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About the Author

Jesper Blomberg is Associate Professor at the Stockholm School of Economics, where he also earned his PhD. His current research includes project management, with both an instrumental and critical stance, organizational analysis of the finance sector, as well as sustainable leadership and resilient organizing. Blomberg has published several books and articles covering organization and management theory, project management and organizational finance. He is also an appreciated lecturer both by graduate students and executive education participants and by professionals and managers.
Head online to https://study.sagepub.com/blomberg to access a range of online resources that will aid study and support teaching. Organization Theory: Management and Leadership Analysis is accompanied by:

For lecturers

- **PowerPoint slides**, featuring tables and figures from each chapter, which can be adapted and edited to suit your own teaching needs.
- An **Instructor’s Manual**, providing ideas and inspiration for seminars and tutorials.
- A **Testbank** to help instructors assess students’ progress and understanding.
- A **Resource Pack** to easily upload all the lecturer and student resources into your university’s online learning platform (i.e. Blackboard or Moodle), and customise the content to suit your teaching needs.

For students

- **Video** links providing further insights into the key concepts discussed in the book.
Organization theory, management and leadership analysis can be described in a variety of ways: as descriptions of activities in companies and organizations, as research orientations consisting of many different theories, as histories of ideas regarding different types of organization and management methods, as a number of metaphors for human interaction, and so on. Organization theory, management, and leadership analysis can also be described in a variety of styles: as a practical guide with normative advice for how to manage, organize and lead, or as a complex body of theoretical investigations. In this book, models and theoretical frameworks are the focus, rather than the practices of managing, organizing and leading. However, this does not mean that ‘reality’ can be ignored, or even consigned to a fuzzy background. On the contrary – through the presented theoretical frameworks and analytical models, reality will emerge, albeit in a more problematized and critically reviewed form. The practices of managing, organizing and leading will therefore become clearer than if they were presented on their own.

Organization theory, management and leadership analysis offer tools to analyze not only business and professional organizations, but almost any kind of social grouping. Everything, from the most unnoticed, trivial encounter between two people to major societal historical trends, can be analyzed with the tools offered in this book. The primary purpose of such analysis is not an intellectual or academic exercise, but to increase understanding for what we do, from very small interactions to society at large. A better understanding of what we do opens up more alternative
possible actions. We increase our understanding of others, of what works well and of what doesn’t. Most importantly, it gives us the knowledge and power to address real problems with practical working solutions. Thus, with the organizational, management and leadership theories described in this book, we can create better human relations, better organizations, and become better organizational members, professionals, change agents, managers and leaders working toward a better world for all of us.

In this first chapter, we jump straight into a quite abstract reasoning of why the combination of ‘theoretical pluralism’, ‘re-framing’ and ‘multi-frame analysis’ is the most useful way of analyzing any organizational, management and leadership phenomena. Multi-frame analysis is compared with ‘free thinking’ and ‘single-frame analysis’. It is concluded that multi-frame analysis creates a deeper and more useful understanding. The description of multi-frame analysis ends with a short presentation of the four basic theoretical frameworks that structure the content of the book.

Before we present the benefits of reflective and critical analysis with the help of different theoretical frameworks, some sort of unproblematic description of reality must be given some space. What more specific ‘organizational phenomena’ are the many analytical tools supposed to help us understand better? What practical aspects and activities can we understand in different, more fruitful ways, given the deeper analytical knowledge that management and organizational theory can offer us? In order to answer these questions, we start this chapter by putting the many models and theoretical frameworks on hold. This makes it slightly easier for us to construct a short and unproblematized picture of what kind of subject organizational analysis is, what organizations are and what organizing is, what organizing processes consist of and what it is we do when we manage, organize and lead.

The empirical material of organizational analysis

An organization (or, more correctly, ‘organizational processes’) can consist of anything from a couple of people who do something together, for example build a fence or try to reduce street violence among young people, to activities in large multinational companies that include tens of thousands of people and shipments of goods and financial transactions across several continents, have close collaboration with political institutions and handle huge sums of money. It can range from non-profit organizations to virtual ‘communities’, with the goal of stopping environmental pollution or creating an international caliphate. Basically, everything we do involves some kind of organizing or some form of organization. We grow up, we study, we work, we travel, we fall ill, we get well, we grow older and we die, all within the setting of organizations. But why is it like this? Why do organizations exist? What do they consist of? And how can we influence, organize, manage and lead them?
Just as a manufacturing company, for example, has usually organized its business into a number of specialized functions, such as purchasing, product development, manufacturing, marketing, accounting and management, educational business economics programs have been specialized into a number of subject areas. Thus, you study accounting, finance, marketing, strategy, operations and other subjects, as part of most business economics programs. Organizational theory can thus be seen as a specialized discipline among others. But it can also be said to differ from the others, partly because its practical function differs from that of other subjects.

