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ORGANIZATIONS, AUTONOMY AND LEADERSHIP: THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CONTEXT

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Question is of the autonomy and the freedom at work.

More precisely, we want to present the place of autonomy in the theories of the organizations. An important point of this text is to understand to what extent theories of organizations leave individuals autonomy and possibilities of taking initiative in the execution of their work. We will also address the issue of freedom the individuals have within the organizations. These questions are essential in the current context. Indeed, the ambitions of workers for more initiatives, companies' requests for more creativity and abilities to change within the organizations explain why we are so interested in that question.

The definitions of the organizations give information about structural constraints in the organizations and about the actors. The theories from scientific organization of work recognize the importance of the individuals. But, that is all. What about autonomy? What about freedom?

The response is not straightforward. It depends on the context, internal and external context. The response depends on the activity sector, the strategy, the culture, the style of leadership and other dimensions.

So, the response is a balance between control and autonomy. How can we explain the situations from internal points? The cultural aspects: values, representation, practices of human resources and styles of leadership but also participation and corporate social responsibility are some examples to explain the importance of autonomy in the organizations.

The role of the leader is important in organizing the exchange with the followers and the participation. This role is varying, as it changes and differs from one organization to another.

At the end of this work we ask about the role and the utility of corporate social responsibility in improving the possibilities of autonomy and positive freedom in the organizations.

Objectives

We will try to present some definitions of an organization and the importance of individu-

als in these definitions. We will try to establish links between the type of theory of organizations and the question of autonomy. This link is not necessarily obvious.

Our hypothesis is that each theory stresses the importance of the actors but not necessarily autonomy and freedom to make decisions. This autonomy can exist but it is often the result of informal practices. It would be correct to think that there are formal procedures to organize autonomy, in research or innovation, for example. We will see that control and autonomy are often associated with each other.

Then the position of the leader is important in explaining different practices which allow more autonomy: debate and participation practices, empowerment, and creation of relations for example.

The last question to ask is if corporate social responsibility is a manner to improve the possibilities of autonomy.

Autonomy and freedom

We can, with Moreno (2004), define three concepts of autonomy. The first is "self organization", the second is "functional self organisation" or "autonomy", and the third is "informed autonomy".

For the concept of "autonomy", the identity is important. The characteristic of "autonomy" is to make a difference between system and environment. The system makes itself the difference with the environment. The system continues because the actors modify the conditions of the environment. The autonomy of the actor is the origin and the destination of his action (Moreno, 2004).

An example of the importance of autonomy

is the manner to display emotions. This example shows the importance of the context and of different internal and external factors in the organization. The emotions are important in the relations at work and with the clients. Then, more flexibility and more latitude "in how employees display emotions, and in doing so, generate benefits for employee and organizations alike (Morris J., Feldman D., 1997, pp.11).

Autonomy and control are linked. Steven Feldman (1989) analyses the work of innovation of managers and engineers in an electronics company. He underlines that in the context of innovation where autonomy is important, the control is also important (Feldman S., 1989, p.83). This aspect is not only a structural aspect but also a cultural aspect that deeply applies to the individuals.

We will speak today about the control by the culture, by the values, by the representation, by symbol and maybe by autonomy, by participation, by stakeholders (Lapayre, 2009). Nathalie Lapeyre analyzes the question of autonomy and of control in project management. We see that we can associate autonomy and participation with control, and regard them as new forms of control.

The autonomy facilitates freedom. We underline the distinction made by Sen (2003) between "positive freedom" (the fact that the individual can act according to the limits he imposes on himself) and "negative freedom" (the fact that the individual can act without being prevented from doing so by others). Both types of freedom have to exist. The literature

about contextual approach will show that the autonomy exists with limits, that autonomy and control are associated, that the situation is more a situation of "negative freedom" than of "positive freedom."

The definition and the limits of this freedom are laid down in the terms of the contract that binds the individual to the organization, in the job description, in the evaluations and the interviews of functioning, in the means of coordination: formal/informal, mutual adjustment and direct supervision, and in the places and practices of socialization.

