Module 3E6   **ORGANISATIONAL BEHAVIOUR**   **CRIBS**

YEAR	TRIPOS	PAPER NO. & TITLE	AUTHOR
2016	Engineering Tripos Part IIA	3E6 Organisational Behaviour	Dr Rene Wiedner

Question 1

    a. Discuss Edgar Schein's model of organisational culture. Use practical examples to illustrate the relevant concepts. [35%]

Students should discuss Schein's three levels of culture: surface manifestations, values and basic assumptions. Good answers will include detailed discussions of particular surface manifestations, values and basic assumptions. Excellent answers will also discuss relationships between these, as well as a critical assessment of concepts or the overall model.

    b. Discuss the implications of a strong organisational culture for the socialisation of employees and organisational effectiveness. [35%]

Students should discuss formal and informal methods by which employees are (consciously and unconsciously) trained to think and behave in line with prevalent or expected norms and values. They should also accurately define the term "strong culture" which refers to members being emotionally attached to particular values (intensity) and widespread agreement about these values (sharedness). Good answers will refer to, and discuss, theories of organisational socialisation, such as Pascale's employee socialisation process. They will also present arguments that highlight strengths and weaknesses of strong cultures, for instance by discussing the types of situations in which a strong (weak) culture results in more favourable organisational outcomes than a weak (strong) culture. Excellent answers will also make links to topics such as decision making, conflict, power and politics, etc.

    c. Discuss the differences between (popular) managerial and (critical) social science perspectives on organisational culture. [30%]

Students should refer to the four dimensions highlighted by Huczynski and Buchanan, namely (1) variable vs root metaphor, (2) integration vs differentiation, (3) culture managed vs tolerated, (4) symbolic leadership vs management control. Particularly good answers will discuss these dimensions in detail and refer to relevant theories.

Question 2

    a. Discuss conditions that may trigger stress in organisations and identify individual and organisational consequences of stress. [30%]

Students should name a number of conditions that may trigger stress at the workplace, such as fast pace and constant change; physical working environment (noise, lighting, lack of privacy, unreliable equipment); inappropriate job design; poor management style; poor

interpersonal relationships; uncertain future; divided loyalties. They should also mention potential consequences, such as a lack of concentration, demotivation, health issues and links to organisational performance. Particularly good answers will provide a balanced assessment and also discuss potential benefits of stress (eu-stress), such as stimulation and arousal.

b. Explain how stress may be managed in organisations. [30%]

Students should mention several strategies by which stress can be reduced. Particularly good answers will also discuss how stress can be stimulated and distinguish explicitly between individual emotion-focused strategies (self-awareness, exercise…) and organisational problem-focused strategies (improved training; staff counselling; improved communication; job redesign; improved team-working arrangements).

c. Discuss unitarist, pluralist, interactionist and radical views of organisations. What strategies for managing conflict arise from each of these views? [40%]

Students should define these four different frames of reference: A unitarist view regards managers' and employees' interests as coinciding; A pluralist view regards organisations as naturally consisting of different groups, each with their own potentially constructive and legitimate interests; An interactionist perspective views conflict between groups as positive and necessary for organisational success; A radical view considers organisations to be products of an exploitative, capitalist system. Particularly good answers will refer to relevant theories or scholars, such as Karl Marx in the case of the radical view. Students should also mention relevant conflict management strategies and relate these to the different frames of reference mentioned above. For instance, a unitarist view suggests employing conflict resolution techniques, a pluralist view suggests the importance of maintaining a balance and seeking compromises to ensure mutual survival, an interactionist view suggests stimulating conflict and a radical view suggests resisting capitalism. Excellent answers will discuss several strategies in detail.

Question 3

a. Define and contrast formal and informal organisation. Illustrate your answer by means of examples. [35%]

Students should accurately define the terms formal and informal organisation. Formal = documented, planned relationships established by management to coordinate the activities of different employees towards the achievement of the organisational goal (e.g. org chart, mission statement, standard operating procedures); Informal = undocumented relationships that arise spontaneously between employees as individuals interact with one another to meet their own psychological and physical needs (personal friendships; power structures; emotional feelings). Particularly good answers will give specific examples and make links to topics such as culture.

b. Define the concept of 'virtual team'. Identify organisational benefits and problems associated with virtual teams relative to other types of teams. [30%]

Students should accurately define the term virtual team as a team that relies on technology-mediated communication, while crossing boundaries of geography, time, culture, and organisation, to accomplish an interdependent task. They should also discuss benefits and potential issues arising from distance (benefits: e.g. reduces travel and costs; increases diversity; problems: e.g. technological, virtual communication skills). Good answers will specifically refer to dispersion dimensions (spatial, cultural, temporal and organisational), discuss in which contexts a high degree of dispersion is beneficial or problematic, and include a broader discussion of different team types (e.g. project, action, etc.)

   c. Discuss the main barriers to effective communication within organisations and explain how these may be overcome [35%]

Students should refer to different types of communication boundaries and mention particular strategies that can be used to facilitate communication. Good answers will provide a comprehensive overview of barriers, including power differences; gender differences; physical surroundings; language; and cultural diversity; or, alternatively, refer to syntactic, semantic and pragmatic boundaries. Excellent answers will refer to relevant theories or scholars (such as Paul Carlile) and link to topics such as perception.

Comments on Questions

Q1 Culture

This was the most popular question and answered competently by the majority of candidates. With regard to the first part of the question, virtually all candidates were able to describe Schein's model of culture, albeit with varying degrees of detail. A few candidates struggled with the difference between "values" and "basic assumptions" (or "underlying beliefs"). Most candidates also answered the second part of the question well, although some failed to accurately define the term "strong culture" which, in some cases, resulted in vague or ambiguous statements. The third part of the question was answered with the greatest amount of variance. Some candidates appeared to be unfamiliar with the main concepts ("managerial" vs "social science" perspective), even though these were discussed in class.

Q2 Stress and Conflict

Most candidates answered this question without many problems. However, several candidates failed to provide a balanced account by not referring to the benefits of stress ("eu-stress") in response to the first and second parts of the question. Answers to the third sub question exhibited a higher degree of variance. While most candidates demonstrated a general understanding of the different approaches, strategies for dealing with conflict were often not discussed in detail.

Q3 Organizational Structures and Communication

This question was generally answered well, although some candidates inaccurately defined the key terms ("formal/informal organization", "virtual team"). Moreover, while most candidates demonstrated knowledge about virtual teams, only a few explicitly discussed all four dispersion dimensions (spatial, cultural, temporal, organisational). Finally, in response to the third sub question, the majority of candidates either mentioned or discussed a range of barriers to communication but not all explicitly considered issues of power.