



Handbook of Organization Studies by Stewart R. Clegg; Cynthia Hardy; Walter R. Nord
Review by: Anne S. Huff
The Academy of Management Review, Vol. 23, No. 3 (Jul., 1998), pp. 622-625
Published by: [Academy of Management](#)
Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/259299>
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randomly in concentrated markets subject to backlogs. He finds that firms with larger capacity optimally "buffer" their smaller rivals by setting their prices generally higher (even if their costs are lower) so that they give up market share when demand is low and gain it when demand is high. This is what actually happened in the turbogenerator business, where GE—the large, low-cost producer—buffered Westinghouse. Ghemawat contrasts this sophisticated behavior with a simple "efficiency" hypothesis that the low-cost producer should undercut its rival when demand is low, and he concludes that game-theoretic interactions add explanatory power over and above nonstrategic reasoning.

Another counterintuitive game-theoretic result, supported by empirical analysis of a number of chemical process industries, is that larger plants in declining markets will tend to be shut down earlier, even if they are somewhat more efficient than their smaller rivals. Once again, the simple nonstrategic intuition can lead one astray.

The need to supplement or replace alternative, noninteractive perspectives on strategic competition with game-theoretic insights is a recurring theme of *Games Businesses Play*, and partisans of the resource-based view of the firm, dynamic capability theory, the price-taking Chicago model of competition, or Michael Porter's theory of "fit" across a system of activities will find themselves provoked on occasion. Ghemawat's critiques pack considerably more credibility than is usual in cross-paradigm discussions because they are based on detailed and specific analyses of real-world business situations, rather than general philosophical principles or hand-waving references to stories in the popular business press. Moreover, Ghemawat is hardly a blind zealot for game theory; many of his reflections (especially on the last three cases), stress the limitations of game-theoretic IO models and advocate more attention to internal organizational factors, such as politics and managerial mindsets.

There are some weaknesses of substance and presentation in this book. Alternative hypotheses are rarely stated fully enough for the reader to be sure of just what is being tested. The proofs of many of the analytical propositions are not included (journal citations are given instead), and the verbal discussions synopsizing them

are sometimes too terse to be useful. Inconvenient arguments are occasionally dealt with too hastily. But these are minor flaws.

I suspect that the real barriers to acceptance for Ghemawat's approach will be found in the cultures of his two primary audiences: IO theorists and management scholars. The economic theorists have neither the skills, the resources, nor the publishing outlets to do a lot of case writing and analysis, although it seems likely that this book might convince some of them that cases are useful for studying game-theoretic propositions. Management scholars, in contrast, are better placed to generate case-based research but, in general (though with a growing number of exceptions), do not have the familiarity or comfort level with game theory to follow the trail Ghemawat has blazed. It will be interesting to see which group will be the first to overcome its cultural barriers and seize this academically critical territory. Perhaps there is even a game-theoretic model that could shed light on the matter.

REFERENCE

Ghemawat, P. 1991. *Commitment: The dynamic of strategy*. New York: Free Press.

Handbook of Organization Studies, edited by Stewart R. Clegg, Cynthia Hardy, and Walter R. Nord. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1996.

Reviewed by Anne S. Huff, University of Colorado at Boulder.

The *Handbook of Organization Studies* is presented as a map of the field and ground for conversation into the next century. Informed by postmodern thought, the editors declare that "the old certainty is gone"—replaced by many different, informative perspectives on organizations and organizing. Their efforts to survey this large terrain provide an exciting panorama that is not easily gained from reading journals or single-subject books, especially in North America, where major streams of academic work have been relatively insulated from some of the theoretic developments covered here. The *Handbook*, therefore, will be of interest to scholars

placing their work in a broader context, beginning work in a new area, or considering the overlap of their interests with other areas of inquiry. It is also an obvious guide for graduate students preparing for comprehensive exams or planning their first research projects.

In the preface Stewart Clegg, Cynthia Hardy, and Walter Nord note they deliberately titled the book a handbook of "organization studies"—rejecting the terms "organization theory" and "organization science" as too singular and too privileged. I am sympathetic with their pluralistic approach but point out that we can now look back on an enormous body of scholarly work, including 50 years of sustained postwar effort in business schools, departments of sociology, economics, psychology, anthropology, and other disciplines. Although practice and theorizing continue to move out from under the conclusions of these efforts, in my view we should not abandon the search for cumulative insights. The agenda is not to pursue "science" as the word has been defined but as it can be developed. Despite the complexity of our subject, a multiplicity of scholarly approaches, and the editors' modesty, the *Handbook* makes a significant contribution by moving us toward the more coordinated conversation that marks greater maturity.

