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SOC-563: Complex Organizations

Prospectus

**Overview**

Survey research is a powerful tool that allows organizations to better understand employee perceptions of complex concepts through strategic analysis of employee responses. They provide insight into the subjective feelings of employees that may not be obtained otherwise (Fowler, 2014). There are many ways to conduct survey research: online, paper, and telephone to name a few. Online surveys that can be accessed on any Internet-ready device are fast, cost-effective, accurate, easy to use for participants and researchers, easy to design, provide more honest answers, are more selective participant-wise, and more flexible than other methods (Fowler, 2014; Sutherland, 2019)*.* For these reasons, an online survey constructed to measure important sociological variables within the organization will be administered to organizational personnel in an effort to improve company processes and outcomes. The survey questions will focus specifically on power, decision-making, leadership, and communication, as these particular concepts play an incredibly important role in efficient, effective organizational operations.

**Sociological Concepts**

I. Power

Power plays an important role in day-to-day operations as organizations themselves are systems of power, an “interconnected series of order-givers and order-followers” (Tolbert and Hall, 2016). Simply defined, it is a relational variable that asserts that the behavior of one individual in the relationship affects the behavior of the other(s). Power asserts itself in many forms: interpersonal, interunit, and interorganizational power are important ideas to consider.

Interpersonal power is demonstrated by the authority that one has over other people, as well as their access to resources and dependence on others. There are several different forms of authority: rational-legal, charismatic, and traditional. The latter two are not as common, however. Individuals in positions of authority have usually been given power based on a legitimate right to issue orders or directives, in line with rational-legal authority described first by Weber (1947, cited by Tolbert and Hall, 2016). Orders are followed because employees believe they should be followed. Where there is an optimal balance of power, employee compliance and involvement may be achieved.

Dependency and resource access also tie into power. If an individual desires something that another individual can provide, the latter will hold power over the former. Access to resources depends on several factors, such the position held by the individual, the abilities an individual has, or even their personal characteristics (Tolbert and Hall, 2016). The resources in question must be valuable to another individual, unit, or organization to wield power over them.

Interunit power is often an important determinant of organizational outcomes (Tolbert and Hall, 2016). Units may be vertically related (hierarchical) or horizontally related (departments at the same level). Interorganizational power occurs similarly. The same conditions that create power at the interpersonal level occur at the interunit and interorganizational levels, just at a larger scale. If one organization provides precious goods to another who requires them, the former can hold a considerable amount of power over the latter.

Power may also lead to conflict, which may be beneficial or not depending on the circumstances. Conflict may arise when differences in preferential decision outcomes occur, and power is utilized in an attempt to promote one preference over another (Tolbert and Hall, 2016). Organizational conflict is often a by-product of decision-making processes, which will be discussed later; conflict is often neither good or bad for an organization but may be used as a way that leadership manipulates situations to its advantage (Rahim, 1986, 1989; cited by Tolbert and Hall, 2016).

II. Leadership

Leadership is related to power but is distinguished by the presence of influence on others (Etzioni, 1965). Leaders motivate followers to achieve leader-sought outcomes. To understand who attains leadership and why, the functions and components of leadership must be understood. Such functions include: planning, organizing, problem solving, monitoring, motivating, managing conflict, and team building, amongst others (Tolbert and Hall, 2016). Generally, leaders are chosen based on individual characteristics, such as their personality traits (Stogdill, 1974; Hogan, Curphy, & Hogan, 1994); their behaviors or orientations (e.g. interpersonally-oriented or task-oriented); their leadership styles (e.g. authoritarian, consultative, delegative, or participative); and the characteristics of their followers or situations (Vroom & Yetton, 1973).

Leadership is important to understand because great leadership has been associated with increases in employee satisfaction and productivity (Kulkarni, 2018; Tolbert and Hall, 2016). Furthermore, leadership succession can cause changes in the organization, both positive and negative, potentially disturbing operations. Knowing who is in a position of leadership, their fit and suitability for the position, and their decision-making skills is crucial for any organization.

III. Decision-Making

Decision-making processes lie at the heart of understanding organizations (Tolbert and Hall, 2016). Making clear decisions based on where the company has been, where it is, and where it is headed is imperative for maintaining the status quo (Kinsey, 2019). To be effective, decisions should be based upon the organization’s mission, vision, financial situation, culture, priorities, values, and goals (Kinsey, 2019). However, decision-making processes are often hindered by factors which may be mitigated, reduced, or eliminated if organizations know how to recognize and improve such occurrences.

For example, humans are limited in their cognitive capacity to consider the full range of options in decision-making, often due to limited information or time; this concept is termed ‘bounded rationality’ (Simon, 1957; cited by Tolbert and Hall, 2016). Bounded rationality can cause “satisficing”, as opposed to “optimizing” in decision-making, where the decision-maker chooses something that is minimally good enough instead of the best possible option (Simon, 1957).

