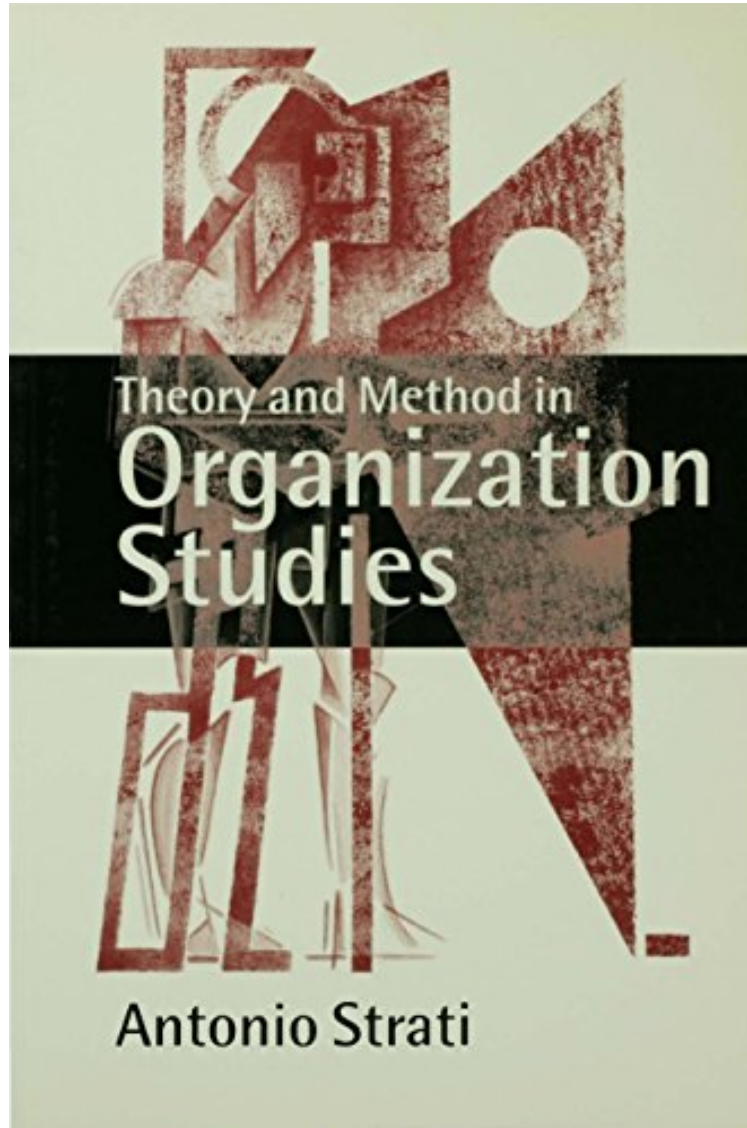


(Download pdf) Theory and Method in Organization Studies: Paradigms and Choices

Theory and Method in Organization Studies: Paradigms and Choices

Antonio Strati

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Antonio Strati : Theory and Method in Organization Studies: Paradigms and Choices before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Theory and Method in Organization Studies: Paradigms and Choices:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Flashes of brillianceBy Punit AroraWhat are organizations? Why do they exist? Are they created to serve some purpose or do the organizations create the purposes for which they shall exist? What are some of the quintessential theories of organizational studies and how can the researchers conduct