In order for a group of people to succeed in building a fence or for a large company to be successful, the work of different people and the activities of different functions must be connected in some way. If I cut planks that are too short for the intended fence, or if you do not understand how my cut planks should be put together, or if a marketing department markets a product that the production department cannot manufacture, then the organization will not work. Organization theory is about how an activity can be divided into several, more specialized activities and how these activities can be combined, integrated or coordinated to form some kind of value-adding process. It does not matter how talented a number of specialists are, how innovative product developers are, how efficient a production department is, or how effective a marketing strategy is, if the different specialist functions do not work reasonably well together. Organization theory therefore differs from other functions, in that it combines them, so to speak, both through their theoretical models and in practice – the reality.

Set in a business context, the central position and weight of the subject of management and organization theory can be illustrated by Figure 1.1. Organization theory can be said to discuss not only how different functions are coordinated, but also how they can and should be coordinated.

![Figure 1.1 Organization as a central and cohesive function](link)

*Figure 1.1 Organization as a central and cohesive function*
However, this is a substantial simplification. In order for an activity to be coordinated, it must also be divided and specialized into different sub-activities. Organization theory is as much about division of labor as about coordination of labor. But even that description is a substantial simplification. The question of what constitutes an organization receives different answers, depending on which theoretical framework the answer is based on. Organizations comprise several and qualitatively different basic theoretical assumptions that can be clustered into a number of consistent frameworks. These frameworks are very important to understand in order to be able to perform proper management analysis. Thus, the content of this book is structured into four basic theoretical frameworks. We return to these frameworks and their different answers at the end of this chapter, and in the next.

Even on a less problematized and less theoretical level, organization is both a more comprehensive and more fundamental phenomenon than Figure 1.1 shows. As mentioned earlier, we also organize ourselves in smaller and more informal contexts (see examples in Figure 1.2). Whether we build a fence in our free time, play games, cook together, do sports or just hang out online or in real life, we relate to each other and can be said to be organizing ourselves. We can definitely understand better what happens in the most trivial social contexts by analyzing them with organization theory. How do we divide tasks up into small groups when we work on a project as part of a course in, say, management? How do we coordinate the same work? How do we make decisions? Who has the most influence, and why? Do we all let everyone speak? Why? Why not? These and similar questions can be answered with the help of organizational analysis. But also, major social phenomena, historical trends, industrial sectors and institutional structures can be understood and analyzed using management and organizational theory.

The many models, theories and concepts in the book have been selected based on the criterion that, if properly applied, they will be able to provide concrete and action-based new knowledge about organization and leadership in practical contexts and situations. Correctly applied, these models will create new insights into appropriate ways of acting in real-world, practical contexts and situations. Well-conducted analyses, based on the many models and the four frameworks in the book, can create better understanding, decisions and actions. This applies to everything from informal organization in small groups, our friendship circles, social media, the formal organizations and companies we often work in, to major, overarching social issues.

After this brief initial description of the empirical subject of organizational analysis, it is time to address its theoretical basis or, more accurately, its theoretical bases. One idea that forms the basis of organizational analysis comes from the concepts of theoretical pluralism, re-framing and multi-frame analysis (explained below). Another, though closely related, theoretical basis is the formulation of four distinct and partly contradictory fundamental theoretical frameworks. In the remainder of this first chapter, we explain why theoretical pluralism/multi-frame analysis is a better starting point for organizational, management and leadership analysis than ‘free thinking’ and
An Introduction to Organization Theory

Critical thinking, theoretical pluralism and multi-frame analysis

It is often said that critical thinking is an important skill among citizens and leaders in a democratic society. Also, in business practice and management contexts, the ideal of the ‘reflective practitioner’ is widespread (Schön 1983). A critical thinker or a reflective
practitioner is usually conceptualized as an individual person, not getting stuck in old trains of thought, but having the ability to discover and interpret new information and to think and act creatively. There are many sayings expressing this conception: ‘think outside the box’ and ‘leave your comfort zone’ are perhaps the most well-known. It has also been suggested that successful, educated and smart people are actually worse at reflective and critical thinking than people in general (Argyris 1991). It is argued that this makes them less fitting as leaders and change agents of organizations that need to be responsive, flexible and innovative.

The assumption that successful management and leadership create flexible, fast and innovative organizations, is usually taken for granted. We seldom review it critically. This means that we often overlook other fundamental functions required in all organizations, namely stabilizing, disciplining and controlling human behavior. In order to say an organization exists, it must lock in resources and stabilize activities. This is one of several possible fundamental definitions of an organization. If an organization reacted to everything, it would lose the ability to invest, develop and create added value. Instead, it would be reduced to a reactive, passive, dissolved, chaotic organism.

But what do we actually mean by reflection? What do we mean by critical thinking? And why is it important? Organization theory, as described in this book, provides an explicit answer to these questions – an answer that also relates to the content and structure of organization theory itself.

We can view any object or phenomenon from very different perspectives. Everything, from a simple drawing to a complex organizational process, can be interpreted qualitatively differently. Such different interpretations are usually a consequence of the fact that they are based on different underlying perspectives or frameworks. Each framework will highlight some aspects and hide others. There is no framework that can show us everything. Thus, a key strength of organizational analysis is the use of different, complementary and partly contradicting theoretical frameworks. Figure 1.3 is deliberately drawn to be interpreted as qualitatively different things. For example, it can be interpreted as a three-dimensional cube or as an umbrella from above. The interpretation depends on who you are, what past experiences you have in life and the context you are in. For example, at a lecture at the Swedish military high command, most participants saw the figure as an army tent from above.

