

MANAGEMENT THOUGHTS: HOMOGENOUS OR HETEROGENOUS

¹Ofoegbu Wilson Chukwuemeka & ²Professor B. C. Onuoha

^{1,2}Department of Management,
Faculty of Management Sciences,
University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

Abstract

This study examines the different philosophies, approaches, concepts, ideas and perspectives in management. It thoroughly examined the concept of management and the different approaches. Also, the study reviewed arguments on whether management thoughts and philosophies are homogenous or heterogeneous. It was concluded that management thoughts are both homogenous and heterogeneous based on the fact that, every management thought or theory, is primarily set out to achieve almost the same objectives which include; achievement of maximum level of output from the available resources, attainment of efficiency in the production process, satisfying customers, creating better and more effective and efficient workforce, achieving better suppliers relations, creating conducive working environment and contributing to national development.

Keywords: Management thought, management theories, management philosophies.

1. Introduction

Management is the most important aspect of any organization (Mahmood, Basharat & Bashir, 2012). No organization can succeed and achieve its stated strategic goals and objectives without properly managing its human, material and informational resources, therefore, Olum (2004) considers management as “the hub of any organization”.

In recent time, the interests in management as an area of study has escalated, management has developed and grown rapidly from virtually been an unknown and inconsequential subject in decades past, to one of the most significant area of specialization in this present-day business oriented world economy (Örtenblad, 2010). As submitted by Cole (2004) management “has become an important concept in not only business circles but also in social, economic and political spheres”. Furthermore, Cole (2004) opined that management has equally advanced into a “dominant and innovative influence on which today’s society depends for substantial support and national growth”. Thus, it can be said that management as a specialized area of study has come to stay.

This growing interests in management study has resulted in the proliferation of management thoughts, ideas, theories, philosophies and perceptions over the last century and has continued to attract the interest of professors, lecturers, business students, philosophers, professionals and other experts in this field (e.g. Schumpeter, 1911, 1934, 1983; Drucker, 1986; Fayol, 1990). The growing interest in the subject matter has resulted in umpteen write-ups on the true meaning, scope and specification of management thought, theories and philosophies by scholars, academics and management gurus (e.g. Koontz, Dannel & Weihrich, 1980; Czarniawska & Sevón, 1996, 2005; Love & Cebon, 2008).

The heated debate as to the nature and meaning of management, its theories, grouping of its theories, which one to adopt for specific problem situation among other arguments are issues of ‘great confusion’ and enormous concern to scholars and practitioners. This confusion resulted in the writing of an article titled “management theory jungle” by one of the contemporary management scholar Koontz (1961). In his work Koontz (1961) equated management theory as a jungle filled with several trees with different nomenclature, all coming together to form a jungle.

One of the frequently debated issues in management is the acceptance of a particular school of thought over another (e.g., Brunsson & Olsen, 1993; Czarniawska & Sevón, 1996; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Erlingsdóttir & Lindberg, 2005). However, in this argument, two opposing positions are captured. That is, those who believe that management thoughts are homogenous and others who believe that management thoughts or philosophies are heterogeneous.

Consequently, the proliferation of studies on management leading to the creation of opposing views on the application of management philosophies, thoughts and theories. While the first proponents believe that management thoughts are homogenous, their opponents believe in the heterogeneity of the management thoughts and its applicability (e.g. DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Erlingsdóttir & Lindberg, 2005; Örtenblad, 2010). In a contemporary research Abrahamson (1996) opined that “the proponents that believe that management thoughts are

homogeneous” are in supports of the notion that the adaptation of a specific management idea or thought results in the organization becoming more similar.

However, before fully delving into the debate of whether management thoughts and philosophies are homogenous or heterogeneous, it is pertinent to take a look at ‘management journey’. That is, how it all started – the historical development of management theories, thoughts and philosophies by contemporary management scholars.

