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Management and Organizational Styles Experienced in the Workplace

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the management and organizational styles experienced by this researcher at her work place in terms of current management theories and practices as defined by Alire, Fulner, Lynch, and Perrow. She discusses the most and least effective managers she has encountered, her current position on management styles, and the dynamics of the first organization to which she belonged—her family.

Management and Organizational Styles I've Experienced in the Workplace

Management and organizational styles I have observed

My work experiences have been in service industries like education, government, law, and health and fitness. My first job besides babysitting and waitressing was for RH Donnelley, the Yellow Pages advertisers. Mine was a clerking job and my manager was L.A. I think the company followed the classical or bureaucratic school, as there was little flexible or cooperative design to the organization. It was strictly top down and workers at my level obeyed the rules down to exactly when you took your coffee break. The management followed Perrow's rule that "if work is predictable and routine, the ...arrangement for getting the work done can be highly structured" (Perrow, 1995, Some conclusions section, ¶ 3).

By the time I worked at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Services, in Washington D.C. as a clerk typist, management styles were less bureaucratic and more human relations oriented. Management from the top down followed Perrow's idea that "...[o]rganizations are cooperative systems, not products of mechanical engineering" (1995, Enter human relations section, ¶ 1). In my immediate office I saw working relationships forming around friendships such as informal groups that shared the workload. The racially mixed accounting office where I worked demonstrated "the value of decent humane leadership" by being organized as a cooperative system (Enter human relations section, ¶ 1). Though the tasks were routine and predictable, the office was managed from the standpoint of tolerance and acceptance of individual differences. The woman who managed my immediate department may have had as her management philosophy Alier's guiding principles (2004, Definitions section, ¶ 7). For instance, I was allowed to set my work hours, and during slow periods I spent extended

lunch hours away from my desk, reading and researching at the wonderful Department of Agriculture library.

The only other office environment I've experienced since then was an immigration law firm in California where I was a document processor. This environment was more hierarchical and bureaucratic in structure. I found the atmosphere stuffy and inequitable, which caused its own kind of stress. For instance, the attorneys for whom I worked rarely discussed my work with me when they placed it at my desk; usually it just appeared overnight as if by magic. If I needed information about the work, I asked the more approachable female attorneys. My manager was the office manager, not an attorney. Her management style was friendly and human relations oriented. Although we all checked over each other's work constantly, we never had staff meetings nor met together except for holiday parties at which nobody discussed work. I was allowed to set my own office hours, but the hours I kept to avoid traffic were not ideal for the attorneys who needed me there till 5:30 or 6 pm.

Of the three jobs discussed above, I stayed the longest at USDA, Food and Nutrition Service. Although I wasn't working there as a fully benefited civil servant, I probably could have stayed in the extended temporary position until a permanent position opened up. It was the only job of that nature that I look back on with genuinely good feelings.

The most effective manager I have encountered

The most effective management/organizational style I've experienced was at the YMCA where I worked for seven years as a lifeguard and swim instructor. My manager, the Aquatics Director, was young woman then in her late 20's and early 30's. S. H. was one of the best managers I have ever had. She managed about 50 summer season employees who were mostly young adults, such as high school and college students. The qualities she needed for this included

patience, tolerance, firmness, intuition--Adire's "BEatitudes: be fair, be consistent, be predictable, be flexible and be strategic" (2004, Definitions section, # 17). Depending on young people for your workforce brings with it an array of problems unlike those of adults. For instance, by the end of the summer the lifeguard room looked like a college dormitory after an all night party, emotions went array unpredictably with girls coming in with problems like "I can't go in the water because my hair is turning green" and "I drank too much last night and missed my 7 am shift." Plus by the end of August you lose most of your staff when school goes back into session, but pool activities continue.

Throughout circumstances such as these, S. H. managed to walk a fine line of standing on her authority at the same time as making you like her. Though to some she was occasionally known as "the bitch," in the end she earned the respect, loyalty, cooperation, and affection of her staff and the complete support of the Y's executive director. One of her responsibilities was to make sure lifeguards were on duty during pool open hours, from 5:30 am to 9:45 pm, over 16 hours, with reduced hours on weekends. For lifeguards one shift is usually between 2 to 4 hours; more than that results in diminished ability to stay alert. I was one of her guards who didn't have regular school hours. So, because of chronic short staffing during the time when Silicon Valley was experiencing an economic boom, I took on double shifts, from 8 or 9 am to 2 or 3 pm. Somehow S. H. made me want to work for her when I really didn't; I just liked her too much to say "no way." And she was doing the other hours, 5:30 to 8:30 am and the late night shifts.

