

A CRITICAL REVIEW OF JEFFREY PFEFFER'S THESIS ON PERSPECTIVES ON ACTION, LEVELS OF ANALYSIS AND THEORIES OF ORGANISATION

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ABSTRACT

Two of the important issues that dominate contemporary organisation theory discourse have to do with how the organisation is conceived and how theorists view the issues associated with theory and its generation in organisational studies. In this paper we review and albeit critique the two major perspectives in organisational theorizing viz. perspectives on action and levels/units of analysis, including an examination of the assumptions about methodology which lie behind the researcher's conception of valid theory. The paper examines the place of the theoretic and contextual issues in organisational studies. Our analysis of these issues leads to the conclusion that the extent to which these two approaches (perspectives of action and levels/units of analysis) are appropriately and complementarily applied will account for the richness in organisation research outcomes.

Keywords: Perspective on Action, Level of Analysis, Theory, Behaviour

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, much of man's activities have been undertaken through the vehicle of organisations. Haralambos and Heald (1980: 278), referring to the statement of the American sociologist Amitai Etzioni that the American society is an organisational society, recount that:

we are born in hospitals, educated in schools, employed in business firms and government agencies, we join trade unions and professional associations and are laid to rest in churches. In sickness and in health, at work and at play, life in modern industrial society is increasingly conducted in organisational settings.

This is a reflection of the indispensability of organisations in human affairs. Despite the huge dependence on organisations for virtually all aspects of man's everyday living, scholars are yet to arrive at a consensus in organisational theory. Rather the ongoing debate on the 'right' way of conceiving the organisation has heightened with attendant increase in themes and perspectives of knowledge development within the organisation theory domain. This situation has given rise to what Koontz (1961) refer to as a 'theory jungle'. Iterating this view, Pfeffer (1982: 1) opines 'that the domain of organisation theory is coming to resemble more of a weed patch than a well-tended garden'. In the same vein Westwood and Clegg (2001:2) is of the view that:

While organisation studies has a relatively short history, characterised by diversity and a degree of fragmentation, and its text are multitudinous and various not only with respect to content but also with respect to the theoretical and methodological stances adopted, it can be seen to comprise many partially overlapping discourses...

Various theories that reflect the different ways that people approach and analyze organisational processes and the problem of behaviour in organisations have emerged over time and this explains the patchy nature of the 'garden'. Man is a complex being and his capacity for making various choices and decisions and solving problems within the organisation in unique ways is made possible by his superior ability to inquire about, learn from, and make input to his social world. Haralambos and Heald (1980) iterate that more than other species, man relies for his survival on behaviour patterns which are learned. This they explain is because man's genetic code unlike other species that rely on instinct, does not contain specific instructions to behave in a particular way. Inquiry about the organisation which is an integral part of man's social world has therefore been characterised by the complex nature of man's knowledge generation and accumulation modes in explaining

phenomena, ascribing meaning to things and understanding reality. The insatiable desire for greater understanding of the organisation is informed by the need to unravel the 'mystery' of organisational functioning which is somewhat a mirage to practitioners.

This paper is a review of the various theories of organisation that project different perspectives of organisational reality. The paper examines the theoretic and contextual issues that shape understanding of the organisation as chronicled by Pfeffer (1982). We evaluate the impact of these issues on and implications for organisations and the study of organisations. This is thus a review of organisational behaviour/theory. Pfeffer (1982) treats organisational behaviour and organisational theory as a seamless discipline. For the purpose of this review, we shall use organization theory and organisational behaviour interchangeably as chronicled in the book *Organisations and Organisation Theory*. Our objective is to explicate the critical issue of what perspective to choose in interpreting organisation theory. We begin by addressing our minds to theory development in organisation theory.

Theory Development in Organisation Theory

Knowledge of the basic principles and techniques of management can have a tremendous impact upon its practice, clarifying and improving it (Koontz, O'Donnel & Weihrich, 1980). *Organisations and Organisation Theory* by Pfeffer (1982) provides a comprehensive analysis of the origin and evolution of organisation theory as a body of knowledge or better still, a distinct discipline to aid understanding and practice. The importance of theory in any discipline cannot be over emphasised as it helps shape people's thought on how to percive issues within the context of the discipline. Within the relatively short span of its articulation as a distinct discipline, several theories have emerged to aid our understanding of how organisations function.