The question of autonomy and the freedom of action is also a question of degree on a continuum, where, on the one hand the importance is attached to the order, and the official norms, and on the other hand, the importance is attached to individuals and their abilities to action. The situation depends on the contexts. However, if the organization attaches importance to individuals and to their abilities to action, to what extent does it leave them autonomy and freedom of action? We present below some definitions and theories of organizations and try to underline the distinctions concerning autonomy and freedom.

Definition of an organization

We will begin with several definitions of the organization and we will try to specify the space left to individuals.

So, some definitions of the organizations underline the structural aspects and the reali-

zation of goals, others talk about order (Probst, 1994), "restricting framework" (Desreumaux, 1996). However, some authors also talk about "relations of authority" (Buchanan and Huczynski, 2004), interactions, exchanges, systems, self-organization (Probst, 1994). Buchanan and Huczynski mention the development of creative talents, the development of stimulation, and the development of multiple points of view. Daft (2004) refers to the uncertainty of the environment and the satisfaction of the stakeholders, Weick (2001) refers to the interpretations of the actors.

So the actors are not ignored in these definitions, whereas the concepts of autonomy and freedom are not mentioned since they are not considered the most important concepts.

What about the theories? Each theory presents a model, a representation of the reality, a choice of the most important elements in coherence with the representation. We present below the important points of the theories.

Theories of organizations

We introduced several theories (Robert, 2007). The question here is to specify the space they leave to individuals and to possibilities of autonomy.

Firstly, the theories of the "scientific organization of the work" were often criticized because they gave too little space for the actors. However, Taylor insists on the importance of the motivation through the increase in salaries to motivate employees to accept

changes. His purpose is the individualization of salaries. Taylor rejects the idea that the workers are less clever and have less judgment than the graduates. Nevertheless, the organization of the work allocates everyone to his place and makes the more optimal way of working possible. Ford, for his part, defines also an organization of work (the production line work), to which each has to adapt. He recognizes also the importance of the retribution to motivate employees (Robert, 2007, p.50). He asks the workers to intervene and make proposals to improvement (De Coster, 1987, p.69).

Fayol introduces the subordination specific interests in addition to general interest, the payment as a source of motivation, equity, the initiative in the conception and the execution in the general principles of administration. Max Weber, at the level of the administration, gives, in the definition of "social activity", a role to individuals, the one that gives meaning to the activity and that makes it exist. It is also essential to conceive a just and fair system (Robert, p.60)..

The "approach of human relations" underlines the importance of the motivation, the norms of the group, the involvement. The theories of motivation and involvement show the necessity of meeting the needs of individuals in order, for the individuals, to better answer the goals of the organization, to better get involved.

Several theories question the rationality of recognizing the existence of a "limited rationality" and the fact that individuals make more

satisfactory and possible choices (March and Simon, 1971).

The company has to adapt itself to the factors of contingency, the idea of a rational organization conceived as an applicable model to all the collapsed situations. The contingency theory accepts some different organizations, some are more adapted to one situation, others to other situations;

The "theory of development of organizations" attaches significance to teams, interactions, participation of the personnel, motivation, and training in order to change and to develop organizations.

The organizations depend more on the rules that they give to themselves than on the economic situation at the market. Adaptation and decision process depends on the competencies of the organisation. This underlines the importance of the concept of institution (Bernoux, 2002).

Other approaches insist on political aspects, relations of power. According to Friedberg (1993), it means the recognition of the diversity of organizations and the role of individuals, their logic. The "virtuous circle in organization" shows the weakness of the bureaucratic systems. We see that individuals take informal initiatives. (Crozier and Friedberg, 1977).

The "French theory of translation" asks to adopt the point of view of the other, to find a common language and to favour changes.

The "theory of conventions" identifies different types of logic, negotiated compromises beyond those types of logic.

The "theory of the regulation" (Reynaud, 1988) recognizes two types of regulation: autonomy (of the workgroup) and the control (from actors outside the workgroup). The result is a compromise between the two.

In the approach of the configurations Mintzberg (1982) pays more attention to the ad hoc(ratic) configuration or to the political configuration of the capacity of innovation or to the conflict. In the ad hoc(ratic) configuration as in the project organisation, people organize their work and control the results. In the political configuration, people try to obtain resources and organize the work. The means of coordination as the standardization of the values show that the value of autonomy can exist but if there is standardization and limits imposed by the company, there is negative freedom. So some theories accept the conflict and recognize the role of the actors and we can ask the question of the existence of the organization without one dominant culture, without acceptance of the norms, without debate and participation to find agreements.