It cannot be argued that a cube, an umbrella or a tent is the correct or true interpretation. These interpretations are equally reasonable, and they are caused by different, equally reasonable interpretative frames. From a military perspective, the army tent is a very reasonable interpretation; and, based on a geometric perspective, the cube is reasonable. Neither can the different interpretations be combined into some kind of true synthesis, for example a ‘cubic umbrella’. Instead, we have to accept a simultaneous presence of several, equally true interpretations. In other words, we can accept theoretical pluralism.
An additional point concerning Figure 1.3 is that we first see the figure, or the ‘phenomenon’, as something, regardless of whether this something happens to be an umbrella, a tent or a cube. After that, using theory, we can begin to examine and dissect the figure/phenomenon into smaller elements – that is, analyze it. Based on one theory, for example, the figure consists of nine (or 12) straight lines of certain specific lengths, with angles relative to each other. According to another theory, it consists of light hitting a paper surface, which in turn reflects different quantities of light, which is then perceived by our eyes, which in turn sends signals. Now it starts getting slightly complicated because light is not only composed of matter but also of wavelengths. The scientific answer depends on which scientific theory you apply.

However, this is not a physics book, nor a chapter on the human eye and brain. More important, in this context, is that, according to a third theory, the figure is an artifact whose meaning and significance are produced by or negotiated between its users, in this case the author of this text, the text itself and its readers. Depending on how this interaction and negotiation develop, the figure takes on different meanings. Suddenly, we face a more natural science (physical and biological) versus a social science (semiotic and literary critical) interpretation of the figure. With the help of theory, we can problematize and go beyond the obvious and seemingly true interpretations that we so easily make in our everyday thinking. Different theoretical frameworks reveal different aspects, and no aspect needs to be truer than the other. Again, it is about theoretical pluralism.

When we consider something, such as a figure in a textbook or on a company’s website, we do not see it primarily as some advanced physical phenomenon or as a semiotic language game, we see it as a figure, a company or something else more or
less obvious. In everyday life as well as in working life, we take most phenomena for
 granted. We rarely ask ourselves what an organization really is, or why organizations
 exist, and we do not analyze seemingly trivial everyday phenomena with the aid of
 theoretical frameworks. But we can if we want, if we have the necessary knowledge
 about how the appropriate analytical tools are used. If we pose these and other,
 seemingly trivial questions, as well as master a variety of analytical tools and
 frameworks, we will gain a greater, deeper and broader insight into the organizations
 we encounter in our work and in our spare time. If we open up our thinking to new
types of insights, we will be more open to new approaches and new ways to influence
 these organizations, and thus our own and other people’s lives.

There is no established knowledge mass that is absolutely true. There is no science
that cannot be criticized for its more or less unfounded assumptions. There is no man-
gement theory, economic theory or organization theory that can legitimately claim to
have a higher truth content than all other similar theories. The fact that organization
theory is characterized by theoretical pluralism should therefore be seen as some-
thing positive rather than as a shortcoming. Within a number of other economic and
business disciplines, the subject is presented as one coherent theory. Organization
theory textbooks are often more honest, as they actually reflect the theoretical diver-
sity that characterizes the subject area. In this way, organization theory is also more
challenging. It does not only require the student to mechanically perform model- and
theory-based analyses, but also requires that the student perform this type of analysis
based on different, and in many cases, conflicting theories. Gaining an ability to
see phenomena from a variety of perspectives – to learn how to conduct re-framing
and multi-frame analysis – is one of the cornerstones of research-based ‘academic’,
‘scientific’ organizational analysis. It is also one of the cornerstones of this book. It is
not enough to completely master a number of models. It is also necessary to under-
stand the basic assumptions of these models, and, when required, to abandon them
in favor of models based on other, sometimes completely contradictory assumptions.¹

However, multi-frame analysis and theoretical re-framing do not have to conflict
with the ability to showcase the use of individual concrete analysis tools. On the con-
trary, the ability to use analytical models based on different fundamental frameworks
can support and give multi-frame analysis a helping hand. Being able to talk unhin-
dered about basic assumptions and various frameworks is not enough to fully master
organizational analysis. It is also necessary to apply the frameworks in the form of
analysis of concrete organizational phenomena. Organization theory therefore has two
fundamental, mutually supportive functions or purposes:

1. to offer specific analytical tools in the form of models and concepts which can be
   applied to analyze and increase understanding of any organizational phenomena
2. to offer several, internally coherent and partly contradictory fundamental theoreti-
   cal frameworks that, when applied in analysis, replace, complement or re-frame
   common-sense thinking.
Multi-frame analysis can both deepen knowledge about and provide an ability to critically review the analyzed phenomena. It can also serve as a tool to critically review the individual analytical models and the analyses and conclusions produced using them.

