Frederick Taylor’s Principles of Scientific Management and the Multiple Frames for Viewing Work Organizations Offered by Bolman & Deal, Carlson, and Pfeffer

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Dr. Frederick Winslow Taylor in a speech called "The Principles of Scientific Management" delivered on March 3, 1915 to the Cleveland Advertising Club exhorts his audience to take on a new, revolutionary view of the way work should get done. To combat the time-ingrained attitude of workmen throughout the world that "it is in their best interest to go slow instead of fast," Taylor proposes four principles of the scientific management of work. He asserts that even though the average businessman believes that if workers were to go fast, thus increasing efficiency resulting in a money saving decrease of workforce, just the opposite would be true. Taylor believes increasing the efficiency of the workman scientifically would increase the not only the opportunity for more work, but also the real wealth of the world, happiness, and all manner of worthwhile improvements in the life of the working person. For Taylor, increased workman output will result in improved quality of life.

Taylor, a mechanical engineer, seeks to apply a positivistic, rational perspective to the inefficient work organization. A second "misfortune of industry" that impedes the progress of improving work is what Taylor refers to as the "soldiering" of the worker, which essentially means to make a show of work not necessarily doing one's best. The worker tries to balance the inner conflict he feels as a result of worry about job security versus expectations of productivity. Taylor says that the worker is not to blame for soldiering since, even if given the opportunity to work harder with greater output, the effect on the labor market is such that rate of pay is cut. What incentive does management have to pay a man more wages, even for greater output, when another man will accept less for, albeit, less output. Taylor believes that scientific management of work will alleviate the common work problems of inefficiency, slow rate of work, and decreased productivity. Logically, according to Taylor’s view, soldiering would disappear as workers’ productivity and security improved.
The above chart illustrates Taylor's four principles of scientific management. Taylor is careful to assert that scientific management is no new set of theories that have been untried, a common misunderstanding. He says that the process of scientific management has been an evolution, and in each case the practice has preceded the theory. Further, scientific management is in practice in various industries: "Almost every type of industry in this country has scientific management working successfully." (Shafritz p.69) According to Taylor, the workman, on the average, in those industries where scientific management has been introduced, has turned out double the output and been the beneficiary of many improvements in working conditions.

Taylor’s principles of scientific management derive from the positivistic paradigm. Positivism attempts to view the world rationally, free of subjective values, applying logic and reductionism to the process of determining cause and effect. Taylor’s principles offer a method to gather information about the work process and the worker. The

**Figure One: Four Principles of Scientific Management**

1. One: Gathering of the traditional knowledge of the workman: record and codify it
2. Two: Scientific selection of the workman and his progressive development
3. Three: Bringing together the trained workman and the scientific approach
4. Four: Teamwork between management and workmen; sharing of a division of the labor
selection and training workers according to a scientific approach attempts to bring together the worker and the gathered, codified knowledge about work engendering some form of teamwork between the manager and the worker. Taylorism seeks a careful, objective approach to the way work is done based on a rational, apparently scientific approach.

Positivism applied to social theory perceives an organization as a rational bureaucracy with an appropriate hierarchy. “Organizations were seen as machines and people were viewed as appendages to those machines” (Carlson, 1996, p. 20). Both organizations and people need to be carefully controlled and monitored. This examination of the organization and the people in it is done through a rational, objective process that reduces the functioning of the organization to a logical, scientific method that can be replicated. Positivism cannot be applied to all organizations. Efficiency, impersonal relationships, rationality and logic do not work well in social systems such as schools, which can be unpredictable requiring flexibility, negotiation, and interactivity (p.21).

According to Pfeffer in Shafritz and Ott (1996), the role of power in the decision-making process of the rational/bureaucratic organization is centralized, and control is exercised over goals so as to be consistent with rules of logic like Taylor’s scientific principles. Decisions are made to increase efficiency in the Taylor model. Social systems such as schools often confront ambiguous situations requiring flexibility. There can be no “one best way.” When confronted with decision-making in a complex social organization, political power can be expected to influence coalitions and cause conflicting interests, create disorder, cause disagreement, bargaining, and struggle for position. All aforementioned effects of political power in a complex social organization are unacceptable and unthinkable in the rational model represented by Taylor.
Bolman and Deal (1997) offer four frames with which to view organizations: structural, human resource, political, and symbolic. The structural frame has the greatest application to the Taylor model of work in an organization. Authority imposes the structure; experts scientifically analyze the context of work with no regard for unexpected change. By attending to a tightly organized structure of rational authority, managers leave no opportunity to consider the motivation of workers, the needs of healthy human beings, or the possibility of sharing responsibility for leadership. The other three frames presented by Bolman and Deal have little or no alignment with the Taylor model. The Taylor model does not take into consideration the needs of human beings regarding motivation and security. Political power is not distributed and remains with the expert authority that exercises control over the one best way for the worker to function in the work organization. Finally, the symbolic frame offers no alignment with the Taylor model; symbols in the Taylor model are neither strategically constructed nor recognized.

The chart in the Appendix attempts to show Taylor’s scientific management and traditional work relative to the perspectives offered by Carlson (1996), Bolman and Deal (1997), and Pfeffer (1996). Most of the conceptual models offered cannot be adequately aligned with the Taylor model. The positivistic paradigm under which Taylorism falls is a narrow view of the world that will not allow flexibility, will not consider the needs of a thinking, human person in the work organization, and will not tolerate multiple perspectives on organizations. For greater understanding, complex contemporary organizations particularly social organizations such as school systems need to be viewed from multiple perspectives that account for the complexity of the sociopolitical systems of such organizations.
References


