IGUANA LEARNING PROGRAMME CORE TEXT

MODULE	Organisational Intelligence
SUB-MODULE	Normalisation
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About this Document

This document accompanies the powerpoint presentation 'Normalisation Overview'. It provides a more detailed explanation of the slides that make up the presentation. The document structure and content follows the numbering and sequence of the slides in the presentation.

What is Normalisation?

Normalisation is about how schools ensure their members comply with the school's vision, norms and rules. By doing this, schools play an important wider role in how societies at large ensure that citizens comply with society's rules and norms. Normalisation is both good and bad. On the one hand, without rules there is chaos. On the other, without rule-breaking, there is stagnation. The trick is to find a balance between stability and innovation.

Schools play a key role in socialising their members to comply with society's norms and rules. Compliance is rewarded and deviation from norms and rules is punished. It follows that schools can also play an important role in supporting their members to rebel against these established conventions so that they come up with new ways of doing things.

Explanations of how compliance works

There are four broad perspectives on compliance. Each draws on different philosophical and methodological positions and interpretations. The classical sociological perspective – represented by Max Weber – focuses on the ways in which people become socialised. The interactionists – a good example being Erving Goffman – were interested in how rules develop through human interaction and everyday life.

The systems psychodynamic approach – Emery and Trist – explores how organisations act as 'defences against anxiety'. They provide protection for their members in exchange for conformity. The work of Michel Foucault is a good example of the use of 'postmodern critical theory' to explain how 'power shapes everything and everyone'. These four perspectives each provide insights into how normalisation and compliance operate in the school.

The sociological perspective: Max Weber

The German sociologist Max Weber, who is often cited, along with Emile Durkheim and Karl Marx, as one of the founders of sociology was the first to explore how social authority works. He identified three main types of authority, each of which is associated with a distinctive form of 'domination'. Charismatic authority is vested in individual leaders who gain allegiance through force of personality. Traditional authority is derived from long-standing traditions and customs that are maintained from generation to generation. Legal authority is based on the development and implementation of rational structures and processes to control social relations, and these are given legitimacy through legal structures. Historically, societies move towards this latter mode of domination and authority, and as a result, the social world becomes increasingly dominated by bureaucratic organisation. The upside of this historical tendency towards rationalisation and bureaucratic organisation is liberation for humans from the tyranny of irrational customs and despotic controls. The downside is an increasing dehumanisation of individuals, as they become 'cogs in the machine'. Weber considered education to be an important mechanism for the establishment of social stratification and status systems and for the reproduction and maintenance of such systems. Social stratification is determined by the interaction of three dynamics: class, status and power. All

three of these components will in turn be shaped by the extent to which an individual has access to educational opportunities. This position was later developed extensively in 'social capital' theory, particularly by Bourdieu, who argued that people use strategies to operate in their 'fields' to distinguish themselves from other groups and place themselves in positions that maximize their utilisation and exploitation of capital, particularly learning capital.

Symbolic interactionism

Symbolic interactionists argued that individuals, and society itself, are created through human interaction. Through social interaction, humans learn to understand, interpret and apply the meanings and symbols that allow them to function as social animals.

Harold Garfinkel suggested that social order is constructed through 'reflexivity'. People apply social rules that are 'taken for granted' and are seen as 'factual' when in reality these rules are constructed through what people do and say. To take an example, a typical conversation between a parent and teenager can exhibit very little surface rules and protocols but demonstrates nonetheless a complex sub-texture of taken for granted assumptions and shared meanings, as in: 'Where are you going?' (Parent) 'Out'. (Teenager). Irving Goffman, one of the most influential members of the symbolic interactionist movement, was interested in how roles are constructed through everyday life. Using the metaphor of the theatre, and the protocols of drama, Goffman demonstrated that social behaviour is scripted according to whether individuals are interacting in a 'front-stage' situation – where acceptable behaviours have already been scripted – or in a 'back-stage' situation, in which behaviours have not been scripted but are improvised between the different actors involved. The interplay between front and backstage behaviour is determined by the nature of the environment in which interaction happens. The more institutionalised the environment, the less opportunity there is for improvised behaviours. In 'totalising institutions', like asylums or boarding schools, all aspects of life are conducted in the glare of the front stage. Conventional schools do not exert the same degree of 'totalising authority' on their members, but they do tend to impose rules and behaviour codes that are highly scripted.

