

Teaching Management in the Context of a Radically Changing Government: How Might Courses in Organizational Behavior, Organizational Theory, and General Management Incorporate Issues of Evolving Systemic Power?

Abstract

Join this working seminar to consider together how societal-level systems like type of government might be included in today's OB/OT/management classroom. Our premise is that future managers should study "systemic power," including the mutual influences of business and government, the importance of economic philosophies, and the distinct role of citizen-workers. In this session, we briefly consider the impact of critical, humanistic and related management theorists that have contributed in this area. Then participants will then discuss forces for and against the study of systemic power, develop a wishlist of systems level topics, and brainstorm ideas for pedagogical materials.

Session Description and Plan

In this session participants are invited to investigate how systemic impacts are currently being discussed in the management/OB/OT classroom (what we refer to as the "management" classroom), and how this inclusion might be advanced. Our premise is that the education of future managers should include material on such systemic issues as the mutual influence of business and government, and the role of citizen-employees in these institutional processes. We call this topic "systemic power."

The session is organized around a series of questions that will be discussed in seminar format. That is, the convener will pose the question and a few of their own thoughts and then open the discussion to the audience either in groups or as a body.

- 1) Do management courses today discuss systemic power? The convener will define "systemic power." As text for the discussion, we read an *Economist* article (Schumpeter, 2016) that notes, "A glaring underlying weakness of management theory [is] its naivety about politics." Participants discuss:

What do you experience with the topic of systemic power in your own courses? In your own institution? What is your sense of the field? Does such inclusion adequately cover the topic?

We then move on to consider several historic approaches to incorporating a systemic perspective, namely critical management studies, humanistic management theory, and business ethics, especially corporate social responsibility. We discuss the following questions:

- 2) Historically, several existing theories of management have suggested that a systemic perspective is important as an educational goal. What has been the contribution to date of critical management studies to the teaching of systemic power? What has been the contribution of humanistic management theory to the teaching of systemic power? What has been the contribution of business ethics?

The previous questions are introductory. Now we get down to the main work of the seminar: consideration of the forces that work for and against a systemic power perspective in management courses, and how to effect change:

- 3) What are some *forces against* the inclusion of systemic power in management courses today? (here are some examples):
 - Textbooks—seeking a nationwide audience, they avoid controversial subjects
 - Evidence-based management theory cannot, within its current paradigms and with its current tools, investigate politics and management.
 - Someone else is covering it (I hope!). Leave it to business ethics or strategy or an elective on government. Ignorance of same.
- 4) What are some *forces working for* the inclusion of the systemic perspective today? (here is an example)
 - An imperative to educate students about what is “really” happening.

Together we will create a direction for improving theory and creating pedagogical materials to support teaching about systemic power in business classrooms.

- 5) What theory needs to be developed or interpreted in order for the systemic power perspective to take hold?

Interdisciplinary research may be necessary. For example, taking into consideration material from sociology and government theory, management professors might deliver modules on inequality and its effects on employee motivation, or the effect of a company’s political contributions on company culture. They might contextualize social enterprises within the legal system to demonstrate how ethics in an organization is both a societal and a personal construct.

- 8) What curricular materials are needed?

What do management courses that discuss systemic power look like? How should this material be delivered to undergraduates, graduates?

Must a course be totally rethought to include these issues, or would a series of modules be sufficient?

What classroom topics would the inclusion of “systemic power” suggest?

--The impacts of economic perspectives (laissez-faire capitalism versus regulated capitalism) on ... employee motivation, stress and health, unionization, organizational effectiveness

--The impacts of societal inequality, or technology, or globalization on ... (list dependent variables here).

Teaching Implications

Develop learning objectives for students studying systemic power, such as:

- recognizing systemic power, including political and economic systems
- understanding how systemic power affects organizational processes, such as motivation, personal power, and culture
- understanding how systemic power affects organizational outcomes, such as stress and productivity

The session is particularly pertinent to the theories of critical management theory, humanistic management theory, business ethics, and corporate social responsibility, and also to the development of new, radical systems theory.

References

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Schumpeter. (2016, December 17). Out with the old: Management theory is becoming a compendium of dead ideas." *The Economist*.

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Application to Conference theme

The 2017 change in leadership in the US presidency is a major societal change. Helping business students and, indeed, professors to make sense of it is a goal of this paper.

Unique Contribution to OBTC

This contribution is unique to this conference.