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Career Games: The Formal, Contextual and Operational Rules of Play

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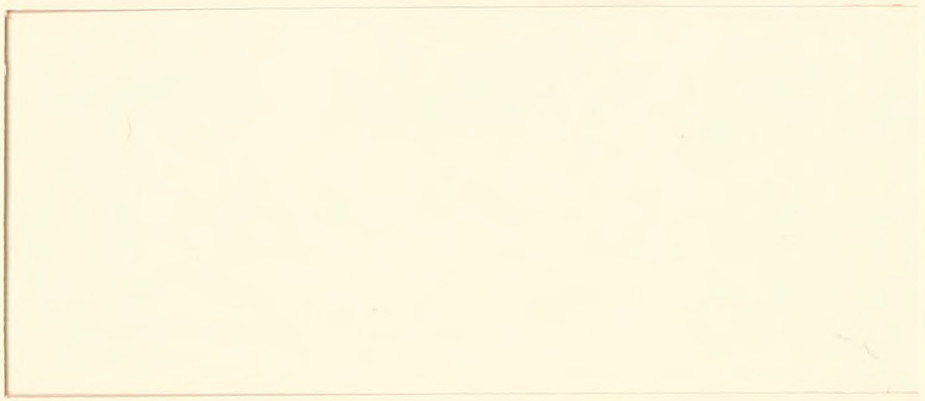

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In the spring of 1978 I came up for tenure. Instrumentally, this meant that my past was to be reviewed by my organizational elders at MIT and their reading of what was called "my case" would either open up or close off an academic future for me at that institution. I, of course, felt it far better to be granted tenure than not but like most others in similar situations, I tried not to allow my private anxieties over the situation to surface publicly in embarrassing or potentially embarrassing ways. Expressively, this meant I "coolly" awaited a decision I "hotly" desired to be favorable. While waiting, I reckoned with my probable fortune by trying to decipher some rules of the tenure game.

Although I had never read them, I felt vaguely familiar with the official tenure policies of the institute. In conservation, these policies were invariably summarized rather accurately, I assumed in terms of the ubiquitous "up or out" rule. In strict form, official policy dictated that a tenure

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judgment must be reached on or before a person's seventh year of employment as a faculty member at MIT and that the department in which one worked would initiate as well as shape the process through which a judgment would eventually be rendered. Yet, uncountable exceptions to this strict policy were alive, well, and going about thier business as usual throughout the institute. As I had rather quickly discovered, the official policy allowed for many legitimate dodges. To wit, one could ask for and receive an early review. One could move to other "tracks" and continue doing precisely the same work as an "adjunct professor," "senior lecturer," or "research associate." Perhaps more common, one could also "buy time" from the tenure clock by taking a well planned leave of absence to teach elsewhere or by paying one's own salary for a period of time through a research grant. These and the many other artful dodges available to all tenure candidates suggested that I would learn very little about the process as a practical accomplishment from the official guidelines since the exception seemed quite often to be the rule.

Being more or less wise to such wordly affairs, I was attentive to the acccunting schemes my colleagues had invented to describe the tenure system. Indeed, I listened closely to those who, in good faith and bad, wished to put me straight on how things "really worked" at MIT. Thus, from others I began to learn of the peculiar and informal rules at work in my department as well as the institution itself. "Quality research," "making a significant contribution to the field,"

"a few articles in established journals," "a book or two," and "bringing in strong letters of support from recognized names in the field" were thought to be rules of thumb in this world. In constrast, "good teaching" was typically held to be, at best, a necessary but not sufficient condition for tenure--"it can't help you but it sure can kill you." Like the official policy pronouncements on tenure, these prescriptions had also a rather glossy and general flavor to them for while there was, for example, consensus on the importance of publishing, no one was quite willing to state how many or what kind of publications would, with any certainty, insure one from perishing.

At another level, the old academic saw about "each case being unique" provided grist for everyone's explanatory mills; yet, to a person, it was felt that despite the uniqueness axiom, certain limiting conditions could still be articulated on the basis of past decisions. Since historical and contextual detail played such a large part in the reasoning of my colleagues, I too began to dimly recognize a number of situational principles upon which the outcome of my case might conceivably hinge. Such practical hypotheses were to be stumbled over almost anywhere and ranged from the dismal, "the department's getting tight, it looks bad," to the bright, "your work fills a gap, it looks good."

Further complicating the picture was the prominent role politics was thought to play in the process. As revealed by

the selective recounting of the fateful particulars of past decisions, my confidantes suggested that strategy, suspense and intrigue were ever present. Moreover, a number of stories were told in which the management or mismanagement of the process was intimately connected to the horrors suffered or enchantment bestowed upon former candidates for tenure. Such tales invoked the motives and character of key participants, emphasizing a curious mixture of shrewdness, integrity, deceit, naivete, cunning, honor, honesty, and pride both false and deserved. Considerations of a similar kind were of course applied to my own case and several people, myself included, constructed what were thought to be "realistic scenarios" based on these more earthy political matters-- "your committee's stacked for (against) you." The trouble with these scenarios was, however, not in concocting them per se but in selecting from among the contrasting versions.

What can be called structural factors also cut across and segmented the various accounts I heard how the tenure system operated. Administrators invariably leaned on the codified rationality of officialdom by stressing the impartiality and fairness the formal procedures were seen to provide. Senior faculty relied less on the procedural rules and more on the perceived good sense and trustworthiness of those sterling cohorts who actually made tenure decisions, citing the sound judgment and uncanny foresight their past record was seen to embody. Junior faculty, either in or about to be in the same boat as I, discounted both official rationality and colleagual good sense and stressed instead the specific merits

and demerits of the individual case as modified by what we then thought to be the local political, economic, and social winds.

To spare the reader further detail, I somehow slipped through the screen of tenure but, upon passage, I feel no more knowledgeable of the actual workings of the process than I did before assuming my new status. Though I quickly have come to "see" the infinite wisdom embodied in the decision, the innermost workings of and rationale for the tenuring process still escape me. Moreover, I have also come to believe that the grounds upon which such decisions are made and the decision processes which display the use of such grounds are by their very nature ellusive, shifting, multiple and can be only partially decoded no matter what theoretical framework one applies.

The implicit assumptions here are therefore twofold. First, I assume that seeking out the rules that might govern our careers is not unique. But, as the second assumption, it is not atypical for us to fail to discover any compelling answers to the riddles posed by the career. Mystery at this level is perhaps altogether common. Less mysterious however are the various sorts of rules we learn about and sometimes invent to play the career game in the first place. At this level, a general analysis is possible though the framework for such an analysis must necessarily be an informational one, unanchored and unpropertied to facts other than socially constructed and validated ones. The knowable rules upon which our careers are seen to rest are thus built by us as helping

arguments of a most practical kind. In a sense, this approach takes a step backward from the current interests of career students in causal explanation and asks the reader to consider the kinds of commonsensical rules, theories, and models ordinary members of an organization have in mind when going about their affairs. By so doing, I hope to render the notion of rules more useful in social analysis as well as to show how rules are put to work by people as aids in shaping and understanding their work careers.[1]

The Career Game

The phenomological premise upon which this paper rests is that people will not gracefully accept uncertainty. No matter what materials are at hand, we seem always to make an effort to define, control, order, and otherwise interpret and make sense of the world of our experience. The on-going process by which uncertainty is managed is, of course, a social one mediated by both circumstance and culture. In large organizations such as those found in contemporary American society, this process is enormously complicated because neither circumstance nor culture are widely shared by organizational members. The standards of conduct that come to be followed by members of any particular segment or group within the organization are manufactured more or less by the members themselves and reflect their own biographically specific but collectively shared work situations.[2]

Moreover, in complex organizations, a large number of events bearing on any individual's fate in that organization take place well out of the person's sight or grasp in a very literal sense. Career decisions are in this regard perhaps the most dramatic, significant, talked about, least understood, and troubling areas of personal uncertainty to be found within large organizations. To understand such decisions, people of necessity must rely to a great degree upon whatever interpretive and inferential procedures they can develop to decode the actions of others into terms meaningful for their own use.[3] The perspective taken here is that this interpretive and inferential work accomplished by organizational members results in the discovery or invention of certain rules. Such rules can then be used to direct and justify one's own behavior as well as to explain the relevant actions of others in the organization thus serving to potentially reduce, make tolerable, or "normalize" the uncertainties surrounding the career game (Van Maanen, 1977, 1979).

