

SYSTEMS' HYPOCRISY THEORY: THE DIVERGENCE OF ERGONOMICS AND ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH

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ABSTRACT

Long has it been argued that the invaluable solutions that ergonomics is capable to provide to institutions, organizations, firms and systems in general, are under-utilized. Ergonomics, as a state of assessing our organizational philosophy has to encounter and include many aspects that do not have anything to do with any abstract or tedious task, but are deeper, profound and are concerned with broader parameters, such as education and culture. This find happens to consort an observed modus operandi that shows resilience. The instruments are there, readily available to be applied in order to transform organizational practice to the definition of a win-win practicality, but they are not, and subsequently systems are left to torment, dysfunction and disease. At the same time, a body of knowledge that is concerned with organizational health has been crystallizing: the wellbeing of the organization directly correlated with the wellbeing of its employees. Pertinent indicators have been formulated and results show that organizational culture may be suffering from absence of ideals unleashed to the world even as far back as the human relations' school. This paper introduces a conceptual system with respect to the correlation of the key principles of ergonomics with those rooted in organizational health. The practical divergence of these principles is coined as systems' hypocrisy and the consequent theory is formulated. From this conceptual infrastructure practical guidelines may be laid out in order to achieve a better understanding towards the manifestation and sustainability of systemic health.

Keywords: Ergonomics, systems' hypocrisy, organizational health

1. Introduction

According to the International Ergonomics Association (IEA), *ergonomics is the scientific discipline concerned with the understanding of interactions among humans and other elements of a system, and the profession that applies theory, principles, data and methods to design in order to optimize human well-being and overall system performance.* Ergonomics facilitate the harmonic co-existence of aspects that interact with people in terms of people's needs, abilities and limitations. A superficial attempt to recognize its importance through its definition, will lead to an initial glance as to the relevance and universal pertinence of this discipline. Its reason of existence is the conciliation of human beings and their systems.

It is not an instance of luck that this is directly correlated with the goals of any managerial activity and by extension indeed any human activity that requires care. The optimum synergy between human beings and their respective task and/or environment is a field that is as old as human beings themselves, an ever-ending pursuit and a journey in perpetuity. Each and every second in any era of human history, whence an interface between two systems has been created, the optimum solution has been sought after, whether the goal is to minimize costs, magnify benefits, or heighten efficiency altogether; the question that remains prevalent to this day, is how are we able to get the job done with the minimum of cost whilst attaining the quality standard requested, whence simultaneously the people getting the job done remain content. One may be led to remark that this syllogism is over-aspiring and unreal, but its instances are there and so are its precedents. Ecosystems wherein all components flourish in abundance and prosper are everywhere in nature, waiting to become the objects of our scientific study. Examples set as best practices in management and cases of uniqueness are also there for reflection; for one, the car manufacturer employee that is so dedicated to the quality of his firm's culture that every day after his work at the factory whence he walks home, he aligns all windshield wipers of the cars (only his company's of course) that he meets in his path. This kind of commitment that could be coined as sacred is an exceptional circumstance that could be included in the design process of a system; the only way to achieve this is through ergonomics.

Ergonomics is of the few sectors that utilizes scientific rigor and discipline in order to better understand the needs and capabilities of us all and for once not point the finger and scavenger for blame but instead understand and build around human weakness, in order to attest that it is better to be human and mistake, that it's all part of the learning experience, if built upon a stylobate of anthropocentrism. With ergonomics the meaning of discipline shifts from a hue of guilt and coercion, to the practical manifestation of freedom of the soul, expression and acceptance. Ergonomics is one of the few practices that follow parallel and tacit to each task, enhancing it with superior performance, whilst simultaneously enriching the experience of the user.

Apart from the specifics of ergonomics and its inherent sectors, we would point that there is a high-level component of this discipline that can be included anywhere. Sure we could utilize organizational ergonomics or macro-ergonomics in order to pursuit system linkages and synergies, but what about ergonomics as a state of the mind, what about ergonomics as a component of systemic health, as the intangible ingredient in all our operations? The route is there and it is not only feasible, but the road more manageable and convenient, for it is free of crises. Whence utilizing a holistic system approach and taking under consideration all systemic interconnections, dysfunction is absent and it is highly improbable to have any discrepancies and conflicts manifested, for whence any issues arises, the same principles will strive for mitigation and deliver it through a framework of systemic bliss.

At the same time, we are very lucky for we live in a world where health encompasses an encircling and non-exclusive connotation. Through this prism, we are relieved of having to analyze and extract pertinent specifics as to the goals or objectives of our operations or ourselves; the answer is there, waiting to be utilized and exploited. It is health. Health can be the journey and the destination, the sine qua non, the desirable and non-negotiable characteristic in anything and everything. The interesting aspect here is that there lies a shared link between health and ergonomics that as explained above for the latter, is to be instated as an intangible component of our system of values and convictions.