2. Historical Development of Management Thoughts and Theories

Managing is perhaps the most essential human function. Since humans start forming social groups and organizations to achieve specific objectives and goals which were impossible or tedious to accomplish as individuals, the art of managing has become important for the group to organize the individual strengths into a formidable force (Olum, 2004; Mahmood, Basharat & Bashir, 2012). According to Olum (2004), management has become important because “as society continuously relied on group effort, and as many organized groups have become large, the task of managers has been increasing in importance and complexity”. Therefore, the understanding of management thoughts, theories, ideas are crucial in the way and pattern managers oversee complex organizational situations (Mahmood, Basharat & Bashir, 2012). Therefore, management is defined as the craft of achieving stated objectives through the help of other people (Follet, 1924; Koontz, 1961; Drucker, 1974; Olum, 2004; Mahmood, Basharat & Bashir, 2012).

Management as a study developed from and is related to several fields of study, among which include philosophy, economics, political science, psychology, anthropology and sociology (Wren, 1994; Abrahamson, 1996). The historical development of management practice can be divided into six eras or movements, which are: the pre-scientific era, the scientific movement, the management process movement, the management science or mathematical (quantitative) movement, the behavioural/human relations approach and the general systems school.

The schools of management thought are hypothetical compositions used in the study of management. Every one of the management school of thought is established on rather different assumptions about human beings and the business or social organizations for which they work or function. Over time, these management thoughts and concepts have been discussed, analyzed and reduced to the form of theories by scholars, to serve as essential tools and guide for a clearer understanding of management thoughts and concepts. Basic among them are (1) scientific theory of management, (2) administrative management theory, (3) Bureaucratic management theory, (4) Behavioral theory (5) Decision-making theory, (6) Biomathematical theory (7) System theory and (8) Contingency theory (Fayol, 1949; Koontz; O’Donnel; Wehrich, 1980; Senge, 1990; Warner, 1994; Robbins & Coulter, 1999; Daft, 2005). These management theories have been group into three schools of thought. These are classical school, behavioural school and modern school of management thoughts.

Fig. 1: Classification of five major schools of management thought, the year of formulation, and their relative areas of emphasis

MANAGEMENT SCHOOLS	Beginning Dates	Emphasis
CLASSICAL SCHOOL		Managing workers and organizations more efficiently.
Scientific Management	1880s	
Administrative Management	1940s	
Bureaucratic Management	1920s	
BEHAVIORAL SCHOOL		Understanding human behavior in the organization.
Human Relations	1930s	
Behavioral Science	1950s	
QUANTITATIVE SCHOOL		Increasing quality of managerial decision-making through the application of mathematical and statistical methods.
Management Science	1940s	
Operations Management	1940s	
Management Information Systems	1950s—1970s	
SYSTEMS SCHOOL	1950s	Understanding the organization as a system that transforms inputs into outputs while in constant interaction with its' environment.
CONTINGENCY SCHOOL	1960s	Applying management principles and processes as dictated by the unique characteristics of each situation.

Source: Barnett, 2017.

The table shows five major schools of management thought. First among which is classical school, which in turn is made up of scientific theory, administrative theory and bureaucratic. Second is behavioral school of management, comprising human relations and behavioural science. The remaining three are most time group into one and modern school of management, it comprises quantitative theory, systems theory, contingency theory, management sciences among others. Some of these theories are discussed briefly below:

2.2 Classification of Management schools of thought

Pre-Scientific Era

Ancient records in China and Greece indicate the importance of organization and administration, but do not give more insight into the principles of management. In the period 1400 to 1450, merchants in Venice, Italy, operated various types of business organizations, e.g. partnerships, trust and holding companies. The Romans effectively used many basic management ideas, e.g. scalar principle and delegation of authority. Concepts of the ideal state were also considered by many 16th century writers like Machiavelli, Babbage and Thomas Moore.

Classical school

The classical management theory is made up of three prominent management theories (Scientific, Administrative and Bureaucratic). This school of management thought came into

being as a result of the industrial revolution of 1780 in Europe and other western countries. The classical management theories emphasized efficiency, production and process of managing workers and organizations more efficiently. The major contributors to this school of management thought include; Frederick W. Taylor, Lilian and Frank Gilbreth, Henry Gantt, Henry Fayol, Marx Webber.