The use of the game metaphor to describe organizational careers is intentional. By using it, I wish to highlight the altogether selective and tactical aspects associated with the individual's emergent understanding of his or her organizational career. Several gaming considerations are pertinent in this regard. First, to play a game implies that the players rationally process information in order to assess its situational meaning and relevance for their purposes. Second, a game suggests that winners and losers will eventually be determined and the players

of a game will typically prefer winning to losing. Third, the outcomes of games are based, at least in part, on the strategies selected by the players. Moves and countermoves can be plotted with a purpose in mind thus indicating that strategic actions are premised on some sort of social logic. Fourth, games almost always entail some face-to-face interaction among the players hence matters of expression such as style, demeanor, and appearance are relevant to the results. Fifth, a game requires there be some tentative agreement among the players as to how the game is properly to be played. This feature more or less forces an analyst to be concerned with articulating the rules of play that operationally define the game. Sixth, game models contrast with structural and process models in that the key gaming variables are informational in nature and origin. The cognitive and potentially creative role individuals play in the shaping of games must therefore be addressed directly. Tactics, options, interpretations, ambiguities, and the manner in which information is dispalyed, recognized, organized, and used by a person become central issues once a game perspective is assumed. In sum, the game metaphor applied to the study of organizational careers demands that the actor's understandings of the workings of his or her career (msiguided or not) be taken seriously.[4]

As a final prefacing matter, I must note that the label organizational career is used simply to denote the series of positions an individual holds within an organization from entry to exit (Van Maanen and Schein, 1977). Career transitions

may be few or many in number, entail upward, downward, or lateral mobility, and demand relatively mild to severe adjustments on the part of the individual. Moreover, the uncertainty and associated anxiety surrounding one's career are perhaps most intense just before and just after career decisisons regarding potential or realized transitions are accomplished (Schein, 1971; 1978). During such times, individuals may indeed be hard pressed to both account for and justify the outcomes of the decision process. The results of this predictive and explanatory work are viewed here as the rules of the career game and, as I shall show, these rules are of various kinds.[5]

Some General Features of Rules and Their Use:

At the most abstract level, rules can be seen to stand for structural relationships existing or presumed to exist among people. In this sense, rules are the metaphors we use to symbolically depict the order of ordinary social life. When expressed concretely in verbal or written form, they prescribe what lines of behavior are to be considered appropriate (or inappropriate) under conditions which can range from the very general to the very specific. But, since rules and the conditions upon which they rest are changeable, potentially infinite, and subject to interpretation, the mere expression of a rule hardly gurantees compliance. Rules are therefore continually problematic both to the social scientist who attempts to discover and decode them and to the actor in everyday life who attempts to live with them.

The perspective laid out in this paper breaks with the established Durkheimian tradition of treating some rules, namely social scientific ones, as akin to social facts which, by virtue of the procedures used to generate them, are granted the special dispensation of being able to transcend the cogni-time awareness of those who are thought to obey them. To be sure, this tradition has a long and distinguished history. But this approach is of limited practical use when attempting to come to terms with certain phenomonological observations such as the way people experience, make sense of, and act out their respective careers.[6] In brief, my position is that guided behavior is made possible not because people are always able to competently follow certain rules but because people are able to use certain rules to accomplish their purposes in particular situations. This perspective on the rules of social conduct has the decided advantage of preserving intentionality when discussing human behavior. Moreover, by drawing on this deceptively simple point, other features of the role rules play in social life can easily be made visible.

One important implication often overlooked by those who claim credit for establishing certain rules is that no rule can transcend its application. No matter how concretely or specifically a rule can be laid out in advance, unforeseen contingencies will always come forth necessitating further interpretation and elaboration of the rule. All rules are consequently limited both spatially and temporally. And, as

social history so vividly documents, the use of one rule invariably begets another (and another) in a potentially infinite spiral of sometimes vicious complication.

At this point it is worth noting that career rules are no different in principle than any other category of rules said to order a social process. Career rules are merely human artifacts designed by people for certain purposes. That these rules are embedded around the issues that arise during the course of an individual's career is the constraining boundary; though, as we shall see, this constraint is at best a very relaxed one.[7]

Career rules, like other social inventions, are often difficult to articularte, change over time, mean different things to different people, and always require a specific set of circumstances before their meaning can be determined. Of course, some career rules change more slowly than others and some are more applicable across situations than others. Moreover, some rules are written down, others are not. Some rules arise only in response to a concrete situation and then vanish forever whereas other rules seem always to be present.

Consider, for example, the so-called "up or out" rule as discussed in the introduction. Variants of this rule are found in many organizations including law, accounting and consulting firms, public and private schools, and the military. The rule in each of these contexts can be shown, however, to have a peculiar history, and enforcement pattern rife with selective exceptions, differing timetables loosely tied to the

use of the rule, and vastly different interpretation schemes for people to utilize when reckoning with the meaning of both "up" and "out."

What this morass of qualifying detail suggests is that the rules and the circumstances of their implementation are intimately intertwined. For example, to rationally apply a rule requiring so-called "performance appraisals" be used as a basis for promotional decisions, a user must take into account a massive amount of background detail: Performance appraisals must be available for the people in question, be reasonably current, assess characteristics of presumed significance for the new positions, be acceptable to the user's superiors in the organization as "reasonable" grounds for promotional decisions, and so on. These matters are often simply assumed, of course, but their situational relevance cannot be discounted. Nor is it hard to imagine circumstances under which the rule would be ignored. Indeed, no matter how well regarded the rule, justifications for its violation based on circumstantial matters can always be constructed by people (though not always accepted).

Accounts, disclaimers, excuses, explanations, and rationalizations all attempt, for instance, to dispel the possible embarrassment and perhaps onus that comes from a recognized rule violation. In essence, what such discounting techniques attempt to accomplish is the construction of a logical case that allows for a socially acceptable exception to the rule (Lyman and Scott, 1970; Hewitt and Stokes, 1975). Even the most prized and endorsed career

rules of an organization do not always lend themselves well to the on-going exigencies of day-to-day operations.

Take, for instance, the somewhat beleaguered but still widely proclaimed standard operating procedure in many organizations to set mandatory retirement dates for employees. Yet, another standard operating procedure exists to overlook such dates when a person subject to them is a "prestigious" figure within the organization, a "troublemaker" who might question the legality of such a rule in the courts, or an individual thought to be "irreplaceable" at the moment. While the rule may well suggest what is to be considered "proper" conduct in the organization, such conduct is not always "smart" given the particular situation. The archtype dope is often the one who rather mindlessly insists on playing by the rules without attempting to see them in light of the surrounding conditions. Pity the poor underling who fails in an attempt to oust the Chief Executive Officer of a firm on the basis of a so-called "mandatory" retirement date.

