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DILL W R. Environment as an influence on managerial autonomy. *Admin. Sci. Quart.* 2:409-43, 1958.

[Graduate School of Industrial Administration, Carnegie Institute of Technology, Pittsburgh, PA]

In the heyday of promulgating general theories, applicable to any kind of organization, my thesis was counterpoised as an inquiry into how environmental conditions made organizations look and operate differently. It emphasized the importance of setting and showed how systematic study of variations in environment could explain differences in managerial power relationships and decision making. It showed how such studies could be done a decade before most students of organizations agreed they were important. [The SSC1® indicates that this paper has been cited in over 225 publications since 1966.]

Why Such Differences in Management?

William R. Dill
Office of the President
Babson College
Wellesley, MA 02157-0901

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The research started as a boondoggle. After my master's degree, I wanted to spend a year overseas and outside the classroom. To earn a Fulbright grant to Norway, I proposed a field study of factors influencing the degree of centralization in the management of industrial firms. After three months of interviews in a dozen firms, I had learned the hard way that "degree of centralization" was a mushy concept and that there were no good schema around for categorizing the environmental influences that made managements organize and operate so differently.

Bemused chief executives let me spend the rest of the year doing intensive data gathering by interview, observation, and survey in two firms that seemed to be polar opposites in one dimension of centralization: the degree of autonomy the president granted key subordinates for making decisions. And I accepted an invitation back to Carnegie to enter their new PhD program on the promise that, even though I was gathering my data before my final course work and exams, I could try to make my Nor-

wegian studies into a dissertation. The rest of the year involved overkill in the collection of data because I knew that after getting back to the US and working through a more formal conceptual framework, there would be no second round of data gathering.

I returned to Carnegie at a time when Herbert Simon was heading two projects that gave inspiration and support. The first was a similar set of systematic field observations of managerial decision making, which had several of us worrying about how to move inductively from data like those I had gathered to useful concepts and theory. The second, with Shaw and Newell, was a RAND study of the SAGE early warning defense system, in which for other purposes they had found it useful to talk of "task environments."

The literature about "task environments" in experimental social psychology and sociology was thin, and the 1950s were peak years for organization theorists to promote generalities about administrative theory, as if differences in mission and setting for enterprises did not matter. It was easy to try something original in trying to describe the two firms' environments systematically, because no one else had tried and few people seemed to care. When I began to report the work outside, only James D. Thompson, an accomplished and innovative comparative sociologist, showed much interest.

The article was discovered and cited heavily 5-15 years later when scholars finally admitted that administrative truths had to be qualified by organizational circumstance. The article did not provide an abiding and testable theory. It did, as a precursor of current approaches, deal with environment as a pattern of information flows. It was intended—and still looks respectable—as a careful comparative case analysis, as a source of some induced hypotheses, and as a fervent argument for the importance of designing and measuring managements in relation to the settings in which they operate.

A good measure of how the article has had impact is given by Stanley H. Udy in his analysis of organizations.¹ A couple of recent papers that cite this article deal with principles such as "task environments"² and executive and environmental characteristics of companies.³

1. Udy S H. The comparative analysis of organizations. (March J G, ed.) *The handbook of organizations*. Chicago, IL: Rand-McNally, 1965. p. 678-709. (Cited 25 times since 1966.)
2. d'Ambroise G & Muldowney M. Management theory for small business: attempts and requirements. *Acad. Manage. Rev.* 13:226-40, 1988.
3. Daft R L, Sornusuen J & Parks D. Chief executive scanning, environmental characteristics, and company performance: an empirical study. *Strateg. Manage. J.* 9:123-39, 1988.

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