

Chapter 1 : Theory of Mechanistic and Organic Systems - Knowledge Center

The article is based upon the work done by the theorists T. Burns and G.M. Stalker (). The theorists argued that organizations need different kinds of structure to control their activities that will allow the company to adapt and react to changes and uncertainties in the environment.

It is fascinating how writers creatively use storytelling to rewrite and even fictionalize the original Burns and Stalker accounts. If we can resituate this most fundamental of dualities, we can shake the foundations of managerialism. Few have stopped to question the silliness of this theory of semantic illusions, or to look at the five-century debate in philosophy about the machine philosophies of Locke, Hume, Newton and the reemerging organic philosophy. I approach this from a storytelling perspective. Characterizations Plot The plot of this story is human domination over nature and male domination over women. The story of the mechanistic narrative is one of progressive disenchantment with organic accounts Berman, The editions are the same except for a 17 page preface added in and an additional 14 page preface added in I will tell you our conclusion at the outset. Our reading is at odds with the field of OT. As this is the foundational study of contingency theory, and much of OT, a deconstruction of the study is in order. Burns and Stalker offer an explanation which is all but ignored by subsequent writers eager to embrace deterministic and dualistic contingency theory: I will briefly take you through the steps of the deconstruction that I am doing with Gephart and Rosile a, b. Mechanistic and organic make their first appearance in Chapter One: After this introduction, the authors note that neither system "was fully and consistently applied in any firm. While it may seem obvious that mechanistic-organic is a duality, Burns and Stalker were quite explicit in theorizing mechanistic-organic as a continuum and not a dichotomy Exploring the Hierarchy of the Duality. First, in dualities one term has power over the other. For Burns and Stalker mechanistic is foundational to organic since mechanistic metaphors are used to define the organic side of the continuum. For example, the organic meetings in the Switchgear firm are described by Burns and Stalker as an "instrument" and a "device" for connecting "part-functions" distributing authority, information, and technical competence in the hierarchal management structure p. The organic is again described in mechanistic language as "only part of the machinery of the work organization at the management level" p. There is thus clearly a form reductionism here reflected by using machine language to define organic. Second, mechanistic tends to be a natural, privileged systems state: Thus "organic" is defined as the exception to the more efficient, formal, and rational mechanistic system. Organic is the fallen term: Once the organic can be dispensed with, the system reverts to mechanistic. For example, several firms in the English sample became even more mechanistic after their experimentation with organic practices "with revived redefinitions of responsibility and executive function" Third, this dualism privileges and reproduces a discourse of managerialism and hence it is not neutral in another way. Managerialism is the accumulation of knowledge for the exclusive use of managers and other experts to effect their will to power, domination and control over labor and the Natural environment. The managing director speaks the "right version" of competing stories of the firm and its environment Burns and Stalker, 19 Both mechanistic and organic metaphors are constructed within a managerialist perspective: Both are an "instrument" and a "device" to "connect" the "part-functions" p. They are "part of the machinery of the working organization at the management level" p. Finally, in the English study, in the most organic firm in their sample, the practice of making middle managers insecure by blurring boundaries between levels as well as between functions, is described as the "mainspring" of the approach p. For Burns and Stalker, human exploitation was more extensive in the organic because "the individual yields himself as a resource to be used" p. In sum, organic is a supplement rooted in a mechanistic string of signifying metaphors. Both mechanistic and organic privilege an underlying managerialist interpretation of the world. The manager decides the state of the environment and the appropriate adaptive design. There is a rhetorical operation that produces the ground of this argument. The premise that mechanistic systems are not ever adaptive and its corollary that organic systems always do adapt to changes in its environment is only a part of the story, since there are claims in Burns and Stalker that contradict and undermine both the premise and its corollary. Yet, mechanistic

