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UNDERSTANDING ORGANIZATIONS  
AND THE WORKPLACE

by

John F. Glass

John F. Glass  
Coordinator  
Institute of Industrial Relations  
Center for Management Research and Education  
University of California, Los Angeles  
Los Angeles, California 90024

(301) 825-1888

(Formerly, Assistant Professor of Sociology  
University of California, Northridge)

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**INSTITUTE OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS**

**UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA**

**LOS ANGELES**

## UNDERSTANDING ORGANIZATIONS AND THE WORKPLACE

John F. Glass

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Few of us realize how much of our lives are spent in organizations. We usually begin and sometimes end our lives in hospitals; our formative years are spent in schools, and we spend the bulk of our adult years working in an organization of one sort or another. Our experiences in organizations help to shape our identity, how we feel about ourselves, and our value as people.

Since its beginnings, sociology has been deeply concerned with organizations and work as key issues in understanding society and social life. Karl Marx, for example, felt that the way in which work is organized is the single most important fact about any society. Perhaps Emile Durkheim's (1964) most influential contribution centers on his analysis of the ever increasing *division of labor* (i.e., of job specialization). Max Weber's monumental synthesis of interpretive sociology was entitled *Economy and Society* (1968a,b).

Sociology teaches us that human action and experience can be understood best in its structural context. Consequently, contemporary sociologists have been especially interested in the social arrangements of the workplace. Since, for most of us, our work life takes place in offices, factories, agencies, hospitals, schools, businesses of various kinds, sociologists are also interested in these places as formal organizations and seek to understand their functioning--how people make their lives and careers within organizations, and the ways in which organizations can be changed to become more humane and more effective.

In this chapter we will look first at some fundamental views about organizational structure and process, and then turn to some more recent work in organizational analysis and planned change,

including culture, the quality of work life, and organizational stress as important variables. The purpose is to help you learn about organizational life and take a look at career opportunities in this area where a sociological bent is most relevant.

A detailed examination of sociological analyses of organizations is beyond the scope of this chapter. Perrow(1972, 1979), Blau and Meyer(1971), Dalton(1959), Etzioni(1964), and Gouldner(1954), are all excellent examples of organizational studies by well known sociologists.

### Formal Organizations

*Formal organizations* ("organizations" for short) are complex human systems deliberately established to fill a defined purpose (Caplow 1983). Pioneered by Max Weber, the sociological study of organizations investigates how they are structured, how people behave in them, how they are led and managed, how they relate to their social environments, and why some organizations are more successful than others.

Sociologists generally analyze organizations from the perspective of systems theory (see Chapt. xx). Human systems on this scale are often described simply as social systems, that is a number of individuals organized into a network of work groups. Like any other system, organizations can be either considered as a whole or analyzed in terms of their component parts and relationships--their structure and process.

Looking at a factory as a process of transforming raw material into a finished product is an example of the general systems, dynamic approach. Activities are analyzed in terms of *input* of information, material, and labor; *processing* of these inputs; and then *output* of products, services, or information. Every such system also incorporates *feedback* mechanisms through which the organization detects and adjusts to changes in both its environment and internal states.

The *social structure* is the framework of the organization; to analyze its structure is similar to analyzing the anatomy of a living organism. In both cases, structure provides forms and patterns for coordinating and conducting the activities (or "functions") of the system.

Perhaps the most basic way of understanding social structure is to consider its internal division of labor--how the tasks of the organization are distributed among its component individuals and groups of individuals. "Roles" and "positions" are the building blocks of organizational structure in this sense.

*Role* refers to a set of expectations for behavior defining how a person within an organization is to function. Roles are always considered in terms of how they relate to others' roles around them: boss/worker, parent/child, and teacher/student are common examples of such role relationships. In organizational analysis, emphasis is commonly placed on the role relationship, for example, on the manager/subordinate relationship where one person is held accountable for the performance of another in a work setting (Jaques 1976).

A *position*, on the other hand, is a location within the organization where the task or function is determined by that organization's purpose. "Waitress," "chief surgeon," and "senator" are examples of positions. The position of waitress in a restaurant, for example, carries with it a set of behavioral norms or rules for performing the role, such as those concerning taking orders, filling orders, serving customers, or preparing certain food items. All these *norms* (expectations for behavior), taken together, define the *role* of waitress, the set of expectations for behavior associated with that position.

Positions and roles are not the same. A position is defined in terms of role relationships and is filled by a person hired or assigned to perform a specific role within the organization. A position can exist without the performance of its associated role, as when a position is vacant.

Every position in a social structure carries with it a *status*, that is a unique place in the organization's *hierarchy*, or pecking order. Status is usually thought of in terms of the authority it carries. *Authority* refers to *the right to make decisions or demands, exert influence, give directions, or apply sanctions.*

“Higher” positions generally have formal authority over lower positions, as in a “chain of command.” Sergeants are allowed to give orders to privates; the role and status of sergeant carries with it this authority. Whether or not the sergeant’s orders are actually followed, however, depends both on the subordinate’s acceptance of that authority and the sergeant’s power to influence his behavior.

*Power* can be defined as *the ability to act and to influence either the behavior of others or the outcome of events.* Although power and authority often go together, they are not the same. Power is an attribute of an individual or a group of individuals, not something inherent in a position. Authority is always vested in positions rather than individuals. For example, the person occupying in the position of “supervisor” has the right to assign work, give orders, and hire or fire workers. The individual has this authority solely by virtue of filling that position; because the person is their supervisor, workers will normally accept this as a legitimate exercise of authority.

In practice, however, one might have authority and no power, or vice versa. A police officer, for example, who is disarmed by a robber has the authority to arrest the criminal but may not in that situation have the power to exercise this authority; an armed robber has power to influence others but no authority to do so. In everyday life people generally follow rules, orders, instructions because they voluntarily agree to accept the authority of those in positions to give such directions.

