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**MST MS1 / MET P5 Examination Questions 2008 – 2009  
ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOUR**

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**QUESTION 1**

Theme: *Engineering models of management, service based economy, the informal organization*

Question:

1. *Scientific management is less relevant in today's organisations than human relations theory. Discuss.*

Crib: Some recently have argued that in a service based economy, where a premium is attached to innovation, discretionary employee behaviours, informal working and flexible structures, engineering models of directive management are less relevant than humanistic approaches. Others, however, may argue that scientific management remains highly relevant, not simply in engineering and manufacturing organizations, but because management retain the (latent) desire to control work and quantify performance. They are prevented from doing so by technical constraints and limitations. With ever more sophisticated management information systems and technology, and with risk and governance at the top of the organizational agenda, will scientific management experience renewed in popularity as the dominant mode for organizing work? Good answers will discuss this and other implications.

**QUESTION 2**

Theme: *Motivation, job enrichment, employee performance*

Question:

2. *Herzberg famously remarked that "If you want someone to do a good job, then give them a good job to do". What are the implications of this statement for process and content theories of motivation?*

Crib: There are numerous competing theories which offer a variety of explanations for instrumental motivation in work organizations. Herzberg, however, argues that the most important factor determining employee motivation is meaningful work. Critical management theorists would argue that many developments in organizational behaviour, such as scientific management, have dehumanized work rendering it less meaningful. A good answer will review various theories of motivation – process, content and job-redesign for example, and assess their rigour and relevance in light of development to the nature of work within organizations. An outstanding answer will highlight the implications of the conclusions for both theory and practice.

**QUESTION 3**

Theme: *Contemporary management theories*

Question:

3. *"Contemporary management theories are merely fads". Assess the validity of this statement and discuss the implications of your conclusion for contemporary management theory and practice.*



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Crib: Contemporary management theories (CMT) dominate arguably current theorizing on organizations. The notion of excellence, culture management, process re-engineering, total quality management, and various other theories, are now common parlance in both theory and practice. And yet, criticism from some quarters is levelled at CMT as lacking substance and representing more a fad than a substantial departure from traditional forms of work organization. A good answer will develop robust criteria, against which various CMT (theories) might be assessed, using examples of practice from real organizations where appropriate, and present an argument in defence or defiance of the statement within the question and address implications for both current theorizing and practice.

**QUESTION 4**

Theme: *Labour process analysis, Post-structuralist theory*

Question:

4. *What are the similarities and differences between labour process and post-structuralist theories of organizational behaviour? Select the theory that you believe applies best, and conduct a critical analysis of the working practices of Google Inc.*

Crib: Labour process and post-structuralist theories offer different accounts of many of the same phenomena we observe in organizations behaviour. In particular, issues of power, control and pluralism between those who own the means of production, and workers, are critical tensions between the two theories. A good answer will explore both theories, drawing comparison across a range of common themes in organizational behaviour, and discuss similarities and differences, and make reference to the implications for our ability to understand complex issues in organizational behaviour. First class answers will apply their learning and understanding to the industry example.

END



## MET 1 2009 PAPER 5 SECTION B – HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

- Q. 5. a) What do you understand by the term *Human Resource Management* [30%]  
(HRM)?
- b) What criticisms can be made of HRM, both in theory and practice? [70%]

### Guidance for Marking:

Students should be aware that there are two versions of HRM, the 'soft' and the 'hard' (Storey), the latter being much more common in practice. There are a number of contradictions in HRM and I would expect students to mention the dual message of competition and collaboration: an emphasis on team working and performance related pay (PRP); loyalty and commitment and numerical flexibility (e.g. short term contracts); rhetoric about employees being valued assets and failing to provide any security of employment etc.

There are also flaws in the theoretical pure HRM Model itself. First, business planning is not a rational and ordered process; it requires continual adaptation and adjustments as the environment changes. Second, management has little strategic choice as such; they must always respond to business pressures from outside. Senior managers will not necessarily accept that HRM is strategic; they often see it as managing managers rather than the workforce. There is no hard evidence that it brings a return on all the investment put into it. It is expensive, and there are continual competitive pressures to compete on low costs and 'muddle through'.

A good student would mention that the 'free market/laissez faire' approach adopted in Anglo-Saxon countries such as the USA and the UK is not necessarily conducive to the pure HRM Model.

### **Post-exam Comments**

The first part of this question was mainly descriptive, but required that students demonstrate awareness of the significant features of HRM. Poor answers to this question omitted important elements of HRM and dealt with generalities. Better answers acknowledged the lack of consensus on definitions of the term, and the best demonstrated an understanding of the implications.

Part b) was assigned 70% of the marks and required students to discuss criticisms of HRM. Poor answers failed to go beyond description and, again, omitted important criticisms dealt with on the course. Satisfactory answers noted contradictions and flaws in the theoretical basis of HRM and acknowledged problems of practical implementation. Good answers discussed the criticisms, including contradictions, and made an attempt at evaluation of, for example, hard versus soft models of HRM. Context was also recognised as a factor in conception and implementation. Very good answers included interesting insights and alternative perspectives, and drew conclusions on the relative merit of criticisms in theory and in practice.

- Q. 6. a) Distinguish between *indirect participation* and *direct participation* [10%]
- b) How do these two forms of participation appear in the Swedish industrial relations system? [50%]
- c) Describe the types of companies in Western Europe in which strong forms of *direct participation* are most likely to exist. [40%]

Guidance for marking:

*Indirect participation* entails decision making through representatives of the employees; *direct participation* entails decision making by the employees themselves. Both forms usually co-exist in companies. *Indirect participation* is a collective form of participation and *direct participation* is an individual form.