In short, management, organizational and leadership theory offers models and tools that make it easier for us to think and act in and around organizations in new ways. We understand more and better. We can increase our tolerance and our control. We can increase our freedom of action and make our organizations better.

Three types of critical thinking

As organizational theory consists of several, partly contradictory, theories, re-framing and multi-frame analysis are one way of looking at critical thinking and help us, in part, to answer the question of what critical thinking is. To explain the benefits of this specific version of critical thinking (by re-framing and multi-frame analysis), it can be compared with two other ways of looking at critical thinking: thinking freely and technical single-frame analysis. We take a look at these three types of critical thinking below.

Thinking freely

'To think freely is great', the saying goes. Thinking freely is trying to think outside of one’s normal lines of thought, without any real systematic approach. Some people may be perceived as being better at coming up with new ideas or solving problems in a creative way, and these people appear to be better at free thinking than others. There is nothing ‘wrong’ with free thinking – on the contrary, it can be ‘great’ – but it’s not obviously the most effective way to try and understand organization. Free thinking involves a number of problems. Among others, it can be difficult to know how free it actually is.

All our thinking is, among other things, a product of our previous experiences. Even a person’s freest thoughts derive to a high degree from that thinking person. If we see something, we can only see this something as something we can imagine ourselves. The thoughts, perspectives and possible interpretations are always limited by our own experience, our own knowledge, creativity and imagination. We all have a limited amount of experience, and therefore there is a limit even for our most daring, unusual and different thoughts. Critically reviewing something, for example trying to understand the causes of an organizational problem, let’s say high staff turnover, means that the solutions are limited by our previous experiences. To be really critical, you must also criticize these experiences of your own, that is, yourself. Self-criticism is difficult, especially without external help. Theory offers such outside assistance, and
without analytical help, for example from organizational theory, a critical review of, for example, ‘high staff turnover’ becomes difficult. We may be able to deal with, and possibly even lower, the high staff turnover in all sorts of ways, but with the help of theory, we can come much further, something we will soon illustrate.

Our practical experiences are, to a high degree, stored in our mind as being taken-for-granted, implicit assumptions, values and ideas. We often refer to these assumptions and ideas as ‘common sense’. They do not offer coherent logical systems or explicit theoretical assumptions. Perhaps our common sense includes theoretical pluralism, perhaps not. Because it is not systematically described, we cannot know. All we know is that it comes from ourselves and our experiences. This is illustrated by the arrows in Figure 1.4, which are overlapping and dotted, that is to say unclear.

In summary, free thinking can be a relatively inefficient way of thinking critically and analyzing organizational phenomena. It is not as free as it may seem, and it is unclear as it is not based on conscious assumptions or systematic systems.

Technical single-frame analysis

A common way of trying to do the almost impossible, that is, change our ingrained ways of thinking, our common sense and behavior patterns, is to enlist external help, in the case of technical single-frame analysis, from a more formalized theory. Such theory is based on other people’s experiences and is often formulated, more or less, as coherent logical systems. Even theory is based on assumptions that can be more or less substantiated, but, unlike everyday thinking, common sense and personal experiences, the assumptions are usually explicitly formulated and thus easier to review. The greater the distance between the formal theory we use and its basic assumptions, our own common sense and own experiences, the greater the potential of the theory to challenge the analyst’s thinking. Or expressed slightly differently: the greater the
distance between our own everyday thinking and the more formal theory, the higher the potential of the analysis to show a phenomenon in new light.

Figure 1.5 shows how theory offers an alternative starting point for analysis. The distance between the analyst’s everyday thinking (in the red person’s head) and the more formal theory (the grey box) can enable interpretations of the phenomenon from a new point of view. In addition, the theory contains a number of basic assumptions (in the grey box). They indicate that this theory is a very traditional economic theory based on an assumption of the rational, utility-maximizing human being, *homo economicus*.

But even technical single-frame analysis, i.e. analysis with the aid of one particular theory, can be problematic. For example, what theory is chosen is crucial to how much it can challenge the analyst to think critically. We all tend to seek supportive information, which means that we often choose a theory that we like. This is often because the theory has much in common with our common sense, our everyday thinking and the implicit assumptions we already make. The distance between formal theory and our own everyday theories therefore becomes unnecessarily small. Thus, the reflection, the critical review, will also be unnecessarily small. As a student or leader, we often choose to specialize in subjects that we like, and since we often like what is similar to us, the possibility of learning a higher degree of re-framing has already been exacerbated.

It will be even worse if we then study this theory in detail and for an extended time, without studying other, contradictory theories in similar detail. With longer and more
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intimate contact with a formal theory, the tendency is that our everyday thinking and common sense begin to be influenced by and resemble the formal theory. Our common sense and formal theory increasingly merge together, and the original function of the theory – to broaden our ability to understand – now has the opposite effect in that we become increasingly narrow-minded.

