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THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO HUMAN SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

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Considering the complexities of human services as a class of organizations, what theoretical approaches are best suited for their study? Morgan (1997) suggests that theories on organizations arise from the images or metaphors we have about them. Yet these metaphors produce a limited and partial picture of the organization. As a result, the theories themselves, although claiming to be encompassing, only provide a partial—if not biased—understanding of the organization. Such images portray the organization in various ways, ranging from a rational instrument designed to achieve specific goals, to a carrier of cultural meanings and rules, to a system determined by powerful political pressures.

Our intention is not to review all the theoretical perspectives on organizations (for such a review, see Clegg, Hardy, Lawrence, & Nord, 2006; Scott & Davis, 2007). Rather, we examine major theories with a focus on those that have been particularly salient in the analysis of human services. First, such

theories should have an empirical base. Second, they should account for the specific attributes that set human services apart from other organizations. These attributes stem from the fact that human services work on people to transform them (see Chapter 1). As a result, these organizations (a) engage in moral work, upholding and reinforcing moral values about "desirable" human behavior and the "good" society; (b) are embedded in a broader institutional environment from which they derive their legitimacy, their license to work on people, and their service technologies; (c) must contend with interest groups, both internal and external to the organization, which would like to achieve their goals through control of the organization; (d) rely on client-staff relations to achieve service outcomes, relations that involve the deliberate use of emotions by both workers and clients; (e) are gendered organizations (i.e., the majority of their frontline workers are

women, a practice that is sustained by an ideology that views the care of people as "women's work"); and, related, (f) reflect organizational ideologies of domination or emancipation. Although no one theory is likely to produce a full picture of human service organizations, this review suggests that some do a better job than others.

THE RATIONAL-LEGAL MODEL

The classical image of the organization is that of a goal-oriented, purposefully designed machine. Morgan (1997, pp. 22–23) reminds us that the origin of the word *organization* is derived from the Greek *organon*, which means a tool or an instrument. In this theoretical perspective, it is assumed that organizations have a clear and specific set of goals and that the internal structure and processes represent a rational design to attain them. The design is *rational* because the internal division of labor, the definitions of role positions, and the distribution of authority are highly formalized and hierarchical and can be shown to be the most effective and efficient means to achieve the organization's aims. The design is *legal* because the assignments to positions, the distribution of authority, and the rights and duties of each position are based on impersonal rules that are applied universally. Both Taylor's *scientific management* and Weber's model of the *rational-legal bureaucracy* exemplify such a design. Rationality can be maintained because the organization is viewed as insulated from a complex environment or as functioning in a highly stable environment, its goals are explicit, and the behavior of its staff is fully determined by their formal role prescriptions.

There are many examples in the human services where attempts are made to put such a model of organizations into practice. Sandfort (this volume) identifies the program designs for welfare-to-work and for early-childhood education. In both examples, the program design consists of an explicit sequence of interconnected activities aimed to produce the desired outcomes. Both follow a logical model consisting of inputs, process, outputs, outcomes, and impact (Kettner, Moroney, & Martin, 2008).

In the case of welfare-to-work, as noted by Sandfort (this volume) and others (e.g., DeParle, 2004; Handler & Hasenfeld, 2007), although many elements of the design were put into effect and could be shown to produce some of the desired outputs, several limitations of the rational design became quite apparent. External political pressures forced the implementers to contract out the case management, making the delivery of services cumbersome and burdensome. Periodic legislative changes and reduced funding resulted in ambiguities about rules and procedures. Vagueness and disagreements about the goals of the program—emphasis on education versus placement in jobs—resulted in inconsistent operating policies. Uncertainties about the availability of services forced case managers to make ad hoc decisions. Difficulties with uncooperative recipients gave rise to informal procedures for handling them not consonant with the manual. And despite an extensive system of monitoring, the validity and reliability of the information was highly affected by how the case managers and the recipients perceived the situation.

Despite its historical standing as a metaphor for organization, the empirical evidence suggests that the rational-legal model does not provide an accurate description of how organizations really function (for a review, see Scott & Davis, 2007). Furthermore, the model fails to take into account many of the key attributes of human service organizations. For example, the moral basis of organizational choices, such as what counts as a desirable outcome and how to measure effectiveness (as well as the power struggles that underlie these choices), is hidden behind a

veneer of technical rationality. Because it assumes a closed system, the multiple and changing influences of the environment are not addressed. In addition, the issue of power as a key variable in explaining the structure, processes, and services of human service organizations is undertheorized in the model. For example, it is assumed that goal attainment would be measured through feedback loops from workers and clients—a naive belief when one considers the significant power that line staff exercise over clients and their ability to use discretion to control such feedback (Brodkin, 1997). The model leaves little room for exploring how the power differentials between clients and staff line workers affect the quality of client-worker relations and ultimately determine service effectiveness. It also fails to account for the influences of indeterminate technology; amorphous and conflicting goals; informal relations both among staff and between staff and clients; and constraints on accountability and authority. Finally, critics have argued that the rational model justifies the concentration of power in large organizations and a hierarchical authority structure (Creed & Miles, 1996), which, as noted by feminist scholars, implicitly legitimizes gender inequalities and male domination (Acker, 1990).

The Human Relations Approach

One theory accounting for relations among management, frontline staff, and clients is the *human relations school*. It emphasizes that the job requirements and the conditions of work have profound psychological consequences on staff, especially in terms of their ability to fulfill their own needs (ranging from physical to self-actualization). These, in turn, influence their attitudes toward their work and their coworkers and ultimately affect how they perform their jobs (Porter, Lawler, & Hackman, 1975). The underlying assumption is that organizational effectiveness is a function of the complementarity and congruency between the goals of the organization and the personal needs of the workers (Argyris, 1962).

There is an accompanying assumption in the human relations school that states that the nature and quality of the organization's leaders is an important determinant of the performance and job satisfaction of their subordinates (see Schmid on leadership, this volume). Glisson (1989) showed that the power, maturity, and intelligence of the leader influence workers' commitment to the organization. In general, it is assumed that leadership that promotes a democratic atmosphere in the organization will improve workers' productivity.

The human relations approach is particularly important in the human services because it is assumed that the attitudes of the staff to their work situation and their coworkers will have direct consequences on how they relate to their own clients. Trust, positive values, and caring emotions are assumed to be determined by how workers feel about their work, how their self-actualization needs are being met, and how the organization facilitates and supports their work.

Perhaps because client-worker relations are central to human service effectiveness, much research from the human relations perspective has been done in the human services. Some research on human service workers finds that role conflict and lack of support from colleagues and supervisors are the main determinants of burnout (Maslach & Schaufeli, 1993). Workers who experience burnout become detached and withdrawn from their clients; postpone client contacts; and assume cynical, negative, and inflexible attitudes toward them. Participatory management, often recast in the human services as the empowerment of workers, has been shown to contribute to organizational effectiveness (Whiddon & Martin, 1989).