A theory according to Haralambus and Heald (1980) is a set of ideas, which provide an explanation for something. It is a perspective with which people make sense of their world experiences and it often takes the form of coherent group of assumptions put forth to explain the relationship between two or more observable facts. Theories are perspectives with which people make sense of their world experiences. Theories are important in organisational studies because they provide a stable focus for understanding as well as criteria for determining what is relevant in communicating efficiently about what goes on in organisations. With theories, learning about various aspects of human organisations is enhanced and practitioners are provided with alternative ways of looking at the organisation as well as the consequences of adopting alternative beliefs.

Theories and the process of their development are therefore very crucial in understanding organisations and since practitioners must necessarily act on theory, it is important to have a means of judging the relative value of theories offered (Dale, 1978). Consequently, Blunt (1983) iterates this view with the instructive warning that an important concern for any discipline is the confidence that can be placed in the research findings which it generates. In this vein, Pfeffer (1982) x-rays the various paradigmatic stances and the attendant methodological underpinnings in organisational theorizing. Special emphasis is particularly laid on the fundamental issues that serve as platforms for assessing theories. According to Westwood and Stewart (2000), for Pfeffer the discourse on organisation disperses around a twin problematic of levels of analysis and approaches to action. The rest of this review focuses on this twin problematic viz, perspectives on action and levels/units of analysis, and the key assumptions and implications presented by these models for organisation theorizing. Our aim is not necessarily to review literature on the several organisation theories but to rather explicate the theoretic underpinnings of these theories.

Perspectives on Action in Organisational Studies

Cognition and action are two principal aspects of organisational life. The former indicates the thought process while the latter gives expression to this process through behaviour manifestations, and these two aspects are considered very critical for characterizing organisational theory. Falconer and Mackay (1999) posit that researchers need to be clear in their minds about their own beliefs regarding the nature of the phenomenon under investigation and their relationship to it as this will form their paradigm. Pfeffer (1982) points out that the theoretic issues that determine one's paradigmatic stance include among others, one's perspectives on action. Westwood and Clegg (2000) are of the view that this is concerned with the determination of action and is partly a question of causality. Ahiauzu and Asawo (2016) extend this view by positing that explaining social phenomena requires an understanding of the distinction between human action and social action. He opines that while in human action, it is the purposive aspect of behaviour not its physical aspects that constitute the unity of an action, social action incorporates the agent's subjective awareness of the expectations of members of his role-set at any given time.

Perspectives on action relates directly to human nature which is informed by relationship between human beings and their environment (Ahiauzu, 2006). Confirming this view, Pfeffer (1982: 5) posits that:

...distinction among perspectives on action is similar

to that advanced by other writers. Van de Ven and Astley (1981: 429) distinguish among theories based on the emphasis placed on “deterministic versus voluntaristic assumptions about human nature.” Thus, they distinguish between “the view that human beings and their institutions are determined by exogenous forces” and the position that human action and institutions “are autonomously chosen and created by human beings ...”

Corroborating these views, Williams (1998) states explicitly that assumptions about human nature are deterministic or voluntarist. Determinism as an assumption on human nature as can be deduced above holds that human behaviour is a product of its environment while voluntarism regard human behaviour as being the product of free will (Blunt, 1983). Determinism holds therefore that people merely helplessly respond to situations in the external world and possess no power to alter the happenings around them. Contrary to this view, voluntarism believes that the individual creates his own environment (Putnam, 1983). In other words nothing happens without the express involvement and action of man who expresses autonomy over his environment.

These philosophical strands in the assumption about human nature are made explicit in Pfeffer's (1982) dimensions to perspectives on action viz: action seen as purposive, boundedly rational and goal directed; action seen as externally constrained; and action being random and dependent on an emergent process. For, according to Westwood and Clegg (2003 p.21) the “first category of action is a form of voluntarism in which action is a function of rational, purposive, goal-seeking behaviour”. They opine further that “the second is a form of determinism under which action is shaped by the external context”. The third, they state, “is a form of social constructionism wherein action emerges as people interact and locate and constitute meaning”.

