



## Book Review

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**Emmanuel Lazega. *Bureaucracy, Collegiality and Social Change: Redefining Organizations with Multilevel Relational Infrastructures*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2020. 352 pp. \$145.00, e-book.**

This interesting book integrates network and organizational governance theories to build a social theory of organizations that has important implications. Lazega simplifies organizations into two logics, bureaucracy and collegiality, with the purpose of arguing how agents embedded in multilevel relational networks at the interindividual, interorganizational, and intergovernmental levels create the conditions for institutional and organizational change and stability. He motivates the importance of his theory in light of contemporary conditions impacting the study of markets, political economy, social networks, and social stratification. He argues public and private policy is increasingly interpreted and determined through the eyes of organizations that in Selznick's (1957) terms "have taken on a life of their own." Who are these organizations, and how are they organized? They are the big technology companies and small groups of elite owners, managers, politicians, and technocrats. Digitalization in particular has increasingly rationalized these organizations resulting in the unprecedented consolidation of power and social control.

Lazega's approach contrasts with prior theory of revolutionary social change from classic Marx to Brinton's (1965) comparative analysis of the French, English, and American revolutions in which social and economic revolution rises from the bottom up against the elite. The original role of elites was not to navigate social revolution from the top down, yet today top-down social change is prevalent. The gravity of Lazega's arguments is crystalized by a new breed of elites that is not ascribed by birth, as in nobility; necessarily representative, as in citizenry; or elected, as in democratic societies and constitutional republics. Explaining this new type of organization and the revolutionary forces it unleashes on institutions, for good or bad, is the purpose of this book. The author argues that to understand this new form of elitism and its consequential amalgamation of commercial, political, and social power requires the joint regulation of two underlying logics, that of bureaucracy and collegiality. Joint regulation occurs not by traditional means of bureaucratic organization in the Weberian sense but by redefining organizations as political communities governed by a continuum with the logics of bureaucracy on one end, defined as routine work and hierarchical coordination, and of collegiality on the other, defined as the interaction between members.

To demonstrate his theory, Lazega draws on many empirical examples of network structures from prior published research—including his own—on law firms, scientific laboratories, the Catholic Church, and judicial courts, among others. Power, participation, and coalition building are fluid—in constant motion and development. He uses a spinning top metaphor to demonstrate agency in

his multilevel theory, specifying the role of “vertical linchpins” who with overlapping memberships have capabilities to travel via an internal staircase across different levels of analysis and empirical domains. In doing so, linchpins set norms and influence institutional and organizational change in their movement along the theoretical continuum between bureaucracy and collegiality. For example, though not included in the book, Dr. Anthony Fauci, Director of the U.S. National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease and Chief Medical Adviser to the President of the United States, is a vertical linchpin who blends bureaucracy and collegiality.

The theory points to the difficulty of identifying which combination of bureaucracy and collegiality, and at what level of analysis, creates, maintains, or de-institutionalizes organizations and their effects. The concern is that in the process, organizations and their self-segregated elites are “ratchets of social stratification” for good and bad: they can, for example, spread lies and rumors to empower their narratives that have grave consequences, as occurred in the recent pandemic, and can perpetuate “unstoppable bureaucratization.”

This book is full of ideas useful to organizational sociologists and management scholars; however, the reader will have to expend effort to distill them. One reason the book is difficult to comprehend is it makes use of terms from the natural sciences and neglects literature that is directly related on hybrid organizations (Battilana, Besharov, and Mitzineck, 2017) and institutional logics and governance (Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury, 2013). The prolific research on organizational hybridity and institutional logics elaborates the heterogeneity and manipulation of logics (Thornton, 2004), as well as change agents such as institutional entrepreneurs (DiMaggio, 1988; Hardy and McGuire, 2017) and “skilled cultural operators” (Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001). Thus, while appreciating parsimonious models, I wondered why the author did not draw on this literature in organizational sociology, management, and strategy to clarify, differentiate, and elaborate his theory beyond the arguably simplistic consolidation of organizational sociology into two logics.

The author justifies this oversimplification by arguing that the logic of the state and the corporation are derived from the logic of bureaucracy (p. 7). He adopts the human resources and political coalitions critiques of bureaucracy. These critiques suggest that (1) workers are not atomized, but have feelings, and work better in groups, and (2) bureaucracies are political arenas in which hierarchy prevents learning from errors and successes. In contrast, the institutional logics perspective suggests that bureaucracy is only one attribute of a logic and that bureaucracy is applicable to other institutional orders besides the state and the corporation. The Vatican and the Catholic church, for example, are bureaucracies, and a reigning view of corporations suggests they are increasingly managed by the market logic (Davis, 2009). By not drawing on these literatures he possibly misses insights and nuances that limit his organization theory to cultures in which the institutional orders of the family and religion have waned. Yet this lacuna may be central to explaining differences among countries and between red and blue states in the United States. In the institutional logics vernacular, Lazega’s theory is an organizational theory. He uses the term logics to elaborate partial attributes of an institutional logic (i.e., bureaucracy and relational networks) for some of the institutional orders of society. It is a theory that is compatible with institutional logics meta-theory

and is a significant contribution by integrating network theory and empirical research with institutional theory.

Lazega's multi-spin argument of scientists exhibiting revolving door relationships from public responsibilities to private jobs and back to public positions is established in sociology with regard to proximity (Stuart and Ding, 2006) and conflicting institutional logics (Murray, 2010). Lazega illustrates vertical linchpins metaphorically as the rotating shaft of a spinning top—to enact foothold positions where linchpins broker conflicting sides with different political definitions of an institution. The central and highly important aspect of the theory is that when vertical linchpins move up and down (top-down collegiality), they are stabilized by an interorganizational network. Thus vertical linchpins are able to maintain their centrality and interactions long enough to escape unpredictable and conflictual politics of the electoral process. This can enable linchpins to succeed in their institutionalization efforts as a non-elective small collegial oligarchy, whether it be to instill critical race theory in the military and K–12 curriculum or determine national science policy promoting vaccines over clinical treatments.

Lazega's theory is useful in understanding contemporary changes to public space, political regimes, and entire societies. His arguments are focused on the regulation of private exclusive access to data, social engineering, and the defense of democratic nation-states to enforce principles of open science to investigate, critique, and seek the truth. The criticality of Lazega's ideas is based in relational network data.

The book presents a new Weberian image of the iron cage fueled by artificial intelligence algorithms, big data, and digitization powered by individuals and organizations that have a staircase to elite networks at multiple levels of analysis and across many domains. Lazega's framework is timely with important implications as the work of vertical linchpins can have potentially grave consequences for democratic nation-states and the practice of open science that is autonomous from the state.

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