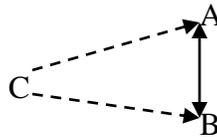


The two papers reviewed here have both used the Parsonian (Aristotelian) method of symmetrical dichotomies in order to bring order to the diversity of theories about organizations.

This method cannot yield deeper theoretical insights; it only provides an a-theoretical descriptive (see Baldamus). A third dimension is needed to explain a two-by-two table because it is only thus that we can see how those two dimensions come to be relevant to the phenomena under study e.g.



The third dimension, often time, introduces a serial relation which essential for conceptual analysis (although not for mere classification according to attributes).

Astley and Van de Ven offer no third dimension which would justify the two dimensions they select. Little wonder. It is difficult to see what could be offered as either the micro or the macro level could be represented as ‘thing’, system or as statistical aggregate. Similarly, there is no reason to believe that organizations and their environments are in any important way arranged linearly on a scale of determinism, and hence no expectations that theories about them are.

It would appear that the authors invented their boxes and then tried to force theories into them. Some degree of fit was found only because, by historical accident, a number of different disciplines have invaded the field.

	Deterministic	Voluntaristic
Macro	Economists/historians	Political radicals
Micro	O&M experts	consultants

It seems to me that we get more insight into the evolution of organizational theories if we relate them to the evolution of economic environments.

	Type I	II	III	IV
Individual organization	-	Closed system (eg. C.Barnard)	O&M McKinsey	“democr. of work” O.D.
Sets of organizations	-	‘Population theories’	Chandler	Organicism (strategic planning)

This way we can see why some theories, at any time, are being pushed into the backwaters and others becoming fashionable. Theoretical interest shifts in a sensible manner with changes in the environment. A and VdeV’s boxes lead to no such observations (just as Paul Lawrence’s dichotomies showed the course of development of organizations as a random Brownian movement). The six questions they see as the polarities that give ‘dialectical tension, to their boxes are so ill-conceived that the answer to each would have to be “both!”.

The reply by Hrebiniak and Joyce is the right direction in pointing out that two dimensions are implicit in the ‘determinism-voluntaristic’ dimension, one referring to the organization and the other to the environment. However, they abort their argument by relying on the same mindless method of reducing the problem to two symmetrical dichotomies.

		Envir. Determinism	
		Low	High
Strategic choice	High	Type III	Type IV
	Low	Type II	Type I/II

In our theory the changing nature of the environment necessarily required a shift from tactics to strategy and then an evolution in strategic objectives and alliances: not the other way round, as they imply. Similarly, ‘environmental determinism goes from H to Low-Low to H and H+; not linear but curvilinear.

Not satisfied with reducing our model to a static model, and smearing all over the outlines with intellectual graffiti, they numbered their quadrants in an order that scrambles the natural series we had identified:-

Quadrant	E Type
I	I
II	IV
III	III
IV	II

They then proceeded to discuss the quadrants, and by implication the types of environment, in the order of those numbers! That is not really a fair treatment of our theory. Then, after bugging-up our beautiful theory, they conclude that, “What is needed is a greater emphasis on integration..” (p 348)! After their destruction?

Both papers are a regression from Terreberry.

*Astley, W.G. and A.H. Van de Ven, "Central perspectives and debates in organization theory". Admin Sc Qtly, 28, 1983, 245-73.

Hrebiniak, L.G. & W.F. Joyce "Organizational adaptation: strategic choice and environmental determinism". Admin Sci Qtly, 30, 1985, 336-349.

Baldamaus, W. The Structure of Sociological Inference, London, Martin Robertson, 1976.

Lazarsfeld, P and Pat Kendall "Problems in Survey Analysis" in Merton, R.K. and P.F.Lazarsfeld, Studies in the Scope and Method of "The American Soldier" "Glencoe, Illinois, The Free Press, 1950