

## Postmodern leadership in organization

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### Abstract

Postmodernism paradigm is one of the newest paradigm that is represented in response to the deficiencies of management traditional and modernism paradigms for increasing and changing needs of organization and society. Post modernism dose not present a systematic and comprehensive theory. This theory believes that organizational environment is changing and turbulent and is opposed to every comprehensive theory about management. This results in fundamental changes in other management concepts such as leadership. In fact, the need for organizational leadership in the post-modern world will not be obviated with the modern leadership. The characteristics and styles of organizational leadership should have been changed appropriately with the transition from modernism to postmodernism period in order to continue their primary duty to maintain the survival of the organization. This study describes the expected features of organization leader in the passing period from modernism to postmodernism.

**Key words:** Modernism, Postmodernism, Leadership, Organization

### 1- Introduction

Before modernity and Taylorism governance bureaucratic issues was at the top and scientific management had been considered as same as educational management .Even with the emergence of the human relations movement, this assumption did not change much and managers were considered as the brain and the employees were supposed as the hand. Despite of the introduction of decentralization and empowering concepts, it was preferred that the leaders speech and make decisions. With the advent of bureaucracy, modern human were changed into a machine that is involved in a repetitive, boring business and industry and became highly specialized. This continues until the point that new pioneers consider organizations as a comprehensive phenomenon that contains of high and multiple skills with high flexibility and planned networks. In this situation, the initial plan of postmodernism was groups' release of pressure and control, so that they released from any obligation, fear and threat (Boje & Dennehy, 1999).

There are different theories about postmodern concept. For example, Peter Draker (1992) spoke of postmodernism for the first time through some questions such as "Do we are beyond the machinery period? Beyond the time that we had no skill in working? If working in teams in a global, flat, and open relationship network makes people strong and self-control. "

Postmodernism represents a philosophical, political, cultural, and intellectual stream in management literature recently. However, there is still disagreement among writers and scholars about the exact time of its beginning date. In fact, post modernism represents the hypothesis of the death of meta-narratives.

In the modern story, scientific management and human relations were manager's goals. Each individual was a mechanical device that was controlled in scientific manner. Jobs had to be

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formalized, standardized, concentrated, and specialized. Postmodernism focuses on networking organization with flat lines, horizontal harmony, and temporal relationships between the seller consumer and employees. A respondent, temporary, and departmental organization that disappear all the organizational boundaries (Boje & Dennehy, 2000).

Postmodernism represented new perspectives in different domains such as philosophy, politics, art, culture, and social science as well as management. Some considers this concept against the modernism, some believe it is a completion of modernism and another count post-modernism as a stage beyond the modernism, which has been emerged in order to solve modernity problems.

## **2- Principles and elements of postmodernism**

Postmodernism have no especial principles, framework, and escape of particular components. However, we mention some of the principals of this theory.

- 1- Pluralism and opposition to any Unitarianism: diversity, divergence, and scattering are the basic principles of this school. Postmodernists are against any centralization, authoritarianism. They reject attention to a central fact for life believes in pluralism.
- 2- Relativism: adherents to this school do not believe in any absolute and certain reality and consider all things as a relative reality.
- 3- Nihilism: traditional society largely was based on the theory of "divine providence" and based on this the universe is progressing and moving toward a specific goal with supervision and guidance of God. Nevertheless, in the modernism school material progression and scientific programs are substituted for divine providence. Nevertheless, postmodernism actually believes in nihilism instead of God's power.
- 4- Emphasizing on language and discourse: postmodernism believes that all knowledge generate from discourse. Based on the theory of discourse, truth and reality cannot be concealing in a specific culture and knowledge. This idea is rooted from pluralistic and relativism view. So these two are the foundations of post-modernism (Bayat et al, 2005).

## **3- Management in postmodern period**

Before the Industrial Revolution, people acquired skills through apprenticeship in the craft and industries so that they did not need someone to teach them how to plan, organize and control. They had learned exactly what they were doing. On the other hand, many also were exploited as a slave. People were car gearwheels. Adam Smith, Max Weber, Frederick Taylor, and Elton Mayo were postmodernist pioneers.

Post-modernism management defines component of the management in another ways. Planning, organizing, commanding, coordination and control are presented as innovation, active organizing, encouraging, co-creation, and self-control respectively in postmodern management (Mirsepasi, 2004).

Organizations have to manage environmental uncertainty and every possible change in order to be effective. Uncertainty means that the decision makers do not have much information about the environment and have difficulty in predicting changes. Therefore, organizations cannot survive without offering new ideas continually (Ykaf, 1996).

Decentralization is an important factor in postmodernism. Post-modernists represent active organizing in contrary to organizing, which is a selected pattern that is based on obtained information from environmental conditions, goals and duties, technology, strategic and technical situations of organization and is less reliance on formal structures and predetermined relationships. Postmodernism emphasizes on wide, decentralize, flexible and flat organizing for autonomous team (Boje & Dennehy, 2000).

Postmodernism facilitate discourse and communication among individual through creating different job groups. The aim of this discourse and communication is information exchange that makes new ways for greater participation and productivity in organization (Keough & Tobin, 2000).

Postmodernists emphasize on discourse as a tool for reinforcing and expanding social interactions and results in providing a tendency to promote cooperation and collective actions such as increase tolerance against opposing views develop ideas, collective thoughts, and new ways to solve problems (Ahanchian,2003).