Through these dimensions, Pfeffer (1982) differentiates theories on how they consider action in the organisation. The first of these three dimensions which has dominated theories of organisation is akin to voluntarism and in the analysis of social action is teleological. This dimension of action as rational and foresightful holds the view that choice precedes action and is directed toward goals. But rationality which is cardinal to this dimension though rather ambiguous is often interpreted as bounded rationality. Foss (2001, p.1) states that 'few concepts in social science come with such a number of interpretations, connotations and diverse modelling efforts as bounded rationality'. The common denominator in these

different interpretations is the reasoning that man is intendedly rational and this attribute is transferred to the decision-making process by introducing the element of choice into the process. Justifying the importance attached to this dimension, Pfeffer (1982) states that the element of conscious, foresightful action reasonably autonomously constructed to achieve some goal or value is a critical distinguishing component of organisation theories. This dimension however gives room for rationalizing as one can usually, after the fact, develop a set of choice preferences and rationality to explain almost any action, whether right or wrong. The assumptions of perfect knowledge and reasoning which results in optimisation as supposed by this perspective on action is also faulty as individuals have limited cognitive capabilities which makes it imperative to 'satisfice' rather than optimize (Simon, 1957). March and Simon (1958) iterate the cognitive limits of rationality by pointing out that human capacity to process information and the capacity for choices and alternatives are limited. Examples of theories that are built around rationality include expectancy theory, path-goal theory, goal-setting theory, needs theory, structural contingency theory, market failure theory and the Marxist approaches.

Proponents of external constraint which is the second dimension aver that action is contingent on the external influences confronting the agent. Pfeffer (1982) is of the view that this dimension is tantamount to "situationism" in psychology and presupposes that action is determined by the nature and degree of influence exerted by the contingencies on the agent. This dimension unlike the purposive dimension emphasizes less on the internal individual or organisational factors such as values, needs, and personalities but rather views external constraints as the main determinants of behaviour manifestations in organisations. In this perspective therefore, actors are constrained and even determined by externalities. These external forces and situations which are presumed to be the determinants of action are therefore the bases for rationality. In this regard, environmental variable rather than the organisation-specific issues become the focus of research. A number of management theories have been built around this dimension and they include population ecology, operant conditioning, role theory and social information processing.

The emergent process view of action which is the final dimension of the perspective on action leans neither towards the purposive nor the external constraint dimensions. In other words, it sees action as neither rational (which is the focus in purposive dimension) nor deterministic (which is the focus of the external constraint dimension). In the place of these views, the emergent process dimension sees, action as random and unfolding. The emphasis in this dimension is on the

sequence of activities in organisations and as it is somewhat impossible to predict future events even when actors and their intentions are understood, this dimension holds that rationality and understanding of the environment constraints is used to explain “history” (Pfeffer, 1982). Some of the theories which are built around this dimension include, decision process theory and cognitive perspectives on organisation.

Differences in Practice and Methodology

Pfeffer's comprehensive survey of organisational theories reveals heterogeneity of paradigms. This poses a great challenge for present day research which must identify and build on the philosophical and methodological foundations supposedly laid by early theorists. An important theoretic consideration that impacts the contemporary social science research process is the question of which of the differing research paradigms underpin one's research approach? The determination of one's research paradigmatic stance is however premised on certain important philosophical issues that confront every researcher. Falconer and Mackay (1999) posit that researchers need to be clear in their minds about their own beliefs regarding the nature of the phenomenon under investigation and their relationship to it as this will form their paradigm. These philosophical issues that determine one's paradigmatic stance include assumptions about ontology, epistemology, human nature and methodology. Stressing the importance of epistemology and ontology Grix (2002: 176) argues that:

- ... a clear and transparent knowledge of the ontological and epistemological assumptions that underpin research is necessary in order:
- 1) to understand the interrelationship of the key components of research (including methodology and methods);
 - 2) to avoid confusion when discussing theoretical debates and approaches to social phenomena; and
 - 3) to be able to recognize others', and defend our position.

Falconer and Mackay (1999) assert that consistency in research approach is attained when the epistemology, theory of human nature and methodology are consistent with the underlying ontological assumptions of the social world. Clarity about methodology which is tantamount to clarity in the logic of scientific enquiry and particularly with investigating the potentialities and limitations of particular techniques or procedures (Grix, 2002) is important for understanding the theories

surveyed by Pfeffer. Since methodology is the science of finding out and as posited by Saunders et al (2003) is the theory of how research should be undertaken, organisational practice relies very much on the validity of research findings. The two methodological strands (nomothetic and the ideographic methodologies) are adopted on the basis of researchers' philosophical standpoints. Gill and Johnson (1991: 126) posit that:

If we accept the philosophical assumptions of positivism and its consequent epistemological prescriptions, we are invariably drawn towards the exclusive utilisation of nomothetic methodology. Conversely, if our philosophical orientation is interpretive the ensuing epistemological mandate impels us towards a more ideographic methodology...

