

Final Journal Report

What particular organizational theories did you find the most meaningful? Use examples from your journal entries and relate them to course materials.

Organizational theories are vital because they provide an explanation or a way to interpret and understand public organizations. Organizational theories “do not exist apart from practice; they are integrally related to the way we act as members or clients of public agencies” (Denhardt 3). Given this statement every action in a public organization occurs within a theoretical framework. The organizational theories that I found the most meaningful to analyzing my actions and the public organization itself were traits and skills theory and transformational leadership.

One of the first theories used to analyze leadership were traits. Statements such as “she is born to be a leader” or “he is a natural born leader” were considered the norm. It was thought that certain people were born to be leaders because of traits they possessed. Some of the traits considered important were intelligence, persistence, extroversion, influence, self-confidence, sociability, initiative, and responsibility. Initially I was very biased toward trait theory. In my journal entry on leadership I described my boss as “a short middle aged Asian American woman who has a friendly voice, and pleasant demeanor. She treats employees with respect and oftentimes defers to their opinions”. I thought my boss was a weak leader because she lacked self-confidence and influence. On many occasions I had interpreted her facial expressions to be frightened. I thought leaders should never show fear in front of their followers, but exude self-confidence and always be very direct and assertive. I made a value judgment on

her ability to lead based upon my perception that she lacked strong leadership qualities.

The belief that leaders have traits that make them successful also explains why I behaved the way I did when Ms. Babcock decided to eliminate the workshop class. I wrote in my journal “I knew that Ms. Sharp respected my leadership and expected me to have an opinion on Ms. Babcock’s decision. I felt pressured to act decisively and with authority because that’s what I thought good leaders do.” Reflecting back upon these experiences in my journal entries I can see that my perceptions about my boss and myself were skewed by trait theory. I used trait theory as a crutch instead of realizing that leadership is not about solely about the individual or the traits they possess, but is a process. Leadership is a complex process that involves “an array of assessment skills, a series of characteristics (traits and skills) that leaders bring to a particular setting, and a wide variety of behavioral competencies (Van Wart 3). Accepting that leadership is a process has been especially meaningful to me because it made me realize that “leadership is available to everyone and is something that can be learned” (Northouse 4).

Subsequently, leadership skills and transformational leadership theory have become particularly meaningful to me because it views leadership as a learning process that involves both the leader and its followers. Skills theory focuses in on skills and abilities that a leader can develop. In particular researchers have identified three basic skills: technical, human, and conceptual as the key to effective leadership. Technical skills refer to “having knowledge about and being proficient in a specific type of work or activity” (Northouse 36). In making the snap judgment of my boss’s ability to lead I should have also

looked at her technical skills and realized that part of her unwillingness to act decisively right now is that she has only been Executive Director for a few months in our office. In my journal I wrote, “she does not understand all of the day to day activities that each employees performs and defers to their opinion most of the time”. I should have been more sympathetic to what it must feel like to become leader of a public organization and have to make decisions before you have learned all the ropes. I have only been employed at my job for two more months than my boss and I have found that I still need to turn to my co-workers for guidance in my decision-making as I learn the intricacies of my job.

Another important skill that leaders should possess is human skills. Human skills are the “ability to work with people” or what some people might call “people skills” (Denhardt 37). John D. Rockefeller, the oil tycoon when asked what he valued most in a leader said, “I will pay more for the ability to deal with other people than any other ability under the sun” (Van Wart 191). A leader having human skills is probably one of the important and undervalued skills in the workplace. In my work experiences I found that the breakdown in communication, decision-making, and leadership is oftentimes the by-product of leader lacking “people skills”. For example, when I made a decision to not address the lack of immaturity that I witnessed with the two secretaries in my office I was avoiding treating them as humans who are fallible. I wrote in my journal “oftentimes these two secretaries came to me for advice for both personally and professionally. I shirked my duty of telling them problems that I saw with their maturity level because I wanted to keep things pleasant”.

Likewise my manager’s decision to let the two secretaries go because they had not passed the civil service exam reveals how he treated these two individuals

as objects in a rigid system that adheres to rules. He never acknowledged to them or anyone else in the office that exams do not always measure people's intelligence or ability to do a job. I think my manager like so many people including myself are oftentimes at a loss with how we should deal with people in an authentic manner. Human issues are sometimes too messy, so both of us avoided addressing the needs of the two secretaries because it was easier to follow rules and protocol. If we had dealt with these two secretaries truthfully we would have addressed some of their issues head on. To help resolve the exam situation we could have asked "Is this something in particular on the exam that is difficult for you or what do you need from us to help you pass the exam? One of the annoying things that both secretaries did was to surf the Internet instead of doing their work. This issue could have been resolved by asking them "do you find your daily task challenging enough or what daily routines do you want to change? Ultimately, I think human skills or how we treat people plays a major role in employee satisfaction, which translates into creating a positive work environment.

