

**Benson J K.** The interorganizational network as a political economy.  
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[Department of Sociology, University of Missouri, Columbia, MO]

A theory of interorganizational relationships stressing the fundamental importance of the struggle for resources (especially money and authority) is proposed. Interaction between organizations, including both coordination and conflict, grows out of their positions within a political economy channeling the flow of money and authority. [The *SSCI*® indicates that this paper has been cited in over 185 publications.]

## Digging for the Roots of Interorganizational Interactions

J. Kenneth Benson  
Department of Sociology  
and Rural Sociology  
University of Missouri  
Columbia, MO 65211

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The paper grew out of a field study of an interorganizational network dealing with welfare and manpower services. It was clear in our data that one could explain work coordination between agencies as a result of the agreement of their personnel on domains (i.e., a division of labor between them) and on ideologies (i.e., conceptions of the tasks to be addressed and techniques for addressing them). Yet, it seemed important to explain the sources of variation in the key explanatory variables—domain consensus and ideological consensus. Based on interviews with high-ranking decision makers in our agencies, I theorized that the relationships between agencies were governed by the pursuit and defense of resources within multiorganizational political economies. So, for example, domain consensus grows out of the struggle for money and authority. Agency

administrators resist coordinating their work with other organizations that invade their domains and challenge their claims to a supply of money and authority. In this way I linked two levels of analysis—one concerned with interactions and sentiments of personnel at the level of service delivery and the other with the interests of organizations in political economies. I tried to establish the interorganizational network as a unit of analysis encompassing these two interrelated levels.

This paper, along with similar arguments advanced by others (e.g., Aldrich, Pfeffer) at about the same time, pushed interorganizational studies toward explanations grounded in political-economic structure and resource dependence relations. The structural positions of organizations in multiorganizational political economies became the focus of much succeeding work. A part of the continuing interest in the present paper is that, while it contributed to a school of thought stressing the structural position of organizations, it also suggested actionist strategies that organizations might adopt to capitalize upon their positions, to change their positions, or even to alter the structure of the political economy.

Subsequent developments moved in several directions. Some refined the measurement of predictor variables for outcomes such as work coordination. Many pursued the practical implications of network studies for the solution of practical problems ranging from community development to the nonhierarchical integration of public policy implementation of nation states.<sup>1</sup> The theoretical focus on political economies opened the possibility to link interorganizational analysis to several other lines of inquiry including population ecology,<sup>2</sup> urban social structure,<sup>3</sup> public policy arenas,<sup>4</sup> economic structure,<sup>5</sup> and theories of the state.<sup>6</sup> A current agenda for interorganizational analysis is to work out the theoretical linkages between these diverse lines of inquiry.

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3. Galaskiewicz J. Interorganizational relations. *Annu. Rev. Sociol.* 11:281-304, 1985. (Cited 10 times.)
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5. Mintz B & Schwartz M. Interlocking directorates and interest group formation. *Amer. Sociol. Rev.* 46:851-69, 1981. (Cited 25 times.)
6. Benson J K. A framework for policy analysis. (Rogers D L, Whetten D A & Associates, eds.) *Interorganizational coordination: theory, research, and implementation*. Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1982. p. 137-76. (Cited 5 times.)