The content and structure of the theory itself also influence this. If it is a question of a technically advanced formal theory, perhaps highly quantified, it is more difficult to question the basic assumptions of the theory. In theories with less technical content, the theory’s fundamental assumptions are often more vivid in the form of discussion and self-criticism. If you have educated yourself for a long time in a highly technical theory that you liked the first time you encountered it, there is a great risk of becoming one with the theory and hence extremely narrow-minded. The ability to think critically is then reduced to unfamiliar contexts and where the theory you usually rely on is not applied before. For example, if you are working in a business setting where economic reasoning is commonplace, and you use advanced economic theory to analyze a problem, there is a risk of it leading to the opposite of critical analysis and critical thinking, albeit in the form of technically dazzling analysis.

In Figure 1.6, the economically everyday-thinking person has chosen a theoretical area that, from the beginning, was relatively similar to their own everyday thinking, that is, a classic economic theory. As this person has also carried out detailed studies in this field of theory, its everyday thinking has also been influenced by and become increasingly similar to the studied theory. As this theory is also technologically

![Figure 1.6](image_url)

**Figure 1.6** If the distance between analysts and theory decreases, the risk of narrow-mindedness increases
advanced, it does not include much self-criticism regarding its basic assumptions. The highly technical theory thus constitutes an obstacle to re-framing (illustrated by the thick grey lines in the figure). The overall effect is that the theory, instead of implying reflection and criticism of the person’s everyday thinking, leads to narrow-minded, one-dimensional analysis.

Theoretical pluralism and multi-frame analysis

The solution provided by organization theory to the problems outlined above is to encompass many theories, some of them partly contradictory. This makes it difficult or impossible for a person who perceives and analyzes a phenomenon to make their everyday thinking and their ‘common sense’ merge with a theory. The different theoretical frameworks act as criticism both of the everyday thinking of people and of each other. A person may feel more connected with one of the frameworks, but the theoretical pluralism of organization theory implies a critical review of this framework as well.

In this book, four more or less logically coherent fundamental theories or frameworks (see Figure 1.7) are presented. If they are used properly in the analysis of a real organizational phenomenon, they will complement and contradict each other.

Figure 1.7  Four different assumptions about human nature and four different theoretical frameworks

- Homo economicus – the economic human (The structural framework)
- Homo ludens – the playful human (The HR framework)
- Homo potetas – the power-seeking human (The power framework)
- Homo socialis – the social human (The symbolic framework)
An organizational analysis using the four frameworks includes both technical analysis and multi-frame analysis. Technical analyses based on several more or less formalized models are complemented by the fact that the models derive from different frames of references with partly contradictory fundamental assumptions.

If we want to be able to analyze organizational phenomena and problems as well as possible, we should also put extra energy into the frameworks that we initially dislike or find most difficult to apply. If we are attracted to, for example, the structural framework, we should put extra energy into an analysis from, for example, the power framework. If we do the opposite, i.e. concentrate our analysis on the frame of reference we like and are familiar with, we risk the same problems arising as in a one-dimensional, more technical analysis, i.e. the analysis creates narrow-mindedness rather than critical analysis and reflection. It is thus important to be able to analyze organization from several frameworks, preferably all four, i.e. to go full circle, as in Figure 1.7.

Four frameworks on management, organization and leadership

The book describes four fundamental theoretical frameworks, as well as a number of models that are included within them. Each framework is presented in two chapters. The first describes the more basic models of the framework and the other describes the more in-depth models. The description of each fundamental perspective begins with a brief historical description of how the current frame of reference has evolved from research and organizational practice. This is followed by a description of a number of analytical models and how these can be used in the analysis of concrete organizational phenomena. Finally, the strengths and weaknesses of the framework are described. However, to create a preliminary picture of organization theory as a whole, the four frameworks are briefly introduced here.

Two modern organizational frameworks

The first two frameworks described in the book, the structural framework (Chapters 2 and 3) and the HR framework (Chapters 4 and 5), are very topical and established in business and organizational practice. For example, if you ask a business executive what their organization looks like, you usually get answers that describe how the business is structured, what processes they have ‘set’ and how they treat employees. These two frameworks are also the two oldest in the organization research field and can be termed ‘modern’, not in the sense that they are the most fashionable or trendy today but because they are examples of ‘modernist’ thinking. They are relatively easy to use in the analysis of organizational phenomena and problems, and if the analyses are
performed correctly, they lead to specific normative conclusions as to whether we have organized appropriately or whether we should re-organize the business into some other, better way. Organizations are seen from these frameworks largely as instruments that can be used to achieve formulated goals, such as the efficient production of goods and services.

The structural framework

An organizational analysis based on a structural framework answers the question of whether we have chosen to formalize and structure organizational processes in an appropriate manner. Do the current structure and the formalized processes support the organization’s strategy, its environment and operations, or should it be restructured to allow it to be able to conduct operations more efficiently? The structural framework has a close link to traditional economic theory and views the human being as a rational maximizer of material wealth (*homo economicus*). Within the structural framework, there are a variety of models for formalizing, specializing and coordinating activities, that is, how organizations can and should be structured to be as efficient as possible (see Figure 1.8).