Another thing S. handled well were staff meetings. The purpose of the meetings was communication, motivation, and training. All staff members had to meet strict YMCA standards, so training and certification were ongoing. The motivational and educational aspects of meetings were geared to the average age of the staff, somewhere between late high school and early

college. For example she used game show formats to make learning fun and candy bars to reward right answers, things as a teacher I would have never approved of.

S. brought creativity, initiative, and industriousness to her job. During her years as Aquatics Director, she greatly expanded aquatics programming by organizing new classes and activities that made use of the existing facilities in new and imaginative ways. The aquatics program is a big money maker for this YMCA and more than pays for itself. Additional programming brought additional income that improved working conditions for the staff. For example: we got new, red, guard storm coats, very useful for those foggy mornings and late nights, elevated guard chairs that looked good and were comfortable, umbrellas on stands that protected us from the sun, boxes of sun block, visors, straw hats, sunglasses, and more staff T-shirts than I'll ever want or need. We got new equipment for teaching like inflatable noodles, and water toys. Our hourly compensation went up and guards were hired at higher pay rates than in the past. Staff recreation increased such as trips to Santa Cruz Boardwalk and a water park, nights out at the movies, pizza parties, all designed to make the Y a fun place for young people to work.

Lynch says that "the primary purpose of an organization is to stay in business...[by] produc[ing] useful products and services for customers and...provid[ing] for the satisfaction and personal growth of the organization's members" (2000, Total Quality Management section, ¶ 1). As a nonprofit organization the YMCA provides a service to the community that embodies the Y's core values or respect, honesty, responsibility, and caring. Part of that service is to employ youth from the community in jobs that develop confidence, character, leadership, and discipline. Fulmer's article about learning organizations raises the point of organizations beginning the pursuit of learning as strategy. "What is an organization," he asks, "that it should learn?" (The

evolution of organizational learning section, ¶ 1). The premise is that, like people, organizations that learn over time result in company longevity. In the sense that the YMCA is a learning organization; its purpose is to develop the physical, emotional, and mental health and fitness of its staff and overall membership.

The national YMCA is more than a hundred years old. The YMCA has developed values that have enable its longevity. The culture of the YMCA where I worked embodied qualities Fulmer suggests are common traits among long-lived companies: sensitivity to their environment, a strong degree of cohesion and identity (culture) including values, and tolerance of new or different ways of thinking (1998, Corporate culture and longevity section, ¶ 4). Over the years, this Y developed programs that met the needs of the community, such as creating Y-Kids before and after school daycare for working families, Active Older Adult program for people 50+, outreach to the Spanish-speaking community, physical education instruction for elementary school when the districts phased out their PE classes. All Y employees are taught the history of the YMCA, the Y mission statement, the core values and how to actively promote them. The Y has initiated new programs for their staff including educational benefits to support college educations for staff, employing learning disabled and mentally challenged people for custodial and laundry services, encouraging Y staff members at various levels to attend paid training at the national YMCA institute for career development and certification in places like Tempe, AZ and Hawaii. S. encouraged me to take this training when I was working there even though I wasn't a full time, nonexempt employee.

Alire's developed a common sense theory of organizational management that incorporates principles and insights drawn from her experience. These principles apply well to the S.'s management practices and those of the YMCA as an organization. S. treated people the

way she would like to be treated. She understood that everyone had a role in making the organization function effectively. She understood that it took teamwork to make the organization work. She knew that she could not demand respect but earned it through her actions. She made decisions that made sense for the organization, even if they made some people unhappy. She started relationships with trust, and only when the trust was broken did she alter the relationship. She accepted integrity as the guiding principle. She understood that her unit was not about her, but about her effectiveness in providing opportunities for others. She let intuition be a guide (2004, Definitions section, ¶ 8).

The least effective manager I have encountered

The least effective management/organizational style I have experienced was at Foothill College where I was hired as a part-time instructor to teach various ESL classes. The person who hired me and who became my manager was K. Y., then Coordinator of the ESL program, now Dean of Language Arts. K. hired me to teach a class for which she had been scheduled, but which administrative duties were keeping her from teaching. Because this was my first teaching job at a community college in the Bay Area, K. agreed to be my mentor teacher. Because she wanted to help me and wanted to make sure of what the students were getting, she gave me the curriculum she developed herself for this class. What started as a warm, friendly relationship characterized by mentoring and sharing, ended up a painful and damaging relationship characterized by distrust and rejection.