research in the field? These are some of the questions that the author seeks to answer. As the name itself suggests, the book is divided in two sections. First part deals with issues in organization studies and second with methodology in empirical research. His principal concern, however, is that the book will stimulate the reader to look at organizational studies afresh prompting interest in understanding of organizations. The first thing that struck me was literally the first line in the book, a theme that is continuously repeated in the book. In the preface, the author begins by stating that the study of organizations as social contexts concerns itself with fragments of organizational life, not with its totality or essential reality, nor with its totality or essential reality, nor with a representative sample of it. The author cites continuing change or flux to be the reason for it: Just like Heraclitus river, which cannot be stepped in twice because the water constantly flows and is never the same, so the same organization cannot be known twice. While I agree that the most studies in the field, like in any other discipline, focus on specific issues, I believe the purpose ultimately is to promote our understanding of organizations in general. The water in the river may change, but the river doesn't. Not in the short run anyway. It still would carry the similar kind of particles, minerals, pollutants and nutrients from day to day. Over a long run, these may drastically change, but studying the river would still help us understand changes, positive and negative. The author further claims that it is neither correct nor opportune to compare heterogeneous fragments, except for elements so well-circumstantiated that they yield some sort of generic information about organizational life. Again, while it is true that the organizational studies have to be understood in their context and that the most writers on the subject err on the side of being too certain and definitive in their policy prescriptions, the author errs on the side of too little. I believe that the different studies have different levels of generalizability, which the author fails to account for. His use of a dramatic metaphor overstates the phenomenon of flux and fragmentation in studying organizations. If it were true to such an extent, we would need to substantially reinvent the wheel every time a study on organizations is conducted. The first part of the book mainly provides a historical survey of organization theories and how they evolved. The author discusses theories, models, paradigms and metaphors commonly used in the literature. I am of the opinion that he does the best justice to the classical theories- scientific management, bureaucracy and human relations schools- the discussions are in-depth and the insights meaningful, which is particularly true in case of his treatment of Weber. I also liked his coverage of non-American writers and their research, which most textbooks on management tend to ignore or underplay. However, the most original idea in the first few chapters is the author's own concept of organizations without walls. To quote him, The organization without walls is an organization brought to light by empirical research. It consists of organizational phenomena which resist precise definition because it is impossible to determine whether they are some sort of association, a collective movement, an outright community, or society tout court. The existence and growth of such organizations is indeed a challenge for organization researchers. As discussed afore, the book ignites some flames while discussing classical theories, but fails to live up to its promise when it comes to other theories which are furnished in short paragraphs without much in-depth discussion. I would have also loved to see some information about big debates in the organization theory, the contribution of the theory to development of the field, the status of present research and the opportunities for future research, especially since the author begins with a stated objective of regenerating interest in organizational studies. I was also intrigued by two other notable omissions. It was surprising to find no mention of the agency theory anywhere in the book, which arguably is one of the most important paradigms for research in the field today. The book makes no mention of the works of Fama Jenson, Jenson Meckling, Amihud Lev, Eissenhardt, Shapiro or any of other hundreds of agency theorists. I am not sure whether it is because the author doesn't consider it important enough or whether he is not comfortable enough in handling the subject. I shall return to this a little later. The author mentions that the study of concept of external environment is fragmentary, and it is difficult to carry out empirically. According to him, it is treated from three standpoints: the environment is residual category or consists of multiple and multiform networks or it doesn't exist (P21). There is no mention of the work of researchers like Dess Beard, Dess Rasheed and Sharfman Dean, who have provided empirical measures like munificence, uncertainty and complexity to measure the task environment. Similarly, while the author mentions the institutional theory, he fails to mention the stream of research that provides us with the empirical measures on institutional environments. These are notable omissions. While reading the book, I also gained an impression, time and again, that the author was biased against or uncomfortable in empirical research in general and empirical research based on archival, secondary sources in particular. Let me illustrate this with few examples. He states measurement----- is an endeavor to give operationality to concepts by translating them into measures and using these as variables----- a notoriously flawed method with which to represent organizational phenomena----- (P 164). Again, archival research is not properly a method of empirical organizational research because data and information are collected, rather than being directly generated in the course of organizational research (P134). And yet again, secondary sources method----- draws on analyses and data collection by others, and is appropriate for studying the work of managers who are unavailable for the researchers fieldwork. But it has the disadvantage of the incompleteness and inappropriateness of the data collected (P 137). I believe the author fails to account for a large body of research which is possible with archival information, especially in this day and age of information revolution. If we look at the two omissions, agency theory and environmental measures, cited above in the light of this fact, it is clear to see a common thread. As we know, much of