organizations adapt all the time. First, in the English and Scottish study, most of the firms adapted by becoming even more mechanistic. In the example of the Scottish firms, they could adapt by networking to a much larger English firm in order to share its laboratory and trained design engineers. Second, in two cases an organic concern was mis-adapted to an environment where a mechanistic form would be more appropriate. A significant point is that only two of the 20 some firms examined in the research were organic when the situation demanded. Third, only one firm, the Rayon Mill, which was not part of the two main studies in the book, was said to be properly mechanistic when the situation demanded. And in all three of these cases the environment had not shifted. The rayon mill had a stable environment all along and the two television producers in the English sample were already situated in a changing technological and commercial context. Finally, environment itself is defined by a language system that is managerialist. This managerialist interpretation picks out some aspects of the environment: We assume that organizations are enacted through storytelling Boje ; ; Czarniawska, and that organizational theorists rely to some degree upon metaphors and stories to construct their theories of organization and environment. The narrative devices allow the fiction of an "organization" bounded by an external and deterministic "environment" to seem tenable. I prefer a storytelling organization perspective. STO is a discursive metaphor. The Long Debate The use of mechanistic-organic metaphors to theorize the cosmos, society, organization, and the human being is an even older set of categories that pre-dates Weber and Durkheim and other work noted by Burns and Stalker by several centuries. Before Durkheim and Weber, writers such as Locke, Bacon, Hume, Descartes, and Newton sought to overthrow the organic framing of the world as a "living system" that had been the way of thinking of the world since before Aristotle. In 1159 John of Salisbury used the organic society metaphor as the basis for a story of the person-writ-large as a hierarchical society: Its body was endowed with life and ruled by reason in the form of the prince, who, together with the clergy, functioned as its soul. Judges and governors, who communicated its dictates to the provinces, represented its sense organs--the eyes, ears, and tongue. The good of the commonwealth was invested in its senate, which occupied the position of the heart. Of the hands, one was armed and protected the citizenry from outside attack, while the other, unarmed, disciplined them from within The feet were farmers, craftspeople, and menial workers, so numerous as to cause the organism to resemble a centipede, rather than a human" Merchant, Mechanistic system thinking was part of the 15th and 16th century, Cartesian revolution of science over religion, a triumph of western civilization over the native. Descartes, for example, awoke from a great dream of a universal mathematics with a zeal to erect a mechanistic model of science based upon measurement Randall, 1 I saw consequently that there must be some general science to explain that element as a whole which gives rise to problems about order and measurement, restricted as these are to no special subject matter. This, I perceived, was called universal mathematics. Living systems, be they planets, trees or humans were just machines and nothing more. By Hobbes wrote a mechanical model of society that opposed organic systems, in his book: It is ironic, that organicism or animism, the view that the world and cosmos, has life and spirit, never left in digenous thinking and is now being reinvented by western society. Many authors have wondered at the struggle between mechanistic and organic systems and ideologies over the last five centuries. There are several important books by authors such as John Randall, Jr. The Making of the Modern mind: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution, that describe the five century struggle between these two ways of thinking. These are books that do not get much citation in organization theory OT. For example, Capra does not position it as an either or phenomenon as do Burns and Stalker. Mechanistic operations take place within living systems. Capra seeks to look at reduction and holism together in their proper balance The distinction between machine and organism becomes quite subtle" Living systems have a high degree of "nonlinear" interconnectedness. They are not linear in the sense of being environmentally or technologically determined. It is as if OT invented systems theory and systems ideology, began with the work Burns and Stalker, without paying too much attention to Weber or Durkheim, and no attention at all to the centuries of work and debate about the struggle for mechanistic understandings in the 16th century that all but did away with centuries of organic views of man, organization, society, and the cosmos. In sum, In the mechanistic story, humans, societies, and worlds were reduced to parts in mechanical systems governed by law and scientific rationality. This manner of storytelling

decontextualizes the time, place, and mind of nature. In the mechanistic story, the self was characterized as "rational master of the passions housed in a machinelike body" rather than self as a living part of the living system of the society and cosmos Merchant. The plot of this story is human domination over nature and male domination over women. The narrative held that the universe was a machine governed by mechanical forces and mathematical laws and that everything, even people, plants, and animals were just machines and not sentient, organic beings.

Chapter 2 : Five Centuries of Mechanistic-Organic

Contingency Theory - Burns and Stalker () Every firm is different and reacts to the environment in its own unique way. Contingency theory thus suggests that there is no one way of organising management, especially during a crisis - it all depends on the present task in the environment at hand.

