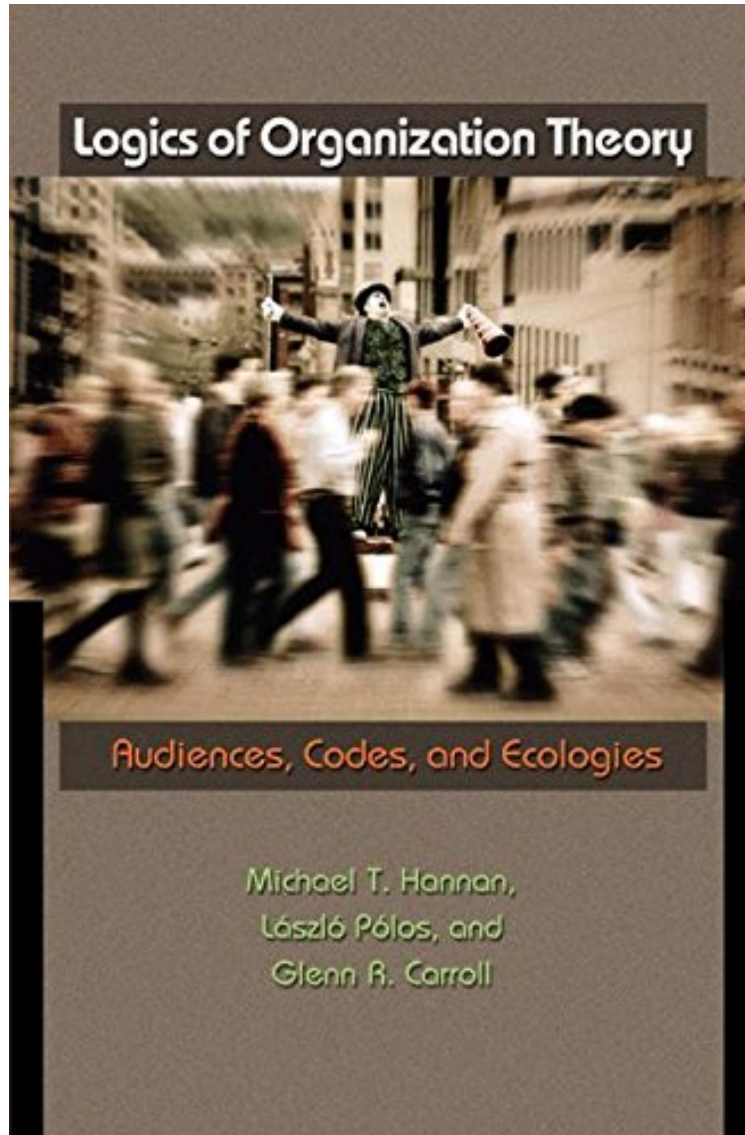


(Mobile pdf) Logics of Organization Theory: Audiences, Codes, and Ecologies

Logics of Organization Theory: Audiences, Codes, and Ecologies

Michael T. Hannan

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Michael T. Hannan : Logics of Organization Theory: Audiences, Codes, and Ecologies before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Logics of Organization Theory: Audiences, Codes, and Ecologies:

4 of 5 people found the following review helpful. A Milestone Publication By N. Mozahem I was surprised to see that this book was rated with two stars. However, I was relieved when I saw that part of the reason was that only a single person actually reviewed the book instead of the result being the average of many reviews. I decided to write a review to "correct" what I believe is an unfair rating. The first thing you need to know before reading this book is that the

