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introducing organisational behaviour & management

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1 Introduction

David Knights and Hugh Willmott

Key concepts and learning objectives

Our intention for this book is to introduce management and organizational behaviour (OB) in a way that:

- Values your *own knowledge* and its contribution to understanding management and organizing.
- Encourages you to scrutinize and develop what you know about management and organization.
- Appreciates how the study of management and organization draws from a number of academic disciplines (e.g. sociology, politics, psychology and economics). It is, in this sense, multidisciplinary.
- Develops an awareness of how knowledge of management and organizations reflects and reproduces the particular framework or *perspective(s)* of the author (e.g. 'mainstream' or 'critical').
- Recognizes how different perspectives conjure up and provide contrasting and competing ways of making sense of management and organizations.
- Understands how knowledge of organization(s) is significantly dependent upon people's preoccupations and priorities and, in this sense, is *politically charged*.
- Challenges the way organizations are conventionally understood in mainstream texts as 'things' consisting of parts (e.g. people, functions, goals). This approach, we believe, is mechanical and removed from human experience.
- Appreciates how, fundamentally, 'management' and 'organization' are concepts. This encourages awareness of the diverse and multiple ways in which they are conceived. Each meaning associated with 'management' or 'organization' does not simply describe something 'out there' because it contributes to the very construction of what it claims to describe.
- Considers how the interrelated concepts of power, identity, knowledge, freedom, inequality and insecurity provide a framework for analysing aspects of organizational behaviour.
- Shows how key concepts in the study of management and organization are as relevant for making sense of everyday life as they are for studying behaviour in organizations.

Aims of this book

- This book seeks to connect the study of management and organization to readers' everyday experience.
- As this connection is made, the study of managing and organizing becomes more engaging and less remote.
- Ideas and insights explored in the following chapters should become more personally meaningful and therefore easier to recall.

Overview and key points

Much of our waking lives is spent in organizations: as students, for example, in schools or universities; as consumers in leisure organizations, such as shops and clubs; or as producers in work organizations, such as factories or offices (which, of course, include shops, schools and clubs). By relating our everyday *experience* to the study of management and organizations, we are likely to become more aware of how much we already know about them. Recognizing that we are already very familiar with organizations can increase our confidence when studying them. It can also encourage us to develop our understanding, question what we already know, and it may even result in us changing our habitual ways of thinking and acting. We illustrate this process in Figure 1.1.

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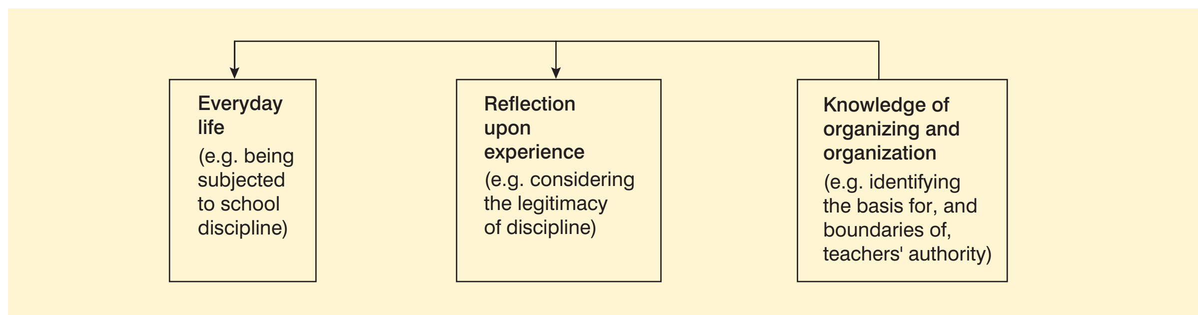

Figure 1.1 Experience, reflection and knowledge of management and organization

It would of course be possible to make further connections in this diagram – for example, by adding more boxes, by using double-headed arrows or by representing the elements as overlapping circles. How might additional elements and linkages offer other interesting ways of connecting our experiences, our reflections and our knowledge of organizations?

Before moving to the main part of the introduction, please have a look at the two boxes below.

Box 1.1: Learning as a challenging process

Learning best takes place when we relate meaningfully to what is being learned. If we take this view to heart, then it can make little sense for us to tell you *exactly* what you will have learned from each chapter of this book as each of the circumstances of each reader will differ. Instead, we encourage you to appreciate and explore your own understandings of the relevance of the various ideas and issues that we examine.

A very good and often enjoyable way to do this is by engaging in discussions with other students on your course. Consider how others are interpreting this text, and how these interpretations can challenge or advance your own understanding. For example, what assessments do you and they make of the arguments about learning and organizations presented in this chapter? What kinds of concepts and language are being used to articulate these views? What differences are emerging and how would you characterize these differences? Do others share your interpretation of these differences? Do these mixed reactions illustrate our point about the creativity, wilfulness and unpredictability of people?

Box 1.2: What you will find in this book

Each chapter of this book comprises an overview of key contributions to the mainstream study of its topic, followed by a reappraisal based upon a more critical approach to its analysis. What we mean by this is elaborated later in this chapter where we summarize our analytical framework based upon the concepts of insecurity, identity, inequality, power, freedom and knowledge. In each chapter we invite readers to go beyond the retrieval and storage of information from this book to reflect upon how the study of OB has relevance for everyday experience, and how this experience has relevance for OB.

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Introduction

This book explores how people are organized and managed at work. Managing people is repeatedly identified by managers as the most demanding as well as the most important aspect of their jobs. Managing people is often troublesome. Why might this be?

Unlike other factors of production (e.g. raw materials and technology), human beings are wilful and comparatively unpredictable. Their creative power is crucial to production but it can also be deployed to frustrate, and not just facilitate, what they are paid to do. Organizational behaviour (OB) has emerged as a body of knowledge that identifies, explores and frequently suggests methods of controlling or 'empowering' the tricky 'people dimension' of managing and organizing.

As a field of study, 'organizational behaviour' comprises a wide variety of topics – such as motivation, leadership and organizational design – that relate to different aspects of behaviour in organizations. Examining these topics has involved incorporating perspectives and insights from a number of disciplines including psychology, economics, sociology and politics. (We elaborate this understanding later in this chapter in the 'What is Organizational behaviour?' section.)

Numerous disciplines that explore the complexity and diversity of collective human activity have contributed to the formation and development of OB. Something of this complexity is apparent in the sometimes conflicting purposes and objectives embraced by, or attributed to, 'management' and 'organizations'. These include: producing profits for shareholders, generating income for oneself and one's family, acquiring or building knowledge and skills, caring for others and so on. People rarely have just one purpose, and the various purposes do not always fit together neatly or achieve consistency one with another (see Box 1.3). To further complicate and confuse matters, people in organizations are affected by the changing circumstances in which they participate.

Providing a single definition of 'organization' is difficult and potentially unhelpful. At the same time we recognize that as we approach a new area of study, it can be helpful to have a working sense, or concept, of what we are studying. Provisionally, then, we will say that 'organization' is a concept used by both practitioners (e.g. managers) and analysts (e.g. academics) to make meaningful, and also to organize, the activities and interactions of people who are conceived to be doing organizational work, such as being engaged in creating, developing, and distributing products or services.

More specifically, in the current context, the concepts of 'organization(s)' and 'management' are deployed to indicate that people are able to accomplish together what they would find difficult or impossible to achieve when acting on their own or in smaller groups. They provide us with the possibility of thinking (or 'theorizing') about our experience, and especially, the practical, *collective* activity, such as the effort involved in making products or delivering services. (We explore the competing logics of organizing later in this chapter, in the 'Organizational behaviour as a contested terrain' section.)

Why study organizational behaviour?

Given the demanding nature of organizing and managing people, it is not surprising that OB is widely regarded as the foundation of management studies. Within the notion of 'behaviour', we include thinking and feeling as well as acting. OB aspires to have relevance for understanding the behaviour of people working at all **hierarchical levels** – from the workers employed part-time or on a casual basis on the **shop floor** or in the office to the most senior executive. Each is involved in processes of

Box 1.3: What about 'purpose'?

In order to explain their behaviour to others, individuals or groups often claim a purpose. But these claims may be rationalizations or simply socially acceptable accounts. Purposes, therefore, are not to be taken at face value or as the causes of behaviour. They are often invoked to make behaviour seem rational and coherent. Purposes are not self-evident. Sometimes we are only dimly aware of purposes after the event of their achievement. Only then are they identified 'on the hoof' (ad hoc) or after the next event (post hoc). (See Chapter 2.)

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organizing and being organized, and managing and being managed. Whereas the management of lower hierarchy employees is transparent, it is also the case that boards of directors (or their equivalent), as well as less obviously personal assistants (PAs) or secretaries, often manage their senior executives.

We have emphasized how managing and organizing people to produce goods and provide services can be a demanding and perverse undertaking. As a student, you may well have experienced casual work, often undertaking jobs that are classified as 'unskilled' (and therefore poorly paid because there is no market shortage of people able to undertake them) but which require considerable concentration and effort, and can have damaging consequences if done badly. Equally, you may have found yourself in jobs where you have time on your hands and where your initiative and skills are underutilized or not used at all, except perhaps unofficially in looking for ways of minimizing your involvement in unpleasant tasks.

In principle, studying OB should enable you to better understand how and why people are organized; to identify and assess the likely consequences of making changes; and to introduce changes in ways that anticipate and minimize counter-productive effects (see Box 1.4). As we have emphasized and illustrated, we believe that this understanding is facilitated by considering organization as a concept rather than a description or an entity, and by applying the insights derived from our conceptual framework that link identity, insecurity, power, inequality, freedom and knowledge (see Appendix: The conceptual framework).

Connecting ideas and experience

Consider your experience as a participant in a higher educational organization. With due consideration to what we have already said about how purposes are **invoked** and **ascribed**, one or more of your purposes in studying this course, which may change over time, might be identified from the following list:

1. Intellectual curiosity.
2. To understand the basics of business.
3. To enhance your management capabilities.
4. To avoid an alternative choice of degree that you view as impractical/boring/intellectually demanding.
5. To obtain a degree with the minimum of effort.

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You can readily add to this list.

What about the purposes of your teachers, the university authorities (whoever you deem them to be) or the government?

You might also reflect upon how our 'attributes' towards studying (and work more generally) are influenced by our interactions with others – parents and teachers as well as fellow students. Such considerations are often described in OB in terms of motivation, involvement or group dynamics. They are significant for OB in so far as they affect the quality and direction of collective action. In the context of

Box 1.4: The relevance of organizational behaviour

OB may be of most direct relevance for understanding general management but its importance extends to specialist areas, such as accounting, production and marketing where, inevitably, organizing and managing people remain central activities. Indeed, OB is a 'subject' taken by a growing number of students, either as a single degree or as a core element of degree programmes in engineering, modern languages and sports studies among others. Specialists within different areas of management and business are inevitably working with others on whose cooperation and 'good behaviour' they depend. Likewise, generalist managers are involved in coordinating their activities with specialist functions of accounting (e.g. through constructing and monitoring budgets) and production (e.g. through liaison with suppliers and customers regarding production requirements and schedules). Crucially, these are not simply impersonal activities requiring technical skills but, rather, involve organizing capabilities that are identified as leadership, communication and motivation. Equally, everyday experiences, including work experience, have relevance for appreciating, assessing and challenging the body of knowledge that comprises OB.

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higher education, this would include the extent to which students actively seek and encourage participation in class discussions, how much willingness there is to question the 'received wisdom' found in textbooks, and generally whether education is experienced as a process of passive or active learning.

Thinkpoint 1.1

Learning and relevance Think of some information that you find easy to remember – for example, popular singers, CD tracks, sports stars, soap opera characters and story lines, etc.

- What makes it easy for you to recall this information?
- Why is it often difficult to retain other kinds of information, such as the contents of some of the courses that you are studying?

Discuss with fellow students your conclusions. How might learning be organized differently to make easier what you find difficult?

The mixed and shifting motivations of students (as listed above, p. 4) presents teachers and textbook writers with a dilemma. Do we seek to 'manage' your learning by providing you with easily digestible 'nuggets of knowledge' that you can memorize and regurgitate with the minimum of effort or thought? This could be seen as the most 'efficient' (i.e. low-effort) way to satisfy (4) and (5) in the list, but is it 'effective' in enabling you to understand something of the basics of management and business (2) as a lived, practical activity, let alone in enhancing your management and organizing capabilities (1)? Think about the design of modules and courses that you have taken in the past, or are currently attending. In their contents and delivery, do some approximate to the 'efficiency' model while others incorporate some concern with 'effectiveness'.

As with all forms of management, this text might encourage and enable you to 'play the game' of appearing to be interested in (1) or (2) while secretly you remain closer to (5) or (4) or vice versa. If you can relate OB to your experience of everyday life, you may find it 'less boring' (4) than some courses and/or at least a comparatively 'easy option' (5). We, of course, believe that our approach is more capable of feeding and nurturing your intellectual curiosity (1), your understanding of business (2) and ultimately your management capability (3). We may, on the other hand, be wide of the mark. You might prefer something more conventional that is perhaps 'boring' but also less demanding because it does not expect your engagement. Instead it requires only that you memorize and regurgitate its contents.

It is worth pausing briefly to note the similarities and continuities, as well as some significant differences, between organizing people at work and processes of teaching and learning. Challenges and frustrations in the lives of teachers and students are often paralleled in the experiences of managers and workers. For this reason, when studying OB it is frequently helpful to reflect upon our own educational experiences in order to bring to life, and grasp the relevance of, key topics and concepts. We now move on to identify some of the distinguishing features of OB.

OB draws upon elements from a wide range of social scientific disciplines. For example:

- *Sociology* examines human behaviour in relation to various social, political, psychological and economic conditions that affect it, but in turn are produced or reproduced by it.
- *Psychology* concentrates on how individuals think and behave.
- *Politics* focuses on competitive struggles for political power and influence in society (see Chapter 8).
- *Economics* examines how wealth is produced and distributed.

Each discipline generates a distinctive way of conceiving of 'organization(s)' and interpreting behaviour in them. There is also a tendency for each discipline to be antagonistic, or even closed to its rivals. Despite this limitation, the different approaches provide a check and challenge to our particular

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prejudices about organizations. They serve to focus and organize our thinking, and that is why we call them 'disciplines' (see Box 1.5).

Box 1.5: Single discipline domination

Despite incorporating some elements of 'rival' disciplines, most OB studies and textbooks are often dominated by a single discipline. A large number of introductory OB texts are influenced most strongly by the discipline of psychology. This influence has meant that the key OB topics are often focused upon the individual and group processes. An example is Ian Brooks (1999), who defines OB as 'the study of human behaviour in organizations with a focus on individual and group processes and actions'.

This text includes a consideration of the psychology of individuals and group processes (see 'The distinctiveness of this text' section later in this chapter), as is evident in our emphasis upon freedom, insecurity and identity as three of six key analytical concepts (see Appendix: The conceptual framework). At the same time, we understand the attitudes, motivations and dynamics of individuals and groups in terms of their social, not just their psychological, formation and development. We extend our vision to include an appreciation of how seemingly 'psychological' factors and forces are shaped by and deeply embedded in social relations that stretch beyond both organizational members and the boundaries attributed to organizations. People at work are simultaneously family members with diverse social affiliations (of gender, class, ethnicity, etc.) that directly or indirectly colour their behaviour as individuals and their participation in groups.

