

Building Process Theories

Part II

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A Typology of Approaches for Studying Organizational Processes

Ontology
An organization is represented as being:

	A Substance ("thing")	A Process
Epistemology	Variance Approach I: Variance study of change in organizations Causal analysis of independent variables explaining change (dependent variable)	IV: Variance studies via modeling of processes Dynamic models of complex adaptive systems
	Process Approach II: Process study narrating sequence of change events in organization Progressions of change (stages, cycles, etc) in the development of org. entity	III: Process study narrating social construction Qualitative process studies of emergence

Approaches to the Study of Organizational Processes


Case I: Using a Variance Approach in a World Comprised of Things

- Define variables that synoptimize processes
 - Convert process into a variable, e.g. implementation, institutionalization
 - Process synopses can serve as dependent or independent variables
- Causal explanation using traditional statistical methods or case studies
- Examples:
 - Van de Ven studies of program implementation
 - Meyer and Goes study of hospital innovation

Approaches to the Study of Organizational Processes

Case I – Comments


- Enables rigorous test of hypotheses about processes (+)
- Fits within established modes of research and discourse (+)
- Synopses elide aspects of processes (-)
- Difficult to study process itself and how it unfolds over time (-)



Approaches to the Study of Organizational Processes

Case II: Process Study Narrating Changes in Substantial Entities


- Characterize processes in terms of stages, steps, states, sequences and properties of sequences
- Sequences or their properties can serve as explanans or explanandum



Approaches to the Study of Organizational Processes

Case II: Process Study Narrating Changes in Substantive Entities


- Examples:
 - Phasic Analysis
 - Poole, Hirokawa: studies of decision development
 - Nutt: Studies of strategic decision making and problem formulation
 - Case Studies
 - Kuhn & Poole: Development of group conflict style and its impacts on decision-making
 - Leonard-Barton: Multiple case study of alignment and innovation



Approaches to the Study of Organizational Processes

Case II – Comments


- Explicitly defines elements of process (+)
- Enables us to study unfolding of process (+)
- States, stages, etc. are themselves synopses (-)
- Tension between defining process entities and fully processual approach (-)



Approaches to the Study of Organizational Processes

Case III: Process Study Narrating Social Construction


- Study of emergent processes
 - May be social constructionist
 - True to basic characteristics of processes
 - Focus on change as essential condition
 - Change in processes, as well
 - Try to avoid synoptic concepts



Approaches to the Study of Organizational Processes

Case III: Process Study Narrating Social Construction

- Examples:
 - Narrative Histories
 - Chandler: Emergence of Modern Organization
 - Structuration (microanalysis)
 - Feldman and Pentland: Routines in organizations
 - Orlikowski: Structuration of IT



Approaches to the Study of Organizational Processes

Case III – Comments

- Truest to processual view (+)
- Stimulates us to rethink static concepts and develop novel theoretical vocabularies (+)
- Potential for theoretical advances (+)
- Tendency to be self-fulfilling (-)
- An irony: It still involves representation of processes that may reify them (-)

Approaches to the Study of Organizational Processes

Case IV: Variance Study of Processual Organizational Phenomena

- Construct models that represent generative mechanisms underlying process—simulate or characterize the process in dynamic terms
- Enables visualization of process or analysis of how it unfolds under different conditions—these often go beyond what we could think through qualitatively
- Qualitative features of the results of models are often more important than quantitative results

Approaches to the Study of Organizational Processes

Case IV: Variance Study of Processual Organizational Phenomena

- Examples:
 - Markov Models
 - Poole et al. Analysis of Cochlear implant project
 - Analysis of temporally dependent data
 - *Time series, Time series regression, Event history analysis*

Approaches to the Study of Organizational Processes

Case IV: Variance Study of Processual Organizational Phenomena

- Examples:
 - Dynamic systems models
 - Systems Dynamics Models
 - Agent based models
 - Corman: Cellular automata of organizational processes
 - Complex adaptive systems models
 - Dooley

Approaches to the Study of Organizational Processes

Case IV – Comments

- Allows us to apply rigorous analytical methods to build theory about what generates process into our models (+)
- Enables us to generate large sample of processes via simulation (+)
- More complex than Case I studies (+)
- Reductionism and loss due to synoptizing the variables (-)
- Representation of process may lose some detail (-)
- Need new model forms—most current models (e.g. time series) were derived under variance assumptions (-)
- Still does not capture multifarious nature of processes fully (-)

Choosing Among the Four Approaches to Organizational Process Research

- Nature of the phenomenon
- Goals of research
- Researcher's preferences with respect to methods
