

Chapter 2

Philosophical Perspectives of Organizations and Ethical Implications

ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses philosophy and organizations. All organizations operate primarily from one of three philosophical perspectives or a combination thereof. The three philosophical perspectives are cognitive, behavioral, and cultural. An organization's core values, strategies, and/or frames originate from its cognitive, behavioral, and/or cultural philosophical perspective. The chapter focuses on explaining cognitive, behavioral, and cultural philosophical perspectives of organizations and ethical implications.

INTRODUCTION

Within this book the term organization is used to represent business (for profit and not for profit), establishment, foundation, society, association, and institution. Swanson & Holton (2001) described organizations as “human-made entities that rely on human expertise in order to establish and achieve their goals” (p.10). Bush (1987) defined an institution as a “set of socially prescribed patterns of correlated behavior” (p. 1076) and noted that correlated behavior consisted of two key tenets; behavior within an institution is not random but purposeful and correlated, and values are the “correlators.” Therefore, behavior is influenced by values.

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All organizations operate within philosophical perspectives and philosophical perspectives consist of core values (Collins & Porras, 1994), strategies (Drucker, 2008), and frames (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Organizations operate primarily from cognitive, behavioral, or cultural philosophical perspectives or a combination thereof. The three philosophical perspectives are. An organization's core values, strategies, and/or frames originate from the cognitive, behavioral, and/or cultural philosophical perspectives.

BACKGROUND

What is Philosophy?

Philosophy has been defined as the love of wisdom by the Greek. Wisdom is a combination of knowledge and experience. Philosophy is not alternative facts. Jaspers (1951) indicated that there is no escape from philosophy and that it is only whether philosophy is conscious or not, good or bad, muddled or clear. He also advised that anyone who rejects philosophy is himself unconsciously practicing a philosophy. The field of philosophy has many branches including ontology, epistemology, and axiology. Within these branches are philosophical questions such as:

1. What is the nature of reality? This is the concern of ontology where the nature of being is examined and it looks at how individuals see the world.
2. What is the nature of knowledge and knowing? This is the concern of epistemology which encompasses the theory of knowledge and what individuals think and know about the world.
3. What is value, valuable and valued? This is the concern of axiology and how individuals determine the kinds of things that are valuable in the world.

HRD scholars have written about philosophical aspects of HRD (Hughes et al. 2019a; Kuchinke, 1999; Ruona & Lynham 2004; Ruona & Roth, 2000) but none have provided specific philosophies of HRD. Schein (2010) questioned whether organization development (OD) was considered science, technology, or philosophy. Stewart in podcast discussions on philosophy and HRD with Short (2022), Hughes, and Chuang, proposed the idea that there are three current philosophies of HRD related to answers to the fundamental question

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