Looking at this experience in terms of K. management style, what was most distressing was that K. seemed to change management styles midstream. She began managing me in the human relations style, where we were in a cooperative, inter-personal, trust-based, participative relationship, but when more than one student came to her with complaints about my teaching

style, my inability to give clear directions or clear explanations, among other things, she quickly became a bureaucratic and hierarchical manager (Perrow, 1989, The technical qualification section, ¶ 4). I think she wrote me off as a hopeless case and didn't want to take the time to work with me. If I, as manager, were unavailable to my mentee, either emotionally, or physically because of other commitments, I would try to arrange for a substitute relationship.

I did not realize at the time that I had not received any support or vetting as a new, part-time, teacher at Foothill, until I was hired in a similar position at City College, San Jose. There, at the start of the school year, I went to two days of workshops for all faculty members and meetings within my department for faculty and staff during which I was made aware of established channels for adjunct faculty, introduced to my union representative and other support services staff, and generally made to feel welcomed and needed. At Foothill, where I started also at the beginning of the school year, I was not informed of any support services and only during the process of exploring my rights when I received a negative evaluation, found out about the training and support I should have received. If I had just hired a new teacher, I would definitely have offered her every opportunity for help and guidance provided by established channels at my campus. I would not have taken on a mentoring relationship unless I had the time and interest in carrying one through, in good faith, to the end of the quarter.

I would coordinate the ESL program differently. We also never met as a department or even more informally. I did get to know others teaching the same classes, but everyone was proprietary about their curriculum. I would have encouraged teamwork among part and full time faculty as a priority. In my case, if I wanted copies of handouts from other teachers, I got them from their students, whom I met regularly at the tutoring lab where I was hired to as a writing tutor.

In addition I would not have assigned a new teacher as heavy a load as I received. I was initially hired to teach one 5-credit class. Then on the first day of classes, demand opened up for a different 5-credit class that I was assigned to. These two classes met every day, for 1 hour, 5 days a week. In addition I was hired to work in the tutoring lab all afternoon, which required me to be at school from 7:30 am to 3:00 pm. At home I was unable to make any real plans for the next day. After I finished correcting essays and other homework, I was too exhausted to think about planning lessons for the two morning classes.

I would have instituted board grading of midterm and final essays, so new teachers could absorb the department's grading standards at each course level. Only later when I was hired at City College did I realize that it was unusual that, at Foothill, I had graded all my own students' essays, and had never participated in standardized board grading for students' mid term or final essays. Board grading is the process whereby teachers of the same course grade anonymous midterm and final essays, none by their own students, according to a common grading rubric. This takes place after all teachers calibrate sample essays to ensure common grading standards.

Another decision of K.'s that didn't work was handing me her curriculum and encouraging me to use it intact in order to teach the same class that she would have taught, since that is what the students had signed up for. By mid semester I realized that her curriculum was the result of 12 or 15 years of fine-tuning and was far too ambitious for me to carry out. I ultimately dropped many of the projects and requirements before the end of the quarter, which made me lose credibility with the students. At City College I was handed the department's official course description and learning objectives for the class, a legal document established as a contract between the college and the State Board of Education. I chose the texts and designed a curriculum that I thought met the requirements, which I then handed to the Dean of Language

Arts for review. I realize that, by giving me her curriculum, K. wanted to make my job easier. But she never fully vested me with the power I needed; I never received, nor saw, the department's official course description or learning objectives, nor knew that one existed. My sense is that she hired me as her little surrogate teacher and then regretted her decision.

My current manager's style

Today, the manager in my present teaching situation, B. T., is nonbureaucratic and low keyed. He follows Perrow's idea that organizations are open systems, everything related to everything else (1998, Enter goals, environments, and systems section, ¶ 5, 6). B. T. is the faculty on record for the 700+ students that come through his program every quarter at De Anza College. We, his teachers, carry out the curriculum he has designed. He understands that how we feel about our job will affect how the students learn in our classrooms.

Although the department is organized hierarchically, when he meets with his teaching group once a week at a staff meeting that we are paid to attend, he shares his teaching skills and experience with us to make us better teachers. He share information handed down from the department level that will affect us and our ability to carry out the curriculum, as well as things that will affect our jobs in the future. For the past year, the department has been undergoing reorganization, and in midyear our program head was diagnosed with cancer and went on long-term leave, which increased the workload for everyone. Change, in terms of limited funds, new job descriptions, the future of the program, is ongoing. We discuss how the uncertainty and turbulence affect those at the very bottom, namely the students.