Since rules vary by the extent to which they are enforced, the use of a given rule must be seen as a negotiated one (Strauss, 1978). To implement a rule always involves the persistent efforts of some people to control the behavior of other people. Rules therefore are only a partial determinant of career outcomes since people possess vastly different amounts of authority, resources, skills, and knowledge with which they are able (or unable) to influence the fashion in which a particular rule will be applied. This is not to say that rules

are always ephemeral or tangential to daily affairs, but merely to suggest that in many circumstances they compete with other means of social control. As wage and salary administrators know only too well, the official policies they seek to enforce hardly offer much protection in and of themselves when an organized and determined effort is mounted to waive them.

Rules must also be seen to serve retrospective purposes as well as prospective ones. Career rules provide therefore a means by which people can account for behavior after the fact as well as guides to direct behavior before the fact (Van Maanen, 1977). Certainly an uncountable number of career decisions are made first on the basis of certain private standards and justified later in public by quite different standards dredged up after the decision had been reached. Dalton's (1959) classic organizational study demonstrated, for example, the hidden relevance of religion, ethnicity, and "character" upon career decisions though officially such features were recast retrospectively in terms of "competence" and "potential." More recently, Gephart (1978) has displayed empirically the retrospective character of even the most informal career rules as they were brought into play only after a decision had been made to unseat the incumbent president of a small social club.

One final characteristic of career rules remains to be discussed and it concerns that great enforcer of all rules, shame (Goffman, 1959). Put bluntly, shame is that most powerful emotion that when fully aroused paralyzes us and causes us great pain. Rules, in essence, are conditional upon their ability to

engender a violator's shame.[8] If there is no potential shame, the rule in question is likely to be irrelevant to social action. Consider again the "up or out" proviso associated with many organizational careers. The central and enduring claim behind the existence of this rule is that it protects the quality of the organization by allowing certain members to weed out other members who are regarded as unfit regardless how socially difficult and distasteful such a task may be. Rule enforcers, then, by virtue of their willingness, however reluctant, to exercise judgment in regard to who may stay and who must go, are essentially actors in a continuing morality play. To overlook the rule and feel no special remorse or shame about doing so is to demonstrate that one no longer cares about the organization. On the other side of the moral boundary, consider the person who blatantly and publically demonstrates his or her contempt for the rule by cheerfully accepting a negative decision. Such action threatens the system which rests in good measure on the personal embarrassement or shame provoked when one is moved "down and out" in the career line instead of "up and in." Anger, distress, retort, and even rebellion on the part of the individual are to be expected, not terminal glee. From this perspective, it is the remorseless not the rebel who is the deadliest enemy of those who wish to uphold the rules and the system they embody.

Rule Types:

All social situations make use of a potent mix of various

kinds of rules and there are perhaps as many ways to classify rules as there are situations to which they can be seen to apply. But, for my purposes, this universe of potential rule types is collapsed into three concetually distinct kinds of rules relevant to organizational careers. Importantly, the players of the many career games make use of all three types of rules though, as I argue below, some rules tend to be more prominent in certain situations than in others. Moreover, each type expresses the characteristics of all rules as discussed in the preceding section. Thus, all three categories contain rules which are situationally defined, selectively enforced, retrospectively used, and potentially able to engender a violator's shame.[9]

1. Formal Rules

Perhaps the least socially binding and most individually problematic of all career rules are those I classify as "formal rules." This category refers to those official, manifest, explicit, and codified rules that attempt to specify in written form what people may or may not do on particular occasions. Consider, for example, civil-legal career rules such as those that fall under the Affirmative Action canopy which attempt, by fiat, to end color and sex discrimination in the work place. Consider also those organizational policies that specify the requirements individuals must meet before they can be placed in particular jobs. Even job descriptions, when written down, can be considered formal career rules becuase, among other uses, they can function as grounds for dismissal. In essence,

formal rules represent the apriori and public plans of people to control certain aspects of other people's conduct. But, like all plans, their effect on human behavior is imperfect, indirect, and pregnant with operational difficulty.[10]

The situations to which formal rules apply are obviously quite varied, changeable, and subject to differing interpretations. For instance, a large police agency with which I am familiar recently enacted a formal rule which stated that a college degree was required of all its first-line supervisors (sergeants). But eight weeks later when a list of newly promoted sergeants was announced, almost half of the 17 names on the list were not college graduates. Situational relevances were clearly at issue because: (1) all of the candidates took the civil service examinations for promotion prior to the making of the rule, thus no self-screening was possible; (2) the special advantage of veteran and seniority status within the promotional system was still very much in effect; and (3) those in charge of the promotions at the time had no rapid way of knowing the educational status of the candidate other than by asking them directly (opening up the potential for lying); asking colleagues or supervisors (allowing for faulty knowledge); or checking the personnel folders (notoriously ill kept and out of date).

Morever, those attempting to comply with the rule differed in their understandings of what it meant. At the time the rule was officially released, a very few "letter-perfect" types insisted that it meant precisely what it said and that all

sergeants who didn't have degrees would be swiftly sent down the ranks (although one wit suggested, to the contrary, that the department "in all of its infinite widdom" would probably send them up the ranks since a similar rule did not exist above the sergeant's level). A few others in the organization took the rule to imply that those sergeants or candidates for the job without degrees had best begin work on them soon for the rule would surely be enforced eventually, a plausible interpretation in light of the fact that it was estimated less than 30 percent of the sergeants currently held degrees. The more common interpretation held that the rule applied only to those officers seeking a promotion and exempted those currently at the sergeant level. Yet, when the list was announced, everyone was understandably and thoroughly confused.

As this example suggests, any formal rule, even a relatively simple and straightforward one, will require considerable interpretive work by both those subject to it and those expected to enforce it. This is to say that in practice more formal rules will almost always be required to handle the ambiguities, the exceptions, the violations, and whatever other contingencies surface in response to the initial formal rule.[11] As lawyers seem only too eager to point out, "new law today is old law tomorrow." As a result, formal rules, particularly those that are claimed to govern career systems, often come and go in organizations and, for that reason alone, tend to be rather socially superficial.

It is often argued, however, that formal career rules make for an orderly system by regulating the conduct of organizational

members in standard and universal ways. This naive perspective implies that rules and order somehow go together. Yet rules bear no obvious or necessary relationship to order per se; they may even create disorder. Formal career rules, for example, often create and maintain sex, ethnic, and class privileges within an organization which foster strained interactions among people and perhaps overt hostilities. As Kanter (1977) points out, formal rules created to increase the number of women and blacks in management invariably inspire a backlash of distrust, anger and a resentment that borders on loathing within certain segments of the organization.[12] Formal pressures to produce, such as arrest or traffic ticket quota systems in police departments, not only systematically erode ideal procedural guarantees vis-a-vis the citizens in a community creating conflict between the organization and the larger society, but such quota systems also create considerable internal tension between hierarchical segments of the organization itself (Van Maanen, 1974; Manning, 1979). The official pressure to produce arising, in part, from the career interests of those making the rules is a source of antagonism in virtually all organizations. Consider also the massive breakdown that would occur were an organization to actually try to enforce all the rules and regulations governing employee behavior currently on the books. Rules and order are terms that must always be uncoupled for there is no logical or automatic relationship between them.