The vulnerable aspect of these facts is as in their initial crystallization, the paradox that is man; as capable of unimaginable greatness and simultaneous inhumanity. The trade-off would arise not as an issue of ability, but of desire, not of capacity but of will. The boundaries are not many times lucid and our capability enough to understand them; the system is nonetheless multi-parametric and we cannot be aware of all parameters and even if we were, it would be impossible to impose beneficial change in all of them simultaneously. Stakes thence become a conflicting eventuality only to bear the ultimate cost, that if everyone doesn't gain, no one does. In our very stochastic universe, this truth holds as a deterministic exemption from usual decorum.

2. Ergonomics' Corollaries

The state of the discipline can be traced thousands of years ago [17] and its evolution is evident, though some issues pointed out in literature a while back seem [11] to be prevalent as well, whence there are needs of the incorporation of ergonomics' considerations in planning. The dimensions of this application, its interdependencies and considerations have been registered as well [29]. Theberge and Neumann [26] provide a very interesting inventory of the intricacies concerning the practice of ergonomics and as to the holistic approach that should be sought after in order to invoke beneficial change, which is the thesis of Maciel in [15] a case study involving participatory ergonomics. This instance is observed in [2] as well, where a case of participatory ergonomics showcased the variable sectors wherein ergonomics can provide beneficial change.

Considering the topic of physical ergonomics, we may observe the undisputed superiority of the discipline; in [32] the application of ergonomics is evident to have provided enormous benefits to the systems' applied, as in [1] the extended benefits deriving from ergonomic interventions are presented, including their inherent psychosocial factors. Rochlin [21] reminds us the broad perspective that safety must encompass and the eventualities that it is evident in an organization as well as the multi-faceted approach that is required in order to achieve a culture of safety. All issues presented can be nullified with a macro-ergonomic approach to the organization.

The facilitations of ergonomics are not without their grave limitations that have been acknowledged in the past, for the discrepancies of theories and practices were apparent from the beginning. Slappendel [24] provides a very interesting analysis as to the causes of this phenomenon in order to tackle ergonomics' utilization issues; the links between organizational structure, planning, quality and innovation are investigated and how these aspects can be interwoven with strategic management, which is the case in [6] as well, where the interrelation of ergonomics and strategy are investigated.

Utilizing a narrow approach, a discrepancy and inability of correlation between strategy and ergonomics could be ventured, though it would not find viable territory, for as explained, ergonomics are a dynamic instrument of universal utility. The implication of administering the ergonomics' philosophy are rendered so far up the corporate chain as to be instilled in corporate strategy; these ideas are far from theoretical and eagerly await practical manifestation in order for all stakeholders to benefit, as we may observe in [13] the case of best practices in everyday operations through the utilization of ergonomics.

Ergonomics' methodologies can be applied wherever system theory surfaces [25] and within all contexts of an organizational setting and environment [33]. The intricacies in order for the perspectives to remain in a materiality principle ecosystem are numerous [3] but not unobtainable. Specific guidelines as to the implementation of ergonomics can be evidenced [8] and utilized. The issue here remains that the impact of the top level existence of ergonomics' culture is uncontested [9] and there should be a closer analysis on the pertinence of the socio-technical approach [12] and the concept of "joint optimization". We would venture to call it a synergistic effect of one subsystem to another, only to arrive at the conclusion that these systems are not only open, but interconnected and in no way or form does prosperity of one imply decline of the other; we move to observe the timid crystallization of the holistic principle.

3. Organizational Health

Recent literature [35] renders a working definition of organizational health for this concept has come to be considered the ultimate goal of an organization as the stepping stone of a sustainable competitive advantage. We are able to observe many models [14] linking organizational health with cultural manifestations. It may be of interest to follow the route of the symbolisms concerning organizations through the years and with some optimism we can extract an anthropocentric shift: from work to well-being for people, and from sterile monetary returns to health for organizations.

The practical matter would be that as not a single person in the world encompasses all the aspects of the definition of health (World Health Organization's definition), with the same etiology neither does an organization. Nonetheless this is a strong point of the concept and definition, for it is so broad that it signifies the constant dynamic struggle towards its realization; it doesn't allow acquiescence to the slightest degree. This exact specific is the critical advantage of the concept, for it signifies an intricate corporate value-system and like the basic principle of all entities, it also embodies permanence. Another benefit is that the framework of organizational health was coined to imply employee wellbeing [18] and the concept extended [5]. In addition to conceptual constructs, many models address the notion analytically, whether through indicators [28] to measure the correlation with organizational change [19], or through dedicated diagnostic models [22].