Schools, like all organisations, need members to conform. They achieve this through applying a range of compliance strategies: by controlling the space and architecture in which the organisation operates; by scripting the expected behaviours the organisation's members are expected to conform to, and by encouraging their members to apply pressure on their fellow members to comply with expected behaviours. The role of the group is extremely important in exerting pressure to comply. A well-known experiment carried out by Solomon Asch in the 1950's showed how powerful peer pressure can be in getting group members to comply with the attitudes and behaviours endorsed by the group. A group of college students were asked to participate in a simple task to explore how perception operates. In reality, all but one of the participants were actors. The real focus of the experiment was to explore the influence the group would have on the remaining student's perception. What happened was that the remaining students, across a large number of trials, consistently adjusted their responses to conform to the collective response demonstrated by the group – even though the group response was clearly illogical and 'wrong'. Another experiment by Stanley Milgram, explored the extremes of compliance behaviour, as Milgram tried to understand how apparently 'normal' soldiers and civilians could collude in the extermination atrocities perpetrated by the Third Reich. In the guise of an experiment on learning, Milgram showed how, by situating people in a highly institutionalised setting, and by populating that

setting with authority figures and authority symbols (experimenters wearing white coats), normal individuals could administer what they thought were potentially lethal electric shocks to other humans when they gave the wrong answer to a question.

The psychodynamic perspective – organisations as defences against anxiety

Systems Psychodynamic theory – developed primarily by the Tavistock Institute in the 1950's and 60's – explores how unconscious processes work within the organisational environment. A key idea in this perspective is that organisations typically act as 'defences against anxiety'

On the one hand, the 'conscious' organisational mode involves the work group and its leadership in defining explicit tasks; systems of organisation; rational rules; conflict mechanisms; management of change. However, people also bring into the work group unconscious dynamics that are rooted in their childhood experience - particularly the loss of boundaries children experience in the transition from childhood to adulthood. In this 'unconscious mode', people and their organisations will create and apply strategies to reduce anxieties and to resist change. This is because the organisation, and the work group, replaces the boundaries lost in childhood. It provides an environment that protects them from anxieties and provides a definition of status – the location of the 'me' in relation to the 'not me'. Part of the price members of the organisation pay to get this protection is compliance with its norms and rules. When these norms and rules change – for example when an innovation is introduced into how the organisation operates – the members of the organisation will resist this change, because change creates anxiety. The resistance strategies adopted by the members include 'fight/flight' - resisting or retreating from change (for example by searching for a scapegoat to blame); dependency (for example searching for an 'omnipotent leader'); 'splitting and pairing' (for example fragmenting into sub-groups in the hope that new alliances will produce a new leader); 'mirroring'– resisting change by adopting the dysfunctional behaviours of clients. Cardona (1999) in studies of how staff in drugs and mental health services operate describes how teams 'work as a sponge' absorbing and soaking up the central dynamics which operate within their client group, often without realising that this is happening. When faced with the anxiety of organisational restructuring, the staff unconsciously sabotaged the intended change by mirroring the behaviours of their clients. Schools also operate in these ways. On the one hand schools are defences against anxiety. But on the other, the behavioural norms and rules they adopt to manage anxiety can act as barriers to innovation and change.

Governmentality

The French philosopher and sociologist Michel Foucault argued that all history is the history of power and how power manifests itself in the control and discipline of humans. In turn, the history of government reflects an unremitting and relentless process of striving to achieve complete control – the 'totalisation' of society.

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Governments try to achieve total control by applying 'techniques of disciplinarity'. These techniques include 'dividing practices' and 'scientific classification' – the appropriation of knowledge by government; its separation from everyday life, and the use of knowledge to examine, classify, control and punish in order to accomplish the 'subjectification' of people, their complete subordination to authority. Foucault considered the school to be a primary mechanism for the application of techniques of disciplinarity. In Foucault's view, schools are a form of 'panopticon' – a form of architecture built for surveillance, discipline and punishment. Schooling is a process whereby people are trained into the acceptance of being controlled in their subsequent lives, with the aid of techniques of disciplinarity like curricula, uniforms and examinations. In later work, Foucault focused more on what he called 'governmentality' - the strategies, techniques and practices by which a society is made governable. Governmentality allows the institutions which control power in society to retain their 'totalising force' whilst delegating the application of techniques of disciplinarity to intermediaries and down to individuals themselves. In this perspective, schools are a powerful agency for 'the shaping of conduct in the hope of producing certain desired effects and averting certain undesired ones'. One of the techniques schools use to regulate desired and undesired conduct is 'responsibilisation'. This involves the construction of an idealised form of conduct, adherence to which can be rewarded and deviation from which can be punished. Schools try to inculcate values like 'responsibility' in their students, and by doing so, they train their students to become 'self-assessors' and 'self-regulators'. This is an important step in the process of 'normalisation' since the individual who seeks to achieve normality will do so by constantly measuring their behaviour and performance against accepted yardsticks, and by working to control their conduct, under the guidance of others, to ensure that these norms are inculcated into others with whom the individual interacts. The problem with self-regulation and responsibilisation, the argument goes, is that the student's capacity for creativity, thinking out the box and exploring other ways of doing things is constantly undermined.

New ideas in normalisation: mirror neuron theory
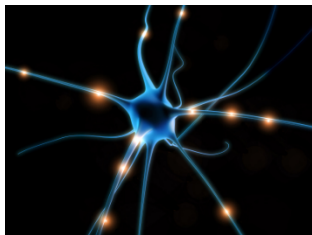
In 1992 Giacomo Rizzolati and a team of neuroscientists at Parma University discovered what later became termed 'mirror neurons' in macaque monkeys. These are brain cells that triggered when the monkey performed an action, like picking up a peanut. But they also triggered when the monkey saw a human picking up a peanut.