The **Scientific Management Theory** which was developed by Frederick Winslow Taylor, Lilian and Frank Gilbreth and Henry Gantt, made contributions to the study and understanding of management. They formulate four principles of management which was to help enhance productivity. First, it calls for “the application of the scientific method to work in order to determine the best method for accomplishing each task”. Secondly, it states “workers should be scientifically selected based on their qualifications and trained to perform their jobs in the optimal manner”. Thirdly, it advocated sincere synergy between workers and management based on mutual self-interest. Lastly, the scientific management proposed that management should take absolute responsibility for “planning the work and that workers' primary responsibility should be implementing management's plans”. Other significant contribution of the scientific management include the evolving of a science for the development of difficult but fair performance standards and the implementation of a pay-for-performance incentive plan based on work standards.

Administrative Management Theory focuses on the “management process and principles of management. In contrast to scientific management, which deals largely with jobs and work at the individual level of analysis, administrative management provides a more general theory of management” (Barnett, 2017). The major proponent of this theory was Henri Fayol. He contributed the fourteen principles of management, among which include discipline, authority, unity of command, subordination of personal interest to organizational interest.

Bureaucratic Management Theory – this organizational theory was developed by Max Weber, the German sociologist. The theory focused on the flawless form of organization. That is, the ideal form of business or corporate entity, what should be obtainable or what should not be obtainable. Weber concluded that most contemporary organizations were “inefficiently managed, with decisions based on personal relationships and loyalty”. He proffered that organizations should be characterized by “division of labor, hierarchy, formalized rules, impersonality, and the selection and promotion of employees based on ability”, and that this would result higher management efficiency. Weber further proposed that a manager’s authority or power to act should not be based on charisma or tradition, but the position of job held.

Behavioural School

As a result of the deficiencies, weaknesses among some of the assumptions of the classical management theories, theorists came up with the behavioural school of management thought. The emphasis on “efficiency, process and principles” by the classical management theorists was not totally acceptable to some scholars who felt that, the classical management school of thought neglect the ‘human’ aspect in the production process.

The major contributors of this school of thought are Mary Parker Follet, Elton Mayo, Clair Turner, Fritz J. Roethlisberger, Chester Barnard, Abraham Maslow, Kurt Lewin, Renais Likert, and Keith Davis, Douglas McGregor, Chris Argyris, Frederick Herzberg, Renais Likert, and Ralph Stogdill, and many others. The behavioural school of management thought, comprise two important management theories. These are: Human Relations and Behavioural Science.

The **Human Relations Theory** was propounded by Elton Mayo with his colleagues, who carried out the Hawthorne studies to determine the effect of the environment on workers' productivity and found a positive correlation between the two. They made several contributions, which include that "workers' attitudes are associated with productivity", also "the workplace is a social system and informal group influence could exert a powerful effect on individual behavior". The third contribution of study was that "the style of supervision is an important factor in increasing workers' job satisfaction". Elton Mayo and his colleagues concluded that managers should make cautious effort to help workers in adjusting to corporate life by encouraging cordial relationship between workers and management.

The **Behavioral Science Theory** of management emerged during the 1950s – 1960s. Among the contributors to the theory included Douglas McGregor, Frederick Herzberg, Raph Stogdill. The theorists focused on applying "conceptual and analytical tools to the problem of understanding and predicting behavior in the workplace". The behavioral science came to being as a fall out of the human relations theory. The behaviourists believed that the human relations theory was "simplistic and manipulative" in its assumptions on the relationship between employees' attitudes and productivity.

The behavioral science school has contributed to the study of management through its focus on "personality, attitudes, values, motivation, group behavior, leadership, communication, and conflict", among other issues.

Modern school

The **Modern School of Management Thought** comprises several other schools of thoughts. These include: Quantitative or Management Science or Operations Research, Systems school and Contingency school.

The **Quantitative or Operations Research or Management Science** school centered its interest on the "operation and control of the production process that transforms resources into finished goods and services" (Barnett, 2017). It originated from the scientific management theory but became a specialized area of management study after World War II. It uses several tools and assumptions of management science.

The **Systems School** was developed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy a biologist. It focuses on "understanding the organization as an open system that transforms inputs into outputs". Other contributors to this school of thought included Kenneth Boulding, Richard Johnson, Fremont Kast, and James Rosenzweig.

The **Contingency or Situational** school of management thought emphasizes that “there is no one best way to manage and that it depends on various situational factors, such as the external environment, technology, organizational characteristics, characteristics of the manager, and characteristics of the subordinates” (Barnett, 2017). A few of the major contributors to this school of management thought include Joan Woodward, Paul Lawrence, Jay Lorsch, and Fred Fiedler, among many others.