Major components of the organizational health concept are kept within values and the intangible aspects of organizations [30] such as trust and knowledge sharing, or the impact and importance of communication

styles [10]. Vinberg and Gelin [31] investigate organizational and health performance and come to support the holistic approach. Golzari [7] found a direct correlation of organizational health with customer satisfaction and especially within an organizational context of environment and facilities. Yüceler et alii [36] found correlations of organizational health to organizational commitment and Shoaf et alii [23] bridge the gap between at first conflicting parameters to propose specific metrics of organizational health assessment, whereas Mako et alii [16] stress the importance of dynamic metrics of job satisfaction.

Thompson et alii [27] demonstrated the need to have a solid organizational family from the aspects of employee evolution and their organizational recognition in order to achieve organizational health, whereas Wright [34] indicates the importance of a diagnostic and pathological approach to mitigate issues in an organizational context, as well as organizational physicals. Perry and Barney [20] expand on the dysfunctional aspects imposed on organizational health through lack of transparency and that as in family, realistic goals have to be set on a basis of anthropocentric values. Cheramie et alii [4] indicate the importance of overall organizational health to the employees decisions with respect to loyalty.

Of the constructs available in management, we would conjecture that the one of organizational health is the most promising, systemic and holistic; for this reason we move to correlate it with ergonomics for they share a mutual infrastructure of joint anthropocentrism and effectiveness.

4. Theory Formulation

We begin with systems' theory. It can exclusively contain humans or frolic in automation, little does the difference matter. All systems receive inputs and generate outputs based on their intrinsic constructs and may learn to deal with disorder through feedback. If these intrinsic constructs (for a person they could be a value system, ethics, culture, ambitions etc.) are harmonized with the internal systemic structure (facilitated through ergonomics), health will be a given (organizational if we are addressing an organizational system). The point of the matter is that whence the human element is introduced, health pertains to the vision and ergonomics to the strategy. Exactly as strategy is the flight plan towards vision, so is ergonomics the path towards organizational health. For systems to function in harmony a definite merger of ergonomics with the framework of organizational health should be pursued; through this fusion a healthy ecosystem will emerge, for it will find profit in the mutual benefaction of its components. This profit will emerge from the exact understanding and acceptance that the mutual functionality through ergonomics will provide.

If the system does not hold in its core a culture of ergonomics, it will be left to isolation. Is it in part because of this fact that we observe systems with complete conceptual constructs (whether it be laws, regulations, directives, and/or policies) that nevertheless fail hopelessly in real-world practice. We can never diverge from the fact that human beings are the central, core and key component, even if the system is automated (planning, design, maintenance and oversight authority are still left to the human factor); if we put a person within a system that lacks an ergonomically sound framework, the verdict is already cast, and it is one of tribulations and subsequent decay. Even if at first we have the notion of function, it is and will remain an illusion, for the parameter of sustainability will not be met.

If a system lacks the direct fusion of a holistic ergonomics' approach, it's doomed to isolation, for its intrinsic constructs will never find materiality. It will be a component within a super-system and it will be alone, wondering what it's all about; it will be a person amongst a plethora of peers and feel as lonely as ever. Within an organization, systemic isolation will lead to structural and functional inefficiencies, eventual financial losses, corruption and organizational chronic disease. If a human system is left in isolation, we will lose all that is human and hold the husk of a psyche, a shadow of what could have been. The generic term that could coin this instance of systemic isolation is hypocrisy and since we are referring to systems, it would be formulated to systems' hypocrisy. Thence the organizational health metrics would be the inverse correlation of systemic hypocrisy, for systemic hypocrisy is the exact opposite of health, so much so that it may be proposed to signify the level of disease.

Whence a system in all its functions has accepted its intrinsic constructs, it is able to shatter any veneer that isolates it from its respective super-system and function for what it truly is. In a practical application this will manifest as a work day so fulfilling that the employee will not want it to end, as the intoxicated asks for a trace of a dose or as the person in love does wishes to never part with its mate. Exactly this will be the systemic benefit of the correlation of ergonomics with organizational health; relative systems will manifest as partner systems functioning in synergy and harmony with one another. Thus the conceptual model of systems' hypocrisy is constructed and awaiting testing and practical trial.

5. Conclusions

The culture that ergonomics formulates can be regarded as a systemic catalyst of excellence. Organizational health provides a holistic framework of componential considerations that will offer sustainability through abundance and collective well-being. Ergonomics paired with occupational health can be the key to organizational permanence, for one may act as its vessel and the other as its fuel. All this will be able to materialize if systemic hypocrisy is absent, for it is an index of systemic disease. The applicability of this model depends on systemic culture and this parameter will add an additional dimension that has to be considered. Another hurdle may be that of working environments' globalization, as many times its expression is not a product of systematic study. Metrics of the theory could be developed in order to provide an analytical construct that will assess any systemic instance and could provide a dynamic complementary aspect with respect to the conceptual model introduced herein.

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