results presented in this book are part of a long debate that has been going on in Organizational Demography (OD). It is not possible to understand these results without an understanding of the problems and discussions that preceded the book. Apparently the previous reviewer is unaware that the authors of this book had published a book seven years before this in which they argued for the use of classical logic in theorizing about OD, therefore he complains that he doesn't believe that classical logic is of any use in organizational theory. I guess some people have a problem with introducing rigor to the field. To them it is better to keep it a field with no systematic way of thinking and without the use of a pre-defined set of tools that can be used to tackle complex problems. What is interesting is that two of the greatest organizational theorists of the twentieth century, Howard Aldrich and Pfeiffer, have acknowledged the fact that researchers in OD have managed to create a coherent, and more importantly, consistent set of ideas and tools to tackle the problems. Logic is one of those tools, and in my opinion, it is the best of them. The fact that the previous reviewer actually used the term "neo-positivist" to describe the use of non-classical logic in the social sciences shows that he doesn't know the difference between classical and non-classical logic. Perhaps he thinks that non-classical logic, of which fuzzy logic is but a small part, is classical logic with a few additions, or extensions, and this is completely false. I would recommend that he read "An Introduction to Non-Classical Logic" by Priest. This is not the place to discuss the difference but suffice it to say that the difference is as big that between foundationalism as discussed by the Greeks and any modern epistemic school of thought. The greatest advances made in non-classical logic were made in the 1950s and 1960s, way after the "fall" of positivism and of course the discovery of Gödel's theorems. These advances were naturally made to revise what was perceived as the shortcomings of the classical logic. That said, it is extremely dogmatic to refuse the use of such a powerful tool in the social sciences because researchers, according to the previous reviewer, are interested in "material inferences". Every single field in the social sciences has theories that have rules or at least guidelines. What is logic but a better formulation of these rules? Why can't it be used? What is wrong with having more systematic thinking? Or should the social sciences, most notably business and management, rely on fluffy inferences? One of the central problems in OD is to know which organization belongs to a certain population. The decision has huge implications for any research. Over the past twenty years many, including the authors of this book, have tried tackling the problems. Lomi and Larsen (2001) have used local interaction as the criteria, Baum (2002) has argued for a network based approach, and yet some, like Barnett and Amburgy (1990), have considered the size of the organization to be the critical factor. In their previous book the authors introduced a very interesting hierarchy in which each layer is more general than the one below it. The rules for deciding the form of a certain organization were stated in the formal language of classical logic. In this book the authors, bravely, state that their previous formulation was lacking and instead present a far more interesting theory. This theory is based on results obtained by Rosch in a series of influential studies which provided evidence for what is termed the "typicality effects". This led to the prototype model of concepts in which categories are composed of core meaning and surrounded by other similar members. This theory has stood very well against competitive theories such as Miller and Johnson-Laird's identification procedure and the probabilistic model of Smith, Shoben, and Rips. Rosch's theory lends itself well to fuzzy set theory. Of course, the notion of fuzzy sets is not new in the social sciences. A good first book is "Fuzzy-Set Social Science" by Ragin, and a more comprehensive one is "Fuzzy Set Analysis for Behavioural and Social Sciences" by Smithson. Hannan, Polos and Carroll masterfully bring all these ideas together and use them to develop a wide theory that, hopefully, will help tackle the problem of which organizations to include in certain populations. Of course, this is but one of the problems which the book discusses, but to me it is the most important. The book is not easy, but this is because it tackles serious problems that have been heavily debated for a long time. A significant part of the book uses logic. However it is enough if the reader knows how to read the language of logic. You don't need to know how to individually prove or derive logical results. There is a very helpful appendix at the end of the book which should be enough. Overall, this is a well needed addition to the current literature and one that will surely result in many empirical research papers.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Sets the stage for so many things.

By Mark Goetsch One of the first things that I got out of the book was a tractable definition for architecture in a business. That is a big deal. I remember that G.B. Richardson did something similar with the term capabilities and was ignored forcing him out of academia. Today there are tons of people looking around for his original paper trying to figure out what he said. I see this book in the same way. From that point on the book makes a simple statement. What if we could treat a business with that type of logical precision? Even if it is not possible, asking the question forces us to consider why. This is what Hannon does in the book and accomplishes it. Is it for casual reading? No. Is it important? Yes.

21 of 29 people found the following review helpful. Ambitious, but...

By Henri Schildt The book is amazingly ambitious. In the preface, the authors actually state that their effort will shake the core of the discipline (they are not specific whether this is OT or the whole sociology) and that reading the book will create "oh my god!" moments for some sociologists. Since the book is written by heavy weight OT professors, it is certainly bound to create interest and cannot be simply ignored. However, I found this book hard to read and hard to like. First, the authors formulate the classical first-order logic as their straw man, a limitation in OT, and propose that we should instead apply more advanced logics. The problem here is that theorizing is not driven by logic. Logics are the result from formalization, abstraction, simplification and study of valid processes of reasoning. Sociological

