3E6 2015 OB Exam Crib:

YEAR	TRIPOS	PAPER NO. & TITLE	AUTHOR
2015	Engineering Tripos Part IIA	3E6 Organisational Behaviour	Rene Wiedner

1.

a. Compare and contrast behaviourist and cognitive perspectives on organizational learning. [40%]

Students should define 'behaviourist psychology', or related terms such as 'behaviourism' or 'stimulus-response psychology', and 'cognitive psychology' or related terms such as 'information processing psychology', and explain how these approaches differ or complement each other. Particularly good answers may provide a detailed discussion of the role of feedback in these perspectives and cite ('Skinnerian', 'instrumental' or 'operant') conditioning, as well as Social Learning theory, Behavioural Modelling and/or Cybernetics. Exceptional answers will also situate these theories historically.

A behaviourist psychology perspective argues that what we learn are chains of muscle movements, and that mental processes are not observable and not valid issues for study. It is concerned with studying relationships between stimuli and visible responses. From this perspective we learn habits and solve problems via trial and error.

A cognitive approach attempts to enhance our understanding of the mental processes that occur when stimuli (such as rewards and punishments) are interpreted. It argues that what we learn are mental structures and that mental processes can be studied by inference, although they cannot be observed directly. From this perspective, behaviour is determined by memory, mental processes and expectations. We do not learn mechanistically but solve problems with insight and understanding.

Fundamentally the two perspectives agree that experiences and feedback shape behaviour but disagree over how this happens. A behaviourist approach draws attention to how stimuli result in 'conditioning': Repeated positive reinforcement encourages, while punishment discourages, certain forms of behaviour. A cognitive approach, by contrast, emphasises that stimuli have to be perceived and interpreted: We have some kind of internal representation or 'schema' of ourselves and our environment. This internal representation (or 'perceptual world'), which is developed via socialization experiences, is used in a purposive way to guide our behaviour. According to social learning theory we engage in behavioural modelling: We learn to evaluate by interpreting certain stimuli as rewarding or punishing and learn how to act by imitating the behaviour of others. Stimuli therefore do not 'cause' predictable responses and there is scope for agency and reflexivity.

General marking guide:

Definition of behaviourist perspective of organizational learning: up to 10 points

Definition of cognitive perspective of organizational learning: up to 10 points

Discussion of similarities: up to 10 points

Discussion of differences: up to 10 points

b. Identify potential limitations of behaviour modification techniques. [25%]

Students should draw attention to how complexity and resource requirements may inhibit the ability to condition and to prescribe desirable forms of behaviour. For instance:

- Highly complex or novel tasks may entail a high degree of discretion and the most desirable forms of behaviour may therefore not be determinable in advance.
- The 'rewards for good behaviour' method may be interpreted as 'patronizing' in some cultures and trigger cynicism and resentment
- Individuals do not always respond in the same way to the same reinforcers
- Appropriate reinforcers may not always be available
- Behaviour modification programmes may be costly to sustain

General marking guide:

Definition of behaviour modification techniques: up to 5 points

Description of limitations: up to 4 points each (maximum 20 points)

c. Define the term 'double loop learning' and explain how this type of learning can be facilitated. [35%]

Students should cite Argyris and Schön's distinction between 'single loop' and 'double loop' learning and mention strategies of reducing defensiveness. Particularly good answers will make links to organizational culture, organizational change and/or refer to theories of organizational learning. Exceptional answers will also situate the concept historically and/or discuss potential limitations.

According to Argyris and Schön (1974), who draw on Cybernetics, single loop learning refers to the ability to use feedback to make continuous adjustments and adaptations in order to maintain performance at a predetermined standard. Double loop learning, by contrast, refers to the ability to challenge and to redefine the assumptions underlying performance standards and to improve performance. It is about 'learning how to learn'.

Changing underlying assumptions is acknowledged to be difficult because these are rarely made explicit (cf. Schein's dimensions of culture) and may trigger resistance. According to Argyris (1991) double loop learning requires the development of 'productive reasoning' to counteract the tendencies to be defensive and attribute problems to others or the external environment. Organizational structures that inhibit open communication and critique provide unfavourable conditions for the development of a 'learning culture'.