![Figure 1.8](sage-bk-b-200120.jpg) A successful organization according to the structural framework

The HR framework

An organizational analysis based on the HR framework (HR as in *human resources* or *human relations*) is more about how the needs of the organization and the employees fit together (see Figure 1.9). If they do not fit together, the work organization...
and/or employee policy should be changed to better meet employees’ needs. Employees are assumed to naturally like to work, just as children like to play, given that they are allowed to work/play (*homo ludens*). If employees are given interesting work tasks, they will become motivated to work hard. According to the HR framework, motivated employees are a prerequisite for efficient operations. If a particular structure or design of a process is in conflict with employees’ needs for, for example, influence, self-determination or stimulating tasks, it does not matter whether the structure or process is right from the point of view of a structural framework. Both the structural and HR frameworks are about what leads to successful organizations, but they have different and partially contradictory recipes.

**Two contemporary organizational frameworks**

The last two fundamental frameworks described in this book, the *power framework* (Chapters 6 and 7) and the *symbolic framework* (Chapters 8 and 9), can be said to be more contemporary. They emerged as distinct frameworks within organization theory after the structural and HR frameworks were developed. They can be seen both as a criticism of and as a complement to these other frameworks.

**The power framework**

Within a power framework, all organizational processes, goals and solutions, are products of political processes between actors with different and conflicting interests. There are neither targets nor efficiency measures that benefit everyone. What is efficient for some is less efficient for others. Conflicts, power struggles and political processes are daily occurrences and cannot be made to disappear, using either optimal structures, correctly set processes or satisfied human needs. The framework assumes that human beings are always striving to increase their powers (*homo potestas*). The power framework consists of different ways of mapping and analyzing the political landscape, which, according to this perspective, characterizes all organizations and their surroundings (see Figure 1.10). Through such an analysis, different, more or less ‘smart’ power strategies can be applied to promote certain interests at the expense of other interests and stakeholders.

**The symbolic framework**

The symbolic framework can be seen as a criticism of the two modernist frameworks (the structural and the HR frameworks) and the more contemporary power framework. The structural and HR frameworks can be said to be romantic or naive in their
belief in efficiency and in their ability to organize in a way that benefits everyone, that is, in the assumption of overall rationality or harmony. The power framework can be said to be cynical in its view of the human being as not just a will-driven but also a power-seeking creature (*homo potestas*). The power framework can be said to immunize against power blindness, but, if it is not complemented by other perspectives, it can also lead to power hypersensitivity. The risk of a unilateral utilization of the power framework is that opportunities for rational and common solutions tend to be underestimated.

Within a symbolic framework, the human being is neither rational, selfish, caring, nor power-driven. The human being is rather what the social context makes her into (*homo socialis*). Given a certain cultural context, the human being can become a thoroughbred bureaucrat, an enthusiastic team player, a strong-willed entrepreneur, a power animal or perhaps a bit of everything – or something else entirely. The symbolic framework’s basic assumption of the human being is that she seeks meaning, that is, to understand an infinitely complex, changing and uncertain world. By creating culture together with, and/or against, others, the complexity can be simplified and may make the world understandable, meaningful and manageable. However, the specific content of such a culture can vary from context to context. For example, a company can be said to recreate a specific corporate culture, while another is characterized by a rather different one. In addition, each department within a company can have its specific character, and different professions can be in conflict with each other. National or regional identities are another way of looking at symbolism and culture.

Organizational analysis based on a symbolic frame is about understanding how symbols express, create and recreate meaning and organizational culture, for example...
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through symbolic leadership, and what effects symbols and culture may conceivably have. Does organizational culture coordinate people’s actions and/or does it exacerbate any attempts to implement change? Do certain symbols primarily fulfill the function of legitimizing the organization’s operations by making them look good, or do the symbols affect the organization's activities more directly?

On a more basic level, the symbolic frame can be said to be the basis for the entire organization theory. The idea of multi-frame analysis and the strength of theoretical pluralism itself are an expression of the symbolic frame’s more relativistic view of the human being and organization. Artifacts in the form of, for example, an organizational chart, a formalized process, a factory or balance sheet, mean different things and are interpreted differently in different cultural contexts (see Figure 1.11). Depending on these interpretations, management, organization and leadership will be conducted in different ways.

Figure 1.11  A symbolic framework on organizational phenomena

Note: Within different cultures, the same phenomenon is perceived entirely differently.
A fifth framework?

In academic textbooks, organization theory is usually presented in the form of a number of clear theoretical perspectives. Sometimes they are categorized a little differently than they are here, as an author may advocate a particular thesis and try to synthesize these perspectives into a single theoretical framework. In some books, the power framework is omitted or integrated into the others, while others focus on a single framework. There are also those who divide up organizational theory into a relatively large number of ‘metaphors’.

However, as this book is intended as a concise introduction to organizational theory, it cannot cover everything. For example, organizational research includes more pronounced critical social theory, which can be said to be driven by more emancipatory or radical-critical knowledge interests, rather than explanatory and regulatory ones. Instead of merely describing how organizations work, an attempt is made to create knowledge about how they could work – not necessarily to become more efficient, in the traditional sense, but to make society better, expose injustice, help weak actors or show how minorities are systematically segregated and act under worse conditions than strong, favored groups or majorities. In such, even more critical, organizational analysis, concepts such as class, social background, gender, ethnicity, diversity and intersectionality are important.

