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W. Richard Scott (2003) *Organizations: Rational, Natural, and Open systems*, Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, fifth edition, 47,50 €, ISBN 0-13-016559-X, 430 p.

I had high expectations for Scott's *Organizations: rational, natural and open systems* (2003). The very fact that this is the "fifth edition" (the first edition was published in 1981) points to the influential status of this book, as also testified by Scott's impressive career as organization sociologist. Despite these promising conditions, however, the book does not fully live up to my expectations.

Scott starts from the argument that it is very important for scientists to take notice of organizations: "Organizations play a leading role in our modern world. Their presence affects virtually every sector of contemporary social life" (2003:1). For this reason it is not surprising that organizations are being studied very intensively. Nevertheless, the author argues that his book differs from other organization books in several aspects. First, it is easily accessible for readers with different academic backgrounds whereas most other books are too specialized. Second, the author argues that he introduces new ideas, without renouncing to traditional theoretical concepts. Third, the author relies on a sociological macro-approach of organizations. Finally, Scott aims at a broad audience from academics and students to practitioners.

Although Scott rightly highlights the importance of the environment within the study of organizations: "No organization is self-sufficient; all depend for survival on the types of relations they establish with the larger systems of which they are part" (Scott, 2003:23), his macro-level approach to study organization (i.e. as collective entities) is debatable, because it severely narrows down the focus. Then, in line with the sub title of his book, Scott works out three ideal typical perspectives on organizations: organizations as rational systems, organizations as natural systems and organizations as open systems.

Although these categories are certainly not new, the comprehensiveness of the discussion is very valuable.

Within the *rational perspective*, organizations are seen as strongly formalized entities aimed at the fulfillment of specific goals. Within this mechanistic approach toward organizations, the formal structure is emphasized. However, within the *natural systems approach*, organizations are seen as fundamental social collectivities attempting to fulfill their own individual needs. The natural system theorists put a greater emphasis on the informal and social structure of the organization as well. Finally, the *open system approach* pays particular attention to the reciprocal ties and the mutual dependence between organizations (with different interests) and the environment. The open character of the system is the most important difference between this and the other two previous perspectives. According to Scott, this theoretical division uses ideal types which “partially conflict, partially overlap, and partially complement one another” (Scott, 2003:31). This statement is not problematic in so far as the perspectives are not presented as mutually exclusive. However, Scott takes the view that an attempt to integrate these perspectives is necessary. This seems to conflict with Scott’s original intention to specify distinct perspectives. Scott compromises the potential strength of his book with his apparent inconsistent choice in the remaining (main) part of his book.

Scott’s attempt to combine the three perspectives is not in line with the chosen format in the first part of the book. His so-called Layered-model has two dimensions, namely “closed versus open” and “rational versus natural”. The 2 x 2 matrix that can be extracted from this model contains four types of organizations: closed-rational, open-natural, open-rational and closed-natural. Then Scott follows (from chapter five) the line of reasoning from his integrated model instead of the triple perspectives that have been discussed in the previous part of the book. The author is right in making the distinction between different perspectives in order to get a sharper view on organizations, but after having done this in a fruitful way in the first part of the book, he suddenly puts the different perspectives together in an artificial way. The consequence of this inconsistent exercise is a blurred picture of reality.

The layered-model does not escape criticism either. The choice of three ‘influential’ perspectives, as the base of the integrated layered-model is insufficiently defended. Arguments for possible other perspectives are mentioned only in a footnote (on page 31). This is regrettable since other perspectives, such as the cultural approach, would have resulted in other useful models. Chapter 13 describes organizational effectiveness. However, attention for a connected theme, organizational legitimacy, is missing. This is an omission given the actual relevance of the (normative) theme of legitimacy. On the other hand, some chapters seem to cover too many topics (given the classroom focus of the book). Despite these critical remarks, one has to recognize that this book contains a broad overview of actual organizational theories and (scientific) discussions. The impressive bibliography challenges readers to engage in further reading and reflection. Although every chapter ends with a short summary, a reflective final chapter would have been of benefit to the reader. The last part of the book is pleasingly surprising, because the society and not organizations, is used as a frame of reference.

Despite my criticisms, this book would belong on the bookshelf of students, researchers and practitioners with different academic backgrounds.