ORGANIZATIONAL PATHOLOGY: SOURCES AND CONTROL

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Abstract

This study examines the concept of organizational pathology, the causes and control. The study shows that organizations wrapped up in conflict due to pathological situations cannot achieve their goals. It list the sources of organizational pathology to include: poor organizational climate, poor time management, failure to delegate responsibilities effectively, technical incompetence, professionals incompetence, existence of unproductive workers with no development potentialities, poor quality management, social irresponsibility, inadequate material resources and lack of effective communication. The author espoused the view that organizational pathology can be controlled among other things through the amelioration of the factors identified above and effective management of organizational change.

Introduction

Organizations wrapped up in conflict due to pathological situation hardly achieve their goals. This manifest in confusing situations such as; poor organizational climate, poor time management, technical incompetence, professional incompetence, existence of unproductive workers with no development potentialities, poor quality management, social irresponsibility, inadequate material resources and lack of effective communication. These pathological situations may arise as a result of the failure of human resources to do what is right at the right time. This study examines how to mitigate such problems.

Organizational Pathology: Sources and Control

The Stedman's Medical dictionary (2000) defines pathology as "the medical science and specialty practice, concerned with all aspects of disease, but with reference to the essential nature, causes, and development of abnormal conditions as well as the structural and functional changes that result from the disease processes'. It can also be defined as the study of diseases or abnormalities or more particularly, of changes in tissues or organs that are associated with disease. It is a deviation from the normal healthy state. Substances or organisms that cause diseases are called pathogens.

Therefore we can define organizational pathology as structural defects, situations or problems that impinge on the normal functioning of the various parts or components of an organization resulting in a deviation from the actualization of the goals of the organization. Writers such as Peter Drucker and Chris Agyris support the contention that an organization can be in an unhealthy state. An organization in an unhealthy state has been described by Agyris (1960) as not 'axiologicaly good'. An organization is not 'axiologicaly good' if all its parts are not well coordinated and interrelated to further the overall objectives, and able to respond to internal and external needs for change. On the other hand, an organization is 'axiologicaly

good' if all its parts are well coordinated and interrelated to further the overall objectives, and is able to respond to internal and external needs for change (Pugh et al, 1971).

Organizational pathology may emanate from structural defects, bad management practices and negative attitudes on the part of workers. The following are sources, signs or symptoms of organizational problems or diseases: poor organizational climate; poor time management; failure to delegate responsibilities effectively; technical incompetence; professional incompetence; existence of unproductive workers with no development potentialities; poor quality management; social irresponsibility; inadequate material resources; and lack of effective communication.

Symptoms or sign of organizational pathology notwithstanding, it can be controlled through the following ways:

Ensuring Favourable Organizational Climate: Organizational climate is the perceived, subjective effects of the system, informal style of managers and other important environmental factors on the attitudes, beliefs, values, and motivation of people who work in a particular organization (Litwin and Stringer, 1968). Good organizational climate helps in ensuring administrative efficiency, and administrative efficiency also helps in ensuring good organizational climate. Litwin and Stringer further suggested that organizational climate could be measured by asking the members of an organization to respond to questionnaire items relating to:

Structure: The feeling that employees have about the constraints in the group, how many rules, regulations, procedures there are...

Responsibilities: The feeling of being their own boss.

Reward: The feeling of being rewarded for a job well done; emphasizing positive rewards rather than punishments; the perceived fairness of the pay and promotion polices.

Risk: The feeling of riskiness and challenge... this is in contrast to playing it safe.

Warmth: The feeling of general good fellowship. The emphasis is on being well liked; the prevalence of friendly and infontial social group.

Support: The perceived helpfulness of the managers and other employees... emphasis on mutual support.

Standard: The perceived importance of implicit and explicit goals and performance standard.

Conflict: The feeling that the manager and other workers want to hear different opinions; the emphasis placed on getting problems out in the open.

Identity: The feeling that you belong to a company and you are a valuable member of the work team.

Proper Time Management: Time waits for no one. With each tick of the clock, man progresses a step farther down times corridor. Administrative efficiency can only be ensured when there is an effective time management. Time management refers to the ability of an individual or group of persons to effectively plan and perform a duty or responsibility within an established time limit. Individuals in an organization have an established time limit for whatever they do. The study of time as a veritable tool for administrative efficiency is more than a century old. This is exemplified in Taylor's time and motion study. The ability of individuals in an organization to perform their jobs effectively within the organization's established time limit is very important in ensuring administrative efficiency. Late coming and absenteeism should also be avoided (Child, 1973).