A - F[edit] Organizational forms are specific configurations of goals, boundaries, and activities are the elements selected by environmental criteria, and change may occur either through new forms eliminating old ones or through the modification of existing forms. Environmental niches are distinct in combination of resources and other constraints that are sufficient to support organizational form. Organizational forms, then, are organized activity systems oriented toward exploiting the resources within a niche. Selection pressures may favour or eliminate entire groups of organizations, such as industries, and the changing population distribution of organizations in a society reflects the operation of such selection pressures. Organizations and Environments, In this view, as environments change, leaders or dominant coalitions in organizations alter appropriate organizational features to realign their fit to environmental demands. Since then, an approach to studying organizational change that places more emphasis on environmental selection processes, introduced at about that time Aldrich and Pfeffer ; Hannan and Freeman ; Aldrich ; McKelvey , has become increasingly influential. The stream of research on ecological perspectives of organizational change has generated tremendous excitement, controversy and debate in the community of organization and management theory scholars. Inspired by the question, Why are there so many kinds of organizations? Baum , "Organizational ecology. Theory and Method The paradigm has constituted a framework in which research progressed leading to the construction of a scientific body of knowledge Contingency theory states that there is no single organizational structure that is highly effective for all organizations. It sees the structure that is optimal as varying according to certain factors such as organizational strategy or size. Thus the optimal structure is contingent upon these factors which are termed the contingency factors. For example, a small-sized organization, one that has few employees, is optimally structured by a centralized structure in which decision-making authority is concentrated at the top of the hierarchy, whereas a large organization, one that has many employees, is optimally structured by a decentralized structure in which decision-making authority is dispersed down to lower levels of the hierarchy. Lex Donaldson , "The normal science of structural contingency theory. G - L[edit] There is no one best way to organize Any way of organizing is not equally effective. Galbraith , Designing complex organizations, The two underlying assumptions of contingency theory. Contingency theory is an outgrowth of systems theory. This approach essentially argues that the decision-making style should be suitable for the situation in which the organization finds itself. The writing of Likert and McGregor reflects a central interest in organizational arrangements for releasing the underutilized energy of individual members. All of these writers tend to start with the individual as the basic unit of analysis and build toward the large organization , while we are proposing to start with larger, sociological entities- the entire organization and its larger subsystems. Lawrence and Jay W. Structures and Dynamics of Autopoietic Organizations. The notion was in the wind at the time. I think we were all convinced we had a breakthrough, and in some respects we did there was no one best way of organizing; bureaucracy was efficient for some tasks and inefficient for others; top managers tried to organize departments research, production in the same way when they should have different structures; organizational comparisons of goals, output, morale, growth, etc. While my formulation grew out of fieldwork, my subsequent research offered only modest support for it. I learned that managers had other ends to maximize than efficient production and they sometimes sacrificed efficiency for political and personal ends. April 6, online at garfield. The other two publications were Paul R. Harvard University Press, , and James D. Organizational theorists , at least since the pioneering work of Burns and Stalker, and Joan Woodward , and others in what came to be called the contingency school, have recognized that centralization is appropriate for organizations with routine tasks, and decentralization for those with nonroutine tasks. For an early statement see Perrow , and Lawrence and Lorch, Charles Perrow , Normal Accidents: Living with High-Risk Technologies. It is more an orienting strategy or metatheory, suggesting

ways in which a phenomenon ought to be conceptualized or as approach to the phenomenon ought to be explained. Drawn primarily from large-scale empirical studies, contingency theory relies on a few assumptions that have been explicitly stated, and these guide contingency research. Testing assumptions hidden within the language of contingency "theory". *Administrative Science Quarterly*, While they vary widely in subject matter, they have the common proposition that an organizational outcome is the consequence of a "fit" or match between two or more factors. This paper examines three ways to define and test this concept of fit: Selection, Interaction, and Systems approaches. A critical discussion of these three approaches will clarify much of the current confusion in the literature on contingency theories, and suggest ways that future theorizing and research can become more systematic and constructive.

Chapter 3 : Contingency theory - Wikipedia

In this essay I will discuss three influential contingency theories, those of Burns and Stalker (), Lawrence and Lorsch () and Fiedler (). Tom Burns and Graham Stalker in their book, "The Management of Innovation" studied about 20 Scottish and British electronics companies operating in increasingly competitive and.