This type of analysis could be presented as a fifth framework. Such a framework could then be said to encompass all the previous four frameworks but with a sharper and more critical ambition. However, within the format of this book, there is no scope for doing justice to this extensive part of organization theory. However, in the book's in-depth chapters on the power and symbolic frameworks respectively (Chapters 7 and 9), a number of theories are described which can be referred to as being more critical. These theories are key to understanding the full scope of organizational analysis. They are very important in themselves as analytical tools, but they also link to another, larger and more critical world of organizational analysis.

However, the division into four frameworks made here (see Figure 1.12) is not unique to this particular book. The division is rather a variation on how Bolman and Deal (2013) divide organization theory. Here, however, the frameworks and their fundamental assumptions are even more pronounced in order to facilitate multi-frame analysis. The big difference between Bolman and Deal’s presentation and this book is the content of the different frameworks. Instead of long descriptions and heroic explanations of mainly American white men and senior executives, this book contains more analytical models as well as descriptions of how these can be applied in theory-driven and action-based management, organizational and leadership analysis.
A toolbox of analytical devices

Even if we ignore the above reasoning about multi-frame analysis, critical reflection and theoretical pluralism, there is much to be found in management, organizational and leadership analysis. The many analytical models can be seen as tools with different functions that are appropriate for different situations. This book then becomes a toolbox – just open the various compartments and choose a suitable tool for the task at hand. Interpreting it like this, the four frameworks become four main compartments. The function of the frameworks will then be toned down – it will be more about finding the right department in the toolbox rather than acquiring a better ability to think critically with the aid of multi-frame analysis. This type of interpretation is of course completely legitimate, but it also means that the potential of organizational analysis is not fully utilized.

Although the toolbox metaphor provides a simplified view of organizational analysis, it can be seen as a good start to the journey into the subject. How to approach organizational analysis is very much a matter of taste. Either you start, as in this chapter, focusing on fundamental theoretical frameworks, or you begin by choosing and rejecting more pragmatically from among all the analytical models described in this book. In the latter case, it will automatically be a more empirically driven analysis. First, you identify a ‘problem’, and then you select a few sensible tools. However, as the example below shows, defining something as a problem requires a perspective, a framework. And maybe, what is seen as a problem from one framework, might be perceived as a non-problem or even a solution from another.

An apparently straightforward example

It was mentioned briefly above that the phenomenon of ‘high staff turnover’ can be understood with the aid of organizational analysis. With the structural framework’s
focus on the human being as an economically benefit-maximizing individual, an analysis of high staff turnover can lead to the conclusion that staff are not receiving adequate wages for their efforts. They therefore choose to work in any other organization that offers higher pay. Possible solutions would be to offer higher or more performance-oriented pay. It may also be a matter of poorly structured processes. By clarifying the specialized roles each individual has, or should have, one can make it easier for the employee to do their work successfully.

From an HR framework perspective, the issue of motivating employees is important, but this does not necessarily happen by means of pay, clear processes or well-defined roles. On the contrary, the solution may be to re-frame the tasks themselves so that they become more challenging and stimulating. Perhaps operations can be organized with less specialization but with increased self-management in teams that communicate and formulate common strategies and goals.

From a power framework perspective, it is perhaps more about how management can strengthen its position of power vis-à-vis the employees. Possible solutions can be individual rewards, increased control, trying to make employees less valuable by transforming their skills into structural capital, or building alliances with trade union representatives. But, from a power framework perspective – as well as from a symbolic framework perspective – high staff turnover can also be good for an organization’s success. It may be cheaper to exploit the employees for a few years, then replace them, than allow them to develop so that they want to stay. At the same time, it may be important to set goals and formally work towards lowering the high staff turnover, but on a more symbolic level. An organization that exploits its staff may appear illegitimate and may therefore find it difficult to recruit new staff, sell its products or finance its investments. One solution may be to set goals and formally work towards reduced staff turnover, but without ever succeeding in doing so.

That which from one perspective can be seen as a problem can therefore be seen as a solution from another. The value of the different analytical models therefore increases if they are based on different fundamental assumptions, i.e. belong to different, complementary and partly contradictory frameworks of organizational theory.

**Strategy, operation management, leadership and related subjects**

Another issue relevant to the selection of the analytical models included in this book is what subject or discipline they belong to or derive from. Or, put another way: where should the boundary be drawn between more general management and organizational analysis and analysis that is usually considered as belonging to other disciplines such as strategy formulation, operation management, entrepreneurship or leadership? This book represents a tolerant view of what is included or not included in organization theory. There is no reason to deselect those analytical models that fit well into an
organizational analysis, and in any of the four frameworks, solely on the basis that, in other texts and contexts, they are considered to belong to another subject. The purpose here is to assist the reader with the most useful models for organizational analysis, regardless of where these models originate. Therefore, the following chapters contain models that, in other courses and programs, should be defined as belonging to strategic management, organizational behavior, talent management, operation management, change management, entrepreneurship, project management, industrial marketing or some other, related subject area.

