

3. Organisational concepts

Organisational theory

There are many definitions of an organisation. Below are some of them:

- **Organisation:** two or more people working together within a specific relationship structure to achieve a specific goal or set of goals.
- **E. Bösemann - An organisation** is a system consisting of a number of elements whose activity is directed towards a common goal. Their interdependence, which is conditioned by this, requires coordination for this purpose.
- **M. Crozier - An organisation** can be considered as a set of games, defined more or less clearly, which are played between groups of partners (participants). These games are played according to formal rules, which can easily be predicted from the knowledge of the roles assigned to (members of the organisation) by the formal organisation.

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Organisational theory (cont.)

Organisation according to Gareth Morgan can be presented in many ways.

He uses images to describe and analyse the organisation and **describes the organisation metaphorically:**

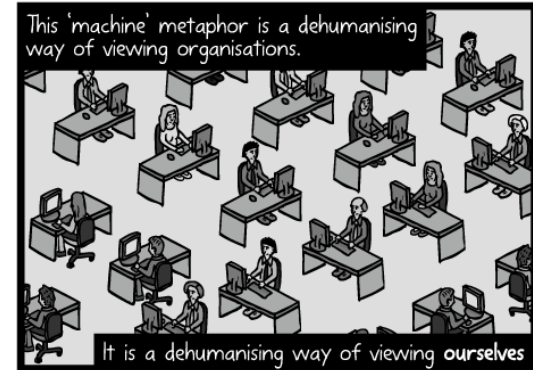
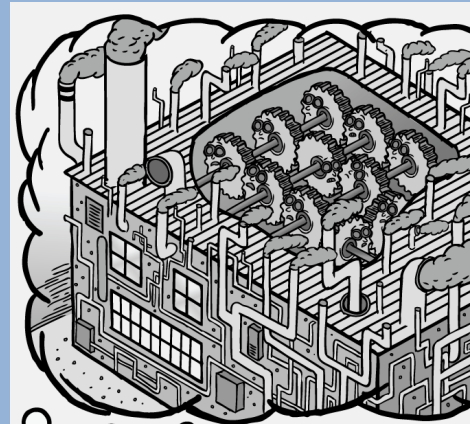
- organisations as machines,
- organisations as organisms,
- organisations as brains,
- organisations as cultures,
- organisations as political systems,
- organisations as mental prisons,
- organisations as flux (networks),
- organisations as tools of domination.



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Organisations as machines

Organisations as machines - the work of an organisation is precise, we often do it mechanically, it consists of permanent activities. The Greek word organon means a tool or instrument, and that is where the word organisation comes from. Tools and instruments have been developed to facilitate the achievement of certain goals, as well as organisations. The classical management theory and scientific work organisation are based on the mechanistic concept.



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Organisations as machines (cont.)

A mechanistic approach to organisation works when:

- we have a simple task to perform when the environment is stable,
- when the same products can be manufactured,
- when precision is rewarded, when human parts of a "machine" are submissive and behave as planned.

The limitations of this theory are:

- mechanistic organisations find it difficult to adapt to a changing environment,
- tend to be too bureaucratic,
- are unpredictable when the interests of the people employed there take precedence over the objectives of the organisation,
- have a dehumanising effect on workers treated as cogs in the machine, especially at lower levels.

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Organisations as organisms

Organizations as organisms - that is living systems. The organization treats employees as people with complex needs that should be met if they are to enjoy life and work effectively in the workplace.

The concept of organisation as an organism was adopted by the **behavioural school** and its representatives were: **Elton Mayo, Abraham Maslow, Douglas McGregor, Frederick Herzberg**. Their concepts laid the foundations for human resources management. The **system school**, which treated the organization as an open system, also believed that, just like a living organism, it drew its components for survival from the environment.

Treating the organization as a species led to the creation of various organizational variants: professional bureaucracy - centralised, "adhocracy" - an organization with a temporary structure, matrix organization - functional and bureaucratic organization, creates teams for specific tasks.

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Organisations as organisms (cont.)

Strengths of the "organism" metaphor:

- the organisation is open and flexible,
- can be improved by constantly paying attention to meeting needs,
- treating organisations as species, we always have different choices,
- organisations as organisms are susceptible to innovation,
- relationships between organisations help to understand the world of the organisation.

Limitations of this theory:

- overly concrete treatment of the organisation and its surroundings, because they are less durable than living organisms,
- organisations are not really as functional units as living organisms, because they can act as one in spite of breakdowns and conflicts,
- the metaphor of the organism will become an ideology.

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Organisations as brains

Organisations as brains process information and are like holograms. In organisations, just like in the brain, huge amounts of information are processed. According to **Herbert Simon**, however, there is limited rationality because:

- people work on the basis of limited information,
- are able to examine only a limited number of possibilities associated with a given decision,
- are unable to attribute an exact value to the results.

If an organisation is a product or a reflection of its ability to process information, it will lead to new forms of organisation. This reasoning is reflected in areas such as air transport, banking, insurance companies, the media, and wherever electronic information processing plays an important role.

Organisations as brains have the ability to learn. Organisations as holographic systems - every part of the hologram has all the information to reproduce the full image just like the brain.

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Organisations as brains (cont.)

Strengths of theory:

- contributes to the understanding of an organisation's learning process and its ability to self-organise,
- helps to understand strategic management to learn how to learn,
- organisations are better able to deal with uncertainties and complex problems than an individual,
- new organisational styles can be created by using new techniques.