When considering the work undertaken by managers or other organizational members, for example, we recognize the importance of their perceptions and motivations for understanding their behaviour. We also appreciate how perceptions and motivations are formed and coloured by wider, historical and cultural (i.e. sociological) experiences and relations both at work and beyond the workplace. Behaviour in organizations is not just about perceptions and motivations. It is also, and perhaps more importantly, about the economic and political conditions and consequences of work. It is therefore highly relevant to pay attention to the historical and cultural formation of managers' and employees' material and symbolic aspirations (e.g. pay, pensions and position, as well as other possibilities or opportunities for improving their situation such as promotion, share options and moving jobs). In this context, we need to appreciate how, for example, managers of private sector companies (PLCs) are *legally* accountable to shareholders as especially privileged stakeholders.

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Image 1.1 College as a global village

When placed in this wider context, awareness increases of how the disciplines of economics and politics are directly relevant for understanding work organizations. People who work in organizations come from diverse social backgrounds and have varied social responsibilities and affiliations outside, as well as within their workplaces. Quite widely divergent motivations and interests are forged and pursued in the process of developing and defending an individual and collective sense of security and identity. As a consequence, it cannot be presumed that, for example, employees or other stakeholders (e.g. customers, suppliers) fully support decisions (e.g. lay-offs, pay constraints, price rises, product range reductions) that are intended to advance the interests of shareholders.

Beyond mechanical prescription

We can illustrate the distinctiveness and value of our approach by considering the 'skill profile' attributed to effective managers (see Box 1.6), such as head teachers or departmental heads in schools. What is your reaction to the contents of this skill profile? Do you consider that knowledge of this profile would make managers that you have known more effective? If not, what else might be relevant? Give these questions a few moments of thought before continuing.

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The 'skill profile' identified in Box 1.6 is based upon extensive research, with much of the data drawn from responses by managers' subordinates. Yet it contains few surprises or insights. In our experience, small groups of school students or undergraduates are able to produce very similar lists within a matter of minutes. If this is the case, it places in doubt the value of such lists, because they do little more than recycle and reinforce **common-sense** thinking (see Box 1.7).

Box 1.6: The effective manager's skill profile

- Clarifies goals and objectives for everyone involved.
- Encourages participation, upward communication and suggestions.
- Plans and organizes for an orderly work flow.
- Has technical and administrative expertise to answer organization-related questions.
- Facilitates work through teambuilding, training, coaching and support.
- Provides feedback honestly and constructively.

Source: From Kinicki and Kreitner, 2003, p. 8; emphases omitted.

Box 1.7: Isn't it all just commonsense?

When knowledge about something is considered to be 'commonsense', we tend to treat it as a self-evident or unquestionable 'truth'. How often have you been told, especially by parents or supervisors, to use your commonsense, or to be sensible? The term is used to convey the view that there is no room for debate or discussion about what is meant. Indeed, to challenge commonsense is to appear stupid or unreasonable. We use the term 'commonsense' to indicate what is believed to be obvious to any competent human being. 'Commonsense' is assumed to be clear-cut and straightforward, and so it is, but only as long as we do not challenge it. Terms that are not immediately recognizable as, or reducible to, commonsense – such as 'organization' or 'social structure', as contrasted to 'pecking order', for example – demand a little more thinking than commonsense expects.

An everyday example of commonsense is the notion that the sun rises and sets. Rising and setting is what the sun appears to do, yet if we accept contemporary scientific authority, then we should talk about the earth rotating: what commonsense tells us is misleading. Another, more directly relevant example of commonsense is the way that people describe economic self-interest as human nature. If we consider this claim more carefully, we find that it is problematic. This is because economic self-interest is also often denigrated as greediness – as in the 2002 scandals at Enron and WorldCom where false accounts were perpetrated to ensure high stock market ratings and big bonuses for the managers of those companies. In these examples, greed was condemned and executives have been urged to moderate their self-interest, suggesting that it can be controlled and therefore it is not essential to human nature. If something is human nature, it is the equivalent of the dog barking when it senses that its territory is being invaded; and, as any dog owner knows, this is nigh impossible to prevent. In the example of economic self-interest, therefore, we can see that despite its claims to truth, commonsense is self-contradictory and rather impervious to reflection. It allows two mutually inconsistent or diametrically opposed views to be held at one and the same time.

We rarely think about organizations in a systematic way or seek to understand precisely why or how they failed to meet our expectations. There is a tendency to account for such failures by relying upon commonsense – for example, by diagnosing the failure as a 'lack of communication' or 'poor organization' as if, by labelling the problem in this way, we need pay it no further attention. Alternatively, we find a scapegoat like the incompetent boss. In principle, the study of OB can provide us with the conceptual and analytical resources for thinking beyond these sweeping and dismissive, commonsense 'explanations'. We might then better understand what renders communication 'lacking' or organization 'poor'. Or, to put this another way, we might begin to open the 'black box' of behaviour in organizations to discover what lurks inside.

Commonsense frequently relies upon assumptions that, on reflection, are shown to be simplistic. When the earth is conceived to be at the centre of the universe, it is 'obvious' that the sun rises and sets; when materialistic societies are conceived to be the most 'civilized', the greed that they inspire is readily identified as an essential feature of human nature. On reflection, economic self-interest is found not to be an essential quality of human nature. It is, rather, an effect of how in contemporary, materialistic societies, the individual and wealth are elevated as key values. In short, greed has become a widespread, normal pattern of

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behaviour – so widespread that economic self-interest is commonsensically regarded as inherent to human nature. But, saying this, there is no suggestion (either) that altruism (as the opposite of self-interest) is essential. Instead, we are drawn to the view that human nature is open and ambivalent. For this reason, to cite human nature as an explanation of a person's actions may be commonsensically plausible but, on reflection, it begs more questions than it answers. It invites us, for example, to ask why human nature is identified in particular ways that appeal to commonsense?

Having signalled its dangers and limitations, from time to time most of us, including scientists, rely upon commonsense thinking, or at least are prepared to suspend disbelief in it. We will, for example, rely frequently on a commonsense understanding of organization as an entity, even though we repeatedly question this commonsense 'truth'. Everyday conversations and communications would simply collapse if every word or statement that relied on commonsense were incessantly challenged or questioned.

What, then, is the alternative? In a nutshell, one possible alternative aims to provide insights into why, in practice, it is so difficult to develop and apply skills identified as effective. Take the example of goals and objectives. The list of effective skills implies that goals are already established and merely require elucidation. In practice, however, they are frequently ambiguous and conflicting as we noted earlier. Those involved may well perceive that the goals identified by the 'effective manager' are incompatible with their own preferences and priorities. In which case, 'participation' may well be more troublesome and even counter-productive in securing employee compliance. Even in situations where others can be persuaded to share goals or communicate and respond positively to honest feedback, competing priorities and limited resources frequently compromise or undermine effective managers' efforts to 'organize an orderly work flow' or 'facilitate work through teambuilding'. It is dangerous to assume that becoming an effective manager simply involves the acquisition of the desired skill profile. If this were so, a manager might be led to believe in the effectiveness of mindlessly applying those 'skills' to particular situations in the absence of interpreting appropriate usage on each and every occasion.

Box 1.8: Why are organizational behaviour texts so wide of the mark?

When considering the skill profile attributed to effective managers (see Box 1.6) we claimed that texts based upon such thinking are of limited value and relevance. This view immediately begs the question why, then, are they so popular and widely adopted? Our response is that their appeal resides in the highly positive image or 'spin' that they give to organizations and managers. This reassuring and even slightly glamorous image is attractive to future employers as well as to students as it portrays management as a respectable and responsible profession where the manager's role is 'simply' to enable others to achieve established, shared goals and objectives. Largely absent from the benign image of organizations and management presented in most OB texts is any recognition of how the practicalities of management are shaped – impeded as well as enabled – by insecurities and inequalities that are endemic to modern organizational life.

If this analysis is accepted, then what *is* of value to prospective managers? It is not, we believe, lists of effective skills or techniques. Rather, effective management involves drawing upon embodied insights into work relations as a means of developing a better understanding of how to manage without following simple prescriptions.

Our skill profile example is typical of an approach that introduces OB through the provision of abstract lists or idealistic prescriptions of management behaviour that students tend to find self-evident and/or remote from everyday experience. Because they are removed from an understanding of the ever-shifting complexities of human behaviour at work, they are likely to be of little assistance in practical situations of managing. Forms of management education and training based upon such prescriptive thinking tends to reinforce a passive learning experience in which students absorb and regurgitate information without ever reflecting upon its value to them, except as instrumental rational means of attaining a certification.

Without an awareness of the messy, politically charged practicalities of organizing and managing, any amount of worthy (and, we would add, often patronizing) prescription will be of little value and may even be damaging. It is foolhardy, and potentially disastrous, to apply a set of principles or 'best

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practices' without first making an assessment of the particular situation and developing an evaluation of their relevance.

We acknowledge that there can be value in identifying a set of skills that are seen to render managers effective. However, such profiles and checklists do not enable us to discern and diagnose why and in what circumstances these skills may be effective. In our view the point of studying OB is to scrutinize and move beyond apparently self-evident but ultimately simplistic and misleading ideas about working and managing in organizations. We elaborate our views in a later section of this chapter where we directly address the question 'Why study organizational behaviour?' For the moment, we focus upon organizations as the context for the study of human behaviour.

Thinking about organizations

So far, we have concentrated upon behaviour in organizations, but what about organizations themselves? When beginning to think about organizations, specific examples may spring to mind. We might think of a major retailer (e.g. Ikea), a manufacturer (e.g. Hewlett-Packard), a public sector organization, like the Health Service or a government department, a school, an office or a pub (see Box 1.9).

It is not difficult to reel off an extensive list of organizations, but what, if anything, do they have in common? Again, it is easy to identify some common features. Most organizations involve employment relations, a division of labour, hierarchy, and a degree of permanence or continuity. What other common features would you add to this list?

Image 1.2 Diverse work organizations: factory, school, office, public house

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With the construction of this list, we appear to have identified a number of the distinctive characteristics of organizations. The difficulty is to find a single item on this list that is *exclusive* to organizations. Consider employment. We can think of examples of forms of employment that are not directly associated with organizations. Within the 'black economy' (e.g. where people work unofficially for cash in hand), many people are employed without being a member of an organization or indeed being recognized as employed for the purposes of tax and national insurance. Within organizations, a division of labour is present wherever members do not undertake identical tasks. But this is true of many other institutions, such as the family where certain jobs are frequently reserved by, or left to, particular members. For example, household tasks are often subjected to a gendered division of labour where women carry out most of the childcare responsibilities, cooking and cleaning, while men tend the garden or engage in DIY.

To take another example, a degree of permanence exists in families but we would not today readily identify families as organizations, even though, in small local enterprises, family members may run a business. In the pre-industrial era, work and family were not as separate as today, since domestic production was pre-eminent. The development of the internet and tele-computing communications has once again brought home and work closer together. Many people, like ourselves, do some or much of our work back in the family home partly because this allows us to concentrate, say, on writing this text without continuous interruptions from colleagues and students. However, through mobile communications, we usually make ourselves available to those who need to be in contact with us. Nonetheless, families are not readily conceived as organizations, perhaps largely because relations between their members are comparatively permanent, personal and intimate.

Thinkpoint 1.2

Working from home How many people do you know who work from home, at least part of the time, and what kinds of jobs do they do? What, if anything, differentiates the experience of doing these jobs from those carried out in offices, factories or other employer premises? Drawing upon your knowledge of people who work from home, what are some of the pros and cons of such work experience? How would you view 'housework' in the context of working from home?

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There is further discussion of 'organization' in a later section in this chapter (see 'The distinctiveness of work organization: Instrumental rationality'). For the moment, it is worth repeating our earlier emphasis on organization as a concept that directs our attention and energies in particular ways, rather than assuming it to be a distinctive kind of social institution. It is also worth re-emphasizing that our purpose throughout this text is to connect its content with your experience of studying and working in a variety of settings or of consuming various products or services. In doing so, the intent is to make the contents of OB less remote and more personally relevant. In line with this approach, we now introduce an example from everyday life.

Box 1.9: What is a pub? A sociologist's answer

According to Clark (1983): . . .

the 'typically English pub' has its particular place in 'English' culture for its symbolic role as an 'icon of the everyday'. . . . Historically, in Britain, public houses have served as the social focus for geographical and occupational communities. The public house has taken different forms over time and has its origins in the 'inns', 'taverns' and 'alehouses' of the pre-industrial era. In that period, alehouses were more numerous than any other type of public meeting-place and were the focus for a huge range of social and economic activity. Ordinary people went there to buy and sell goods, to borrow money, to obtain lodging and work, to find sexual partners, to play folk games and gamble in addition to the usual eating, dancing, smoking and carousing.

However, it was not until the early 1800s that the purpose-built public house as we know it began to be built in large numbers and the 'alehouse' gave way to the 'public house'. By the beginning of the 19th century the term 'alehouse' had all but disappeared and by 1865, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word 'pub' had entered the language. (Watson, 2002, p. 18)

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Organizational behaviour and everyday life: Going down the pub

We have already noted how difficult it is to draw a hard-and-fast distinction between organizations and other social institutions such as the family. The pub – or public house – provides a further example. For those who work in pubs, they are in many ways organizations that employ their specialist skills. In contrast, for regular customers, their 'local' is more like an extension of their family or community. In the following example of a pub – the Dog and Duck – we deliberately chose an example of an organization that is (a) familiar to most students and (b) ambivalent and shifting in its status as an organization.

In exploring the case of the Dog and Duck, we begin to introduce some of our key concepts (in italics) to demonstrate their relevance for analysing everyday life, including the pub as a work organization and a place of leisure where products (e.g. drinks and food) and services (such as live music and sports events) are consumed.

Our students tell us that the pubs that become student venues generally offer cheap deals on drinks and lower prices generally. In terms of material *inequality* (see the Appendix), many students are (albeit temporarily) low down on the social scale. The exceptions are students whose parents provide them with plenty of money, secure a large loan, or who get a well-remunerated job while at university. Even when not 'hard up', however, many students prefer drinking in student pubs rather than more expensive bars and clubs. Why is this? Take a moment to reflect upon what draws students to particular pubs. Do these work organizations have distinctive features?

Generally, student pubs are friendly toward young people and the management and staff are willing to put up with the boisterousness and noise where students gather in large numbers. They also provide attractions that students value, like pool tables and juke box music. But, beyond this, how does the student pub make you feel 'at home', relaxed and comfortable, and in what kinds of conditions

CASE STUDY 1.1 Jackie at the pub (1)

Jackie finished off her assessed work that was to be handed in the next day and felt she needed a drink. Her flatmates had gone out earlier that evening but she knew where they would be – at their local, the Dog and Duck. Her mates usually congregated in the pub around 7.00pm most weeknights because there were special deals on the drinks – two for the price of one. The landlady and landlord were happy for their pub to be full of students and did not hassle them when they got a bit rowdy. Also, in student jargon, the pub was good for 'pulling'. Jackie was now in her second semester of her first year and had already 'pulled' a couple of pretty fit lads she first met in the Dog and Duck. But the main reason for going to the D&D – or the 'B&Q' (the Bitch and Quackers) as it was known to her friends for reasons that Jackie would be embarrassed to explain – was that you could guarantee that your friends would be there.

