The Dynamics of Rules: Change in Written Organizational Codes

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Contemporary Sociology, Vol. *30*, No. *5* (Sep., 2001), *479-480*.

Stable URL:
http://links.jstor.orglsici?sici=0094-306%28200109%2930%3A5%3C479%3ATDORCI%3E2.0.CO%3B2-V

Contemporary Sociology is currently published by American Sociological Association.

it be news to many citizens and scientists. Racial hygiene and eugenics (plus Nazis) provide the nasty grist that makes the point, but one learns little that is not already widely known. The chapter on the environment is not much better, one disaster after the other proving that science is corrupted by being "extrinsically motivated" and "diminished by "utility" and "technology."

From the perspective of the sociology of scientific knowledge (SSK) and the wider interdisciplinary field of science studies, this book will be met with disappointment (if not indifference). This is because the author employs the fundamentally flawed understanding of science, technology, and their relationship found in Habermas. The past thirty years of empirical research in SSK has demonstrated that the dualism between the internal (pure [intellectual]science) and external (everything else), so beloved by both logical positivists and critical theorists, is a figment of their imagination. Far from technology corrupting science, it is precisely the historical integration of natural philosophy, mathematics (in the early modem period largely a mechanical and commercial art), and engineering that gives rise to modern science. Pure philosophy, of course, is another matter.

The author does not adopt the key methodological principles of SSK (symmetry, neutrality, and reflexivity), a body of scholarship he otherwise claims in his support (as a comparison, see Steven Epstein's *Impure Science*). Jacobsen construes the social as a constraint, limit, or distorting force, when the crucial demonstration of SSK is that the social also enables, creates, and secures knowledge. The social is not mere epistemic corruption.

The actors in this book are dupes or crooks, either unaware of what is happening or active architects of evil technologies. Jacobsen only consults them in order not to be "lulled into accepting" their "self-understanding of their actions." In the last sentence the author explains how our aim must be the "construction of a genuinely rational society." The irony is that these words might easily be taken as the trademark of the many villains in this book. Like those he criticizes, Jacobsen believes there is one pure and correct concept of rationality, and indeed science. Unfortunately, this is precisely the idea that has historically provided the epistemological and moral basis for the very forms of tyranny from which this book is intended to liberates us.

The Dynamics of Rules: Change in Written Organizational Codes, by **James** G. **March, Martin Schulz,** and **Xueguang Zhou.** Stanford, CA Stanford University Press, 2000. 228 pp. $49.50 cloth. ISBN: 0-8047-3744-4. $24.95 paper. ISBN: 0-8047-3996-X.

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This is a unique book. March, Schulz, and Zhou have developed an entirely new field of organizational research, which amounts to a sort of ecology of organizational rules, and have developed an elegant theory of that field. One of this book's most important contributions is to bring insights from population ecology theory to the internal operation of the firm. Another is to build on March's ideas about organizational learning. The authors not only develop a new organizational genre and a theory to go with it, but introduce a new kind of data: demographic data on organizational rules. They track every rule created at Stanford over a period of 100 years.

Theirs is the first general theory of the rise, evolution, and demise of rules. It is built on three ideas, and is fleshed out with quantitative analyses of rule founding and change. The first idea is that rules are responsive to environmental and organizational problems. Environmental demands produce waves of rule change, much as environmental shifts produce waves of foundings in population ecology theory. Waves of new rules can also be stimulated by internal changes, such as growth spurts.

The second idea is that populations of rules are governed by a sort of ecology. Thus as in population ecology, at high levels of density fewer new rules are founded. New rules also have contagion effects, stimulating change in related rules. And competition operates, as rule formation in one domain draws resources and attention away from other domains, dampening rule founding there.

The third idea is that organizational learning shapes the life histories of rules. Rules are subject to a sort of liability of newness: New rules are highly susceptible to change, but as

rules age people learn how to use them (or to subvert them) and thus they become more stable. Organizational age has a different consequence, for as the organization ages people become adept at making and changing rules.

March, Schulz, and Zhou strive for generalizability, with the effect that while the analyses cover one hundred years, they are not particularly sensitive to history. For the most part, the authors could be talking about the French bureaucracy of the eighteenth century or Microsoft in the 1990s. Some findings may reflect the time and place of the study, for instance, the finding that Stanford was more likely to change rules over time may not be a consequence of organizational learning, but of growing legalism in twentieth-century America.

Because *The Dynamics of Rules* is such an original piece of work it begs the question: Will we now see the kind of growth industry that Hannan and Freeman spawned? To back up their theory, the authors have put together the richest longitudinal dataset on organizational rules anywhere. For each and every formal administrative and academic rule in Stanford's history they coded the time of first adoption, the time of each revision, and the time of revocation. My head aches at the very idea. Hannan and Freeman's success depended on an approach to data that (a) facilitates sophisticated dynamic analysis, and (b) permits the creation of a full dataset in a month or two (I speak from experience). March and colleagues certainly fulfill criterion la), but theirs is hardly a minimalist approach to data collection. Fans of March, Shulz, and Zhou will necessarily think twice before trying this at home.

The Dynamics of Rules is not a book for the statistically faint of heart. Analyses are presented clearly, but they are presented much as they are in *American Journal of Sociology* and *Administrative Science Quarterly.* The authors tell us little about concrete rules, and when they do cite examples they resist the (substantial) temptation to pander, avoiding Stanford stories that have the makings of tabloid headlines. They mention that growing federal dependence caused Stanford to elaborate accounting rules, but fail to tell us of the hot water President Donald Kennedy got into by spending federal overhead on the school's 72-foot yacht. They mention that Stanford changed its tenure rules in 1910 after a controversial dismissal, but do not say whether Thorstein Veblen's notorious affairs with students and hasty departure in late 1909 played any role.

There are a lot of new ideas to be found in this book as well as some very solid evidence to back them up. The findings presented here deserve to be refined in future studies of other organizations, and they deserve to influence the catalog of control variables used in other studies of organizational rule change. If the latter does not happen, it will likely be for pragmatic rather than intellectual reasons. Most studies of rule change depend on longitudinal data on a few rules from many organizations. To control for the factors identified in *The Dynamics of Rules,* analysts would need to chart every rule ever adopted in every organization sampled. Until the National Science Foundation devotes the same level of resources to sociology that it devotes to high energy physics, this is unlikely to occur.

CyberUnion: Empowering Labor Through Computer Technology, by **Arthur B. Shostak.** Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1999. 288 pp. $72.95 cloth. ISBN: 0-7656-0462-0. $24.95 paper. ISBN: 0-7656-0463-9.

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Many prominent researchers argue that the information economy has made unions outdated. An institutional remnant of an older industrial age, unions are seen as too inflexible to adapt to the rapidly changing economy. In *CyberUnion,* Arthur Shostak attempts to provide a different view, examining the ways unions currently use information technology and providing a vision of potential Future uses. In doing so, Shostak attempts to make the case that unions can effectively take advantage of new technologies to adapt to the changing world of work, providing better services to their members and gaining power as a social actor.

CyberUnion is primarily targeted toward union leaders themselves, along with sympathetic academic researchers. As such, the strength of the book lies in some inspiring case studies and a wealth of references to both online and printed resources designed to