Power is a key sociological concept in organizational life as well as in life in general. Who has power, who doesn't, whether it is shared or not, and the major struggles that occur when people want access to power or don't want to give it up, is often the key to understanding organizational behavior.

### Organizational Structure

An organization, then, can be looked upon as a hierarchical network of positions each carrying specific role expectations and a formally or informally defined level of status. The number of

positions and hierarchical levels is closely associated with organizational scale. That is, in small businesses and similar organizations, a few people take on many roles; sales, service, and bookkeeping may all be done by a single individual. Status hierarchies tend to be minimal in such cases, compared to the large organization in which there is a great division of labor. The traditional automobile assembly plant is a prime example of this, where each worker does just one or two tasks, and several echelons of supervisory and management personnel are required to coordinate all these people in accomplishing the organization's task.

The structure of an organization has significant consequences for its functioning at all levels. Since the organization is a social system, the relationships between positions are of utmost importance. Organizations have problems when roles are not clear, when structure is not compatible with task, or when individuals are not clear about who is accountable or responsible for what.

Common sense might tell you that structure is structure; to analyze organizational structure, all one would have to do is consult an organization chart, the charter or legal code formally establishing that organization, its bylaws, or other documentary evidence. This is what Elliott Jaques (1976), a leading British clinical sociologist, terms the organization's *manifest social structure*.

Jaques has found, however, that in organizations, as elsewhere in social life, things are not necessarily what they seem. It is essential, he has shown, to consider three other aspects of organizational structure. The first is the *assumed social structure*, how the participants in the organization see its role structure, what they believe or assume to be the current situation. Second, he stresses, the sociologist must also analyze the *extant social structure*. This refers to how things actually function, which can be determined only by systematic research. This generally leads to a description of the organization that is very different from its manifest or assumed structure. Finally, from the perspective of a sociological clinician, Jaques considers the *requisite social structure* of an organization. This is a conceptualization of the organization as it would need to be in order to maximize its effectiveness in realizing its objectives.

A classic example of sociological practice, from the work of William F. Whyte, can illustrate many of the concepts we have been

discussing. Demonstrating how the structure of social relationships decisively influences behavior within organizations, it also shows how sociological investigation can lead to useful change (Whyte 1948; Porter, 1962).

In the years after World War II, Whyte was retained by a restaurant chain to help them with pressing problems of inefficiency, low morale, and high employee turnover. Waitresses were stressed; cooks were walking off the job; and managers, needless to say, were upset. After applying his expertise in field research methods (described in Chapter xx) to investigating the situation, Whyte determined that the root of the problem lay in the high levels of stress during busy periods, which affected the relationships between waitresses and customers, waitresses and cooks, waitresses and managers, managers and cooks.

Upon examining the extant social structure and observing interactions between these roles, Whyte found that the situation violated nearly all aspects of requisite structure. The setup was simply inappropriate. The cooks, who were males, earned more money than the waitresses, who were females. They also had higher status—in the manifest structure, that is.

In actuality, Whyte observed the waitresses giving orders to the cooks. This violates the rule that persons of higher status give orders to those of lower status, not vice versa. Moreover (remember, this was some 40 years ago), women were giving orders to men.

Whyte's associate, Edith Lenz Hamilton, pointed out an elegant and amazingly simple solution: the *spindle*, that round metal band with clips on it to hold written "orders" now found in almost all restaurants. This innovation allowed the waitress to place a customer's order before the cook without having to give the order verbally.

- The spindle changed the social structure of the restaurant. It served as a memory device for the cook, who no longer had to remember all the orders. This made his work easier, especially during rush hours. The spindle was also a buffer; several waitresses could put up their orders simultaneously without having to fight for the cook's attention. By restructuring the relationship between cooks and waitresses, this device led both to feel differently,

behave differently, and experience their work roles with less stress and internal conflict.

It also had the practical effect of enabling the cook to get to each order at his own work rate. The spindle held orders in the sequence received, while allowing the cook to look them all over by merely turning the spindle. This made it possible to coordinate the preparation of all the orders, reducing errors.

The spindle restructures the *relationship between positions* in the restaurant. By facilitating a change in the pattern of interaction between people in the social system, Whyte thus solved a problem that had exhibited itself through individual behavior in forms that were good for neither the organization nor the individual.

Common sense might have suggested a psychological explanation and solution for the problem, but it actually lay in the way the work was organized, how positions were filled, cultural biases concerning gender, and how roles interacted. In short, it was a sociological problem:

The structure of relationships between roles has a decisive effect upon ... the people who occupy them, and upon the quality of their social interactions. Change the nature of this structure of social relationships and you change behavior and the quality of social life. The same people act and go about life differently....In short, social institutions produce powerful effects on human behavior and relationships; they are never neutral or innocent (Jaques 1976: 14).

What Whyte did, in summary, was to look at the restaurant as a social system rather than look only at the positions and processes making up the system. A systems approach, then, investigates the dynamic configuration of the whole organization; how roles interact, how work flows, how information flows. Systems-level solutions are sought for systems-level problems.



## Bureaucracy as a Kind of Organization

Sociologists have investigated many kinds of organizations, large and small, formal and informal, voluntary and coercive, to name just a few. In our society today, the workplace is predominantly a form of "bureaucratic organization."

First studied by Weber, this kind of organization is designed to accomplish large-scale administrative tasks by systematically coordinating the work of many individuals in a rational manner. By "rational," sociologists mean both cost effective and scientific. This contrasts with the old-fashioned "Mom and Pop" operation where business was conducted on the basis of personal relationships, common sense, and the owners' "feel."

*Bureaucracy* is identified with such features as impersonal management by formal rules, a hierarchy of specialized positions organized in terms of status and function and the principle that the position is separate from the person appointed to fill that job description. This form of organization may not be appropriate for neighborhood enterprises such as the "Mom and Pop" store or in professional and educational situations where efficient administration and production is less important than quality of relationships or where roles cannot be performed within a hierarchical structure.