Contents Summary

This 700-page work is divided into three parts. Part One, Frameworks for Analysis, provides an introductory chapter on theorizing about organizations, then covers "structural contingency theory," organizational ecology, organizational economics, theories about the individual, institutional theory, critical theory and postmodernism, and feminist approaches. Part Two, Current Issues, includes chapters on strategy, leadership, decision making, cognition, identity, group performance and information technology, communication, technology and structure, innovation, learning, the environment, and globalization. Part Three, Reflections on Research, Theory and Practice, considers data, action research, emotion, aesthetics, time, culture, power, normal science, and theory in practice. The conclusion adds a manifesto for more reflexive awareness of how we define and discuss organizations and organizing and for more willingness to let the subjects of our observations speak for themselves.

The choice and division of topics did not always make sense to me. (Shouldn't there be direct consideration of change, for example? Why are emotion and power discussed in Part Three? Doesn't it make sense to split technology from group performance and structure?) But these early concerns were small ones. Most chapters are well-written reviews that can be praised, first of all, for providing readers with a historical view of their subject. It is not surprising that Michael Reed's introductory chapter on theorizing includes references to Taylor, Pareto, Parsons, and other early scholars, but many later chapters also give exemplary attention to early work. Stephen Fineman's chapter on emotions, for example, includes over a dozen references to work done before 1960. Too often organization scholars are content to consider only the most recent contributions to a topic. Many of these chapters establish a higher standard; quite a number have a primary objective of helping readers understand the historical emergence of their area of interest.

An obvious, although not conclusive, division among the remaining chapters is between those that develop a framework for categorizing important subtopics of interest and those that raise provocative questions for future consideration. Marta Calás and Linda Smircich's chapter on feminist approaches to organization studies stands out as an example of the first approach. By summarizing seven different feminist approaches and illustrating each with different versions of the same vignette about a successful female executive, the authors evoke a complex set of theoretical possibilities, which they then reference and critique further. This kind of framework is useful for those who are already working in an area, while also providing an overview for those who know little about it. The *Handbook* provides similar organizing reviews on many other subjects, including chapters on ecology, organizational economics, institutional theory, decision making, cognition, and group information technology.

Karl Weick and Francis Westley's chapter on organization learning illustrates an alternative plan of action. These authors begin with a contentious statement: organizations and learning are essentially antithetical processes, which means the phrase "organizational learning" qualifies as an oxymoron. To learn is to disorganize and increase variety. To organize is to

forget and reduce variety. In the rush to embrace learning, organizational theorists often overlook this tension, which explains why they are never sure whether learning is something new or simply warmed-over organizational change (p. 440). The chapter is an essay built around additional engaging but provocative statements on subjects as diverse as humor, improvisation, and psychotherapy. A number of other chapters take a similar tact, evidenced even in their titles. Walter Nord and Suzy Fox discuss the "the individual in organization studies" as "the great disappearing act." Linda Putnam, Nelson Phillips, and Pamela Chapman introduce relatively unfamiliar work from organizational communication by speaking in terms of metaphors. Richard Whipp discusses strategy as "creative destruction." Deborah Dougherty's chapter on innovation suggests three ways in which theory in this area should change. Chapters on time and aesthetics contribute arresting images that cannot be found in my everyday reading.

All of this made my copy of the *Handbook* a porcupine of paper slips marking interesting references, quotes, and disagreements. I'm sure the density of these markers comes, in part, from the fact that many chapters are written from a perspective outside my normal frame of reference. The *Handbook* draws on an international group of authors, primarily from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. As a result, even the familiar author is more likely to say something new to many readers. For example, I have known and admired Richard Whipp and his work for some time, but his chapter on the meaning of strategy is not the kind of chapter I might have written, in part because we come from different countries and have different training and experience. Whipp draws on more European sources; some of his recommendations (notably, uniting strategy and organizational studies to better understand public and not-for-profit organizations) are less likely to come from the United States. It is a pleasure, although a discomfiting one, to be challenged in one's own areas of study.

I was also pleased by evidence of convergence on topics of interest to the field through overlaps in subject matter in different chapters. For example, in their chapter on power, Hardy and Clegg address identity and gender, as well as more expected topics. As the editors of this volume, they may be particularly aware of top-

ics found here, but many chapters showed similar breadth. We need these overlaps in interest to move from organization studies to organization science. This volume makes a significant and innovative contribution because it not only offers readers an expansive view of their own areas of interest but a bridge to subjects that are less familiar.