However, on this occasion, Jackie arrived quite late because it had taken her longer than expected to finish her essay. Her mates had all disappeared. She had some idea that they would have gone off to one of the student discos in the town, but she was rather tired and so decided to have a quick drink on her own before heading back for a long-promised early night. At this time in the evening, most of the students had left and the bar was filling up with 'locals'. Like the students, the locals knew each other and therefore didn't ordinarily talk to the few remaining students unless they themselves were 'on the pull'. This was the first time that Jackie had found herself in the pub on her own and she felt a little embarrassed just standing at the bar with a drink. So she sat down in a corner of the pub, hoping she would be left alone. However, within a few minutes a group of young people, mainly lads, came towards her table. They seemed friendly enough and were talking in an animated way about the poor performance of the local football team. Jackie felt that she could fancy one of these lads. When he asked if anyone else was sitting at her table, the absence of other glasses made it difficult for her to refuse, and anyway her desire for a quiet drink had now been overtaken by her interest in the faceable lad.

Soon the conversation turned to the changing clientele in the pub and some of the group began running down the students, describing them as 'toffee-nosed' and 'cliquey'. It was clear to Jackie that they resented the 'takeover' of their local by the students, something that had happened earlier in the year when a new management at the pub made an effort to attract students. The pub had been quiet between about 6.30pm, when the early drinkers on their way home left and 8.30pm when the later regulars appeared after their evening meal. Jackie felt even more embarrassed that these locals were 'slagging off' students, as she thought, because she felt that they must know that she was a student, and were deliberately winding her up. She wasn't at all sure how, or even whether, to respond.

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would you feel threatened? Does drinking with other students confirm or reinforce your *identity* (see the Appendix) as a student? Does that provide a key to understanding why we tend to gravitate to places where there are people like ourselves? When we find ourselves in a room largely full of strangers, we usually seek out a person we know. Why? Case Study 1.1 provides a story or scenario about going down the pub.

Like any other institution, the pub reflects a complex set of *power* relations (see the Appendix). As a customer, Jackie is dependent upon the staff of the pub to be served and, ultimately, for protection against verbal and physical abuse. But, as a customer, Jackie is important to the pub managers since they are determined to pursue the potentially highly profitable custom of students. Power relations operate to identify her not only as a student but also as a valued customer – and, quite possibly, as a customer who can encourage or dissuade her mates to use the pub. So even though Jackie and her friends occupy a comparatively low rung on the income scale, the existence of material *inequality* does not imply an absence of power as long as her custom, and that of her student friends, is valued. However, as our **vignette** or brief story shows, other customers, or even pub staff, may not share the positive value being ascribed by the pub managers to students as clientele.

Having read this account of Jackie's visit to the pub, what do you think you would have done in her position? Consider first what you perceive her position to be. What features of this position do you regard as significant? Once you have clarified your understanding of Jackie's situation, consider some possible responses Jackie could make:

- Pretend not to be listening to what they are saying?
- Confront the locals and attempt to defend the students?
- Pretend not to be a student and find a way of joining in on the stereotyping of them, if only as a way of attracting the attention of the Beckham-double? (After all, it is not too far-fetched to think that he may have targeted Jackie as a potential chat-up.)
- Ignore the attack but try to get into conversation with them?
- See the lads engaging in an alternative kind of 'chat-up' by trying to provoke some reaction instead of using a well-worn (institutionalized!) chat-up line – such as asking your name and what you did – so take the lads' (attention) in your stride?

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Can you think of other ways that a student in Jackie's position might react?

We will return later to develop our analysis of this story. For the moment, we note only that what happened to Jackie indicates in a practical way how, even in places of leisure, experiences are

"Just for the minutes did anyone manage to catch the chairman's parting words?"

Image 1.3

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unpredictable because others – in this example, other customers – act in ways that are experienced as intrusive and objectionable, and which can be characterized as friendly, wilful or mischievous. Traditionally, the pub has been associated not only with symbolic violence, as experienced by Jackie, who felt personally affronted by the lads' 'slagging off' of students, but also physical violence when, fuelled by alcohol, frayed tempers spill over into punch-ups.

Outright physical violence involving an exchange of blows is exceptional but not unknown in other work organizations. Symbolic violence, however, is much more widespread. It can be based on physical characteristics (e.g. sexual or racial harassment) or take the form of verbal bullying. Many critics of the workplace argue that simply the demand to perform repetitive, physical work tasks that hardly engage the brain is a form of symbolic violence, in which case a majority of employees experience it at some point. We hope to show in this text how employees suffer a sense of frustration less from the routine nature of their tasks than from the absence of any power to influence how tasks are decided and organized. In our case, Jackie's levels of stress and *insecurity* (see the Appendix) – in the form of anxiety, embarrassment, irritation and frustration – were raised by her sense of powerlessness and lack of control. While she desperately wanted to challenge the lads' stereotypical views about students, she felt inhibited and intimidated. Whether or not it was their intent, they had succeeded in winding her up and she was finding it difficult to calm down and collect her thoughts. The study of organizations encounters conflict and contested points of view in more ways than in the direct expression of verbal or physical violence.

Symbolic violence – in the form of mild or vehement expressions of disagreement – might include, for example, differences of opinion among bar staff (and customers) about the desirability of students as clientele, and the verbal and non-verbal communication directed at this group. In this process, there is an elevation of the symbolic value or identity (see the Appendix) of one group through a negation of the other. In its most extreme versions, there is a complete polarization so that the other(s) or 'out-group' are demonized as unworthy of proper human respect. At football matches, this has resulted in the necessity for institutional forms of crowd control, such as physical segregation and other restrictions on the away supporters.

Such violence extends to disagreements among researchers, consultants, and indeed employees about the usefulness and meaning of concepts that are deployed to analyse behaviour and pursue practices in organizations. These disagreements – such as our criticizing conventional texts – may not result in the trading of blows but they can, and do, involve passionate exchanges of views and uneasy 'stand-offs'. Even when people recognize discussion and debate to be healthy and a source of new ideas, they may still feel threatened when their own ideas are challenged. Take a moment to reflect on some of the ideas or beliefs that you are attached to and would defend against a challenge. Often these are so deeply ingrained or taken for granted (e.g. your gender, class, nationality, race or religion) that it takes considerable reflective effort to bring them to mind.

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In leading textbooks, OB tends to be presented as largely cut-and-dried and settled, thus lacking any controversy, conflict or contest, yet such appearances are deceptive. There are fundamental differences of view – cultural, political and ethical – about how organizations are organized, how they should be organized and how they can be studied. To some extent, these mirror and amplify differences of opinion and preference among people working in organizations (between factions of senior managers, for example) about how to organize and manage their operation. As a general rule, theories that articulate and confirm our preconceptions and prejudices tend to be most appealing, as they are the easiest to grasp and make us feel secure in our views and identities. So, in general, women are more likely than men to appreciate how relations of gender implicitly or explicitly affect the workplace, especially in areas of recruitment, selection and promotion. We invite you to discuss and reflect upon why this may be the case.

Here we are highlighting the continuities between practitioners' and researchers' ways of making sense of behaviour in organizations. At the same time, it is relevant to note that these practitioners and researchers are positioned in different relations of power – relations of power that provide access to distinctive ways of thinking and that assign different weights and values to such thinking. Some researchers favour and elaborate forms of analysis that highlight and explore how organizing is largely consensual and routine; others contend that organizing is precarious and conflict-ridden. Such analyses can serve to illuminate practitioners' everyday experiences, but practitioners themselves, especially

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managers, may find more favour and comfort with ideas that assume organizing to be consensual and conflict-free; or, at least, which assume consensus to be the normal and natural state of affairs.

Differences within and between practitioners and researchers can be confusing and frustrating, not least for students of OB. But these differences are also what make the field dynamic and engaging. Glossing over these differences can make OB easier to present and absorb, but this does students and practitioners few favours when highly complex organizational processes are examined in technically simplistic and politically naive ways. Challenging thinking that skirts around or skates over this complexity is necessary for developing an awareness of it. It is through such conflict and debate – in practice as well as theory – that intellectual reflection and organizational innovation is stimulated. At least, it is difficult to imagine how reflection and innovation would occur without them.

Exercise 1.1

Encountering organization Consider an organization where you have worked or have been a customer. List some differences of view, or grievances, among employees and/or customers that you encountered. How do these concerns connect to how activities were being organized and managed. Are there other issues that *you* would raise as an employee or as a customer? Reflect upon how your values and preoccupations lead you to raise these issues.

Competing logics of organizing

We have repeatedly stressed that organizations are politically charged, complex, social institutions (see Chapter 8). Their complexity does not arise directly from their scale or even from the diversity of their operations, but rather from conflicting priorities and preferences of their members who, in turn, are caught up in webs of others' demands upon them (e.g. families, customers, shareholders, etc.). An expression of these conflicting priorities is found in the existence of competing logics of organizing material and human resources to provide diverse goods and services. We have seen, for example, how Jackie found herself in a situation complicated by the competing priorities and

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preferences of the pub managers and the local customers. Whereas the new managers wanted to maximize the use of the premises at all times, this priority risked losing their established customer base of local regulars who resented 'their pub' being taken over by students.

A much broader example of competing logics of organizing concerns the issue of how 'public goods', such as health and education, should be provided. In recent years, questions have been asked with increasing frequency and urgency about the adequacy, and even the viability, of provision of such goods by public sector organizations. Public sector organizations have been repeatedly criticized for being too bureaucratic, unresponsive and insufficiently alert to (changing) customer preferences and expectations. Their critics point to an ingrained inflexibility (i.e. of managers, professional staff and workers) as the greatest obstacle to delivering value-for-money public goods (e.g. education).

During the 1980s and 1990s many people were persuaded that the answer to problems identified in the public sector – such as waste, rigidity and inefficiency – was to run it as a private business (see Box 1.10).

For elements of the public sector that were not privatized, the 'modernization' plan was to populate the public sector with 'professional managers' and to introduce more entrepreneurial ideas from the private sector. This process has included provisional targets and financial incentives for staff. It has encouraged competition and discipline associated with performance measurement and comparisons between different services. In the United Kingdom, the reforms included the introduction of performance measures in the form of league tables to schools and hospitals, for example, so that their 'customers' (i.e. parents and doctors) would make an informed choice between alternative service providers. In making a choice of school or university course, you (or your parents) may have been influenced by such tables.

Thinkpoint 1.3

League tables Consider the pros and cons of introducing league tables to measure the performance of schools or university departments. Imagine that you are advising a government in a country that has no equivalent to these tables. Consider the probable effects of their use upon the organization – e.g. scope and delivery – of educational provision. What arguments would you make to recommend or resist the introduction of league tables? How would you illustrate your position by reference to your own experience and knowledge as a recipient of educational services?

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Box 1.10: Privatization and the 'new enterprise culture'

The case for the privatization of public services, either through substitution or contracting out to the private sector, is based on the claim that employees and especially managers in most organizations, including many in the private sector, have to be shaken out of their complacency and become more willing to take risks and be innovative in pursuit of efficiency, productivity and improved performance. In many countries, a number of publicly owned utilities (e.g. electricity, gas, transport and telecommunications) were 'sold off' to the private sector through a process of 'privatization'.

The supporters of this move argued that it would serve to modernize these services by making their provision more cost-effective, in addition to releasing capital that could fund tax cuts, reduce debt or boost the financing of services retained within the public sector (e.g. armed forces). Its critics pointed to the loss of control of key services, the damaging consequences of making them objects of profit, the erosion of conditions for public services workers and the redistribution of wealth from the poor to the rich by expanding the private sector. For organizations that remain in the public sector, what is needed, it is claimed, is a set of targets linked to incentives that can substitute for the profit motive and competition, which are seen to drive private sector managers to deliver high levels of performance. Public sector management, its critics complain, lacks incentives to make radical reforms. Enabling managers to exercise greater prerogative, unhampered by established traditions of collective bargaining and custom and practice regarding such things as manning levels and job design, is the key to raising the quality as well as the cost-effectiveness of public service delivery.

While there is a continuing controversy about the wisdom of privatization, or selling off the family silver as Lord Macmillan once described it, the idea that the private sector has much to offer the public sector remains. In the United Kingdom, confidence in the capacity of private ownership and associated forms of organizing and managing reflects a wider embracing of values that have been characterized as part and parcel of a new 'enterprise culture'. Balanced against this, highly visible failures of privatization (e.g. UK railways) have somewhat tempered public opinion and policy making in this area.

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In the United Kingdom, the substitution of private for public forms of financing and organizing has been welcomed, or at least tacitly supported, by a majority of people. This is unsurprising because a reluctance to fund public services through taxation increases has left them (us) on the receiving end of under-investment in a public sector run down and demoralized by this neglect.[1] Almost everyone has a tale to tell of poor or worsening standards of public housing, healthcare and education. People suffering a bad experience with the public sector are already receptive to the suggestion that government should be run like a business, with professional managers being given the prerogative and discretion to manage resources.

'New managerialism' in the public sector

What this new managerialism means or at least claims, in less abstract terms, is that only by running public services like a business can citizens (as customers) receive the value-for-money and quality services to which they are entitled (see Box 1.11). The reform of public services is advocated in order to ensure that they are run for the benefit of those who use them, and not for 'the bureaucrats' who provide them. Paradoxically though, the result of such 'reforms' is an increase of managerial and monitoring staff whose salaries are paid by slashing the numbers, and eroding the terms and conditions, of the front-line employees who are being 'modernized'. Various private sector managerial techniques of budgets, targets, financial incentives, project management, performance league tables and accounting procedures are applied to the public sector.

After the scandals at Enron and WorldCom, the ideology that commends the running of public services like a business may be less convincing. 'New managerialism' does not acknowledge how too much faith in a managerial view can readily lead to corruption and greed. This then might undermine the very conditions necessary for a successful economy (such as confidence, trust and security).

Image 1.5

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Box 1.11: The organization and managerialization of everything

Managerialism refers to a view that assigns to managers the exclusive power to define the goals of the organization and their means of achievement. In extreme form, it proposes that everything can be managed efficiently through the application of 'correct' techniques. Elements of this can be seen in the delivery of programmed education provided in modularized chunks, using standardized overhead transparencies and student workbooks. Likened to the provision of (fast) food, this has been described as the 'McDonaldization' of education. To cater for a mass education market, textbooks are being produced to a standard formula and, like burgers, are probably not to be recommended as part of a healthy diet.

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Thinkpoint 1.4

Would you privatize? How do you feel about efforts to 'privatize' or 'modernize' the public sector? In considering this question, you might examine reports of the Fire Brigades Union dispute that occurred during the autumn of 2002 into 2003. You might also reflect upon your experience as a consumer of public services – education, health, transport, local public facilities, etc. Here you could assess the effects of privatization and modernization upon the availability, scope and quality of such services.

The recurrent complaint of those who favour enterprise or market-based solutions to all forms of resource allocation is that the public services have been organized primarily for the benefit of producers (e.g. public sector employees) rather than their customers. This echoes the discovery of an earlier generation of OB researchers who found that bureaucracies suffered considerably from what they described as **goal displacement** (Merton *et al.*, 1952). Conforming to the internal rules of the organization (perhaps for reasons of career advancement) was shown to be more important than fulfilling the objectives (service to clients) that the rules were designed to facilitate.

