

analysis of large numbers of people in organisations.⁵¹ The three essential principles of action theory can be summarised as:

- Sociology is concerned not just with behaviour but with 'meaningful action'.
- Particular meanings persist through reaffirmation in actions.
- Actions can also lead to changes in meanings.

These three principles apply mainly to explanations of individual, or small-scale, behaviour. Bowey gives four additional concepts on which analysis of large-scale behaviour can be based. These concepts are redefined in accordance with an action approach.

- **Role.** This is needed for the analysis of behaviour in organisations. It explains the similar action of different people in similar situations within the organisation and the expectations held by other people.
- **Relationships.** This is needed to explain the patterns of interaction among people and the behaviours displayed towards one another.
- **Structure.** The relationships among members of an organisation give rise to patterns of action which can be identified as a 'transitory social structure'. The social factors, and non-social factors such as payment systems, methods of production and physical layout, together form the behavioural structure.
- **Process.** Human behaviour can be analysed in terms of processes, defined as 'continuous interdependent sequences of actions'. The concept of process is necessary to account for the manner in which organisations exhibit changes in structure.

The three principles of action theory, together with the four additional concepts from systems theory, provide an action approach to the analysis of behaviour in organisations. Bowey goes on to illustrate her theory with case studies of five different types of organisations, all in the restaurant industry.

Postmodernism (Post bureaucratic)

With the development of the information and technological age a more recent view of organisations and management is the idea of **postmodernism or post-bureaucratic**. *Cooper and Burrell* refer to the contrasting postmodern view of 'organisation less the expression of planned thought and calculative action and a more defensive reaction to forces intrinsic to the social body which constantly threaten the stability of organised life'.⁵²

In the 1990s, writers such as *Clegg* described the postmodern organisation in terms of the influence of technological determinism, structural flexibility, premised on niches, multiskilled jobs marked by a lack of demarcation, and more complex employment relationships including subcontracting and networking.⁵³ Postmodernism rejects a rational systems approach to our understanding of organisations and accepted explanations of society and behaviour. Postmodern organisations are perceived as highly flexible and responsive, with decentralised decision-making, fluid, less hierarchical structures and with the ability to change quickly to meet present demands. **Matrix structures, discussed in Chapter 12**, can be seen as a form of post-bureaucratic organisation.