

The Last Course: The Study of Organizations

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This is the last article of a series of six, where I have summarized and reported to a certain degree the state of knowledge about human organizations, their design and management ventures. My dearest student Miguel Cruz tells me that I have complied to his request and satisfaction. The idea was to present the growing numbers of active organizational research scientists studying and working to transform organizations. To the large number of leaders, managers and customers, I wanted to suggest both ideas of potential interest and relevance, and the more core possibility of eventually offering a long course of organizational theory and design that will bring together academics concerned with the study of organizations and managers facing operating problems inside them.

To my student, and to those readers that quickly approached me, I am more than glad that these articles provided for them exciting areas for imaginative study, research and applications.

Indeed, I wanted to make the point that organization theory and design has a history and a pedigree.

A pedigree suggests a series of casually connected events in time, and history consists in a temporal ordering and interpretation of events. Organization theory and design has both of these two dimensions. My candid message is that whoever wants to grasp the state of this challenging field (that includes many disciplines) has to discover it by reading profoundly, dedicating years to the formal research pieces, and engaging in understanding the different models, perspective or approaches.

To end this serie, I would like to summarize a kind of a theory of interorganizational relationships.

The relationships of any single organization with its environment take place through the actions of other organizations. A key designing proposition is that organizations affect organizations. This is elegantly shown in the work of **Pamela R. Haunschild, Interorganizational Imitation: The Impact of Corporate Acquisition Activity.**

Individuals as well as organizations are affected by the formal and informal relationships. For example, clients of a social service organization are vitally affected by interorganizational relationships. A common practice is client referral. If one agency is unable to provide the needed services (like in a hospital) for a particular client, the individual is referred to an appropriate agency for service. What can happen in practice is that clients who are easily treated or provided services are not referred, and the more difficult over are referred, this last group running the risk of falling between the cracks of the referring set of organizations. These dynamics occur in almost all the fields or sectors.

It should be clear that leaders and managers should pay attention to interorganizational relationships and always look beyond their organizations boundaries into organizational environments. This is the case when they begin to recognize communities as networks of different types of organizations.

A consistent research finding is that integrated interorganizational relationships contribute to improve the performance of the field, sector, community or environment of the organizations. Again, this is clearly demonstrated in the research study of **James Goes and Ho Park Seung, Interorganizational Linkages and Innovation.**

Crossing over the different management and organization theory approaches that I have reviewed over the six articles is the concept of organizational goals and objectives.

The analysis of organizations as a distinct subject in social sciences emerged full-blown in the 1960s. In that decade two distinguished sociologists (who were my professors and I invited them to the University of Puerto Rico in the late 70s and early 80s). Amitai Etzioni and William Scott made important definitional and conceptual statements. They stressed the expression that organizations are social units (human groupings) deliberately constructed and reconstructed to seek specific goals. In this definition corporations, armies, schools, hospitals, churches, and prisons are included. They also established that organizations are defined as collectivities that have been established for the pursuit of relatively specific objectives on a more or less continuous basis. It should be clear that organizations have distinctive features like fixed (sometimes permeable) boundaries, a normative or culture order, authority ranks, a communication system, and an incentive system which enables various types of participants to work together in the accomplishment of common goals.

The very important point here is that to the extent that organizations achieve their formal and operational goals one can say that they are being effective.

To finish this review is adequate to alert readers to the work of **Gareth Morgan, Images of Organization** where he makes a profound statement that organizations can be viewed as machines, organisms, brains, cultures, political systems or psychic prisons. He makes the point metaphors or models create ways of seeing and shaping organizational life.

If we want to see, think and act in new ways we have to change the manner or the model we use to interpret or read the reality.

At the beginning we said that organization theory and design has a pedigree. This is the case because by managing this complex body of knowledge you can practically produce a robust proposition for understanding leadership, decision making, small and large groups, social structure, growth and development, communication, interpersonal relations and creating effective work and process flow, among others.

Finally, these days there is widespread agreement of the need to apply these models and perspectives in combination rather than as competing explanations. Of course, this will require of very well educated reflective practitioners!