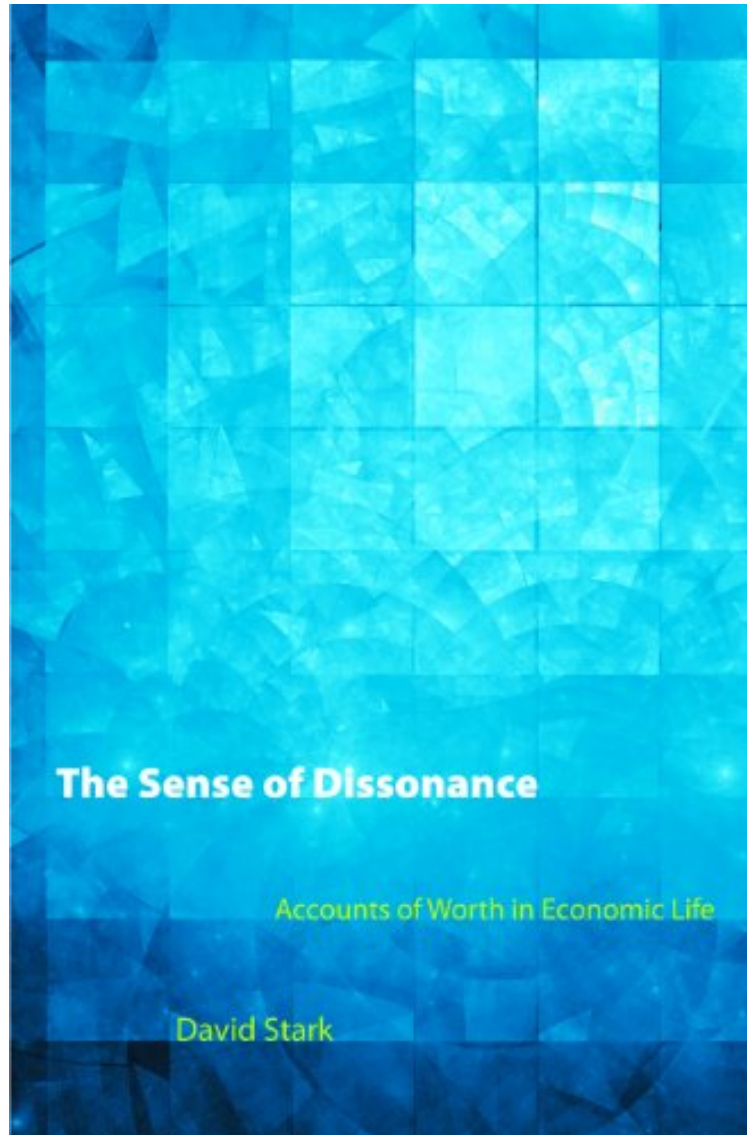


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# The Sense of Dissonance: Accounts of Worth in Economic Life

*David Stark*

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**David Stark : The Sense of Dissonance: Accounts of Worth in Economic Life** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Sense of Dissonance: Accounts of Worth in Economic Life:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy Paula ClarkeArrived on time and as described. Thank you!  
6 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Shaking the sociology of organizationBy Jesse LainerThis is a very welcome challenge to the prevailing consensus among organizational theorists (neo institutionalists). Instead of searching for "taken-for-granted" norms, procedures etc. as a way of explaining everything out there, Stark looks on

the very cognizant, reflective manner through which actors build and dismantle institutions. The message is liberating--no longer to we need to look for things in the darkness that our subjects fail to see (that the analysts somehow is able to see). Rather, the goal of the analyst is to analyze the surface of behavior--to see how people consciously navigate their life. Not only is this approach more empirically oriented and realist, it also yields important insights regarding the role of consensus and lack of consensus in organization and more. This is like a breath of fresh air to both organizational theorists and economic sociologists!8 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Excellent sociological exploration of innovation in organizations By Jonathan C. Hall You might not get it from the title, but this book is about the conditions that lead to creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship in organizations. According to Stark, the presence of competing notions of value within an organization, or what he calls "dissonance," is one such fundamental condition. A sociologist, Stark marshals the methodological and interpretive tools of his discipline to make his case. The book is a series of three "ethnographies" of modern creative companies, and Stark's analytical framework draws on figures in the tradition from John Dewey to Bruno Latour. But Stark also self-consciously expands his approach into what he calls "economic sociology." Whereas sociologists are often said to study values while economists study value, for Stark, value and values are part of the same complex, the same conversation, the same negotiation that results in companies creating new things. The writing is crisp and engaging, driven by narrative in the ethnographies, but equally compelling in the analytical sections. The heart of Stark's argument -- and what he discovers in three very different cases -- is that organizations are better innovators who allow and encourage their members to use and express diverse ideas about the worth of their work, products, services, what have you. Stark writes, "The coexistence of multiple, principled standpoints means that no standpoint can be taken for granted as the natural order of things. Creative friction yields and organizational reflexivity." So, in a for-profit company making widgets, perhaps the marketing person looks for PR potential, the programmer for technical sophistication, the designer for beauty, the accountant for costs. Obvious, right? But the key to spurring innovation is to empower each of these points of view in a governance structure Stark calls heterarchy. "Heterarchy represents an organizational form of distributed intelligence in which units are laterally accountable according to diverse principles of evaluation," he writes. Today, the old consensus on top-down management -- e.g. chain of command, "running a tight ship," etc. -- is disappearing. Hierarchies are not responsive enough to innovate and change directions quickly. Stark's heterarchies might be. And, of course, "innovation" and "survival" are increasingly synonymous. While this book is not exactly a survival guide, it offers compelling principles and cases that illustrate how and why organizations survive or not in our time.