the research in these fields is based on archival research, which makes me believe that the author is perhaps biased against or a shade uncomfortable in handling empirical research. However, there is something to be said about his chapter on empirical research. He provides detailed examples from classical research for various research methods like Minzbergs structured interview method, Cohen, et als simulation, etc, which is very useful for those planning their own research. The best chapter in the book, however, is the last one on qualitative research, which furnishes at quite some length the information on how to go about doing such research, what methods to use, which softwares would be useful and so on. Who is this book most useful for? PhD students in sociology looking for an introductory book on organizational sociology would find the book quite useful. PhD students in management, interested in streams such as social or organizational networks or qualitative research, may also find it very useful. General readers may skim and skip the book. For other readers with more advanced interests or those looking to supplement their knowledge from this book from other sources, in my opinion, Central perspectives and debates in organization theory by Graham Astley and Andrew Van De Ven (Administrative Science Quarterly, 1983) might be a good place to start at. Overall, Theory and Method in Organization Studies by Strati is a decent and easy read with flashes of brilliance. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A org-theory book for Non-beginners By Morten Vendelo Antonio Strati book is an introductory text to the field of organization theory, and thus it is comparable to similar books, for example, Hatch (1997) Pfeffer (1997) and Scott (2003). Strati's book has a different flavour, for example, it takes a firm stand on the temporality of organizations, emphasizing that "organizational phenomena are in constant flux" (p. xi), and that the same organization can never be known twice. This position gives us an awareness of both the limited and subjective nature of our knowledge of organizations, and that it is not opportune to compare heterogeneous fragments of organizational life. When evaluating the book one must acknowledge that it deals with several organizational issues in non-traditional ways. For example, it makes an enormous effort to convince us that there is not one, but many organizational realities, as well as in demonstrating that organizations are not rational entities, but worlds with conflicts, disagreement, many goals, loose couplings between groups and actors. Also, it fleshes out the distinction between old and new ways of thinking about organizations, and shows that empirical investigation of organizations is problematic. Yet, one also have to think about the students that could benefit from the book as an introductory text. Based on the complexity of the text, I believe that they should be of the more mature kind, for example it could be students in sociology who need an introduction to organizational sociology. Or students with experience of organizational life, as the book often presumes such experience of the readers. For example, chapter one makes direct references to the way organizations work, but these direct references are not easy to understand without real experience of organizations. In conclusion, the book seems to not be suited for students without any prior experience in either organizational life or in the field of sociology.

‘This introductory book is really worth buying. It is accessible without being patronizing. It stimulates thought without using rhetoric. It offers exciting content on methods and techniques without being arrogant’ - Organization Studies In this introduction to theory and method, students of organization will find a comprehensive view of the key theories in their field, combined with a toolkit of guidelines linking these to the different methods available for analyzing and interpreting organizational life. Distinguishing ‘the external society’ and the ‘internal society’, Antonio Strati sheds light on the different contexts that shape organizational life and the different levels of analysis that may be used. By showing the many levels at which organizations function and can be understood this book provides an invaluable introduction to analysis and research for advanced students. Recent concepts such as ‘the organization as hypertext’, ‘communities of practice’, ‘tacit knowledge’, and organizational learning; are explored as ways of approaching organizations: this book shows how to link such approaches to appropriate methodologies in order to achieve insightful analysis.

‘This introductory book is really worth buying. It is accessible without being patronizing. It stimulates thought without using rhetoric. It offers exciting content on methods and techniques without being arrogant. Reading it becomes less a once-only duty, more an experience that is enjoyable to repeat from time to time.’ (ORGANIZATION STUDIES) ‘This introductory book is really worth buying. It is accessible without being patronizing. It stimulates thought without using rhetoric. It offers exciting content on methods and techniques without being arrogant. Reading it becomes less a once-only duty, more an experience that is enjoyable to repeat from time to time.’ (ORGANIZATION STUDIES) Language Notes Text: English (translation) Original Language: Italian