However, this complaint about self-serving public sector bureaucrats also deflects attention from the importance placed upon shareholders, rather than customers, in the organizing logic that distinguishes private sector service provision. Private sector companies are obliged not only to operate profitably, but also to compete to raise the return on capital deployed. Of course, they may fail to do this, in which case they are starved of capital, experience a cash flow crisis, and eventually go to the wall unless they are bailed out by government. Or they succeed in staying afloat by engaging in sharp (e.g. anti-competitive) practices, which restrict consumer choice and raise prices. Alternatively, they engage in 'creative accounting' to inflate their earnings or conceal the extent of their liabilities and expenses. Private sector companies frequently claim that it is their priority to serve customers as a way of retaining or increasing market share, but neither will be pursued unless they contribute to profits. The users of privately supplied public services in the United Kingdom (e.g. children taught by agency teachers or travellers using the privatized rail system) have routinely discovered this to their cost, sometimes with their lives.

It has become increasingly clear that the private sector does not have all the answers (see Box 1.12). In the worst case, customers experience increased prices, lower levels of service and safety and massive inconvenience – as in the case of the railways in the United Kingdom. Contractual services are also often far from perfect. For example, hospitals have been encouraged to contract out their cleaning to private companies. Through a bidding process, the costs may end up being lower, but the quality of the cleaning is often poor and perhaps dangerous to the health of patients.[2] Incentives can work in perverse ways. Basically, a low-cost supplier will tend to 'cut corners' in order to maintain profit margins rather than raise standards. (A comparison of the private and public sectors is set out in Table 1.1.)

In an effort to counteract this endemic problem of purely market-based relations, increasing interest is being shown in private–public partnerships. In principle, the entrepreneurial features of private business are conceived to shake up and inspire improvements in public sector organizations without entirely abandoning an ethos of public service delivery. The assumption underlying this move was that market competition between private contractors would reduce the cost while maintaining or even improving quality. However, this calculation does not take significant account of the capacity/expertise of inexperienced staff in the public sector to secure a good deal.

Box 1.12: Denting confidence in private sector rationality

During the 1990s, the failure of many dot-com companies and e-commerce ventures indicated that private sector methods and strategies are not guaranteed to be superior to other (e.g. democratic, bureaucratic) ways of running an organization. In historical terms, the bursting of the dot-com bubble is not new;[3] and indeed, on a smaller scale, a high proportion of new businesses go bust every year. This is the nature of private enterprise and indeed the stock market has been likened to a giant global gambling casino (Strange, 1997). When the market crashed, those that spread their risks across a wide range of investments fared much better than those who were sucked into the idea that the boom could go on forever. Perhaps we should be just as circumspect when it comes to delivering public services.

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Table 1.1 Comparing private and public sectors

Sector	Private	Public
Focus	Produce what is profitable for investors	Provide what is demanded by voters
Governance	Accountability to shareholders	Accountability to electorate
Logic of organization	Innovation to produce better returns on capital invested	Standardization to provide continuity of service and security of employment
Shortcomings	Lack of concern with anything (e.g. the environment, ethics, other stakeholders) that does not contribute to profits	Under-investment, bureaucratic rigidity and ineffective use of resources

Instead of surrendering, as it were, much of the public sector to private sector operators and their market-driven logics, there is increasingly an attempt to forge longer-term partnerships between the two sectors to secure the best of both worlds. Supporters of this middle way suggest that entrepreneurial flair can be transferred without damaging the ethos of public service delivery. In place of the lowest bidder, 'best value' is taken as the baseline for evaluating competing private sector bids for public service contracts. Best value can incorporate a concern with the ethos of the contractor, including their track record on collaborating in long-term partnerships, to find mutually acceptable ways of securing cost-effective improvements in service delivery.

Whether or not faith in public–private partnerships is justified or sustained, there is no doubt that a defining feature of capitalist business is risk. Critics of the 'enterprise culture' have asked the question: 'If you are ill do you want to be treated by an entrepreneur or a doctor following professional and regulated standards of good practice?' This question became all the more poignant or significant when in 2002 senior executives at major international companies (e.g. Enron, WorldCom) were exposed for fraudulently massaging their balance sheets to secure better stock market share prices. As major shareholders, many of these executives were the direct beneficiaries of the increased valuations and in many cases offloaded their shares prior to the company's collapse (see Box 1.13).

Contexts of organizational behaviour

Apart from the tragedy for employees losing their jobs, the Enron and WorldCom scandals had the effect of scaring already jittery investors who had experienced the pain of the dot-com bubble into a mass exodus from the stock market that brought share prices tumbling down and reminded people of the Great Crash on Wall Street in 1929. Because the whole world experienced several

Box 1.13: 'Enronomics'

The collapse of Enron followed by WorldCom begged a number of questions: How many more companies might be fraudulent? It led investors to ask: 'Can we trust executives – even, and perhaps especially, those with MBAs – with our money?' Almost overnight, senior executives and their so-called independent audit firms suffered worldwide disrepute. From being popular American heroes, corporate executives were reduced to pariahs – viewed with increasing suspicion and scorn when previously they had been lavished with bonuses and praise.

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years of deep recession and mass unemployment after the 1929 crash, any parallel is viewed with great fear.

Of course, not every company is an Enron or a WorldCom, and not every dot-com company was badly managed or went bankrupt. But their 'excesses' are a reminder that the values and priorities of private business are financial profit. Companies stay in business only so long as investors (e.g. shareholders and banks) have confidence in the executives to deliver an acceptable rate of growth on their capital. When confidence is dented, investment is withdrawn as capital is transferred towards less risky ventures. Depleted of capital, financially weak companies based upon optimistic or 'unrealistic' business models then struggle to survive when an economic downturn favours companies with sufficient reserves to slash prices and/or weather the storm.

Combined with misgivings about the performance of privatized public utilities and private contracting, the 1990s dot-com bubble burst and the subsequent loss of confidence in audited accounts can only help to moderate the enthusiasm of governments for exclusively private sector solutions to public sector reform. In the wake of major scandals and collapses, the idea that 'government should be run like a business' is destined to lose some of its common-sense appeal. Perhaps, after all, solutions for organizational problems are not so simple, and maybe despite the problems of rigidity characteristic of bureaucratic organizations, there is some merit in the checks and balances built into 'old' public sector management (Du Gay, 2000).

At the time of writing (early 2003) world markets were struggling to avoid or climb out of recession, which, despite governments' best endeavours, tend to occur in cycles. Part of this problem was a global crisis of over-production (i.e. too many goods/services chasing too few consumers) but depressed stock markets resulting from global uncertainty about an Iraqi war plus the accounting scandals discussed above exacerbated the sense of crisis. Despite relatively high rates of employment, exceptionally low income tax and interest rates that would normally fuel consumer spending, the talk of economic gloom was fuelling the crisis. Contexts such as this cannot be ignored when studying organizations because they provide good or legitimate reasons (or excuses) for decisions that, for example, lead to downsizing, mergers and acquisitions, or liquidating a company.

Instead of focusing narrowly upon the behaviour of individuals and groups in organizations, we have sought to locate 'organizing' within a wider context – such as the private or public sectors of goods and services production (see Box 1.14). It is important to remember that organizing takes place within wider historical, cultural and institutional contexts. Organizational behaviour is embedded in this context, which it reproduces or transforms. How would you characterize the contemporary context? Modern? Capitalist? Industrial? Post-industrial? These and other terms may spring to mind, but there is also a case for describing contemporary society as simply organized. Many contemporary activities and arrangements are characterized as the properties of organizations – bodies that cater for virtually every aspect of our lives.

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Organizations have become central to, and now dominate, processes of producing and consuming goods and services of all kinds. To earn a wage or salary, a majority of people find employment within organizations – the self-employed being an exception (although many of them are contracted to work for organizations on a casual or temporary basis). While we usually work in one organization, we spend most of our earnings in other organizations, notably in the retail outlets where we buy food, clothing, cars, mortgages and so on. Organizations provide us with most of our material, and a considerable number of our less material (i.e. leisure and other service) wants. In their absence, many people would struggle to obtain an equivalent income, and there would be an acute shortage of goods and services. Organizations have become crucial to our material lives and perhaps survival.

Box 1.14: The 'unnaturalness' of organizations

The provision of goods and services through the creation of organizations is clearly not a 'natural' (i.e. a part of the human condition like food, water and oxygen) or necessary way of sustaining our lives. We need only think of how (even today, and more so in the past) a majority of people in the world produce and consume their everyday goods by depending much more on family and community than they do upon the activities and arrangements that we describe as organizations.

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Back to the pub: The personal and the organizational

When thinking of organizations, there remains a tendency to think first of manufacturing industry or perhaps an established public sector organization, such as a school or hospital. We could easily have situated Jackie's experience of organization in a school, office or factory instead of a pub. The pub is however an interesting space as it combines processes of production, in the form of service delivery and sometimes brewing, with processes of consumption that are partly commodified (e.g. through purchasing and branding of goods) but largely self-organized (e.g. through socializing, conversing, etc.).

In contemporary, post-industrial societies, leisure has become a distinctive sphere of (recreational) life by virtue of other time that is sold to an employer or taken up with routine chores and 'maintenance' activities. Historically the 'public house' has been a recreational space and of central significance in 'disposing' of leisure time. Increasingly, however, advanced industrial societies are becoming de-industrialized as manufacturing is more profitably undertaken in industrializing economies where access to labour and raw materials is cheaper, more plentiful and less regulated. As the proportion of income available to be disposed on non-essentials (e.g. accommodation, food, clothing) has grown, the leisure sector has enjoyed sustained growth by commodifying the means of entertainment. That is to say, forms of leisure are increasingly 'packaged' for sale in the market-place rather than self-organized within families or communities.

Let us therefore go back to our narrative about Jackie in the Dog and Duck, a pub owned by the brewery, which has not (yet) sought to give it a 'theme' or 'facelift'. Remember she was sitting in a corner of the pub, having to listen to a gang of locals openly engaged in what she experienced as a character assassination of students.

We invite you to reflect further upon Jackie's visit to the pub (see Case study 1.2), concentrating this time upon the landlord and landlady's approach to managing this organization. To assist in this process, we encourage you to consider, preferably with other students on your course, the following questions:

1. Jackie is taking a course on organization studies. How do you think her experience of working in the pub might help with her studies and, how might her studies help her in the work?

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CASE STUDY 1.2 Jackie at the pub (2)

Instead of choosing the various options suggested after presenting our vignette earlier, Jackie decided to leave the table and return to standing at the bar. After a short time she entered into conversation with the landlady and landlord who, for a few minutes, were sitting on the customer side of the bar. The conversation meandered through a number of topics, until Jackie felt sufficiently relaxed to bring up the experience of being criticized by the locals.

The landlady sympathized with Jackie, recognizing that there was a good deal of animosity between the locals and the students, especially since they had made considerable efforts to attract students into the pub. Ordinarily there was little trouble as the students were inclined to move on to other bars or discos nearer the centre of town before the locals came in. The landlord went on to explain his policy in seeking to attract the students when he became the tenant of the pub 12 months ago. He pointed out that they were hoping to make their tenancy a great success, as this was the way to obtain a much bigger pub from the brewery. Eventually they were hoping to buy their own pub in a nice coastal village in Cornwall where the tourist trade during the summer would provide financial security and allow them more time to pursue their hobbies – of astronomy and art work – during the quieter winter months. As they were talking, some customers were becoming impatient at not getting immediate service, and the landlord went back behind the bar for a while. The landlady then confided in Jackie that the growth in business in the pub had presented a staff problem for them.

As she left the pub Jackie felt a lot more at ease. The friendliness of the landlord and landlady had reassured her that students were really welcome and she knew that, in future, she could always talk to them when waiting for her friends to arrive. In fact she had found herself saying that if ever they were short of staff, she would be happy to help out. On her next visit to the pub, Jackie was asked by the landlord if she could do a few hours the following night when one of the staff had to visit her mother in hospital.

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2. How does the case illustrate the concepts of identity, insecurity, power and inequality, and illuminate the practicalities of management and organization? (See the Appendix for further discussion of these concepts.)
3. Are there any other questions relating to this case study that you feel are important? If so, discuss these and feedback your results to our website.

It might be assumed that organizations have relevance, value or significance only as instruments for producing and providing goods and services. Yet organizations are also of central importance in producing and providing *a* sense of identity for both employees and customers. It is through our participation in organizations (e.g. as producers or consumers) that we develop, confirm or manage our sense of identity – for example, as employable (in work organizations), as prosperous (in retail outlets), as sick or cured (in hospitals), as well-educated or ignorant (in schools), and as enjoying ourselves (in pubs and clubs). But, as we have seen in our case study of the Dog and Duck, pubs can also be contexts where our identities are threatened in ways that fuel our insecurities. We saw how Jackie experienced this when the local lads voiced their assault on students – an assault that was provoked by insecurities aroused because of the pub's concern to attract students into their local.

Formation, development and change in our identities occur through social interactions – with ourselves as well as others – as we reflect upon our experiences and resolve, perhaps, to change our ways. This is, of course, not easy as is evidenced but the number of new year resolutions that are broken as our habitual patterns of action override our good intentions before the end of January.

Inescapably, what happens in organizations has personal as well as **instrumental** significance. Our experiences in organizations reinforce (or threaten) our sense of who we are and what is meaningful and valuable to us (and about us). In this process, relations of power operate to enable or obstruct how interactions and identities are accomplished. For example, Jackie's identity as a student is not just created by herself but also by the locals and the landlord and landlady. This identity degrades her value in the eyes of the locals but enhances it from the perspective of the landlady. She regards Jackie as a potential employee who can assist in developing a student clientele.

From Jackie's standpoint, her limited income as a student made the opportunity to do some part-time bar work more attractive than for someone in a healthier financial situation. But it was not simply material inequality that rendered Jackie more alert to this job opportunity. She also regarded it as a chance to enhance her status in the eyes of her parents who had been exerting pressures upon her to find part-time work. It is hardly surprising then, that Jackie felt much better after having had a more pleasant interaction with the landlord and landlady, being eventually offered a part-time job behind the bar. A few months later, after demonstrating a flair for interacting with customers, she was asked by the landlord if she would be able to manage the pub for a weekend. We take up the story on her first night in this enhanced role (see Case study 1.3).

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CASE STUDY 1.3 Jackie at the pub (3)

Jackie was in some trepidation about managing the pub and, in particular, the reactions of the two other bar staff. They were both slightly older and also locals. John was pretty relaxed and she didn't expect much of a problem, not least because he displayed a 'soft spot' for her and this gave her a sense of control. Christine, however, was a different kettle of fish. When Christine had found herself working behind the bar with a student, she had felt threatened. As the elder and more experienced bartender of the three, Christine was upset that she had not been asked to manage the pub. This was particularly galling because she had ambitions to become a landlady.