Other barriers to effective decision-making include rules and regulations that individuals, units, or organizations face, politics and conflict that may arise from uncertainty, constraints placed on the organization, and abuses of power. Such problems can arise and remain relatively undetected, especially in companies with high levels of decentralization (Tolbert and Hall, 2016). Eventually, the organization will experience systematic issues if decision-making processes are poor. Knowing if these barriers are occurring within one’s organization can assist in targeting them for correction. One of the simplest ways to improve decision-making skills within one’s organization is to focus on communication (Xaxx, n.d.)

IV. Communication

Effective communication is the building block of successful organizations (Juneja, 2015). Without communication, power, leadership, and decision-making fail to exist. Managements devotes a great deal of their time to communications; upwards of 80% of managerial time is spent performing a communication-related task (Juneja, 2015; Klauss and Bass, 1982; cited by Tolbert and Hall, 2016 ). It enables leaders to perform the aforementioned leadership functions. It provides information for decision-making processes. It plays a crucial role in leader and follower components, such as their attitudes, behaviors, and leadership styles. It helps organizational flow; communications within and between departments and other organizations must occur so that each employee has a clear idea of their roles and expectations, and processes remain unhindered.

Communication is affected by several factors within the workplace. For example, individual factors, such as perceptions, biases, stereotypes, and personality characteristics play a role in how communications are sent and received (Tolbert and Hall, 2016). Organizational factors, such as company culture and structure, may also contribute; organizations often attempt to minimize communication issues through socialization (Pascale, 1985; cited by Tolbert and Hall, 2016). Structure may affect vertical and horizontal communications; that is, communications that occur through hierarchies as well as between employees, departments, and divisions. Communications must be able to go up and down, left and right through each respective employee for it to be effective. Occasionally, dysfunctions with the hierarchy occur, but meetings and coordinated communications may improve such occurrences (Tolbert and Hall, 2016).

Furthermore, general communication problems may exist within an organization: omissions, distortions, and overload. When deletion of certain messages occur, whether accidentally or purposively, vital pieces of information are lost. Distortions refer to alterations of messages that occur in a similar manner to omissions and are often caused by individual differences in perception. Overload occurs when too much information is input into the organizational system and can lead to the other issues of omission and distortion. Based on how important communications are to the organization, minimizing such errors is a top priority.

**Survey Analysis**

To evaluate employee perceptions of the four important sociological concepts discussed, employees will receive a survey comprised of twenty research-backed questions that have been pre-tested on a simple random sample. The survey will be available to all organizational personnel based on a list of email addresses and presented in an online format; online surveys are fast and inexpensive to create and distribute and can be accessed anytime, anywhere. Because employees may access the survey at the location of their choice, self-administer the survey, and maintain anonymity and confidentiality, employee response bias may be minimized (Fowler, 2014). Employees will receive emails reminding them of a predetermined survey due date, which may reduce nonresponse as well and helps the data collected from the surveys to be more accurate (Fowler, 2014).

The survey questions are presented in formats where employees either rate their level of agreement or their perception of frequency. As these Likert-scale questions are ordinal, they can be analyzed using appropriate nonparametric tests and contingency tables, such as Mann-Whitney or Chi-square tests (Wuensch, 2019). Modern programming languages and/or statistical software make data cleaning and analysis relatively simple and quick. The results will be provided in an easy-to-understand format after the data have been analyzed, with data visualizations available upon request.

**Appendix**

The twenty-question survey that will be delivered to employees in an effort to obtain their perspectives on the sociological variables previously discussed is found below.

*Thank you for participating in this employee perception survey. Your responses to this survey are completely confidential and serve to help your organization improve. For Parts I through IV, please read the statements as they pertain to you and provide your best responses.*

**Part I: Power**

1) I have the authority to make decisions necessary to do my job

Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always

2) My input is valued by my supervisor

Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always

3) I depend on others to help me accomplish my job tasks

Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always

4) There are differences of opinion among members of my organization

Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always

5) I have access to the material resources I need to do my job properly

Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always

**Part II: Leadership**

6) My supervisor clearly communicates expectations

 Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always

7) My supervisor responds to me in a timely manner

 Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always

8) Upper management is open to suggestions from employees

Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always

  9) Upper management treats employees fairly

Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always

  10) Upper management involves employees in decisions that affect the employees personally

Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always

**Part III: Decision-Making**

11) I participate in decision-making within my organization

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

12) Upper management shares information with employees about decisions made within the organization

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

13) Decisions are made that are consistent with the organization’s goals

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

14) Changes in the organization are communicated to employees prior to implementation

Strongly Disagree     Disagree      Neutral          Agree             Strongly Agree

15) Decision-makers in the organization make decisions with employees’ best interests in mind

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral          Agree         Strongly Agree

**Part IV: Communications**

16) I receive the information I need to perform my job well

 Strongly Disagree Disagree    Neutral    Agree    Strongly Agree

17) I can trust the communications I receive within my organization

 Strongly Disagree Disagree    Neutral    Agree    Strongly Agree

18) I am well-informed as to what is happening within the organization

 Strongly Disagree Disagree    Neutral    Agree    Strongly Agree

19) My organization has an open-door policy for communications

 Strongly Disagree Disagree    Neutral    Agree    Strongly Agree

20) I share ideas directly with upper management

 Strongly Disagree Disagree    Neutral Agree    Strongly Agree

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