Guterman and Bargal (1996) found that there is a relationship between the sense of empowerment social workers feel and their perceptions of service outcomes. Keller and Dansereau (1995) argue that empowering leadership aligns subordinates in accordance with the preferences of supervisors. Glisson (1989) showed that the more workers perceive their leaders to have power and maturity, the greater their commitment to the organization. The research on burnout does seem to support the notion that job satisfaction is associated with jobs that provide autonomy, participation, challenge, promotional opportunities, and financial rewards (see Jayaratne & Chess, 1983; Pines & Aronson, 1988).

The linkage between the well-being of the staff and of the clients is an important contribution of the human relations approach. As noted in the previous chapter, the core work of human service organizations occurs through client-worker relations, and undoubtedly, the quality of these relations is influenced by the morale and job satisfaction of the workers. There is also good evidence to suggest that job satisfaction is influenced by the nature of the task and by an organizational culture that is constructive (i.e., promotes positive proactive behavior and encourages interactions among the workers that meet higher satisfaction needs; see, e.g., Glisson & James, 2002; Whiddon & Martin, 1989). Indeed, applied to caseworkers in child welfare and juvenile justice, an organizational intervention known as Availability, Responsibility, and Continuity (ARC), which relies on human relations strategies such as team building, participatory decision making, conflict resolution, feedback system, and job redesign, has been shown to reduce staff turnover, role conflict, overload, emotional exhaustion, and depersonalization (Glisson, Dukes, & Green, 2006).

Nonetheless, the human relations approach suffers from some fundamental limitations, mostly because its level of analysis is social-psychological. The organization is still viewed as a closed system, and the political, economic, and institutional dimensions of the macro-environment are ignored. Consideration of the impact of the environment on structure and processes is relegated mainly to the recognition that leaders and workers bring into the organization their own personal dispositions and predilections. Furthermore, although the model places importance on worker-client relations, it is silent on the moral choices that underlie the service delivery system and the specification of desirable outcomes.

Most problematic is the potentially misplaced emphasis on the psychological needs of the workers and on democratic participation as determinants of organizational effectiveness. These factors may pale in the face of strong environmental factors such as political and economic constraints. It is hard to imagine, for example, that democratic participation is going to significantly alter those features of the welfare department that workers find especially alienating, such as extensive paperwork, inability to respond to the many dire needs of the applicants, pressure to reduce error rates, low wages, and poor working conditions. Nor is it always possible, given the nature of the technology of the organization, to create job conditions that provide for autonomy, creativity, and promotional opportunities. Indeed, the ARC intervention failed to change organizational culture that reflects more enduring structural features of the organization (Glisson et al., 2006). Similarly, studies of home care workers indicate how the inherent attributes of the work itself—low skill, part-time, isolated—coupled with poor wages and benefits create low morale and high turnover. Moreover, demonstration projects to improve the conditions of home care work through job enrichment and training and supervision, although having beneficial results, ultimately failed to alter the organization of home care work because of

the basic economic and political forces controlling the home care industry (Feldman, 1990). Ironically, the democratic ideology reflected in the human relations approach could act as a tool of domination by shifting attention from broader conditions of inequality in the organization to interpersonal relations.

Contingency Theory

Shifting the focus from a social-psychological emphasis to a structural perspective while addressing the limitations of the rational-legal model, researchers have formulated a *contingency theory* of organizations (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Thompson, 1967). Viewing the organization as an open system, the impact of the environment and the technology on the structure of the organization is recognized. The fundamental assumption is that the effectiveness of the organization is a function of the congruency between its internal structure and the exigencies presented by the environment and technology. That is, there is no one universal effective design—as the rational-legal theory or human relations approach would have it—and an effective design must respond to the contingencies presented by these two external conditions. Donaldson (1987), for example, shows that organizations that achieve a fit between a particular contingency and an aspect of their structure (e.g., strategy and structure) outperform organizations that lack such a fit.

The environment, consisting mostly of other organizations, varies in terms of both its stability and its heterogeneity. A stable and homogeneous environment requires limited unit differentiation and standardized rules, whereas a turbulent and heterogeneous environment requires high unit differentiation and decentralized decision making (Thompson, 1967, pp. 72–73). There is some limited empirical evidence from the human services to suggest that

this proposition is at least plausible (e.g., Aldrich, 1979; Leifer & Huber, 1977).

Similarly, the effectiveness of the organization's technical system hinges on the design of work units that respond to the technological contingencies. Technologies differ by their task difficulty and variability. These dimensions generate four types of technologies: (1) routine, (2) craft, (3) engineering, and (4) nonroutine (Perrow, 1967). Each technology has different requirements in terms of workers' discretion, power, coordination, and interdependence. The appropriate organizational structure for each of these technologies, respectively, is (1) formal and centralized, (2) decentralized, (3) flexible and centralized, and (4) flexible and polycentered. The empirical evidence from the human services gives some limited credence to this idea (for a review, see Scott, 1990).

Recent developments in contingency theory relevant to the human services stress the multiplicity of contingencies the organization needs to address as it designs its structure (for a review, see McGrath, 2006). These include the embeddedness of the organization in many networks (see Provan and Milward, this volume), the internal interdependencies among units within the organization, and the capacity of the organization to shift its location in the environment (e.g., leaving a resource-poor neighborhood or opening a satellite in an emerging neighborhood). Moreover, there is greater recognition that there is no one best way to accomplish the organization's service mission.

The difficulty with contingency theory is its static and mechanistic orientation. The association between the environment, technology, and structure is quite dynamic and is mediated by many factors, not the least of which are the macrolevel changes in institutional logics and the shifting political and economic interests of groups (including clients) within and without the organization. As noted below, changes in the institutional logics that legitimate human services

influence what models of services lose or gain in acceptability. Shifting interests and the power of various interest groups also influence how services will be structured. Moreover, in the case of human service technologies, we have emphasized how they represent enactments of practice ideologies. Thus, it is quite possible that internal power relations and negotiations (i.e., structure) within the organization actually determine the nature of the technology. Finally, for the most part, the empirical research on the relationship between technology and structure has failed to provide a convincing verification of the theory (Glisson, 1992; Schoonhoven, 1981).