Therefore, we can easily notice that it is difficult for the theories of organizations to ignore individuals totally. Even the determinist theories can not totally ignore the situation of the individual who gets determined.

If the role of the individuals is recognized, it is not always a question of autonomy and initiative. In contrast to autonomy, the question of control seems to be more usual and commonly asked. Each theory of the organization expects and can be associated with one form of control.

Contingency approach

The question of the autonomy is linked to the choice of a theory of organization and also to the discovery in each model of organization proposed the existence of formal or informal practices, leaving place for control but also always for participation. These kinds of formal or informal practices can be present in each theory to varying degrees. It depends on contingent dimensions.

The type of organization is contingent. Each organization exists in given limits and each organization may allow formal or informal expression in given limits. The existence of autonomy and freedom within each type of organization is also contingent.

The differences of degree of autonomy in the organizations depend on structural, cultural and individuals aspects. We must be very careful in generalizing our analysis.

In fact, we must take into account the specific contexts (Alvesson, 2003, p.1456). There is every reason to acknowledge great variation in work situations, social relations and ideologies of managers in different functions, countries, organizations, industries, and on different levels (Alvesson, 2003, p.1456).

The importance of autonomy and freedom are conditioned by the strategy of the organization, its strategic objectives, by the culture and the construct of identities. Culture has an impact on identities at work (Sainsaulieu, 1996). People's actions contribute to the construction of the rules and to the representations of work.

These rules and representations construct the identities (Sainsaulieu, 1996). The representation of the freedom has an effect on the practice of human resources (d'Iribarne, 2003).

The study of the organization by project underlines the importance of adopting another logic than the binary logic autonomy/control (Lapayre, p.6). The Management by Project refers to a logic of the paradox. Some authors, cited by Lapayre, state that it is important to link the two dimensions: autonomy and control. Each is important for the other. Lapayre explains the specificity of the Management by Project by two steps. Firstly, there are the necessity of creativity and the importance of autonomy in order to have a lot of creativity (Alter). The second step is to adapt the importance of the control. This importance varies at each level, and it depends on the progression of the project. The possibilities to make errors, the necessity of auto-control do not imply necessary participation and emancipation. Autonomy or participation would be new factors of subordination of the workers, and they are emphasized. (Lapayre, 2009, p.12). This refers to the "negative freedom" presented before.

Autonomy and control seem important in improving morale and motivation (Feldman, 1989), p.100). At this point, Trevelyan (2001) speaks of "the paradox of autonomy". In the context of scientific research, autonomy does not increase motivation, but motivation is intrinsic and not necessarily linked with leadership. In other sectors, autonomy can increase motivation. The autonomy allows more

satisfaction. But, the question of the autonomy is complex, some studies explain that too much autonomy without contact and input is not the best solution. In this context, the leadership is essential for explaining the autonomy in the work group. It is important to have participating and involved leadership. Leadership must always be related to a specific context. (Bryman et al. 1996).

Leadership and organization

We can identify three types of leadership with Hawkins (Hawkins and al.): the "engaging leadership", the "involving leadership" and the "goal oriented leadership" (Hawkins, Dulewicz, 2009, p. 255). This study underlines that the "engaging leaders" or "transformational leaders" are associated with committed followers. There is also a relation between a leader's performance and a committed follower.

From this point of view, we can think that the participation is an important point (Kahai, Sosik and Avolio, 2004). The efficacy of one style of leadership depends on the structure of the problems. "When dealing with semi-structured problems, a leader should display a higher level of participation". "This participation, in turn, improves performance by enabling a more thorough consideration of ideas... participative leadership increases the self-efficacy to deal with lack of structure" (Kahai, Sosik, Avolio, 2004, p.97). This self-efficacy can be associated with more autonomy and more positive freedom.

When we have a structured problem, the directive leadership is more accepted. We can suggest that, in this case, the "negative freedom" is more important. We have autonomy in the limits that the leader gives us.