Formal career rules are nevertheless quite useful as resources to justify action after the fact. Formal rules

are perhaps most commonly used as a means of convincing other people that one acted appropriately. Indeed, formal rules on many occasions serve the so-called CYA or "cover your ass" function said to be so critical to the aspiring careers of doctors, military officers, accountants, police officers, and managers. Take, for example, some of the pervasive folklore which has developed around how to fire an employee. Such folklore invariably counsels the one doing the firing to seek out the most formal justifications available such as the tried and true "using-company-time-for-personal-business" even though such behavior (engaged in by everyone) had not even been recognized before the decision to fire the employee had been reached.[13]

In a somewhat different vein, having a set of well articulated, imaginative, socially esteemed, and, there ore, impressive career rules is also extremely valuable in managing the image the organization presents to those outside its boundaries. To point to an internal set of official rules suggests to outsiders (and sometimes insiders, though insiders are typically more savvy about such matters) that this is the sort of organization that does not act capriciously but rather it is one managed in thoughtful, careful, and orderly ways. Formal career rules then can be seen to sometimes sell stock, help ease relations with the government, attract employees, gather social prestige, and so on.

Inside organizations, it is almost always the case that formal rules overlook situational contingencies and the difficulties ordinary people have in determining just what any given rule means. Civil service rules, for instance, lay out very

elaborate patterns for proper career advancement. But the careers that result are frequently personalized by those who follow them on the basis of the individual's more or less unique background, career goals, changing personal circumstances, and a host of other considerations (Roth, 1963; Lortie, 1975; Van Maanen and Katz, 1976).[14] And there is, of course, a substantial body of research that shows rather vividly that formal rules in general are often viewed by those expected to abide by them as simply organizational foils against which considerable effort is spent trying to avoid, alter, or ignore (e.g., Dalton, 1959; Goffman, 1961; Crozier, 1964, 1971; Douglas and Johnson, 1978).

The central reason formal career rules are so difficult to interpret, follow, or enforce comes from the very fact that such rules can be made explicit in the first place. To be explicit means that rule makers have in mind both an objective they wish to foster as well as the behavior they seek to control. This is to say that formal rules do not necessarily express the more or less ordinary and routine goals and practices followed by the people to whom they are directed. That, in the past, breaches of particular behavioral expectations have been frequent enough to have been noticed and, once noticed, some person or group has become mobilized to put an end to such activity. Were this not the case, there would be no necessity to draft the formal rule.

A good example in this regard are the so-called "anti-corruption" policies in effect in many police departments which

require patrol officers to alter their beats every few years. Such rules have been justified by police officials on many grounds though the most frequently issued justification claims that long tenure in a particular geographical area leads to bribe-taking, overlooking certain crimes, and a general deterioration of "professional" conduct. Historically, however, police officers have been quite reluctant to leave a district since, among other reasons, learning a new district will require considerable time and effort; if transferred, an officer must give up those hard earned personal ties with the residents of a neighborhood which make for comfortable and pleasant working arrangements; and, if moved, the special territorial and social knowledge police officers possess of their beat becomes, for all practical purposes, useless. Without doubt, most veteran police officers prefer to stay put or, at most, work only a few geographically distinct district assignments over the course of their career in the patrol division. In this case, the formal transfer rules reflecting the logic and practice of police administration directly challenge the logic and practice of police work as seen by patrol officers.[15]

In sum, because formal career rules often stand in direct opposition to what people have done, are doing, want to do, and probably will do anyway, their influence must always be regarded as suspect. Under most conditions, the creation and enforcement of formal rules refelct power differentials moreso

than they reflect any underlying natural order or consensual view of proper conduct. Over long periods of time, unpopular formal rules may perhaps gain gradual acceptance. But such colonization processes appear to have rather dreary chances of success if social history is our guide. Thus, examining only the formal rules that apply to organizational careers is likely to prove unenlightening and reveal very little about the ways in which people actually go about carving out their careers.

2. Contextual Rules:

Closer to the core of the various career games as played out in organizational settings are "contextual rules." In contrast to formal rules, contextual ones are not usually written down or easily articulated. In some sense, these rules are connotative background features of organizational life and, unless they are dramatically made relevant to our immediate endeavors, we will typically be only dimly aware of them. As used here, contextual rules refer to the approved forms of thought and action an individual learns while becoming a member of an organization. This process is, however, one that begins in this society long before a person actually joins the organization (Merton, 1957; Moore, 1969; Van Maanen, 1976; Schein, 1978; Mortimer and Simmons, 1978).[16]

The enforcement of contextual rules resides primarily with the immediate, face-to-face interaction network surrounding a person. But, since contextual rules are violated far less often than formal rules, the special motivation to officially

recognize them in a written code is lacking.[17] Applied to the career, these rules are associated with what is considered "acceptable," "proper" or "expected" behavior within the organization. So deeply embedded are these rules that when we fail to operate in accord with them, it is usually those closest to us, our immediate neighbors in the organization, who will be the first to let us know (though not always the last). To the extent then that our self regard and self esteem is connected to being a member of good standing and deserving of respect within the organization, contextual rules are critical and can be overlooked only at our peril.

The contextrual rules surrounding careers cover an extremely broad spectrum of behavior including such matters as dressing properly, finding a sponsor for one's career in the organization, displaying the "right attitude" toward career advancement, redressing perceived wrongs in the approved fashion, assuming the correct stance toward subordinates, peers, and superiors, exhibiting the correct corporate image in public, and so on. Viewed in this fashion, contextual rules typically fall under the rubric of what we call commonsense. That is to say we take many of the contextual rules that surround our careers for granted and find little about them to warrant special attention. They are so much a part of our everyday lives that we may have difficulty in even finding words to express them. Consider, for example, the rule found in most if not all organizations which equates success with upward mobility. Where such a rule is firmly in place, it would be quite difficult and

maybe even heretical for one to suggest that alternative indicators for success might possibly exist such as long service, competent performance, or widespread social regard.

Because of their implicit or latent status, contextual rules are most often recognized only in their breach. When, for instance, a man does not quietly follow the usual organizational maxim of keeping one's negative feelings toward his boss discreetly hidden from the boss' view, others will become conscious of the contextual rule of hierarchical deference because the observed behavior represents an obvious exception to it. Or, similarly, in some organizations when women are placed in high management positions, the previously unquestioned and perhaps unseen contextual rule which holds that only men are proper in such positions comes strikingly to the fore.

Contextual rules have something of an "of course" characteristic to them. They deal typically with those actions we assume of others rather matter-of-factly (and others of us). As a result, we feel we have almost a moral right to expect contextual rules to be followed. Take, for example, the role one's avowed sponsor is expected to play in organizations. Sponsors, it seems, are fully expected to fight for their charges, bypass the hierarchy on their behalf, and use their power in the organization in ways beneficial to the career advancement of those that look upon them as sponsors (Martin and Strauss, 1956). When such behavior on the sponsor's part is not forthcoming, the one who was to receive these blessings is almost sure to be surprised, hurt, and offended. The rules are then "seen" when they are violated.

Not all contextual rules can be located quite so directly because what may be taken-for-granted by some will be problematic to others. Contextual rules vary therefore in terms of those who are likely to follow them. It would be mistaken and foolish to fail to distinguish between those contextual rules which appear to display great pervasiveness throughout an organization and those that do not.

