Teaching Organizational Behavior: Individual, Group, and Team Behaviors

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Introduction

Ivancevich, Konopaske, and Matteson (2011) define organizational behavior as "The study of human behavior, attitudes, and performance within an organization setting; drawing on theory, methods, and principles from such disciplines as psychology, sociology, political science, and cultural anthropology to learn about individuals, groups, structure, and process" (p. 11). Common to each discipline is the search for understanding of the dimensions of human behavior that impact organizational structure, or most importantly what are the causes and effects of relational behaviors. The class objective is to contextualize behaviors in terms of specific human processes including the formation of relationships and organizations, conflict in organizations, the decision making process, the problem solving process, motivation and rewards, the use of influence, and the use of power.

Behaviors within organizations begin and end with the individual, the basic unit of humanity. We first look at how individuals influence and are influenced within each of the processes of behavior. Secondly individuals as a part of an organization create a group dynamic where human behavioral processes have differing levels of influence and result in group responses. Thirdly individuals may or may not be involved in teams, but any team within an organization exerts its own influence. Our objective is to compare and contrast how each behavioral process plays out for the individual, a group, and a team.

Formation

What are the causes of human behavior? How does personality develop? How do individuals become effective leaders? What motivates an individual or provides job satisfaction?

These and other questions should be examined from a multi-disciplinary perspective that includes psychology, anthropology, and even religion. Ivancevich, Konopaske, and Matteson (2011) posit individual differences matter in the study of organizational behavior. The authors write, "Every person is unique because of their background, individual characteristics, needs, and how they perceive the world and other individuals" (p. 67). Individual behaviors are the product of *nature and nurture*, where physiological and psychological differences ultimately can determine how a person *fits* within an organization or a team.

The psychological factors of an individual's personality, perceptions, and emotions are important constructs in organizational behavior studies. Ivancevich, Konopaske, and Matteson (2011) note "When we speak about an individual's personality we are referring to a relatively stable set of feelings and behavior that have been significantly formed by genetic and environmental factors" (p. 80). Personality and emotions contribute heavily to conflict resolution strategies, problem solving, decision making, and leadership styles. An individual's differences influences work behavior, including how they are attracted to careers or organizations and how an individual performs on the job. These also reflect in a person's identity and perceptions of self as they relate to a group.

Ivancevich, Konopaske, and Matteson (2011) write "A group is two or more individuals interacting with each other to accomplish a common goal" (p. 277). Groups include business organizations, but also include any kind of social group such as school, family, church, or governmental agency. The most important distinction is that the minimum requirement for a group is two individuals. There is no maximum as to number of individuals involved in a group. A second part of the definition relates to purpose – interaction toward a common goal with a desire to accomplish the goal.

Teams are groups but not all groups are teams. Teams also require two or more people interacting toward a common goal but the contrast is "Teams are mature groups with a degree of member interdependence and motivation to achieve a common goal" (Ivancevich, Konopaske, and Matteson, 2011, p. 277). At what point a group can be identified as a team is subject to progressive stages of development but the characterization of member interdependence is important. Groups can have tenuous relationships while members work toward the same goal, but teams are better characterized by dependent relationships, cohesion, and group identification.

Human Processes in Organizational Behavior

The field of organizational behavior is based conceptually on the notion that "organizational performance depends on individual performance" (Ivancevich, Konopaske, and Matteson, 2011, p. 17). As individuals develop relationships with others who have common goals, the processes of human behavior begin to work to advance or impede relationship development and organizational success. Those human processes include managing conflict, making decisions, solving problems, creating motivation, influencing behaviors, and the uses of power.

Types of conflict

Conflict is inevitable in relationships even if it is a simple difference of opinion about where to eat. Meza-de-Luna and Romero-Zepeda (2013) state "conflict is a form of socialization, where intense reactions appear" (p. 87). Behavioral studies focus on causes of conflict or on conflict resolution and again this crosses multi-discipline fields of study. Individuals and groups are influenced by cultural environment and the individual emotional makeup of those involved in conflict.

