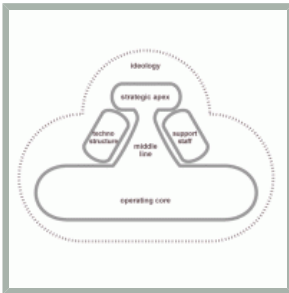


five configurations



characteristics

author:	Mintzberg, Henry
country:	Canada
period:	1979
type:	model
role:	consultant
activity:	analyse and design
topic:	org. design & development
abstr. level:	environment
perspective:	living
status:	final
module:	classics I
comments:	2

description:

The Canadian academic, Henry Mintzberg, synthesised organisational design literature into five ideal organisational forms or configurations that do not exist in the real world, but provide consultants and managers a framework to understand and design organisational structures.

Mintzberg defined organisational structure as "the sum total of the ways in which it divides its labour into distinct tasks and then achieves coordination among them". Each configuration contains six components:

1. *operating core* : the people directly related to the production of services or products;
2. *strategic apex* : serves the needs of those people who control the organisation;
3. *middle line*: the managers who connect the strategic apex with the operating core;
4. *technostructure* : the analysts who design, plan, change or train the operating core;
5. *support staff* : the specialists who provide support to the organisation outside of the operating core's activities;
6. *ideology*: the traditions and beliefs that make the organisation unique.

The components are linked by four flows:

1. authority;
2. work material;
3. information;
4. decision processes.

The organisation's structure depends on the organisation itself, its members, the distribution of power, the environment and the technical system. Design decisions can be grouped into the:

- design of positions;
- design of superstructure;
- design of lateral linkages;
- design of decision making system.

Work constellations are quasi-independent cliques of individuals who work on decisions appropriate to their level in the hierarchy. These groups range from the formal to the informal.

Mintzberg used the components, flows, work constellations and coordination mechanisms to define five configurations:

1. *Simple Structure*

Entrepreneurial setting: relies on direct supervision from the strategic apex, the CEO.

2. *Machine Bureaucracy*

Large organisations: relies on standardisation of work processes by the techno-structure.

3. *Professional Bureaucracy*

The professional services firm: relies on the professionals' standardisation of skills and knowledge in the operating core.

4. *Divisionalised Form*

Multi-divisional organisation: relies on standardisation of outputs; middle-line managers run independent divisions.

5. *Adhocracy*

Project organisations: highly organic structure with little formalization; relies on mutual adjustment as the key coordinating mechanism within and between these project teams. In later work Mintzberg added two more configurations:

6. *Missionary Form*

Coordination occurs based on commonly held ideologies or beliefs: standardisation of norms.

7. *Political Form*

No coordination form is dominant: control is based on forming alliances.

Each configuration represents a force that pulls organisations in different structural directions. For example, operators want to professionalize in their drive to control their work. Therefore, they favour a professional bureaucracy based on the standardisation of skills.

The structure an organisation chooses depends, to a great extent, on the power of each of Mintzberg's six components.

assets:



contingency factor organisational structure matrix
ProvenModels • editor PM • version 0.1 • 67 KB



five configurations in detail
ProvenModels • editor PM • version 0.1 • 97 KB

**five structural configurations**

ProvenModels • editor PM • version 0.1 • 159 KB

**seven pulls on organisations**

ProvenModels • editor PM • version 0.1 • 42 KB

pros:

- The model provides a framework to analyse organisational structures in relation to the ideal types. It hands the consultant tools to design organisations, but the configurations should not be used as a blue print.
- The model helps us understand how organisations change over time, how powers shift and how all this affects their structures.
- Mintzberg's classification is based on the assumption that formal and informal structures are intertwined and often indistinguishable from one other. Formal structures evolve over time and formalise changes in the informal structure.
- The model provides an important synthesis of structural contingency literature.

cons:

- The model does not provide operational guidance for organisational (re)design activities since it lacks a normative framework.
- The model depends on contingency factors that influence structure. Contingency theory faces a variety of methodological problems: e.g. how possible it is to single out one factor from the complexities of reality and how these factors influence one another.
- The model used an outside - inside process. The environment determines the organisation as if the organisation itself does not have the ability to make decisions.
- Most organisations operate in dynamic and complex environments thus limiting the relevance of the model.

references:

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