The more bounded contextual rules associated with career games reflect the social organization of the work place and are linked to the expressive styles of behavior that develop in each segment.[18] Like other areas of social life, these rules find their application most refined within relatively closed social circles or segments of an organization wherein members may well recognize the presence of other standards but nonetheless choose to follow their own. Within one's own circle, following such rules not only helps to protect one from local embarrassments by maintaining one's own good standing within the group, but helps also to further establish and solidify the identity of the circle itself in contrast to other social groups in the organization.

An example is useful in this regard. Take the bi-polar status system that apparently exists in the corporate world between those managers who are "mobile" and those who are "stuck." As described most carefully by Kanter (1977), the "mobiles" are the "fast trackers," "boy wonders," "high potentials," or "water walkers" who, having experienced

considerable early success, strive competitively for even more by seeking greater visibility within the organization, working long hours, talking incessantly about their careers, and trying to associate only with people equal to or above them in hierarchical rank. The "stucks" on the other hand, not having experienced much early success, understandably work far fewer hours, accentuate their activities outside the firm as topics for conversation, concentrate on survival in the organization by trying to assume a low profile, and seek out subordinates or lower status peers with whom to associate. The "mobiles" emphasize colleagual rivalry but great cooperation with the desires of their organizational superiors wheras the "stucks" emphasize colleagual harmony and often maintain an almost anti-organizational stance by directly opposing the wishes of their superiors.

Within any one sphere, to neglect any of these contextual rules is to commit something of a moral affront. For a "stuck" to express great dedication and loyalty to the organization by working long and hard hours or by eagerly volunteering for a particularly distasteful or risky assignment would be certain to draw fire from the other "stucks." For a "mobile" to turn down an assignment to corporate headquarters where it is thought that one's visibility is heightened, one's perspective is broadened, and one's opportunity to forge political alliances is increased would be viwed as shockingly aberrant by other "mobiles."[19]

This example is not meant to imply, however, that contextual rules survive only through a sort of social tyranny based upon one's identification with a given segment of the organization. Indeed not. It is far more often the case that the contextual rules one attempts to follow and enforce run deep within the individual's own belief system. In this sense, we police ourselves when contextual rules are involved. The real test of understanding the use of contextual rules is not to be found merely in one's positive evaluation of them but in the unhesitating fashion one abides by and honors them. Self-consciously followed contextual rules are similar to formal rules and represent, at best, an awkward learner's crutch. Consider, for instance, the contextual rule found in many organizations which posits that the road to the top is paved by accepting any and all assignments that come one's way. Such a rule is typically not discussed at all, it is merely assumed.[20] To talk about it publicly suggests that the person not only still thinks about the rule but probably finds the rule somewhat disturbing, difficult to grasp, or unacceptable. The proper use of contextual rules requires one to dispense with calculation and take on the casual appearance of one who knows what to do "naturally." One doesn't have to think about whether or not to accept new assignments; one simply accepts them as they come along as a matter of course. Like learning how to ride a bike, when the learner of contextual rules can say "look Daddy, no hands," the tentative and consciously considered rules of the game have become fewer in number.

The more pervasive variety of contextual rules apply to all organizational members. They are considered to be so basic, so fundamental to the functioning of the organization that once learned they will almost never again be considered except when socializing the very raw recruit or attempting to resocialize members who are seen to have gone far astray. When these basic rules are knowingly violated, an indignant reaction of the most self-righteous and encompassing sort can be expected. An interesting case of just this sort of reaction occurred some years ago in a California university when a rather popular assistant professor publicly turned down tenure in the organization. His cardinal sin revolved around his professed disregard for the tenure system itself. In fact, he said pointedly that he wished very much to continue teaching at the university, but he would do so only on the basis of a short-term contract since he claimed not to believe in the merits of the tenure system. The furor his refusal raised on campus and the outrage expressed on the part of the great majority of administrators, staff, and faculty at the "shameful" behavior of this man provided dramatic testimony as to the deeply lodged character of the contextual rules surrounding tenure -- i.e. that one should not only want it, but gratefully accept it when offered. Though the university honored his wishes, the pressure brought to bear on this man was apparently so great and distressful that he left his academic post some six months after the public hue and cry had diminished.

The more pervasive contextual rules surrounding careers in organizations are almost always of a residual sort. That is, even if we could vacuum up and write down all the rules of proper conduct that appear to surround the career game, other deeper rules would no doubt remain. Consider, for example, those contextual rules which adhere to justifying career decisions once they have been made. Such rules refer to the problems faced by career decision makers when they attempt to display their good sense and reason. These deeply submerged matters are essentially rules-about-rules. "Rationality" would seem to be an illustration of one such elemental rule governing the use of other rules since people go to considerable lengths to demonstrate to others that they have considered the relevant facts, acted in line with precedent, and have been "objective." This contextual rule suggests the unspoken importance of impressing upon others that one's actions were not undertaken thoughtlessly, randomly, on a whim, or without due consideration for the facts of the matter. The lengthy review procedures built into many types of promotional decisions appear to be premised upon just this kind of contextual rule.

"Plausibility" would also seem to be another deep contextual rule surrounding career decision justification procedures. Here, decision makers must demonstrate that their decision more or less fits the situation in a "practical" fashion. The choice may not be the best one as it later unfolds, but, given the limited information at hand, the decision can be shown to have been a plausible and practical one. To wit, a young man who seeks out a position in the sales division of a firm from

which to begin his move up the corporate ladder might well explain to anyone who listens that he picked sales because the firm operates in highly competitive markets and therefore sales is a very visible and critical function in that organization. Since the function is watched closely by the powers that be in the firm, his chances of being noticed are enhanced. Such a reasonable account would no doubt display "good sense" to most listeners and therefore fall well within the contextual rule. On the other hand, to claim one wishes to climb the corporate ladder by beginning in a division that is cute and cozy, over-staffed, or isolated from key figures in the firm is to violate the contextual rule of plausibility and, no doubt, leave one's listeners confused.

In closing this section, I should note that contextual rules are hardly unchanging or sacred. Though they are far more penetrating and solid than formal rules, contextual ones too alter their form and content over time. Many formerly taboo matters in organizations have been confronted directly in recent years by various individuals and groups with an interest in altering the contextual rules which have traditionally defined the career game. In particular, social movements questioning the taken-for-granted rules of the society have made their presence felt with organizations. The stress currently being put on redefining the roles women, ethnic minorities, homosexuals, old people, and even the so-called "plateaued employees" play inside organizations is a case in point. Many of us have felt threatened by some of these movements for there is comfort in

tradition. But, at the same time, others of us have felt liberated by these movements because, in part, there is always an exhilaration that comes from change. Regardless how we have responded, however, many organizational careers have been changed, thus indicating that at least some contextual rules are hardly as pervasive as they once were.

3. Operational Rules:

Unlike the formal and contextual rules that surround the career, operational ones are those rules tied most closely to the immediate circumstances of people. They refer to the concrete "doings" of persons attempting to accomplish career relevant purposes. Operational rules are logically required since formal and contextual rules only outline in sketchy fashion what is to be regarded as appropriate career behavior in the organization. While formal and contextual rules help define the behavioral limits to be discovered in the organization, operational rules, by taking into account the situational particulars of the moment, help people select from among the alternative lines of behavior available within the limits.[21] Operational rules deal then with the denotative manner in which formal and contextual rules are handled in practice.