"As problem structure increases, participants have a more favourable attitude toward a directive leader and are motivated to participate because the leader's directives enable participants to stay focused on a limited set of interpretations that can be imposed on a structured problem. Performance improves with participation, as noted above" "(Kahai, Sosik, Avolio, 1997, p. 97).

Rose Trevelyan presents the "boundary leadership" that associates with the directive style (Trevelyan, 1998). This leadership associates with the directive leadership and is a softer style of leadership which takes individuals better into account. "This model of leadership promotes motivation, creativity and performance...while also sustaining support, managerial control and expert input" (Ibidem, p. 38).

The equilibrium between autonomy and control, and the flexibility of the management are essential as we see concerning changes in today's organizations. The question is complex. The question of the decentralization of activities, for example, is not always associated with more participation or decision-making. They are different and new forms of control. In the case of decentralization, trust between the leader and subordinates is very important. The

trust is also a new form of control (Lapayre, 2009, p.12). This is the second example of negative freedom.

Autonomy and freedom left to individuals can be evaluated at the level of corporate culture and by the daily practices and the consideration of the "stakeholders".

Consequences and social responsibility

The definitions and the theories of the organizations recognize the rules of the individuals but not necessarily autonomy and freedom. Some theories underline the rule of the actors, the political aspects of the organizations and more generally the informal aspects of the organizations.

The autonomy as "informed autonomy" makes distinction between system and environment. The actors contribute to the identity of the system. This identity makes the autonomy of the system. The actors influence the environment and contribute to the survival and the adaptation of the system.

The identity is important; for example, for displaying emotions. But, identity and control are linked.

Beyond the types of organization, the definition of the stakeholders, and the existence of formal and informal deliberative practices are to be looked for. It depends on an interpretive concept of culture.

The relations with the suppliers and with the clients can not respect the formal rules. For example, in a small company which has

one label, it is important to inform the clients about the label. But, in fact, the seller decides whether they speak about the label or not. The clients are open for the idea, if the seller mentions the label, and the clients seem to oppose, if the seller does not speak about the label. The seller interprets the situation and either applies the rule or not.

The importance of the control depends on the organizational culture and on the strategy. These dimensions depend on the internal and external context.

So in an ICT company, it is important to give autonomy and to motivate in order to improve creativity. In another organization with a lot of procedures and rules of work defined strictly, the situation will be different.

It is also important that the stakeholders are free to participate in the decision-making and are free to give their opinions.

There is a gap between theory and practice in the application of corporate social responsibility. It is important to have a strong leader to improve the social responsibility in the company. The opinion of the leader about the importance of corporate social responsibility depends on the strategy and on the conditions of the market (Rondinelli, 2007)

In conclusion

The definition and the theories of organizations recognize the rules of the individuals but not necessarily autonomy and freedom. Some theories underline the rule of actors, the

political aspects of the organizations and, more generally, the informal aspects in the organizations.

The autonomy as "informed autonomy" makes distinction between system and environment. The actors contribute to the identity of the system. This identity makes and allows the autonomy of the system. The actors influence the environment and contribute to the survival and adaptation of the system.

The identity is important, for example, for displaying emotions. But, identity and control are linked. The autonomy and the participation are elements of control in new forms of organizations.

The autonomy and the question of freedom are the questions of degree and of contingency. The difference of degree of autonomy depends on strategic, structural, cultural and individual aspects. We must take the specific contexts and their great variation in the work situations into account. In some contexts, the first step is to create ideas? For that, it is important to have autonomy. The second step is auto control. These two are important in specific limits. There we can speak about "negative freedom".

We can speak about "the paradox of autonomy". The autonomy does not always improve the motivation. It depends on the context. The autonomy allows motivation but too much autonomy is not always good. Then, the role of the leader is essential.

The role of leadership depends on the structure of the problem. To find the equilibrium, the "boundary leadership" might be a solution.

This leadership style associates with directive leadership and more with soft leadership.

The role of the leadership is essential in organizing, for example, autonomy, decentralization, debates, trust and communication with

the stakeholders. The communication with the stakeholders is a good opportunity to improve autonomy and positive freedom of the stakeholders. The leadership plays an important role.

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