What counts? In work, as in other areas of life, it is not always clear what standards we are being judged by or how our worth is being determined. This can be disorienting and disconcerting. Because of this, many organizations devote considerable resources to limiting and clarifying the logics used for evaluating worth. But as David Stark argues, firms would often be better off, especially in managing change, if they allowed multiple logics of worth and did not necessarily discourage uncertainty. In fact, in many cases multiple orders of worth are unavoidable, so organizations and firms should learn to harness the benefits of such "heterarchy" rather than seeking to purge it. Stark makes this argument with ethnographic case studies of three companies attempting to cope with rapid change: a machine-tool company in late and postcommunist Hungary, a new-media startup in New York during and after the collapse of the Internet bubble, and a Wall Street investment bank whose trading room was destroyed on 9/11. In each case, the friction of competing criteria of worth promoted an organizational reflexivity that made it easier for the company to change and deal with market uncertainty. Drawing on John Dewey's notion that "perplexing situations" provide opportunities for innovative inquiry, Stark argues that the dissonance of diverse principles can lead to discovery.

"The Sense of Dissonance is an important and refreshing contribution to both economic sociology and organizational sociology, introducing a wealth of new concepts, ideas, and lines of thinking."--Olav Velthuis, *American Journal of Sociology* "Stark's ideas about the value of play, ambiguity, and uncertainty are particularly provocative and far-reaching."--Brooke Harrington, *Contexts* "[S]mart and ambitious. . . . [This book] constitutes an important contribution to the most cutting-edge debates of contemporary economic sociology and organization theory."--Pierre Franccedil;ois, *European Economic Sociology Newsletter* "Stark gave us a book both theoretically very deep, pleasant to read, and rich in empirical details."--Filippo Barbera, *Sociologica* "The Sense of Dissonance is a great book, and I recommend it warmly. . . . Like most great achievements, Stark's book opens up more questions than it answers and leaves its readers with important puzzles."--Petter Holm, *Administrative Science Quarterly* From the Inside Flap "In this book, Stark takes the reader on a fascinating journey of discovery, from the socialist factories of Eastern Europe to the new media companies and financial trading floors of Manhattan. The Sense of Dissonance is equally a book about how organizations really work and how we should think about the problem of organization--a great accomplishment."--Duncan Watts, author of *Six Degrees: The Science of a Connected Age* "For many readers, the most powerful demonstration of the ever-present duality of value and values will be Stark's field research on the impact of the 9/11 tragedy on one financial firm that lost hundreds of employees that day. Stark recounts the process by which the firm

rebuilt its business through the painful and cathartic narratives of those lost and of those who survived. A moving analysis that redresses Dewey's paradox of the emotive and evaluative."--Bruce Kogut, Columbia Business School "At a time when global crises have shattered standard accounts of economic life, David Stark's *The Sense of Dissonance* offers powerful alternative explanations of economic activity along with specific prescriptions for twenty-first-century economic survival. Taking us into the varied worlds of Hungarian toolmakers, Manhattan Silicon Alley new media workers, and Wall Street arbitrage traders, Stark deftly grounds theoretical insights with marvelous ethnographic accounts. This book instructs and inspires."--Viviana A. Zelizer, author of *The Purchase of Intimacy* "This wonderful, lively, and personal book is packed with insights for economic sociology and general sociological theory. A mature statement by a leading sociologist, it is also a delight to read."--Walter W. Powell, Stanford University "This is an important book about an important topic--and it has a strong narrative and impressive, engaging ethnography."--Michele Lamont, Harvard University

From the Back Cover "In this book, Stark takes the reader on a fascinating journey of discovery, from the socialist factories of Eastern Europe to the new media companies and financial trading floors of Manhattan. *The Sense of Dissonance* is equally a book about how organizations really work and how we should think about the problem of organization--a great accomplishment."--Duncan Watts, author of *Six Degrees: The Science of a Connected Age* "For many readers, the most powerful demonstration of the ever-present duality of value and values will be Stark's field research on the impact of the 9/11 tragedy on one financial firm that lost hundreds of employees that day. Stark recounts the process by which the firm rebuilt its business through the painful and cathartic narratives of those lost and of those who survived. A moving analysis that redresses Dewey's paradox of the emotive and evaluative."--Bruce Kogut, Columbia Business School "At a time when global crises have shattered standard accounts of economic life, David Stark's *The Sense of Dissonance* offers powerful alternative explanations of economic activity along with specific prescriptions for twenty-first-century economic survival. Taking us into the varied worlds of Hungarian toolmakers, Manhattan Silicon Alley new media workers, and Wall Street arbitrage traders, Stark deftly grounds theoretical insights with marvelous ethnographic accounts. This book instructs and inspires."--Viviana A. Zelizer, author of *The Purchase of Intimacy* "This wonderful, lively, and personal book is packed with insights for economic sociology and general sociological theory. A mature statement by a leading sociologist, it is also a delight to read."--Walter W. Powell, Stanford University "This is an important book about an important topic--and it has a strong narrative and impressive, engaging ethnography."--Michele Lamont, Harvard University