Negotiated Order

An alternative to the contingency theory is to view the organization as a dynamic system in which the nature of the work is evolving and changing and in which the structures that emerge to handle the work are a temporal reflection of the *negotiated order* among different actors (e.g., staff and clients) who participate in the work (Strauss, Fargerhaugh, Suczek, & Wiener, 1985). Because much of the theoretical model was developed through research on hospitals, it has particular import to the understanding of human services in general. The work that the organization has to do on its clients is a fundamental building block for understanding its evolving structural characteristics. The work, as we have seen, is multifaceted; in the hospital, for example, it includes machine work, safety work, body work, information work, and comfort work, to name a few. Although such work has objective attributes (Strauss et al., 1985), for example, measuring body fluids and administering medication, it is also socially constructed (e.g., who gets priority, how to interpret the client's reactions). Moreover, such work requires the

coordinated participation of various workers who have different levels of training and competence and different values and interests. Also, as work is being done, it affects the service trajectory and hence the nature of subsequent work.

"Negotiation enters into how work is defined, as well as how to do it, how much of it to do, who is to do it, how to evaluate it, how and when to reassess it and so on" (Strauss et al., 1985, p. 267). These negotiations are influenced not only by the requirements of the tasks and the skills to carry them out but also by the interests, power, ideologies, and social and professional affiliations of the workers and their clients. That is, these negotiations are embedded in the broader social worlds of these actors. These social worlds "include occupational worlds (medicine, physics), ethnic worlds, leisure worlds (ski, tennis), industrial worlds (chemical, oil), and so on" (Strauss et al., 1985, p. 287). It is in this sense that the organization is seen as an open system. How the work is done represents the key processes of the organization, and the emerging yet evolving negotiated order represents its structure.

Although the theory adopts an open-systems perspective, its primary focus is on microlevel processes, as the emphasis is on negotiations among individual actors. In an attempt to bring macrolevel factors into the analysis of negotiated order, recent research has examined the influence of organizational structure on the form that negotiations will take. Svensson (1996) shows how changes in the health care context opened negotiating spaces for nurses in hospital wards. These included the increasing reliance on nurses to manage chronic diseases, the use of team nursing, and doctor-nurse conferences. These new opportunities for exerting power then influenced the patterns of doctor-nurse interactions by giving nurses greater influence. Conversely, Allen (1997) highlights the role of structural constraints on face-to-face, interdisciplinary negotiations in the negotiated

order of a hospital. These constraints influenced doctor-nurse relations and modified the division of labor between nursing and medicine. These studies underscore the importance of structures in enforcing patterns of interactions, which greatly limit the content and nature of negotiations.

There is much to be commended by this model of human service organizations, especially because it was developed in such a context. In this approach, the clients are prominently included as significant actors. The emphasis on the influence of work on people and its socially constructed dimensions is also a significant contribution. The idea that the division of labor reflects processes of negotiations among workers with different skills, ideologies, and occupational affiliations is equally important. Nonetheless, concepts such as *social world* and *negotiated order* remain quite vague and undifferentiated, and despite the contributions of recent scholars, the role of the institutional and political environment could be further developed.

POLITICAL-ECONOMY

The *political-economy* perspective (Wamsley & Zald, 1976) recognizes that for the organization to survive and produce its services, it must garner two fundamental types of resources: (1) legitimacy and power (i.e., political) and (2) production resources (i.e., economic). We have indicated that legitimacy is indispensable to the survival of the organization, and power is the means by which authority and influence are distributed in the organization. Production resources (e.g., money, clients, personnel) are essential for establishing and operating the organization's service delivery system and for setting the organization's incentive system.

The political-economy perspective highlights the importance of the environment, especially the *task environment*, in shaping the organization's service delivery system. The task environment refers to other organizations and interest groups (including clients) who have a potential stake in the organization either because they control important resources needed by it or because it can advance their own interests. A key feature of the theory is the notion of *resource dependence* (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). It proposes that the more the organization depends on resources controlled by an external element, the greater the influence of that element on the organization. Therefore, many organizational practices, such as the service delivery system, will reflect the constraints and contingencies imposed by those who control needed resources (Cress & Snow, 1996). For example, insofar as hospitals depend on Medicare payments, they must accept the constraints imposed on them by the prospective payment system (e.g., Diagnostic Related Groups). This has a significant effect on the delivery of medical services, such as the reduction in the length of stay for the elderly.

Moreover, because it is imperative for the organization to ensure a stable flow of external resources while preserving its autonomy as much as possible, it engages in a variety of strategies—ranging from competition to co-optation—to manage its external environment (Benson, 1975). These strategies, in turn, will influence the service delivery system of the organization. For example, it is quite common for social service agencies to obtain governmental contracts to deliver services such as child protection, drug counseling, and mental health case management. To secure these contracts, the agencies may undertake several strategies, including (a) "creaming" clients, which can demonstrate positive outcomes; (b) using unpaid or low-paid staff to save on costs; and (c) including influential persons on their board of directors (Kramer & Grossman, 1987). Most important, the handling of the clients themselves is part of the organizational

strategy to manage its external relations (Hasenfeld, 1972). The organization may be concerned that it attracts too few clients and embark on a major public relations campaign, or it may find that it attracts "inappropriate" clients and engage in a form of "dumping" (Kramer & Grossman, 1987, pp. 49–50). Thus, as argued by Pfeffer and Salancik (1978), "the underlying premise of the external perspective on organizations is that organizational activities and outcomes are accounted for by the context in which the organization is embedded" (p. 39).

Power and economic relations within the organization determine how the service technology is implemented and how decision-making authority is distributed among organizational units. The relative power and control over resources that any organizational unit or group possesses is, by and large, a function of its importance in managing the organization's external environment. For example, in their research on universities, Salancik and Pfeffer (1974) found that the best predictors of departmental power were, first, its ability to obtain external funding, followed by the number of graduate students, and then its national ranking. Some groups wield power because they possess personal attributes, control internal resources (e.g., information and expertise), or carry out important functions (e.g., manage the budget) that are not easily substituted (Lachman, 1989). The emerging power relations shape the internal structure and the resource allocation rules. These, in turn, reinforce the power relations (e.g., Astley & Sachdeva, 1984; Pfeffer, 1992).

The political-economy perspective makes a major contribution to our understanding of how the service delivery systems of human service organizations are influenced by both external and internal political and economic forces. Given the high dependence of human service organizations on their external environment, the model is especially cogent in explaining how adaptive strategies to cope with such dependence have major impact on organizational structure and processes. The model also recognizes clients as a significant resource and as a potential interest group and can make predictions about how the organization will respond to its clients on the basis of the power and resources they possess (Hasenfeld, 1987).

Nonetheless, the political-economy perspective tends to understate the importance of moral values and ideologies that transcend calculations of power and money in shaping organizational behavior. This is especially problematic in the case of human service organizations in which values and ideologies play a key role. It should also be mentioned that political and economic imperatives themselves can be thought of as institutionally derived (Friedland & Alford, 1991), a perspective that is overlooked by the political-economy framework.