In most other cases—the majority of contemporary work situations, in fact—bureaucratic organization promotes efficient operation, eliminates favoritism, and provides career opportunities based on expertise and specialized knowledge. It has become popular to associate bureaucracy with "red tape," inertia, and inefficiency, but these very real problems are related to the imposition of this form on situations where it is simply inappropriate, or to inappropriate organization of the bureaucracy itself.

We may find ourselves frustrated by corporate or governmental bureaucracies as they exist at present. Jaques (1976) argues that bureaucracies can be made both more humane and more effective through, among other things, restructuring roles and authority patterns. Not only is bureaucracy here to stay but it represents the most efficient way of structuring large organizations. Therefore, when we consider how sociologists can apply their knowledge,

perspectives, and methods to working with organizations, we are generally speaking about working with bureaucracies (Blau and Meyer 1971).

## Organizational Management

There have been two major schools of thought that have dominated American management, *scientific management*, and *human relations*. The dominant approach in industry in the first half of this century was the *scientific management school*. This approach is exemplified by the work of F.W. Taylor in the early years of the 20th century (Weisbord 1987). The prototypical "efficiency expert," he sought to improve factory performance by "rationalizing" work--that is, by breaking down jobs to their smallest elements so as to make tasks as quick and efficient as possible. These tasks were then quantified, generally in terms of output rates, and the worker was offered a bonus for "increased productivity." The goal of the efficiency expert was to get workers to do exactly as management wanted. The method was based on stopwatches and individual psychology, not systems theory. "Scientific management" was interested in one thing and one thing only: how much one worker could do, day in and day out, if he or she were shown the most efficient way of doing the job.

Increasingly, however, emphasis has been placed on management control rather than efficiency of production. Here, a rudimentary systems approach has been employed that is, in many ways, compatible with the structural-functionalist model. Consultants employing this perspective concentrate on the organization's needs, goals, structure, and functioning. The assumption is that the healthy state of a social system is one of equilibrium and that this harmonious condition will naturally follow if only people are adequately socialized to accept the values of the organization. The organizational structure, they believe, should be determined by the functional needs of the system.

This "structure-systems" approach for understanding and changing organizations is typically management oriented. After all,

the consultant is hired by management to help them with problems in employee relations, productivity, profitability, and so forth. The expectation is that employees will "be reasonable," as defined by the organization or the policies under which it operates—meaning, of course, "by management." The legitimacy of managerial authority and the necessity of "rule from above" are simply taken for granted. Policies based on these presumptions, however, can evoke strong feelings of anger and frustration when those within or served by the organization feel that their needs or their situations are not being considered.

It should be noted here that sociologists who work with organizations tend to share a common set of values that emphasize the individual's well being within the organization. Often denoted by the term *organizational democracy*, this set of values views worker and management alike as "citizens" of the organization. It defines the purpose of intervention as facilitating such things as self-regulation, participation in decision making, innovation, trust, openness, and collaboration. These stand in contrast to the conventional values of regulation from above, "top down" authority (following orders), reliance on standardized procedures, mistrust, secrecy, and "minding one's own business."

Indeed, sociologists (and others as well) have been vitally interested in organizations from the viewpoint of the individual. Goffman's classic study portrays the mental hospital as an institution in which patients learn to "make out" i.e, to develop informal norms, and in a myriad of ways to evade the formal rules and controls and protect their behavior which often is at odds with the goals of the organization (Goffman, 1961). Studs Terkel's (1975) best seller, *Working*, tells the stories of workers in a variety of occupations through their individual feelings and experience with regard to their jobs and the organizations they work in. A more recent study of how men and women differ in their experiences, work, and careers in large corporations is reported by Rosabeth Moss Kanter in *Men and Women of the Corporation* (1977).

## The Human Relations Approach

What has become known as the human relations approach remains perhaps the best known application of sociological thinking to organizations and the workplace. Its roots lie in the pioneering studies by industrial sociologists during the 1930s at the Western Electric telephone equipment plant near Chicago. There, Elton Mayo, Fritz Roethlisberger, and others found that workers set informal norms about production. They would trade jobs, and establish their own work rules, generally unknown to management and often contrary to official company policy. A good summary and critical evaluation of the Hawthorne findings are found in Landsberger (1958) and Weisbord (1987).

The human relations school stressed the importance of informal networks (sometimes called "informal organization") and showed that people are motivated by social as well as economic rewards. The human relations approach also established the importance of group membership as a determinant of attitudes and behavior. Douglas McGregor, a social psychologist, whose book *The Human Side of Enterprise* (1960) had a great impact on organizational research and practice, coined the terms "*Theory X* and *Theory Y*" to represent two different assumptions about human behavior which also were translated into management styles and corporate philosophies.

Theory X assumes that human beings are inherently lazy, will avoid work if they can, and must be directed and controlled. These negative assumptions arose from the philosophy of the assembly line and traditional hierarchical organizational structure. Theory Y on the other hand, makes positive assumptions about human motivation and behavior. People are willing to assume responsibility, desire to achieve, are capable of directing their own behavior, can be trusted, and are able to change and develop. Theory X and Theory Y assumptions affect managerial styles, relationships between peers and subordinates, the level of trust in a work team, and an organization's formal and informal structure. Theory Y assumptions underlie much of the more recent organization theory and design as covered later in this chapter. Weisbord (1987) argues that both Theory X and Y have positive and negative aspects and that both X and Y exist in each of us, thus rejecting the simple dichotomy of X or Y.

An example of the human relations approach in action comes from sociologist Robert Schrank (1978) who suggested that what makes work pleasant for many workers is the chance to socialize with other workers. Schrank's credentials are not those of an "armchair expert." Instead, he put in some 25 years as a blue-collar worker, union organizer, and bureaucrat before he entered college and earned his Ph.D. in sociology.

