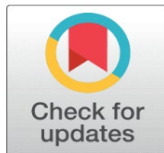


CHESTER BARNARD'S FUNCTIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE IN THE 21ST CENTURY A CRITICAL REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Almost a century has passed since Chester Barnard published his seminal work on Organisational Behaviour in 1938. Since then, the book has garnered criticism as well as adoration. However, the applicability of Barnard's functions needs to be evaluated in the context of 21st century and it remains to be seen how much the core beliefs of the theory have mutated given the time that has lapsed since the work was first published.

Keywords: Organisation, Executive, Leadership, Morality, Behaviour

“In the main I believe the great value of Barnard's discussion is that it is one of those rare cases in which a man of affairs, an experienced executive, also has genuine curiosity and wisdom”

John Dewey, American Philosopher



1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of Organisation has undergone a tremendous transformation since the 'Functions of the Executive' was first published in 1938. Written in the decade when the debate surrounding organisation and organisational productivity was at its height and when the Hawthorne experiments conducted by Elton Mayo had shifted the emphasis of organisational theory from physical work environment to psychological and social factors of the workers, Chester Barnard undertook a similar exercise in exploring the contours of organisational behaviour and the role of individual within it. Andrews (1968) describes Barnard's thinking as abstract, objective, proficient and logical. In fact the views presented by Barnard are in complete contrast to the mechanistic theories that were the dominant discourse in the early 1900s. On the other hand, Barnard focused entirely on the human factor in the organisation and the 'psychological strength of the human behaviour (Nikezić, Dželetović, Vučinić (2016)'. The reviews of Barnard's book, however, are mixed. While some scholars view Barnard's contributions as path-breaking, others regard them as outdated and difficult to grasp (Chandran, 1998). For instance, Wolf states, '... over the years I have become aware that Barnard's book has proved to be hard and uninteresting, for a lot of teachers and their teachers (Wolf, W. 1974)'. On the other hand, scholars like Jay Chandran are of the opinion that even in 21st century Barnard holds a position of eminence for the study and research in organisation behaviour. Mahoney (2002) argues that the teachings of Barnard remain valid even in the face

of criticisms and intensely resonate with the students and researchers of managerial sciences. He argues that Barnard, unlike others of his time, combines science and art of organisation literature and pushes the boundaries of literature to convey the "aesthetic feeling of managing". Highlighting the significance of Barnard's ideas in the 21st century, Aupperle and Dunphe in 2001, for instance noted that, 'Barnard is quietly becoming the lost management bard'.

2. ON NATURE OF INDIVIDUALS

Chester Barnard following the organismic theory of personality, held the view that 'individuals' within an organisation acted as an open system, whose core values consisted of self-preservation and self-esteem. Individual behaviour, therefore, was in a large measure, governed by forces of which the individual, himself, was unaware. This, non-logical thought process was of special interest to Barnard and is of central relevance to most of his ideas and theorisation. In Barnard's own words, 'non-logical thought processes include all those processes which the individual is not able to express in words or as reasoning and which are only made known by judgement, decision, or action'. Logical thought processes, on the other hand, described the processes involving conscious thinking and which can be easily expressed by the individual in words and/or symbols. It would, thus, not be wrong to state the Barnard is the founder of the present field of Organisation behaviour, as it was Barnard who for the first time thought of organisations as 'co-operative efforts' and termed them as, "cooperation among men that is conscious, deliberate, and purposeful" (p. 4). Thus, to study an organisation is to first study the individual. Before we understand what an organisation truly is we need to first answer questions pertaining to the individual, person, and free will. Barnard notes, with some hindsight that the individual in his/her own self has a unique identity including a name, address and a history while in the organisation, he/she loses his individuality when the organisation as a whole is taken into consideration and it is that non- personal presence that takes dominance. Chester Barnard, thus, seeks to define this amalgamation through his functions of the executive wherein not only the individual is considered but his role and position vis-a- vis the organisation is taken into consideration.

The great legacy of Barnard lies in his admiration of human identity and its place within an organisation. To start with, Barnard gives out 4 'properties' of an individual- behaviour, presence of certain psychological factors, choice (albeit limited) and purpose. To this litany of definitions, he adds one more, motive, for Barnard describes it as "a tension resulting from various forces". Within an organisation, Barnard discusses two types of interactions: a) between individuals within the co-operative system, and b) between the individual and the group. These interactions by way of their very nature are 'social' and unavoidable, and constitute one set of social factors that are observed in cooperation. These, further, are said to operate on the individual so affected and get embedded in their mental and emotional disposition. Such is their effect on the individual that at times, these interactions are seen to alter the motives of the individuals as well. These interpersonal cooperations further affect the organisational environment; if the interactions are cordial, the organisational environment shall be positive, however, if the interactions are negative and obstructive they shall result in a pessimistic work environment. Another type of interaction witnessed within an organisation is between the individual and various groups observed within the organisation. Although Barnard doesn't distinguish between formal and informal groups, the groups nevertheless are regarded in two senses. Firstly, the group is regarded as a combination of forces acting on the psychology of the individual concerned, in the second and perhaps more important instance the group is regarded as a 'unit' with which the individual is seen to interact. Thus, a group, "present a system of social action which as a whole interacts with each individual within its scope (p. 42)".

