Theme of the Book

Designed as an introductory text for students new to the subject, this comprehensive study of Organisational Behaviour theory and practice has plenty to offer seasoned managers and will bring them up-to-date on current thinking in a lively and thought-provoking way. Topics range widely to cover, for example, communication, team and individual working, organization structures and processes, politics, change management and leadership.

Topics are organised around themes:

- The organizational context
- Individuals in the organization
- Groups and teams in the organization
- Organization structures
- Organization processes
- Organization management
Key Learning Points

Provides insight into a wide range of subjects within the field of Organizational Behaviour including:

- The complex nature of technology on today’s world of work
- Why it may be time for organizations to slow down the pace of change
- How visionary leaders can do more harm than good
- Why political savvy may be more important today than ever before
- How to interpret the post-modern business
Challenging Issues

The book introduces readers to key new thinking in a number of areas. These include:

- New HRM is old hat – are we simply repackaging century-old practices today?
- Networking, not working – the problems of co-ordination and communication in the virtual world
- You talk, I’ll try not to listen – why today’s employees pay little attention to management communication
- Cultures moving closer apart – to what extent is divergence in national values, attitudes and beliefs counteracting globalization and the dominance of English as the international business language?

- Readers are prompted to question themselves:
  - whether they are doormats or bullies
  - why asking individuals whether their jobs require higher or lower level skills than five years ago is unlikely to provide a reliable answer
  - how closely leaders they know reflect the qualities of new leaders, superleaders and transformational leaders
- Offers a refresher on many well-established tools and theories. For example, Force Field Analysis, Hygiene Factors, Fordism, job rotation and PESTLE analysis are all studied.
In summarising such a comprehensive text, it is not possible to give more than a flavour of all the themes covered to illustrate the range of debates and discussions, which challenge the managerial reader.

Technology affects how we communicate, how we purchase goods and services and how we spend our leisure. As such, it is a major force in our lives. But what is the impact of this force – does it improve our lives or reduce our satisfaction and achievement? What does it really mean for the world of work? In exploring the impact of technology on our working lives, it can be easy to assume that technology drives and determines how we work in today’s competitive world. However, managers can still retain control through making choices about the design of technology they employ, the purposes to which they put it and how work is organized around it. Managers today must take care to balance the extent to which they rely on technology and allow it to drive their decisions, and avoid the temptation to see it as all good news or all bad.

To understand technology’s impact, we must first pinpoint what is meant by ‘technology’. As the rate of development in ‘technology’ has outstripped the rate of development of language to describe it, so the meaning of the word has become distorted. It has become an umbrella term covering a wide range of phenomena including tools, instruments, machines, organizations, methods, techniques, systems and all of these brought together (pg 70). In oversimplifying this complex area, we have also begun to oversimplify what it
means for us, and the discussions surrounding technology tend to reduce it to either ‘good’ or ‘bad’.

<table>
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<th>Some of the ways in which the media oversimplifies the impact of technology (pg 71)</th>
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While these predications can all be shown to be valid, they do not paint the whole picture.

However, to understand what technology means for business, we need to look beyond these negative assumptions. For example, technological development seems to lead to employment growth rather than decline. The overall impact of technology depends on the **compensatory mechanisms** that surround it. For example, technological innovation has led to new products such as digital video disks, multimedia computers, the internet and email, and smart bankcards. Such developments create consumer demand which in turn lead to more factories and supporting infrastructures, including new jobs.
Equally, to argue that technology leads to deskilling is oversimplifying the picture. While some roles may require less skill, much technology has been shown to increase the cognitive and social skills needed to operate it effectively.

Technology has undoubtedly changed the nature of work in much of Britain. The potential to provide a service remotely has led to an explosion of teleworking – home-based, nomadic or remote workers who carry out business away from one central office. Call centres have expanded and mean that organizations can manage costs through providing centralized services in locations where property and wage costs are low, and staff easier to recruit. Employee surveillance is now easier than ever. In 1997 the American Management Association found that two-thirds of 900 large companies used some form of electronic surveillance of their staff.

**Change**

Organizational change occurs with increasing frequency. The top 50 companies in Britain went through major reorganization every five years in the 1990s – this had increased to every three by 2000.

‘Many studies of manufacturing technology suggest that sophisticated, flexible, expensive equipment needs sophisticated, flexible, expensive people to operate it effectively. Recent research shows that while computerization has reduced the labour content of industrial processes, it has triggered a trend away from low-wage blue-collar work towards higher-paid occupations’. (pg 73)
‘This pattern of ‘repeat change’ is driven by:

- Intensified competition and stockmarket turbulence in the private sector, consumerism and government pressures in the public sector;
- The pace of technological innovation;
- Increased knowledge-intensity, as organization design affects information flows. (pg 606)

But increasing frequency of change does not bring increasing effectiveness in dealing with it. Too often change results in poor financial returns, and lowers morale and staff retention. In organisations saturated with change, pressure reaches damaging levels. One study showed that over 60 per cent of managers believed individuals in their organizations were experiencing initiative fatigue. In another, almost fifty per cent of respondents said the pace of change was leading to middle management burnout.