Schrank questions much of the conventional wisdom about worker satisfaction and life in the factory. High absenteeism, he argues, does not necessarily mean dissatisfied workers but may reflect the fact that the workers can afford to take a day off to go fishing. As a manager, Schrank himself closed shop and "took inventory" the day hunting season opened.

Getting workers to work for you rather than against you can be accomplished through such simple tactics as keeping toilets clean, having pleasant dining areas, and improving the social atmosphere of the workplace. While Schrank is pessimistic about management's ability to make repetitive work interesting and enriching, he suggests that giving workers a chance to *schmooze* will at least make the day less dull for them. He suggests that the workplace can easily be rearranged to facilitate this:

If you have a crew or workers assembling parts at desks and they keep turning around craning their necks to talk to the people behind them, thru the desks around so they face each other.... Turn your machines around so people can talk to each other like normal human beings (quoted in *Successful Business*, 1979:41).

Redefining the situation, even in this simple, physical sense, initiates a re-definition of behavioral roles within that environment. How? The work environment had previously been structured to block interaction between workers, quite effectively defining their roles (as opposed to those of office staff) as not involving socializing on the job. Schrank merely removes this element of the situation, effectively unblocking the flow of interaction between workers. He believes, moreover, that managers should talk to their employees and find out what they think. In many cases, employees can be left to organize work themselves. People will work harder and be more satisfied in a workplace where people are friendly, where there is warmth, a supportive atmosphere, and a

good reward and feedback system that considers the needs of the people who constitute the organization.

Schrank is especially critical of the attempt to "be scientific" by simply quantifying everything; this is precisely what Taylor tried to do. Rather than study an organization from the management's perspective, through questionnaires or other so-called empirical methods, Schrank prefers to take workers to a local bar and, over a couple of beers, ask them to talk about their job. In this way, he attempts to gain *Verstehen* into how the system is or is not working from the perspective of those who are doing the actual work.

This led Schrank to propose some unusual innovations. He suggests, for example, putting telephones in factories so that blue-collar workers have the same opportunity to call or be contacted during the work-day as white-collar workers. Most production workers, one must realize, operate in an almost military atmosphere in which they are permitted only one or two breaks a day, by the clock, and in which their activity often is entirely controlled by the flow of the assembly line. When a Canadian company added telephones on a production line, it found that the average worker made or received only two or three calls a week, and that this did not interfere with production at all. In fact, assembly-line workers covered for their buddies who were on the phone, and an informal norm developed that it was unfair to inconvenience others by spending too much time on the phone.

The past few years have seen great changes in large organizations due to changes in technology as we experience a dramatic shift from an industrial to an information society. This shift is made possible by the dramatic increase in the use of computers, where knowledge rather than brute labor has become central to economic development (Toffler 1990). Managers need to be facilitators, not controllers, in this new computer age. Decentralized workplaces replace the large hierarchically managed workplace of old. The increase in mergers, re-organization, a growing multi-cultural workforce, global competition, layoffs, are all indications of the greater need to pay attention to the human issues in organizations. The age of Taylor, that of unskilled workers on assembly lines, is largely over.

## Organization Development

Beginning in the early 1960s, a new field, *organization development*, commonly known as OD began emerging from the work of applied behavioral science practitioners from business, psychology, and sociology (Burke 1982). Its roots lay in the industrial human relations research and practice based on small group theory and leadership training popular in the 1950s and 60s. Kurt Lewin's work in group dynamics and his development of *action research* (Marrow 1969; Weisbord, 1987) had a major impact on the field. Lewin, an experimental social psychologist, believed in the wedding of theory and practice with the belief that diagnosis of the problem also should include a commitment to action. People participating in research on their own behavior are more likely to act on the results. This is a radically different notion than the traditional scientific stance that seeks to avoid any influence of the researcher on the subject.

OD is really an umbrella covering a variety of organization design and intervention activities (Burke1982; Schein1969; Tannenbaum, et. al. 1985). The goal is to improve organizational effectiveness and meet needs of organizational members. The targets of any change may be the structure of the organization, the social climate, or the behavior of individuals in the organization. As the OD field has grown, it has become more self-consciously sociological in orientation; its focus has progressed from small group interventions to changing whole social systems. Two major perspectives, one focusing on organizational culture, and the other on quality of work life are instructive examples of sociological theory and practice in organizational development.

## Organizational Culture

At the beginning of the chapter we examined organizational structure--the network of social relations in detail. Another dimension of social organization is the culture of the organization (Blau and Scott 1962).

There has been a great interest in organizational culture in the last decade (Deal and Kennedy 1982; Kilmann 1985, 1989; Schein, 1985). The culture of an organization is that set of generally unconscious assumptions about reality shared by members of the organization and expressed in their shared beliefs, values, and behavior. Culture is rarely discussed, but newcomers learn the unwritten rules of "how we do things around here."

Peters and Waterman (1982), Kanter (1983), O'Toole (1985), Schein (1985), Peters (1987), Walton (1988) and others have investigated extremely successful corporations to see what they have in common and what distinguishes them from less successful ones. "Excellent" organizations exhibited a conspicuous and coherent culture maintained through stories, slogans, myths, and legends. Like the anthropologist who seeks to understand societies through their cultures, the clinical sociologist can glean valuable information about an organization by looking for evidence of its culture. A similar approach is taken in the fascinating collection of articles on organizational ethnography by Jones and his colleagues (1988). Ethnography, relying on participant observation, in-depth interviewing, and documentation of traditions brings to light the values and ways of doing things in organizations that guide behavior and decision making, and aid or hinder organizational effectiveness--in short, gives clues to the organization's culture.

