Lesson Six

Mechanistic and Organic Organizations

Introduction

Each design challenge has implications for how an organization as a whole and the people in the organization behave and perform. Two useful concepts for understanding how managers manipulate all these challenges collectively to influence the way an organizational structure works are the concepts of mechanistic structure and organic structure. The design choices that produce mechanistic and organic structures are contrasted in Table 1.

Mechanistic Structures Result When an Organization Makes These Choices.	Organic Structures Result When an Organization Makes These Choices.
• Individual Specialization Employees work separately and specialization in one clearly defined task. • Simple Integrating Mechanisms Hierarchy of authority is clearly defined and is the major integrating mechanism. • Centralization Authority to control tasks is kept at the top of the organization. Most communication is vertical. • Standardization Extensive use is made of rules and sops to coordinate tasks, and work process is predictable.	• Joint Specialization Employees work together and coordinate their actions to find the best way of performing a task. • Complex Integrating Mechanisms Task forces and teams are the major integrating mechanisms. • Decentralization Authority to control tasks is delegated to people at all levels in the organization. Most communication is lateral. • Mutual Adjustment Extensive use is made of face-to face contact to coordinate tasks, and work process is relatively unpredictable.

Table1-How the design challenges result in Mechanistic or Organic structures

Mechanistic Structures

Mechanistic Structures are designed to induce people to behave in predictable, accountable ways. Decision-making authority is centralized, subordinates are closely supervised, and information flows mainly in a vertical direction down a clearly defined hierarchy. In a mechanistic structure the tasks associated with a role are also clearly defined. There is usually a one-to-one correspondence between a person and a task. *Figure 1A*, depicts this situation. Each person is individually specialized and knows exactly what he or she is responsible for, and behavior inappropriate to the role is discouraged or prohibited.

At the functional level, each function is separate, and communication and cooperation among functions are the responsibility of someone at the top of the hierarchy. Thus, in a mechanistic structure, the hierarchy is the principal integrating mechanism both within and between functions. Because tasks are organized to prevent miscommunication, the organization does not need to use complex integrating mechanisms. Tasks and roles are coordinated primarily through standardization, and formal written rules and procedures specify role responsibilities. Standardization, together with the hierarchy, is the main means of organizational control. Given this emphasis on the vertical command structure, the organization is very status conscious, and norms of protecting one's turf are common. Promotion is normally slow, steady, and tied to performance, and each employee's progress in the organization can be charted for years to come. Because of its rigidity, a

mechanistic structure is best suited to organizations that face stable, unchanging environments.

Organic Structures

Organic structures are at the opposite end of the organizational design spectrum from mechanistic structures. Organic structures promote flexibility, so people initiate change and can adapt quickly to changing conditions. Organic structures are decentralized so that decision-making authority is distributed throughout the hierarchy; people assume the authority to make decisions as organizational needs dictate. Roles are loosely defined and people continually develop new kinds of job skills to perform continually changing tasks. *Figure 1B*, depicts this situation. Each person performs all three tasks, and the result is joint specialization and increased productivity. As employees from different functions work together to solve problems, they become involved in each other's activities. As a result, a high level of integration is needed so that employees can share information and overcome problems caused by differences in subunit orientation. The integration of functions is achieved by means of complex mechanisms like task forces and teams (See Table1). Coordination is achieved through mutual adjustment as people and functions negotiate role definitions and responsibilities, and informal rules and norms emerge from the ongoing interaction of organizational members. This organic approach to decision making is very different from the mechanistic one used by the old IBM, which was discussed earlier. In IBM's vertical, centralized product

development system, getting a decision made was, according to one engineer, like wading through a tub of peanut butter.

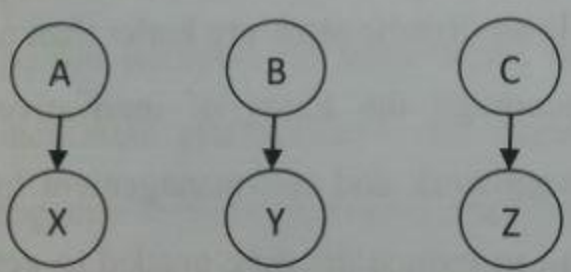
Over time, in an organic structure, specific norms and values develop that emphasize personal competence, expertise, and the ability to act in innovative ways. Status is conferred by the ability to provide creative leadership, and not by any formal position in the hierarchy. Once again, this was the case in the old IBM, whose mechanistic structure made grade, seniority, and loyalty the foundation of its norms and values. The result was slow and ponderous decision making and managers who were afraid to rock the boat.

Clearly, organic and mechanistic structures have very different implications for the way people behave. Is an organic structure better than a mechanistic structure? It seems to encourage the kinds of innovative behaviors that are in vogue at present: teamwork and self-management to improve quality and customer service, and to reduce the time needed to get new products to market. However, would you want to use an organic structure to coordinate the armed forces? Probably not, because of the many authority and status problems that would arise in getting the army, air force, marines, and navy to cooperate. Would you want an organic structure in a nuclear power plant? Probably not: if employees adopt a creative, novel response in an emergency situation, this might result in a catastrophe. Would you even want an organic structure in a restaurant, in which chefs task the roles of waiters and waiters take the roles of chefs, and authority and power relationships are worked out on an ongoing basis? Probably is not, because the one to one correspondence of person and role allows each

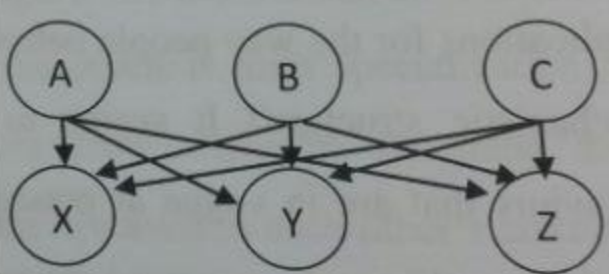
restaurant employee to perform their role in the most effective manner. Conversely, would you want to use a mechanistic structure in a high-tech company like Apple or Microsoft, where innovation is a function of the skills and abilities of teams of creative programmers working jointly on a project?

Figure 1: Task and Role Relationships

A.
Individual specialization in a mechanistic structure. A person in a role specializes in a specific task or set of tasks.



B.
Joint specialization in an organic structure. A person in a role is assigned to a specific task or set of tasks. However the person is able to learn new tasks and develop new skills and capabilities.



and overcome problems caused by differences in subunit orientation.

E: Translate the following passage into Persian.

An organizational structure refers to the type of framework a company uses to distinguish power and authority, roles and responsibilities, and the manner in which information flows through the organization. An organization must choose a structure that is appropriate for its individual needs and allows for the company to react and adapt to uncertainties and changes in the internal and external environments. Having a suitable organizational structure will allow a company to implement proper operating procedures and decision-making processes that will aid the organization in accomplishing its goals. A mechanistic structure, also known as a bureaucratic structure, describes an organizational structure that is based on a formal, centralized network. The mechanistic structure is best suited for companies that operate in a stable and certain environment. Organic structures are used in organizations that face unstable and dynamic environments and need to quickly adapt to change. When an environment changes, an organization must be able to gather, process, and disseminate information very quickly.