

MODULE 4 TASKS

- Read Chapter 3
- Read Module Overview (includes video and news article)
- Discussion Board Post – Critiquing and/or Praising Theory (see end of document)
- If applicable – Article Report (see end of document for those who signed up for this week)

Disclaimer: The module overview is only meant to serve as a supplement to the required readings. This review does not include all of the information from the chapter. Instead, it provides a brief summary while also factoring in discussion questions and additional examples. Please see the end of the document for a formal reference list, which includes our textbook as well as any other resources used to complete this document.

Module 4 Overview

Housekeeping

As noted in the syllabus, there is a midterm exam in the class. You have two options for taking the exam—online or on-campus. To quote the course calendar, “The midterm exam takes place on campus from 3:30 p.m. to 4:45 p.m. on Wednesday, February 28th. Room location TBA. There is also the option to take the midterm exam online sometime between February 26th and February 28th. However, the online version requires the use of ProctorU. This service is \$19.75 (since our exam is 75 minutes) and the fee is the responsibility of the student. Please view the ProctorU informational handout on D2L in the general information content folder. If you have a class conflict for the on-campus option and prefer not to use the online system, please contact me asap so that we can schedule a different time before the official midterm deadline (11:59 p.m. on Wednesday, February 28th).” If you are going with the online option, remember to make a reservation with ProctorU. You can begin making reservations now. Note that there is an additional fee if you register for the online exam within 72 hours of the exam date. Register early to prevent this fee. Since our midterm exam deadline is February 28th (11:59 p.m.), the latest exam slot you can schedule with ProctorU is 10:45 p.m. on 2/28.

Organizational Theory

Last week we added to our definition (and understanding) of organizational communication. Your understanding of Organizational Communication will grow as we work through each chapter. If you haven’t done so already, start thinking about the organization you want to analyze for the final project. Some of you have already made selections—great. We’ll definitely want to have topics nailed down by the midpoint in the semester (but the sooner, the better). Once you select an organization, you’ll want to start researching and stay up-to-date on what’s happening. Check news sources—are there any big stories going on that might impact your organization or are directly about your organization? Also, continuously check the organization’s website—what type of information are they including? This speaks to how they communicate with those inside and outside of the organization. This research will also help you assess how the organization adapts (or should adapt) to the changing environment.

This week we discuss the various theories that can be used to understand how organizations operate. You’ll notice that the theories receive praises and criticisms. The criticisms of one theory oftentimes lead to the creation of a new theory (similar to what you saw with the communication models discussed in a previous chapter).

Eisenberg, Trethewey, LeGreco, and Goodall (2017), begin by providing a little background on theories, in general. They mention how theories are, “formal systems of hypotheses that aim to explain, predict, and control” (p. 63). The authors also acknowledge that theories are:

- (1) **Partial**, because they won't tell us *everything* about a problem
- (2) **Partisan**, because they tell different stories from the perspective of the specific creators (the way a theory interprets meaning behind a phenomenon is impacted by the theorist's viewpoint)
- (3) **Problematic**, because theories cannot make ultimate statements. Instead, theories lead to more and more questions. However, this can be promising as it may lead to important dialogue about different phenomena.

In chapter 3 we learn about three different approaches and corresponding theories: Classical Management, Human Relations, and Human Resources.

The Classical Management Approach views organizations as efficient machines. Theories attempt to use science to predict ways to make an organization run efficiently. There is a big focus on hierarchy. This approach views communication as a way for the managers to deliver orders to employees. In terms of the balance between creativity and constraint, these approaches would link communication a bit more towards constraint. Those in powerful positions have more *reason* to use communication to deliver orders and instructions to employees (Eisenberg, Trethewey, LeGreco, & Goodall, 2017).

Theories and principles along this line of thinking include:

- (1) **Scientific Management**: Frederick Winslow Taylor is a pioneer in this area. His work discusses how scientific management can have an impact on an organization's efficiency. Because this reinforced divisions of labor and strict hierarchy, conflict arose from this approach. This led to a new focus on manager/worker relationships and how this impacts an organization's productivity (Eisenberg, Trethewey, LeGreco, & Goodall, 2017).
- (2) **Fayol's Classical Management**: Henry Fayol's five principles of classical management include planning, organizing, commanding (goal setting), coordinating, and controlling (evaluating). Fayol argued for the importance of a firm hierarchy, centralization of power, rewards for employees to improve retention rates, and employee morale. Fayol also argued, "employees should subordinate their personal interests to those of the organization" (Eisenberg, Trethewey, LeGreco, & Goodall, 2017, p. 76).
- (3) **Bureaucracy**: Organizational bureaucracy was created in order to protect employees from particularism. Principles associated with this approach are also detailed in the chapter and include the importance of hierarchy, a fixed division of labor, and a general set of rules to guide the organization's practices (Eisenberg, Trethewey, LeGreco, & Goodall, 2017).

Of course each of these theories came with criticisms. However, this is something you'll discuss this week in the discussion board.

As mentioned earlier, Taylor's work brought up a new focus on employee and manager relationships but didn't focus on the *quality* of those interactions. This is where the **Human Relations Approach** factors in to our discussion. Let's tie this, for a minute, to the way in which theories are partial, partisan, and problematic. A classical management theorist would view an organization as a machine. Thus, in accordance with that view, a theorist would look at how relationships impact productivity; this would be part of his/her *story* about organizations' productivity (refer back to the discussion on theories as partisan). The theory had criticism and led to additional questions for some. This can tie to the problematic, yet dialogue-provoking element of theories (Eisenberg, Trethewey, LeGreco, & Goodall, 2017).