What are the shared values? Are they innovation, product quality, and service? Does the organization treat its employees well? What is the climate of the organization--open, closed, authoritarian, democratic, repressive, growth oriented? What myths have sustained the organization over the years? The Bell Telephone Company, for example, deliberately maintained the image of itself as a service company rather than a telephone company; in both its



advertising to the public and its internal communication, "Ma Bell" instilled in its employees and the public the belief that it was a public service company rather than a manufacturer and distributor of telephone equipment. F & P, Inc. (the letters stand for Fun and Profit), a promotions and marketing company in Los Angeles, has a teddy bear as a corporate symbol to stand for a "warm and fuzzy" company.

Most innovative companies believe that their individual employees, from top to bottom, are the best source of new ideas and energy. Highly innovative organizations reward people for being collaborative. They view the task of management as one of creating climates and environments hospitable to people's natural inventiveness. Harrison(1983) believes that balance and harmony are keys to organizational vitality. The support of individuals by one another and by the larger whole comes through a sense of mutual responsibility and caring in such organizations.

Organizations have a certain style, character, ways of doing things that may be even more important than the formal system in understanding the organization if a change effort is to be successful (Kilmann 1989). When Pacific Southwest Airlines (PSA), was taken over by US Air, the new owners sought to change an informal history of irreverence that was a trademark of PSA and loved by its customers. The happy face smiles on the front of the aircraft were painted over, and flight attendants were instructed to cut the humor from their public address announcements, long a PSA trademark.

Norms, written and unwritten are a good clue to an organization's culture, as the PSA example shows. Ralph Kilmann (1985), Director of the Program in Corporate Culture at the University of Pittsburgh School of Business has developed a culture gap survey that looks at the differences between the actual norms and the desired norms. In his consulting work he has group members list actual norms that currently guide their behavior ("don't disagree with your boss," "don't rock the boat," "look busy even when you are not") and then share and discuss them. Participants come up with a new list of norms they would like to see to promote organizational success such as "congratulate those who suggest new ways of doing things."

Some organizations that Kilmann works with, where the culture gap between actual and desired norms is too great to confront, exhibit norms that exemplify resistance to change--

"protect yourself at all costs," "don't try to change until everyone else has changed," "if you ignore the problem, maybe it will go away."

With the recent rash of mergers, buy-outs, and corporate takeovers, very different cultures are often thrown together, as in the PSA example, when the acquiring firm wants to completely integrate the other and have a uniform set of norms. Marks and Mirvis (1966) believe that the most important contributor to discord in mergers is a clash in corporate cultures. There may be a fear of loss of an organization's identity, as in the airline example mentioned earlier. There are often differences in the way the companies are managed--participative and people oriented vs autocratic and focused on numbers. Culture is often overlooked when merger deals are made--economic, production, marketing, and technical issues are foremost. Developing a transition structure, keeping people informed, and providing social support can ease the stress of mergers.

Dave Jamieson (1989) looks at an organization's culture from a broader perspective than Kilmann. Jamieson considers five components of an organization's culture: *Linguistic*--language, jargon, slogans; *Symbolic*--logos, decor, facilities; *Historic*--stories, myths, legends about founders; *Ritualistic*--things valued, ceremonies, rewards for right behavior; and *Normative*--rules and norms about what is right and wrong. In his consulting work Jamieson has the members of the organization identify the five components, by looking at their values, beliefs, and assumptions. He then has them come up with a desired culture that can be reinforced through the organization's structure, systems, and procedures.

A recent large scale attempt at organizational change at Pacific Bell provides a dramatic example of the impact of organizational culture on the outcome (Faithorne, 1987). In 1983, Pac Bell was divested from AT & T, along with other regional telephone companies. These new companies now had to compete with other telephone companies without the umbrella of Ma Bell. The top management of Pac Bell decided that the culture of the company must change to adapt to the new conditions of deregulation and competition. A leadership development program was started in 1985 involving managers at all levels and eventually all 67,000 employees. It was one of the largest planned change efforts of its kind. The program was abandoned in 1987 after complaints from

some employees led to a Public Utilities Commission investigation and extensive press coverage.

What went wrong? The culture of Pac Bell was not prepared for the leadership development program. The company wanted to change its culture; paradoxically, the change effort itself reflected and reinforced the old culture. Used to top-down leadership, management bought a program and introduced it at the top. The change program stressed creativity, innovative thinking, and a whole systems approach that did not fit easily with the traditional business culture of a telephone company.

The project was intended to develop appreciation for the competitive nature of the business after de-regulation and to enhance initiative and effective work across traditional bureaucratic boundaries. However, employees, who for the most part worked for Pac Bell for their entire careers were used to following strict procedures spelled out in manuals. Telephone operator behavior was measured and controlled to the minute, and conformity was valued for uniform service goals. Profits had been assured and competition was never an issue. Management orders flowed from above, dependably, predictably, reliably, without much change--in short a compliance culture that did not leave much room for individual expression or creativity.

Pac Bell has a bureaucratic culture developed in a semi-regulated environment and characterized by conformity, low risk, and concern with how things are done rather than results. Some people feared taking risks, losing their power, prestige, position. Top management bought the change effort without sufficiently sharing information with others who would be directly affected by the decision. The program was designed to help employees let go of old habits, learn new ways to facilitate team work, be more creative, and think for themselves--all admirable goals.

From this example we learn that organizational cultures are very difficult to change. They are real and powerful, and shape the behavior of those in the organization. Unless there is a genuine effort to include those affected by planned change in the change effort, such interventions are almost certainly experienced as a threat and produce defensiveness and resistance by those organization members involved.

## The Quality of Work Life

Another approach to the study and change of work organizations, an example of organization development with a sociological approach, focuses on the *quality of work life*, (QWL), a term coined in the early 1970s to describe a) a concern with the impact of technology on people as well as on organizational effectiveness; b) the idea of participation in organizational problem solving and decision making at various organizational levels. When there is a special emphasis on the interaction of human systems and technology, the term "*sociotechnical systems*" (STS) is used (Trist 1981).