INSTITUTIONAL THEORY

While the political-economy model tends to overlook the role of societal and organizational values and norms, the *institutional* school makes them the driving force of its theory. It proposes that the structure of certain classes of organizations, such as human services, is determined not by technology but by *rules* emanating from the *institutional* environment. Meyer and Rowan (1977) put it this way:

> Many of the positions, policies, programs and procedures of modern organizations are enforced by public opinion, by the views of important constituencies, by knowledge legitimated through the educational system, by social prestige, by the laws, and by the definitions of negligence and prudence used by the courts. (p. 343)

Key sources of institutionalized rules in modern society are the state, the professions, and public opinion, but they also emanate

from the network of organizations that constitute an "industry" such as the mental health industry (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). In such an industry, there is hierarchy and dominance, and organizations emulate the practices of the authoritative and powerful organizations in the industry. Moreover, as Zucker (1988) points out, organizations are also an important source of institutionalization when they successfully create new practices or structures. In the human services, this is often manifested in *moral entrepreneurship*.

Institutional theorists assume that because organizations want to survive, they are forced to uphold these institutional rules because they are the sources of legitimacy and the avenues to obtain resources. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) suggest three processes by which this is accomplished: (1) *coercive*, through state and legal forces such as the accreditation of hospitals; (2) *imitative* or *mimetic*, following the example of successful organizations, such as the adoption of the curricula of effective schools; and (3) *normative*, the transmission of professional norms, such as the use of *DSM-IV* by mental health organizations. These processes result in institutional isomorphism. Meyer, Scott, Strang, and Creighton (1988) present data on the increased bureaucratization, formalization, and standardization of the U.S. public school systems, which they attribute not to the centralization of funding but rather to societal forces such as the professionalization of teaching, the pursuit of educational equality as a national norm, and the rise of national standards for the proper credentials of teachers and classroom curricula. Thus, institutional isomorphism leads to considerable structural similarity and homogeneity among the organizations in the same industry.

Meyer and Rowan (1977) argue that when institutional rules are embedded in the structure of the organization, the latter becomes decoupled from the actual work or service technology. In the case of schools, for example, the formation of curriculum requirements and the certification of teachers are only loosely related to what teachers actually do in their classrooms. Similarly, when mental health professionals use the *DSM-IV* diagnostic labels, these seldom predict the actual therapy therapists will use (Kirk & Kutchins, 1992). The structure, then, serves as a buffer between the technology and the environment. This is especially important for organizations in which technologies are indeterminate and the results are uncertain.

In this respect, institutional organizations engage in *myths* and *ceremonies* (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). The rules are rationalized myths because they are based on unproven belief systems such as professional ideologies, yet they are viewed as rational means to achieve desired social ends. The ceremonies are periodic affirmations of these myths through symbolic actions, such as certification, accreditation, graduation, and the like.

The institutional school also brings into the analysis the concept of an industry, sector, or field, which Scott and Meyer (1983) define as "all organizations within society supplying a given type of product or service together with their associated organization set: suppliers, financiers, regulators and the like" (p. 129). This is an exceedingly important concept because it draws our attention away from the individual organization to how a network of organizations—having responsibility for the delivery of a service such as public education, mental health, or child welfare—is organized. Because the relations within a human service sector are determined by rules and regulations rather than by market exchanges, they are highly institutionalized. These rules will influence how decision rights within a sector about goals, means, and funding are allocated among the constituent parts. Thus, sectors will vary in their degree of decentralization, fragmentation, and federalization. Sectors will also vary by how the activities of their

constituent organizations are controlled. Thus, the institutional approach argues that the structure of individual organizations cannot be understood without reference to the structure of the sector in which they are located. For example, Hasenfeld and Powell (2004) found that nonprofit organizations that contracted to provide welfare-to-work services experienced a high degree of isomorphism, in part because of the centrality and authority of the Welfare Department in the sector.

The institutional perspective adds considerable depth to our understanding of human service organizations. As indicated earlier, because they engage in moral work, human service organizations are the quintessential embodiment of institutional organizations. Yet, as Mohr (1998) notes, the higher-order systems of meanings that constitute the institutional environment have largely evaded direct measurement and, hence, analysis. Rather, the lower-order phenomena of institutionalization—for example, homogeneity or convergence of institutional fields—are measured, whereas cultural structures are simply inferred. Also, as DiMaggio (1988) points out, the theory is quite mysterious about the process of institutionalization that is at the heart of the theory. He argues that "institutionalization as a *process* is profoundly political and reflects the relative power of organized interests and actors who mobilize around them" (p. 13). Moreover, as suggested earlier, organizations themselves are a major source of institutional rules, and they actively shape the institutional environment. Finally, the institutional approach deemphasizes the importance of the work to be done and the effects of the institutionalized ways of doing it on the organization of work. Put differently, the distinction between the institutional and technological environments is quite blurred. As noted earlier, technological developments influence institutional rules and vice versa. Thus, even

in the human services—in which technologies tend to be indeterminate—there are, nonetheless, socially sanctioned ways of delivering the services that are embedded in the structure of the organization.

The *institutional-logics* perspective, which has emerged as part of the development of institutional theory, attempts to address some of these limitations. For one, it provides a conceptual framework for direct analysis of the cultural content of the key institutions of society and identifies the moral choices they reflect. Friedland and Alford (1991) propose that the values that are embedded in institutions are dually constituted as symbolic systems and material social relations through which action is experienced as meaningful. These sets of symbolic constructions and material practices represent institutional logics that make sense of the particular social world in which they are relevant. Institutional logics define means and ends and thus constrain individual and organizational behavior.

Guetzkow (2006) applies this perspective to the study of policy formulation. He notes that solutions to a given social problem (and the material practices the solutions suggest) are crafted in response to the perceived cause of the problem, and he demonstrates how political elites morally construct target populations to create a bridge that links causes to solutions. For example, when problems are located in the individual rather than in the environment, solutions often focus on behavior change, and target client groups are constructed as willfully making immoral choices. These frames constitute logics that are institutionalized when they are embedded in social policies.

At the organizational level, Mohr and Guerra-Pearson (in press) employ an institutional-logics framework to demonstrate how the work human service organizations do on people reflects and enacts the moral construction of target populations. In turn, these moral categories give meaning

to organizational practices. Studying a sample of Progressive Era, antipoverty organizations, they show how the combination of categories of people served, the kinds of problems addressed, and the types of things the agencies did to alleviate those problems combined to constitute logics that morally constructed target client groups.

