

THIRD EDITION

**ORGANIZATIONAL
REALITY
REPORTS
FROM THE
FIRING
LINE**

**PETER J. FROST
VANCE F. MITCHELL
WALTER R. NORD**

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PETER J. FROST

University of British Columbia

VANCE F. MITCHELL

University of British Columbia

WALTER R. NORD

Washington University

To Nola, Fran, and Ann

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PREFACE

The enthusiasm with which the previous editions of this book have been greeted by colleagues, students, and practicing managers far exceeded our initial expectations. The contrast between organizational life as presented in academic texts and the "reality" that emerges from the essentially non-academic literature from which so many of our selections are drawn has provided a rich and flexible basis for teaching. The regularity with which students read well beyond assigned material and draw on their additional reading for class discussions attests to their reception of the book. Practitioners have also responded enthusiastically; managers frequently tell us that many of the readings describe "their" organization.

Nearly 60 percent of the selections in this edition are new. Although a number of favorites (yours and ours) remain, the third edition is substantially different from the first. In a number of instances, the selections we dropped were dated and have been replaced by more contemporary material. Other substitutions seemed to us more representative of the organizational reality we seek to present. As in the second edition, we have included a number of news clippings to augment and to illustrate some of the larger selections. While these clippings are listed in the Table of Contents to make them easier to locate, they are not always commented on in the Introduction to the sections in which they appear.

The stimulation and enjoyment we have experienced from discovering and selecting the contents are as great as before. In some ways the task is more difficult because of the increasing attention that "real life" in organizations has received in the mainstream literature in our field and the popular management literature more generally. There is simply more to read and to choose from today than there was ten years ago when we compiled the first edition. On the other hand, the task is less difficult because this increased interest makes it easier to find good selections on topics that had been previously ignored. For example, when we did the first edition, it was very difficult to find selections relevant to secretaries. While secretaries are still given less attention in the organization literature than their numbers, power, and dilemmas warrant, there is considerably more written on them today than a decade ago.

Finally, the book is a product of the efforts of many people. Once again, our contributions have been distributed equally throughout the book, and the ordering of names on the title page is simply a carry-over of the random selection procedures followed in preparing the first edition. Of course, no book is solely attributable to those whose names appear on the title page, and this book is no exception. Thea Vakil did a great deal to make this revi-

sion possible by identifying and obtaining the numerous and often obscure permissions to reprint that were required. We also thank Merle Ace, David Cawood, Diana Cawood, Jill Graham, Bob Berra, Howard Blaustein, Linda Krefting, Kerstin Sonnerup, Elizabeth Doherty, Linda McDougal, and David McPhillips for material they sent our way that, in one form or another, found its way into this edition. We owe a debt of gratitude to the many university and professional students in our courses whose reaction to the first and second editions guided this revision and served as a prod to our endeavor. We also thank the many astute and articulate students of organization whose reports comprise this book.

Jim Sitlington and John Nolan, our editors, have been a continuing source of support and encouragement. Finally, our deep thanks to Ginny Guerrant, Project Editor, and Guy Huff, Permissions Coordinator, who shepherded this book through with grace, good humor, and skill.

Peter J. Frost

Vance F. Mitchell

Walter R. Nord

INTRODUCTION

The introduction to the first edition of *Organizational Reality* began with the following four paragraphs.

"Suppose that you are a visitor to Earth from the distant planet Utopia. One of your assignments is to bring back printed materials to Utopian scholars who are attempting to understand what Earthlings call formal organizations. You have limited space so you must choose very carefully. One option you have is to bring back one or two of the leading textbooks on organizational behavior. Another option you have is to bring back selections from newspapers, business and general periodicals, and short stories and plays about life in organizations. Which would you choose to bring back?

"The picture that the Utopian scholars will develop from each of these sets of materials will most likely be very different. If you were to choose the textbooks, the scholars would most likely come to understand organizations as systems which are managed in a rational manner in pursuit of certain stated goals. They would be more than likely to conclude that organizations are staffed by people who are committed to achieve these objectives. Also, it is probable that the scholars would come to believe members of organizations are oriented towards cooperation and are sincerely concerned with each other's well being. Depending on the particular textbook you brought back, however, the scholars might conclude that organizations do not in fact operate in these ways, but that through the application of a certain set of procedures, techniques, philosophies, and so on, any organization which is not operating both rationally and cooperatively could be made to do so.

"By contrast, if you happened to take this book or some other collection of materials from periodicals, newspapers and other sources which have been less completely filtered by the academic mind, the picture of organizations the scholars derived would be quite different. They would be likely to decide that organizations are anything but rational, cooperative systems. They would conclude that members at all levels of the organization frequently pursue their own interests at the expense of others in the organization as well as at the expense of the achievement of the goals of a total organization. The scholars would see that organizations are frequently quite inhumane systems. Individuals experience intense stress from task demands as well as intense and often bitter conflict and rivalry with members of their own work group and with members of other work groups and organizations. One would also find that organizational participants often respond aggressively against these pressures and against whatever

threatens their own interests. Furthermore, it is unlikely that the scholars would conclude that there is any discernible set of principles, techniques, and philosophies which seems capable of turning most organizations into rational, cooperative systems. It is more likely that they would discover that various strategies of power, manipulation, human relations and 'all out war' are used, all having varying degrees of success in giving different organizational participants different degrees of influence in organizations.