3. Is Management Thought Homogenous or Heterogeneous?

Despite, the different approaches to management study, the welter of research, and the number of differing views have resulted in much confusion as to what is management?, what management theory and science is?, and how managerial events should be analyzed?. This confusion led the renowned scholar Harold Koontz to write the article “the management theory jungle” (Koontz 1961; 1962; 1980). Since that time, the vegetation in this jungle has grown exponentially, with addition of new school of thoughts, approaches, theories. These additions plus the older approaches have taken management to new heights with new meanings and new words attached to them, but the developments of management science and theory still has the characteristics of a jungle.

It cannot be denied that, of all the confusions seen in the study of management, none is more serious than what Koontz calls the "management theory jungle" or "a kind of confused and destructive jungle warfare". It is a warfare because each party claims its superiority over the others.

The line of reasoning used in this paper so far has been based on studies of the literature on knowledge and learning in an organisational context. However, it is important to link this to the debate about the diffusion of management ideas that deals with practice and whether or not the spread of management ideas leads to homogeneous or heterogeneous practice within organisations. This is not only an empirical question; it is also one of definition – primarily of what it is that is spread (that is, how ideas should be demarcated).

While some authors have argued that despite the proliferation of management theories, the goal and objectives of every theory is about the well-being of the organization and the people working in them, thus making management thoughts and theories homogenous (e.g. DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), others disagree with this notion, for them management theories can liken to ‘management fashion’ in which every player chooses his or her own style, therefore making management heterogeneous (e.g. Abrahamson, 1996; Erlingsdóttir & Lindberg, 2005; Örtenblad, 2010).

Furthermore, Örtenblad (2010) argued that “the spread of ideas can thus lead either to homogeneous or heterogeneous practice within organisations or actually to homogenisation as well as heterogenisation simultaneously (depending on which of the themes is being implemented)”, therefore achieving the mixed-method. This argument is in line with the submissions of Latour, (1986), who opined that when a group of ideas in the same domain of study is disseminate at the same time, it could be pretended to concurrently result to “isopraxis and polypraxis, as well as to isomorphism and polymorphism”.

From the above narratives, it is already established that there exist contradictory and conflicting opinions concerning management thoughts, philosophies, theories and ideas. But the differing opinion is not a problem in itself because the originators of these concepts are from different backgrounds. However the problem is the applicability of these beliefs and the condition/time should a theory be adopted.

It is a well-established fact that, as far as management practitioners are concerned, there is no one best approach or style. Every one of the approach is dependent upon the understanding of the practitioners and from his or her background knowledge. This is the belief of the situational theorists. This submission is in concordant with the earlier submission of Örtenblad (2010), who pointed out that “each individual may have to assess himself and his environment and make a choice of one of more approaches that suit him”.

In this paper, the standpoint on management thoughts is proposed that their adaptation could result to simultaneous homogenous and heterogeneous practices. Though this perspective is rarely pointed out, Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall (2002) authoritatively observed that “organisations simultaneously reveal a striking homogeneity and heterogeneity”. Also, Örtenblad (2010) suggested that management “ideas dealing with the same, or a similar, issue are almost identical. The ideas all contain the same set of themes, but they are dissimilar in two respects. They differ in that they have different names (i.e., labels) and that they emphasise different themes”. In support of this point of view Evans (1976) pointed that “most successful managers select elements from various schools that fit their personalities”.

Authoritatively, most management practitioners feel less concerned about the division of management thoughts into school or may not even be aware of the existing of some schools of management, they are more concerned with proffering solutions to organizational problems, than with which school of management thought to adopt. Lastly, Örtenblad (2010) noted that “the schools of thoughts in management are transcending into an electric stage as far as modern managers are concerned”.

4. Conclusion

The viewpoint of this paper that management thought is both homogenous and heterogeneous is borne out of the fact that, every management thought, theory, philosophy, idea is primarily set out to achieve almost the same objectives which include; achievement of maximum level of output from the available resources, attaining higher efficiency in the production process, satisfying customers, creating better and more effective and efficient workforce, achieving better suppliers relations, creating conducive working environment and contributing to national development.