Despite the evidence of the damage relentless change causes individuals, the impact on them is invariably too low a priority – only one in five organizations give Human Resources a leading role during change.

‘With major change expensive new information systems and complex new structures attract most attention, while people are forgotten. When asked about the aims of their reorganizations, managers emphasized customers, market share and internal efficiency, and ranked improving employee morale and retention lowest.’ (pg 607)

However, in taking this approach organizations are missing an essential ingredient of successful change which requires employee involvement and supportive HR policies.
Achieving successful change also means it is essential to *unfreeze* the current situation, *move* to the desired new position and then *refreeze* to stabilize those changes. However, in today’s repeat change organization, refreezing and stabilization is not an option. The authors suggest that ‘permanent thaw’ may be a better metaphor and this thaw is likely to continue for the foreseeable future.

In managing this turbulent environment, it is essential to set the change within the context of what is not changing. Perhaps there is also a need to put more focus on slowing down change, or even not changing for periods of time. In getting dazzled by the possibilities, we too often ignore the value of what currently exists. There is a growing voice in support of replacing this ongoing, fast-paced change with measured, incremental improvements in a bid to achieve sustainable and value-adding movement.

**Leadership**

Leadership permeates all areas of organizational life and is crucial to effectiveness. Yet despite its prevalence, it remains controversial.

‘This is a subject with many paradoxes. We hear the complaint that ‘we need more leadership’. However, the organizational hierarchy and formal authority that underpin leadership positions are increasingly being challenged. We tend to equate leadership with positions of power, influence and status. However, acts of leadership can be observed at all levels of the organization structure. Leaders have job titles and working conditions which symbolize their status. However, flat structure, team-based working, the growth of knowledge work, and virtual and networked organizational forms, all weaken
traditional leadership positions based on hierarchy and organizational symbolism; (pg 716)

When asked to list leaders, we tend to identify a diverse range of individuals from Mother Teresa to Bill Gates, from Anita Roddick to John Howard, from Richard Branson to Nelson Mandela.

Seeking to answer this question has led to many perspectives on leadership. The trait theories of the 1940s which suggested leaders possessed specific personality traits were superseded by style-counselling which argued individuals could learn leadership capabilities. More recent theories suggest that leadership can be judged as effective only when understood within the context in which it occurs, while another debate highlights ‘new leaders’, ‘superleaders’ and ‘transformational leaders’ who create vision and engender support for it. This heroic perspective is turned on its head by theorists who argue that such leaders actually destabilize organisations, driving too hard and causing burnout and initiative fatigue. Leadership is also seen as a dispersed role, found at many levels in organisations and possessed by many individuals who have no formal leadership title.

The authors suggest that understanding the complex nature of leadership in today’s organisations means recognising the importance of all these different perspectives rather than seeing any as out-of-date or inappropriate.

But perhaps organizations would be better without leaders anyway. Charismatic, visionary leaders may do more damage than good as they seek to encourage ever greater organizational transformation to achieve their vision. Sustainable change may actually result better from middle managers
who balance change with continuity or less visible leaders who work quietly behind the scenes.

It is this multidimensional perspective that today’s leaders must seek to understand if they are to fulfil their role effectively, although this means accepting and working with conflicting ideas on the very nature of this contentious organizational role.

### Power and Politics

Power and politics combined are an important feature of organizational life.

> ‘...
> power concerns the capacity of individuals to exert their will over others, while political behaviour is the practical domain of power in action, worked out through the use of techniques of influence and other...tactics.’ (pg 828)

Power is exerted by groups, sections, departments and organizations as well as by individuals. However, rather like leadership and despite its prevalence, it is a difficult concept to define. Power can be possessed by individuals, resulting from their personality and position within the organisation; it can exist in terms of the relationship between individuals, resulting from the beliefs that individuals hold about one another; and it can be woven into the fabric of the organization, where it is the result of the expectations and beliefs created through the structures, policies and procedures of that organization.