Consider the daily working situation of patrol officers in American police agencies. As most patrol officers will readily admit, they find themselves facing official demands from their superiors that contradict what they believe to be the contextual demands of their job as it is enacted in the street. For example,

the formal requirement of securing a warrant before entering a private dwelling or searching a car is seen as an inappropriate nicety which if adhered to slavishly, would needlessly put them in danger on too many occasions. Patrol officers find themselves trapped between two contrasting rule systems. If they follow the formal rules, they may be killed; if they follow the contextual rules, they may be fired. The dilemma is overstated, of course, but it does suggest that the behavior of patrol officers cannot be fully described without reference to a third rule system which recognizes the immediate circumstances of the moment in which a decision must be reached.

To take another example, consider the formal rules surrounding career paths in organizations that presumably govern such things as the number of hierarchical levels a person can jump at any one time or the minimal amount of time one must spend at each level. There are also contextual mandates suggesting that line jobs in the organization are more likely than staff jobs to get one to the top or that if one wishes to move upward, they are best off working for a boss who is also on the rise in the organization. But these rules are in themselves insufficient for understanding what individuals can do in their immediate situation to enhance or retard their careers. In other words, what are the operational rules under which working for a particular someone in a particular spot will pay off? Thus, it is in this domain where the organizational piety "performance counts" actually counts because the performance that is given must be tailored to the demands of a concrete, not an abstract, situation. Operational rules come into play at this level,

therefore, and may take the form of such specifics as working certain Saturdays, drafting the boss's budget before one is asked, being visibly engaged in what appears to be an engrossing task when there are certain visitors in the office, making sure one's name appears prominently on a given report that originates in the department, and so forth.

In general, the operational rules of the career game draw their prescriptive and accounting power from the on-going exigencies of social interaction, the specific demands that go with given assignments, the different kinds of people to be found in various situations, and the immediate goals available for perusal on the scene. There are, in contrast to formal rules, some similarities between contextual and operational rules. Both are typically unwritten and often conflicting across segments of the organization. But there are also some crucial differences. In particular, operational rules are far more explicit and instrumentally oriented than contextual rules which deal more often with the unstated matters of "good form." While "good form" represents something of an enabling condition to protect or further one's career, content and substance matter too. In contrast to contextual rules, operational ones speak directly to the specific actions required to implement career objectives. They deal with the means by which people sharpen their character and uniqueness in the organization, manage those problems of a non-routine nature, and develop day-to-day standards for converting remote career contingencies into matters over which they might conceivably have some control. Whereas contextual

rules hold relatively firm across situations, operational rules do not and are quite likely to vanish entirely once a situation has been altered.

Compare, for example, the operational rules that surround the management of a new organizational function to those that might surround the management of a well-established one. Those individuals who take on what are thought to be innovative assignments will be judged on a different set of criteria than those who are expected to merely maintain a particular operation. Contextual rules usually suggest that doing it first is extraordinary thus more difficult and more important than doing it second and these contextual rules will be played out in operational ways. For example, innovators typically have greater access to those at the top of the organization than will their successors. Keeping a sinking venture afloat or maintaining a smoothly functioning one is to entail a different set of activities than getting it started in the first place.

Operational rules can be seen to adjust more swiftly to changing environmental patterns than will formal or contextual rules. Corporate employees on fast-moving career paths, for example, tend to be located most frequently in those areas of a firm currently assessed as the most critical to the company's competitive status (Rosenbaum, 1978; Roth, 1963). In times when business is bad or a tight money situation exists, one would expect the careers of those employees in the financial and economic ends of the corporation to prosper. When labor problems abound, personnel people may move ahead more rapidly. Contextual rules of mobility and visibility are of course pertinent

in this regard; yet, only by making use of the operational rules which denote what specific areas of the organization are currently most troublesome and critical can the individual potentially take advantage of the situation.

Operational rules are significant not only because situations differ but also because similar situations permit differing degrees of behavioral latitude depending upon the social composition of the situation. When we consider issues of this variety, operational rules tend to line up or mirror the more expressively oriented contextual rules of conduct in the organization. To wit, compare the unusually bland language we use in the presence of strangers to that often earthy and raw language we employ when among particular friends. Knowing the limits of one's social situation is a matter of considerable concern to those involved in the career game, and one can be sure that people will develop operational rules to reflect these limits. If, for example, we slight a specific person at work whom we hardly know by not responding politely to the person's pleasant "good morning" in the hall, we run the risk of being seen by this person as anti-social, stuck-up, preoccupied, different, or, more to the point, one who does not display the proper regard for others. On the other hand, this same lack of response to a greeting given off by an intimate is unlikely to create anything other than a mild stir as to what particular detail of life is bothering us at the moment. In the latter case, our character is not in question as something to be diagnosed in terms of the contextual rules of conduct, only our specific behavior

is of concern in light of the operational rules surrounding person, action, time and place.

More broadly, career rules of an operational sort reflect the various social situations in which ordinary organizational activity takes place. A job in sales, for instance, typically offers considerably more autonomy of action than does a clerical job. Put forth simply, sales positions are far more difficult to supervise directly since so much of the work occurs outside the confines of an office. Supervision must necessarily be geared more toward the formal and contextual rules surrounding "getting the job done" than toward the operational rules that suggest "how the job gets done." Clerical functions, by contrast, are typically performed under the gaze of supervision and therefore allow for the direct monitoring of operational rules. The work-a-day atmosphere in the former locale is often like a social club that is exuberent, expressively oriented, and cheerful whereas the latter tends to resemble a schoolroom that is reserved, instrumentally oriented, and somewhat grim. Behavior likely to advance or constrain one's career in each setting will be tuned to far different operational rules in each setting. Within each context, operational rules suggest what contextual rules are to be most useful, what formal rules are to be observed, and how both rule forms are likely to be invoked. Formal and contextual rules are varied and while situations may allow for the expression of any number of rules, the individual always has choices to make.

From this standpoint, the difference between what we say and what we do is hardly the great mystery some of us have made it out to be. The difference merely reflects the fact that

we cannot discover, invent, or articulate the operational rules of doing something with any certainty until we are required to actually do it under what will always be particular circumstances. This feature of organizational life reflects Weick's (1979) insightful remarks concerning the occasions of choice as the apriori condition for the formulation of goals, both personal and organizational. Career choices then surface operational rules which are known and discovered primarily by the backward not the forward glance. Only by making choices are the rules of the career game made visible.

Comment

I have presented in this paper a simple taxonomy of rule types. While the labels for and analytic contrasts among the types are mine, I have tried to remain as close as possible within each category to the manner in which organizational members themselves describe and understand the workings of their careers. It is true of course that the rules as understood by the players of career games may bear little relation to the eventual outcomes the use of such rules are thought to advance. Unintended consequences are hardly unknown in the social world. Nevertheless, the practical actions of people are premised on what they believe they are doing at the time and not on what a dispassionate observer decides they were "really" doing after the fact.

From this perspective, career rules must be regarded as socially constructed artifacts whose meanings are varied, in flux, and tied to the pragmatic objectives of organizational members. People are the makers and users of rule and not simply the followers of them. Even when following rules, people must pick

and choose which ones to follow according to their purposes at the moment. In terms of research, taking this perspective seriously would require elaborating upon such phenomena as how organizational members learn of the various career rules, select from among them, justify their selections, switch rules, invent rules, and attempt to enforce certain rules in lieu of others. Comparative study could and should be carried out which would allow us to contrast the rules available and utilized in one career line with those of another. Such a research program would produce the sorts of descriptive materials needed to develop a valid account for the career relevant actions of individuals that does not do violence to the creative grounds upon which human behavior is built. The rule-based taxonomy developed here is then a way of beginning this task by organizing the career management practices of people without swallowing up the active, strategic, and personalized aspects of these practices.