Individual conflicts are due to internal or external stressors that agitate emotional responses. The sources of stress can be varied and many, and for an individual within an organization these are often involved with roles, rules, or relationships. Ivancevich, Konopaske, and Matteson (2011) note "Stressors at the individual level have been studied more than any other category [sic *of stressors*]. Role conflict is perhaps the most widely examined individual stressor." Lu (2012) examines work-family balance noting "Another often neglected perspective in work-family literature is that work-family issues are not only intrapersonal role conflicts but are also typically interpersonal conflicts involving incompatible role expectations by people from work and family domains" (p. 77). Barclay and Wolffe (2011) posits conflict is about life-style and cites Fisher stating sources of dissension come from "differences in social power, inequities in access to resources, and disparities in important life values as possible sources" (p. 124). The study of conflict, work-family balance, and roles include an examination of issues of job satisfaction, job design, and motivational rewards which are among factors that lead to strategies to resolve individual conflict.

Group conflict can also be impacted by roles, leadership styles, inter-group conflicts, individual conflicts within a group or many other factors. Inter-group conflicts can be functional, meaning they have benefit, or dysfunctional meaning they can hinder organizational achievement. Many organizational conflicts are cultural conflicts as the result of globalization which highlights the importance of cultural awareness in conflict resolution. Awang and Roach-Duncan (2010) write "Effective conflict resolution methods differ by culture and geographic region in the same way that effective business communication differs according to the culture and region" (p. 28). Hofstede's dimensions of culture including issues of power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, and orientation are important constructs in

conflict resolution strategies determined by a cultural region. These dimensions are thoroughly reviewed in organizational studies.

Inter-group conflicts can arise within an organization as a result of competing goals or agendas. There is a danger that inter-group conflict within an organization creates a divide that damages organizational culture, performance, or brand. One theory dealing with inter-group conflict is *social identity* theory. Cuhadar and Dayton (2011) write,

Within the social realm, this human tendency to search for patterns naturally results in the creation of in-groups and out-groups; categorizations of people who are ''like us'' and people who are ''unlike us.'' (p. 274).

Inter-group conflicts are often the result of team development. One of the potential dynamics of team formation is the tendency "of people to behave with preference toward members of their own group and discriminate towards member of other groups" (Cuhadar and Dayton, p. 275) which gives rise to inter-group conflict.

However, team conflicts are most often intragroup conflicts. The stages of team formation include those known as forming, storming, and norming suggesting the socialization process includes conflict as a part of the "work in progress". Rispens (2012) notes two major areas of conflict for teams are interpersonal conflicts which are non-task related and task related conflicts. Rispens writes, "Avoid relationship conflict and enhance task conflict" and posits "This advice is partly based on the well-established finding that conflicts relating to interpersonal incompatibilities and issues not related to the task are associated with reduced performance" (p. 349).

Conflict resolution

Conflict within organizations, whether individual or group, have a debilitating effect on morale and possibly on organizational culture. Studies of individual conflict within the context of organizational behavior emphasizes the work-life balance, motivation, and interpersonal relationship issues that most likely contribute to individual conflict with the knowledge that resolving individual conflict usually results in better outcomes for the organization as well as the individual.

Any study of organizational behavior with regard to individual behavior must therefore include the role of human resources which are responsible for the many programs and practices that impact individual needs. These practices include the understanding of individual differences, work behavior, human psychology, of motivation, job design, rewards, and the management of stress (Ivancevich, Konopaske, and Matteson, 2011, p. 16)

In contrast, understanding conflict resolution in the context of group conflict requires an understanding of group dynamics, stages of conflict, cultural differences, and conflict resolution strategies consistent with organizational environment. Common areas of concern include management-labor relations which require negotiation or mediation strategies. Organizational processes related to power and politics, leadership, and structure are often dictated by an organization's culture and environment. Hofstede's dimensions of culture suggest differences in individualistic and collectivist societies where cultural differences reveal preferences in conflict resolution methods. Kwok, Yuk-Fai, Fernández-Dols, and Iwawaki (1992) note differences between collectivist and individual societies also suggest differences in individual and group conflict resolution. They write "Specifically, subjects preferred to use conflict-reducing

procedures more, and confrontational procedures less, when groups were involved than when

individuals were involved" (p. 198). Cultural preferences can dictate which approach to conflict

resolution is used.