Delegation: This is the process whereby the performance of a duty or responsibility is assigned by a superior (boss) to his capable subordinates. Delegation helps a superior to enhance his performance, since the stress involved in the performance of his duty is reduced. To ensure administrative efficiency through delegation, the following should be born in mind: authority and delegated responsibilities must be equal; there should be proper accountability; duties or responsibilities must be delegated only to those who are capable of performing them; delegation should not be used as channel for criticizing a subordinate; the superior should give the subordinate a substantial amount of freedom to perform the duty; do not delegate duties to subordinates who are already over-loaded with job responsibilities; the duty to act judicially that is to make decisions of a judicial nature must not be delegated to subordinates because it negates the rules against sub-delegation' (delegates non potest delegare). Delegation is advantageous to the superior, the subordinates and the organization. It makes an organization to develop and ensures managerial effectiveness.

Technical Competence: employees charged with the responsibilities of using the machines available to the organization must have the ability to use them effectively to render quality services.

Professional Competence: Administrative efficiency can only be ensured when professionalism is not sacrificed for god-fatherism or mediocrity. The organization should be made up of individuals that are specialists in their areas of endeavour.

Retrenchment of Unproductive workers with no Development Potentialities: There are some individuals who are unproductive and cannot be developed. Such individuals should be retired or retrenched to reduce the cost of maintaining them and the cost of their unproductiveness. These individuals must be given retirement or retrenchment benefits. It is germane to say that retrenchment of worker should only be carried out when it has been proved beyond reasonable doubt that the individual(s) cannot be developed.

Availability of Materials Resources: Efficiency can be ensured in an organization when the individuals that are in it are regularly given the materials to work with.

Effective Communication: There should be free flow of information in the organization that is upward, downward, horizontally and diagonally.

Encouragement of Innovation: people with new ideas or methods of doing things more effectively must be encouraged to use them.

Organizational Safety: The working environment must be free from health hazards. Adequate attention should be paid to the protection of the health of workers when they are carrying out their duties. Individuals who sustain injuries when performing their duties should be adequately treated and compensated.

Total Quality Management (TQM): Following the initiation of the Malcolm Baidrige National Quality Award in 1987, there has been increased emphasis on total quality management. Advocates of total quality management define the concept as a system approach to management that aim at continuously increasing value of customers by designing and continuously improving organizational processes and systems. It involves the creation and continuous improvement of organizational systems that when used by organizational members lead to increased value for the customers of its products or services. Continuous improvement refers to the constant refinement of products, services and organizational systems to yield improved value to customers (Carrell and Gillen 1987). Total Quality Management contributes to organizational development. All employees must contribute towards ensuring Total Quality Management. Customers can also play key roles by providing timely feedback.

Social Responsibility: The value, attitude and behavioural pattern shared by a group of people can affect the profitability of a firm operating in a particular place and significantly alter its behaviour. This makes it important for an organization to respond favourably to the needs of the people around its area of operation. An organization that acts as if it has a conscience can be said to be socially responsible. Social responsibility is the implied, enforced or felt obligation of managers acting in their official capacities to serve or protect the interests of groups other than themselves (Mandy, 1988). If an organization fails to take the interest of individuals and groups around its area of operation into consideration, a conflict situation may arise.

An organization may cease to exist if it fails to satisfy the need of the society. This is because an organization operates by public consent to satisfy the needs of a society. Generally, the society expects the following from organizations: eliminate poverty and provide quality health care; preserve the environment by reducing the level of pollution; provide a significant number of jobs and career opportunities; improve the quality of working life of employees; provide safe and livable communities with good housing and efficient transportation systems (Davies, 1973).

A socially responsible organization must provide the aforementioned and also carry out voluntary social action programmes such as career counseling. Socially responsible actions may seem expensive at the short run but increases profit and goodwill at the long run.

Benefit and Welfare Administration

Apart from regular payment of salaries, adequate attention should be paid to staff welfare and fringe benefits. According to French and Steward (1977), 'Fringe benefit is something of value, apart from agreed regular monetary payments of salaries and wages, given by an employer to an employee'. The proper administration of welfare services in organizations could be very beneficial to both management and staff. The following are some importance of fringe benefits and welfare services: they help to attract and make employees to remain in the organization; they help employees in satisfying their needs. Money that would have been spent on these items could be put to other useful purposes. They help organization to keep pace with competitions from other organizations in the same industry since satisfying workers are more productive; they improve workers moral, increase employee's security, generate greater loyalty and blunt the sharp edges of managerial autocracy and provide a positive public relations image; they are expected to have positive effects on motivation and productivity (Zollitech and Langstar, 1970).