In terms of the rule types themselves, several points are worth further comment. First, the three rules types are obviously interrelated in complex ways. Formal rules, for example, are enforceable only insofar as there are to be found people to support them and procedures to implement such support. Formal rules are vacuous in and of themselves. Their influence is conditional and dependent upon the contextual and operational rules in place. The "up or out" rule depends upon people who prefer "up" to "out" and are willing to do something to enact that preference. Operational rules too play off formal and

contextual ones in the sense that contextual rules help define (often after the fact) the appropriate ends to be sought in the situation and formal rules represent potential guidelines and resources to be used (or obstacles to be overcome) while such seeking takes place.

Second, the rule types vary by specificity. Formal rules codify certain ideals about the way things should be organized and accomplished from the perspective of those who invent and attempt to enforce these rules. Contextual rules stem from the actual practices adopted by various groups of people in the workplace and therefore have a good deal more relevance to the career objectives of any given individual. But, because contextual rules are also of a general sort, operational rules develop to provide for everyday behavioral guidelines, resources, and justifications. Thus operational rules allow us, as Goffman (1970) wisely noted, to talk and act as if our conduct were in fact rule governed and sensitive to external facts. Operational rules provide rationales for why we acted in a particular fashion at a particular time and thus invoke specific interpretations for formal and contextual rules. From this perspective, the exception is itself the rule.

Third, the distinctions between one rule type and another are often fuzzy and blurred. This suggests that rules could be placed on continua of various kinds thus ordering the rules on some basis and replacing the nominal (but convenient) classification scheme offered here. If, for example, we based such a continuum on the use of particular rules, those operational rules of the career utilized by one or at most several organizational members

to accomplish particular purposes would be at one end of the continuum. These rules would reflect individual adjustments to circumstances not commonly encountered by most organizational members. In this regard, consider as illustrative the operational career rules invented by "token" women or "token" blacks as described by Kanter (1977). At the other end of the continuum would be those equally privatized, odd rules of a formal sort whose uses are forgotten or irrelevant to all but a very few organizational members. The most officially rule-minded of all organizational participants seem, for instance, to be those who have no other means available in a situation of influencing others except by attempting to make use of those obscure, infrequently encountered formal regulations (Crozier, 1964, 1971). In between these two poles, contextual rules would be placed, the most pervasive of which would reside in the middle of the continuum. Shading off toward the operational end, those contextual rules utilized most frequently by certain segments of the organization without position, power, or influence in the organization would be found whereas those contextual rules used by more powerful segments of the organization would be located toward the formal end.

Fourth, since rules are continually changing, certain systems concepts may be helpful in understanding career dynamics if they are applied with care. An equilibrium state, for example, might be said to exist when contextual rules are held in common by most organizational members. Thus, a more or less normal curve could describe the rule usage pattern in the organization as plotted along the continuum discussed above. Disequilibrium

might be described by a bi-modal usage curve where contextual rules vary greatly and one segment of the organization makes relatively more use of rules at the formal end while another segment makes use of rules at the operational end. Such a distribution is perhaps less stable because, over time, there may be reasons to expect the operational rules to gradually become more pervasive as might be the case were their creators and users to move into more prominent and powerful organizational positions. The operational rules would then become the dominant contextual ones of a "new order." And, as a result, some but probably not all formal rules of the "old order" would be driven out or fall into disuse. The pattern might even work in reverse were power to become more concentrated in traditional hands.

Fifth, I must qualify my emphasis on rules and the game playing imagery it conveys. By and large, this imagery is mine since I do not think it is or necessarily can be fully recognized or acted upon with any certainty by organizational members. Although considerations akin to strategic gaming are no doubt discussed by organizational members, these considerations are most meaningful to people only after concrete career-related events have taken place. Before such events occur, the specific rationality, temporal consequences, and descriptive adequacy of the various rules which inform behavior cannot be well-known or understood. From the individual's standpoint, careers are seen to emerge as much from drift as from design.

As a final example, again consider my own description of the tenure game with which I opened this paper. Reconstructing a small part of that description and tying it to the concerns discussed here, I would argue that formal rules were relevant

to my behavior only to the extent that I saw at the time no need to seek to circumvent them. The contextual rules I followed seemed to be drawn straight from the academic mainstream in the sense that I sought to advance my career by publishing. Operationally, there were, of course, crucial personal choices to make about many matters including what and where I published. These operational choices were made both on the basis of friendly advice coming from perhaps three or four people I knew well and on the basis of personal taste meeting with fortunate circumstances. There certainly was no master plan upon which my career moves were coordinated. Indeed, I would profess that drift fits my career more than design.

Yet, is it also the case that by describing my actions in this fashion, I have also: 1) dramatized the kinds of discretionary choices I made (operational rules); 2) affirmed the values I believed (contextual rules); and 3) displayed a rather unremarkable conformity to the official policies of the organization (formal rules). In other words, there is perhaps a logical but unavoidable pattern underneath my accounting scheme that represents, in abbreviated form, the kind of data researchers can and must work with if they are to grasp careers as understood by the individuals who create them. From such data, I think many analytic possibilities are to be found. Three such possibilities stand out. First, to the degree that the verbal depictions of the rules are shared by people, a sense of the social structure within which careers are played out will emerge and can be documented. Second,

when and where conflicts in the rules are discovered, the social organization of careers can be described. Third and most critically, by preserving the rules of the game as hypothesized by the players, an active and ultimately causal characterization of individual careers will be made empirically possible.

Notes

1. In this paper, I lean heavily on the theoritecal and empirical work coming out of cognitive anthropology (e.g., Tyler, 1969; Spradley, 1972), phenomonological sociology (e.g., Douglas, 1970; Psathas, 1973); and the symbolic interactionist tradition in social psychology (e.g., Blumer, 1969; Strauss, 1978). The integrating theme running through these varied approaches to the study of social life is the analytic necessity to view human behavior as purposeful, strategic, and situated.

2. Practically any modern textbook concerned with organizations regards their segmented nature to be their most distinctive yet problematic characteristic. What has been less prominently displayed in these textbooks however are convincing arguments as to the origins, bases, forms, and consequences of such segmentation. On these matters, Burns(1955), Silverman (1970), and Blankenship (1977) are exemplary.

3. These procedures are of a "constitutive" variety. That is, they represent a means of structuring activities and events such that these activities and events can be assembled by people into "social facts" such as an organizational career. The perspective taken here assumes that careers emerge from the socially organized interactional work of organizational members. Careers are not viewed as a direct result of personal or environmental factors but are seen instead to be a result of the generative interactional procedures (and rules) that constitute the series of decision making encounters surrounding an individual's career. For some detailed empirical work on these matters (pertaining largely to student careers), see Mehan, 1978; Erickson, 1975; and Cicourel and Kitsuse, 1963. Theoretical foundations for this study can be located in Garfinkel and Sacks, 1970; and Garfinkel, 1962.

