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0521839491 - Social Movements and Organization Theory

Edited by Gerald F. Davis, Doug McAdam, W. Richard Scott and Mayer N. Zald

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Social Movements and Organization Theory

Although the fields of organization theory and social movement theory have long been viewed as belonging to different worlds, recent events have intervened, reminding us that organizations are becoming more movement-like – more volatile and politicized – while movements are more likely to borrow strategies from organizations. Organization theory and social movement theory are two of the most vibrant areas within the social sciences. This collection of original essays and studies both calls for a closer connection between these fields and demonstrates the value of this interchange. Two introductory, programmatic essays by leading scholars in the two fields are followed by nine studies that directly illustrate the benefits of this type of cross-pollination and two closing essays. The studies variously examine the processes by which movements become organized and the role of movement processes within and among organizations. The topics covered range from globalization and transnational social movement organizations to community recycling programs.

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Preface

Until very recently social scientists who studied complex or formal organizations and social scientists who studied collective action and social movements had little to do with each other and seemed to have little in common. Students of complex organizations such as corporations, government agencies, and the larger nonprofit organizations studied organizations that were large and had relatively clear boundaries, bureaucratic and formal procedures, and fairly well defined authority structures. By contrast, social movements and collective action were characterized as more spontaneous, fluid, and unorganized. To the extent that organizations played any role in social movements, they were thought to be small, ephemeral, and resource poor. Moreover, leaders of movements and collective action depended upon charisma and rhetoric, not formal-legal authority, to induce participation in their followers.

On both sides some early theorists and studies suggested that the sharp division of the fields of study overdrew the differences. Robert Michels's study of political parties (1962 [1911]) showed how parties that originated in social movements developed formal organization and authority structures that resembled those found in bureaucracies. Michels's "iron law of oligarchy" may have been overstated, but it nicely captured the transformation of what had been participatory and less bureaucratic organizations into formal organizations with hierarchic and self-reproducing authority structures. Social movements and collective action events that endure for any length of time are likely to develop some formal mechanisms for coordinating action and develop social movement organizations that are amenable to organizational analysis.

On the other side, at least since the development of the human relations approach to organizational behavior, sociologists and social psychologists

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have studied the extent to which a focus upon the formal structure of organizations ignores the informal processes that structure member interaction, and out of which informal leaders, coalitions, and conflict relationships develop. In short, internally formal organizations would seem to exhibit emergent features and mobilization processes very similar to those we see in social movement groups. Similarly, in their external relations, formal organizations also would seem to mirror their movement counterparts, participating, as they do, in fluid relationships with other organizations, joining in coalitions, and engaging in political action to affect state policy. Thus, they engage in political and mobilization processes that resemble those studied by social movement scholars. Still, until very recently, few scholars have bridged these areas of study.

Developments in the wider society and in scholarship have made it clear that the time is ripe to break down the barriers between these two fields. This volume and the conferences that preceded it represent our attempt both to create a network of movement and organization scholars and to show the advantages of applying social movement metaphors, concepts, and theories to things organizational and the utility of using theories and concepts developed in organizational study to inform research on social movements and collective action. After a theoretically oriented pair of introductory chapters that stake out the terrain, this book seeks to show concrete research consequences exemplifying the kind of crossover we have argued for. One purpose of the book is to show how concepts developed in one of the domains (organization theory or social movement theory) are useful for the other. For example, theorists of organizations have contemplated alternative structures for organizations with many sub-units that are geographically dispersed, and when and why they work as they do. Chapters on social movement “franchising” (by McCarthy) and on transnational social movement organizations (by Smith) document how these concepts help illuminate relatively new organizational forms in the social movement sector. Conversely, social movement scholars have described movement/countermovement dynamics during struggles over policy, which provides an enlightening framework for analyzing the struggles among the “shareholder rights movement” and more-or-less organized corporate elites over state-level corporate law (in the chapter by Vogus and Davis).

These chapters continue a tradition initiated by the article by Zald and Berger (1978) on movements within organizations. But the years since this

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paper was published have seen great advances in theory and methods in both organizational studies and social movement studies. Social network analysis and dynamic statistical methods, for instance, have greatly expanded the empirical sophistication and rigor of both areas and have enabled more subtle (and testable) cross-level theorizing. Thus, although we have argued that the current period is especially characterized by examples of crossover, the theory and research we present are useful to explain phenomena from earlier times. The authors of the chapters have been particularly attentive to highlighting the added value of the combined approach.