Foucault, the French philosopher and historian, introduced yet another perspective - the concept of bio-power. This occurs when certain ways of operating are embedded in society or the organization and accepted as normal or abnormal, acceptable or socially deviant.
‘Bio-power is targeted at society in general, is achieved through talk, writing, debate and discussion, and controls us through getting us to consider what is ‘normal’. At the level of the organization, once employees do this, they become self-disciplining and no longer require management to keep them under control.’ (pg 837)

Whatever the underpinning perspective, what steps can individuals take to increase their personal power? Based on research with experienced managers from Australia, Britain, Sweden and Finland, several key sources of power were identified including:

- Image building – actions which enhance reputation and further careers
- Selective information – withholding unfavourable information from superiors, keeping useful information from others, overwhelming others with complex data
- Scapegoating – avoiding personal blame, blaming others and taking credit for success
- Compromise – giving in on minor issues to create allies for issues that are more important
- A range of covert, ruthless tactics – Political infighting

Alternatively individuals may build their power through their formal job roles, their ability to withhold or grant rewards, their expertise or their natural charisma.

Making use of any or all of these tactics means engaging in political behaviour as individuals seek to ‘acquire, develop, retain and use power in order to obtain their preferred outcomes in a situation where there is uncertainty or disagreement about choices. Political behaviours concern the actions that
individuals take to influence the distribution of advantages and disadvantages within their organizations’ (pg 847).

It seems that indulging in political behaviour has become more evident in organizational life in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. This may partly be attributed to the increasingly turbulent environments in which we work.

However, it is also possible that this apparent growth in political activity is reflective of increased emphasis on it rather than an actual increase in activity.

It seems, however, that in a business world where organizational change is increasingly frequent and overarching, and job security is reducing, today’s business managers should take account of their own power sources and remain alert to the political plays in their organizations.

Postmodernism in Today’s Business World

The authors explore how to understand the business world from a post-modern perspective. In the post-modernist world each person’s interpretation is different and as valid as any others’. To the manager, this is more than obscure philosophy: it offers fresh perspectives on organizational behaviour and such widely-held ‘truths’ as ‘change or die’. It quotes Hatch (MJ Hatch 1997 Organization Theory: Modern, Symbolic and Postmodern Perspectives) in offering a post modern perspective:
• Learn to take nothing for granted;
• Deconstruct all claims to truth by exploring the assumptions behind them;
  o Keep asking, whose point of view is benefited by this way of looking at things;
  o Focus on how language is used to construct reality and identity;
  o Focus on what is not said, on what is hidden by conventional ex
  o Avoid 'one right answer';
  o Dispute the categories into which we place people;
  o Forget the belief that everybody should think the same way that you do;
  o Be reflexive - challenge your own assumptions;
  o Maintain a critical distance between your idea of self, on the one hand and socially and culturally defined ways of seeing the world, on the other;
  o Bring your own socially constructed understanding under control and challenge;
  o Imagine alternatives to our 'taken-for-granted' understanding organizational life;
  o Consider change 'as a form of thrill', 'as a state to be sought out as invigorating', as a welcome experience.

Readers will find themselves challenged to consider how films and literature portray the business world, and organizational behaviour in particular, and how this influences our thinking about it.

The book explores ways in which work and organizations are represented in photographs.

‘Why should we pay attention to these transient images? We see them once and rarely feel the need to refer back to them again…The problem is that visual images are rarely, if ever neutral.’ (pg xxix)
Some of the ways in which the media portrays technology negatively (pg 71)

“Robots will replace people in manufacturing: ‘the unstaffed factory’ is a reality

Office automation does away with clerical and administrative work; the ‘paperless office’ is here to stay

Where people are still required, work will be simplified, routine, dehumanized: the days of craft skill and worker autonomy are gone”

Perception

Perception helps us to make sense of our world; however it can also lead to highly inaccurate interpretations of behaviours and events. Understanding the impact of perception in a business context can help us better understand decisions in organizations. For example, our perceptions of ourselves and others are impacted by attribution - a belief about the cause of an event or action. We use attribution to explain why someone is successful, why a project failed, why two people are still arguing. However, attribution is an unreliable tool.

‘Research has revealed patterns in our attributions. When we are explaining our personal achievements, we point to our capabilities, but when we are explaining our lack of success, we blame our circumstances…However, we tend to attribute the behaviour of others to their disposition, …to aspects of their personality.’ (pg 230)

The impact of attribution in organizational settings is substantial. A study into the relationship between pay and looks, height and obesity showed that
attractive people earn more than their less attractive colleagues. Attractive men in customer-facing sales positions typically earn 13% more than less attractive men while attractive women in secretarial and clerical jobs are likely to take home 15% more than their plainer counterparts. Tall men earn substantially more than short men. Obese women earn less than their average weight counterparts.

‘With respect to attractiveness, sex, height and weight, we are dealing with factors which cannot have any meaningful impact on performance for most jobs or occupations...The problem seems to be that we make attribution errors by jumping quickly and unconsciously to judgements...’. (pg 233)
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