Conceptual skills are also important for a leader to develop. Conceptual skills refer to the ability to deal with ideas, concepts, or the big picture. "Conceptual skills are central to creating a vision and strategic plan for an organization" (Northouse 38). Conceptual concepts have been meaningful to me because of my experience working for an Internet start-up company. The company was called ePlay and it's mission was to be an educational website that helped parents, teachers, and students. The problem with the mission was that it was too broad and instead of focusing on capturing one audience it tried to hold three. Needless the company went bankrupt not only because the dot.com

industry failed, but also because our leader lacked the ability to provide the organization and its employees with a clear picture of our objectives. In my journal I wrote that “month to month my boss would come in with new ideas that replaced the old ones and we never stayed with one clear vision. It was a very frustrating experience that made me realize how important it is for leaders to provide the big picture for its employees”.

Transformational leadership theory also has special meaning to me because it concentrates on the connection between leaders and followers. Transformational leadership is defined as “the process in which individuals engage with each other and create a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower”(Northouse 170). Once again I am drawn to the situation with the two secretaries and things that I could have done better. If I had been a transformational leader I would have tried to help these two individuals. In my journal I wrote:

In the future if I work with individuals who are younger than me and have less work experience I will strive to create a supportive environment that encourages and motivates them to grow professionally and emotionally. I will explain to them the every behavior has an effect or a consequence. I will not be afraid to name their behavior and give them an opportunity to take responsibility for their actions and the solution.

Transformational leaders are “attentive to the needs and motives of followers and tries to help followers reach their fullest potential”(Northouse 170).

Another situation in which I could have acted as a transformational leader was the incident where I turned over leadership of the Special Education Department to Ms. Babcock. In my journal I wrote, “instead of seeing Ms. Babcock’s decision as a personal affront to my leadership, I should have welcomed this as an opportunity to improve the program”. I should have

supported Ms. Babcock new role as leader by providing inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation. I could have accomplished this goal by sitting down and having a frank conversation. For inspirational motivation I should have asked what her visions for the program would be next year. For intellectual stimulation I should have asked her opinion on the strengths and weaknesses of the program. Looking back I think if we did have a conversation that it would have went very well based upon the fact when we discussed her decision to eliminate the workshop and we were able problem solve the issues and come up with a compromise. In the end I think the organizational theories that have meant the most to be me are traits and skills theory and transformational leadership because they have taught me that leadership is not about the individual or the traits they possess, but a complex process the involves both the leader and followers making choices that will complete a goal.

As a result of personal reflection and writing these entries, what did you learn about yourself, particular your behavior in or reaction to workplace situations?

My personal reflections in my journal entries revealed many things on the surface that I already knew about myself, but could not quite understand without using organizational theory as analytical framework. First, my leadership style gravitates toward being more task-oriented and not relationship oriented. This means that I typically focus on facilitating followers to achieve my objectives instead of helping people feel comfortable with themselves and with the situation they find themselves (Northouse 65). I know understand that in most situations I typically draw upon my dominant behavioral pattern and natural inclination to be authoritative and decisive because this is how I think effective leaders should act. I have a tendency to ignore the issues of the followers because I always think that I know what's best. As I continue to reflect on my journal entries and my

dominant pattern of behavior I think my new found knowledge of leadership as a process will help me balance my desire to be sole decision-maker.

Secondly, my journal writing also made me finally realized that I'm not very understanding toward individuals that I perceive lack a strong character or work ethic. In my journal entries regarding the two secretaries being let go for not passing the exam I wrote, "I'm not very tolerant of individuals who let personal conflict interfere with their ability to get work done. On several occasions I witnessed how personal conflict or issues affected their work production". In many ways my reaction to the two secretaries being dismissed was one of secret joy. They both knew the consequences for waiting to take the test so late and what it would mean if they failed. I don't have a lot of sympathy for people who make poor decisions. However, looking back on this experience I know realize that I should not let my personal opinions and biases about an individual's work ethic cloud my judgment on what's best for the organization or the individuals involved. Instead of blaming these two individuals I should have been thinking about how my decision-making played a role in the outcome of the situation. I should have acted as a role-model for these two young instead of letting them continue to make mistakes.

What has this self-knowledge taught you about organizational behavior and how will it help you participate more effectively at work?

Organizational behavior is concerned with "what human processes were operating in this situation? (Denhardt 202). In particular organizational behavior is centered on three important processes: leadership, communication, and decision-making. The self-knowledge that I have learned from my journal entries has taught me a lot about organizational behavior, but two concepts resonate the

most with me is that organizational behavior is frequently centered around power and bounded by rationality.