By 2010, a meta-analysis of over 100 brain imaging studies had confirmed mirroring activity in parts of the human brain where, in monkeys, mirror neurons are known to be located. Work on mirror neurons has profound implications for how we understand learning. What is suggests is that learning relies on imitation; that it is social and collaborative, rather than individuated; that it involves empathy; that, on the one hand, it creates the glue for social cohesion and social capital, but that, on the other, it can reinforce stigmatisation and prejudice. Mirror neurons may explain not only how we come to learn and to understand others, but how humans acquired new skills in social organization, tool use, and language that made human culture possible. Recent experiments have shown that mirror neurons help us share others' experience as reflected in their expressions, providing a biological basis for empathy. The dark side of mirror neurons is also beginning to be explored. The evidence suggests that the acquisition of scripts, beliefs, and schemas about the world through

imitation and inference – a process involving mirror neurons - is the most important contributor to the replication of violence in the long term. Other research on how mimicry in humans reflects social cues highlights how mirror neurons work to reinforce a tendency to like people who act like us. People are more likely to mimic a member of the same ethnic group, less likely to mimic a stigmatized person who is disfigured, and less likely to mimic members of a group that is viewed with prejudice. This undermines traditional conceptions of learning as the bedrock of morality, and conceptions of learning as a key determinant of an ethical, just society. What the research suggests is the possibility that schools could act as incubators for the maintenance of compliant behaviours rather than laboratories for innovation and progress.

New ideas in normalisation: memetic theory

The concept of the 'meme' was first coined by Richard Dawkins. The meme is analogous to the gene in that it is seen as the 'replicator' responsible for cultural transmission. Like the gene it is 'selfish', and pre-programmed to spread itself regardless of whether it has positive or negative effects on its human hosts.

Memes, it is argued, are the 'learning vehicles' for virtually all social, economic and cultural phenomena, marking the shift from hunter-gathering to farming; framing scientific revolutions; fuelling the growth and spread of religion; promoting advances in engineering and architecture; creating musical genres, social fads, fashions and political beliefs. Like mirror neuron theory, memetic theory has profound implications for how we look at learning and how we understand the nature and role of schools. If it is true that successful memes are those which are capable of replicating ideas and knowledge, then it follows that that much of what we hold true about how knowledge is rational, progressive and rooted in learning is untenable. It is possible that much of what we think of as knowledge that is derived from thought and reflection is in reality the product of selfish, replicant memes that are simply more successful in attaining purchase in consciousness and culture than other competing memes. In this context, educational enterprises like the school can be seen as storehouses or repositories in which successful memes can replicate and proliferate. As with the argument around mirror neurons and learning, this suggests that schools are good at reinforcing orthodoxy and not good at nurturing innovation. This is increasingly true as the education system begins more and more to adopt social media in teaching practice, since social networking technologies like Facebook offer unprecedented opportunities for memetic proliferation.

Living with normalisation
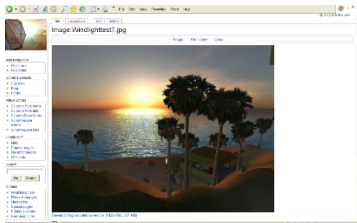
So is 'normalisation' good or bad for the school? The answer is – neither. Normalisation is part of the very nature of education, and of the educational enterprise. As has been shown, normalisation defines a process that helps to create stability and order, and helps to define boundaries. These are important attributes for a successful and innovative school.

But it's also clear that

normalisation is a powerful agent of control and plays an important role in supressing new ideas and new innovation. The challenge for schools, therefore, is to try to manage these two polarities so the net result is to promote growth and well-being. This is not possible without risk-taking and without trying out what Foucault called 'marginal practices' – in other words thinking outside the box. The SCHOME project shows one attempt to do this. Schome (school-home) was a radical experiment in education that tried to make a bridge between the school ad the home. Originally aimed at so-called 'gifted' young people who had trouble fitting in with the routines of conventional school life, Schome used the virtual world platform 'Second Life' to create a completely on-line learning environment inhabited by avatars. Students were able to complete their history assignments with the aid of trips to a computer-enhanced ancient Egypt. The success of the experiment encouraged the expansion of the programme to include students with other profiles – for example students presenting with attention disorders; young people on the dyslexia and autism spectrum and, eventually, students who had been excluded from school. An important dimension of the Schome experiment was that it offered a rare opportunity to explore different kinds of governance, rule-making and rule-breaking. As a result, the programme experimented with a number of organisational formats and forms of interaction- but all were based around a central concept of treating 'students' and 'teachers' as 'co-producers of knowledge'. This removed the hierarchical power structures of conventional schools and, the evidence suggests, led to greater creativity and innovation in teaching and learning practice.