The Difficulties of Mapping and Conversation

Of course, one can always ask for more. I wish that the editors had been able to carry out their original plan to involve academics from outside the English-speaking tradition. The project began with a request from a Brazilian, yet Latin American authors are not included, nor are those with an affiliation in Asia. In fact, only three authors come from outside the United States/United Kingdom/Australia triumvirate represented by the editors' own affiliations.

Similarly, the need for closer links to practice is primarily a postscript, and only one biography emphasizes experience outside of academic institutions. Although the *Handbook* is an ambitious accomplishment that can be praised for including more voices than almost any book on the market, an even more diverse set of authors would have enhanced its ability to speak of the future of organization studies.

It is not just that a truly global set of voices is missing; some issues of importance to globalization are also overlooked. The editors' interpretation of mapping the field gives little attention to the "who, what, when, why, and where" of organizing. For example, the impacts of regulation and financial markets are given little attention. We don't hear much about new attempts to organize in Eastern Europe or Asia—not to mention Africa and other regions. Despite my genuine admiration for the interesting and contemporary set of topics covered, I am eager for theory growing out of a more substantive set of interests.

A third criticism has to do with the need for more engagement among the many subjects covered in the *Handbook*. The editors evoke the image of conversation, but interaction among chapter subjects is by happenstance rather than design. Of course, the problem is ours as much as it is theirs. I spent some time considering the Index as an unobtrusive indicator of the current cohesion of organization studies. It surprised me

to find only 16 terms (bureaucracy, contingency theory, control, functionalism, gender, global/globalizing, knowledge, language, networks, organization, population, postmodernism, power, rational/rationality, self, and technology) that appeared in at least 10 of the book's 29 chapters. This list suggests a general lean toward postmodern approaches, which the editors freely acknowledge. Intriguing words that were not in 10 or more chapters include action, leadership, innovation, management, markets, structure, and uncertainty. Surely, this is a list that will see more play in the future.

Conclusion

It is much easier to stand back and review than pull together 29 chapters within a reasonable time frame, and I want to end by reiterating how useful I think this volume is, particularly because it gives space to so many different subjects and authors. Readers who are aware of, but perhaps nervous about, the postmodern perspective will benefit from seeing it in action here. It has enabled the editors to give us a broader, more cohesive view of our field than any other source that has captured my attention. A more ambitious agenda may have to be realized on the Internet; one important promise of the *Handbook* is that it provides the rich material to spark further conversation in more interactive settings.

I am eager for these conversations to move us into a post-postmodern agenda for organization studies. Most alternatives to rationalist, prescriptive views of organizations have been too reactionary, in my view. Although the steps beyond the alternatives included in this volume are not very clear, I believe we should face more firmly toward the future and be less obsessed with self-reflection. Organizations—and organization studies—need an internal compass. Recent voices, many of which are represented in this volume, join forces with changes in organizations themselves to suggest that any representation we find is unlikely to be as confidence inspiring as the simplistic views we have used through much of our recent history. Nonetheless, I think we can discover, in the challenges that we face, islands of interest and sense that inspire collective action.

When I was an undergraduate philosophy major, I was enchanted by epistemology, espe-

cially the argument that it is impossible to be scientifically certain about even the simplest questions of identity. The conversation that stands out in my mind was about whether we can know whether the most commonplace object—say, a telephone—is what it seems to be. The skeptics worried, "What if the object in my hand turns into a tiger in the night? What if a baby could eat it? We can never be *sure* that this really is a telephone until scientists carry out an infinite number of tests."

Postmodernism risks getting us into a similar impossible predicament. If there are as many perspectives as observers, and if no stance can claim the privilege of dominating, organization science is an impossible project and organization studies a suspect one. The graduate student may be dazzled by the possibilities, diving in with enthusiasm to think of new tests for suspect objects (like organizations): "What if they disappear tomorrow? What if they sprout wings?" But, ultimately, this is an exhausting preoccupation that moves us away from many organizational members who might have looked to us as collaborators.

As a student, I finally welcomed the realists in the epistemological debate, who calmly said, "Can you call your mother? If so, it's a telephone." A similar development in organization studies would be welcome, although I am aware that I speak from the preoccupations of strategy, and this is not the only useful future for organization studies. My summary point is that the value of the *Handbook of Organization Studies* will be measured not only by its map of the diverse and intellectually interesting ground we have been constructing, but by its capacity to help us move on. It includes a large number of coherent islands, which I recommend as stepping stones toward an increasingly interesting future.

***Leading Corporate Transformation: A Blueprint for Business Renewal*, by Robert H. Miles. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997.**

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The jacket's description of this book is a useful orientation to its content and approach. Here, the book is described as "consultant Robert