The institutional-logics perspective also accounts for the political processes of (de)institutionalization by providing a link between the macrostructural perspective of institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977) and micro-processes that involve situated forms of organizing. The theory argues that the institutional work of advancing new institutional logics or dismantling existing ones is enabled by the existence of multiple institutions that are structured by inherently contradictory logics (e.g., the market economy and the welfare state). Organizations commonly operate within the context of multiple institutions: Health care organizations, for example, are positioned at the intersection of the state, the market, and the professions. Organizational-level entrepreneurs can exploit institutional contradictions in this heterogeneous and contested environment to further their interests. They do so by arranging and re-arranging the discursive building blocks of institutional life to create new meanings (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Hardy & Maguire, 2008). Zilber (2002) recounts how a rape crisis center was initially founded to reflect a feminist institutional logic, which assumes that rape is a result of inequality and the repression of women and that the response must be through education and social mobilization. Reflecting this logic, support to victims was provided by "sister volunteers" who tried to empower the victims to regain control, and the internal structure was highly egalitarian. Nonetheless, as the center acquired the status of a nonprofit organization and gained more recognition, an alternative logic, that of professional treatment,

began to compete with the original feminist logic and succeeded in replacing it, such that professional therapists gained more power in the organization.

The ability of institutional entrepreneurs to create new logics depends, first, on the range of cultural schema available in the environment. As the range of cultural schema expands, opportunities to build new logics increase. For example, during the 1980s and 1990s, the federal government aggressively marketed welfare reform demonstration projects to the states. In response, some states experimented with new practices such as time limits and work requirements (Haskins, 2006). These new schemes were then appropriated by political elites and integrated in the landmark legislation Temporary Assistance to Needy Families. In turn, the legislation restructured the institutional environment of human service organizations involved in the provision of welfare benefits.

Second, the ability of institutional entrepreneurs to advance new logics hinges on their capacity to convince others of their views of society—an endeavor that is inherently political. Because institutional logics create identities and provide the justification for the movement and control of resources, the institutionalization of new logics or the dismantling of prevailing ones will be actively resisted by entrenched interests. Thus, the institutional work required for institutional change entails the mobilization of power, especially for institutional entrepreneurs who initially lack cognitive legitimacy. Institutional work can involve strategies such as political advocacy and the education of actors in the skills and knowledge necessary to support new logics (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006).

Finally, the institutional-logics model challenges the early institutional view that institutional rules and technological imperatives are discrete organizational elements. It calls into question the notion of an essentialist technical

core, viewing the technology itself as constituent of institutional logics in the environment. Because the institutional environment is a heterogeneous arena of ongoing political struggle, "technical" elements can always be contested and displaced when new repertoires of possibilities are introduced.

POPULATION-ECOLOGY

The shift in the level of analysis from a single to a collection of organizations is completed in the *population-ecology* theory. Here, the emphasis is on a *population* of organizations, defined as all organizations that have a *unitary character,* which means that (a) they share a common dependence on the material and social environment, (b) they have a similar structure, and (c) their structure and other characteristics are quite stable over time (Hannan & Freeman, 1989). An example might be all the child care or all the mental health agencies in a given community. The metaphor is that of the biological evolution of species in which the processes of variation, selection, and retention define the attributes of the population. The theory is concerned with three fundamental issues—that is, the rates, in a given population, of organizational (1) founding, (2) disbanding, and (3) change. These are important issues in understanding the evolution of human services. In areas such as mental health or child welfare, we tend to witness cyclical patterns of rapid expansion followed by periods of contraction. Within these cycles, we observe the rise of new organizational forms, such as the community mental health center, followed by a period of stagnation or inertia. Population-ecology attempts to account for these patterns.

Singh and Lumsden (1990) state the basic principle of the theory as follows: "Once founded, organizations are subject to strong inertial pressures, and alterations in organizational populations are largely due to demographic processes of organizational founding (births) and dissolution (deaths)" (p. 162). The observed cyclical pattern of organizational founding is explained by two processes: (1) density dependence and (2) population dynamics. An initial increase in the number of organizations signals legitimization for their activities and form, thus attracting more founding. But as the number of organizations continues to increase, competition for resources sets in, leading to a decline in founding (Hannan & Freeman, 1989). Moreover, when existing organizations disband, they create free resources, which encourage entrepreneurship, but as the rate of disbanding continues to rise, it signals a hostile environment and discourages additional new ventures (Singh & Lumsden, 1990).

Why do organizations disband? As in biological evolution, organizational forms disappear when they are no longer supported by their environment (e.g., the decline of homes for unwed mothers and orphanages in the United States). Organizations with generalized services are more likely to succeed when the environment is variable and experiences large, periodic fluctuations. In contrast, organizations with a specialist strategy are more likely to survive in a relatively stable environment experiencing small and regular fluctuations (Hannan & Freeman, 1989). Organizations also disband because of the "liability of newness"—namely, their inexperience and inability to compete with well-established organizations. Similarly, the "liability of smallness" results in a high disbanding rate because small organizations have difficulty attracting resources.

Ecological processes are not the only determinants of organizational founding and failure. Technological developments influence the importance of various resources, creating new opportunities while rendering the competencies of existing organizations obsolete (Tushman & Anderson, 1986). Institutional developments, such as changing government

policies and funding, will also affect the rates of founding and failure (Tucker, Baum, & Singh, 1992). Similarly, linkages to community and public institutions provide resources and legitimacy that reduce failure rates (Baum & Oliver, 1991).

Hannan and Freeman (1989) argue that the environment favors organizations whose structures have high inertia. This is because the environment tends to select organizations with a high degree of reliability and accountability. These are organizations that have a well-defined set of reproducible routines. Thus, the organization is adaptive or successful because it has specified which routines apply to what situation (e.g., hospitals shifting from normal to disaster situations). It also follows from this argument that as organizations age, they become more inert.

The population-ecology perspective has been criticized not only for inappropriately applying biological evolution models to social organizations (Young, 1988) but also, more significantly, for its inarticulate conception of the environment. The model, as Perrow (1986) puts it, "tends to be a mystifying one, removing much of the power, conflict, disruption, and social-class variables from the analysis" (p. 213). Although there is an implicit recognition that the environment is socially constructed, the theory is silent about how it is constructed and changed over time. This is in sharp contrast to the institutional and political-economy theories. Aldrich (1979), for example, does recognize the important role of the state in shaping the environment. In the human services, the state is a key player in the environment, and state ideologies, politics, and economics have probably more to do with the founding and survival of human service organizations than any other factor. Indeed, Twombly (2003) has shown how government initiatives, such as welfare reform, and local philanthropic cultures of giving influence both the entry and the exit of nonprofit human service organizations.

Also disturbing is the concept of *population*, which refers mostly to organizations with a similar product. But this presents only a slice of the complex network of organizations that have different degrees of involvement in the generation of the product. Rather, the concept of *sector* mentioned above seems more promising.

