

Visions for the Future

Paired Seminars – Sample Questions
SBPD7004

Intensive Session 3
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Some ideas for paired seminar questions

The following list of possible seminar (and report) questions would need to be made more specific to a chosen business context and/or to particular issues addressed in the module:

1. Henri Fayol claimed (1916) that the four key roles of a manager are to “plan, organize, coordinate, and control”.

Henry Mintzberg (1990) rejected Fayol’s claim, saying ‘if you watch what manager’s actually do, it is hard to relate it to any of these four roles.’

Is Mintzberg’s critique of Fayol fair? Would the observations not depend upon which levels of management were being observed? Is Mintzberg’s own ‘classification’ of management roles (interpersonal / informational / decisional) an improvement on Fayol’s? How would these roles apply to management job descriptions in a business of your choice?

Some ideas for paired seminar questions - 2

2. Are the ideas of F. W. Taylor (1911) for 'scientific management' – especially the focus upon "time and motion studies" of workforce task completion – returning to modern industry through advocacy of (so-called) "activities analysis (job analysis)" in the works of theorists like Fleishman ('F-JAS') in the 1980's and Premeux (et al.) in the 1990s?

For a production industry of your choice, how should we evaluate the application to HRM of these modern extensions of Taylor's views?

Some ideas for paired seminar questions - 3

3. Following Elton Mayo's work on employee motivation (see Hudson, 2011, p. 3) various behavioural psychologists developed theories of management roles relating to 'motivation' (Maslow, 1987), 'social systems theory' (Emery et al., 1960) and Herzberg's 'hygiene theory' (1974).

In relation to companies in the technology sector, is there still a place in 21st century businesses for these theories about creating and maintaining job satisfaction?

Some ideas for paired seminar questions - 3

4. Is one key tenet of proponents of 'contingency management' (including Woodward, 1958; subsequently Mintzberg (see HBR reading)) - that no single management theory is possible for the multi-faceted roles of managers in different organisational structures and different business sectors - defensible?

For a sector of your choice, is 'managerial flexibility' and 'adaptation' more important than classifying specific management roles?

Some ideas for paired seminar questions - 4

4. Does the idea of "management style" make any sense? – relative to different cultures (cf. the debate over Japanese (e.g. Ouchi's "theory Z" in the 1980s) versus American 'management style')?

OR

- relative to gender (male versus female management styles: Woodward, 1980; Stewart, 1997; Moss Kanter, 1993)?

OR

- relative to ethnicity (e.g. Chevrier on cross-cultural management)?

Some ideas for paired seminar questions - 5

5. "Human decision-making (and therefore management decision-making) cannot be entirely rational, owing to the vulnerability of decision-makers to 'decision traps'." Do you agree?

For strategic management in a business sector of your choice, which methods or procedures should be used to mitigate the effects of irrational decision-making? (cf. for example, works by Tversky and other decision theorists).

Some ideas for paired seminar questions - 6

6. Elkington (1994) coined the term "triple bottom line accounting" (a.k.a. TBL or 3BL) as a recipe for businesses to evaluate their performance in relation to CSR (corporate social responsibility) policies for sustainable business practice. How does TBL work?

For a business sector of your choice how might TBL be implemented to ensure compliance with CSR policies?

Would (or should) TBL be used by SMEs in developing countries' economies?