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# Preface

This book has both an intellectual and a personal history. Its intellectual history comes from my experience with sharing my academic insights about organizations with a wide variety of students from different age groups and social and national backgrounds. The students constantly reminded me that there is no single understanding of a given organizational phenomenon and that context matters a great deal in understanding. This book's personal history stems from my practical involvement, as a worker, consumer, and consultant, in many different types of organizations and in many different countries. I have observed how organizations struggle with various types of problems. In many cases, these problems were structural in nature, but were experienced as personal failures. Ineffective solutions were often not the result of deficient skill training on the part of organizational participants, but were caused by deep-seated misunderstandings, stemming from differences in personal disposition or social background. I have written this book with a view to the value of pursuing alternative interpretations of organizational phenomena, hoping that the analysis helps readers better connect abstract theoretical concepts to "facts" as they may apply to their own life experiences. A practical test of this book's value is whether it helps readers view organizational matters more clearly, or at least differently.

When writing this book, I also had Bernard Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* in mind. The structure of an aggregate like an organization is the result of the actions of individuals who may or may not have some larger collective goal in mind, but, in the end, these individuals are what they are: self-interested, but also sociable; competitive, but also cooperative; dependent, but also controlling; and vulnerable, but also resilient. Moral sentiments aside, and metaphorically speaking, organizational participants behave like bees, busily constructing a place for themselves, in an uncertain environment filled with natural enemies and potential cooperators. There is an important difference, however. Like bees, they "dance to each other," but, unlike bees, they also reflect about their dancing, in search for better understanding.

This book is aimed at advanced undergraduate and graduate students in the fields of organization theory and organizational behavior, with applications in

areas like human resource management, strategic management, and small business and entrepreneurship. It should also be of interest to students in sociology, psychology, economics, political science, public administration, social anthropology, and history. It is intended to provide readers with an up-to-date and accessible resource for study, debate, and inspiration regarding a broad range of phenomena in organizations, large and small, in business, government, and the non-profit sector. To make the most of this book, readers should have a basic understanding of the principles of social science analysis and the kinds of questions addressed by social scientists.

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