Things were going all right on this Saturday evening until it got very busy. One of the customers was clearly expressing impatience at not getting served. Both Jackie and John were serving customers but Christine was engaged in a lengthy chat with a friend who was sitting at the bar. Jackie asked Christine if she could serve the waiting customer and she appeared to accept the request but then continued to chat with her friend. A bit of a row then occurred as Jackie tried to get Christine to come into the back where they could discuss the problem. Christine simply blew her top, condemning Jackie for embarrassing her in front of the customers. Christine walked out, saying she was not going to be bossed about by a trumped-up student who knew nothing about bar work.

The pub was very busy and it was going to be extremely difficult to manage with just two bar staff. At the first opportunity

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Jackie tried to ring the landlord but couldn't get an answer. So she rang one of her flatmates – Carol – to see if she would come and help out. Fortunately Carol agreed to come at once and, despite needing a lot of help, the evening went reasonably smoothly. Eventually the landlord rang back and Jackie was able to explain the situation. He was sympathetic but was also a bit worried about how to replace Christine who, he feared, was gone for good. Maybe Carol, he suggested, would fill in for Christine, although Christine was working more hours than might be expected from a full-time student. Carol seemed quite keen. She had seen how Jackie had flourished since taking the job, plus the money was not to be sneezed at.

Jackie had experienced a big boost to her self-esteem by being asked to manage the pub. In contrast, not being chosen to manage the pub was a terrible blow to Christine. Not least, this was because she was more experienced in pub work, older, and of even more importance, she had ambitions to run a pub of her own. This helps us to understand Christine's reactions when Jackie sought to manage her defiance. Christine's defiance threatened Jackie's sense of identity, and especially her stand-in role as manager of the pub. She felt that her position as temporary manager had been undermined in the eyes of the clientele, and that her standing with the landlord and landlady would be damaged. Jackie was also concerned about how the landlord would react to the possible loss of Christine as a valued employee. While she had been embarrassed by Christine's walkout, Jackie's dignity and self-esteem remained intact by virtue of her not exploding in the same way as Christine. However, she felt some mild resentment towards the landlord who, she believed, must have had some inkling of how Christine might react. She felt that she had been placed in a difficult situation, and it crossed her mind that the landlord and landlady had perhaps seized, or even created, an opportunity to force Christine out so as to replace her with someone who they could trust to act as a reliable manager in their absence.

Once again, we encourage you to reflect upon staff relations at the Dog and Duck as illustrative of different aspects of behaviour in organizations. Here are some questions:

1. If Jackie is right that the landlord had contrived a situation that would provoke Christine into walking out, what implications does this have for 'the effective manager's skill profile' presented and discussed earlier.
2. How are the concepts of insecurity, identity, knowledge, power, freedom and inequality (see the Appendix) relevant for exploring and analysing the dynamics of the relationship and interactions between Jackie, Christine and the landlord?
3. Can you draw some parallels between the actions of the landlord, Jackie and Christine and your own experiences of work or leisure relationships?
4. Can you think of media reports of disputes at work, past or present, whose content might be illuminated through a similar analysis to the one we have sketched to interpret aspects of organization and management at the Dog and Duck?

Jackie's experience illustrates how organizations are not only important to our material existence, but they also have *symbolic* significance. For organizations involve not just our objectives and interests, but also our feelings, sentiments and identities. Organizations are among the core institutions – including the family and school – that foster and shape our aspirations and our attachment to particular social identities.

When we highlight the personal and social significance of organizations, we are also acknowledging their status and importance as institutions within which people – employees and customers – become institutionalized. You have probably heard the phrase 'the British pub is an institution' and never thought to reflect upon what it means. The phrase signals, we suggest, the distinctiveness of the social interactions as emblematic of British society. More sceptically, it could be argued that the pub is invoked to support a romantic ideal of how many people prefer to think of Britain.

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Of course, there are many institutions that are not readily or plausibly identified as organizational. For example, a series of activities may become institutionalized around preparing for mealtimes, such as breakfast. The kind of breakfast that is prepared and the particular interactions, or grunts, exchanged with others during the process of preparing and consuming breakfast, assumes a pattern that becomes 'normal' and taken-for-granted. It is only when this pattern is disturbed, intentionally or otherwise (e.g. a valued ingredient runs out or a guest requests a very different kind of breakfast), that an awareness of the routine is aroused. The routine is an element of 'an institution' in the sense that it is the outcome of an orderly set of social relations that ensures, most of the time, that, in the case of the breakfast routine, the desired ingredients have been bought and that the usual grunts are exchanged (see Box 1.15).

Thinkpoint 1.5

It's just routine Consider some other routines (e.g. going to lectures) and how their presence and significance only comes to light when they are disrupted, or when we reflect critically upon them by imagining the possibilities of their disruption.

An example of 'breaking with routine' is the inability to 'make' the 9.00am lecture because of a hangover or lack of sleep the night before (assuming, of course, that such a routine was ever established). Student life can result in late nights and leisure becoming the routine, and this might only be disrupted when realizing that the lifestyle could result in failing the degree.

The significance of routines

Actions and relations are institutionalized in the sense that there is regularity and routine – for example, in how pupils relate to teachers, how doctors treat patients and how ticket inspectors check passengers. This process does not occur automatically. Rather, actions become institutionalized as people become attached to routines for material reasons (i.e. income flows from the routines of a job) or social acceptance (i.e. 'fitting in' with the routines of our mates). In both cases, our identity is confirmed, thereby making us feel secure – unless, of course, we are striving to establish a sense of identity in opposition to established conventions and lifestyles (in which case, we are involved in a process of institutionalizing alternative values and forms of behaviour).

As we noted earlier, over the past decade or more, pubs as work organizations have been expanding their services in an attempt to appeal to new customers. Providing play areas for children can attract young families, those seeking to eat out inexpensively can be catered for by pub food, and some pubs might (like the Dog and Duck) seek to specialize by encouraging a potentially profitable segment (e.g. students). In each case, the traditional clientele may feel (as we saw at the Dog and Duck) 'pushed out' or denied their institutionalized expectations when going down the pub.

More generally, employees as well as customers in many organizations have been obliged to make sense of, and deal with, disruptions to established practices and routines as companies have sought to use their (human and material) facilities in more productive, profitable and cost-effective ways. Think, for example, of the use of call-centres to replace face-to-face services, the shift to self-service

Box 1.15: Institutions and institutionalization

When sets of actions and relations are seen as fairly predictable, they are termed 'institutions'. Institutions involve common ways of doing things. Members of institutions (e.g. students within a university system) may not always agree with the rules (e.g. examination regulations) but usually comply (e.g. because of the concern to gain a degree). Processes of institutionalization are simply the outcome of our routinely behaving in accordance with what the institution (e.g. the family, school or work organization) deems appropriate. So, for example, in schools and work organizations, the process of institutionalization includes the acquisition of habits, aspirations and discipline (e.g. time-keeping and deference to authority) that enable classes to run on time, students to attend and a degree of order to be maintained.

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Image 1.6 Everyday routines – having a meal, cleaning the fridge

(e.g. bank ATMs, supermarket consumption) or the exploitation of brands to generate customer loyalty and a high pricing strategy. Do these changes have implications for how people use products and services (e.g. how customers use pubs) and become 'institutionalized' through their interactions within them?

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Thinkpoint 1.6

Branding and consumption When companies brand products (e.g. themed pubs), what assumptions are they making about the organization of consumption (and the production of such goods and services)?

Whenever we participate in an institution, we take with us implicit as well as explicit knowledge of the routines and conventions that we expect to find in such contexts. As a regular customer in a supermarket, for example, we learn how the store is arranged in terms of how the goods are grouped and where they can be found on the shelves. Again, this knowledge may be so taken-for-granted that it surfaces only when there is a 'reorganization'. Such changes are usually justified by a managerial calculation that they will produce more traffic down the aisles and thereby increase revenues. It disrupts our shopping pattern, and perhaps makes us more aware that we had such a pattern, but it is effective from the viewpoint of the supermarket's managers and shareholders if it has the effect of us purchasing other goods that had previously been invisible to us.

What such disruptions risk, of course, is a negative reaction from customers who, in the absence of any marked loyalty, may respond by changing their routines as they decide to shop elsewhere. A parallel analysis could be applied to the locals, as customers, at the Dog and Duck (see earlier) who were reacting negatively to what they were finding on the equivalent of 'the shelves' in the supermarket – that is, the influx of a student clientele. Can you think of other examples where a change in what is available to consumers upsets their routine?

The centrality of people

As we all know, our everyday relationships with parents, friends or lovers can be difficult. The more we try to organize them the more difficult they often become. Work organizations exhibit these same

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difficulties, except we do not usually or necessarily share the same intensity of commitment and loyalty to relationships at work. In general, it is easier to leave the organizations in which we work than to walk out of personal relationships, unless of course they coincide!

Exercise 1.2

Organizing in everyday life Think about a tension or conflict you have had personally with someone close and reflect on the degree to which it can illuminate an aspect of organizing, being organized or relating to some organized activity (e.g. a place of education, work, consumption or leisure). If convenient, this could be done in pairs whereby one of you probes the other and vice versa so as to try and avoid the tendency that we all have of rationalizing (i.e. reinterpreting unpleasant experiences in a more favourable light in terms of our own part in them). Consider, for example, how a sense of 'fairness' is negotiated or imposed, or reflect upon how trust is established or undermined.

When faced with pressures to increase productivity or improve levels of service, managers may attempt to coerce staff into working harder (e.g. by bullying or imposing penalties). Earlier, when considering the actions of the landlord at the Dog and Duck, we raised the possibility that he engineered the situation that resulted in a staff member (Christine) walking out. When detected or even suspected by staff, such methods reinforce the impersonality of the relationship, and make it more difficult to engineer more personal or involved forms of motivation and leadership. This tells us something significant about work organizations. Participation in them is usually based on an impersonal contract of employment in which a wage is paid for the application of skill and effort. In itself, this impersonal contract carries with it no moral obligation to work diligently or to be loyal to the employer.

People in organizations may be more or less willing to accept being organized. Ultimately, willing cooperation or grudging compliance depends upon their sense of the legitimacy (fairness) of the demands made upon them, and of course the capacity of managers to influence the conditions that make compliance the normal employee response. We saw earlier how compliance is not to be taken for granted when Christine was unwilling to be managed by a younger barmaid in the pub in which they both worked. People can be creative, responsible, dedicated and loyal, but, equally, they can act in ways that, from a managerial perspective, are destructive, subversive, irresponsible and disloyal.

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Identifying organization

On the face of it, what 'organization' means is obvious or self-evident. Ask anyone to name six organizations, and they would have few problems providing a list. What would you name? Let's make the question a little more testing by asking you to identify six *educational* organizations. Which six would you choose from the list in Table 1.2?

Table 1.2 Types of educational organization

❖ School	❖ Workplace	❖ University	❖ Community centre
❖ Family	❖ Hockey club	❖ Night class	❖ Beach party
❖ Friendship group	❖ Garden centre	❖ Chat room	❖ Toddler group
❖ Bookshop	❖ Library	❖ Cinema	❖ Media

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Once you have chosen the six that, in your view, are 'educational organizations', think back to what led you to pick them. If you now had to justify your selection, what would you say? What is it about your six selections that differentiate them as 'educational *organizations*'?

Perhaps the most obvious candidates are 'school' and 'university'. These, commonsensically, are bodies that provide educational goods or services. When we think of 'education' we tend to privilege *formal* methods of teaching – as found in classrooms. That is what education commonsensically means, even if there are alternatives which challenge that understanding, like 'the school of hard knocks' which celebrates learning through the 'university of life' – doing and making mistakes.

Parents, for example, are also involved in educating their children – by teaching them how to speak and to interact with others. Parents may also try to compensate for perceived shortcomings in their children's formal education by supplementing it with their own instruction or employing tutors. Governments may even build this view of 'responsible parenting' into educational policy by, for example, prosecuting (even gaoling) parents of truanting children for not instilling the values of education in their offspring. So, do we count the family as an educational *organization*?

In the workplace, various kinds of education abound, both in training and through learning from others as mates and mentors. The same could be said for many other forms of human association. In the process of meeting up with friends, going to discos, clubs, pubs and parties, playing sports and even watching TV, visiting retail stores, chat rooms, etc., we become educated about various aspects of the world in which we live. Many of these activities are 'organized' and/or take place in organizational contexts. Indeed, they can and do provide alternative forms of education, even to the point of placing in question the authority and value of formal education. From a critical perspective, formal education can be seen as a narrow indoctrination into certain 'respectable' patterns of belief and behaviours that restrict rather than expand intellectual and moral horizons. Critics of formal education might well wish to place some scare quotes around much of the 'education' provided by schools and universities. Purposely, we also placed on the bottom row of our list a number of non-educational organizations/institutions that, nonetheless, may facilitate education. The last two – cinema and media – indicate that almost anything can be educational; it depends on how we relate to them.

When education is seen as a process, almost everything we do has educational significance and implications; it all depends on how we *relate* to what we do. Learning can be seen as synonymous with our everyday practices of talking, interacting and relating with one another and the world around us. Take the case of organizations. Why assume that we know little or nothing about organizations or organizing just because we have never attended an OB course or read a textbook and, therefore, jump to the conclusion that we are ignorant of the subject? In doing so, we effectively disempower ourselves as we cede authority to 'experts' who are deemed to possess a monopoly of knowledge in this field – a view that allows our experience of organizations and organizing to be ignored or marginalized. Instead, we might usefully recognize how frequently and continuously we have participated in organizations and organizing processes, and how much we have 'picked up' or learned in this process. Unfortunately, many textbooks fail to recognize and facilitate the exploration of this knowledge as part of studying OB.

Box 1.16: Education in business schools

Associated with the idea that organizations are distinguished by the presence of formal, impersonal relationships and procedures is a conception of business and management education that emphasizes and reinforces this understanding. The ultimate expression of this thinking is the treatment of people as mere factors of production or commodities.

Since the Enron and WorldCom scandals, there has been considerable soul-searching about the education of executives. The content of MBAs (Masters of Business Administration), in particular, has been criticized for the lack of attention to the ethics of managing. Finance-centred courses in particular have encouraged and legitimized the ruthless pursuit of shareholder value fuelled by the rising value of stock options used to compensate executives. Commonsensically, the term 'education' is reserved for what happens in schools, colleges and universities, and increasingly tends to focus upon abstracted forms of knowledge comprising sets of information and techniques. Even case studies, which offer a potential means of exploring issues of politics and ethics in decision making, tend to concentrate on the analysis of information and the identification and application of appropriate techniques. This commonsense notion of education revolves around treating education as a 'thing', which is confined to specific settings, rather than a process that occurs within all spheres of everyday life.

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In the next three sub-sections, we consider some different ways in which 'organization' can be defined, identified and analysed.

An entity view

Box 1.17: Mainstream definitions of 'organization'

- 'Organization refers to social arrangements such as factories, bureaucracies, armies, research and development teams, and so on, created to achieve technical, productive ends'. (David Buchanan and Andrei Huczyinski, *Organizational Behaviour: An Introductory Text*, third edition, London: Prentice Hall, 1997, p. 552.)
- 'An organization is a consciously coordinated social unit, composed of two or more people, that functions on a relatively continuous basis to achieve a common goal or set of goals. It's characterized by formal roles that define and shape the behaviour of its members'. (Stephen P. Robins, *Essentials of Organizational Behaviour*, seventh edition, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2003, p. 2.)