In Sweden *indirect participation* is covered firstly by the 1977 Act on Co-determination at Work (MBL). This act applies to all workplaces where at least one union member is employed. The law regulates many issues, such as the right of association and bargaining, and rules concerning mediation and conciliation of disputes. An employer is obliged to consult with local trade unions before implementing decisions that involve a major change for employees in general or an individual union member. Secondly, under another law, unions may appoint representatives to the board of directors of most companies with at least 25 employees (there is no balloting among all employees).

Swedish *direct participation* is covered by a 1982 Agreement on Efficiency and Participation. The main idea of this is to delegate authority to foremen and individual employees. The agreement proved important and served companies and employees well by bringing participation back to the workplace.

According to a large European Foundation survey, *direct participation* is most likely to be found in Western European companies that compete in international markets and are in close competition with Japanese firms. More advanced forms of direct participation are also more likely in firms that produce high value-added, high quality, customized goods rather than in establishments concerned with high volume, low value-added, labour-intensive products.

A good answer would point out that examples from the European Foundation suggest that successful organisations tend to have integrated *both* indirect and direct forms of participation in their employment policies.

**Post-exam Comments**

No students attempted this question

- Q. 7. a) What impact do computerisation and advances in telecommunications [50%]  
have on products and production in manufacturing organisations?
- b) Discuss the implications of these new technologies for the future of [50%]  
work.

Guidance for marking:

Microelectronics finds its way into **products**. They are more reliable, cheaper, can be linked together for integrated control and information systems, the number of components is reduced, and all this encourages more convergence between industries. Larger conglomerates emerge and there is an increasing importance attached to the role of government and multi-national companies in setting the agenda for the form and direction that new technology takes. There is a reduction in the work-phases of production and enterprises are more likely to buy-in components. Industrial concentration also increases. End-product manufacturers are forced to "customise" their products and this leads to radical changes in management structure. Product life cycles are becoming shorter and many traditional management wisdoms are being stood in their head (e.g. traditional company location becomes unimportant, accounting concepts need to be revised). The trend is for networks of small specialist companies in close proximity to information technology expertise. Marketing, software and R&D become important enterprise functions whereas production management is not so important for enterprise success. Information becomes a key resource in management decision-making.

Microelectronics and computerisation also has implications for **production**. Robots, CAD/CAM and FMS are gradually being diffused. Most importantly, automation has now spread to small-batch manufacturing with the use of CNC machines. This has all kinds of implications for skills and much depends on how the technology is introduced by management. Microelectronics in production will affect managers in a number of ways. Computerisation highlights management weaknesses. Future managers will be "generalist" rather than "specialists" in particular management functions. A "vicious circle" will arise between R&D and competition; in order to survive in the market place companies have to devote more and more resources to R&D in order to remain competitive. Competitive pressures will in turn force companies to spend more on R&D. Traditional supervisory functions will become more technically-based rather than human-centred. Human resource management itself reflects this technological change; with its emphasis on resources rather than being a product of the "human relations" school of thought which until recently was the basis of modern personnel management philosophy. More and more management activities, such as training, will be sub-contracted.

For the second part of the question I would expect to see the following to be mentioned in relation to the future of work: smaller enterprises, the growth of home-working and telework, increased labour segmentation, the contraction of management hierarchies, more fixed-term

contracts, portable pension schemes, the demise of working for one employer in one's career, and 'generalists' being more important than 'specialists'.

### **Post-exam Comments**

Marks for this question were equally split between parts a) and b). The first part was intended to be more descriptive than the second. In part a) poor answers failed to distinguish between products and production, and did not address the question. Satisfactory answers addressed products and production separately, and demonstrated awareness of the consequences of developing technology. Good answers discussed the implications and attempted some evaluation, usually referring to "long wave theory", and the importance of Research and Development; both topics covered on the course. The best answers discussed the nature of the technologies referred to in the question, and the extent to which they differed from other technologies.

Poor answers to part b) dealt with generalities, apparently relying on general knowledge rather than course material or specific reading. Some dealt with only one stream of implications, and all omitted important concepts dealt with on the course. Satisfactory answers dealt with a number of implications of the technology, and demonstrated awareness of the far-reaching consequences. Good answers discussed a range of implications, demonstrating multiple dimensions (a point dealt with on the course), identified themes, and drew some conclusions. The best answers successfully presented a case that challenged received wisdom, or extended conclusions beyond what had been dealt with in lectures.



Q. 8. “Globalisation has implications for many occupations in Western [100%] countries but there are some occupations that are relatively unaffected”.  
Assess the validity of this statement and discuss the implications.

Guidance for marking:

I would expect quite a range of answers to this question, particularly the first part of the quotation. For the second part of the quotation there are a number of occupations that spring to mind – civil service, the police, transport, nursery care, health service employees and many others in the public sector and in the services sector.

**Post-exam Comments**

Although this question allowed a wide range of answers, the topic had been covered in some detail during the course, with 3 lectures dedicated to globalisation and related subjects. All of the students who attempted this question made some attempt at addressing the validity of the statement, but those which were deemed only satisfactory tended to be largely descriptive, presenting evidence of impact on different economies and occupation without an integrating narrative. Good answers recognised the multiple dimensions of globalisation and their differential impact on nations and individuals, constructing an argument for or against the statement, with substantiating evidence. The best answers challenged prevailing wisdom, or presented novel insights.

Original document prepared by Colin Gill - Post-exam revisions by Paul Heffernan