Recent developments in population ecology attempt to address these issues. For example, some scholars have advanced the idea that institutional and ecological perspectives are complementary, depicting the institutional environment as an important context for ecological selection processes (Aldrich, 2006; Baum & Oliver, 1991, 1992; Hannan & Freeman, 1989). Institutional linkages are thought to increase the competitiveness of organizations, and institutional rules may favor certain organizational forms over others (Baum & Oliver, 1991, 1992; Miner, Amburgey, & Stearns, 1990; Singh, House, & Tucker, 1986).

In addition, new theoretical work on the concept of the ecological niche makes strides in articulating the environmental conditions under which an organization can survive. *Niche theory* asks how organizations fare under different and changing environmental conditions and tries to understand their survival capabilities under competitive conditions induced by a scarce resource environment (for a review, see Popielarz & Neal, 2007). The niche is defined as a market, an audience, and a set of organizations (defined by identities and organizational form codes) that make offerings to the audience (Hannan, Carroll, & Polos, 2003). Organizational forms that occupy specific niches are defined in terms of social codes with rulelike status that specify the characteristics organizations are expected to have (Hsu & Hannan, 2005; Polos, Hannan, & Carroll, 2002). For example, social codes might signify that the organization is a hospital or a shelter. These organizational defaults emanate from the institutional environment and are reflected in

the expectations, assumptions, and beliefs of *audiences* or "agents with an interest in the domain and control over material and symbolic resources that affect success and failure of the claimants in the domain" (Hsu & Hannan, 2005, p. 476). These audiences, which constitute a key element of the environment, could represent potential employees, members, board directors, clients, funders, or other input resources. Failure to adhere to social codes can result in withdrawal of support for the organization and lead, ultimately, to organizational failure.

Niche theory also considers issues of power and politics. In the presence of competitors, the actual appeal of offerings is a function of the intrinsic appeal (the match of the properties of an offer to the taste of an audience) and the intensity of the organization's engagement with its environment. Methods of engagement, such as marketing or political advocacy, are thought to translate intrinsic appeal into actual appeal by shaping audience perceptions about the availability, legitimacy, and authenticity of the offering (Hsu & Hannan, 2005).

Finally, niche theory has introduced sociodemographic variables to the ecological approach by examining the relationship between social networks and niche audiences. McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook (2001), for example, ask why organizational forms can attract certain audiences and not others. They demonstrate that potential members of voluntary associations are recruited through the social networks of existing members. These networks tend to be socially homogeneous, indicating that the niche spaces of volunteer associations have a sociodemographic dimension. This model has been extended to show that cultural forms (Mark, 2003) and social movements (Stern, 1999) similarly occupy niches in social space based on social networks. One can see how the theorization of alternative niche spaces—based on geographic, political, or cultural dimensions—could be employed to extend understanding of the environmental

conditions that are conducive or toxic to the survival of human service organizations. For example, the offerings of nonprofit human services that serve devalued and marginalized clients may appeal to a limited range of donors, as defined by their cultural tastes, ideological beliefs, and sociodemographic characteristics.

CRITICAL THEORY

Whereas the political-economy perspective emphasizes the role of strategic negotiation in the reconciliation of diverse interests, *critical theorists* view organizations as exploitative instruments of domination in which conflicting interests are ultimately resolved through the hegemony of powerful constituents. And whereas institutional theory focuses on human service agencies as socialized entities that seek legitimacy through conformity to cultural meaning systems, critical theory is interested in how these meanings function as ideologies that rationalize patterns of domination. From a critical perspective, workers are complicit in their own subordination through their acceptance of inequitable arrangements and the ideologies that support them. For example, some studies have shown that managers control work processes by providing categories and frames that focus worker perceptions on some areas of interest and concern and not on others (Astley & Zammuto, 1992).

The central goal of critical theory in organizational studies is to create societies and workplaces that are free from domination and where all members have equal opportunity to contribute to the production of systems that meet human needs and lead to the progressive development of all. Given that power is a key variable in defining the structure, processes, services, and worker-client relations of human service organizations, the emancipatory focus of the critical perspective becomes particularly salient. For example, a trusting client-worker relationship—a

necessary condition of effective services—is predicated on some degree of power balance between clients and workers. Yet, as mentioned in the previous chapter, clients generally have much less power than workers.

To uncover systems of domination, the critical perspective employs an *ideological critique*. Ideologies play a central role in (a) the moral construction of human service clients, (b) defining the desired ends, (c) shaping the service technologies, and (d) the socialization and control of the staff. They uphold certain forms of knowledge and define appropriate forms of organizational action. For example, several studies demonstrate how the "new" public management ideology encourages organizations to adopt businesslike management practices emphasizing the values of efficiency, economy, effectiveness, and accountability, sometimes at the expense of values such as caring or social justice (Alexander, 2000; Dart, 2004).

An ideological critique entails a careful examination of the organizational vocabularies and taxonomies through which ideologies are enacted. Alvesson and Willmott (1996), for example, tried to show how strategic management is actually a form of domination because strategic discourse and the decision-making process are controlled by the managerial elite, thus legitimizing its hegemony. Other research has investigated accounting and budgeting language as a form of organizational control (Berry et al., 1985; Dent, 1991).

From a critical perspective, these "rational" discourses mask power differentials because differences in interests are framed as technical problems best resolved by professional managers rather than as political issues requiring the input of workers or clients. When political interests are suppressed, the working conditions that are all too common in human service organizations—lack of control over the conditions of work, wages that do not reflect the real value of workers' efforts, and the subjection of workers to extensive

bureaucratic controls—may remain unaddressed. Clients, who are often the most powerless interest group of human service organizations, lack the capacity to challenge the ideological frames that determine the moral labels that are applied to them and the services they receive.

The *feminist critique* of human service organizations is rooted in critical theory, with an emphasis on patriarchal domination. It is well suited to an understanding of human services because much of the work done in these organizations is gendered. For example, women constitute the majority of human service workers, and yet men are more likely to assume the key administrative positions. There are several feminist approaches to explain and remedy gender inequality in organizations; each offers a different perspective on the organization itself (for a review, see Calas & Smircich, 1996).

Liberal feminism, for example, does not challenge mainstream conceptions of organizations but acknowledges that inequality is a result of stereotypes and discriminatory practices that block job and advancement opportunities. Hence, legal-rational remedies, such as (a) antidiscrimination and sexual harassment policies, (b) equal worth pay, (c) gender-free performance appraisals, and (d) unbiased promotion criteria, are promoted (e.g., Kanter, 1977; Powell, 1992; Reskin & Hartmann, 1986).