"Most students in organizational behavior, introductory business and even management policy courses are exposed only to the first set of sources. In this book, we plan to provide a ready collection of the second set. We do not offer this collection as evidence that the normative views presented in most academic textbooks are totally irrelevant. In fact, we believe that the normative views are very relevant. However, it is ineffective to present them to students without complementary information about how organizations are experienced. Students readily discover that organizations as described in the textbooks are not the same as organizations they actually experience. Consequently, students and managers reject the 'whole package' of organizational behavior as 'soft,' theoretical or irrelevant without examining the potentially relevant materials. Many students take their courses in management and organizational behavior because they are required, but turn to accounting, finance, economics, information systems, and even marketing when they seek to discover what organizations really are. Other students accept the text material while in school, but never find ways to translate it into action when they become managers."

These ideas provide a suitable introduction for this edition as well, since there appear to have been few changes either in the nature of organizations or in the description of organizations by academics. While a few anthologies similar to *Organizational Reality* have been published and more traditional anthologies on organizational behavior have begun to include a very few selections from non-traditional academic sources, for the most part textbooks in organizational behavior still fail to provide adequate descriptions of organizations as they are experienced by people. There have, however, been some changes in the general management literature. There are more systematic efforts to see the world from nonmanagerial perspectives. Still, these efforts are at most attachments to conventional treatments rather than integral parts of them.

Although the major thrust of this book remains the same, there are several reasons for publishing a revision at this time. First, many aspects of organizations are closely tied to current events; any book that attempts to deal with organizations as they are experienced will become dated very quickly. The dating does not seem to be due to the fact that old problems have disappeared but rather to either the appearance of new problems or the fact that old problems get discussed in somewhat different terms. The second, and most important, reason for this revision is that we continue to discover exciting new and insightful material. Moreover, we have become aware of several topics and a few excellent pieces that we wish we had included in the first two editions. Third, we feel that a bit more attention to some of the positive aspects of the reality of organizational life is useful for

stimulating a fuller discussion of the issues. While these positive aspects are well represented in conventional texts, they often appear in abstract form. By including some of these ideas in a form that parallels the rest of the material in the book—i.e., more “in the words of the participants themselves”—we hope greater appreciation for the complexity of life in organizations can be derived from this edition. In short, our goal of providing a collection of materials that will introduce students to organizations as they are experienced has not changed. We do feel, however, that the updated edition provides a more stimulating, comprehensive collection for today's students.

Even though our basic purpose and approach remain the same, reactions of colleagues, students, and other readers to the first edition have influenced our current positions in several ways. First, the number and intensity of the positive reactions we have received have strengthened our belief in the value of the perspective portrayed in this book. While we were not surprised by the favorable reactions of students, we have been particularly impressed by the fact that many of the most positive reactions have come from experienced managers, who have reported seeing their organizations in a different and more informed way. In fact we are even more confident in what we are doing than we were before. Recently, one of our friends—a Jungian therapist—said, “What you have done is to portray the ‘shadow side’ of organizations.” In Jungian terms the shadow is the part of one's personality that is so threatening that it is held out of normal awareness. This comment and our growing affinity for the work of scholars such as Ian Mitroff have given us “better words” to describe what we were attempting to do initially. With these “better words” came more self-awareness and feelings of legitimacy that have given us increased confidence in our approach. We are exploring the shadow side of organizations, and there is good reason to believe that such exploration is necessary to understand the whole.

Second, we are still cognizant of the somewhat arbitrary nature of our organization of the materials under the section headings we employ. This point was made quite well in Dr. Todd Jick's review of the first edition in the *Administrative Science Quarterly*, March 1979. He observed that many of the presentations in the book are really holistic by themselves. Consequently, they

“ . . . do not subdivide into neat conceptual categories as textbooks and myopic journal articles would imply. Thus, it becomes an ill-fated effort to impose groupings among relatively holistic presentations.” (p. 159)

Jick's criticism is a sound one. Many of the selections are rich; almost every one deals with at least several important issues. While we admit there is a certain arbitrariness in our grouping of the materials, we remain convinced that our message can be best communicated to students if the readings are organized in a framework that helps them to contrast these ideas with the ones they study in traditional textbooks and journals. The difficulty in organizing these materials that capture “holistic” experiences under either conventional headings or unconventional ones indicates how

complex life in organizations is in comparison with our ability to talk about it.

One further change has taken place—in us. Our view of organizations is quite different from the one that resulted from our academic training. While we still feel that traditional academic approaches are worthwhile, we now see them merely as one set of perspectives on the reality of the social processes we call organizations that needs to be complemented by other perspectives.