When considering the definitions set out in Box 1.17, you may well respond by thinking: 'Yes, that makes sense. It is a bit technical but it is along the lines I was expecting'. We acknowledge the contribution of such thinking, at least to the extent that it highlights how, in work organizations, there is a great deal of emphasis on the means to achieve what are presumed to be shared objectives. In families or in friendship groups, in contrast, doing things more efficiently or effectively is generally of lesser importance than preserving the quality of our relationships, as an end in itself. In this respect, at least, there is logic when studying organizations in emphasizing the impersonal and objective criteria of appointment and promotion, as often based primarily upon qualifications and/or measurable length of service.[4] In the process, however, other ways of understanding organizations are screened out.

Mainstream definitions reflect and reinforce the common-sense understanding of 'organizations' as *entities* consisting of a distinguishing set of characteristics. Organizations are portrayed as unified entities comprising 'formal' rules and structures. Roles, or positions, are hierarchical – meaning that those who occupy senior positions always 'define and shape' the behaviour of subordinates (see Box 1.18).

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Box 1.18: Roles, security and power

The notion of role is not unlike that used in the theatre but the script is unwritten and therefore, in principle, more open to interpretation, improvisation and inspiration than is the case for the actor. A role, however, consists of a set of expectations and obligations. To the extent that people identify with these roles as a source of security and/or sense of power, they operate to constrain the individual almost as much as scripts constrain actors on stage.

Definitions should not be dismissed as simply the ritualistic elements of a textbook. Definitions are significant insofar as they distil and frame a particular way of thinking that is exemplified through a text. How 'organization' is defined frequently provides an important clue to how the boundaries of the field are being drawn and how its contents are being examined.

Like the common-sense idea of education as something that occurs within specific organizations, the definitions provided in Box 1.17 are not so much wide of the mark as limiting and potentially misleading. They focus attention principally upon aspects of organizing that coincide with the concerns of those occupying the senior ranks of organizations. It is a view of organizations developed by their designers, and it is one that portrays organizations as malleable, instrumental tools for achieving their established objectives. Minimal attention is given to the conflicting priorities of other members of the organization or the dangers in managing organizations as if such conflicts were of little consequence.

Definitions found in mainstream textbooks may appear to be uncontroversial and politically neutral, but this is far from the case. Their adequacy and credibility can be challenged on account of the exclusion of issues of power, domination and exploitation. Silence on these issues casts doubt upon the

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practical relevance as well as the scholarly standing of their contents. It is important to recognize how their contents operate not only to describe but also to define and discipline how organization is thought about and how we act within them (including ourselves as lecturers and students).

The effect of these texts, when we accept them as common-sense truths, is to equate the meaning of organization with their contents. They invite us to accept their knowledge of organizations without presenting alternatives and without actively encouraging us to reflect critically upon their analyses and prescriptions. To assume that organizations are created and/or maintained simply 'to achieve technical, productive ends' is simplistic since it excludes consideration of many (mixed) 'motives' and 'preoccupations' that inspire and shape their design and development. Similarly, presuming that the goals of senior managers are identical to those of other members of the organization is politically unrealistic. To believe (commonsensically) in the entity view is the equivalent of thinking of the sun rising, rather than the earth rotating.

A process view

To say that organization is a process rather than an entity is not to deny that there are activities occurring that are identifiable as 'organized', and that are located, as it were, in organizations. By conceiving of organization as a process, however, the study of (organizing) processes is not confined to what are commonsensically identified as large, formal organizations or their structures, roles and so forth. The focus of analysis is not upon organizations as entities, but upon processes of organizing wherever organized activities occur – in families, beach parties, toddler groups, etc.

Box 1.19: A process view of 'organization'

'The concept of "the organization" is extremely difficult to define and, additionally, depends upon what use is to be made of the definition . . . For this reason, *our focus is not on organization as a thing but on organization as process*: the activity of organizing and being organized. All particular organizations are examples of this process . . . The process of organization in this context is the configuration of people and things in ways that are not given in nature . . . when we talk about organizations we mean any organization, whether big or small, multinational or local, formal and informal, for profit and not for profit, involuntary or voluntary'. (Norman Jackson and Pippa Carter, *Rethinking Organizational Behaviour*, London: Prentice Hall, 2000, p. 7, emphasis added.)

The process view draws our attention to the ways in which organizing, in diverse settings, is accomplished through social interactions in which we seek to manage ourselves as well as others. It understands behaviour in all human associations as a process of skilful negotiation in accomplishing whatever is done. This view invites us to scrutinize how various activities happen or are disrupted in the everyday life of an organization, whether this is in settings commonsensically identified as 'organization(s)' or outside of such settings. Importantly, it recognizes the continuity of organizing processes across institutions, and does not confine them to, or reserve them for, 'organizations'. Organizations – such as the multinational enterprise or the local voluntary group – are understood to be products or expressions of such 'organizing processes' that should not to be reduced simply to formal role-playing or goal-orientated behaviour.

A process view of organization might perhaps be seen as more theoretical. Yet it is arguably more focused on the practices that comprise organization than on the entity approach. For an entity definition tends towards a concern with prescriptions and models, such as the allocation of tasks, the grouping of activities, systems of measurement and reward, and so on, rather than the activities and interactions that comprise organizing as a dynamic process.

A concept view

As Jackson and Carter (2000) point out, the difficulty of single, universal definitions is that they cannot take account of how a definition will change in relation to how it is used in a particular context. We see no problem, in principle, in engaging alternative definitions of organization for different purposes. Yet it would be devious not to declare our own preference for a third, 'concept' view of organizing and organization. In doing so, we acknowledge that 'the concept of "the organization" is

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extremely difficult to define' (Jackson and Carter, 2000, p. 7). Its meaning is multiple and contested. Does this imply that differences over the meaning of organization can be settled? In our view, they cannot. Instead each definition, or way of conceiving of organization, is partial and political. It is partial not in the sense that it reveals just one aspect of organization, but, rather, because each definition necessarily excludes other ways of thinking about organization as it supports and champions a *particular* view. It is political because it invites and encourages people to 'see' *and organize* the world in particular ways. As a consequence, the world – including the world of organizing and organizations – takes a form associated with specific ways of thinking and associated actions. When a particular complex of thought and action assumes prominence and dominance, it becomes the 'common-sense' view (until it is disrupted and supplemented by an alternative).

What makes the 'concept view' distinctive? The concept view understands that 'organization' is first and foremost a word that assumes a variety of meanings and exerts a number of effects. The concept view recognizes that 'organization' can be conceived as an entity; and it can also be conceived as a process. But it is neither an entity nor a process. Organization is rather a concept to which a variety of meanings are attributed – including the view that it is a concept. We have already observed how, for those who favour a process view of organizations, it is the *activity of organizing*, wherever this takes place. Definitions of both entity and process make reference to organizations as identifiable social units or as examples of organizing activities. The concept view draws attention to how all definitions are politically charged as they construe activity in particular ways and anticipate or expect certain behaviours in the future. In this sense, ideas of organization do not just describe but also *prescribe* (i.e. outline what should happen) and act to *discipline* the behaviour of their members. That is what makes them partial and political.

Thinkpoint 1.7

It's kind of hard to define . . . Given our concern to make studying organizations more interesting and connected to everyday life, you might justifiably object that our attention to definitions is contradictory. Surely, you might say, definitions are abstract and boring and that is why, in everyday life, we prefer to point to the object that we are talking about rather than define it. Our response is that definitions remain important for communication and disciplining thought. Clarifying how terms are being defined can minimize the danger of talking at cross-purposes. Even so, we prefer to regard definitions as 'views'. The term 'definition' tends to imply that words can capture the basic features or essence of what they aspire to describe, whereas 'view' better conveys our understanding that words operate to make us see, make sense of and perform the world around us in particular ways.

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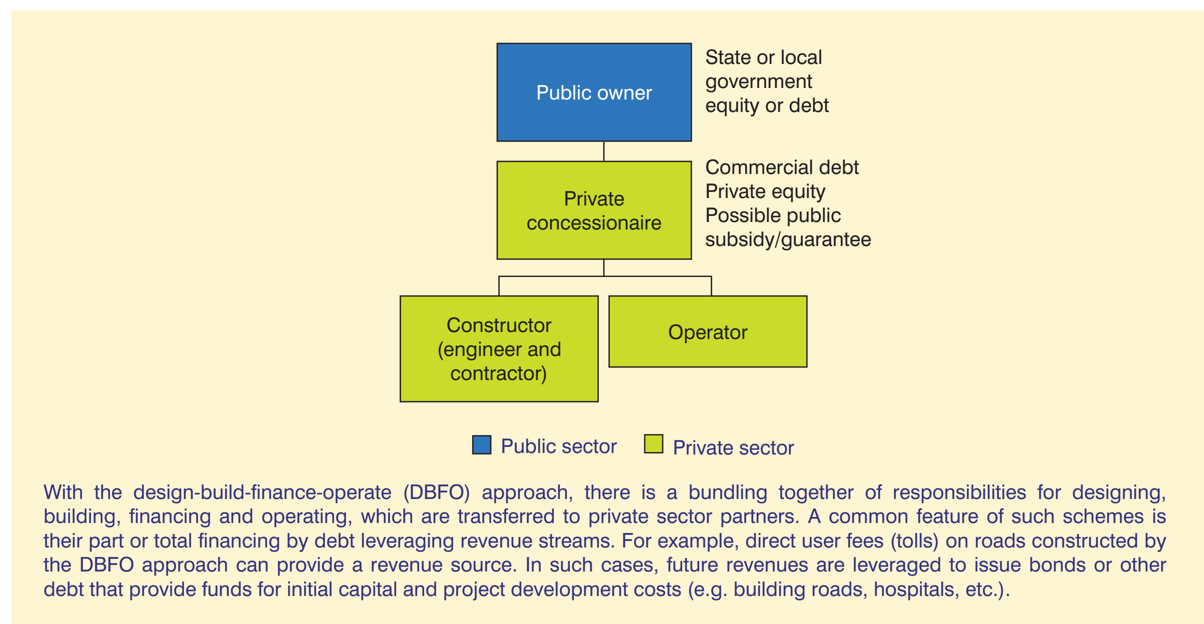

Figure 1.2 Public–private partnership: design, build, finance, operate (DBFO)

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The principal merit of identifying organization as a concept is that it disrupts the tendency to assume that language (e.g. organization) reflects or captures some element(s) of the world that are external to it – such as the features of the 'entities' and 'processes' the views discussed earlier claim to describe. To put this another way, the concept view reminds us of our involvement, as subjects or agents, in helping to produce, sustain and change the social world of organizations that otherwise appears to exist independently of us.

Box 1.20: The origin of the term 'organization'

The word can be traced to the Latin word organum, meaning a musical instrument and the disciplined playing of pre-arranged notes. Organization then continues to have this association with order and discipline (hence the ease with which the entity view prevails) but the discipline is implicit rather than explicit as in a musical score. Moreover, perhaps (to retain the musical analogy) an organization is more akin to music such as jazz, rock or heavy metal where there are greater degrees of interpretation and improvisation. Over time, it has come to assume a related but rather different meaning in which there remains continuity with order and discipline, and where the disciplined setting and playing of notes has parallels with activities that are identified as what is meant by organization. As we have seen, however, this emphasis on discipline and order is implicit rather than explicit in mainstream definitions of organization, and the political nature of the definition is thereby concealed. This does not mean that alternative definitions (e.g. the process view – see Box 1.19) are free of politics. Refusing to follow the convention of defining organizations as formal structures designed to achieve shared goals is a political statement, but one that disrupts rather than conserves commonsense ways of thinking and acting.

The concept view indicates that there is no one universal way to define or study organizations. When we accept or adopt a particular view, we are engaging in a political, reality-defining act. In that moment of decision, we act in a way that construes any object (e.g. organization) in the world as 'this' rather than 'that'. From this it follows that different definitions of 'organization' should not be evaluated according to their claimed correspondence to what they aspire to describe.

We conceive of organization as a potent concept, while commonsense tends to treat it as an entity. Organizations are identified and discussed as if they exist 'out there' in a way that implies that they are virtually identical with the buildings or that social space they occupy. Most textbooks on organizational behaviour perpetuate this common-sense understanding as they favour an entity definition of organizations. We have sought to question this approach.

Box 1.21: Overview – 'Organization' as entity, process and concept

- *The entity view*. Organizations are particular kinds of unified entities. Such features as their design for achieving particular productive goals and the formal roles that define and shape the behaviour of their members differentiate them from one another.
- *The process view*. Organizations comprise processes of organizing but these processes are not confined to organizations. Processes of organizing give rise to the activities, which the entity view aspires to delineate as tasks, roles, structures, etc.
- *The concept view*. Organization is a term used to characterize activities in a way that differentiates them from other forms of human association, such as community or family. It also indicates how we are active agents in organizing whatever it is that the entity or process view defines as organization.

When we examine different definitions of organizations or texts that amplify these definitions, it is tempting, yet ultimately mistaken, to ask the question: 'How realistic is this view?' The difficulty with this question is that it assumes that we have direct access to reality and are able to evaluate definitions in terms of their correspondence with it. On reflection, this seems unlikely. More plausibly, we rely upon a set of interpretations, prejudices and hunches to assess the credibility of different views. These views are relevant in enabling us to elaborate, refine or even abandon our interpretations and thereby (re)direct our actions. Learning from competing views is certainly possible, but it should not be conflated or confused with assessing their correspondence with reality. A diversity of views can open up alternative lines of action and/or provide ways of challenging dominant thinking, but their summation does not produce a more comprehensive grasp or map of the terrain. Attention is more appropriately directed to scrutinizing the values, preferences and *effects* embedded in different conceptions of organization and organizing.

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Distinctiveness of work organization: instrumental rationality

'Bureaucratic work shapes people's consciousness in decisive ways. Among other things, it regularizes people's experience of time and indeed routinizes their lives by engaging them on a daily basis in rational, socially approved, purposive action' (*Jackall, 1998, p.p. 5–6*).

'Community and family are conserving institutions. In general, their members act to maintain stability and to prevent, or at least to slow down, change. But the modern organization is a destabilizer. It must be organized for innovation, and innovation, as the great Austro-American economist Joseph Schumpeter said, is "creative destruction" ' (*Drucker, 1992, p. 96*).

Earlier, when considering the entity view of organizations, we noted how organizations are conventionally and commonsensically associated with the use of an instrumentally rational means to achieve explicit purposes or goals. Such instrumental rationality is reflected in the definitions of organization provided by the entity view, where 'organization' is seen largely in terms of the technical or functional means to achieve 'a common set of goals'.

In discussing instrumental rationality, we have repeatedly drawn upon the entity view of organization – for example, when we talk about organizations (as entities) pursuing objectives or refer to managers in organizations engineering employee loyalty. This is not surprising because we understand the entity view to be closely associated with, or even a product of, instrumental rationality. Organization is conceived as an entity as it is identified as an instrument for attaining objectives as defined by senior managers. In other words, we regard the entity view as a product of the instrumental rationality that it also aspires to advance. Equally, both are seen to reflect commonsense because, as soon as we use the word organization, we tend to associate it with the concrete entity (i.e. the building) in which it is located and the very entity is assumed only to exist to serve some instrumental purpose.