Researchers in either of the two distinct strands logically employ these different methodologies that best reflect their ontological and epistemological positions as well as their views about human nature. While the positivists are inclined to scientific rigor and therefore largely depend on quantitative data, the subjectivists are akin to adopting qualitative research that focus more on contextual data.

Over the years, interest in developing philosophical accounts of scientific knowledge that incorporate the social dimensions of scientific practice has been on the increase. This is in response to the contention of social scientists who argue contrary to the view that the social sciences are a straightforward extension of already developed scientific approaches in ontology and epistemology. Gill and Johnson (1991) identify the argument of this group as the belief that the reason for limited success in management science research for instance, is due to the application of scientific methodology to real-world, essentially social problems. Consequently, we affirm using Pfeffer's survey of the several organisation theories as a basis that while there are theorists who are inclined towards science with its ultimate rationality, there are others who diverge quite considerably and rather advocate for normative social concerns in organisational research. This is generally reflected in the research designs and particularly in the measurement device adopted in undertaking various organisation studies.

The three dimensions or perspectives of action viz. rationality, external constraint and emergent process view, all have different ways of understanding and predicting behaviour. Pfeffer (1982) states that these three perspectives imply very different views about the fundamental nature of organisations and about the task of

administration as well as tending towards different methodological leanings. From the review of these perspectives, it becomes obvious that the rational dimension hold to the view that administrative tasks improve performance. This perspective has therefore developed several refined tools for analysis and simulation such as linear programming, economic order quantity inventory planning and strategic planning and analysis (Pfeffer, 1982). Unlike the rational viewpoint, environmental constraint minimizes the affective role of the manager and is therefore akin to use case studies and simulation for evaluation. Taking a different position, the random perspective inherently doubts any success of prediction and sees the manager as a figurehead attempting to maintain the semblance of rationality. These philosophical and methodological differences seem to separate the theories. Nevertheless, combination of perspectives is possible just as methodological triangulation is today advocated to enhance the richness of social science research.

The Place of Levels and Units of Analysis in Theory Building

Apart from the perspectives on action, theorists need to identify the importance of the levels and units of analysis in theory building. Ahiauzu and Asawo (2016:85-86) examined the position of Pfeffer (1982) on levels and units of analysis and gave the following analysis:

Pfeffer investigates the process through which individual decisions influence collective behaviours and vice versa. In other words, Pfeffer uses two categories of analysis to explain and classify the various organisation theories. These which are referred to as the levels of analysis are (1) the microlevel – in which individuals and subunits are the subjects of examination and (2) the macrolevel – where organisation as a unit is the subject of examination. Westwood and Clegg (2003) in their review of the discourse of organisation studies, affirm that Pfeffer views these levels of analysis as a matter of whether organisation theory takes organisations themselves as the appropriate unit of analysis or a suborganisational unit such as individuals or groups. According to them, this problematic is tantamount to Reed's (1999) position on individualism versus collectivism.

Here again, there are methodological implications for the choice of analysis level. Pfeffer (1982) notes that a misapplication of theoretical mechanisms on levels of

analysis will most certainly blur understanding of organisation theories. Because of the importance of establishing the locus of causation in organisation theorizing, researchers' appreciation of the relevance of the units of analysis determines to a large extent the degree to which the outcomes of research can be generalised. This is because the research mechanisms, when appropriately applied to the right units of analysis prevents the introduction of spurious relationships in the interpretation of causation between dependent and independent variables. This explains the individualist-structuralist controversy which is deeply engrained in most organisation study discourses.