B. T. leadership and management style inspires loyalty. Perrow states, "bureaucratic organizations can change faster than nonbureaucratic ones, and that morale could be higher where there was clear evidence of bureaucracy" (1993, Bureaucracies comeback section, ¶ 2). In

our case, many of us stay because we feel committed. B. is constantly learning, experimenting, and innovating with the curriculum and the course procedures and administration. He listens to us to find out what works and what does not work. We all make suggestions and feel that we have the ability to change the process. In that sense this workgroup follows Perrow's category of "nonroutine, high-status, interesting and challenging jobs performed by highly educated people" (1998, The technological qualification section, ¶ 2).

Although the concepts we teach don't change, there is a good deal of leeway as to how to teach them better in the time we have and how to tailor them to better meet the needs of individual students. Perrow suggests utilizing management theories that "emphasize autonomy, temporary groups, multiple lines of authority and communication" in managing this kind of workgroup (1998, Some conclusions section, ¶ 3).

My position about management styles

My personal position about management style is similar to Alire's (2004) commonsense principles and Humanistic Management by Teamwork (HMBT) principles. If I were to manage the lifeguards at the pool where I worked this summer, ideally I would try to apply these principles. However, in everyday life in the classroom and on the pool deck, the default day to day grind ends up driving me closer to the "decision making" school as discussed by Perrow (1998). Because of limitations in time, information, reasoning power, and energy available, I usually seize on the first acceptable alternative when deciding and rarely change things unless they really get bad, that I merely "satisfy" rather than maximize or optimize personnel or procedures (Enter power, conflict, and decisions section, ¶ 5).

I would like to learn more about Total Quality Management. I appreciate that TQM has broken with the norms by suggesting that "it is essential for organizations to remove all systems

that create fear in the employee, particularly appraisal systems that compare employees, and the use of merit pay in organizations" (Lynch, 2004, Total Quality Management section, ¶ 3). I am encouraged that TQM theory opposes individual performance appraisals, believing that people do their best for the organization if management is supportive and if the employees believe in what they do.

TQM proponents believe that "employees naturally care about the quality of the work they do, particularly if management provides the tools and the training that will enable them to achieve" (Lynch, 2004, Total Quality Management section, ¶ 2). Although I agree that "the majority of real-life work tasks are probably not all that intrinsically interesting to a lot of people," if people are treated justly and equitably they will find ways to make what is intrinsically uninteresting into something interesting and will strive to do the best they can (Lynch, 2004, Total Quality Management section, ¶ 3, 4). For example, for years I had a seasonal job as a lifeguard at my local pool club that was intrinsically boring. But, because of the sense of well being I derived from management and from members, I found much of interest and even fascination about the work. I never tired of watching children at play in water and of observing human behavior. I saw plenty examples of good and not so good parenting behaviors. My good feelings about the job translated into wanting to do the best job possible.

Conclusion

Organizational management styles is a touchy subject for me because it involves the supervision of a person's actions and the evaluation of a person's behavior. It took me a long time to learn to handle criticism and evaluation constructively. And yet I find it as hard to give criticism and evaluate others as to receive it. I would rather avoid possibly damaging someone's self esteem, even when the criticism is meant constructively.

I grew up resisting authority. I learned to not expect fairness or understanding from the adults around me or from older siblings. Throughout my youth, family members told me that I was bad, had a bad attitude, and had a chip on my shoulder. I loved school because my teachers were just, rewarded for ability and good work, gave me equal chances at success, and never tore me down. At home I received so much destructive criticism that I engaged in self-destructive behavior as a young adult.

The family in which I was raised, the first organization to which I belonged, was bureaucratically and hierarchically organized. The dynamics of the family revolved around my mother, who was a tyrant. Because we were all girls, my father eventually lost interest and left our rearing to my mother. Everything was always about her and her word was law. She gave first priority to her eldest children; the rest of us got the scraps. For instance, before I was 10 at a rummage sale I found brass bookends made in Korea, which mother bought for me. Then, when my older sister saw them and wanted them, mother let her have them. Knowing that her own wants trumped mine belittled me in my sister's eyes and made life more difficult for me.

Now I no longer look for my origins in matter or in material circumstances of any sort. I have accepted that I am spiritual. This knowledge has resulted in physical and emotional healing. But I doubt that I will be applying for management positions in the near future.

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