The provision and proper administration of welfare services to employees contributes to the improvement of workers performance and commitment to the organization. Example of benefit and welfare services includes: pension benefits, sick-pay, medical facilities, subsidized meals, transport services, long service awards, social and recreational facilities, training leaves and scholarships, death benefits, official accommodation, redundancy and lay-off-pay, savings and thrifts plans and accident free bonus (Okoh, 1998). Effective management or organizational change and amelioration of organizational pathologies.

Just as social changes are to the social system, organization changes are indispensable to the organizational system. No social systems is static, it is dynamic. Similarly organizations are also dynamic system. Effective's management of change is the key to preventing organizational pathologies. Change is simply "the alternation of the status environment, it has to adapt itself to changing demands. For change to take place there must be a catalyst. A manager can be a catalyst that initiates and implements change that is, he is a change agent. The way change is managed in an organization, determines how successful, the organization will be.

Sources of Change

There are two major sources of change namely

Exogenous Changes: This refers to change that is developing eternally but has some impact on the organization. It can be a change taking place in the social, political or cultural environment that also has some effects on the organization. Such changes can make an organization to modify its way of doing things.

Endogenous Change: Change is said to be endogenous when it is formed within the organization. At times the organization may initiate the change and another organization assists in implementing it. It is also pertinent to mention that most change that takes place in an organization is as a result of change in the social, cultural and political environment. We can therefore postulate that there is a significant relationship between exogenous change and endogenous change.

Two types of change can be identified: random or haphazard change: change that takes place without being planned or initiated by someone (change agent) and planned change: planned change is a conscious and deliberate attempt on the part of some agent (individual or group) to bring about alternation, in a system. (Chin and Benne, 1965). Consequently, there are two directions of change: backward and forward direction of change.

Backward: This is used to qualify a change in which the organization moves to a worse state instead of a better one. It is characterized by retrogression instead of progress. No organization desires a backward change.

Forward change: this term is used to qualify change that is progressive. This alters the status quo for the better. When an organization adapts a more developed, more progressive and more efficient ways of doing things than before, it is said to undergo a forward change.

Rate of Change: the rate of change can be rapid or slow. It can also be classified as revolutionary, reforming reactionary or conservative.

Rapid: this qualifies a change that is quickly accomplished.

Slow: This refers to change that is not hasty, and not very progressive.

Moderate: This implies change that is gradual; it is neither rapid nor slow.

Change Agent: Change agent refers to anyone, or group of persons that initiates and implements planned change. The change agent could be a manager, groups such as pressure groups or informal groups in an organization. Labour unions and other forms of formal groups within a social system can also act as change agents (Manghan, Shaw, and Wilson 1972).

Stages of Planned Change

Three stages of planned change have been identified namely: freezing the system; initiating the change; stabilizing and refreezing (Koib and Frohman, 1970).

Unfreezing the System: The organization feels that there is need for a change as it searches for a solution to some problems.

Initiating the Change: Different scholars have identified many strategies for initiating the change. Some have grouped them into three general headings namely; force, reeducation and rational appeal (Chin and Benne, 1965).

Force: Although this may ensure a speedy implementation of change, it often fails in effecting a true change in attitudes.

Re-Education: This ensures a better implementation of change because it helps people to know how to behave and why they should behave that way. It helps to remove dissatisfaction unlike force.

Rational Appeal: It has to do with telling people to modify their behaviour towards the planned change and showing them the need to do so, since the change is advantageous. This strategy can be very successful under certain conditions. It can also be proposed that 'three common strategies for implementing planned change are force, re-education and rational appeal. Force is fast, but it fails to bring about long-range changes. Re-education is slow and costly but it secures long term commitment. Rational appeal is fast and results in last commitment' (Duncan, 1978).

Stabilizing and Refreezing: This refers to the process of evaluating the implementation of the change so as to re-introduced stability into the organization.