One contentious issue in organisation studies that arises from the foregoing discussion is whether individual and organisational behaviour are synonymous, distinct or interconnected, and which constitutes an appropriate unit of analysis. The question is whether the organisation has the ability to act in isolation from the individual members that make up the organisation. In the light of this poser, one of the barriers of understanding organisational process is the difficulty of linking knowledge about individual behaviour and collective behaviour. Some contributors argue in favour of the individualist position that evaluates social-level phenomena by studying the interlocked cycles of individual behaviour. The individualists reject the structural view of organisation which sees behaviour as a collection of micro-situations of individual behaviour and relationships that evolve over time and is believed to be a reification of the organisation. On the other hand however, the structuralists believe that one cannot understand organisations without studying the microprocesses. They believe that collectivities are more than the sum of their parts, a view championed by the German Gestalts that according to Cole (2002) was led by Max Wertheimer. Ikehara (1999) reports that Gestalt means, in German, "whole", "configuration" and "figure/ground". The Gestalts accordingly, see the individual as perceiving things from the holistic perspective. Cole (2002) drawing from the experiment of the Gestalts affirm that learning is a matter of assembling one's world into meaningful patterns. This view according to Wang and Ahmed (2002) holds that humans do not perceive things in isolation and so organisation theory when conceived from the perspective of structuralism emphasizes aggregate properties that highlight such institutional mechanisms as policies and strategies, systems, structures, routines and culture.

A number of scholars have however attempted to clarify the issues in an attempt to bridge the gap between individual and organisational behaviour. In the context of organisational learning for instance, Mumford (1995) argues that though individual learning does not guarantee organisational learning, no organisational learning occurs without it. Even though it has been argued that an organisation would not succeed at creating knowledge without individuals (Griggs & Hyland, 2002), yet 'the

learning achieved by an organisation is not simply the sum of the learning achieved by the individuals within that organisation' (Davies & Nutley, 2000:2). The argument is that in the long run, the organisation outlives its members and it is only logical that it constitutes, along with the individuals, the unit of analysis. Individuals are therefore considered as agents in the organisational process. People are therefore not just the actors and preservers of organisational behaviour but also require the appropriate atmosphere for collective actions to thrive. For though the individual is at the heart of the organisational exchanges that shape organisation theory, organisational structure plays a role in determining how these exchanges are ensured. The understanding that organisation theory can be analysed at different levels is the major cutting edge and constitutes the prime mover of present organisational studies.

Implications for Organisation Theories

The various organisation theories expound different perspectives of action as well as different levels of analysis. Pfeffer (1982) organizes his views on, and differentiates theories on the basis of these perspectives. For instance, the theories identified under the rational action perspective are broadly classified into individual-level based (Chapter 2 of Pfeffer 1982) and organisational-level based theories (Chapter 4 of Pfeffer 1982). In the same vein, the external constraint theories are classified into individual levels of analysis (Chapter 3 of Pfeffer 1982) and organisational levels of analysis (Chapter 5 of Pfeffer 1982). We will now examine the import of this broad categorisation.

Micro-level Rational Action

Pfeffer (1982) identified certain theories of organisation as rational and within the ambit of individual level of analysis. He buttresses this view stating that:

The theories each share some common elements: (1) analysis proceeds from the basis of essentially individual-level concepts, such as preferences, goals, values, or needs; thus, social action is presumed (often implicitly) to be the result of some aggregation of individual-level behaviour and behaviour-determining processes; (2) the behaviour is operation of a rational value-or-utility-maximizing choice process; and (3) this process is based on the attainment of some valued needs, goals, preferences or the taking of action consistent with attitudes, beliefs, or value judgments; thus, in each instance, the rational calculus is presumed to operate over some

individual-level dispositional property (Pfeffer, 1982: 41-42).

These theories include:

Expectancy Theory: Expectancy theory proposes that people will behave based on their perceived likelihood that their effort will lead to certain outcome and on how highly they value the outcome (Bateman & Snell, 1999). This theory which is classified under the instrumentality theory of motivation has been widely articulated in literature as much as it has gone through critical methodological examination. Mitchell (1974) for instance questioned Vroom's (1964) formulation on the adoption of across-subjects rather than within-subjects design and also raised doubts about performance as an appropriate dependent variable (Pfeffer, 1982). In the same breadth, Pfeffer reports that Schmidt (1973) also raised questions about measurement. Conspicuous among the criticisms of expectancy theory with regards influences on behaviour is the omission of normative and social influences.

Path-Goal Theory: Path-goal theory proposes that the leader's role is to help the worker engage in organisational activities that lead to rewards that the worker values (Ivancevich, Lorenzi, Skinner & Crosby, 1997). Again this is an instrumentality theory that also has the begging question of whether performance rather than effort is the appropriate dependent variable.