One of the best known QWL-related innovations is *quality circles*, small groups of workers and managers who meet regularly for problem solving (Abbott 1987). The problems might involve work roles, flow of work, labor-management relations, improving product quality, or redesigning jobs. Criticisms of quality circles are that they do not encourage workers to discuss larger issues of the firm and rarely have the ability to change the real power structure at work (Lerner 1986).

The concept of sociotechnical systems gives equal emphasis to both people and technology. Offices using computers, and factories of almost any kind are workplaces where humans interact with machines--the social system of workers interacting with the technical systems. Unlike the scientific management school, which emphasized technology and looked at workers as individual attachments to it, STS looks at workers in relation to each other and to the tools, techniques, and environment of the workplace from a systems perspective (Weisbord 1987). The restaurant spindle example, earlier in the chapter, was an elementary example of an STS approach.

An informative example of how STS works in practice comes from an intervention attributed to the work of Norwegian social psychologist Einar Thorsrud (Trist 1981; Whyte 1989). Norwegian merchant ships with large crews were facing strong competition from foreign countries with lower labor costs. Shipping company

managers and union leaders wished to explore whether ships could be operated with smaller crews and better living/working conditions, which would also reduce crew turnover, another costly concern.

Shipping company managers, union leaders, and ships officers and crew members worked with a team of social scientists to re-design the ship with new technical, physical and social arrangements. The traditional segregation of personnel--officers, petty officers, and crew, including deck and engine room personnel was ended. Guided by STS thinking, ships were re-designed to facilitate the establishment of a single shipboard community among people who must live together under isolated conditions, 24 hours per day. Some of these design features included common recreation and dining halls where all ranks could socialize, as compared to separate facilities for each group. This involved changing the social system by the deliberate reduction of status differentials between officers and crew. This successful intervention, later carried out in other shipping companies and maritime nations, was a pioneering example of how a more democratic organization of the workplace in a non-bureaucratic manner could lead to more efficient operation and greater employee satisfaction.

The new Saturn automobile plant in Tennessee (Gwynne 1990) is a striking example of an industrial organization's attempt to design a plant to make a product that will be competitive based on QWL and STS thinking. Team work, a major commitment to increasing quality, and the efficient use of resources underly the transformation from a hierarchical assembly line. The union, the United Auto Workers, fully shares in the power and decision making at top levels. The plant is organized into some 165 work teams of about ten members each. The teams are allowed to interview and approve new employees for their team, are given budget responsibility and a say in the purchase and installation of car assembly equipment. The Saturn philosophy encourages consensus decision making, and worker compensation is affected by product quality, productivity, and company profits giving employees a direct stake in the outcome.

The Saturn plant reflects the character of organizational renewal spelled out by Kanter (1983) and others: encouragement of a culture of pride, reduction of layers of hierarchy, and giving people at lower levels a chance to contribute to change. This shift to more participatory, democratic, and team centered production is seen as

America's best strategy for survival in the tough economic times ahead.

In short, QWL, and STS represent a shift from Taylorism to systems thinking, and to a belief that social systems can be improved only when those who are part of them understand how they work and can have a role in changing them. It represents a shift from the bureaucratic model of order, control, and concentrated prediction, power to a more decentralized model with a flatter hierarchy, where emphasis is on cooperation, empowerment at all levels, innovation and creativity. Weisbord (1987) stresses that this new thinking must include economic realities--competition, markets for products, and social responsibility, as environmental and other global issues become paramount.

### The Sociologist as Change Facilitator

Since we have looked at organizational analysis and change from an increasingly sociological perspective, let us look more closely at some sociological practitioners of organizational change. The focus of their interventions is on roles, relationships, organizational structure, and the environments in which the organization functions.

One of the earliest models of sociological practice at this level, *social analysis*, was developed by Elliott Jaques while associated with the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations in Britain during the 1940s. We already have discussed some of his concepts. Although he is a trained psychoanalyst, Jaques's approach is distinctly sociological, focusing on social structure as opposed to personality factors or group process.

Social analysis is based on the fact that things do not always work the way they are supposed to work and that the way they are supposed to work is always subject to re-definition, anyhow. The method, as it has been developed over the past 40 years, is quite elegant (Jaques 1982). The social analyst looks at role relationships and how they are perceived in order to learn about the organization. Jaques has found that specifying and clarifying accountability and authority in manager-subordinate role

relationships is essential to organizational success and individual well-being. Specifying roles is therefore an important sociological task in organization design, analysis, and change.

The social analyst is invited into some unit of an organization experiencing problems. The analyst then discusses the situation with those involved, both as a group and individually, working up a summary of their views, which is then presented to the group as a whole. The analyst's role is to help members clarify their views, teasing out the important ideas and supplying concepts when necessary, and then to help the group systematically conceptualize their situation and possible resolutions. Often, this will be worked up into a report, which is then presented to the next higher unit of organization and the process repeated at that level of the system.

Jaques worked with a single company, Glacier Metal Works, for over 30 years. During this period--probably the longest-term study of a single organization yet conducted--he did social analysis with the company's Work Council on a wide range of projects. These included methods of payment, managerial organization, trade union representation, industrial relations, promotion procedures, and employee participation. As a result of this work, Jaques's expertise has been called upon time and again when large organizations are considering structural changes. His group has done social analysis, for example, with the Church of England, the British National Health Service, and the U.S. Army.

