

Organizations in America: Analyzing Their Structures and Human Resource Practices.



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explosions, weapons designers had to worry about their bombs not exploding—Livermore's early history was marked by humiliating test site fizzes. Gusterson argues that the sense of mastery gained from successful tests alleviated potential anxieties about the reliability not just of individual weapons but of nuclear deterrence as a whole. Testing was also crucial in a cognitive hierarchy in which the authority of "test-seasoned" designers was central. By necessity, the world of the nuclear weapons designer must be largely a closed one. Achieving the "Q-clearance" needed for access was only a first step; the nuclear test was a more discriminating initiation rite.

In a time of science wars—heated debates over a sociological perspective on science—Gusterson's book carries a lesson. He is honest about his antinuclear predilections, but also open about how his fieldwork experiences have changed him emotionally as well as intellectually; he reports the loss of his visceral fear of nuclear weapons. The man he debated against in 1984, Thomas Ramos, is one of nine participants whose comments on the text are reproduced. Says Ramos, "His observations rang true to me, even though they occasionally stung my sensitivities" (p. 247). Not all of Ramos's colleagues agree, but Gusterson's brave and honest book is testimony to his fieldwork skills and to his achievement of a measure of what one might even dare to call objectivity.

Organizations in America: Analyzing Their Structures and Human Resource Practices. By Arne L. Kalleberg, David Knoke, Peter V. Marsden, and Joe L. Spaeth. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1996. Pp. xvi+382. \$58.00 (cloth); \$27.95 (paper).

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For many years, social scientists have been lobbying the National Science Foundation (NSF) and various other federal agencies to support development of a matched national sample of organizations and employees. The argument has been that building a longitudinal data set could harness the power of the social sciences in tracking the changes in jobs and employment experiences in a manner useful for both basic and policy-relevant research. This book begins to test this idea. The authors analyze data from the National Organization Study (NOS), a representative sample of work establishments in the United States that was obtained by asking respondents to the 1991 General Social Survey (GSS) for the names and contact information of their places of work. Organizational data were then collected from personnel managers via telephone interviews.

Each chapter of the book is written by one of the authors and one or more colleagues. A wide range of topics are covered, arranged under three headings: (1) organizational structures (size, control and coordination sys-

tems, formalization, etc.), (2) human resource practices (staffing, training, unionization, earnings, and benefits), and (3) the changing workforce (contingent work and gender differences). By the end of the book, the reader has a pretty good idea of the strengths and weaknesses of this design and the data it generated.

Any survey is only as informative as the theoretical framework used to guide the choice of questions asked. The theoretical lens used to design a national survey that seeks to inform policy makers carries an especially heavy burden since it must be responsive to both current policy issues and future, often difficult to anticipate, shifts in policy agendas. In their introductory chapter, the authors outline their chosen model—a structural approach to organizations and employment practices. They trace the evolution of this structural perspective from the 1960s studies measuring organizational bureaucracies through the internal labor market models introduced in the 1970s to the “new” structuralist perspectives of the 1990s that seek to relate organizational and internal labor market features to social and economic stratification. While this is a broad and defensible approach, it produces a somewhat static and mechanical view of how employment relationships and organizations are determined and evolve. The analysis would have been greatly enriched by building in some complementary (and competing) perspectives on these issues from industrial relations (i.e., a greater focus on interests, power, the nature of union-management relations, and governance systems), from human capital (education, training, compensation, and mobility), or from strategic human resources (competitive strategies, leadership values, and the role of human resource professionals and line manager relationships).

The major contribution of the book is to provide a snapshot of the structural features and human resource practices of a representative sample of organizations circa 1991. The results reported provide a national benchmark against which the rate of change in practices and their consequences might be gauged if and when the survey is replicated. Most of the key findings reported relate to organization size. Size is positively correlated with formalization, decentralization, codification of rules, well-developed internal labor markets, the extent of training, high performance work systems, earnings and fringe benefit levels, and earnings inequality among managers. Widespread use of contingent workers and gender segregation are also reported. Many of these findings have been documented in prior studies with more limited samples, however, the value added here lies in the validation of these results and the more precise baseline measurement of the levels and variations in these organizational and human resource practices for comparison with future studies. For this reason alone, this book provides essential source material for all researchers engaged in research on workplace topics.

The biggest weakness of the design, as the authors note, is having only one employee observation per organization. This makes it impossible to sort out individual versus organizational effects when the two provide equally plausible explanations for a finding. The authors also note that

many of the most interesting issues related to the changes or transformations occurring in employment relationships today are difficult to see with these data. Policy analysts will undoubtedly add that the data provide only a general, five-year-old snapshot of the employment practices and are not directly useful for assessing options open to either program administrators or for assessing the performance of any particular policy or regulation.

These limitations are recognized by the authors and therefore should not diminish the contributions of this impressive complication of current practices and the potential value that can be realized by *replicating* and *enhancing* the design of this type of study. Of the enhancements suggested by the authors, the most valuable would be to add multiple employee respondents to the organizational samples in order to assess the effects of organizational structures and policies against the processes and relationships among workers, managers, and external institutions and networks. I would also urge an expansion of the theoretical lens guiding the choice of questions to better capture the essence of the transformations underway and to test alternative explanations for their consequences. Finally, to gain government support, future studies must be attentive to and flexible enough to speak to policy issues that will endure over the time span required to conduct and to report the results of the project. These are tall orders, however, they need to be tackled if the full potential of this important project is to be realized. I hope the authors and the NSF stay committed to the project.

Consumption and Identity at Work. By Paul du Gay. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1996. Pp. vi+213. \$65.00 (cloth); \$22.95 (paper).

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Du Gay sets out to provide some answers to what he calls the question of identity in contemporary society: "This book is an attempt to explore some of the new articulations that are emerging within the world of paid work and organizations . . . it is concerned with delineating and examining the construction of new work identities and the production of different work-based subjects" (p. 3). He claims he will do this using theoretical tools derived from sources not traditionally associated with the study of work and organizations. In addition, as signaled by his title, he aims to investigate some of the ramifications of the stress on consumption in modern society.

In pursuit of these aims du Gay divides his book in two parts. The first part, consisting of four chapters, is intended to explore limitations in traditional approaches to the analysis of work identities and to construct an alternative framework founded on the concept of discourse (his new theoretical tool). The purpose of the second part is to develop the