Making Connections Between Theory, Model, and Management Practice: Revisiting Workplace Privacy.

Ekpen T. Owie
Principal Consultant
Bodleian Houghton and Fields
United States
ekpenowie@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Management theories play significant roles in further theorizing and practice. Theory can inform actual practices in management by drawing connections. The significance of making such connections with theory is that management practitioners can understand the theoretical underpinnings of what they currently do and plan to do. Models can help top executives shape the future of their organizations as well. In this paper, I examined how theory drives workplace privacy issues and identified the theoretical underpinnings and management model that relate to it.

Keywords: Management, theory, model, workplace privacy

1. MANAGEMENT THEORIES AND MODELS

Theories are about showing the relationships between concepts or variables in a controlled environment. Theories are the clarification of connections among concepts in a set of boundary context: with variance theories focusing on the antecedents of concepts and process theories more about the entire cycle of concept development over time (Bartunek, 2008; Van de Ven, 2007). Similarly, Wacker (1998) defined theory "as a statement of relationships between units observed or approximated in the empirical world and having four components vis-à-vis definitions, domain, relationships, and predictive claims to answer the natural language questions of who, what, when, where, how, why, should, could and would" (p. 364). From a management perspective, a theory can be seen as a basket of ideas that can be used by managers to coordinate the activities of an organization. Theories such as McGregor X and Y, Maslow Z, Ouchi Z have shaped management practices over the years.

On the other hand, a general definition of a model is a "representation of a system that allows for investigation of the properties of the system and, in some cases, prediction of future outcomes, and are often used in quantitative analysis and technical analysis, and sometimes in fundamental analysis" ("Model", n.d.). However, Birkinshaw and Goddard (2009) defined management models as the choices top executives make on how they manage their organizations vis-à-vis setting objectives, allocating resources, motivating employees, and coordinating business activities.

In other words, the path an organization takes, whether successful or not, is predicated on the type of management model chosen by top executives. It is imperative that senior executives make careful choices using management models as well as theories for the success of the organization. In this paper, I discussed how theory drives workplace privacy issues for instance and identified the theoretical underpinnings and management model that relates to it.

2. WORKPLACE PRIVACY

Stakeholders working at all institutional levels are concerned about employee monitoring and have raised several issues regarding its effects on factors such as productivity, security, liability, privacy, creativity, paternalism, and social control (Martin & Freeman, 2003). Despite all these arguments, none has been conclusive enough to justify a position and thus, continue to raise pertinent managerial and moral issues (Martin & Freeman, 2003). Privacy is perhaps among the most discussed ethical and social issue. Staff monitoring is becoming a predominant feature of most firms, be they big or small. This monitoring, made easier with the use of electronic devices, compromises the employee's right to privacy in the workplace.

The monitoring, which covers recording with CCTV & miniature cameras, opening e-mails, listening to voicemails, checking Internet usage, social media platforms, and keeping records of telephone calls, among others, amounts to a mass stripping away of the privacies. Being aware of the fact that somebody knows about everything you do can feel invasive and violating (Hartman, 2001). Employees want to be treated as free people, being able to exercise the ability to decide how their lives will unfold without being electronically monitored.

Highly invasive monitoring can lead to conflict in the workplace. The fact that employees cannot deal with personal issues or family emergencies immediately, and in a confidential manner during office hours, can result in high levels of stress for the employee and lead the employer to believe the employee is tardy or a skive. According to a study by Smith (as cited in Alder, 2001), employee monitoring can lead to extreme anxiety and depression. In contrast, there have also been studies that showed the benefits of monitoring for both employer and employees (Alder, 2001).

Although the individual need for privacy may vary, employees still expect the notion of it, at the very least, to be theirs. However, with their employer's monitoring activities along with its ensuing lack of privacy, may well impinge on their ability to control such (Hartman, 2001). The tendencies for organizations to monitor employee's performance has always been there as they try to determine if they are getting what they are paying for (Alder, 2001). In other words, they want to monitor what employees are doing to ensure their investments in terms of pay and training are achieving the desired results.

