a matrix listing the first and second alternates of everyone in the organization. The selection of these alternates will be determined by the primary employee with the approval of the leader.

When determining the alternates, the following must be followed: 1) alternates must be from outside the direct functional area, 2) alternates must have the capability of learning the work to be performed, 3) it is the primary's responsibility to train two different alternates, and it is everyone's responsibility to back-up at least two individuals.

In effecting these networks, the following guidelines must be followed: 1) for "normal" type absences, the primary will contact his or her alternate and provide directions for activities that

must be covered during the primary's absence, and leave a message for the supervisor that this has been accomplished and why, and 2) for emergency absences, the primary will inform the supervisor or the alternate of the emergency and then forget about work and attend to the emergency. Additionally, it will be the alternate's responsibility to resolve any issues that arise during the primary's absence, and to brief the primary when he or she returns. The alternate will be required to question, research, and determine the appropriate actions required during the primary's absence.

Once this matrix has been developed and agreed upon, it becomes the primary's and the alternate's responsibility to ensure their work areas are covered during absences. In the case of an emergency, the employee will only be responsible to ensure someone at work is aware of his or her plight.

Conclusion

Community and commitment must be socially constructed within contemporary organizations (Bergquist, 1993). In the parochial family unit, the parent creates a lifelong bond by loving and serving their children (Bergquist, 1993), and in organizations of the future, employees construct high performing networks by demonstrating love and serving each other's needs. Love is powerful, and the love of humanity and the desire to be a decent human being is an important characteristic of the postmodern employee. Organizations need to attract the best talent possible, and by leading the construction of a caring organization, managers of the present and future position their organizations well toward this objective. Leaders who are genuinely concerned with the development of their employees technical and self-esteem needs attract and maintain the best.

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