Sociologist William F. Whyte, whose restaurant research we discussed earlier, uses a form of organizational research and intervention called *participatory action research* (Whyte 1987; 1989a; 1989b). PAR is a technique for advancing scientific knowledge and solving practical problems in an integrated manner. It is a collaborative effort for change based on sound scientific knowledge --the Norwegian shipping example described earlier is a good example of PAR. Employees in the organization team up with professional researchers to design the initial projects, to gather and analyze data, and utilize the findings in action projects. Participant observation by the researcher is often a part of the process. Whyte points out that in the complex field of modern industrial organizations, few problems can be solved by a single academic discipline. Ideas and methods from engineering, accounting, and business administration need to be integrated. PAR does not follow the standard scientific model of researcher collecting the facts

without any feedback from the subjects of the study involved. By working together the PAR team can correct information before it is finally reported or implemented.

Kurt Lewin coined the well known phrase "There is nothing as practical as a good theory." An example from my own consulting experience illustrates how theory can inform practice. I was asked by a company to look at their credit department which had developed serious morale problems and employee dissatisfaction. The company's culture could be best described as one big family, where multi-generations worked, hardly anyone got fired, and there was strong loyalty to the company.

The work of the credit department was stressful and routine. After interviewing about half the clerks, the supervisors, and the manager of the department, I discovered the problem lay primarily in the management of the department. The manager was an alcoholic, and had promoted a clerk to be his assistant and supervise a key section of the department. This woman, who had no supervisory training, was a classic Theory X top-down manager: she was constantly critical, treated employees as children, did not allow them to talk to each other, did not trust them, and gave them no latitude in how the work was to be done. The result was a climate of fear, suspicion, hostility, and no trust.

The assistant manager was covering for her ineffective boss and running the department, a case where she had the power but no official (manifest, to use Jaques' term) authority to do so. Her emphasis on control, denial, and workaholism was perfectly analogous to an alcoholic family, where the non-drinking spouse covers for the alcoholic, and the children act out. This is well explained by family systems theory (Schaef and Fassel 1988). Her intentions were the best: she genuinely believed her behavior was in the best interest of the department and the company. The company decided the best course was to remove both the manager and his assistant from the department resulting in much improvement.

Organization development specialists, as we have seen, take a variety of approaches in their work as change facilitators in organizational settings. As we move from a production oriented economy to an information processing, service economy, there have been a number of corresponding changes in the workplace and work environment which offer new challenges for the clinical-organizational sociologist.



## Workplace Issues for the 1990s

The last decade of the 20th century promises sociological, economic, and political changes that affect the workplace and are a challenge to organizations of many kinds. There have been revolutions in computer technology, international trade, and composition of the workforce. Through the year 2000, 29% of new labor force entrants will be non-white and 66% will be women. There is increasing evidence of a growing shortage of skilled labor (Finkelstein 1990). Job security has eroded for many employees as companies face increased competition due to de-regulation, mergers, acquisitions, and foreign competition. We will look at two issues that have gotten much recent attention and have sociological import: women in the workplace and occupational stress.

### Women in the Workplace

A study by Judith Rosener (1990) shows that women have dramatically different management styles from men, and that their style may be the leadership style of the future. Women executives tend to share power and information, encourage employee participation, and have more sensitivity to how personal and organizational goals can be mutually reached. This is in contrast to male management which still tends to be top down and by command and control as described in the beginning of the chapter. This new style of management is in tune with the fundamental transformation in work activity as rigid bureaucratic organizations are giving way to more flexible arrangements that encourage employee participation and cooperation--essential if we as a society are to adapt to a turbulent, diverse, and rapidly changing environment (Finkelstein 1990).

As more women move into higher management, the organizational assumption that to be a professional is to be a man is changing. Women find themselves in a role dilemma: If they act like males, they are seen as non-feminine; if they act like women, they are seen as nonprofessional. And there is still a glass ceiling, an invisible,

informal norm that women are to go no further up the executive hierarchy.

There is increasing tension between career and family, formerly largely a male issue ("I don't have time to be home with the wife and kids"), now that more women are in the labor force. Over 50% of women with children under age six work outside of the home. The increasing number of dual career marriages create two sets of job demands, two paychecks, two egos and many competing claims on both spouses' time and energy (Hochschild 1990). When promotions and transfers occur, new problems arise and commuter marriages emerge. Fax machines, telephones, and commuter airlines become part of family life as couples struggle for more family or leisure time. Businesses are discovering that there are increased costs in absenteeism, sick leave, turnover, and down time when family concerns are neglected. Job sharing, working at home, restructuring work to delegate more routine tasks, and flexible work hours (flextime) as well as developing more child care facilities, often at the worksite, are ways of coping with these new issues.

## Stress in the Workplace

The rapid changes in the environment, work place, and organizational life all add stress to the lives of people involved.

Organizational stress can come from a variety of sources: the job itself, role conflicts, role ambiguity, job insecurity, stressful relationships at work, and family/work conflicts (Renshaw 1976; Cooper and Marshall 1977). Mergers can be stressful especially if incompatible corporate cultures are thrown together or the values of individual employees are at odds with the organization's culture.

Occupational stress has become a major health hazard. Mental stress claims against employers increased more than 500% in the 1980s in California according to the Workers' Compensation Institute. The past decade has seen the emergence of many stress management programs; most commonly they help individuals to identify stressors and train them to alleviate or accommodate stress through diet, relaxation, exercise, and the like. A psychological and physiological approach is not enough from a sociological viewpoint-- the situational perspective is lacking (Goldman 1984; Gutknecht 1984.).

Michael Lerner (1986), a psychologist who has designed and led occupational stress workshops from a distinctly sociological perspective, feels that the best remedy for stress is to identify and change the sources of it rather than merely help individuals to adapt to it. He believes that people in organizations are victims of a surplus powerlessness-- a set of feelings and beliefs that make people think of themselves as even more powerless than the actual power situation requires, and thus leads them to act in ways that confirm their powerlessness, a classic example of *self fulfilling prophecy*. His workshops emphasize empowering members to change the job or workplace conditions through collective action. Social support is an important component; people in greatest distress tend to utilize social support systems the least.

