

Masters' Thesis

Civilization and Organization Theory: A New Epistemological Discourse

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

Abstract	i
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Chapter 1: Civilization: Theoretical Framework to study and analyze Organization Theory 1

1.1. Introduction	1
1.2. Civilization and Organization Theory	4
1.3. Why Western Civilization is Chosen for the Study?	9
1.4. Conceptualization of the Construct Civilization	10
1.5. Conceptual Framework	15
1.6. Civilization as a Theoretical Construct for Organization Theory	18
1.7. Facets of Organization Theory Chosen for the Study	29
Chapter End Notes	38

Chapter 2: Research Process 43

2.1. Rational of the Epistemology and Theoretical Perspective	43
2.2. Research Process and Analysis	48
Chapter End Notes	54

Chapter 3: Western Civilization 55

<i>Historical Discourse</i>	55
3.1. Western Religious and Ethical Thought	55
3.2. Western Philosophical and Scientific Thought	68

3.3. Western Economic Thought	77
3.4. Western Sociological Thought	79
3.5. Western Governance and Political Thought	80
3.6. Western Postmodernity	81
<i>Organizational Discourse</i>	87
3.7. Organization Theory during the Dark and Medieval Ages	87
3.8. Renaissance and Enlightenment Organization Theory	93
3.9. Post-Enlightenment Modern Organization Theory	94
3.10. Postmodern Organization Theory	103
<i>Western Civilization and the Nine Sub-Inquiries</i>	114
Chapter End Notes	120
Chapter 4: Discussion	126
4.1. Reflexive Relation between Civilization and Organization Theory	126
4.2. Civilization as a Theoretical Construct	130
4.3. Rational for positing Civilization as an Episteme for Organization Theory	134
4.4. Concluding Remarks	142
4.5. Future Research Implications	146
4.6. Limitations	148
References	149

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Abstract

Culture, nation state and society are generally employed in contextualizing organization theory. The construct civilization which transcends national, cultural and societal boundaries is not used in indigenization of organization theory. This thesis employs civilization as a theoretical construct to study and analyze organization theory of Western civilization. The analysis is undertaken by using discourse approach. Two parallel discourses, historical and organizational, are constructed for the Western civilization. The historical discourse presents the major thoughts and ideas of the civilization. The organizational discourse shows the impact of historical discourse on organization theory of the civilization. The historico-organizational discourse of civilization is used to construct the reflexive relation between civilization and organization theory. Three elements research model is used for conducting this study. The epistemology of constructionism and theoretical perspective of interpretivism is used to formulate discourses of the Western civilization. The discourse analyses are followed by a discussion on the reflexive relation between civilization and organization theory, grounding of civilization in the contemporary organizational theories, rational of positioning civilization as an organizational epistemology, concluding remarks, major future research implications and basic limitations of the study. A four-tiered conceptual framework is represented to posit civilization as an episteme for organization theory.

Chapter 1: Civilization: Theoretical Framework to study and analyze Organization Theory

1.1. Introduction

This thesis posits civilization as a theoretical construct to study and analyze organization theory. Chapter 1 identifies the gap in organization theory literature regarding the utilization of construct civilization. Contextualization of organization theory has mostly centered around the constructs of culture and society and civilization is not posited as an organization theory episteme. The chapter describes the inherent relation between civilization and organization theory. The first task which it undertakes is to conceptualize civilization as its foundational values or core essence or deep cognitive roots. This logic based conceptualization provides a base for the study of the historico-organizational discourses of the Western civilization. Western civilization is included in this study because it is the dominant civilization of our times within the ambit of which contours of modern, postmodern and contemporary organization theory have shaped and developed. The chapter employs civilization as a theoretical construct in the backdrop of ethical, institutional, population ecology, and diffusion of knowledge theories of organization theory. It also seeks to posit civilization as an organizational metaphor and knowledge paradigm and raises the question whether civilization can withstand the universalism promoted through globalization. It also presents a four-tiered conceptual framework which captures the value hierarchy of each of its four constituent components: civilization, culture, organizational systems and management models.