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Chapter 4 : Tom Burns (sociologist) - Wikipedia

A contingency theory is an organizational theory that claims that there is no best way to organize a corporation, to lead a company, or to make decisions. Instead, the optimal course of action is contingent (dependent) upon the internal and external situation.

Stalker have provided a way to understand which organization forms fit to specific circumstances of change or stability. In their highly influential work "The Management of Innovation", they provide the following characteristics of Mechanistic vs. Distribution of tasks Specialized differentiation of functional tasks into which the problems and tasks facing a concern as a whole are broken down Contributive nature of special knowledge and experience to the common task of the concern. Nature of Individual task The abstract nature of each individual task, which is pursued with techniques and purposes more or less distinct from those of the concern as a whole: The "realistic" nature of the individual task, which is seen as set by the total situation of the concern. Who defines tasks or refines tasks The reconciliation, for each level in the hierarchy, of these distinct performances by the immediate superiors, who are also, in turn, responsible for seeing that each is relevant in his own special part of the main task. The adjustment and continual redefinition of individual tasks through interaction with others. Task scope The precise definition of rights and obligations and technical methods attached to each functional role. How is task conformance ensured The translation of rights and obligations and methods into the responsibilities of a functional position. The spread of commitment to the concern beyond any technical definition. Structure of control, authority and communication Hierarchic, Contractual. Network, Presumed Community of Interest. Locating of knowledge Reinforcement of the hierarchic structure by the location of knowledge of actualities exclusively at the top of the hierarchy, where the final reconciliation of distinct tasks and assessment of relevance is made. Omniscience no longer imputed to the head of the concern; knowledge about the technical or commercial nature of the here and now may be located anywhere in the network. Communication between members of concern Vertical communication; i. Governance for operations and working behavior Instructions and decisions issued by superiors. Information and advice rather than instructions and decisions. Values Insistence on loyalty to the concern and obedience to superiors as a condition of membership. Prestige Greater importance and prestige attaching to internal local rather than to general cosmopolitan knowledge, experience, and skill. Importance and prestige attach to affiliations and expertise valid in the industrial and technical and commercial milieux external to the firm.

Chapter 5 : contingency theory | calendrierdelascience.com

Contingency theory is a behavioral theory that claims that there is no single best way to design organizational structures. The best way of organizing e.g. a company, is, however, contingent upon the internal and external situation of the company.

Stalker, *The Management of Innovation*, In mechanistic systems the problems and tasks facing the concern as a whole are broken down into specialisms. Each individual pursues his task as something distinct from the real tasks of the concern as a whole, as if it were the subject of a subcontract. The technical methods, duties, and powers attached to each functional role are precisely defined. Interaction within management tends to be vertical, i. Management, often visualized as the complex hierarchy which is familiar in organization charts, operates a simple control system, with information flowing up through a succession of filters, and decisions and instructions flowing downwards through a succession of amplifiers. David Dugdale, Stephen Lyne. *Budgeting Practice and Organisational Structure*. Individuals have to perform their special tasks in the light of their knowledge of the tasks of the firm as a whole. Interaction runs laterally as much as vertically. Communication between people of different ranks tends to resemble lateral consultation rather than vertical command. Omniscience can no longer be imputed to the head of the concern. The vast majority of biological mutations are said to be harmful. When, as in human affairs, enormous numbers of random possibilities are eliminated by rational choice, the chances of harm rather than good resulting are reduced, not eliminated. This in turn depends on the ability to suppress differences of status and of technical prestige on occasions of working interaction, and on the absence of barriers to communication founded on functional preserves, privilege, or personal reserve. The effective organization of industrial resources Equally, we desire to avoid the suggestion that either system is superior under all circumstances to the other. In particular, nothing in our experience justifies the assumption that mechanistic systems should be superseded by organic in conditions of stability. The beginning of administrative wisdom is the awareness that there is no one optimum type of management system. Of these, fifteen were in the electronics industry, four were in research and development, and one was a major manufacturer. The particular environmental conditions examined were the rates of change in the scientific technology and the relevant product markets of the firms being studied. Organisations , which he saw as collaborative systems, fascinated him and he was a committed researcher, whose comments on the research process remain of great value. Even as a senior professor he remained a hands-on interviewer in a range of contexts: His best-known works were *The Management of Innovation* with G. Out of this came the distinction between mechanistic and organic systems of management. Firms working in a stable environment with fairly fixed technologies could operate appropriately with the mechanistic system; those with rapidly changing technologies and uncertain market conditions worked better with an organic system. Since the second situation was becoming more pronounced in the post-war world, the implications of this were far reaching and went far beyond traditional conceptions of what constituted good management practice. John Eldridge , " Professor Tom Burns ". *The Independent*, 20 August *The Management of Innovation* [is] Introduced the mechanistic-organic polarity never a dichotomy to the management lexicon. Bedeian , and Daniel A.

