Rational, Natural, and Open Systems

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Authors Note

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Rational System

When you think about a rational system perspective of an organization, it can be defined as a focus on an organization's formal structures and sees the organization as a group of people who work together to pursue specific goals. Scott & Davis (2007) give a great example of the story of Moby Dick and how Captain Ahab says all of his means are his motive and objectives are mad. I would bet that when most people think of a large organization, they are thinking of businesses that use the rational system. In this system, the organization's behavior and its participants are viewed as actions performed by purposeful and coordinated agents. (Scott & Davis 2007, p. 36)

This rational model can be used for the good of society as in the case of, let's say, the Y.M.C.A. or for its negative implications. Scott & Davis outline the rise of the Nazis in Germany, and I found Ho's (2019) research just as compelling as the author studied how the communist party in Vietnam harnessed the opportunities of social media and controlled the risk of sites like Facebook to the county's citizens. In Vietnam, the government had a goal of maintaining integrity and consistency in the Vietnamese media narrative. (Ho 2019) They did this by employing the rational systems model. The government created its own social media pages to disseminate information and viewpoints to counter the 'misinformation" and "misguided" opinions of other social media sites like Facebook. (Ho 2017) Think about that for just a second and imagine if that were to happen here in this country. While we have seen a little bit of it being played out in recent weeks with social media sites like Parler being removed from application platforms, it is nothing like what the research showed by Ho (2017) in Vietnam.

Scott & Davis (2007) argue that goal specificity is an essential part of organizations' rational system model. Specific goals provide unambiguous criteria for selecting alternative

activities. (Scott & Davis 2007, p. 36) These goals provide the requirements and allow for the organization to be designed. These specific goals will enable the organization to directly ask what it wants to achieve and how it will get there. However, it is essential to note that goals often have different functions and arise from other sources. For example, a top manager may often stress motivational goals to help build commitment. In contrast, a middle manager may transform these goals into more specific plans to engage their employees in the decision-making process.

Scott & Davis (2007) also explore formalization in the rational system. They explain that it is an attempt to make the structure of the relationships more viable and explicit. The authors suggest that diagrams, workflows, and organizational charts are examples of this formalization type. The research of Fischer, Ferreira, Van Meurs, Gok, Jiang, Fontaine, and Abubakar (2019) took this a step further in examining how organizational formalization facilitated organizational citizenship behaviors in the workplace. Their finding suggests that clarifying the dynamics between perceptions of the norms at the organizational level will allow the firm to understand when employees should engage in helping and voice behaviors. (Fischer et al., 2019) It is important to note that a vital component of this is that managers can foster relationships through organizational formalization interventions in uncertain environments. One can only assume that this is what they were trying to do with the egregious social media censure in Vietnam?

On a personal note, I can look toward Proverbs 29:18 (NIV), which says, "Where there is no vision, the people are unrestrained but happy is he who keeps the law." Or Habakkuk 2:2-3 (NIV), which says, "write down the revelation and make it plain on the tablets so that whoever reads it may run with it." These passages can be used as guidance as I think about the organizations that I am involved in, both in business and community endeavors. Having a better

understanding of a rational system model's positive and negative effects will better prepare me moving forward. Having faith, humility, commitment, diligence, and motivation will allow me and my partners to make rational decisions with thought given to specific goals as we are looking forward with a Christian worldview.

Natural System

The natural system perspective can be defined as an advancement of the idea that informal and interpersonal structures within an organization are more important than formal structures. People within this organizational structure have multiple interests or conflictual processes that drive the organization. This system is very familiar to me and is used in much of my leadership training, especially in outdoor leadership. When one thinks of Theory X and Theory Y, sensitivity training, and even worker/follower participation, you can use the natural system model to attain the group or organization's goals. Right away, you can see two significant differences between the rational and natural systems. They concern goal complexity and informal structures. Often there are multiple goals in an organization that are complex and conflictory, and sometimes less formal social networks are more important than formal ones in understanding and predicting organizational behavior.

To better understand the natural system model, Scott & Davis (2007) notes that the natural system perspective developed in no small measure from critical reaction to the inadequacies of the rational system model, and it should be defining a novel and exciting view of organizations that deserve to be considered in their own right. (p. 55) Natural systems are first and foremost collectives, rather than the rational approach where an organization is deliberately constructed to reach specific goals. There is a myriad example of both. If you think about most service-oriented businesses, you might think of them in the rational approach. ACME business is

formed to provide widgets to its customers. Many non-profits may be seen as more of a natural system, at least at first glance. For example, a group of volunteers plans a 5K running event to raise money for cancer research. As a collective, this group comes together to achieve a goal, yes, but being together to achieve this goal collectively is more important than more formal business structures.