In contrast, radical feminism maintains that organizations are inherently gendered and subordinate women via hierarchical structural arrangements and power relations. These attributes give primacy to male dominance while suppressing feminist values, such as egalitarianism, cooperation, nurturance, and peace (Acker, 1990; Taylor, 1983). Hence, radical feminism argues that it is necessary to counter hierarchies of power through the development of alternative organizational forms that are imbued with feminist values (Acker, 1990). Such organizations include attributes such as (a) participatory decision making, (b) flexible and interactive job

designs, (c) equitable distribution of income, and (d) interpersonal and political account-ability (Koen, 1984, cited in Calas & Smirich, 1996). Feminist organizations that have emerged in the human services include femi-nist health centers (Hyde, 1992; Schwartz, Gottesman, & Perlmutter, 1988), rape crisis centers (Martin, DiNitto, Byington, & Maxwell, 1992), and schools (Rothschild & Whitt, 1986). These organizations have shown that alternative structures can pro-mote relations among workers and between workers and clients that are caring and based on mutual responsibility and accountability (Iannello, 1992; Rothschild & Whitt, 1986).

Nonetheless, research suggests that femi-nist structures may conflict with organiza-tional survival, growth, and competitiveness (Aschraft, 2001; Bordt, 1998; Zilber, 2002). For example, power sharing, teamwork, and relations built on mutual respect become less tenable as organizations grow past the point where all members can develop close rela-tions with one another (Clegg, Courpasson, & Phillips, 2006). As a result, feminist orga-nizations are rare and, if they do exist, tend to assume a hybrid form that combines hierar-chical and egalitarian modes of power (Aschraft, 2001, p. 1303). Such hybridization has been shown to produce a dialectic ten-sion between inequality/equality and cen-tralization/decentralization (Aschraft, 2001, p. 1305). For example, Aschraft's (2001) study of a feminist organization to assist sur-vivors of domestic violence showed that the members were reluctant to challenge the authority and expertise of their supervisors despite an ideology that encouraged equal and open communication.

Postmodernism

Postmodernism shares much in common with other theories discussed in this chapter. Like the political-economy perspective, it emphasizes the role of power in structuring organizational relations. Like institutional theory, it proposes that culture influences organizational structures and practices and is a major source of organizational control. And like critical and feminist perspectives, it argues that hegemonic ideologies perpetuate patterns of dominance in organizations. The postmodern critique, however, questions *all* truth claims, arguing that "facts" are always situated and historically contingent.

Analysis thus shifts from explanation to the deconstruction of prevailing understand-ings of the organization (Derrida, 1976), showing "how artificial are the ordinary, taken-for-granted structures of our social world" (Cooper & Burrell, 1988, p. 99). Dominant meanings, such as *rationality*, are understood as social constructions that give preference to certain culturally defined dis-courses over others. In fact, consistency of the symbolic order signals the suppression of multiple, diverse, and contradictory rational-ities. Knowledge is produced through lan-guage, which is value-laden and emerges via power dynamics that result in the ascendance of hegemonic discourses and the silencing of subordinate perspectives. Consequently, power is always deployed in the construction of organizational realities. As stated by Alvesson and Deetz (1996), "Power resides in the discursive formation itself—the combi-nation of a set of linguistic distinctions, ways of reasoning and material—practices that together organize social institutions and pro-duce particular forms of subjects" (p. 208).

The postmodern perspective provides a powerful lens for understanding human service organizations. These organizations work on people, and in so doing, they engage in a moral discourse that becomes objectified through technical language. This rational discourse masks the moral choices that must be made. The choice of service technology, for example, reinforces certain moral constructions of clients, at the same time that these moral judgments rationalize the service technology employed. Only when they are deconstructed can we study the dynamics of how certain meanings have

become dominant, how they exclude alternative conceptions, and how they control the language used by professionals.

Indeed, professional knowledge and language can be seen as powerful tools of social control, or what Foucault (1977) sees as a disciplinary mode of domination. Schram (1995), for example, showed how food shelves, unable to meet the flood of people asking for food, embraced prevailing definitions of dependency. As Schram puts it,

> Food shelf personnel must invoke discursive practices that enable them to shift responsibility for hunger back onto the poor themselves. Imputing deficiencies to the poor allows food shelf staff the room to justify the regulations of clients' behavior and the rationing of food and to maintain a sense of control over their own operation. (p. 64)

As a result, the food shelves adopted the dominant moral assumptions of "blaming the victim."

Therefore, the language that is used in the organization becomes an instrument of managerial control over both staff and clients. Following Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), the organization can be viewed as a contested relational and stratified field in which different actors compete and struggle for access to valued resources by using their economic, social, and cultural capital. The classification and categorization schemas embedded in organizational language (e.g., how service goals and objectives are expressed, how clients are defined, and how workers rationalize their work) result from classificatory struggles and negotiations between actors and interest groups with differential access to power. Those in the organization that gain greater power also accumulate symbolic capital, which provides legitimacy to their worldview. They promote certain versions of reality through the use of language that excludes certain ideas as unthinkable and inculcates others as self-evident (Everett, 2002). Hence, powerful actors in the organization acquire a common "habitus," which is a set of internalized mental schemata and structured dispositions that make their status and oppressive relations within the organization appear natural. Those who are controlled can be understood as complicit in their own subordination when they incorporate in their habitus hegemonic taxonomies and schemes that reproduce the structures of domination in which they occupy a disadvantaged position. Hence, for Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), such hegemony amounts to symbolic violence because it involves "the power to impose (or even inculcate) the arbitrary instruments of knowledge and expression (taxonomies) of social reality—but instruments whose arbitrary nature is not realized as such" (p. 168).

Although Bourdieu seems better able to explain the reproduction of power and inequality than to explain organizational transformation, he does assert that change can emerge from the mismatch between members' habitus and their location in the organizational field of positions (Bourdieu, 2005). When habitus and the dispositions embedded in it are generated under conditions discordant with the current field position, the actor may perceive windows of opportunity that are less visible to others who experience consonance between their habitus and field position (Emirbayer & Johnson, 2008). For example, when compared with dominant-group managers, executives who share the same ethnic or sociodemographic background as minority-group clients may have a worldview that more closely reflects the interests of those clients, which may then be expressed through organizational goals and practices. Meier and Stewart (1992) found that in schools with more teachers from ethnic minorities, minority students perform better. Thus, having more African American teachers results in fewer African American students being tracked into cognitively disabled classes and more being tracked into gifted classes.

Giddens's (1984) *structuration theory* also accounts for change and stability via the microprocesses found in the interaction between human agency and social structure. Based on the notion that structure and agency are mutually determined, the theory views social structure as both enabling and constraining human agents whose actions produce and reproduce the structure. From this perspective, organizational members exercise their agency through their capacity for reflexive action and their ability to be knowledgeable about the conditions and consequences of what they do in their daily lives (p. 281). In particular, agents are not only able to observe and understand what they are doing, but they can also adjust their observation rules. For example, workers knowing that their decisions about their clients are affected by their own moral beliefs can modify such decisions. When agents do so, they can effect change in the social structure. Structure is conceptualized as recursively organized rules and resources that agents draw on and reconstitute in their daily activities. Therefore, "structure has no existence independent of the knowledge that agents have about what they do in their day-to-day activity" (p. 26). As a result "the structural properties of social systems are both the medium and outcome of the practices they recursively organize" (p. 25). This implies that structure is not something external to human agents but is both enabled by them and constrains them. An important element of the theory is the idea of *modalities*—interpretative schemes that include meaning, normative elements, and power—that agents draw on in the reproduction of social interactions that also reconstitute their structural properties.