Organization theory is a diverse field which draws from many disciplines. Some facets of organization theory are chosen in the background of two of its discourses: dominant and critical discourse of organization theory. These facets include ethical views, organizational epistemology and ontological states, organizational metaphorical forms, leadership and management styles and, organizational culture. Based on these facets of organization theory, nine sub-inquiries of the thesis are raised in chapter 1. The main inquiry of the thesis seeks to posit civilization as a theoretical construct to study and analyze organization theory.

Most of the organization theory research during the last century was conducted by borrowing the research strategies and methodologies from natural sciences. This thesis does not employ objectivist and positivist epistemology and methods of natural science research. It constructs the organizational discourse of Western civilization by reflexively interpreting its historical discourse.

Chapter 2 presents a three-element research process which is employed in this non objectivist study. It's informing epistemology of constructionism and interpretivism formulates the discourse analysis of Western civilization. The discourse analysis is conducted by employing the research techniques of corpus building, coding, memoing, concept mapping and secondary analysis of existing stats. The discourse analysis constructs the historico-organizational discourse of Western civilization through interpretations of the historical documents.

Two discourses, historical and organizational are constructed for the Western civilization in chapter 3. Along with major historical events and developments, the historical discourse captures the overall ethical, political, philosophic, economic, scientific and sociological thoughts and ideas of Western civilization. These thoughts and ideas provide the general framework within which organization theory of Western civilization is thought to be embedded and formulated over a time period spanning centuries. The historico-organizational discourse is formulated in chronological order, starting from the genesis of the civilization down to contemporary times. The starting point of the historical discourse of the Western civilization is taken from the start of Christianity in the Roman Empire. It is traced through the dark and medieval ages to Western modernity, postmodernity and globalization. The chronological presentation of various thought developments within the Western civilization is however not done in a static way. The terms such as dark and medieval ages are used minimally in the main text. Attempt is made to clearly delineate various strands of thoughts into overall coherent and whole thoughts. The term postmodernity is however retained in the description of Western civilization's discourse. This is because the study treats postmodernism as a separate thought and philosophy and not merely a chronological milestone. .

The organizational discourse studies the organizational and organization theory development in a chronological order during the same time periods covered for the historical discourse. At the end of Western civilization's discourse, nine sub-inquiries raised in chapter 1, examine the reflexive relation between history and organization theory of the civilization. The nine sub-inquiries are related with the organizational issues of ethics, organizational forms at

genesis stage of civilization and their survival and sustainability, management styles, metaphorical organizational forms generally prevalent in civilization's organizations, the informing epistemology and ontological states of organizations, organizational cultural orientation, major organizing principles and, potential future contributions and adaptability of the Western civilization to contemporary organization theory. In sum, ten inquiries, one main and nine sub-inquiries, are presented by this study. Chapter end notes (self-addressed memos) are used freely to isolate and describe specific historical and organizational events and developments in the discourse of Western civilization.

The discussion of chapter 4 reflexively reconstructs the relation between civilization and organization theory by grounding it in the contemporary theories of managing and organizing. It also constructs and presents civilization as an episteme for organization theory by interpreting the nine sub-inquires which were raised for the historico-organizational discourse of the Western civilization. The four-tiered conceptual model presented in chapter 1 is discussed in detail. The chapter also presents the main conclusions, major future research implications and limitations of this study.

1.2. Civilization and Organization Theory

Both Western and non-Western scholars call for contextualization of social and organization theories. The nature of organizational work has been related with national and local cultural contexts (Clegg, 1989, p. 21; Dahrendorf, 1968, p. 112; Walsh, 1998, p. 36). Michel Crozier (1964) discussed how familial hierarchical traditions and avoidance of direct confrontations

of French culture affected working of their organizations. Black *et al.* (1977) argued that Asian and East African cultural traits impacted their work practices. Korean scholars have attempted indigenizing Western management theories with Korean cultural values and norms (Kim & Rho, 1982).

