

Martin Dimitrov: Scott –Institutions and Organizations, chapters 1-4 (1995)

Introduction: This is a textbook treatment of institutions and organizations that aims to be comprehensive, and thus at times it is hard to make out where Scott situates himself in the debate. Lots of info, not much in terms of argument.

Summary of main points

Ch. 1: Review of earlier work in economics, political science, sociology; in general, earlier work doesn't pay enough attention to organizations. Classical economics praised, since its proponents emphasize indeterminacy, endogenous preferences, behavioral realism (vs. "simplifying assumptions"), and diachronic analysis (vs. synchronic analysis).

Ch. 2: Review of early work in org theory –the great names and their contributions:

--Selznick –empirical studies of diverse organizations (TVA); by taking on a distinctive set of values the organization acquires a character, a structure, and an identity

--Parsons –examines relation between an organization and its environment; distinction among technical, managerial, and institutional aspects of organizations

--March/Simon –performance programs

--DiMaggio/Powell –coercive, mimetic, and normative mechanisms for diffusion of instrumental effects through organizations

Ch.3: Contemporary Institutional Theory

p.33: "Institutions consist of cognitive, normative, and regulative structures and activities that provide stability and meaning to social behavior. Institutions are transported by various carriers –cultures, structures, and routines, and they operate at multiple levels of jurisdiction". Along with the charts on p. 35 and p. 52 this could summarize all four chapters.

Three pillars of institutions

- a) regulative pillar –institutional constraints and regulative behavior
- b) normative pillar –values (ends), norms (how things should be done), roles (conceptions of appropriate action)
- c) cognitive pillar –social construction of reality; to understand an action you need to take into account not only the objective conditions but the actor's subjective interpretation of them; importance of constitutive rule (Searle) –the creation of categories and construction of typifications; social construction of actors and interests

Key points:

--rational action is always grounded in social context that specifies appropriate means to particular ends –choice structured by socially mediated values and normative frameworks

--difference between instrumental logic (regulative role –what are my interests in this situation?) and logic of appropriateness (normative conceptions of institutions –given my role in this situation, what is expected of me? –people do what they are told to do – importance of standard operating procedures, roles, routines, beliefs)

--importance of mimetic processes which lead to organizational isomorphism –wider belief systems and cultural frames are imposed on or adopted by individual actors and organizations

--organizations are deeply embedded in institutional questions

--multiple levels of analysis (and supposedly multiple predictions generated by them, though Scott eschews this): world system, societal, organizational field, organizational population, organization, organizational subsystem

Ch.4 Explaining Institutions: Empirical Research

--Distinction between variance and process theories: variance theories focus on abstract independent and dependent variables without reference to time ordering in an attempt to establish causal relations (why did it happen?), while process theories concentrate on time ordering and try to answer the question "how did it happen?" (path dependence, lock-in)

--In general, research has been unable to provide a compelling explanation of the mechanisms of institutional maintenance and diffusion; it has only identified types of institutions that persist, but hasn't shown why and how they persist

Problem: Sociological institutionalism is not a theory of international (or of domestic for that matter) politics; it relies mainly on case studies that provide interesting description but fail to generate cause and effect explanations or a set of testable hypotheses.