Features of neoliberal and relational organisational approaches

Is your organisation more modern or postmodern?
Modern organisations tend to be economically driven. Workers are a cost to the business and individually responsible for maximising short term profit goals. Standardised methods are used to achieve these goals. This reflects some of the neoliberal approach. Postmodern organisations still strive to be profitable but see diversity as an asset. Workers are an investment and success is achieved through, creativity and cooperation.

Why does this matter?
I believe that people create successful organisations. When conditions are created for people to be valued, productive and involved, organisations stand more chance of thriving and succeeding.

In recent times there have been more and more claims by politicians, current and retired, that modern regimes based on neo-liberalism and capitalism have failed. This year, New Zealand politicians including Jacinda Ardern (20 October 2017), Winston Peters (15 July 2017; October 2017) and former Prime Minister Jim Bolger (21 April 2017) have commented on the failure of these political regimes. This failure is evidenced in the growing gap between rich and poor, impacts on access to health and social services and appalling mental health and suicide statistics. The call for a more humanistic and collaborative emphasis has been made.

What can you do individually?
One way to address this failure is to understand the features of neo-liberalism, use this knowledge to identify areas to review and change, and develop strategies to turn the tide towards more people centred and relational approaches to organisations.

Table 1 contrasts key features of neo-liberalism with a relational approach. The features of neo-liberalism, in the left column, are drawn from literature addressing neo-liberal tertiary education and adapted for organisational contexts.

The continuum in the middle column provides the spectrum to assess personal or organisational perspectives in relation to each feature? The numbered values do not compare the approaches in a hierarchal way. A lower score simply indicates a closer association with neoliberal approaches and a higher score is indicative of a closer association with relational approaches.

Whatever your role in your organisation you can use the table as a survey to consider the features that shape your organisational culture. Consider the fit with your organisation’s vision and values, philosophy and policies, and current practice.

How can you engage others?
It may be a useful exercise to discuss this in groups if the conditions are such that people are positioned well to share their perspectives safely. Does the outcome indicate a more modern neoliberal position or a more
postmodern relational position? Is this satisfactory for you personally or for your organisation? Are there areas for refinement and change? Are there similar or different perspectives being expressed? How is this meaningful and what possibilities for refinement and change are evident?

Important points to note
It is important to note that these features are not presented as complete or definitive lists with discrete clearly defined lines of difference. They are not presented to pit one against the other. The intention is to provide some distinctions to assist organisations and staff to consider their positioning across a range of areas of practice and evaluate this. They are intended to spark discussion and reflection. There are multiple possible places to stand and multiple perspectives and these can be dynamic and context dependent.

Neoliberal characteristics drawn from the following sources that critique neoliberal practice in tertiary academic contexts:

References


Links


http://www.radionz.co.nz/programmes/the-9th-floor/story/201840999/the-negotiator-jim-bolger


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Neoliberal (Modern) Organisation</th>
<th>---Spectrum---</th>
<th>The Relational (Postmodern) Organisation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Survival is economic</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>Survival is moral</td>
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<tr>
<td>There is no other way</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>There are other ways</td>
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<td>Care for self is difficult</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>Care for self is necessary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More for less ideology</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>More makes more ideology</td>
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| Cost of care is individual 
responsible | 1 2 3 4 5    | Cost of care is collective 
responsible                           |
| Individual responsibility        | 1 2 3 4 5    | Collective responsibility              |
| External and self-surveillance 
monitoring is encouraged       | 1 2 3 4 5    | Collective reflexivity and commitment 
to best practice is encouraged      |
| Competitive                       | 1 2 3 4 5    | Collaborative                          |
| Trust is undermined               | 1 2 3 4 5    | Trust is valued                        |
| Debate is discouraged             | 1 2 3 4 5    | Debate is encouraged                   |
| Truth telling discouraged         | 1 2 3 4 5    | Truth telling encouraged               |
| Problem focused                   | 1 2 3 4 5    | Solution focused                      |
| Reward, discipline, punish        | 1 2 3 4 5    | Involve, encourage and appreciate      |
| Critique and creativity 
foreclosed                           | 1 2 3 4 5    | Critique and creativity encouraged    |
| Divisiveness, homogeneity, 
disconnection                        | 1 2 3 4 5    | Collective, relational, connection    |
| Illusion of autonomy              | 1 2 3 4 5    | Encouragement of autonomy              |
| Questions are discouraged         | 1 2 3 4 5    | Questions are encouraged               |
| Exacerbates fear of difference    | 1 2 3 4 5    | Celebrates difference                 |
| Rewards rampant, consumerist 
competitive individualism          | 1 2 3 4 5    | Rewards collective, relational, 
collaborative humanism               |
| Standardised performance measures 
and profiling                       | 1 2 3 4 5    | Team determined and created 
performance measures and diversity of 
team members                         |
| Mandated monitoring and auditing  | 1 2 3 4 5    | Self-monitoring and auditing           |
| Individualism cut loose from the 
social                               | 1 2 3 4 5    | Social consciousness and responsibility |
| Moralistic audit-driven surveillance | 1 2 3 4 5  | Morality based best practice          |
| Mindless criticism regarding rules 
and regulations with individual 
vulnerability and group conformity | 1 2 3 4 5    | Critique regarding best practice with 
individual robustness and group 
collaboration and shared decision 
making                                 |
| Managerialism                     | 1 2 3 4 5    | Leadership                            |
| Economics driven                  | 1 2 3 4 5    | People driven                         |

Table 1: Features of neo-liberal and relational organisations
*Table developed by Wendy Talbot PhD, October 2017.*

Adventurous Conversations Ltd work with organisations to develop values driven, people centred, relational and collaborative culture and relationships. Call, email, or book a no obligation 30-minute introductory consultation if you want to turn the tide towards more relational organisational culture and approaches.

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