



Information Systems and Organisations
Topic 2:
Social Contexts and Perspectives on IS

Scope and Coverage

This topic will cover:

- Perspectives on organisations
- Social contexts for technology
- Sensitivity of different organisations to types of technology initiative



Learning Objectives

By the end of this topic students will be able to:

- Understand different perspectives on organisations
- Appreciate how differing perspectives affect the introduction of technology/IS
- Evaluate how social context may affect the likely success of technology/IS initiatives



Contents

- Common perspectives on the organisations
- Impact of technology
- Approaches to technology initiatives

- Emphasis – **People and Organisations**



Perspectives on Organisations 1

- General aim of an organisations is to achieve business goals through effective use of resources
- Specialisation of functions (sales, production, marketing etc.) is often necessary to manage specialist resources
- So, one example of a perspective on an organisation is to be view it as a 'machine' that is designed/organised/controlled to produce desired goods/results (factory, hospital, ...)



Perspectives on Organisations 2

As well as being viewed as 'machines' organisations are often also described as tree/hierarchical structures:

- So another generic view is to consider them as 'structures' identifying functions and structural relationships between them



Different Views

... each person has a different view depending on how the organisation affects/benefits them ...

- Employees' View: (employment, money, pension, social contact, sources of power, status and career satisfaction)
- Customers View: (goods/services, quality, price)
- Employers' View: (structure, profitability, brand)
- Society's View: (economic, societal and environmental impact)



Generally Accepted Perspectives

- FOUR typical metaphors are:
 - Organisations as Machines (Mechanist)
 - Organisations as Structures (Structuralist or Formist)
 - Organisations as Organisms (Organicist)
 - Organisations as Contexts (Contextualist)
- The first 2 of these have already been provided as examples, but all will now be looked at in more depth...



Mechanist Perspective - 1

- Operation of an organisation can be understood using an engineering approach
- Changes can be made by design
- Challenges are largely technical in nature



Mechanist Perspective - 2

- Implementation follows a rational and logical 'planned project' approach
- Resources and costs can be accurately estimated
- Outcomes and benefits can be un-ambiguously evaluated



Structuralist (Formist) Perspective - 1

- Operation of an organisation can be understood through the description of its structure
- Changes can be made by adjusting structures
- Challenges relate to getting resources in the right place (structure)



Structuralist (Formist) Perspective - 2

- Implementation is an administrative process
- Resources and costs can be accurately estimated
- Outcomes and benefits can be un-ambiguously evaluated



Organicist Perspective - 1

- Operation of an organisation is similar to a living being
- Changes occur by development and growth in the right environment
- Challenges are related to achieving the right environment (internal and external)



Organicist Perspective - 2

- Implementation is contingent and involves many factors
- Resources difficult to gauge in advance
- Outcomes and benefits take time to emerge (grow)



Contextualist Perspective - 1

- Operation of an organisation can be understood as the result of competing interests and differing interpretations
- Changes result from social and political action
- Significant challenges are often political in nature



Contextualist Perspective - 2

- Implementation follows both 'overt' and 'covert' processes
- Resources and costs subject to negotiation
- Outcomes depend on who is evaluating them



Approaches 1

- Mechanism and structuralism are related and conform to an instrumental 'hard' paradigm when considering technological change
- Aim of technology in this approach is more effective and presents efficient ways of doing things
- Motivations are economic, to achieve more with less resource
- The balance between quality of outcomes and efficiency is market and competition driven



Approaches 2

- Similarly, Organicism and Contextualism (regarded as 'soft' paradigm approaches), are related
- Introduction of technology in this approach is much more open to interpretation/discussion
- Motivations for technological change tend to serve particular political/social agendas
- Particular interests and situations tend to override efficiency considerations in both planning and evaluation



Real Organisations

- Exhibit characteristics that reflect all the paradigms
- All paradigms are useful as a way of approaching change



Culture of Organisations

- Every organisation has its own culture that refers to:
 - METHODS of Management and Control
 - MEANINGS ascribed to Ideas, Actions and Events
 - NORMS of Behaviour
 - HISTORY and LANGUAGE – including taboos about what may be said and how it may be said

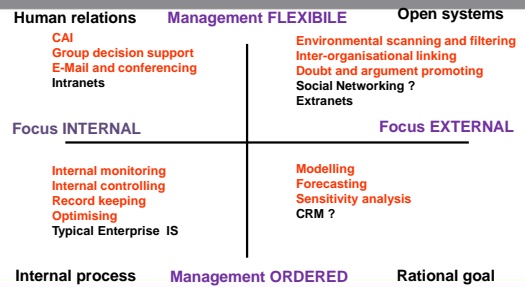


Focus and Organisation Types

- Cooper (1994) and Quinn et al (2003) describe organisations as having cultural types that may be expressed in terms of TWO axes:
 - INTERNAL or EXTERNAL focus
 - FLEXIBLE or ORDERED management
- The classification is shown in the next slide, together with Information Systems that fit well within these cultures



IS & Cultural Types (of organisations)



Examples:

- The organization type refers to the way the organization and staff are managed, what is valued, processes, etc. Large modern organisations may well have elements of cultural type that fall into several quartiles. However, typically:
- Human Relations – Social Work Organisation
 - Open Systems – Advertising Agency
 - Internal Process – Manufacturing Plant
 - Rational Goal – Oil Exploration Company



Impact of Technology

- Influenced by TYPE and Culture of Organisation or part of organisation
- e.g. Human Relations, Open Systems, Internal Process or Rational Goal
- Influenced by PERSPECTIVE/APPROACH
- e.g. Mechanist, Structuralist, Organist or Contextualist



References

- Hassall, J.C. (1999 and 2010), "Some Thoughts on Information Systems and Organisations ", unpublished monograph,
- Boddy, D., Boonstra ,A., Kennedy, G. (2008) Managing Information Systems : strategy and organisation 3rd ed. FT Pearson. ISBN-13: 978-0273 -71681-5XXXX



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Any Questions?