We do not propose that this collection captures the “true” essence of organizations. We do suggest, however, that current management and organizational textbooks do not capture this essence either. Moreover, it may seem that the current collection provides a very distorted, biased picture of organizations. Undoubtedly there is some bias; we did not use a random selection procedure to determine which articles would be included. However, we did not systematically seek out muckrakers. We were amazed at how many articles we could find that make points very similar to almost all the ones we have included. Therefore, we remain convinced that the contents of the book give an accurate picture of many aspects of what people perceive to be the reality of organizations. Still, our own tastes and values are embodied in our selections in ways that we are unable to make fully explicit even to ourselves.

We ask the reader to pay careful attention to the sources of the articles included in this collection. Many of the selections come from what are normally considered mainstream business publications such as *Fortune*, the *Harvard Business Review*, and *The Wall Street Journal*. Other selections come from fictional works, academic texts and journals, publications of organized labor, and several best-selling books. Still, a number of selections were written by critics of organizations and individuals who are discontent with many elements of modern life. We believe these selections, taken together, provide a useful picture of a number of aspects of modern organizations.

Of course, the reader must ultimately determine how realistic the picture is. Unlike the interplanetary scholars, most readers of this book will have a number of alternative sources of information about organizations as they exist on the earth. In addition to academic textbooks, they will have access to personal experiences and to the reactions of others who, willingly or not, have the quality of their lives thoroughly affected by modern organizations.

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1

STAFFING

Strip away the social properties and you are left with a primitive, ritualized confrontation, one which involves the mutual manipulation of firmly held self-interests.

—Landau and Bailey

During every working day, an intense struggle goes on in organizational settings. The focus of this struggle is the staffing decision—who gets into, moves in, and moves out of the organization. On one side is the organizational representative, typically a manager or administrator; on the other side is the individual, the job applicant or the candidate for promotion, transfer, or firing. The manager has at his or her disposal a wide range of tools, techniques, tactics, and devices, many of which have been revised and refined by behavioral scientists, and an insider's view of what the organization wants and intends from the staffing decision. These weapons provide the basis for the manager to probe and pry, to try to penetrate the protective armor of the individual on the other side of the decision equation. The weapons serve also to provide managers, if they wish, with protective cover so that they do not have to reveal a position unless by choice. A manager's tools include physical and psychological tests; tactics take the form of the panel interview, the business lunch, the appraisal interview, and the deep-end treatment. Devices managers use are the private secretary, as a buffer against intrusion, and the classification schemes themselves, which by defining people, jobs, roles, positions, and so forth, symbolize and shape what is within the organization's perspective and what is excluded.

The individual who wishes to gain entry to the organization, be promoted, move within, resign, or contest removal from the organization likewise has tools, techniques, tactics, and devices at his or her disposal. However, this protagonist in the struggle is not well served by behavioral scientists in any systematic sense. The applicants or contenders must make it on their own, drawing on personal resources, experience, a good deal of intuition, political savvy, and a smattering of survival or "how to" manuals written in the popular press. The objective for these individuals is to assess what the organization has to offer or has in store for them, while at the same time putting their best foot forward and protecting their self-esteem and self-interest.

We chose the articles in this section to display this battle and to point up and to dramatize certain features of the encounter. Taken as a whole, the articles provide an interesting spectrum of staffing issues. Getting past the receptionist to see the person who makes staffing decisions is a skill which Geoffrey Lalonde suggests requires firmness, a smile, and a certain amount of subterfuge. He recognizes the political nature of the struggle and identifies the role the receptionist plays in the process. In "What Every Woman Should Know," Landau and Bailey also recognize the politics of the staffing process. They identify several strategies imbedded in the selection interview at middle and senior levels of organizations and suggest ways to recognize and deal with these strategies. They note that the selection interview contains some traps to which women as job applicants are especially vulnerable.

Employers usually have quite definite ideas concerning just what type of new employee they wish to acquire. The selection "Building a Team" describes how the individuals charged with the design of a new computer reached their decision concerning just what type of employee they wished to hire. The recruiting practices that were followed, the interview tactics that were used to probe an applicant's motivation, and the reasons successful applicants responded to the challenge inherent in the job for which they were being considered are very typical of those practiced in the burgeoning high-tech industries.

Once hired, failure to accurately assess the situation with which the new employee is confronted can damage the individual, as Sally Quinn found to her cost in her brief career with CBS in "We're Going to Make You a Star." In this case the struggle took on Kafkaesque proportions as neither side appeared to know which reality they were inhabiting. The emotional, psychological, and physical costs to individuals and, at times, the financial and effectiveness costs to organizations seem high when the staffing decision is either too loose or too programmed and depersonalized.

The final selection in this section, "The Tricky Task of Picking an Heir Apparent" acquaints us with the variety of techniques that are used by giant corporations in picking a new chief executive. It is interesting to note that the processes by which the selection decision is made at this level are far more varied than those employed for lower level managerial positions. Indeed, the personalities of the present incumbent and members of the board seem to be the primary determinants of how and whom will be selected. The imperfections of this selection process are underscored by the number of instances in which newly selected chief executives are "tried in the balance and found wanting."