Chapter 6 : Summary of Mechanistic and Organic Systems. Abstract

contingency theory A strand of organization theory (sometimes also known as the 'rational systems perspective'), the leading practitioners of which were Tom Burns, Joan Woodward, Paul Lawrence, and Jay Lorsch, an otherwise theoretically eclectic group who were nevertheless united in their belief.

Stalker Recommend this article to your friends! This article deals with describing the differences between mechanistic and organic organizational structures. The article is based upon the work done by the theorists T. The theorists argued that organizations need different kinds of structure to control their activities that will allow the company to adapt and react to changes and uncertainties in the environment. Companies facing a dynamic and uncertain environment may have to develop or maintain an organic organizational structure, whereas companies operating in a stable environment may benefit from developing or maintaining a mechanistic organizational structure. The reason for this is that organic structures can process and distribute information and knowledge faster within the organization, which thus results in an increased ability to respond or react to changes in the environment. However, mechanistic structures may act as an effective and efficient organizational structure for companies operating in a more stable and certain environment. Companies operating in a stable environment may not need to make decisions quickly. Likewise, many of the day-to-day decisions and operating procedures may be formalized and centralized, because there is no inherent need for constant change or innovation. Some characteristics for each type of organizational structure are listed below:

Mechanistic Structure This organizational structure works best when the environment is relatively stable. Low differentiation of tasks Tasks will not be differentiated much, because each subtask is relatively stable and easy to control. Low integration of e. Centralized decision-making When the environment is stable, there is no need for complex decision-making that involves people at lower levels. Therefore, decision-making is centralized at the top of the organization. Standardization and formalization When tasks are stable, tasks should be standardized and formalized, so that operations can run smoothly without breakdowns.

Organic Structure This organizational structure works best when the environment is relatively dynamic and uncertain. High differentiation of tasks Because tasks are often changing, tasks may need to be differentiated, so specialists, each responsible for one or few tasks, are able to respond quickly. High integration of e. Therefore, departments and different functional areas need to be tightly integrated Decentralized decision-making When the environment is dynamic and uncertain, there is a need for complex decision-making that involves people at lower levels. Therefore, decision-making power should be distributed to lower ranks, which should get empowered in making decisions. Little Standardization and formalization When tasks change rapidly, it is unfeasible to institute standardization and formalized procedures. Instead, tasks should be mutually adjusted, so that each subtask is balanced with other subtasks. As said, Burns and Stalker studies show business leaders that organizations should design their structure to match the dynamism and uncertainty of their environment. The points given to us by Burns and Stalker are greatly related to contingency theory, which is further described in the article: What is Contingency Theory?

Chapter 7 : The Management of Innovation - Tom Burns; G. M. Stalker - Oxford University Press

Burns and Stalker offer an explanation which is all but ignored by subsequent writers eager to embrace deterministic and dualistic contingency theory: the political and status behavior of managers intercedes in the theorized system to environment fit process.

Chapter 8 : The Management of Innovation - Tom Burns, G. M. Stalker - Google Books

Soci Midterm. STUDY. According to Burns and Stalker () the two ideal organization types are Contingency theory, at least as articulated by Burns and.

Chapter 9 : Heledd's thoughts

Burns and Stalker's work, along with other contingency theories, has been very popular from the s onward in both the organisation and management accounting area. It.