Goal Setting Theory: Goal setting theory holds that people that set goals outperform people who don't set them (Ivancevich et al, 1997). Pfeffer (1982) identifies four unresolved issues in the goal setting literature. These are, emphasis on application at the expense of theory formulation; the recurring misplacement of performance as the dependent variable; the need to distinguish goal setting from other theoretical mechanisms; the neglect of considerations of the organisational context in studies of goal setting.

Needs Theories and Job Design: The needs theories which propose that action is a function of one's needs is a well articulated theme of motivation. Nevertheless it has suffered criticism for its dearth in empiricism. Salancik and Pfeffer (1977a) joined to criticize the basic theoretical structure of needs model as well as how they are tested (Pfeffer, 1982). Similarly these theories have been criticised on the grounds of inconsistent and partial measurement. Pfeffer (1982: 42) summarizes the major flaws of these theories to include:

- (1) their presumption of the preexistence of purpose or intent;
- (2) their tendency to ignore the effects of context on behaviour;
- (3) their use of individual-level

constructs to build theories of collective or macro level behaviour; (4) their heavy reliance on cognitive, information-processing assumptions about causes of human activity; (5) their reliance on hypothetical constructs that reside largely in people's heads and thus that are problematic to observe and measure; and (6) their fundamentally tautological nature, which makes them somewhat theoretically suspect.

Despite these difficulties it is however still important to end this section by reiterating that behaviour in organisations has been increasingly influenced by the idea that it is characterised by bounded rationality which focuses on goal specificity and formalisation as means of making behaviour predictable and structuring relationships to achieve goals.

Organisation-Level Rational Action

Pfeffer (1982) identified other theories of organisation that are also rational but within the ambit of macro level of analysis. He argues that the justification for the emergence of these theories is in the emergence of large-scale organisations that demanded theories that would address institutions as wholes rather than as environment in which individuals worked. The major theories that constitute this category include:

Market Failure Approach: The market failure or transaction cost approach is organisational-level rationality with an efficiency orientation. This approach explains integration and its consequences. Like the individual level rationality theories, the market failure approach also has its conceptual and empirical shortcomings the foremost of which is the imprecision of its concepts (Pfeffer, 1992).

Structural Contingency Theory: To keep the organisation stable there has to be structure in the organisation for rationality to occur. Giddens (1979 p.69) cited in Reed (1985) states that 'the structural properties of social systems are both the medium and the outcome of the practices that constitute those systems'. Reed (1955: 146) thus asserts that,

structure is considered to be both enabling and constraining in that it is essentially implicated in the production of social systems as a resource to be used by actors which necessarily limits the strategies which the latter are able to follow.

The major import of the structural contingency approach is that there is no one best way to manage but that the appropriate design is contingent on the organisation's context (Pfeffer 1982). Consequently, size, technology, the environment of business, strategy and structure are major considerations for understanding the workings of organisations and should be important elements in organisation theorizing. The bane of this approach to organisation theorizing is however on the flaws identified with contingency theories viz. ambiguity and tautology (Pfeffer 1982). These pose theoretic problems in the areas of measurement and operationalisation of concepts.

Marxist Analysis of Organisations

Power equation in organisations is the focus of the Marxist approaches to organisational analysis. The Marxian perspectives to social stratification, class and capitalism, power and politics, work and leisure, bureaucracy and several other issues in organisations all project conscious, rational, strategic actions. Pfeffer (1982: 163) states that 'Marxist perspectives are relevant to examining two issues in organisational analysis: the organisation of work and the nature of the employment relationship, and the relationship among organisations'. In his detailed consideration of these two aspects of the Marxian analysis of organisations, Pfeffer (1982) highlights the power imbalance in the organisation of work, especially between labour and capital and the forces that necessitate such imbalance in organisations' power equation. He also identifies patterns of cooperation among and across class structures and the economic motivations for such cooperation.

The External Control of Individual Behaviour

There are a number of organisation theories that fit into our earlier description of the external constraint perspective on action in organisation analysis. Some of these theories equally fit into the individual level of analysis and form the basis of our discussion in this section. In appreciating the focus of this section, it is instructive to draw attention to Pfeffer's (1982: 82) views that in contrast to the rational approach to organisational studies 'the external control approach argues that rationality is often retrospective, with goals, attitudes, and values developing after the behaviour to make sense of what has already occurred, rather than serving primarily to guide behaviour prospectively.' In his presentation of the theories in this category, Pfeffer (1982) identifies and explains the effects of social exchange and informational influence as two fundamental forms of external influence in each of these theories. We will now consider the theories that are in this category of organisation analysis.