The process of planned Change

1. Force
2. Re-education
3. Rational appeal

Source: Adapted from DUNCAN (1973).
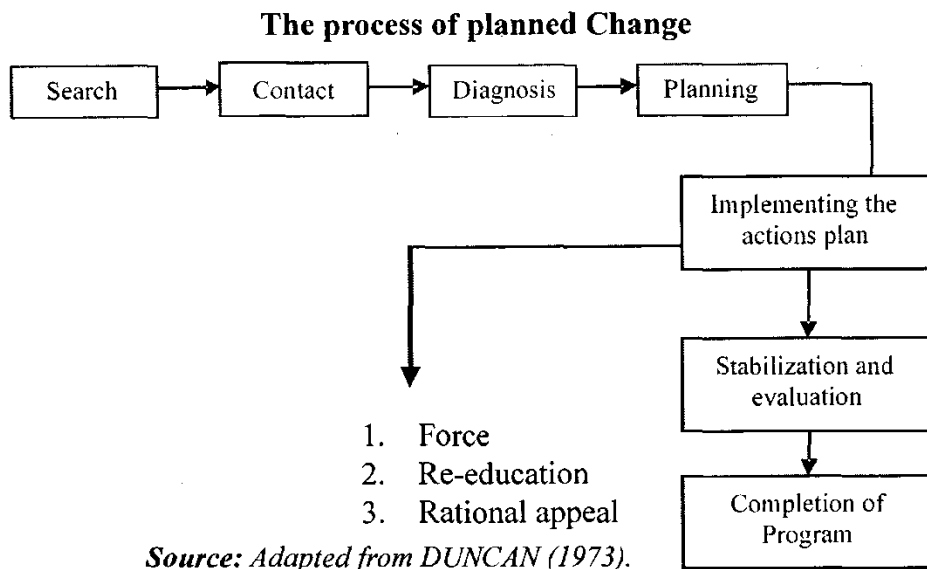
Change and organization's life Cycle

The life cycle of an organization is a series of five major stages; birth, growth, maturity, deterioration and death (Adizes, 1979).

Figure 14:2
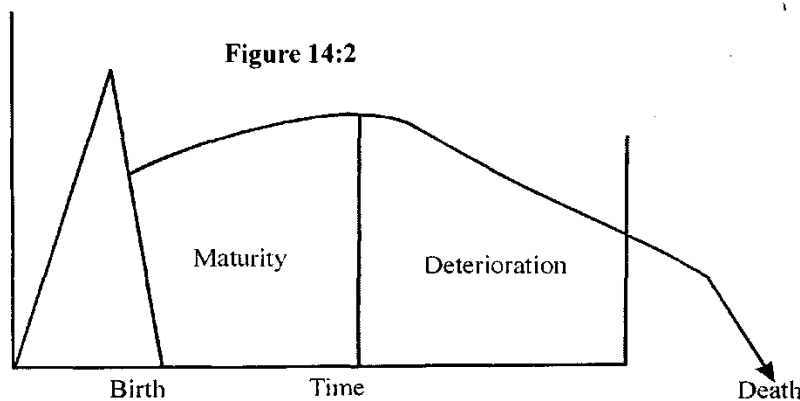
Source: Adapted from Hodge and Anthony (1991).

Birth: This refers to when two or more people come together to achieve a common goal. It simply refers to when the organization was started.

Growth: This refers to when the organization records its strongest growth experiences. This stage is characterized by the expansion of the organization.

Maturity: At this stage growth becomes slow. It develops a culture and strong relationship is established between behaviour and work: At this stage the organization finds it difficult to remain in the market because of intense competition. At this stage tradition reigns supreme. People are more recognized for their long period of service rather than their performance. People coming up with new ideas are usually resisted. It is the gradual process to death if nothing is done to improve the situation. An organization can pull itself out of this state by changing its top management that is, appointing those with fresh or new ideas who can ensure forward change. It can also merge itself with another more progressive organization since the deteriorating one has some resources that the more progressive organization needs, if the situation becomes very challenging. Managers can also find out other suitable strategies for getting out of this stage. An organization that could not get out of this stage will move to the next stage, which is death.

Death: At this point the organization is no longer playing any recognizable or positive role in the society. It is characterized by entropy. Although all organizations are subject to change, not all organization move to the stage of death. This is only possible when there is organizational development (forward change).

Concluding Remarks

Though change is a necessary condition of life, people resist change because of such reasons as insufficient information, lack of effective communication, fear and poor organizational climate. Effective managerial practices require preventing or curbing pathological situations in organization. This also involves the effective management of change. All activities directed towards this direction must be continuous and progressive.

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