Scott & Davis (2007) reiterate the importance of understanding goal complexity when thinking about organizational systems. The authors note that organizational goals and their relation to the participants' behaviors are much more problematic than the rational approach. (Scott & Davis 2007, p. 69) It is important to note what is perceived as the "real" goals of the organization and its actual or operative goals. Jung, Kang, & Choi (2020) researched goal complexity in organizations and found that successful organizational change is an essential factor in maintaining sustainable competitive advantage and growth in today's rapidly changing business environment. This change is equivalent to the natural system by allowing people within this organizational structure to have multiple interests or conflictual processes that drive the organization. Again, this can go back to a non-profit our leadership in the outdoors or even in the Bible. Passages like Proverbs 16:9 (NIV) say, "The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps." Or as noted in Matthew 6:24 (NIV) and the serving to two masters.

Team management in an organization can be used to initiate a natural system model. I have the most recent experience within the planning and execution of a 700-mile expedition across the state of Alaska last February by sled dog team and snow machine. While this trip is up for much analysis and the feature of much of my research thus far in the D.S.L. program, it is essential to see how that organization was flawed because I tried to initiate a more rational approach than a natural system approach as it should have been. From my research in BMAL

704, I found that team effectiveness expands beyond the team's time and task boundary and is essentially better understanding the significance of a complex teaming environment. (Edmonson, 2012, Wageman et al. 2012; as cited in Maloney et al., 2019) Having a better understanding of the natural system and organizational theory can allow me to generate relationships among group members that have lasting value even after the teams disbanded. This is an integral part of my research because much of my time in this program is an analysis of the past to prepare for the future of the organizations involved.

Open System

An open system organizational structure argues that one cannot look at an individual organization in isolation. In this view, originations are intertwined within their environments to the extent that the organization-environment boundaries are indistinct. Scott & Davis (2007) describe an open system as capable of self-maintenance based on through-pit of resources from the environment. Haken & Portugali (2016;2017;) postulate that this self-organization system takes place in open systems that acquire functional structures without specific instructions from the outsides. These open systems are composed of many interacting components, parts, and elements, thus "open" in the sense that they may exchange with their environment and subsequent information. (Haken & Portugali 2016;2017;)

Seyed Naghavi, Poorbehroozan, & GhorbanAlizadeh (2020) argue that an open organizational system must always be ready for change, but there are usually obstacles to that change. Their research was to identify and overcome inertia formation regarding changes in an organization. (Seyed Naghavi et al., 2020) The study showed that resistance to change is because an individual's commitment and attachment to change have given responsibility and devotion to

another. Thereby, an individual's ability to deal with change is simply countered by change and such attempted to change are thwarted. (Seyed Naghavi et al., 2020)

What does this all mean, and how can it be applied in today's landscape? Systems theory has been studied since the 1930s and is based on the idea that the whole is bigger than the sum of its parts. In this case, a set of systems is an open systems model, a collection of elements standing in interrelation among themselves and with the environment, and constant flux. (von Bertalanffy, 1972; as cited in Jung & Vakharia, 2019) In other words, breaking down a system into smaller parts and focus on them individually. (Jung & Vakharia, 2019) Even in the Bible, this type of open system is used. In Romans 12 and other places, Paul taught us that when we become believers, we are to see ourselves primarily as the body of Christ and only in a secondary way as individuals.

As a dog training company owner, it is easy to see how the open system organization could be used negatively towards our customers. Here is an example. A client complains to us about the quality of dog training received from one of our contract trainers. As the owners, we attribute the problem to our inability to recruit experienced trainers, which stems from a tight labor pool in Alaska. By blaming the trainer's situation provided sub-par service and coaching to our client, we should have been searching for links between the presented problem and other system components; we might find weaknesses in our own business. These problems could be; contractor training problems, lack of definitions of responsibilities, or inadequate coordination and control of their work. If we recognize these areas as a need for improvement, the business and, therefore, the contract trainer can enhance the quality of their service and coaching to the client regardless of the contractor's experience.

As Scott & Davis (2007) propose, the open systems perspective developed much later than the rational and natural systems. Still, it has gained adherents rapidly and proudly altered our conception of the organization and its specific features and processes. In our own company, we use this model to develop not only our organizational structure but also our programs. Professional dog training is not just teaching the family dog how to sit and stay but also the development of a routine and a process that the pet owner can use time and time again to receive desired results. Not to sound cliché, but it goes back to what Paul says in the Bible. Paul notes; "so it is with Christ." (1 Cor 11:1) We can use that too with our clients by eliciting that dog training classes, especially group classes, are open systems theory in minute detail.

Relationship Between the Three Systems

In the most basic terms, organizations are collectives of participants. How the organization defines its purpose and the relationship between the participants' motivations is what a particular system will determine. As noted, the rational system model relies on an organization's formal structures and the organization as a group of people who work together to pursue specific goals. Consequently, the natural system model is the advancement of the idea that informal and interpersonal structures within an organization are more important than formal structures. In an open system model, organizations are intertwined within their environments to the extent that the organization-environment boundaries are indistinct. Each model has its place in an organization, and it is up to the planners, managers, and decision-makers to determine which is the best fit for their needs. In my brief understanding of what is available in the literature, I can find parallels on how each system fits nicely into organizations I am involved in and which systems I would pick and choose pieces to make an ideal fit for the operations I oversee. From my understanding, there is not a one-size-fits-all solution for any organization but

having a better experience of the parameters of each of these systems should I allow me to make

conscientious decisions moving forward.

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