Other sources of stress come from the "de-skilling" of jobs, when machines take over job functions and workers feel their work gives them no opportunities to use their abilities. Long work hours also can be stressful. Americans work more hours per week and more weeks per year than in any other capitalist country, with the possible exception of Japan.

Industrial sociologist Robert Karasek found the highest incidence of stress (as measured by heart attacks) in low level jobs with high demand on workers and low opportunities for control (Karasek, et. al 1981). A traditional assembly line is a classic example of a high demand, low control work situation. Physicians and lawyers may have very stressful jobs but they have much more control over their work lives, control being measured in terms of how much opportunity workers have to determine what is done and at what pace. People in high demand, low control jobs had much greater risk of coronary heart disease than people in high demand, high control occupations such as physicians and lawyers.

This is a sociological, not psychological, analysis of physical illness. Lerner's own research on psychic distress found the same explanation. The explanation of these findings is based on the belief that human beings need to use their capacities and abilities, and the frustration of those needs can create physical and mental malaise. Opportunities for social interaction and support, participation in decision making (empowerment), restructuring work tasks and designing work technology with the needs of workers in mind are all interventions in the work place that can alleviate stress, lower costs, and meet human needs.

Stress can also come from being in an organization with an irrational organizational culture, dysfunctional management styles, or neurotic leadership, as Kets de Vries and Miller (1985) explore in a book entitled *The Neurotic Organization*. Taking a sociological perspective does not mean discounting psychological causes of organizational problems. A multidisciplinary approach to organizational analysis and change is best.

### Doing Sociology in Organizations

The sociology of organizations as an academic subject and a field of practice is based on the fundamental principle that human behavior is influenced by the social contexts in which it occurs. This principle is basic to understanding and creating change. If our behavior is shaped by social structure, culture, and environment, then it can be changed by altering any or all of these three.

As we have seen throughout this chapter, a sociological perspective is useful both to understand organizations and to facilitate change in them. Training in research design, an awareness of social systems and structure, and sensitivity to cultural and social phenomena (such as family/work issues and ethnic, racial, and gender concerns) gives you insight and tools to work with organizations. (Gutknecht 1984; Glass 1979; Rebach and Bruyn 1991). Schein (1969) and Steele (1974) are excellent primers on consulting skills.

Although this chapter has focused on business and industrial organizations, an increasing number of sociologists work in public and nonprofit organizations, such as schools, government, and social service agencies. Much of our discussion applies equally in these settings (Bryson 1988).

There are many career opportunities in organizations for which a sociological background is most relevant (Finkelstein 1990). Human resource development (the new name for personnel management), employment/labor relations, training and professional development, employee counseling and assistance programs, affirmative action,

and solving family and day care problems are just a few possibilities.

Sociologists should be part of any team negotiating mergers and acquisitions, creating a multi-cultural work force, and dealing with the cultural problems facing multi-national corporations. Strategic planning, a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and bind what an organization is and does (Bryson 1988:5), is another increasingly important area where sociologists can use their expertise.

As we have seen in this chapter, working with organizations requires an accurate understanding of an organization's structure, process, and culture in order to pinpoint problems and facilitate appropriate interventions. A *sociological* approach is useful for gaining the information needed to guide such change.

If you were a sociological change agent, the sort of approach you might take in *diagnosing an organization's work structure* would very likely involve applying *field work* and *participant observation* tactics such as these:

1. *Talking* to people in the organization.
2. *Watching* what they do and how they do it.
3. *Reading* reports, bulletin boards, policy statements, organization charts, and other relevant material.

You would be looking to answer such questions as these:

1. What is the mission or purpose of the organization?
2. What is the formal and informal structure of the organization?
3. What symbols, rituals, and other evidences of the organization's culture can you discover?
4. What is distinctive or unique about this organization?
5. What do people like most and least about their jobs?
6. How are work tasks organized?

7. Are decisions made at the level where the most adequate information is available?
8. What is the climate and level of trust in the organization?
9. How are differences and disagreements handled?
10. When changes are made, are the people affected by the changes asked for their ideas?
11. Do people desire to contribute their talents and abilities to their work as fully as they can?
12. How effective is the organization in fulfilling its goals?
13. How does the environment--political, social, economic-- affect the organization's behavior and performance?

This kind of information would allow you to understand and assess the organizational system which might be useful in helping an organization --both to achieve its goals and to maximize its potential as a satisfying workplace for its employees.

The sociological challenge is to discover which social arrangements contribute to human growth, health, and organizational well-being. Problems may have psychological, technical, economic, or political dimensions, to be sure--but we must not forget the more subtle influence of social context. Human systems are interrelated; problems in one system or aspect of a system affect all others.

Unclear organizational objectives can contribute to poor work-team performance. Work problems and organizational turmoil can affect family life, and family problems can affect work life. A clinical perspective on the sociology of organizations, therefore, means more than using sociology for creating change. We need to study how organizations affect our lives and use that knowledge to improve the quality of our lives and those of our fellow human beings.

## Review Questions and Exercises

1. What are the differences between a social systems approach and an individual psychology approach to improving organizational productivity?
2. What is the role of bureaucracy in contemporary American life? Consider both the positive aspects of governmental and private-sector bureaucracies. How could the negative features be eliminated or reduced and the positive features enhanced?
3. Take the role of a sociological change agent. Either discuss in a group or write how you would go about diagnosing the work structure of an organization of your choice, what you might find, and the sorts of changes you might recommend to improve both the human interaction and the overall effectiveness of this system. (If possible, gather data on an actual organization for this exercise.)
4. What is the impact on organizational life of the dramatic increase of women and ethnic minorities in the workforce?
5. What are your own values and priorities around work and career? In what kinds of organizations would you feel most comfortable and effective?

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