

This Week's Citation Classic

Katz D & Kahn R L. *The social psychology of organizations.*

New York: Wiley, 1966. 489 p.

[Dept. Psychol. and Survey Research Center, Univ. Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI]

A description of theoretical models of organizations and of research results bearing on processes of organizational functioning and change is presented. [The *Social Sciences Citation Index*[®] (*SSCI*[™]) indicates that this book has been cited over 960 times since 1966.]

Daniel Katz

Department of Psychology

University of Michigan

Ann Arbor, MI 48104

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"The Social Psychology of Organizations was written as a theoretical treatise for students in the social studies and health sciences interested in an analysis of the phenomena of organized groups. Though most of our lives are spent within the confines of organizations, most psychological treatments emphasize an individual psychology and few social psychological approaches go beyond the family or the small informal group. On the other hand, the conventional accounts of sociologists or economists tend to leave out people in their explanations of social structure. Between the micro approach of the psychologist and the macro account of the sociologist there is a need for a bridge to interrelate the concepts of the two levels. Our book was an attempt to apply such a bridge through the framework of open system theory. Open system theory had proved useful at the biological level and its major conceptualizations of input, throughput, and output, of negative entropy, of system boundaries and interdependence with the environment, seemed capable of application to complex social phenomena.

"Specifically, open system theory suggested two important lines of attack. One

derived from the notion of systems and suggested that the problems of organizations could be viewed as a function of the type of structuring in which they occurred. For example, a peaceful outcome to differences between labor and management in a company marginal to the industry might be due to this marginal position in which neither could afford a costly strike. The second line of attack is the search for social dynamics in the interdependence of organization and environment as the organization relies upon energetic and informational input from its surround and processes this input to achieve a product which the larger society needs. Organizations are not self-contained, though they seek to control their environs and extend their boundaries.

"Organizations which have received the most study are industrial in nature and our book utilized investigations in this field to illustrate how open system theory could be tied to research. Previously, organizational and industrial psychology had been linked with the scientific management of Taylor¹ or the classic bureaucracy of Weber,² which accepted the existing structures as givens and did not deal adequately with problems of restructuring or social change. Open system theory, with its emphasis upon openness to new inputs, therefore, had an advantage. Students in areas other than business administration and industrial psychology, such as educational organization, social work, hospital administration, and public administration, were quick to utilize the approach of open system theory. Its usefulness to so many types of social scientists has justified a revision to take account of development in the field over the past 12 years—a revision which appeared in the late spring of 1978."³

1. Taylor F W. *Principles of scientific management.* New York: Harper, 1923. 144 p.

2. Weber M. *Theory of social and economic organization.* New York: Free Press, 1947. 436 p.

3. Katz D. *The social psychology of organizations.* New York: Wiley, 1978. 838 p.