References

- Abrahamson, E. (1996). Management fashion. *Academy of Management Review*, 21(1), 254–285.
- Abrahamson, E. (1996a). Management fashion. *Academy of Management Review*, 21(1), 254–285.
- Barnett, T. (2017). *Management thought*. Retrieved on 17th December, 2017 from <http://www.referenceforbusiness.com/management/Log-Mar/Management-Thought.html>.
- Brunsson, N. & Olsen, J.P. (Eds.) (1993). *The reforming organization*. London: Routledge.
- Cole, G.A (2004). *Management theory and practice* (6thed.). Thomson learning, United Kingdom.
- Czarniawska, B. & Sevón, G. (2005). *Global Ideas: How ideas, objects and practices travel in the global economy*. Liber, Malmö.
- Czarniawska, B. & Sevón, G. (Eds.) (1996). *Translating organizational change*. de Gruyter: Berlin.
- Daft, R. L. (2005). *Management* (7thed.). Australia: Thomson/South-Western.
- DiMaggio, P.J. & Powell, W.W. (1983). The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields. *American Sociological Review*, 48(2), 147–160.
- Drucker, P.F. (1974). *Management: Tasks, responsibilities and practices*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Drucker. P. (1986). *Innovation and entrepreneurship*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Erlingsdóttir, G. & Lindberg, K. (2005). Isomorphism, isopraxism and isonymism: complementary or competing processes?, in B. Czarniawska and G. Sevón (Eds.): *Global ideas: How ideas, objects and practices travel in the global economy*, pp.47–70, Liber, Malmö.
- Evans, G. E. (1976). *Management Techniques for Libraries*. New York: Academic Press.
- Fayol, H. (1949). *General and industrial administration*. London: Sir Issac Pitman & Sons, Ltd.
- Fayol, H. (1990). General principles of management. In D. S. Pugh (Ed.), *Organizational theory* (3rded.): 179–181. New York: Penguin Books.
- Follett. M. P. (1924). *Creative experience*. New York: Longmans, Green.

- Koontz, H. (1961). The management theory jungle. *Journal of the Academy of Management*, 4(3), 174-188.
- Koontz, H.O' Dannel C. & Wehrich, H. (1980). *Management in broader perspective. Management of multidisciplinary study*, Tokyo: McGraw Hill Publication Limited.
- Latour, B. (1986). The powers of association, in J. Law (Ed.): *Power, action and belief: A new sociology of knowledge?*, pp.264–280. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Love, E.G. & Cebon, P. (2008). Meanings on multiple levels: The influence of field-level and organizational-level meaning systems on diffusion. *Journal of Management Studies*, 45(2), 239–267.
- Mahmood, Z., & Basharat, M., Bashir. M. (2012). Review of classical management theories. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Education*, 2(1), 512-522.
- Meyer, J.W. & Rowan, B. (1977). Institutionalized organizations: Formal structure as myth and ceremony. *American Journal of Sociology*, 83(2), 340–363.
- Olum, Y. (2004). *Modern management theories and practices*. Uganda: Makerere University.
- Örtenblad, A. (2010). Homogeneity or heterogeneity? On the nature of management ideas and their spread. *Int. J. Management Concepts and Philosophy*, 4(1), 71–86.
- Robbins, S. P. & Coulter, M. (1999). *Management* (6th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Sahlin-Andersson, K. & Engwall, L. (Eds.) (2002a). *The expansion of management knowledge: Carriers, flows and sources*. CA: Stanford University Press, Stanford.
- Schumpeter, J. (1911). *The theory of economic development*. Harvard: Cambridge.
- Schumpeter, J. (1934/1983). *The theory of economic development*. Harvard: Cambridge.
- Schumpeter, J. (1943). *Capitalism, socialism and democracy*. Harvard: Cambridge.
- Senge, P. (1990). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of learning organizations*. New York: Doubleday/Currency.
- Taylor, F. W. (1917). *The principles of scientific management*. New York: Harper.
- Warner, M. (1994). Organizational behavior revisited. *Human Relations*, 47(10), 1151–1164.
- Wren, D. (1987). *The evolution of management thought* (3rd ed.). New York: John Wiley and Sons.