Team conflict requires resolutions strategies that are team building in nature. Ivancevich,

Konopaske, and Matteson (2011) write "Team building is a type of planned intervention that is

meant to build self-awareness and camaraderie among team members of a team" (p. 328). Since

interpersonal conflict and task related conflict are the most common areas of conflict,

organizational behavior examines roles, interdependence, and how individuals handle

interpersonal conflict. Aritzeta, Ayestaran, and Swailes (2005) notes two dimensions of concern

for team members are "for production" and "for people" (p. 162). Research by Rahim and

Magner resulted in a two dimensional model of styles for handling interpersonal conflict that

included integrating, obliging, domination, avoiding, and compromising (p. 162). These mirror

those used for managing intergroup conflict (Ivancevich, Konopaske, and Matteson, 2011, p.

318). Important to the study of team conflict resolution is the leadership style and skill of the

leader in team development.

Decision making

Decision making is most often studied in the context of organizational leadership.

Modern theories include the issue of participatory decision making and decentralization which

emphasized individual and group needs in contrast to emphasis on organizational needs

(Ivancevich, Konopaske, and Matteson, 2011, p. 13). Important individual factors include the

need to understand leadership personality, ethics, and the steps in the decision making process.

Ivancevich, Konopaske, and Matteson (2011) note the importance of attending to the manager's

decision making process by stating, "Managers in organizations may be separated by background, lifestyle, and distance, but sooner or later they must all make decisions" (p. 408). Whether a manager makes a rational or irrational decision depends on factors such as availability of information and experience but also can depend on intuition or emotion.

Groups can also make decisions which can follow similar processes as individuals. Factors of ethics, personality, and experience can be just as important but group dynamics add an additional layer of behaviors that can be explored in organizational studies. Ivancevich, Konopaske, and Matteson (2011) observe "Managers frequently face situations in which they must seek and combine judgments in group meetings" (p. 423). The advantages of group decision making includes the benefit of more knowledge and experience being available in a group process, greater capacity for developing alternative solutions, collective judgment in evaluating alternatives, and creativity.

Teams often make decision that are related to their specific goals and task. One characteristic of effective teams is cohesion where there is strong interdependence and camaraderie. One danger in highly cohesive teams is the potential danger for *groupthink*. Ivancevich, Konopaske, and Matteson (2011) define groupthink as "The deterioration of the mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgment of the individual members of a group in the interest of group solidarity" (p. 291). The characteristics of highly cohesive teams include pressure to conform to the group and the feeling of unanimity. To prevent groupthink the use of a "devil's advocate" or outside expert acts as check and balance in the decision making process.

Problem solving

Individuals rely heavily on emotion, perception, prior experience, and cognitive skills in problem solving. Sagir (2011) observes "To solve a problem is a kind of work which involves intelligence, emotion, intent and action regarding needs, goals, values, beliefs, skills, habits and attitudes" (p. 2483). It is evident that problem solving skills must be developed and an understanding of individual personality, emotions, and cognitive abilities are important constructs of understanding the individual problem solving process. Ivancevich, Konopaske, and Matteson (2011) note general problem solving processes include judgment, intuition, and creativity (p. 410). Problem solving is tied to other individual characteristics such as intelligence. Ivancevich, Konopaske, and Matteson note "Despite different theories, there is a common belief that intelligence is a goal-directed mental activity that is marked by efficient problem solving, critical thinking, and abstract reasoning" (p. 110).

The problem solving process entails analysis, judgment, and cognitive abilities within a framework of experience and knowledge. There is a debate as to whether individual problem or group problem solving is more effective. Groups have an advantage in terms of greater amount of knowledge, establishing goals and objectives, evaluating alternative methods, and offering more creativity. In contrast, groups tend to accept more risk in problem solving. Ivancevich, Konopaske, and Matteson (2011) note however, "Certain decisions appear to be better made by groups, while others appear to be better suited to individual decision making" (p. 424. It is important to understand factors related to group thinking and interpersonal relationships that can affect the group process.

Teams are often used specifically for problem solving exercises by organizations. At times this is a temporary arrangement that uses brainstorming and other techniques to develop solutions. Teams are also developed for specific work-processes, and at times are cross-functional allowing for different expertise in developing solutions. The use of problem solving teams including quality circles, self-managed teams, cross-functional teams, or virtual teams requires understanding skills needed for effective team membership, and issues to developing effective teams. Ivancevich, Konopaske, and Matteson (2011) observe team effectiveness depends on training, communications, empowerment, and rewards for optimal performance. Groupthink can affect team problem solving as similarly mentioned in team decision making.