theorists reason in many ways. I believe that theorists are mostly interested in materially, rather than logically, valid inferences. If we accept that OT is not, has never been, about applying formal logic to generate insights, a key premise of the book vanishes. Second, one of the key ideas in the book is that researchers should analyze categorization processes through (fuzzy) sets of category members. It seems impossible that an actual research subjects (sets of individuals that the authors call audiences) would ever be able to comprehend whole sets of such forms as "school" or "chinese male" outside the encounters where categorization decisions are made? Moreover, how could a researcher ever measure this perceived set from the individual on any meaningful level of validity and reliability? It seems rather dubious that the authors in preface suggest that the social code (i.e. the meaning of a category) is defined through consensus on the proper entities within the set. For example, we develop an understanding of what a chinese male is by agreeing on exactly who belong to this set (and to which extent, $[0,1]$)? If this is a causal claim, the direction is at reverse to that developed within psychological research on categorization (so called theory-theory a.k.a. knowledge based view). If it is an analytical statement it is self-evident beyond boring. As a sidenote, a well-known problem with set-theory approach to categorization is that it is difficult to explain what it means for audiences to be mistaken ("I really thought it was a university but clearly it is not and never was!"). Third, while the authors use the concept of audiences (inspired by Goffman, I presume) to capture the active evaluators of organizations, they don't really attend to the performance of the role by the organizations. If we take psychological research seriously (the authors do cite a lot of cognitive research in some parts of the book but it doesn't really always figure in their reasoning), categorization decisions are created in-situ and draw on broad domains of knowledge. Thus, a novel organization can influence how others categorize it by making various domains of knowledge salient in the situations where audiences encounter it. In other words, rhetorics rather than stable properties play a big role. The apparent properties of a firm do not necessarily decide whether it is a nanotechnology start-up -- the evaluation is influenced in social interactions where arguments and counter-arguments may be crafted. As the authors note, evaluations may be graded but membership is often absolute (like whether Pluto is a planet). Finally, the most complex and perhaps unobvious problem relates a neo-positivist dream that seems to underlie the book. We should remember that one of the reasons why positivism died was Quine's insight: it is impossible to separate analytical and synthetic statements. That is, any claim becomes true if we make changes to the meaning of concepts. In typical realist research, one attributes properties to entities and tests the relationships of these attributions. Realist (unlike positivist) keeps in mind that attribution of properties is somewhat arbitrary, as is the choice of the entities. Fuzzy sets amplify this arbitrariness: the choice of criteria for evaluating the relationships between fuzzy sets and the choice of criteria for grading set members are at least somewhat interchangeable. To rephrase: the way incorrigible individual evaluations of organizations is objectified into populations has complex relationship with objectively observable relationships between populations and outcomes. I am afraid that regression analysis between multiple fuzzy sets is good for falsifying formally postulated relationships between fuzzy sets, but it ill suited for falsifying interesting claims about organizations stated in natural language. The book is in many ways a strange artifact. The reader is often puzzled by the fine line between description and theory. Perhaps the contents of the book can be explained by the authors' intent to reconstruct the basis of population ecology. This has lead to a positivist reification of populations as unproblematic essentialist objects subject to analysis -- only this time as fuzzy sets rather than classical sets. If the reader is interested in organizational populations, I would suggest to take a turn the authors explicitly reject in introduction: investigate the knowledge structures and pragmatic concerns of various audiences to develop and apply labels to organizations. If we forget populations as reified entities we can see legitimacy and evaluation in a richer and more realistic manner. Most sociologists have long realized that any grouping of entities, by actual research subjects or us researchers is a pragmatic feat that allows generalization. While these groupings help us to communicate our insights and generalizations, they are seldom good across time or topical areas (although when reified, categories can serve as a source of power, as researchers following Foucault like to remind us). PS. Interestingly, the authors' concept "social code" (the criteria for category membership) largely equals analytical philosophers' concept "linguistic norms" (beginning from Sellars, Austin, and Searle in 50s and 60s) - the criteria for the application of a concept. A reader interested in perceptions of organizational populations might be well advised to approach "hedge funds" and "investment banks" from a linguistic perspective. This would lead us into logic-in-practice of organizational categorization.

Building theories of organizations is challenging: theories are partial and "folk" categories are fuzzy. The commonly used tools--first-order logic and its foundational set theory--are ill-suited for handling these complications. Here, three leading authorities rethink organization theory. Logics of Organization Theory sets forth and applies a new language for theory building based on a nonmonotonic logic and fuzzy set theory. In doing so, not only does it mark a major advance in organizational theory, but it also draws lessons for theory building elsewhere in the social sciences. Organizational research typically analyzes organizations in categories such as "bank," "hospital," or "university." These categories have been treated as crisp analytical constructs designed by researchers. But sociologists increasingly view categories as constructed by audiences. This book builds on cognitive psychology and anthropology to develop an audience-based theory of organizational categories. It applies this framework and the new language of theory

building to organizational ecology. It reconstructs and integrates four central theory fragments, and in so doing reveals unexpected connections and new insights.

"The book will appeal to different audiences, making the book itself an interesting case study for the theory developed in it. The broader message of the book, developing a new set of tools that aid theorizing in sociology and the administrative sciences, will appeal to those interested in social science methodology. But first and foremost, it is of interest to researchers working on organization theory in general and on organizational ecology in particular. It goes substantially beyond earlier formalizations of organizational ecology published in the last decade, with a radical shift in focus toward the whole process of theory building."--Administrative Science Quarterly

"Logics of Organizational Theory deserves to be read and discussed by everyone interested in organizations and in the method of developing sociological theory."--Michele Lamont, American Journal of Sociology

From the Back Cover "There is nothing like this book in the field today. Its remarkable contribution is to demonstrate that logical formalization can breathe new insights into a social science research program, even when it has attained a mature level of development. The book's process of logical reconstruction sheds light not only on the ecological paradigm, but also on other social science perspectives--both within and outside organization studies."--Martin Ruef, Princeton University

"It is vanishingly rare for organization theorists (social scientists more generally) to make such a big investment in regrounding theory--especially when it is their own theory! This book really challenges the reader to think seriously about developing good theory, and about fixing the theory we have. I particularly appreciate the role given to the 'audience' in creating organizational forms, as well as the use of fuzzy sets to capture how categorization processes work. These new building blocks pay off in many fresh insights into longstanding issues. As such, the book is a huge service to the field."--Ezra Zuckerman, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

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