4. The early work of Goffman (1959; 1963; 1970) represents the most thoughtful consideration of the use and abuse of gaming models in the study of social life. Excellent reviews of the weird but brilliant light Goffman's brand of "game theory" has cast on contemporary sociology are to be found in Manning, 1978; and Dawe, 1973.

5. I should note that one's concern for their career is hardly limited to just these transitions periods. Indeed, career concerns emerge very early in this society and perhaps never abate throughout one's lifetime. The point to be made in the text however is that these concerns are more salient and explicit during those transitional events that are associated with potential career passages than during other periods. Such events must be interpreted and from these interpretations emerge career rules. Theories in everyday life are not built merely as a mental exercise but they are built to explain key events in one's career (past, present, and future). They have therefore most practical uses (Van Maanen, 1977).

6. At root, the epistemological trap discussed in the text suggests than any theory which does not deal directly with the way people behave in concrete, immediate situations is a short-circuited one. There is therefore a methodological irony in the work of the researchers

who have examined the influence of organizations on individuals. Although the "career" is the principal variable that links a person's background and organizational experience, we have rarely examined the actual process through which a career unfolds. We have studied various indices of the career - hierarchical rank, number of moves, length of time in the organization - but what actually happens inside organizations on a practical level - in the office, in evaluation sessions, in meetings - has typically not been studied by researchers who use the correlational method to determine the influence of organizations on people. The career has therefore been treated as the "black box" existing between input and output factors. This critique is handled well by Silverman, 1970.

7. It should be understood (both prospectively and retrospectively) that virtually all social behavior (from "getting drunk at the boss' party" to "getting an excellent performance rating") has potential relevance for one's career. I have constrained my discussion in this paper however, by using as examples primarily only those rules of transition which are seen to govern upwardly mobile careers. This is obviously an arbitrary choice. Other constraints are possible and career relevant as well. Consider Sudnow's (1965), Weider's (1970) and Zimmerman's (1970) treatment of the rules surrounding certain occupational practices; Douglas' (1973) treatment of the rules surroudning the identification and handling of deviance; or my own treatment of the rules surrounding social interaction (Van Maanen 1979).

8. Shame itself is premised upon that sacred principle of social life: "to be observable is to be embarrassable." In any public situation, our ability to bring off a performance that reflects a basic competence with an understanding of the social proprieties of that situation is at stake. It is true, of course, that certain situations matter far more to us than others. In those that matter, a part of our esteemed self is on the line and shame therefore is likely to be a more prominent concern to us than in those situations which matter less. In the interest of space and simplicity, I do not directly consider the orientation of organizational members toward their careers. By and large, my illustrations assume a positive orientation or a major self-investment of persons in their careers.

9. It should be clear that a person's belief or trust in certain rules will vary from blind faith, to mild skepticism, to perhaps cynical disbelief. While there may be psychological generalizations to be made about individual differences on this matter, I will not consider them here. I wish to emphasize the surface, observable, recognized, and calculated career behavior of people, behavior of the sort that can be best understood as interpersonal, not intrapersonal, activity.

10. Formal rules originate both inside and outside an organization. They attempt to control behavior thought by some (the rule makers) to be out of control. Those rules coming from the outside often reflect the law of the land which presumbably mirrors the wishes of the society

at large. Those coming from the inside presumably represent the wishes of the governing elite within the organization. However, it would be a fairy-tale image to suggest that the link between preferences and rules in either domain is a direct one.

11. For an analysis of precisely this phenomenon, see Miller and Van Maanen, 1979.

12. Nor is this reaction confined merely to verbal forms. Kanter (1977) illustrates in vivid detail, the resistance to directives, operational slow downs, working to rule, and acts of overt hositility that characterized the behavior of many of those employees, managerial and clerical, who felt most threatened by the Affirmative Action guidelines adopted by the firm she studied. The so-called "non-mobile" employees were the major offenders.

13. This example came from an article titled "Getting Rid of Dead Wood" (Los Angeles Times, August 23, 1977. Similar advice is not hard to locate. Consider the ever popular, self-help genre of management writings. See, in particular, Ringer (1977) for some ingenious rules for corporate climbing.

14. Careers can also be "impersonalized" in the structural sense as well. For example, when the economy takes a nose dive, career opportunities may be closed off. While we tend to personalize career success and institutionalize career failure, both the individual and the larger structure within which career possibilities are sustained play undeniable roles in the shaping of unique careers. See Van Maanen and Schein (1977) for a perspective on the "internal" and "external" dimensions of the career.

15. The validity of the official justification has been examined and has not, in fact, stood up to empirical test (Sherman, 1974; Manning, 1977). The implementation issue is another matter altogether. And, it appears that transfers, in practice, are far more common for those with little or no seniority in the organization than they are for those who have seniority (Manning, 1980).

16. Contextual rules are quite similar to what I have referred to elsewhere as cultural rules (Van Maanen, 1979). The assumption followed in this paper is that organizations tend to develop their own cultures that only partially reflect the larger ones within which they are embedded. But, like formal rules, contextual ones can originate either inside or outside the organization. For a discussion of the penetration of cultural codes of conduct into occupational domains, see Miller and Van Maanen (forthcoming).

17. There is a blurring around the edges of this rule classification scheme that is discussed in the concluding section of the paper. An example, however, is useful here. Consider the issue of having the "right credentials" for certain jobs. For instance, there often are no written policies to consult when considering who may aspire to the corporate presidency. But, rest assured, there will be many contextual

rules surrounding succession and some of these may as well be written so explicitly are they known. The line separating the two rule forms is, in practice, occasionally muddy though I think the distinction made in the text between formal and contextual rules is by and large a socially valid and empirica-ly sound one.

18. Contextual rules typically flow from the social organization that characterizes a given set of people. In work settings, functional and hierarchical boundaries will be partial determinants of the social organization but clearly other dimensions enter into the matter as well (e.g., social backgrounds, interactional styles, ethnicity, etc.)

19. It should be noted that these rules have a self-fulfilling property to them. This recalls my earlier point about the "constitutive" character of rules. "Stucks", for example, often claim to not want promotions, would not take them even if they were offered, and do not value upward corporate mobility. The expression of such sentiments while contextually correct and approved, serves at the same time to keep them in the "stuck" category. By following the rules, the meaning and structure of the career are thus maintained. This constitutive character of social rules is explored in great detail in M. Douglas (1973).

20. A number of observers have suggested this rule has lost much of its force in recent years (Beckhard, 1977; Hall, 1976). But, as Kanter (1977) and Seidenberg (1975) rightly point out, the rule has always been of the most limited contextual sort used primarily by those "on the make" and "on the rise" managers. From the public debate surrounding the issue, it is difficult at present to see whether or not, contextually, any change has in fact occured.

21. These limits are of course exceeded in many situations. Consider such apparently widespread practices as: expense padding, equipment theft ranging from paper clips to typewriters, collusion with competitors, kickbacks, bribes, illegal campaign contributions, industrial spying and sabotage, false reporting and the personal use of organizational resources. What is most intriguing about these matters is not their occurrence *per se* (and the obvious contrast between the formal and operational rules), but rather most intriguing from the perspective presented in this paper is the manner in which people invariably fall back on the implicit contextual rules in explicit ways to excuse such activity - "everybody else is doing it." Again, a blurring of the rule-types occurs.

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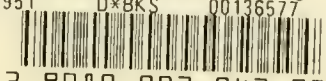

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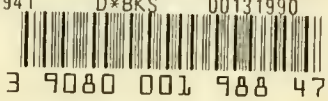

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