Operant Conditioning: Operant Conditioning is a behavioural theory that resulted from the experiments of Thorndike and later of Skinner (Thompson and McHugh

1995, Maier et al 2001, Cole 2002). It is sometimes referred to as instrumental conditioning (Maier et al 2001) and is premised on what Thorndike refers to as the 'law of effect' in which he concludes that when a response is followed by a reward, or feeling of satisfaction, that response is more likely to be repeated in similar circumstances (Cole 2002). Here focus is shifted from the stimulus as in the case of classical conditioning, to the consequences that follow behaviour (Thompson and McHugh 1995). Consequently, Jones et al (2000) affirm that according to operant conditioning theory, people learn to perform behaviours that lead to desired consequences and learn not to perform behaviours that lead to undesired consequences. The important role of the environment in defining and maintaining behaviour is made explicit in this case and over the years, the subject of behaviour reinforcement within the organisation has been built around these ideas. Pfeffer (1982) however identifies tautology in its explanation of the relationship between reinforcers and behaviour as a major conceptual problem with operant conditioning.

Social Learning Theory: Social learning theory also referred to as social cognitive theory (Wang & Ahmed 2002) is built around observational learning. Rollinson et al (1998) posit that the theory mainly focuses on the importance of social interaction or interpersonal skills in learning. Bandura (1977) corroborates this view by affirming that this theory is based on the individual learning principle that is enhanced by observation. This, Wang and Ahmed (2002) argued, requires learning from models, experiences and self-efficacy. In other words, the learning individual develops a goal which leads him to identify and observe a model from whose 'ideal behaviour' he gets reinforcement. At other instances, the learning individual reflects on past incidences or undertakes a self-assessment exercise and gets influenced to behave relatively permanently in a new way. This theory is premised on the fact that man is a social animal whose actions are domiciled within a never-ending social exchange process. The major difficulty with the social learning approach is that it does not have a distinct association with the external constraints perspective to organisational theorizing. Pfeffer (1982 p.96) therefore posits that 'social learning theory threatens to lose both its distinctive theoretical focus as well as the incorporation of external constraint and context as explanation for behaviour'.

Socialisation: Pfeffer's (1982) views on socialisation are akin to the concept of social capital. The 'Social Capital Initiative', as in Kasozi (2004), identified three concepts of social capital. The first of these is Putnam's (1993) view that social capital as a set of 'horizontal associations', facilitate co-ordination and co-operation to the end that members of the community benefit mutually. The second concept is based on Coleman's (1998) view that social capital is a variety of different entities, with two

elements in common. These common elements consist of aspects of social structure, as well as social capital being a facilitator of the actions of the members in an association. The third and final view explains social capital from the perspective of the larger socio-political environments that provide the basis for development of norms and as well shape social structure. Socialisation theory directs attention to the important element of social interactions as a major influence on behaviour. This notwithstanding, Pfeffer (1982) advocates proper planning for the conduct of socialisation to forestall the problem of effectiveness associated with it.

Role Theory: Role theory emphasizes the obligation placed on the actor by his web of relationships otherwise known as the role set. Two major elements emphasised by Pfeffer (1982) in his explication of role theory in the light of the external constraint on individuals within the organisation are role pressure, role conflict. He argues that the very concept of interdependence means that performance of individual's own role depends on the activities of the focal persons in the role set.

The External Control of Organisational Behaviour

Some theories of organisation fall within the spheres of external constraint in their perspectives on action as well as being at the macro level of analysis. These theories include:

Population Ecology: Population ecology focuses on organisational change arising from change in population. It brings to focus the environmental constrain on an organisation's existence. In his discourse on population ecology, "Pfeffer (1982) draws attention to the critical issues of variation in form and structure, the selection process which is based on organisation-environment fit, and retention and its mechanisms" (Ahiauzu and Asawo, 2016: 47). It is obvious that organisations are naturally selected and variation in form is a critical issue in determining the fate of selected and retained organisations. Pfeffer (1992) identifies that population ecology is at its infancy as applied in organisational analysis and faces the challenges of validity and operationalisation.

