

ENGINEERING TRIPOS PART IIA 2004

Solutions to Module 3E6
Organisational Behaviour and Change
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3E6 OB and Change: Final Cribs 2004

Question 1

a) Candidates should list and briefly explain: duty assignment; payment and employment terms; source of authority; hierarchy and reporting structure; division of labour; qualification and experience; uniformity and impersonality of decisions. It would be equally acceptable to include the same material under the headings: functional specialisation; hierarchy of authority; system of rules; impersonality. Strong answers would also explain rational-legal authority as the basis of the bureaucratic model

b) Candidates should list and explain: goal displacement; mock bureaucracy; impersonality myth and make reference to the work of Merton, Crozier and Gouldner. Strong answers might cover more complex dysfunctions such as those of 'homosociality' and those revealed by Blau's analysis of the impact of 'working to rule'.

c) Answers should be able to distinguish between the rationality of means and the rationality of ends. Implications for organizations could be discussed in several ways but good answers would certainly include a discussion of issues of motivation and dehumanization and of ethics, perhaps drawing upon the work of Bauman.

Question 2

a) Candidates should explain that this approach focuses on the individual characteristics of leaders. They should also be able to indicate the main such characteristics identified by various research studies and identify those characteristics which appear across a range of studies. It would be creditworthy to additionally (but not alternatively) indicate that these traits are relevant to both 'assigned' and 'emergent' (or 'formal' and 'informal') leader positions.

b) The central point which candidates should make is that trait approaches do not account for situational or contextual variance. They should be able to point to alternative process based explanations of leadership. The second main point is that trait approaches over-focus on the individual and therefore neglect the relational aspects of leadership. Extra credit could be gained by exploring how this would give rise to 'distributed' models of leadership. Strong answers might indicate that these objections carry implications for how (and whether) leaders can be trained, and link this to an explanation of leadership roles and competencies.

c) Candidates are likely to answer this question by reference to French & Raven's classic typology of the various bases of power. If so, answers would then explain for each basis of power how it links (whether positively or negatively) to leadership. However, it would also be acceptable to answer the question by reference to other formulations of power. Better answers will go on to discuss relational or network conceptions of power and these could be linked to distributed models of leadership (either in detail or by reference back to section b). Strong answers may discuss the power-effects of 'narrative' and

'storytelling' functions of leadership, which could be linked to the various characterisations of leadership as 'transformational' or 'visionary'.

Question 3

a) Candidates should list and briefly explain: horizontal, vertical and spatial differentiation; formalisation; centralisation. It might be possible to answer using a different typology (e.g. 'Structure in Fives'), but similar ground would need to be covered.

b) Answers should explain the Blau curve, linking organizational size measured in employee numbers to increased levels of formalisation and differentiation; and the Aston Studies, linking increasing organizational size to higher levels of repetition and hence formalisation. Strong answers will question the causality of the size-structure relationship.

c) Answers will be likely to be based upon the Heckscher model of post-bureaucracy and if so the characteristics should be listed and briefly explained. Other models could also be used (e.g. organic models) The structural implications should be explicitly identified, at least with respect to (decreased) horizontal and vertical differentiation and (increased) spatial differentiation. Strong answers will be likely to question the extent to which such organizations exist with the corollary being that if they are more rhetorical than real then so too are the structural changes with which they are associated.

Question 4

a) Candidates should identify arguments about structural change in the economy with moves from mass markets to niche markets and the organizational implications in terms of flexibility, drawing perhaps on Piore and Sabel or some similar source. Globalization and increased competition; deregulation; consumerism; rise of the service sector and technological change should all be mentioned and explained

b) Candidates should be able to identify various standard counter-arguments including sectoral differences in the extent of these changes and their generalizability in different parts of the world and to different societies (e.g. variations in access to new technologies). Questions should be raised as to the extent of the implications for organizations e.g. by pointing to the continuing use of traditional methods. Stronger answers might discuss whether change is partly a matter of the susceptibility of businesses to 'management fads'

c) Answers are likely to include standard management explanations of change failures, including: psychological resistance to change; lack of leadership; partial implementations; under-resourcing of change programmes; political factors. Better answers will also identify less standard explanations e.g. change fatigue; unrealistic project targets. Strong answers will identify fundamental limitations to management control of change.