The core assumption of the proponents of contextualization of organization theories is that there is no cross-cultural consensus regarding human, societal and cultural values and that local perspectives and worldviews are mostly missing in the “non-Western and developing countries” social and organization theories (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999, p. 124). Barnard (1976) also argued that individual work values were shaped and formed under the influence of cultural values and norms. He observed:

Many moral forces are inculcated in the individual by education and training (which) suggests the convenience of postulating several sets of general propensities or codes in the same person, arising from different sources of influence and related to several quite diverse types of activities. (p. 262)

W.G. Scott (1974) observed that utilitarian values of American culture have influenced the US organization theory paradigm. He argued that overarching cultural values of utility have shaped the contours of American and Western organization theory and management as merely ‘efficiency’ and ‘resource’ focused (p. 244-246).

The above discussion reveals that culture, nation state and society have been used to contextualize and indigenize organization theories. However, civilization has not been posited as a theoretical construct in organization theory. It has been used in political discourse like Huntington's (1997) thesis of clash of civilizations. This thesis attempts to fill this void in organization theory literature by positing civilization as a theoretical construct to study and analyze the phenomena of organizing and managing.

Culture and nation states, the two constructs linked with organization theory, are region and society specific. Civilization, on the other hand, transcends cultural, societal, nation states and geographical boundaries and in that sense is much broader theoretical notion which can explain and interpret more succinctly the general picture of a human social system.

Civilizations not only reflect the present, but also contain in its bosom the inherited values, ethics and belief systems of hundreds and thousands of years¹. For example, the organization of church, allowed Latin Christendom to become synonymous with Western civilization (Osborne, 2006, p. 3-4). Similarly the mosque became the defining organization of Islamic civilization which conceived of itself as a primarily religious civilization where the members were supposed to submit wholly to God in all matters of life (Meri, 2006, p. 101; Eisenstadt, 1992, p. 41). The Sinic civilization's core ethics of simplicity and humaneness impeded its mechanization for many centuries². Organizations, therefore, can be said to represent a civilization's ethical heritage (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983, p. 183). The main assumption of this thesis is that civilization is a historical and social phenomenon which can be used as a theoretical construct to develop organization theories which may transcend national and regional boundaries. Culture assumes the role of a sub-civilization in this discourse.

McGregor (1960) noted that “every managerial act rests on assumptions, generalizations, and hypotheses – that is to say, on theory” (p. 6). As already discussed, organizational theories depend on the core values of a culture and society. It follows, therefore, that managerial acts rest on the basic values and ethics of a culture. Civilization, being a ‘supra-cultural’ construct, is therefore expected to be the fountainhead of the cultural and societal values on which organization theories and managerial acts rest. The civilizational values and ethics have persisted or evolved during the discourse of a civilization of which a society or culture is a part.

Organizations constitute a significant part of human social systems. They affect a person’s life in different social contexts. These effects may start right from the organization of a maternity hospital or a family in which one is born, to that of a graveyard committee or a funeral parlor (McAuley *et al.*, 2007, p. 4-5), through which one is buried. Human behavior is interpreted by understanding the organizations and organizations are explained by general social structures of a particular civilization (Clegg, 2002, p. xxvii). The history of organization is therefore the history of mankind which dates back to about 10,000 to 9,000 BCE. All the major world civilizations had their own distinct histories. These histories also entail their organizational systems. The Industrial Revolution of the 18th century can be marked as the starting point of modern organization theory (George Jr., 1972).