In postmodernism, management is an art and ability to pursue new dreams and make a commitment to follow them. In the modern era, people are educated, achieve to a common goal through participation in groups so that they are committed to the goals, and try to achieve those (Keough & Tobin, 2000).

#### **4- Leadership in postmodernism**

Today, there are new forms of organization that are needing new leaders who are able to act based on postmodernism's assumptions such as lack of attention to the rational model, creating integration and combined thinking. In other words, the postmodern organizations require postmodern theories of leadership and management.

Modern theories emphasize on leadership effects and the legal status of the leader in bureaucracy. However, postmodern theories focus on the process of leadership. In the recent ideas, leader is not only reliant on his/her legal status. Leadership process is no longer dependent on valuable exchanges with others in order to influence them. It emphasize on personal ability of the leader and his/her influence on the beliefs, values , behaviors and actions of others. Therefore, retinal leadership models should be combined with irrational models, which are based on intuition, charisma and so on.

Modern leaders are usually interested in preserving legal status, improved quality of performance through boss – subordinate exchanges and enhance employee's motivation, while postmodern leaders influence on employees through a shared system of values and beliefs and persuade followers to the new look even to the old problems and efforts to achieve the goals. Modern organizations focus on the results and effects of management and leadership rather than processes (Landy, 1998).

This sentence, " if you watch me, I'll be watching you," is directly focused on rational thinking of leadership model (House, 1971). In this context, modern management studies are more tend to the issues such as limiting the power of the leader in bureaucracy and developing static and dynamic leadership and management models and theories. Organization's experts have created a change in the paradigm of modern organizations. It is natural that these changes in organization theories will lead to changes in management and leadership theories.

Given the management theories of the last fifty years, we will realize that all these theories are in exchange manner. Reforms such as vertical communication, contingency concept, and

the social interaction and path-goal theories indicate the influence of leader on followers that is based on a mutual value exchange. For example, "exchange theory of Hollander," asserts that if a person wants to be in a leadership position, he or she must respond to the needs of subordinates (Hollander & Julian, 1969).

"Theory of charismatic leadership" is one of the most important theories that are represented by Weber in 1947. This leadership model, unlike previous models, is based on personal characteristics and abilities of leader to influence on the beliefs and values of others (Thompson, 1956).

The gap between the theories of rational and irrational leadership today will be discussed as "transactional leadership in comparison with transformational leadership" (Bern, 1987; Bass, 1985).

Boss and colleagues stated in their study about exchange leadership that this type of leadership focuses on quality of performance improvement through exchange management between superior and subordinate. While, transformational leadership emphasizes on the influence through ideas and values. Transformational leadership is irrational because it assumes that leaders and followers primarily are under the influence of moods and the values then consider logical and empirical issues (Olive & Vadman, 1988).

Modern theories of leadership are based on independence to the followers. According to this theory, managers and leaders are rational and noticeable people that think about the root of problems provide available alternatives and criteria for evaluating them and implement plans by choosing the best alternative (Vaill, 1992).

As mentioned earlier, leaders and managers are under the influence of their own ideas, values, and thoughts in the process of decision making. Therefore, the best way in the process of decision making in postmodernism is pursuing thoughts and values that managers are seeking for them (Russell & Kuhnert, 1992). In a postmodern organization, the impetus of leaders to lead and reasons of followers to follow could have several aspects. Both of them are rooted from the behaviors, beliefs, and experiences of the individual. Separating the reasons should not be considered in leadership and management studies. Personality characteristics, behavior, and organizational position of individual can be studied simultaneously in the postmodern leadership theory (Sashkin, 1989).

Recently, a model has been developed for the selection and actuation employees in which employees are selected based on organizational situation, not the job requirements. In the old model, the ability, skills and knowledge of applicant that are related to the characteristics and expectations of job had been examined (Bowen et al, 1991). They suggest in a model that in the selection process, it is better to examine the fit between individual and organization rather than matching candidate with job (in terms of knowledge, experience, and skills) and overall competencies have to be considered.

According to the recent model, attributes and characteristics of workers with organizations' criteria have been examined. This analysis led to the development of criteria from "job - employee" to "employee - organization." this idea is a postmodern approach because it considers all individual abilities and the process of individual in accordance with organizations rather than paying attention to one specific abilities of person that is related to the job requirement.

## 5- Conclusion

As previously mentioned, today's world is in need of new organizations and new organizations need new leaders. Leaders who believe in various inventing factors in decision-making and are equipped with new thoughts based on values and emotions perception in addition to the rationality and classical thesis of modern organizations. Modern leaders make decision and solve problems independently, but postmodern leaders do not believe in quite reasonable decision-making. They rely on subordinates and sometimes are unreasonable. Management and leadership will require a better understanding of the complex relationships within and outside the organization in the future. Leadership has to tolerate changes in order to face with postmodern organization and new people. The diversity and creativity of subordinates should be nurtured by leaders and multiple causes, constructive reality and aesthetic reality and valuable thinking must be accepted as the basis for decision making. One of the newest approaches for studying leadership process is to study personal emotions and values of followers instead of studying leaders' skills, performances and characteristics, which is recommended for future studies.

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