Resource Dependence: Resource dependence theory appreciates the insatiability of organisations' resource needs and the fact that organisations are not internally self-sufficient which necessitates sourcing for resources within the larger environment. This scenario creates a situation of interdependence which in most cases attract external pressures and constrains on the organisation. According to Ahiauzu and Asawo (2016: 52), Pfeffer (1992) in finding a distinction between the different forms of resource dependence argued that:

firms do not merely respond to external constraint

and control through compliance to environmental demands. Rather, a variety of strategies may be undertaken to somehow alter the situation confronting the organisation to make compliance less necessary.

His argument affirms the attempts by organisations to manage and not just react to dependence.

Social Constructionist Views of Individual Behaviour

From the theories so far discussed we have shown that the major theoretic challenge for organisational analysis is to trace the link between perspectives to action and levels of analysis and the impact on research outcomes. Another important contemporary effort at theoretic classification other than we have so far covered in our discourse and which extends the debate on the earlier discussed approaches is the social constructionist view. In differentiating this view from the rational and external constraint perspectives on action, Pfeffer (1992) posits that this view is process focused, more interactive in its approach to explanation and leans towards the ideographic methodology which applies qualitative data generation and measurement techniques. Two sub-categories are identified under the social constructionist views viz. interactionist and structuralist approaches. A major distinction between these two approaches is that while the interactionist approach is built on experiential reality, the structuralists uphold that meaning is socially constructed and so agreement reality is the necessary starting point for social inquiry. In other words, while on the one hand the individual is the curator of meaning, on the other hand meaning is socially constructed. This distinction is vividly captured in Pfeffer's (1982: 209) postulation that,

the structuralists see patterns of meaning shaped by roles and shared paradigms that structure and constrain the interpretations that are given to interaction patterns. The interactionists position tends toward extreme relativism, as such event is knowable only in the frame of person experiencing the event. Structuralists, by contrast, see more shared understandings and social definitions in situations, even though these shared definitions are themselves the consequences of processes of meaning creation.

The import of this assertion is that the choice of methodological procedures through which accurate and reliable data can be generated and analysed differ on the basis of

the researcher's philosophical views about social reality and the research process. But since the social constructionist view emphasizes the relativistic nature of the world (Pfeffer, 1982), which depicts an anti-positivist epistemological assumption, the social constructionist view leans towards the qualitative research method. Consequently, ethnomethodology is a research approach adopted by social constructionists. The ethnomethodological perspective is a general approach to sociological analysis (Reed, 1985) that is characterised by its emphasis on a situation-specific frame of reference and cognitive sense (Pfeffer, 1982) drawing heavily from the phenomenological philosophy (Haralambos & Heald, 1980). Ethnomethodology therefore derives data through a seamless association with the social actors.

A second issue identified by Pfeffer (1982) as part of the social constructionist view is the place of cognition in theory construction. In discoursing the cognitive theories, he highlights the two dimensions used to characterize cognitive maps viz., degree of differentiation of schemata and specific relationships in causal structure. Cognitive theories are noted for their exploration of the cognitive maps of organisations in the collection and analysis of data.

Two other issues are identified by Pfeffer (1982) as important to the social constructionist view. These are language and affect-based processes. He draws attention to the importance of a leader's stock of vocabulary in effectively managing staff members of the organisation. This buttresses the importance of effective communication in the development and maintenance of an enabling organisational culture. Language he argues is very much tied to the phenomenological tradition. Closely relating to the issue of language is the issue of affect-based processes. A relevant distinction that has to be made is between rhetoric and reality. The distinction clarifies the debate on cognitive versus emotive evaluations and sense making in organisational studies.

CONCLUSION

Several theories have been reviewed in this study in the light of contemporary themes in organisation-based theorizing. The emphasis has been on the redirections that are emerging in organisational analysis viz., perspectives of action and levels of analysis. The important theme of social constructivism was also briefly discussed along with the major theories of organisation and their underlining methodology. This review has been mainly concerned with identifying and putting into perspectives these major themes that make up Pfeffer's text on organisations and organisation theory. The paper examines the place of the theoretic and contextual issues in organisational studies. Our analysis of these issues leads to the conclusion

that the extent to which these two approaches (perspectives of action and levels/units of analysis) are appropriately and complementarily applied will account for the richness in organisation research outcomes.

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