Enactment Theory

How people act in organizations

History and Orientation

Karl E Weick (1988) describes the term enactment as representing the notion that when people act they bring structures and events into existence and set them in action. Weick uses this term in the context of 'sensemaking' by managers or employees. He also describes how they can enact 'limitations' upon the system to avoid issues or experiences. It is also seen as a form of social construction. To date enactment is related to organizations and their environment and strategic management.

Core Assumptions and Statements

Enactment theory deals with life in general and organizations. Individuals and organizations are constantly in the process of self-formation (Deetz, 1982). Employees form themselves in organizations. According to Eisenberg (1986) this formation occurs in two different ways. Firstly, they achieve stability through enactment of interaction cycles. Secondly through the development of rules for appropriate behavior. Enactment theory can be seen as a process whereby people achieve continuity and coordination. This process requires rules and roles, so that people can coordinate their activities with another. Enactment theory gives a rationale for distinguishing strategic and routine behavior. Much enactment is scripted. People employ routine communication plans when they can; when they cannot, their ability to devise new plans is crucial to their success as company members (Heath, 1994). In practice, a lot of what occurs on behalf of the company is routine, scripted, and random rather than strategic.

According to Weick (1979) organizations are in the process of organizing, it undergoes constant change. Enactment results because people are conscious of relationships. Enactment theory is related to organizations. Members of an organization cannot separate themselves as an individual or a member of the organization about how they think about the meaning they impose on themselves, other actors, and the environment. Working in an organization reflects a person's products, services and activities.

Statement: "The external environment literally bends around the enactments of people, and much of the activity of sense-making involves an effort to separate the externality from the action" Weick, 1988, p. 130). Weick formulates it in a way that people engage each other, their organizations and their environment.

Conceptual Model

Weick, K. E. (1995). *Sensemaking in organizations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Favorite Methods

Qualitative methods, such as dialogue and discourse analysis are used. Dialogue strives for a balance between individual autonomy and organizational constraint through incorporating diverse voices (see f.e. Eisenberg).Discourse refers to language, grammars, and discursive acts that form the foundation of both performance and voice.

Analysis of consultation between management groups is another method that can be used. With storytelling the impact (in focus groups) can be measured.

Scope and Application

Enactment can help identifying the structure of an organization. Relevant for research are interpersonal, groups and organizations. The communication structure of organizations can be studied. The communication structure is the most important predictor of informal networks. The predictor can be used in relation of the duration of networks and the strength/ weakness they have.

Example

See Eisenberg.

References

Key publications

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See also: Network analysis in organizations, Sensemaking

See also Organizational Communication