

Introduction

For thousands of years people have worked to survive, but the way in which people work has changed enormously in that time. As the labour force has grown more influential with what it can achieve with better efficiency and productivity, the need for a system that can manage and understand how to extract the most from its workers becomes more important than ever before.

The industrial revolution marked a massive turning point in economies around the world as demand increased along with the pressure being put on organisations. At the beginning of the 20th century a new management theory was established, Taylorism, designed to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of an organisation (Mullins L. J., 2008) by focusing on several elements of working practices as organisations were struggling to provide any form of improvement in their labour productivity and Taylor found the problem was not in labour, but in the way that it was being managed, so scientific management was established to combat these issues (Daft, 2003).

Taylor's theory consists of four principles; (1), study the way workers perform their task, gather all the informal job knowledge that workers possess, and experiment with ways of improving the way tasks are performed; (2), Codify the new methods of performing tasks into written rules and standard operating procedures; (3), Carefully select workers so that they possess skills and abilities that match the needs of the task, and train them to perform the task according to the established rules and procedures; (4), Establish a fair and acceptable level of performance for a task, and then develop a pay system that provides a reward for performance above the acceptable level (Jones & George, 2004). Taylorism's fundamental principles were then modified by Henry Ford, the founder of Ford Motor Company, in which Gramsci summarises as an advancement of capitalism, in which these practices were then later known as Fordism (Clarke, 1990). Fordism consists of three main principles, (1) achieving high productivity through an assembly line where the product's construction was passed down the line where a worker would perform a single task repeatedly and then the product would continue down the line until it was finished, (2) and by using standardisation a company no longer needed craftsmen to make individual products, everything could be produced with the use of moulds and machines, (3) and finally, workers were paid for the amount of work that they were able to do as Ford noticed that the workers were unable to buy a Ford car on their current salary so he paid them more for the work they did so inevitably the money was flowing back into the company (Grey & Willmott, Critical Management Studies, 2005). These sorts of work practices are better known as capitalism, something that Clegg et al (2008) outlines is an economic system that was founded on the power of private property rights that are organised through markets. Essentially, capitalism is an investment that is looking to maximise profits within the laws and regulations that are set by governments.

The term neo-liberalism became familiar in the 20th century as there was a push for free markets which stimulated the progression of globalisation as barriers for entry were lifted and companies were able to trade freely around the world (Crane & Matten, 2010). This created a lot of opportunities for a number of organisations, but there is a dark side to globalisation as

Critical Perspectives in Management – Assignment 1

the gap between rich and poor countries unquestionably expanded as these rich countries benefited at the expense of the working class (Schalit , 2002).

Main Body

Amazon

To fully understand scientific management Braverman (1974) states that its value to organisations can only be in terms of capitalists, whose sole objective is seeking profits and not of kindness towards employees. Taylor identified his aim for effective workers so he started fining workers if they broke any equipment, lateness or breaking any rules, but he also sacked any workers who were not efficient enough (Copley , 1923). Within Amazon, the use of Taylorism is evident as they are constantly emphasising a philosophy of efficient and dependable workers that will meet the targets that they set (Jawad , 2018). The organisation has designed their 14 rule leadership principles and their 3 point strike system which is designed to deter employees from not meeting the proposed targets set as well as taking days off due to illness (Poulter , 2016) This sort of system does not allow for any flexibility in the workforce, leading to more efficiency, but it also creates a culture of fear within the company as workers are worried about being sacked (Certo , 2000). Amazon is able to treat its workers in this way as there is an abundance of readily available unskilled workers at any given moment which allows Amazon to employ the most productive workers as they can swap and change who they have working for them at any given moment (Rittnehouse , 2017). However Mullins (2010) suggests that the ever changing global competition means that Taylorism methods are not reasonable as organisations need for flexibility and team work so that high performance teams are formed.

Another principle of Taylorism is time management, the theory replaces the normal productivity estimates with precise measurements that can be monitored so that optimum job performance can be met (Wood & Wood , 2002). Due to the nature of an ever changing business environment and technological developments, the term “digital taylorism” has been created as organisations utilise technology to become more efficient (Schumpeter , 2015). Examples of these are in Amazons as they employ a sophisticated tool that contains a vast amount of functions; one of these is a count-down clock that indicates how long a worker has got to pick a product before they start getting behind on their performance targets (Baraniuk , 2015), but these targets are hard to hit when you have a warehouse that is 800,000 square feet, the size of 11 football pitches (Cadwalladr , 2013). The software system also guides and monitors workers so that the job is “as simple as possible” so that employees do not need to remember where items are located in the warehouse. Finally, the software can be used to analyse data in real time by management so that an employee who is behind will receive a message outlining they are not meeting their targets and if they do not meet them then they face penalties (Lashinsky , 2015). In doing so, Amazon have faced significant criticism for their treatment of workers, but Sports Direct, a multi-national company have also been accused of using similar practices of exploiting workers in their warehouses (Unite the Union , 2016).