Structuration theory can provide an important analytic approach to understand human service organizations. It draws attention not only to how workers in their daily activities reproduce and reify organizational assumptions and conceptions about the clients, but also to how they change them (see Sandfort, this volume). It pays close attention to the interpretative schemes that workers use because these determine how clients are morally constructed, how actions are justified, and how they become reproduced in the structural properties of the agency. At the same time, the theory also provides important insights into the processes of organizational change—especially in the capacity of workers to be knowledgeable and reflexive about the rules they use—and how reflexive action can bring about change in organizational structure.

PROMISING DIRECTIONS

It is clear, even from this cursory review, that no one theory is adequate to explain the structure and processes of organizations in general, let alone human services in particular. Rather, the efficacy of each theory depends on the nature of the organizational phenomena being addressed. Rational theories have a contribution to make if we wish to understand how efficiency is pursued; human relations theories are appropriate for understanding the nature of interpersonal relations in organizations; contingency theories are significant for exploring the impact of technology on structure; the negotiated-order perspective provides insight into how individuals and groups negotiate and carry out their work; political-economy is useful in understanding the role of power dynamics and negotiations in resource mobilization; institutional theory is important in understanding how organizations attain legitimacy; an institutional-logics perspective helps us examine the political dynamics underlying institutionalization; population-ecology is appropriate for exploring the rates of founding and disbanding of organizations; niche theory pays attention to the environmental conditions

under which an organization can survive; critical theories draw attention to human services as systems of domination or emancipation; and postmodernism provides a lens for uncovering the socially constructed nature of organizations and the processes through which these constructions are produced.

However, an appropriate theory on human service organizations should account for their specific attributes. As noted above, human service organizations are distinguished from other organizations in many ways: (a) their work is profoundly moral, (b) they must seek legitimacy for the moral choices they make from the institutional environment, (c) interest groups that control vital resources have a stake in what they do and may try to influence them, (d) services are delivered through client-staff relations, (e) emotional work is involved in the delivery of services, (f) they are gendered, and, related, (g) they uphold ideologies of domination/ emancipation.

As shown in Table 3.1, some of the theories reviewed here do a better job than others when it comes to accommodating these attributes. We propose that the most nuanced and comprehensive understandings are found at the intersection of theories relevant

Table 3.1   Organizational Theories and Attributes of Human Service Organizations

	Moral Dimension of Work	Institutional Environment	Power and Resources	Client-Staff Relations	Emotional Work	Gender	Ideologies of Domination/ Emancipation
Rational-legal model							
Human relations approach				√	√		
Contingency theory			√				
Negotiated order			√	√			
Political-economy			√	√			
Institutional theory		√					
Institutional logics	√	√	√				
Population-ecology							
Niche theory	√	√	√				
Critical/ feminist theories	√	√		√		√	√
Postmodernism	√	√		√		√	√

to human service organizations. Put another way, there is a synergy between several of these theories—particularly political-economy, institutional, ecological, critical, and post-modern perspectives. Some models, such as institutional logics and niche theories, exploit these synergies in a way that enables them to account for multiple attributes of human service organizations.

The institutional-logics approach integrates elements of institutional and political-economy perspectives to highlight the power dynamics that underlie institutionalization. In addition, the theory brings the moral choices made by human service organizations into sharp relief because it focuses attention on the specific cultural meanings that the organization must accommodate—meaning systems that include moral assumptions about categories of clients, human problems or needs, desirable outcomes, and prevailing understandings about effective and efficient practice. Institutional logics constituted from various combinations of these elements provide the base for theories of social provision. When translated to practice, these theories have direct implications for the nature, quality, and availability of services and resources for clients. The ascendancy of new logics and the de-legitimization of others is enabled by a heterogeneous, contradictory, and contested institutional environment that institutional entrepreneurs can exploit, given the political resources needed to challenge entrenched interests and advance new public theories. Service technologies are, therefore, the outcome of power struggles and negotiations among various interest groups, including organization-level institutional entrepreneurs and the state.

Niche theory also provides an integrative approach. It extends the institutional-logics perspective by positing an ecology of competing institutional logics whereby environmental selection pressures—including market forces and changes in the relative

prevalence of societal-level institutional logics—favor certain organizational forms that are compatible with their institutional environment. For example, research by Scott, Ruef, Mendel, and Caronna (2000) on the Bay Area health care system demonstrates how regulatory systems introduced a state logic that undermined the prevailing professional logic, disempowering physicians and creating the opportunity for the introduction of a corporate logic that generated new service delivery systems such as health maintenance organizations and point-of-service organizations. This approach helps account for moral systems that are embedded in human service organizations by examining the institutional, ecological, and political dynamics that allow these systems to arise and cause them to disappear.

Critical theories (including feminist theories) can contribute to institutional and political-economy perspectives by showing not just how logics or ideologies rise and fall but also how they enable structures of domination. Hence, institutional logics—and the moral assumptions they reflect—uphold specific systems of exploitation that promote certain interests at the expense of others. Because they are represented as simple fact, however, hegemonic logics and ideologies can be difficult to uncover.

Postmodernism helps reveal the constructed nature of privileged narratives. Like critical theories, it reminds us that prevailing understandings of organizations are frequently determined by powerful interests, which manipulate narratives to serve their own interests. Like the institutional-logics perspective, it attributes much explanatory power to the institutional field in which the organization is embedded. However, it pays closer attention to the relations of power through which conformity to societal-level institutional logics is generated and upheld. For example, Bourdieu's (1991) concept of capital provides a useful heuristic that identifies the specific "stakes

that are at stake" in political struggle. His focus on language as a medium of power and control helps trace this political struggle back to the sociohistorical conditions from which the taxonomies and schema of valuation emerge. Finally, his concepts of symbolic violence and habitus enhance understanding of how hegemonic perspectives are internalized by subordinate actors and reproduced through their practices and routines.

Finally, postmodern perspectives that focus on microlevel processes, such as structuration theory, extend the above theories by showing how workers in their daily activities reproduce and reify organizational assumptions and conceptions about clients and also how they change these assumptions. By focusing on the embedded agency of organizational actors, such microlevel theories help us understand client-worker relations within the context of larger organizational and societal structures, power dynamics, and systems of meaning.

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