

introduction

Welcome to our book, *Key Concepts in Organization Theory*. Our hope is to help those of you who are studying organization theory work your way through what may seem complex and abstract theories about the workings of today's organizations. *Key Concepts in Organization Theory* is designed as a resource that you can use to help you understand the basics of organization theory, to check your understanding of specific concepts, to fill in any gaps, and as an aide-memoire. It will not replace, but will complement, the organization theory textbook that your instructor uses in her or his course. It will do so in a number of ways: by providing a background to the concepts you are studying; by offering a context for specific topics; and by providing a basis for exploring organization theory in more depth through your textbook. We believe the book is written in a way that reflects the historical and interdisciplinary nature of the field – something that few textbooks cover.

There are many, many concepts in the field of organization theory and this book could end up larger than your typical textbook. So, we decided to start with a selection of key concepts that not only interest us but which were also ones we believe are deserving of your attention. Our collection of concepts includes some of the classic and durable theories covered by most organization theory textbooks, some of the more contemporary concepts that are covered to different degrees in textbooks, and concepts from different perspectives that may only be alluded to or simply ignored by most textbooks.

Organization theory as a field has many diverse concerns. There are basic management concerns, such as how to ensure that managers act in the best interests of a firm's owners, what the best way is to achieve goals by managing environmental demands and maximizing core competencies, when certain operations of a firm should be performed internally or when it makes sense for the firm to allow the market to perform those operations through the use of contracts, or how to move an organization from its present condition to a desired state as it struggles to create value and survive. There are concerns about theories and models, such as how the environment influences organization strategy, structure and design, how the organization influences the environment, and what links the actions of individual members of society with the broader social structures of society.



There are seemingly abstract concerns, but ones that have important ethical implications, such as why people in contemporary society feel so estranged from themselves, their actions and their surroundings, what the power relations are behind theories about organizations, and how organizational scholars might become more reflective within their empirical or theoretical writings.

Organization theory as a discussion of competing and conflicting theories is, by nature, complicated and very abstract. To help you grasp this complexity, we provide you with a definition of each concept, a contextualization in terms of its history and relevance, followed by a discussion of some of the contemporary research, and end with one or more suggestions for further reading. Our aim is to provide you with a deeper understanding of the context of organization theory and of the richness of the field.



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