Box 1.22: Instrumental rationality

An instrumentally rational organization or person is concerned primarily, if not exclusively, with the most effective means to achieve specific ends or objectives. The *value* of those objectives is taken for granted and therefore is not open to debate or challenge. One might suggest, for example, that private companies are preoccupied with the best means to increase profits; or that public corporations are concerned with the most efficient means of providing a public service such as health or education. Each is geared to increasing labour productivity and reducing the costs of production.

We have also suggested that organizing is fundamental to human existence but that this activity occurs within different kinds of institutions (e.g. the family or peer groups) and is not confined to organizations. We have differentiated (work) organizations from other institutions by the degree of dependence upon instrumental rationality. While instrumental rationality may be present to some degree in many institutions, it is most dominant and legitimate within (work) organizations. This is why we describe them as organizations, rather than families or communities. We can say, then, that the concept of organization, and the associated notion of organizational behaviour brings with it a particular, instrumentally rational view of *how to organize* – what is expected from us when becoming a member of an organization.

Box 1.23: Legitimacy

Legitimacy is a term used to convey an unquestionable or legal right to something. Once it is legitimate to exercise power over someone, it is difficult to challenge that right, although this does not rule out resistance. Indeed it is only by challenging or resisting the legitimacy of established power relations that social change occurs. People had to resist the legitimate power of slave-owners to abolish slavery, the absolute sovereignty of the monarchy and aristocrats to achieve democracy, and the imperial powers of Western nations to achieve independence for ex-colonies and protectorates.

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Given the pervasiveness of organizations in modern societies and the centrality of instrumental rationality in schools and workplaces, it would be surprising if their influence did not extend to family life and friendship groups who may come to resemble organizations when planning, resourcing and implementing an event or set of tasks. Peer groups often try to organize an event, trip, or perhaps just a party; and then what they do can begin to look like the activities associated with organizations.

Consider the party. Someone proposes a party and usually individuals or groups agree to take on particular tasks such as arranging an appropriate venue, ordering or preparing the food and drink, getting the music sorted, etc. This way of 'making it happen' is routinely conceived or calculated to be the least time-consuming and individually onerous. So, a leisure group can, for limited periods, look not dissimilar to a work organization. You might raise the objection that the peer group does not get paid, or seek to make a profit. These are relevant distinctions but ones that define an *economic* work organization as opposed to an organization per se. What makes holding a party similar to a work organization is reliance upon instrumental rationality that supports the logic of a division and coordination of the labour involved in making it happen.

Box 1.24: Mixing rationalities

The predominance of a means–ends (instrumental) rationality is, we have suggested, what distinguishes the entity view of organization from other human associations such as families, friends or communities where we expect love, loyalty and commitment to prevail. In principle, organizations are those institutions to which a greater influence of calculative, means–ends rationality is attributed. There are, however, continuities and overlaps.

Instrumental reasoning enters other social institutions and arrangements when, for example, someone marries for money, uses friends to advance their career, or engages in community work to enhance their status and reputation. Conversely, managers often try to secure loyalty, cooperation and commitment from employees by emphasizing family and community values of solidarity. But, of course, their motivation is an instrumental one: they calculate, perhaps correctly, that developing a more attentive and friendly attitude towards their staff will improve morale and employee retention. In 2003, the UK government passed family friendly legislation that gave employees with children under six the right to flexible working hours. A popular device for securing both cooperation and commitment is teamworking drawn from team sports. Here an identification and solidarity with the 'in-group' in opposition to the 'out-group' is used as a competitive device for raising productivity. However, where cooperation and collaboration between different groups or teams is important, this competitive ethos may be counter-productive.

Conversely, a family can be seen as an economic work organization when, for instance, some of its members run a small business, such as the corner shop or a small farm. In such cases, there is generally a blending (or uneasy union) of instrumentally rational principles, such as a division of labour with respect to particular tasks (and associated responsibilities), and other, familial values that demand a degree of flexibility and commitment – qualities in a workforce that are more difficult to engender and mobilize in the absence of family and community ties. The significance and impact of instrumental rationality is well illustrated when, for example, a hobby or leisure activity, like playing football, is turned into a job that provides a source of income (see Box 1.25). What previously was pursued casually and in an ad hoc manner then becomes a target of more careful calculation, as time becomes money.

Manchester United is not just a work organization because, unlike many football clubs throughout the world, it has been highly profitable and has an international image and thus is a global brand – something that has been a major attraction to corporate predators wishing to take it over. It is also a work organization because it is identified as such by others (e.g. staff, investors, etc.) who emphasize its likeness (in terms of hierarchical and formalized organizing practices, for example) to other institutions that are characterized as work or business organizations. This identity is further reinforced by players insofar as they regard their activity as work (albeit comparatively pleasurable) in which they participate in the development and promotion of a business and expect a substantial income in exchange for their efforts, skill and time. It is difficult not to be aware of the superficiality of family-like solidarity and loyalty within football when key members of the team (e.g. David Beckham) are 'sold off' to help balance the books. Business values almost always take precedence when push comes to shove – something, that invariably disaffects hard-core fans who are more interested in retaining star players than in making profits for shareholders who have only a financial interest in 'their' club. A similar analysis could be made of the British royal family, which its members privately but revealingly describe as 'The Firm'.

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Box 1.25: Family, community, organization and Manchester United

Concepts such as 'family' or 'community', rather than 'organization', may be emphasized when characterizing a football team. Managers often seek to engender a 'happy family' atmosphere among their teams, despite its obvious superficiality when key players can be 'sold off' to make room for the latest superstar or to 'balance the books'. A family friendly image has also become a major marketing tool of the big clubs, with family stands, etc.

Consider the appalling tragedy at Hillsborough football ground in Sheffield. Due to a combination of barriers, overcrowding on the terraces and police incompetence large numbers of spectators died or were seriously injured because of a sudden surge of fans crushing those in front of them. The outcome of this tragedy was government insistence on seating-only stadiums, an unintended consequence of which was to make football more of a family spectator pastime as the standing-only terraces were swept away.

Fans of Manchester United have appealed to family and community notions when seeking to question or resist multinationals taking over the club. In 2000 the community of fans demonstrated their power when Rupert Murdoch and his media empire tried to takeover the club partly to strengthen its TV rights monopoly over the most attractive football matches. The official fan club mobilized the community of Manchester United fans to persuade the directors not to pursue the offer, and this probably had some effect. Eventually the Competition Policy Committee outlawed the bid on monopolistic grounds, but it is likely that the community protest had some effect on the outcome. It had much less effect, though not for want of trying, when Malcolm Glazier bought the club through enormous borrowing in 2005 and saddled what was previously the most profitable soccer club in the world with huge debts. Amidst considerable anger from the fans and even the wider public, Manchester United became a private company owned solely by Malcolm Glazier, whose interest would seem to be the purely financial one of exploiting the brand to maximum effect. It is expected that he will sell the club on once this further exploitation of the brand is realized.

Game-playing and resistance

In practice, there can be considerable resistance to instrumental rationality in organizations. As we have repeatedly noted, other rationalities are present that are resistant to being supplanted or **colonized** by instrumental rationality. People enter organizations with their own values, their own objectives and their own sense of what is reasonable. In doing so, they may think, or be persuaded, that it is appropriate to forget or suspend their values and priorities once they set foot in the office or factory. But they may also resent and resist demands to be compliant. Or they may become more instrumentally rational – not by directly pursuing corporate objectives but by calculating how to set, protect and fulfil their own agendas, while managing an impression of dedication, loyalty and commitment. Career systems allow some coincidence of personal and corporate agendas as commitment can be demonstrated and rewarded with promotion and/or pay. But because of the complexities of organizations, where outcomes cannot easily be attributed directly to the efforts or skills of a single individual, there can be a lot of game-playing in which individuals claim responsibility for 'successful' outcomes and endeavour to shift the blame for 'unsuccessful' ones.

Box 1.26: Game-playing in higher education

Students and staff engage in various forms of game-playing. Lectures, tutorials/seminars, and self-study or library work are regarded as the instrumentally rational way of enabling large numbers of students to gain degree-level education. This education is meant to involve a creative component that takes students beyond the comparatively programmed and packaged experience of A levels. In practice, many management students (at least) discover that much degree level work is less demanding and less creative than some of their A level courses.

There is often ambivalence about this. On the one hand, it is frustrating and disappointing, with a sense of being cheated or 'conned'. On the other hand, it is a relief and leaves more time for leisure pursuits. What tends to emerge is a conspiracy of silence – a kind of grand game-playing – in which neither students nor staff are inclined to acknowledge this particular 'elephant in the room'. Staff say that some creative input into essays is required but then often penalize students when it appears. To do otherwise, would require considerable time in assessing the merit of eccentric

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approaches that deviate from the model answers often required to standardize the assessment process.

Cutbacks in resources and associated pressures to secure research grant income and generate publications make it unlikely that staff will sacrifice their careers or their leisure time by giving assignments that are demanding to assess. Students realize that regurgitating lectures and textbooks is a less risky way of achieving a good (but perhaps not outstanding) mark. Both students and staff act in an instrumentally rational way to reproduce a system that is ostensibly organized to provide degree level education but which routinely falters in its delivery. At the same time, performance systems for teaching as well as research are introduced, which staff become adept at 'gaming' in order to provide the required evidence of educational quality. In this, students are encouraged to collude by accepting the logic of the calculation that the value of their degree depends in some measure upon the reputation of the department that is being assessed.

Less-privileged (i.e. lower-ranking) staff in organizations generally have fewer opportunities to play games that substantially improve their material (income) or symbolic (social status) wealth. Nonetheless, they may pretend to be committed while remaining psychologically distant from what they are doing. This occurs frequently when they are engaged in mundane routine tasks such as performing data entry, routine office work, or working on the mass assembly line in car production and other manufacturing work. Staff may daydream or spend much of their time chatting except when the supervisor appears, at which time they put their heads down and give the impression of being engaged on the task. Occasionally resistance to the instrumentally rational pursuit of production goals will be more disruptive or subversive. Workers may purposely slow down the machine or **sabotage** the conveyor belt by causing it to break down. In this way, they demonstrate the dependence of managers and shareholders upon their productive efforts. This dependence is even more dramatically demonstrated when there is a strike or 'work to rule' in labour relations. For then there are no products and services from which profits can be extracted.

Theory and practice

An underlying assumption of educational provision, including the delivery of OB modules, is that exposure to academic or 'scientific' knowledge about behaviour in organizations will make workers, and especially managers, more efficient and effective. More specifically, it is anticipated that the expertise, or at least the qualifications (e.g. an MBA), will add legitimacy to the exercise of authority. Either way, there is an expectation that knowledge of human behaviour will result in improved practices.

This view is seductive but also problematic. Its limitations are manifest in the manager who is highly qualified – let us imagine someone who possesses a first degree in business studies followed by an MBA – yet is notoriously bad at organizing and managing people. Such a manager has sat through numerous courses, including OB modules, to gain such qualifications, and has also passed examinations that apparently demonstrate an expert knowledge of the field. So, why doesn't this expertise translate itself into effective ways of managing and organizing people?

We doubt that there is a simple or universal answer to this question. To assume that there is would be to fall into the trap of believing that a medical model is appropriate for 'treating' problems attributed to organizations: all that is required is to diagnose what is wrong, prescribe the medicine and await the recovery. The assumption that organizations can be likened to the human body has attracted many students, and particularly management consultants, who propose a whole range of prescriptions for diverse symptoms of 'organizational ill health'. We have yet to find the organizational equivalent of the aspirin, let alone antibiotics; and we argue that we never will because organizations are not the same as bodies. To put this another way, the theory – including its conception of the relationship between practice and theory – is poorly aligned with the practice.

Nor are organizations like machines. Yet the metaphor has been another influential way of thinking about organizations, with the assumption that knowledge of engineering will yield effective solutions to perceived problems. Indeed, some of the most influential classical, and a number of more recent theorists of organization (e.g. Fayol, Taylor, Crosby and Deming) were engineers by training. Students of organizations have sought to treat them as machines in order to bridge the gap between theory and practice in one 'quick fix'. Our own view is that thinking drawn from the social sciences rather than biology or engineering is more relevant. Ideas of **contextual embeddedness**, for example, can help us to explore possible reasons for the gap between theory and practice.

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On the basis of what we have explored so far, we can sketch a number of reasons for the theory–practice gap, and we invite you to add others:

- Theory presented in textbooks, or underpinning influential practice provides an over-rosy ('idealized' to use a bit of social scientific jargon) view of complex behaviour, leading to simplistic interventions. Textbook knowledge fails to appreciate particular, contextually embedded aspects of the situation and thereby offers seemingly universal but locally inappropriate solutions to problems.
- Students view knowledge of organizations and management instrumentally as a means of gaining qualifications. There is little thought for, or grasp of, its potential relevance for the messy practice of managing and organizing. Knowledge is often viewed inappropriately as a reliable instrument of power and thereby applied mechanically or naively to practice.
- Politics and power operate to frustrate consultants and managers' efforts to reorganize activities by applying theories, even of the most sophisticated variety. Attempts to impose control provoke resistance that is unanticipated because it is assumed that those being managed will share managers' sense of priorities.
- The practice of managing and organizing involves, above all else, interaction with people – colleagues and superiors as well as subordinates. There is little in management textbooks or indeed in education and training that directly addresses this critical issue.

What other possible factors behind the theory–practice divide can you think of?

We have cautioned against using commonsense as a guide to the study of organization (see earlier examples). Yet we have also recognized how it is drawn upon in developing theory and in management practice. Jackie was hardly consulting a textbook when running the pub for the weekend. She just drew on her everyday experience of organizing, and as we have said, this is extensive for us all. If you think about it, every day of our lives consists of a great deal of organizing. Some, of course, we have learned consciously at school or elsewhere. Knowing this, the managers of the pub could assume that Jackie would be able to add up the takings at the end of the day and communicate with the other bar staff. Yet, as we saw, in the case of Christine, not all such tasks are simple. What Jackie did not appreciate or anticipate was how Christine would interpret and react to the landlord's decision, and how this would result in an embarrassing and threatening display of defiance. What Jackie lacked was a theory of organizational behaviour that would have sensitized her to this possibility and thereby enabled her to think through how she might deal with such an eventuality. Yet even had she studied OB, there is no guarantee that in the heat of the moment she would have been able coolly to apply its insights rather than just react spontaneously as she did.

CENGAGE brain

In general, the curriculum and teaching of OB has given priority to ideas that are conservative and broadly pro-managerial. OB has been superficially pro-managerial in the sense of presuming that managers *alone* have a monopoly of knowledge of, and an almost divine right to determine, how work should be organized. As a consequence, the orthodox treatment of OB has taken the form of a technology of control, with each of its topics (e.g. motivation, leadership) being presented as an element of a control toolkit. Ideas and perspectives that do not fit neatly into this toolkit are either ignored or accommodated as just one more dimension to consider. Efficiency, performance and/or profit are seen to inform everything that occurs in organizations, whereas social and moral responsibility are either seen as outside the sphere of OB or simply tagged on as an afterthought. Even where ethical issues are included, and this has become more relevant in recent time because of various corporate scandals, the focus is on compliance with regulations to avoid bad publicity or financial sanctions against the organization. In short, the concern with business ethics (see Chapter 14) is simply another instrumental means to the end of preserving the status quo.