Splitting tasks into much simpler and more manageable jobs that can be taught quickly was something that Taylorism and Fordism used in their theory, but Henry Ford took it even further and began split the operations into even smaller subtasks, for example he split making

a car wheel into 16 steps so that workers did not need years of experience to construct it (Economist, 1999). This is done at Amazon to maximise efficiency in the warehouse as workers are split into tasks of production, picking, packing and preparing orders for shipment where supervisors will be on constant watch so that is no “time theft” (Head, 2014). Splitting each aspect of the process is suggested by Braverman (1998) to be degrading for workers as it creates dissatisfaction as there is nothing to motivate them, something very similar to the assembly lines in Ford’s production lines (Drucker, 1955).

Taylor introduced the term “Functional Foreman”, someone that was observing every second of the operation as a way of making sure that workers were always working hard (Linstead et al, 2009). On the packing lines at Amazon there are six of these “Functional Foreman” who are there to make sure that the line keeps on moving and that any workers that were talking to each would face reprimands as well as any packer pausing to catch a breath would also receive some form of punishment (Grey, 2017). They would also record how often and for how long any employee went to the bathroom for and if they did not go to the closest then they wanted to know why (Head, 2014). Furthermore, depot managers and supervisors are always looking to find ways of making the lines even faster by creating a detailed “process map” whereby they will try and utilise new untapped areas and look for evidence of waste. This is a process that is taken so seriously that Amazon brings in veterans of lean production from Toyota who would identify new ways to save time and cut wastage (Berger et al, 2014)

Ford’s stance on employees was clear, come to work, work hard, go home for some rest and then start the process again (Boyer & Durand, 1997); but at Amazon their lack of respect and trust expands further than questioning them on their actions to a point where they have checkpoints in action around the warehouse so that nothing is being stolen (Cadwallar, 2013). This sort of treatment towards employees suggests that they are just treated as commodities to the company and that although these checkpoints reduce breaks for 30 to 20 minutes in which employees struggle to have their meal, Amazon still use them (Parmer, 2018). Amazon ill treatment of employees goes even further, as they provide workers with ill-fitting footwear which cause blisters and discomfort, as well as that they rely on agencies for staff employment so that they can pay them less and they can be sacked at any point without cause (Head, 2014), said to be unethical by Carroll & Buchholtz (1999).

The Fordism theory underlines how employees should be rewarded for their efficiency and constant commitment to the intense and repetitive tasks by high wages and job security (Warner, 2001), something that does not happen at Amazon as the warehouse staff are paid just above the minimum wage and the performance targets that are set are so far out of reach that they are unachievable to the majority of the workforce (Head, 2014). This sort of treatment can be described as unethical by many, but the conditions that these workers are put through for such little pay is hard to justify when the CEO, Jess Bezos receives a salary of over \$1.6 million after compensations (Shen, 2016). Making the reports of employees camping in tents near the warehouse as a way of cutting costs as they cannot afford to travel to work from their homes more horrid (Kentish, 2016). Furthermore, the company has received subsidises from the UK government to construct new warehouses in a bid to combat the low rate of unemployment in the country (Ethical Consumer, 2015). But in 2013, it was

reported that Amazon were not paying any corporation tax on their £5.3 Billion of sales as they have created over 2,000 new permanent jobs at the company (O'Connor, 2013), but Rushe (2018) argues that the overall employment from Amazon based warehouses did not increase unemployment levels in the UK, with data suggesting that there may have been an increase.

Conclusion

From the evidence that has been evaluated in this essay it is clear that both Taylorism and Fordism are able to achieve an increased amount of efficiency from the labour force as well as increasing the production time within an organisation. Nevertheless, Amazon has taken elements of these theories to the maximum to extract the absolute most of its workers to achieve efficiency but they are not rewarded for their high levels of productivity with job security of bonuses, making it an unattractive organisation to work. The culture that has been created in the warehouse is something of fear, constant supervision; extremely difficult targets, no talking and checkpoints where employees are frisked by security have created fear among workers as well as making them become dissatisfied at work. Although there is a large amount of bad, the organisation does not look like changing their ways anytime soon; there is an abundance of unskilled worker queuing up to work and there is no laws being broken by Amazon, meaning that high competition by other companies around the world and globalisation has led to the mistreatment of the workforce in the 21st century. The only issue currently facing Amazon is that this style of management leads to problems in the long-term and leaves very little room for innovation as they are driven by maximising profits, a capitalism approach to an organisation.

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Critical Perspectives in Management – Assignment 1

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