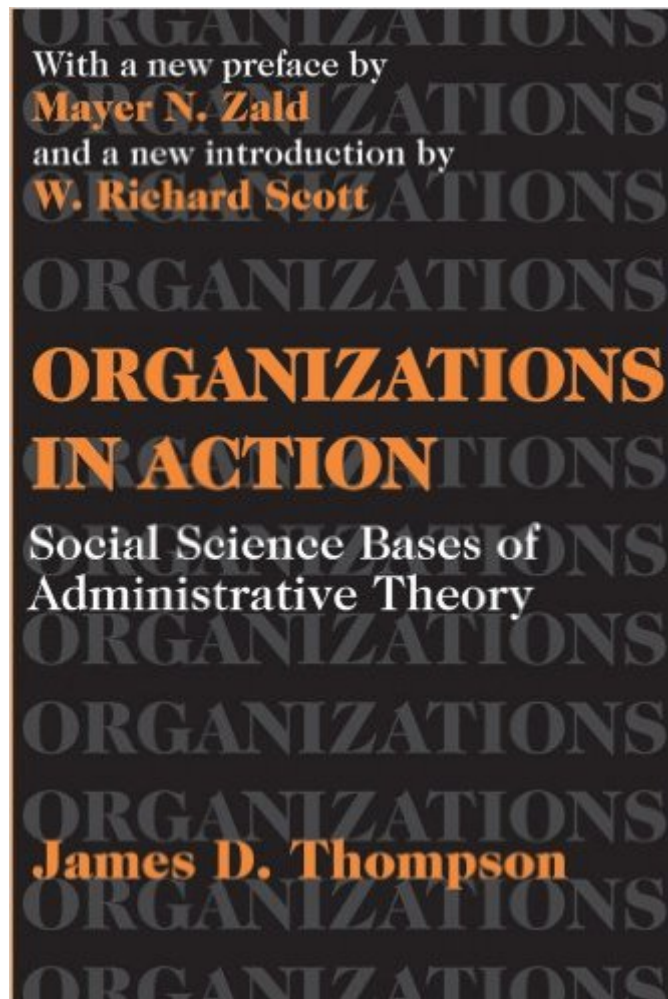


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Organizations In Action: Social Science Bases Of Administrative Theory (Classics In Organization And Management Series)



Synopsis

Organizations act, but what determines how and when they will act? There is precedent for believing that the organization is but an extension of one or a few people, but this is a deceptively simplified approach and, in reality, makes any generalization in organizational theory enormously difficult. Modern-day organizationsâmanufacturing firms, hospitals, schools, armies, community agenciesâare extremely complex in nature, and several strategies, employing a variety of disciplines, are needed to gain a proper understanding of them. *Organizations in Action* is a classic multidisciplinary study of the behavior of complex organizations as entities. Previous books on the subject focused on the behavior of people in organizational contexts, but this volume considers individual behavior only to the extent that it helps explain the nature of organizations. James D. Thompson offers ninety-five distinct propositions about the behavior of organizations, all relevant regardless of the culture in which they are found. Thompson classifies organizations according to their technologies and environments. That organizations must meet and handle uncertainty is central to his thesis. *Organizations in Action* is firmly grounded in concepts and theories in the social and behavioral sciences. While it does not offer an actual theory of administration, the book successfully extends the scientific base upon which any emerging administrative theory must rest. This classic work is of continuing value to organizational and management specialists, behavioral scientists, sociologists, administrators, and policymakers.

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1967 saw the publication of three books that are now considered founding blocks of contingency approaches in organizational studies and human resource management. Theory of Leadership Effectiveness by Fred Fiedler, Organization and Environment: Managing Differentiation and Integration by Paul Lawrence and Jay Lorsch, and "Organizations in Action" by James D. Thompson. Fiedler created a model of leadership for industrial and organizational psychology while Lawrence, Lorsch, and Thompson studied organizational structure. Thompson's book aims at providing what he calls a "conceptual inventory": a framework for tying together a multitude of concepts by various authors. The book reads like a serialized decision tree - a hundred propositions presented in the order of their dependencies, fleshed out by explanations and some examples of the concepts involved. Thompson's approach is based on two fundamental ideas: 1) The nature of uncertainty in the environment is a determining factor of organizational structure. 2) Simple models cannot work for complex organizations, but for their respective components. Uncertainty in the environment - variables the organization can neither control nor predict - is a key to understanding organizational structure, according to Thompson.

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