Our text attempts to be different primarily by presenting and contrasting alternative conceptions – orthodox or mainstream and critical – of OB. In each of the following chapters, an account of the subject matter found in mainstream texts familiarizes the reader with what is conventionally studied

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in this field. The orthdox approach is not presented here as an end in itself, however. Instead – as we have shown in relation to the 'entity' concept of organization – orthodox thinking is treated as a foil for introducing critical or unorthodox thinking on OB. To do this, we rely upon an approach with which all the contributors have been closely associated for several years.

Box 1.27: Orthodox and critical wings of organizational behaviour

What do we mean by 'orthodoxy'? The term orthodox is used to describe what most people *currently* recognize as a legitimate way of doing or thinking about things – it is conventional and conservative, or a continuation of the way things have always or traditionally been done. The orthodox view regards managing as a technical activity and organization as a neutral instrument for achieving shared goals.

What do we mean by 'critical'? The term 'critical' is used to signal an interest in interrogating and challenging received wisdom – both theory and practice – by drawing upon social science perspectives that are routinely ignored or excluded from OB. Critical refers to approaches that challenge the orthodoxy in some way. The critical view regards organization as a political instrument for achieving contested goals.

Of course, if widely accepted, a critical approach may become the orthodoxy. Examples that spring to mind include the challenge to religion made by science, the challenge to monarchy posed by republicanism, the discrediting of imperialism generated by anti-colonialists, and the challenge to anti-apartheid in South Africa represented by the (after the fact) heroic figure of Nelson Mandela.

Each chapter of this book addresses a core topic of OB. In each chapter both mainstream and critical contributions to knowledge of this topic are presented and explored through one or more of the six central concepts – identity, (in)security, freedom, power, inequality and knowledge – around which the more critical content of this book is organized (see the Appendix for a definition of these concepts).

Throughout the book, we endeavour to make the subject matter more relevant and accessible by viewing organizational behaviour first and foremost as practices of organizing and meaning-making, involving thinking, feeling and acting, that are not so dissimilar to everyday life. An important implication of this approach is that it acknowledges, rather than denies, the politically and emotionally messy human detail of organizations. This approach, as we explained earlier, makes it easier to learn about organizations as work relations and management activities are understood to be less remote from everyday life.

More specifically, we seek to appreciate and emphasize the continuities between the experiences of students and employees. Both are engaged in, and shaped by, a world in which organizations are as central as they are familiar. We also endeavour to capitalize upon the closeness of this understanding with the view that we all learn best when we can identify and participate in the 'object' of our learning. This may sometimes demand a leap of imagination and a refusal to compartmentalize our everyday lives (e.g. going to clubs, pubs, bars or parties) from what we are studying. Of course we are not suggesting that the social world of the student is equivalent, let alone identical, to that of a manager or administrator. As we have emphasized earlier, we do not deny the distinctiveness of organizations in which the working lives of employees are routinely conditioned by the demands and trappings of instrumental rationality. But, at the same time, we reject the reduction of the messy complexities of organizing to the abstracted and idealized ways of representing this complexity in the mainstream, orthodox OB literature.

In turn, this approach leads us to recognize and stress that (i) instrumental rationality is neither politically and morally neutral nor free of specific values for it cultivates a particular, **impersonal and disembodied** way of living; and (ii) it is introduced and applied by economically and politically interested managers and employees who are also gendered, sexually charged, ethnically located, emotionally involved, and more or less passionate human beings. These interests, emotions and identities after all comprise some of the most fundamental of our experiences, whether at work or not (Knights and Willmott, 1999). Put at its simplest, we challenge the very idea that the organization is separate from life outside it and vice versa. To explore this connection, contributors to this text have been guided by a framework of six interrelated concepts.

Six key concepts

The central concepts that provide the framework for all the chapters are outlined here, together with the principal and secondary disciplines that are ordinarily associated with them (see Table 1.3).

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Table 1.3 Key concepts and disciplines

Concepts	Principal discipline	Secondary discipline
Insecurity	Psychology	Economics
Identity	Social psychology	Sociology
Inequality	Economics	Sociology
Power	Sociology and politics	
Knowledge	All disciplines	
Freedom	Philosophy, politics and economics	

We deployed these six concepts earlier in this chapter but now seek to define them a little more closely in relation to Jackie's experiences in the pub. If you return to the vignette, you will recall that when first standing at the bar Jackie had felt uncomfortable and perhaps a little *insecure*, as all the students had already left the pub to go to the disco. Our assumption is that uncertainties and associated insecurities are a widespread feature of working in organizations. They may range from a general feeling of uneasiness to more fundamental questioning of its purpose, accompanied by unvoiced doubts such as 'is this all there is?'

Box 1.28: Insecurity

Insecurity arises when people are unable to interpret a situation in a way that confirms their own sense of themselves – for example, as a 'bright student' or as a 'caring person'. Social situations are especially difficult in this respect since we can never be fully sure of, let alone control, how others view us. Yet, it is through our sense of how others view us that we develop and evaluate self-identity. 'Knowing' someone reduces the stress or tension of this uncertainty in social encounters. However, this uncertainty cannot be entirely eliminated as people are continually changing as a result of new circumstances, experiences and relationships.

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When the local lads who sat at her table started criticizing students, Jackie felt her *identity* was under attack. Perceiving her identity as a student, she did not like the lads undermining it. People routinely attribute an identity to us, in past as a way of dealing with their own uncertainties and insecurities. We also, often subconsciously, take on identities and only realize the extent of our identifications when they are challenged. Much of the time we are unconsciously striving to reproduce an habitual sense of identity (or identities – student, brother/sister, son/daughter, man/woman, etc.) that we have largely taken for granted.

As we all know, attacks on our identity can be almost as bad as being physically assaulted. As an example, in 2002 the Republic of Ireland and Manchester United soccer captain, Roy Keane, became a household name less for his footballing brilliance than for his violence (both physical and verbal) in what can only be seen as an attempt to assert and/or defend his identity against the Irish manager of the 2002 World Cup squad. Zidane's head butt in the 2006 World Cup final provides a further example.

Box 1.29: Identity

Identity refers to how people are identified or classified – as a man, brother, student, fighter, etc. Our sense of self-worth or significance is related to our social identity. But an identity is not only an image presented by oneself or attributed to us by others. It is also associated with expectations and obligations about how to behave. When how we behave is consistent with what others expect there will tend to be coherence between our sense of self-identity and the social identity ascribed to us.

Returning to Jackie, when she was on her own in the pub, she felt *power*-less to intervene to defend her own identity. She had a sense of being subjected to the *power* of the locals and thereby unable to do much about their ridiculing students. More generally, her very sense of identity as a student was

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an effect of the power that produced this identification. We frequently think of power as a possession – the lads had it, Jackie lacked it – but it is perhaps more illuminating to conceive of power as shaping who we are and what we do. Thinking of power in this way enables us to consider the extent to which both the lads and Jackie were objects and agents of power (e.g. the power that defined Jackie as a student) – the power that placed them in a particular way in relation to each other.

Box 1.30: Power

Power has traditionally been associated with the coercive and repressive means through which respectively a class of capitalists exploits proletarian labour (Marx), political elites control the masses (Pareto) or management cadres dominate subordinate employees (Burnham). Such concepts of power see it as a wholly negative control of one group or person over another. More recently, an alternative has rejected this negative or purely coercive conception of power. Instead, allowing that there are no social relations that are 'free' of power, it is seen not just as constraining in its effects but also productive and positive (Foucault, 1980, 1982). An individual or group can exercise power positively by transforming individuals into subjects who find meaning, purpose and identity in the practices that it demands or expects. The effect of power then can be to make those over whom it is exercised more creative, productive and powerful, which, of course, does not imply that they always and everywhere accept or defer to the ostensibly powerful. Sometimes subjects will exercise their own power to resist what is demanded or expected of them.

Why did Jackie feel powerless to resist the negative stereotypes or stigmas of students that the local lads were constructing? Largely it was because of being outnumbered and this *inequality* making her feel insecure in a way not dissimilar to when she had stood alone at the bar. This situation of inequality would have been reversed had she come to the pub earlier when the students outnumbered the locals. However, were we to examine the future prospects of the students compared to those locals who had not attended university, we would probably conclude that many of them suffered more from inequality – in terms of housing, employment opportunities, life expectancy, pension provision, etc. – than the students.

Box 1.31: Inequality

Inequality describes differences in wealth and status, such as the inequalities of income and privilege between managers and employees and between men and women, or those suffered by ethnic minorities. These inequalities may be seen as institutionalised insofar as they are embedded in, and reproduced by, working relations (e.g. hierarchy and job segregation by gender or ethnicity) and employment practices (e.g. recruitment and promotion). They are also reproduced by other social formations such as markets, where inequalities of wealth are reinforced because money, makes money, or the family, where inheritance guarantees intergenerational inequality.

Indeed, it is this *knowledge* of how inequality works that might explain the perhaps semi-conscious purge for the locals to verbally abuse the students. Arguably, the locals were feeling swamped by students who had begun to 'take over' a pub that they regarded as 'theirs'. This antagonism was, in all likelihood, prompted and fuelled by an implicit awareness and resentment of how students can trade on their knowledge to secure privileged jobs and a superior social status in life.

Box 1.32: Knowledge

Knowledge is sometimes referred to as power ('power is knowledge'), and this is probably because invariably, when exercising power, knowledge is drawn upon. Knowledge – both everyday knowledge and more specialist knowledge – leads us to interpret and produce the world in particular historically and culturally specific ways. Just think of how disempowered we feel when, as we move out of our sphere of knowledge, we do not *know* the language or *know* the culture. It is not coincidence that a majority of football managers are ex-footballers as they can draw

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upon their knowledge of playing as well as of more recently acquired management skills.

Knowledge and power are so intimately related that Foucault (1980) insisted on speaking about power/knowledge relations. However, it is not just that knowledge is a resource for the exercise of power. Knowledge is also often an effect of, or produced by, the exercise of power. So, for example, the very exercise of power over a football team will generate knowledge of how to exercise that power, and this is why nothing is seen to entirely substitute for experience. Acquiring knowledge through education is something that you are doing as students, and you may be doing it largely not for its own sake but as a means to getting a 'good' job.

Perhaps the reason why the local lads were antagonistic to the students was because they also resent the *freedom* that students appear to enjoy. Students do not have to get up at a certain time every day for work, enjoy long holidays, experience few controls, etc. The locals overhear them recounting exciting experiences overseas in the summer vacation and they always seem to be partying.

Box 1.33: Freedom

Freedom has often been defined as autonomy or an absence of constraints on the individual. However, while we all may seek fewer constraints on our choices and behaviour, a moment's reflection would suggest that an absence of all constraints would be chaotic or anarchic. We have to use our freedom (and power) responsibly so that it at least does not directly violate other people's freedom. We can see here that our very concept of freedom is based on a (humanistic) constraint of being respectful to the 'other'. With the development of the environmental movement, this respect is extended from the world of human beings to that of nature. Human freedom or autonomy then, as Foucault (1982) reminds us, is both liberating and disciplining.

We use this conceptual framework to interpret the key elements of, and present an alternative to the orthodox or mainstream treatment of OB topics. In addition to providing some insights into behaviour in organizations, these six concepts can also readily be related to your own experiences, thereby making the study of OB more meaningful and memorable.

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Box 1.34: Mainstream, orthodox texts

Mainstream texts tend to present a (exhaustive) body of knowledge that aspiring managers are invited to absorb in a way that is abstracted from their everyday experience. In the absence of any overall and explicit sense-making framework, it is difficult to grasp the relevance of the knowledge and to incorporate it into what is done in organizations. In contrast, by exploring a web of concepts, students are able to draw and build upon their own experience of organizations. Then, the relevance and value of the orthodox body of knowledge can be scrutinized and selectively drawn upon.

We are not of course suggesting that the combination of these concepts is all that matters. Clearly you could think of lots of other concepts (e.g. emotion, rationality) that would help us to understand behaviour in organizations, including Jackie's experiences and actions. However, when speaking about Jackie's emotions or rationality, it would be difficult to ignore one or more of the six concepts. Her emotions revolve around insecurity and identity, and her rationality is dependent on (because it is exercised through) her freedom, knowledge and power. Jackie also deploys both rationality and emotion in securing knowledge and maintaining her position within a system of social inequality through succeeding in education, and through her social skills and capacity to present a favourable impression to the landlord and landlady, thereby gaining a job as a barmaid.

Each concept in our framework is intuitively relevant for understanding people in organizations. For example, we are all routinely ascribed an *identity* – as students, employees, customers, suppliers, etc. – that will have some influence upon how we present (and manage) ourselves. We may invest in more than one identity, and sometimes these may conflict. At this point, you may usefully return to the case study of the pub to list the different identities that relate to Jackie and consider whether there

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are conflicts between them. Take the issue of gender and sexual preference. These are important identity issues for most people. Misconceptions and misunderstandings in these areas can cause considerable offence, embarrassment and pain when they are not a source of amusement and pleasure. When others (e.g. customers) identified Jackie as a barmaid, she was seen differently. The sexist stereotype of this role might help to explain the numerous sexual advances that she experienced, some of which she found flattering or amusing, but most of which she experienced as awkward or demeaning. Again, you might wish to reflect upon the possible explanations of such mixed reactions.

As employees, we may comply with certain expectations but we may also seek to challenge and change them. In dealing with others, including those who hope to persuade or coerce us to perform organizational tasks, we mobilize everyday *knowledge* of others as well as of ourselves. In doing so, we exercise both *power* and *freedom*. In this process, we encounter relations of *inequality* as we discover that others have more money/income or status than ourselves. This, combined with the difficulties of fulfilling or wanting to challenge other people's expectations, can make us feel insecure – as was Jackie when, as a student, she felt personally subjected to a character assassination of students by the locals. This was so despite the oblique nature of their assault.

This way of thinking about behaviour in organizations rarely surfaces in mainstream, orthodox OB texts. Why not? It is because, on the whole, orthodox texts are preoccupied with conveying an exhaustive and comprehensive list of theories and topics so that their authors cannot be criticized as failing to cover all the literature.

They are less concerned with showing how behaviour in organizations can be illuminated and made meaningful to students by approaching its topics through a linked set of concepts or a conceptual framework. Such a framework provides a basic analytical *aide-mémoire* that has wide applicability for interpreting, and participating in the dynamics of OB. Of course, we hope that you find it helpful when studying OB. But we hope even more that you will continue to find it useful when you have completed your studies and are facing the challenges of working with people in organizations.

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Notes

1 In addition, those who bought shares in privatized industries at knock-down prices made substantial capital gains, provided that they sold their investments before the privatization bubble was burst by scandal and subsequent regulations.

2 We have direct experience of contract cleaners rarely doing more than emptying the waste bins in universities, but in hospitals cleanliness is more than a mere aesthetic.

3 When the high valuation given to internet and new technology stocks was dramatically cut.

4 These are the kinds of criteria used to justify the shortlisting of candidates. Thereafter, other less readily auditable and quantifiable criteria come into play, such as assessments of their character and ability to lead, or the knock-on effects of appointing particular or disappointing individuals.

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