The tradeoff between employees' workplace privacy and employers' need to protect company assets among others, often favors employers, as the legal system provides much leeway for employers to monitor employees' electronic communications in the workplace (Friedman & Reed, 2007, p. 75). According to Fishman (2004), the Electronic Communications Privacy Act (ECPA) of 1986 has yielded limited consequential protections for employees against monitoring despite the Act prohibiting communication

intercepts or attempts to. "The expectation that the law protects a variety of privacy rights, including the U.S. Constitution's fourth amendment protection against "unreasonable search and seizures," the extension of the fifth amendment due process protection to a variety of personal property rights and common law invasion of privacy protection is ingrained in American society seems incongruent" (Friedman & Reed, 2007, p. 76). The vagueness of the law, in essence, allows employers to act without legal implications.

The issues of workplace privacy would continue as arguments about employer's right to surveil to protect assets and employees' privacy. Further, how employees are monitored and how the data are stored and used will ensue in the discourse. Therefore, the issues related privacy in the workplace must be at the forefront of management discussions.

3. THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

Monitoring can be seen as a lack of trust between employers and employees. As Nirenberg (2004) argued, McGregor X theory can be understood as the rationale for why employers are driven to monitor employees. According to the McGregor X theory, employers believe that "people are passive, dislike work, avoid responsibility, need to be carefully supervised, told what to do, self-centered, prone to resist change, and not very intelligent" (Nirenberg, 2004. p. 1). Thus, monitoring occurs since employers believe that employees are not self-starting, are passive, and indolent. The productivity and creativity arguments for employee monitoring as highlighted by Martin and Freeman (2003) further underscored the theory X belief by employers that informs the monitoring. Employees are being monitored for the purpose of achieving productive and creative organizational goals without due considerations of the effects on employees. Similarly, Stewart (2010) postulated the concept of "trust" using his theory U (less control over people) and T (more control). Theory T puts into perspective the situation where employers see employee control as a way to build trust, which also drives the issues that necessitate workplace surveillance.

Further, Argyris (1995) espoused, and in-use theories of action are another viewpoint that explains workplace monitoring in the face of organizational rebuttal. An organization's motto may be "to create a friendly environment for employees by being free" (espoused). However, in a bid for the organization to assert control, they monitor employees and create a tense workplace in a supposedly "tightly-controlled environment" (in-use). Thus, the disconnect between professing aspirations and actual actions becomes evident.

4. MODEL CORRELATION

The Planning Model closely relates to Theory X pertaining workplace monitoring. Birkinshaw and Goddard, (2009) addressed four generic management models namely planning, quest, scientific, and discovery using their "ends" and "means" dimensions as well as "tight" and loose "principles" distinction for emphasis. Organizations that use the planning model "operate with narrow, short-term objectives, clearly defined management process, and strict hierarchical decision making" (Birkinshaw & Goddard, 2009, p. 88). As organizations, they rationalize their short-term objectives of making profits and staying in control of the market. They also impose rigid systems and processes to ensure their agents (employees) are acting in ways that are congruent with internal policies. These systems could be interpreted as a lack of trust on the part of the organization towards their employees as there would be no need for such rigid processes or systems if trust existed. In

enforcing this control through electronic monitoring of employees, it creates the issue of privacy in the workplace.

5. CONCLUSION

Management theories and models can help managers shape the paths of their organizations or understand and justify their current practices. As organizations try to deal with various issues in management, theories and models can be significant in drawing comparisons and addressing salient points. This paper showed how McGregor X theory and the planning model justify employees monitoring that raises the issues of workplace privacy in management discourse. These theoretical and modeling explanations do not solve the actual management issues but shed more light on them. However, it is incumbent on managers to use theories and models as a guide to shape the future of their organizations. Finding solutions to management issues as they affect the organization and its environment must continue to be a priority.

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