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General marking guide:

Definition of double loop learning: up to 20 points

Explanation of double loop learning facilitators: up to 15 points

2.

   a. **Describe the principles of Scientific Management and discuss their potential limitations [30%]**

Students should define Scientific Management and cite Taylor, as well as provide a description of the five principles and popular criticisms. Particularly good answers will refer to the social and historical context in which Taylor developed his methods of Scientific Management.

The five principles are: Clear division of tasks and responsibilities between managers and workers; Use of scientific methods to determine the best way of doing a job; Scientific selection of the person to do the job; Training of the worker to perform the job in the way specified; Surveillance of workers through the use of hierarchies of authority and close supervision.

Critics of Taylorism have, for instance, argued that (1) it assumed that the motivation of the employee was to secure the maximum earnings for the effort expended. It neglected the importance of other rewards from work (achievement, job satisfaction, recognition) which later research has found to be important; (2) it neglected the subjective side of work – the personal and interactional aspects of performance, the meanings that employees give to work, and the significance to them of their social relationships at work; (3) it failed to appreciate the meanings that workers would put on new procedures and their reactions to being timed and closely supervised; (4) it had an inadequate understanding of the relation of the individual incentive to interaction with, and dependence on, the immediate work group; (5) it ignored the psychological needs and capabilities of workers. The one best way of doing a job was chosen with the mechanistic criteria of speed and output. The imposition of a uniform manner of work can both destroy individuality and cause other psychological disturbances; (6) it had too simple an approach to the question of productivity and morale. It sought to keep both of these up exclusively by economic rewards and punishments. Moreover, it assumed that there is always 'one best way' of performing a job and that tasks are necessarily highly routine. Recent work by Barrett, Weick, Feldman, Tsoukas, Chia and others instead highlights the potential value of improvisation and bottom-up organisational change processes.

General marking guide:

Definition of Scientific Management: up to 20 points (up to 5 points for general definition and up to 3 points for each principle)

Discussion of potential limitations: up to 10 points (up to 2 points for each critique)

b. Identify at least three 'survival' strategies that employees may use to counter alienation. Illustrate each of them with appropriate examples. Explain how these strategies may be interpreted by different stakeholders. [30%]

Students should refer to organisational "misbehaviour" and describe Noon and Blyton's five survival strategies and provide examples of how these may be interpreted by employees, managers, or an outside observer, as either a form of consent or resistance.

Examples of survival strategies and associated interpretations include: 'making out' (game playing; undermining management control); 'fiddling' (deserved perks; theft); joking (preserve status quo; challenges management); sabotage (letting off steam; malicious acts or 'whistleblowing'); escaping (withdrawal that affirms status quo; reduces organizational performance)

General marking guide:

Definition of employee survival strategies: up to 5 points

Discussion of each survival strategy: up to 5 points (maximum 25 points)

c. Critically evaluate the argument that increased task specialization in organizations results in deskilling [40%]

Students should explain the deskilling thesis and cite Braverman and Ritzer. Relevant criticisms should be mentioned, including the 'upskilling thesis'. Particularly good answers will provide a balanced account and identify under which conditions forms of deskilling or upskilling are more likely to occur.

The deskilling thesis argues that fragmentation, rationalization and mechanization result in deskilling and the ability to substitute workers; Deskilling can take two general forms, namely "organizational deskilling", which refers to the separation of task conception from task execution, and "technological deskilling", which refers to replacing human skills with technology. Common critiques include: lack of evidence; simplistic; ignores alternative management strategies; overstates objective of controlling labour; treats workers as passive; overlooks skill transfer possibilities; The upskilling thesis argues that increased use of technology results in the requirement for higher skills. Menial jobs are thereby replaced with 'knowledge work'

General marking guide:

Definition of the deskilling thesis: up to 20 points

Discussion of critiques and alternative theories: up to 20 points

3.

a. Compare and contrast content and process theories of motivation. [30%]

Students should define content and process theories of motivation and explain how these differ from one another. Particularly good answers may discuss to what extent these two approaches are compatible with one another and give specific examples of relevant theories, such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs, equity theory or expectancy theory.

Theories of motivation based on drives and needs are known as content theories, because drives and needs are seen as part of our common 'mental luggage'. The most well-known content theory of motivation is Maslow's hierarchy of needs that consists of nine elements (biological; safety; affiliation; esteem; to know and understand; aesthetics; transcendence; freedom of enquiry and expression; self-actualization). A more recent example is Nohria et al.'s (2008) 'emotional needs' theory that claims that we are driven by four basic and innate ('hardwired') drives:

- the drive to acquire (obtain scarce goods, develop social status);
- the drive to bond (form connections with other individuals and groups);
- the drive to comprehend (satisfy our curiosity, master our environment);
- the drive to defend (protect against threats, promote justice).