Limitations of theory:

- important conflicts between the requirements of learning and self-organisation and the realities of power and control can be overlooked,
- learning and self-organisation require a change in attitudes and democratisation, and this may take some time.

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Organisations as cultures

Organisations as cultures - organisation is a cultural phenomenon and changes with the development of society. A different approach to work dominates in Japan, where an employee often starts work and ends up in the same organization, and in the USA where labour mobility and labour turnover are common.

Each organisation produces its own organisational culture, i.e. a set of norms and values that enable it to fulfil its mission in the best possible way.

Strengths of the cultural metaphor:

- throws a symbolic meaning on every aspect of the organisation's life, allowing it to focus on the human side of the organisation,
- the organisation is based on common meaning systems,
- companies try to organize their surroundings as they are organized themselves,
- helps to understand organizational changes.

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Organisations as political systems

Organisations as political systems - as systems of governance and influence. Autocracy, bureaucracy, technocracy, co-decision, representative democracy, direct democracy.

Organisations as political systems are a place of games of strength, conflicts.

Organizations give power, control over all resources, knowledge and information, over the decision-making process.

In an organisation as a political system there is also room for interpersonal alliances and dependencies. In such organisations prejudices and stereotypes can be important (as well as gender in politics).

Organisations are also pluralistic, i.e. they represent a diversity of needs and views.

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Organisations as political systems (cont.)

Strengths of political metaphor:

- makes it possible to understand that the activity of an organisation is based on business,
- refutes the myth that organizations are always rational, are rational from the point of view of some people and others are not,
- makes people aware that tensions between private interests and the interests of the organisation are incentives for individuals to act,
- raise awareness of the roles that the organisation plays in society.

Limitations:

- if we look at an organisation as a policy, we see political issues and motives everywhere, even if they do not exist,
- political thinking is used to settle one's own interests instead of shaping new views,
- pluralism can be superficial.

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Organisations as mental prisons

Organizations as mental prisons - organizations, although created by man, can imprison him in themselves, because they are separate entities.

The success trap - the sense of superiority does not allow for development and the chance for development can be missed.

Organisational clearance trap - the adopted sentences "let's create confidence", "let's take into account the margin of error" lead to organisational incompetence.

The trap of group processes - leads to a syndrome of group thinking and wrong decisions.

Other possible aspects of organization as a mental prisoner: ignorance, displaced sexuality, patriarchal family.

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Organisations as mental prisons (cont.)

The strengths of the political metaphor:

- helps to understand that people create their own worlds, which in turn experience as limitations and problems,
- points out ways out of the traps that people themselves create,
- shows that our understanding of the organisation is excessively rationalised,
- contributes to raising awareness of the importance of the human element in every aspect of an organisation's life,
- identifies many barriers to innovation and change.

Limitations:

- emphasises unconscious patterns of behaviour and control,
- leads to utopian speculation,
- evokes the spectre of "Orwell's" world, in which one tries to control the minds of others.

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Organisations as a flow and transformation (flux/networks)

Organisations as flow and transformation - systems operating on the principle of "autopoiesis" - self-creation - are closed loops. These are self-referential systems that seek to shape themselves in their own style and similarity. Systems have surroundings, but everyone's relations with the environment are internally determined. If we want to get to know the environment, we have to get to know ourselves first. Many organizations at all costs try to create their own identity and promote their image in the environment, often false. An important issue of the metaphor of flow is change and designing changes.

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Organisations as a flow and transformation (flux/networks) (cont.)

Strengths of the flow metaphor:

- new directions of thinking about changes,
- perceiving change as a positive phenomenon,
- the logic of adverse events can be reversed and in many cases made positive by the organisation and its environment.

Limitations:

- this metaphor is too idealistic,
- the full assessment of a change depends on an "after-fact" assessment.

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Organisations as tools of domination

Organisations as tools of domination - for example, the construction of the Cheops pyramid was an example of exemplary organisation and dexterity, but it is a symbol of exploitation, hard work and cost the lives of thousands of victims.

Max Weber (1864-1920) created a **theory of bureaucracy**, which he regarded as a tool of domination. He distinguished three types of domination: charismatic, traditional, rational and legal.

Michel Crozier (1922-2013) noticed in the politics of bureaucratic organization bureaucratic oligarchistic tendencies, i.e. power is exercised in them by only a narrow group of people. He believed that there were no democratic organizations, because power is always held by individuals, even against expectations.

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Organisations as tools of domination (cont.)

Organizations often use their employees. They suck the best out of them and then throw them away if they no longer need them. For example, "workaholic" managers who fall victim to redundancies. Also, working in inappropriate conditions may favour the organisation's dominance over its member. Accidents happen at work, working in bad conditions causes occupational diseases. The cause of illness is also social and psychological stress.

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Organisations as tools of domination (cont.)

Strengths:

- shows that rationality on the part of the organisation can have a disastrous impact on the employee,
- forces us to recognise that domination may be the right way to organise and is not just a side-effect,
- the metaphor of domination allows us to see that some people are actually exploited in the workplace, not just the voices of 'radicals'.

Limitations:

- it can be identified with the primitive conspiracy theory of organisation and society,
- by claiming that dominance and organisation are one and the same, other forms of organisation that are not based on dominance can be overlooked.