The human relations approach “emphasized the interpersonal and social needs of individuals and marked a clear break from earlier points of view” (Eisenberg, Trethewey, LeGreco, & Goodall, 2017, p. 79). The Classical Management Approach looks at questions of organizational efficiency, strict division of labor/decision-making, and viewed organizations as a make up of wage-maximizing individuals. On the other hand, the Human Relations Approach focuses on empowering workers and emphasizes the importance of cooperation and strong interpersonal relationships within organizations. Several scholars contributed to this way of thinking (e.g. Mary Parker Follett, Elton Mayo, Chester Barnard). For example, Barnard argues that an effective manager should persuade employees to accept a common goal. Building strong interpersonal relationships would help encourage employees to work together towards a shared purpose. The Hawthorne Studies touched on how even more attention to employees can help increase productivity; more so than changing physical work conditions (Eisenberg, Trethewey, LeGreco, & Goodall, 2017).

Again, this approach also came with criticisms, which we will explore in the discussion board for this module.

Continuing this idea that theories are partial and problematic, the **Human Resources Approach** fills in gaps identified in the Human Relations Approach. Eisenberg, Trethewey, LeGreco, and Goodall (2017) explain:

Where human relations encouraged employee communication mainly to “blow off steam,” it took another set of thinkers to fully assert the crucial role all employees can play in promoting organizational effectiveness...[T]he human resources approach is concerned with the total organizational climate as well as with how an organization can encourage employee participation and dialogue. (p. 84)

Theorists with this approach argue that Classical Scientific Management ignores individual needs. The Human Resources Approach follows the reasoning that if an organization understands the employees’ own needs it can make it easier to merge individual goals with organizational goals—thereby leading to more organizational effectiveness. Examples of this approach include:

- (1) **Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs:** Many of you may already be familiar with this concept. Tying this to organizations, individuals have different needs that must be satisfied as they work their way up to self-actualization. Effective management would recognize these goals and attempt to creating a working environment where individuals feel motivated to reach their full potential. Doing so could ultimately help an organization (Eisenberg, Trethewey, LeGreco, & Goodall, 2017).
 - a. Take a look at this video clip that discusses working conditions at Google: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z8wqS7VkAcw> (for close captioning, click the CC icon at the bottom right of the video.) Think about how creating such an environment can address such needs. Do you think it is more helpful or harmful? This is a question for you to consider. No formal write up is required. However, you are welcomed to factor in some of this information into your discussion board or future ACT assignment.
 - b. Look at this news story about Wal-Mart’s decision to require a new employee dress code. Is there a conflict of “needs” and “goals” here? How might this impact organizational effectiveness? http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/09/09/walmart-dress-code_n_5792224.html. Again, this is a question for you to consider. No formal write up is required. However, you are welcomed to factor in some of this information into your discussion board or future ACT assignment.

- (2) **McGregor's Theory Y Management:** Douglas McGregor argued that average employees are not people who 'dislike work and avoid responsibility if they are not being controlled' (Eisenberg, Trethewey, LeGreco, & Goodall, 2017, p. 86). Instead, McGregor views employees as valued human resources. His Theory of Y Management includes several principles including: the right conditions can encourage employees to accept and seek responsibility, it is natural for people to put effort into their work, and rewards for achievement can increase commitment for objectives (Eisenberg, Trethewey, LeGreco, & Goodall, 2017).
- (3) **Likert's Principle of Supportive Relationships:** Rensis Likert identified four types/systems of organizations. Of the four, System IV—participative, includes the principle of supportive relationships. According to this view, communication within organizations is very important in building supportive relationships and productive interactions. Positive interactions also help individual employees see their importance to the organization which could improve morale and lead to more productivity (Eisenberg, Trethewey, LeGreco, & Goodall, 2017).

So, what's the bottom line?

Various theories have been created to understand organizations. From focuses on machine-like productivity and efficiency to the importance and role of quality relationships, each approach takes a different stance on how organizations can be viewed. You'll notice that all of the approaches take stances on the importance of communication and relationships. Each theory also comes with criticisms. We'll continue exploring theories and approaches for the next two weeks.

In your discussion board for this week you are asked to reflect on one of the approaches and the corresponding theories mentioned in the readings. The textbook discusses some of the criticisms and praises of the theories and approaches. Based on your own professional experiences and what you've learned from the readings (and other relevant courses), tell the class about your stance on one of the specific theories and/or approaches. More specifically, I want you to identify a part of one of the theories and/or approaches that you really agree (or disagree) with and explain your reasoning. Be detailed. Providing examples is always a plus. In your responses to your classmates, explain *why* you agree or disagree with their reasoning. Go beyond simple responses (ex of simple response—one line: yes I agree that this is a good theory because of all the strong points you made). Also, remember to focus on the internal communication rather than Public Relations or Marketing angle.

REMINDER: The following students are scheduled for an article report this week— Anthony D.

Remember to review the instruction sheet for article reports and the example provided on our D2L page.

Eisenberg, E. M., Trethewey, A., LeGreco, M. & Goodall Jr., H. L. (2017). *Organizational communication: Balancing creativity and constraint*. 8th ed. Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martins.