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Designing Organizations

A Very Brief Introduction

2nd Edition

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ISBN 978-3-032-00856-5 ISBN 978-3-032-00857-2 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-00857-2>

Translation from the German language edition: “Organisationen gestalten” by Stefan Kühl and Judith Muster, © Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden 2016. Published by Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden. All Rights Reserved.

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Preface

This book represents a paradigm shift in organization management. Although the idea of organizations as machines that can be operated and optimized is still predominant in the minds of many managers and consultants, it has suffered a tremendous loss in plausibility over the last decade. Based not only on the results of organizational research, but primarily on the reports from everyday organizational practice, it is possible to recognize that organizations do not function as *trivial machines*, for which it is possible to know with certainty which output will result when using a specific input. And yet, even if referring to organizations as “complex,” “nontrivial,” or “chaotic” belongs to the current lip service of managers and consultants, the perspective of instrumental rationality on organizations is nonetheless still dominant in the literature for change management in organizations.

In contrast to that literature, we would like to demonstrate what the design of organizations can look like, beyond the *machine model* of understanding organizations. It is the possibilities that lie within the organization itself, and

not the supposed “Best Practice” from other companies, that should give rise to changes. We demonstrate that it is much more about the development of an organization’s hidden possibilities, which are difficult to communicate, than it is about working out the “core competences” of the organization, which are usually easy to spot. According to the approach presented in this book, *blind spots* (observational latencies) inevitably arise from the formation of structures in organizations. These *blind spots* are not necessarily inaccessible; they can be used for processes of change in organizations through the observation of external parties. The challenge in processes of change lies particularly in that, even when made visible, *blind spots* are not easily communicable in an organization. The response to these taboos (communicational latencies), within a protected environment, can provide interesting material for the design of organizations.

We classify our focus on *blind spots* and taboos under a fundamental understanding of organizations within a framework of systems theory. Therefore, we will begin by defining what is meant by the term “organization” and what its main types of structure are (Chap. 1). Subsequently, we provide an explanation as to why, under the concept of organizational design, an ends-means approach is still dominant when designing organizations, and show where the limits of this approach lie from the point of view of modern organizational research (Chap. 2). Based on the considerations regarding the roles of rationality gaps, *blind spots* and latencies, we provide a detailed description of an alternative approach in the designing of organizations (Chap. 3). Finally, in the conclusion, we discuss the possibilities and the limits of such an alternative (Chap. 4).

The approach for the design of organizations that we present here is based on our long-term experience