Organization of the Book

We organize the book into five main sections. The introductory section lays out the case for convergence by showing the value of a common field-level approach and the centrality of social mechanisms for constructing cross-domain theory. The next section, “Political and Mobilization Context,” highlights the multilevel nature of movement activity and describes how political contests play out in nested systems. The prototypical study of social movements involves struggles between “elites” with privileged access to state power and “challengers” with limited access to formalized channels for political change. Yet within the United States, and in a global economy, states are nested within higher-level jurisdictions, and themselves contain important political subdivisions, and there may be multiple authorities responsible for particular issues. The four chapters in this section use a diffusion framework to examine struggles at the level of the American states and document how elites, challengers, and state authorities in one locale are embedded in larger systems that shape structural and political outcomes. State laws, for instance, are deeply influenced by what laws in other states look like and what is happening at the federal level; to examine states in isolation misses the multilevel dynamics that shape movement outcomes.

Section III, “Social Movement Organizations: Form and Structure,” uses theory about nontraditional organizational forms – franchise organizations and transnational firms – to examine dispersed multiunit social movement organizations. While the prototypical social movement organization might be envisioned as the homespun formalization of a singular grassroots movement, contemporary movement organizations often seem to have absorbed the organizational logic of the corporate sector, in which economies

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of scale and the efficiencies available through contracting out have shaped the kinds of organizational structures observed. Most movement activities, from recruitment and fund raising to lobbying legislators, can be contracted out, and thus a “movement organization” may be little more than a part-time staffer with a fax machine – much like the “hollow corporations” enabled by the elaboration of a specialized business services sector (Davis and McAdam 2000). But the same technologies enable the development of both corporations and movement organizations with a much wider geographic reach, and the chapters in this section theorize the parallels in organization forms adopted by franchised movement organizations (such as Mothers Against Drunk Driving) and transnational social movement organizations.

The following section, “Movements Penetrating Organizations,” picks up the theme of organizations as polities harboring internal social movements. With the articulation of firms as analogs of nation-states, employing “citizens” that possess rights, the application of the techniques of social movements to organizational change followed directly. Social movements do not stop at the factory gate: they have their impacts in the office and on the shop floor, in the expectations and demands of those who work in organizations, and in the policies adopted by firms. Movements likewise take place within organizations, as small-scale mobilizations aimed at challenging the status quo parallel their society-wide counterparts. Moreover, the generic tactics of change-oriented collective action turn out to be tools that can be appropriated for top-down as well as grassroots change within organizations. The chapters in this section describe how movements in the larger world influence organizations and how internal social movements arise from above or below, and how they have their effect.

The fifth and final section contains two concluding essays. The first places the convergence of the study of organizations and movements into larger historical shifts in social organization and social theory and suggests areas for future research, while the second assesses what the studies reported in the book say about the value of and prospects for joining the study of social movements and organization theory.

Acknowledgments

Our attempt to bridge the organization/social movement divide goes back more than a decade. McCarthy, McAdam, and Zald, along with Woody

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Powell and Neil Fligstein, wrote a short proposal for a conference in 1989. A few years later Zald asked ICOS (the Interdisciplinary Committee on Organizational Studies at Michigan) for funding for a conference on this topic. It was turned down. Davis and McAdam got together at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences in 1998 and wrote a paper (2000) that showed how the two fields complemented each other. Later, after McAdam took a position at Stanford, he and Dick Scott began to work through the commonalities and differences in emphases of the fields. In 2000 Davis and Zald received funding from ICOS to hold two conferences on organizations and movements at Michigan in 2001 and 2002.

The first gathering was a “get acquainted” conference. A group of scholars were invited who were known to have some interests in the intersect. Some of them had been most active in the study of social movements and came out of a resource mobilization and political process theory background. Others came out of an organizational studies background, especially in neoinstitutional theory and in population ecology. They varied in whether they were more “micro” or “macro” and in their methodological commitments. The conference was loose in its structure; some sessions were devoted to idea sharing, while others were devoted to rough paper outlines.

The second conference, held in May 2002, included most of the participants in the first conference and several others especially recruited because they were doing exciting work in areas not well represented at the first gathering. This volume includes revised versions of the papers presented at the second conference as well as two others commissioned to effect an overall integration of the selections. At the risk of being immodest, we think the volume fulfills its “agenda-setting” mission and amply demonstrates the great benefits to be gained from ongoing collaboration between organization and social movement scholars. Let the conversation continue.

We close with several heartfelt acknowledgments. We begin, appropriately, with our enormous debt to ICOS. Quite simply, without its financial and institutional support, this project would not have been possible. But beyond its crucial role in this effort, ICOS provides a home for interdisciplinary and interschool collaboration about organizational studies possibly unmatched at any university in the country. Besides ICOS, we also received substantial financial support from the University of Michigan Business School, from the Horace H. Rackham School of Graduate Studies, from the Office of the Vice President for Research at Michigan, and,

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