Theories of motivation that focus on how we make choices with respect to goals are known as process theories. Unlike content theories, process theories give us a decision-making role in choosing our goals and how to pursue them. Individuals are motivated by different outcomes. Cultures encourage different patterns of motivation. We thus appear to have some choice of motives, and the means to achieve them. The theories of Nohria and colleagues, and of Maslow, are universalist – they apply to everyone, and cannot readily explain differences between individuals and cultures. Examples of process theories of work motivation are equity theory, expectancy theory, goal-setting theory, and inner work life theory.

General marking guide:

Definition of content theories: up to 10 points

Definition of process theories: up to 10 points

Discussion of similarities and differences: up to 10 points

b. Explain Herzberg's two-factor theory of motivation. Illustrate your answer with appropriate examples. [30%]

Students should define the terms 'motivator factor' and 'hygiene factor' and provide several examples of each. According to Herzberg's 'two factor theory of motivation', factors which lead to job satisfaction are different from those which lead to job dissatisfaction. Motivator factors refer to aspects of work which lead to high levels of satisfaction, motivation, and

performance, including achievement, recognition, responsibility, advancement, growth, and the work itself; Hygiene factors refer to aspects of work which remove dissatisfaction, but do not contribute to motivation and performance, including pay, company policy, supervision, status, security, and physical working conditions.

General marking guide:

Definition of Herzberg's theory of motivation: up to 10 points

Definition of motivator factors, including examples: up to 10 points

Definition of hygiene factors, including examples: up to 10 points

c. Critically evaluate the use of 'empowerment' and 'self-managing teams' to increase organizational effectiveness. [40%]

Students should define the terms 'empowerment' and 'self-managing teams' and explain how they are used in the literature with regard to improving performance. Particularly good answers may contrast popular managerial conceptions with critical management theory and cite relevant scholarly work.

Empowerment refers to organizational arrangements that give employees more autonomy, discretion, and decision-making responsibility. The term 'self-managing team' refers to the delegation of responsibilities (including, for example, the selection of the team leader, acceptance of new members, distribution of work, time flexibility, production methods and goals) to teams. Empowerment and 'self-management' are theorized to increase motivation because employees have more control over tasks and gain a heightened sense of responsibility. This may also increase employee identification with the organization.

According to Psoinos and Smithson (2002) the main reasons for introducing empowerment have concerned quality, productivity, flexibility, and cost reduction, not concern for quality of working life. According to Wall and Wood (2002) empowerment improves individual performance by encouraging new ideas, and by allowing employees to work more effectively. Empowerment itself is not motivating. Moreover, empowerment is apparently not equally valued across all cultures. Critical scholars regard 'empowerment' as a potential euphemism for 'co-optation' (Selznick 1948) that seeks to pass on managerial responsibilities to employees and align interests.

Barker (1993) highlights that the introduction of self-managing teams may not necessarily free employees from tight control but may instead trigger a shift from overt and direct management control to a covert form of worker discipline ('concertive control'), which is achieved by securing workers' involvement and engagement in, as well as their commitment to, their organization.

General marking guide:

Definition of empowerment: up to 10 points

Definition of 'self managing teams': up to 10 points

Critiques: up to 5 points for each critique (maximum 20 points)

Comments on Questions

Q1 Organizational Learning

This was the least popular question. This could be explained by the fact that this topic was not directly covered in previous years' exam papers. The first and second parts of the question were not answered as well as the third, with some candidates experiencing difficulties in terms of differentiating between various organizational learning theories and accurately defining the term 'behaviour modification technique'. By contrast, most students competently defined the term 'double loop learning' and many identified several double loop learning facilitators.

Q2 Work Design

This was a relatively popular question that was generally answered well. The first sub question was competently answered by the vast majority of candidates. Answers to the other two sub questions exhibited a higher degree of variance, which is not unusual given their slightly higher degree of complexity. In particular, not all students engaged with critical management theory in the third sub question.

Q3 Motivation

This was the most popular question, perhaps because this topic has featured in many previous Organizational Behaviour exam papers. All three parts of the question were answered about equally well.