Rewards

Ivancevich, Konopaske, and Matteson (2011) observe "One of the most powerful influences on individual performance is an organizations reward system" (p. 18). Rewards are motivators that can be used to increase job performance. Motivation depends on the individual's attitudes, perceptions, and values which are often culturally based or are influenced by an individual's environment. Generational differences impact intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. The authors note "Millennials tend to require more praise and short-term rewards than do Gen X and baby boomers" (p. 72). Since rewards act as a stimulus the type and timing of rewards, including frequency, individual expectations, and how they are distributed are important to understanding the psychological effects of rewards. The topic of motivation and rewards is one of the more expansive topics to be covered in organizational behavior studies because it is the underpinning of human resources management related to job design, job satisfactions, retention, and training.

Ivancevich, Konopaske, and Matteson (2011) write, "The reward system in most organizations is individually based. That is organizational members are rewarded based on evaluation of their individual performance" (p. 299). However, motivation is a factor for performance for groups and teams. Team performance is often rewarded by incentivizing individuals but organizations have used profit sharing and other incentive models in recognition of the value of team contributions.

Influence tactics

A major focus of organizational behavior has been the concepts of power, politics, and empowerment because organizations are about relationships. A primary dynamic in terms of achievement is the role of influence, not only as a leadership attribute but as a means to obtaining a goal or objective. Individual goals in an organization often include those based on self-interest. Advancing self-interest is typically associated with *political influence* or politically oriented behavior that is used to gain power and status. Current studies on influence tactics not only include the type of tactics used but why individuals select influence strategies. Van Knippenberg and Steensma (2003) note the choice of tactics depends on the *strength of the influence* that is needed to accomplish the objective. They write "Tactic strength can be defined as the extent to which using particular influence tactics takes control over the situation and the target, and does not allow the target any latitude in choosing whether to comply" (p. 56). The categories of influence tactics such as consultation, persuasion, pressure, etc. are differentiated as hard or soft influences. The implication for understanding influence tactics may be associated with understanding an employee's or a leader's personality, the potential of positive or negative uses of impression management, and the ethical underpinnings involved in using political influence.

Groups and teams also use political influence to advantage. Departments within an organization are most often associated with specific knowledge or expertise that provides leverage for purposes of power. Accounting departments for example have a great deal of power because accounting information is needed for effective decision making. Ivancevich, Konopaske, and Matteson (2011) note the study of purchasing departments "attempting to persuade engineering to think in purchasing terms" (p. 352). The political impact could influence engineering decisions in order to meet purchasing goals for cost containment.

Use of power

Ivancevich, Konopaske, and Matteson (2011) state "An organizational member does not have to be in a formal leadership position to possess or use power" (p. 359). Power and influence may be two sides of one coin, but differ in that power "represents the capability to get someone to do something" (p. 329). The important element of how power is used depends on the source of power, and the rights or privileges associated with the individual. An individual's power can be legitimate or formal based on position, which provides authority. The source of power is the position. Reward power has rewards as a medium of exchange, coercive power has the power to punish as a source, expert power has knowledge and skill as a source, and referent power depends on personality.

A second major area of study for individual power is the concept of empowerment which requires understanding how the ability to use power impacts the work environment and self-efficacy of an individual. In turn empowerment "can lead to a culture of contribution" (Ivancevich, Konopaske, and Matteson, 2011, p. 347) that relates to job satisfaction and

performance. Empowerment can be both on an individual or group level and is important to success.

An organization or group in contrast has power that is based primarily on structural identity and resources available to the organization or group. Understanding the sources and distribution of power requires an understanding of the subunits and departmental power structures, as well as the various forms of interpersonal power that exist within an organization. Within the organization are multiple interests and multiple responsibilities and at times interest conflict. Ivancevich, Konopaske, and Matteson (2011) note the importance of recognizing strategies through which organization power is developed and used. "This includes understanding the importance of timing, the use of the organization's structure, and the various forms of interpersonal power" (p. 359).

Summary

Individual, group, or team behavior is intertwined within an organizational setting. Organization behavioral studies attempt to look at causes and effects as processes of relationships and how they develop and how they ultimately define the organization.

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