3. ON FORMAL ORGANISATION

In continuity to Barnard's views of individuals, there exists a similarity in the way he views the organisation. For Chester Barnard, an Organisation is co-terminus with an Organism, a living entity wherein the parts are inter-related not only with each other but also with the larger whole. On one side there exists 'individual needs and freedoms on the other the need for organisational order and predictability. The prime function of the executive, therefore becomes the establishment of a balance between these two extremes, what Barnard refers to as an 'ethical ideal'. Thus, what we see in Chester Barnard's work is a constant need for an equilibrium of physical, biological and social forces within the organisation, while at the same time being consciously aware of the existing forces to which the organisation is exposed (Wren & Bedeian, 2009; Barnard, 1938). The goal of the organisation therefore, becomes changing and controlling the motives of the individuals through influence and control (Barnard, 1938). Formal organisations, for Barnard, therefore

shall have balance, a conscious view of external forces at play and an analysis of the functions performed by its executives (Wren, 2005). In terms of employee motivation, Barnard explained that in order for the workers to be motivated and group goals to be achieved, the organisation needs to offer incentives to fulfil individual motives. Barnard's work was also groundbreaking, owing to his definition of and expectations from a good and responsible leader. While cooperation as per Barnard is a creative process, leadership, on the other hand, is defined as "... the indispensable fulminator of its forces (Barnard 1938, 259)". Barnard continues, 'the inculcation of belief in the real existence of a common purpose is an essential executive function'. In the scholarship of Chester Barnard, Leadership, within an organisation, becomes all the more important.

Another related concept in Barnard's Functions of the Executive is 'Responsibility'. Probably recognised as the most important function of the executive, responsibility can be interpreted as honour and faithfulness in the mannerisms of the manager through which most of the functions are carried out. As per Barnard responsibility is, '... an emotional condition that gives an individual a sense of acute dissatisfaction because of failure to do what he feels he is morally bound to do or because of doing what he thinks he is morally bound not to do, in particular concrete situations (Barnard, 1948)".

Perhaps most important function of an organisation as per Barnard was development of proper communication channels, which Barnard saw as a 'sine qua non' for Organisations. A related concept that follows is that of authority which he defined was, 'the character of an order which brings about compliance'. The concept holds two components/dimensions; the character of the organisation (impersonal), and the interpretation of the order (personal). In order for an authority to exist and recognized, associated orders must not only be understood but compliance must also be observed. Barnard also refers to the concept of 'zone of difference' when referring to the concept of authority, This he terms as orders that are unquestionably accepted, falling as they inevitably are in the activities which the individual acknowledges as his obligations to the organisation. Barnard also developed a detailed debate around the concept of organisational decisions, primarily the processes involved and observed within formal organisations. Two types of decisions are highlighted; decisions as means and those regarded as to ends. Decision as to ends were defined by Barnard as being concerned with the moral issues while the decisions as to means were dominated by technical issues. Another distinction was with respect to personal and organisational decisions. Organisational decisions were seen to be impersonal and largely dominated by organisational ends with logical thinking and processes. Personal decisions, on the other hand, were seen to be determined by subconscious processes dominated by sentiments and conditioned by external environment seen as distinct from the formal organisation. In contrast, organisational decisions are dominated by logical processes quite different from what is observed in the case of individual actions. Similarly, while personal decisions cannot be delegates, organizational decisions are generally observed to be well delegated and monitored; lastly, in the case of organisations decisions are specialized, whereas in the case of individuals decision specialisation is generally absent.

Another important theorisation for organisational effectiveness given by Barnard is what he refers to as 'the theory of the strategic factor'. As per Barnard, although the system of an organisation is viewed as a whole, its parts can, nevertheless, be identified. In this regard he identified what he called a 'strategic factor', which in an organisational context is any part (factor) which if removed/ changed can be used to accomplish the desired output provided that other factors remain unchanged. Therefore, a strategic factor can be identified as one whose control can be used to establish a new system within the organisation so that the overall goals are achieved.

4. CONCLUSION

Although the work of Chester Barnard has come under criticism with some scholars terming it as 'outdated' and 'old-fashioned', they nonetheless remain relevant in the fields of management, psychology, and public administration. Barnard's humanistic approach to organisation and the way organisations sought to operate holds true in the economic structures of the 21st century. The current paper sought to emphasis on his main teachings and how Barnard changed the way organisations were perceived in the late twentieth century. In analysing Barnard's contributions to Organisational Behaviour Literature, Simon (1947) and Williamson (1995) can very well be quoted as emphasising Barnard's contributions to "the science of organisation". Similarly, Levitt and March (1995) write that, '...Barnard's thesis is that management requires both art and science and his masterpiece achieves this balance'.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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