Power is defined as the “capacity or potential to influence. People have power when they have the ability to affect others’ beliefs, attitudes, and course of action (Northouse 6). In the decision to let the two secretaries go my manager made a decision that was based upon position power. Position power “is the power a person derives from particular office or rank in a formal organizational system” (Northouse 6). His decision was uni-lateral and he did not consult my co-workers and I who actually directly supervise these two secretaries on a daily basis. His decision is not surprising because it conforms to the organizational behavior of my office that decisions are made without consulting the opinions of its employees. I also think that my office is not much different from many other organizations in which decisions are top down. This tells me the organizations that make decisions top down think inside the box. In order for me to be more effective in the workplace I will need to push the envelope and challenge my office to not fall into the trap of allowing only those with power make the decisions.

Another example of how power is used in an organization as an attempt to influence and control the situation is the incident in which I confronted Ms. Babcock and her decision to eliminate the workshop class. I wrote in my journal “I wanted to reassert my power as leader of the special education program by forcing Ms. Babcock to change her mind”. Reflecting back on this experience I am ashamed of my behavior because I put Ms. Babcock in the hot seat and embarrassed her in front of her colleague in the attempt to get what I wanted. I think people in positions of power using bullying and intimidation frequently to

get what they want in an organization. What I have learned from this situation is that power is deceptive. A lot of people who wield power over others is simply because of the positions they hold. My manager who decided to let the two secretaries go is not very liked by the employees in my office. They think he is a micro-manager who places office procedures above the interest of his employees. I think the consequence of organizations in which individuals assert their position power over employees is that these managers/leaders are seen as the enemy instead of partners. The organizational becomes more mechanical instead of functioning as organism with everyone working together. My new understanding of power may not enable me to completely change the dynamics of my office, but on an individual level I can make sure that my leadership style is more democratic and coaching. Which means that I will ask people what they think and help others improve their performance.

Another important lesson that I learned about organizational behavior is bounded by rationality. The concept of rationality believes that “organizations are created in order to enhance human rationality and to structure human behavior so that it may approximate abstract rationality” (Denhardt 74). Rationality theory believes that individuals can only make rational decisions when they are part of an organization. Organizations that utilize a rational approach are concerned with efficiency, effectiveness, and legality. What is the quickest or cheapest option? What option will be most successful? What option must be based upon legal procedures? In the example of my manager deciding to release the two secretaries he was relying on rationality decision-making model to make his decision. He used the rules that stated an employee has to pass the 1497 exam before working a thousand hours as his primary reason for his decision. The

problem with my managers decision is that he ignored the interest and feelings of the two secretaries. I know that it will be an economic hardship for both of these secretaries to lose their jobs. I also know these two employees are well-liked and capable of doing a good job despite their immature behavior. What I learned from this incident is that the using rationality as your primary decision-making model ignores the fact that human values should sometimes be given priority over those of the organization. You shouldn't assume that everybody can act rationally. I know from first hand experience that humans do not always act wisely. The two secretaries did not necessarily act sensibly when they decided to risk taking the test late knowing that if they failed they might not get to take the test over again because they would have reached the thousand hour maximum. If I had to do it all over again I would speak up on behalf of these two secretaries and ask my manager if they could be given a second chance. I would explain to him that despite the immaturity of these two secretaries that they were good workers and our Department needed them. More importantly, as I continue working in public organizations I will be cognizant of trying to balance the needs of the organization and the individual when I make decisions. I will not fall into the trap of using only one framework to make a decision, but I will follow the decision-making process that involves three steps: understanding the factors in the decision environment, understanding the values involved, and understanding and being able to utilize the appropriate framework.

In what ways have you changed intellectually and psychologically as a result of writing in your journal? Describe your reaction to journal writing in general and this final assignment in particular.

The purpose of an Administrative journal is to help the individual bridge the gap between theory and practice. Denhardt believes that "by actively reflecting on our experiences and by drawing generalizations from them, we can

learn important lessons about the way organizations work and about the way individuals act in organizational setting” (Denhardt 199). After completing several journal entries about my experiences in the workplace I can definitely say that I learned something about how organizations work and how I act and behave in the context of an organization. Intellectually the journal challenged me to use organizational theories as analytical framework to understand my behavior and organizational behavior. Emotionally the journal challenged me to confront behaviors and actions that I felt uncomfortable discussing. In this sense the journal writing was worth it because it changed me intellectually and psychologically, but on the other hand I can't give it my full stamp of approval because I did not enjoy the journal writing process. Every time I sat down to write a journal entry I cringed about having to put my feelings on paper because I felt I couldn't do it in a concise manner. I felt like I had diarrhea of the mouth and I was writing too much. Even right now I am worried that this final journal report is too long. I feel more comfortable as an academic writer because I can be succinct.

That said, I would recommend that you continuing give this assignment because its an important tool that can help individuals make the connection between theory and practice. I would make some modifications to the assignment like having a maximum page length to help people like myself be more concise. I would also rewrite questions one and questions two because I thought they overlapped each other. When I was explaining what organizational theories meant the most to me I felt that I was essentially describing what I learned about myself. I became very concerned that these two sections were repetitive, but

perhaps I could be mistaken. At any rate I definitely learned a lot about managing organizational behavior.