The literature offers sufficient evidence that modern society and civilization function and flourish through management and organizations³. It is observed that “societies in their very nature represent organized groupings of people whose activities are institutionally

channeled” (Katz & Kahn, 1966, p. 1). Governments and their political, economic and social systems rise and fall through performance of organizations. Documented empirical research shows that “most of the life is organized (and people) would go so far as to imply that organization is basic to all life” (Argyris, 1957, p. 229). Organizations and organizing phenomena is therefore indispensable to human civilization, its survival and progress. Organizations and civilizations are labeled as ‘interdependent twins’ in the literature because they cannot develop and survive without each other (Farazmand, 2002, p. xv, xviii & 100; Jones & Munro, 2005, p. 38-39). Civilizational view of organizations is underpinned by the belief that no aspect of them can be understood without taking their historical and social contexts into account (Connerton, 1976)⁴. The three broad levels of Sociotechnical perspective of organization theory takes into account the primary work systems, whole organization systems and the macro social systems. In other words, organization theory connects individual with the ‘smaller whole’ of institutions as well as with the ‘larger whole’ of society, culture and civilization (Burke, 2008, p. 40).

It follows therefore that like organizations, organization theory and civilization are also interdependent. The organization theory literature, however, reveals a paucity of studies linking organization theory with civilization and history. The sheer complexity of organizational life is said to be responsible for this trend (Goldman, 1994); Bacharach, 1989; Donaldson, 1996; Mohr, 1982; Bunge, 1979; Ziman, 2000). Some scholars of organization theory feel the need to abandon this trend of historical discontinuity (Ericson, 1970). They argue that there is a clear need to challenge management theories based on pure scientism. They also challenge the widely held view that natural sciences’ models, and not history, can

formulate general laws and universal hypotheses which can explain organizational phenomena (Kieser, 1994; Aktouf, 1992; Hempel, 1942).

1.3. Why Western Civilizations is Chosen for the Study?

Specific analysis of organization theory in Western civilization is undertaken in this study. Firstly, this thesis formulates an historical discourse of the Western civilization. The historical discourse offers a general picture of the civilization. Secondly, the historical discourse is methodologically extrapolated to find out the ‘contours’ of organizations and organization theorizing in the Western civilization.

Western civilization is chosen because it is the major and dominant civilization of contemporary times. However, this dominance is more cultural than civilizational in nature. Professor Arnold Toynbee identified four other distinct civilizations; Orthodox Christian, Islamic, Hindu and, Sinic in addition to the Western civilization. He summarized the intactness and endurance of other civilizations and worldviews in the following words:

It is interesting to notice that when we turn back to the cross-section at A.D. 775 we find that the number and identity of the societies on the world map are nearly the same as at the present time. Substantially the world map of societies of this species has remained constant since the first emergence of our Western society. In the struggle for existence the West has driven its contemporaries to the wall and entangled them in the meshes of its economic and political

ascendancy, but it has not yet disarmed them of their distinctive cultures. Hard pressed though they are, they can still call their souls their own. (As quoted in Meyerhoff, 1959, p. 110-111)

Despite claims and hopes of emergence of a universal civilization⁵ after the end of cold war, the situation noted by Professor Toynbee about the ‘intactness’ of other civilizations, remains more or less the same. Huntington (1997) identifies seven distinct civilizations in addition to the Western civilization⁶. He argues that religion and language form the two central elements of any civilization and demonstrates that both English language and Christianity, the central elements of Western civilization, exhibited a downward trend in their progress during the last century⁷. First colonialism and later globalization have however increased the spread of Western cultural influence across the globe and has made it seem dominant.

However, despite these observations it cannot be ignored that the contours of contemporary organization theory were shaped and developed in the post-Enlightenment Industrial Revolution of the West. It is because of this reason that Western civilization is chosen ahead of all other civilizations for this study.

1.4. Conceptualization of the Construct Civilization

Bjur & Zomorrodian (1986) define organization and administrative theorizing as cultural values based. They developed a three level conceptual model for theorizing. They argued that the overarching *cultural values* formulate the first level of the ‘value hierarchy’ of