Leadership theory and analysis lie within an Anglo-Saxon tradition, regarded as both a research field and a study subject separate from management and organization theory. The typical Anglo-Saxon mainstream leadership textbook has a very different structure and quite different content to textbooks in organization theory. In a Scandinavian and, to some extent, European tradition, leadership is viewed as an integral part of management and organization theory. One common formulation about leadership in Scandinavia is that leadership is the application of organization theory in practice. This does not exclude many of the leadership concepts and models developed in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, but they are often included and placed side by side with more organizational and managerial concepts and models. Within this Scandinavian tradition, leadership has ‘always’ been viewed as relational, distributed, organizational, as a process, and not necessarily defined as something to do with ‘shared goals’ (the latter corresponding to one of the four frameworks in this book). This book is firmly rooted in this Scandinavian view of leadership. Leadership models are incorporated in all four fundamental theoretical frameworks, which might surprise the reader not used to this.

**How to use this book**

As noted in the preface to the book, this text is consciously relatively deficient in empirical illustrations and examples and can therefore appear to be abstract. One reason for this is that the best empirical material to apply all the models and frameworks to in your analysis is your own experience. Everyone has the experience of various organizational settings. Everything from informal organizational processes in the most mundane, everyday situations, to the formal reorganization efforts of large corporations, can work as empirical material in applying the models and frameworks presented here. But for the student, the less experienced employee, manager or leader, this can still be problematic. There might be a need for less personal and more ready-packaged material to practice your organizational analysis on.

**Using Chapter 10 for examples**

It is warmly recommended that those readers who desire more concrete examples of how the many models may be used, jump to Chapter 10, the last chapter of the book,
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at any time. Chapter 10 describes a company with, in many ways, a typical organizational problem, which is then analyzed on the basis of each of the four theoretical frameworks. It is perfectly possible to alternate between reading about different models in the following chapters, and to read about how they are applied to one and the same phenomenon in Chapter 10.

The fact that the book is designed in this way is partly due to the ambition to keep the length short, but there are also many other benefits. Different readers have different needs for empirical illustration. For example, many leaders already have so much experience of real problems, dilemmas and successes that they can easily apply the described models without using Chapter 10.

Another important motive for concentrating most of the application of theory in the last chapter is that this text can serve as a kind of reference book. This is an important function for both the less experienced student and the senior manager. In the description of models and theoretical perspectives, the reader should know that what is actually written there are academically based and structured analytical tools and nothing else. Neither less relevant theoretical digressions nor irrelevant empirical examples should, so to speak, dilute or make it more difficult to find the most relevant analytical tools.

A third motive is theoretical. The power of multi-frame analysis is best communicated by gathering all the analytical applications in one place. For example, when the analyses from the structural framework and the HR framework stand side by side, it is much easier to understand the similarities and differences between these frameworks, compared with if these analyses appeared in different places in the book. Gathering up the applications of all four frameworks up to Chapter 10 means that both differences and similarities between the frameworks appear much more clearly. But, as has been said, feel free to use the analyses in Chapter 10 wherever you find yourself in the other chapters.

Reading Chapters 2–9

The four basic theoretical frameworks are presented in two chapters each. In each framework’s first chapter, the more basic and ‘mainstream’ models and concepts are described. These are the very tools and models that you usually find in other management textbooks and sometimes also in more practical management literature. Each framework’s second chapter consists of more advanced theory – either in the form of more fundamental social theory, results from more contemporary research and/or important theories that for different reasons have been excluded from most texts on management. Despite the more advanced content in these second chapters, the presentations are straightforward, accessible and geared towards how to apply theory in everyday organizational life. The book is written to be read in the order the chapters are presented, but you can also apply other strategies. As a reader, you can
choose to only focus on the more basic chapters for your first read. You could stop there and still have learned a lot of new tools for analyzing management, organization and leadership processes; or you can view it as a first step and then read the more advanced chapters.

Enough with prefaces, provisos and instructions. It is high time to deliver, that is, to describe the frameworks and all their different analytical models.

Videos

Don’t forget to watch the video to discover more about the key concepts in this chapter: https://study.sagepub.com/blomberg

Notes

1 For a relatively accessible, original and well-written introduction to the scientifically philosophical position which the form of ‘re-framing’, ‘multi-frame analysis’ or ‘aspect seeing’ described here is based on, see Asplund (1983).

2 Organisation från grunden [Organization from the ground up] (Forssell & Ivarsson Westerberg 2007) provides a basic and detailed description of the structural perspective, but very little or nothing is said about the other perspectives.

3 A good book with a description of a large number of perspectives, is Images of organization (Morgan 1986). Morgan describes seven different metaphors that can be used to analyze organizations. All these metaphors cannot be said to be established within the subject area; however, the large number also risks fragmenting established and relatively coherent perspectives.