The Integrative Perspective on the School as an Organizational System

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Abstract

This article examines various theoretical viewpoints on organizations and the traits that define schools as organizations, with an emphasis on the systems perspective of analysis. We aim to provide an integrative lens of school organization using a multidisciplinary approach. As societies have become more complex, the approach to analyzing organizations has required the use of multiple perspectives to provide a more comprehensive picture of the phenomena studied. In this paper, we examine how organizations have evolved, the elements that characterize school organizations, the relationships between these elements, and the various models of schools as organizations. This paper aims to enhance the understanding of the phrase "school organization" and its implications for both theory and practice.

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1. Introduction

Society is constantly evolving, and organizations must continuously adapt to these changes to be sustainable. A multitude of factors determine the need for transformation, including political ideologies, governmental changes that introduce new policies, financial fluctuations, demographic shifts, and technological advancements. Schools are the main source of education for the younger generation and, like other organizations, they need to adapt to meet the expectations of the community and society. The effectiveness of the school results from the cooperation of the participants and the coordination of a combination of processes. Although schools operate based on clearly defined regulations and procedures, the outcomes differ. These differences in the quality of schools have been associated with several factors, including differential access to resources, family and zonal socio-economic levels, the degree of teacher involvement, the level and quality of training of human resources (teachers and principals), the type of evaluation and monitoring of school performance, and others. Recent approaches argue that internal school resources lead to different performance (Schiefelbein, 2017). These internal resources encompass the individual and team competences of the organization's members, as well as less visible and measurable aspects of school functioning, such as culture and climate.

Research on schools as organizations in the Romanian context is limited, with only a few studies focusing on this specific topic. Dînşorean and Sava (2023) emphasized the need to transform schools into learning organizations, especially to generate a change regarding the future of students, regardless of their previous experience, but also to train citizens who can thrive in an increasingly dynamic and complex society. Iosifescu et al. (2013) analyze the status of quality culture development in pre-university education to identify the characteristics of the organizational culture of schools in Romania and propose a series of interventions at the national, county, and local levels. Gavreliuc et al. (2014) explore social hierarchy, interpersonal relations, and organizational culture in Romanian universities, highlighting the unique aspects of these institutions. Rogoz (2018) examines the connection between the school's vision and mission, alongside the influence of values in shaping specific traits of the organizational environment, and emphasizes the importance of correlating the manager's value system with those that define the specifics of the school institution.

Given all these aspects and their implications at different levels of analysis, we believe that an interdisciplinary approach to organizations is beneficial in facilitating a deeper understanding of how they function. This article aims to analyze organizations as complex systems combining elements from the three perspectives of organization analysis proposed by Scott (2003): organizations as rational systems, natural systems, and open systems, with a focus on school organizations. Thus, in the following sections, we will present definitions and theoretical perspectives on organizations, elements common to both organizations and schools, specific elements that differentiate schools from other organizations, as well as different models of the school as an organization.

2. Organizations as systems

The literature devoted to the study of organizations emphasizes the prevalence of these structures in all sectors of social life, which characterizes contemporary society. Organizations are the hallmarks of modern society" (Vlăsceanu, 1999). An organization is a social system in which and through which people interact (cooperate) to achieve common goals. "Interaction is the process through which human conduct is formed, a framework in which human conduct finds its mode of expression" (Blumer, 1998).

Barnard (1938) believed that an organization is formed when individuals can interact with one another, they are motivated to take action, and to reach a shared objective. In the symbolic interactionist perspective, the common goal is achieved through cooperation. Cooperation involves understanding the intentions of the other, which is a series of alternative responses,

formulated by one side and the other, after the acts of the other are deciphered and interpreted, namely "conscious conversation of gestures" (Dobrescu & Bârgăoanu, 2003).

The term "organization" is derived from the Greek word ὄργανον (organon), meaning instrument or tool. In this sense, an organization is a social structure conceived as a tool to achieve a goal. Organizations emerged in the 19th century in Europe and America, in the period of economic expansion brought about by the industrial revolution, initially as 'communal' forms based on kinship ties, later transformed into 'associative' forms based on contractual arrangements between individuals who had no personal ties but pursued common interests or goals (Scott, 2003).

The emergence of organizations can be attributed to a multitude of factors, each contributing to the formation and evolution of these complex social structures. One of the primary reasons for the emergence of organizations is the need to manage and coordinate the behavior of individuals within a collective framework, based on the findings that group work is more efficient and yields better results through the combined effort of individuals and division of labor. Organizations emerge as a means to satisfy people's aspirations and needs, serving as a vehicle for the production of goods and services. The time needed to achieve objectives is a key factor in setting up organizations; the desired results are achieved in a shorter time with direct effects on costs. Additionally, organizations play a crucial role in facilitating innovation by providing a structured environment for the development and implementation of new ideas. They also have the benefit of previously accumulated knowledge (the transmission of acquired information from one generation to the next fosters progress).

Theoretical and practical research carried out over time has advanced/proposed a multitude of perspectives to define organizations, through which to examine and comprehend the intricate relationships, frameworks, and processes that form the foundation of organizational existence. Richard W. Scott (2003) contends that three differing definitions of organizations have surfaced, each linked to one of three viewpoints on organizations: as a rational system, as a natural system, and as an open system. The first definition views organizations as highly formalized, goal-oriented collectivities that are focused on the pursuit of specific objectives and prioritize efficiency as their primary goal. The second definition views organizations as social systems formed through consensus or conflict, seeking to maintain their existence. The third definition views organizations as activities that involve coalitions of participants with diverse interests embedded in broader environments, with a focus on adaptation. From the rational and natural systems viewpoints, organizations are regarded as entities (substantivist definitions), while in the open systems approach, organizations are viewed as processes (relational definition) (Emirbayer, 1997).

M. Vlăsceanu (2003) points out that the former perspective approaches organizations and environments as separate entities with clearly defined and rigorously determined boundaries, focusing solely on the analysis of relationships within organizations. In contrast, the approach of organizations as open systems focuses on the relationships between organizations or between the environment and organizations. The rational system perspective considers organizations as groups focused on achieving specific objectives and characterized by well-defined social structures. Various authors emphasize these characteristics of organizations, likening them to an organism designed to fulfil a clearly determined purpose.

According to Barnard (1938), formal organization is an intentional and planned cooperation between people based on clear structures and rules. Organizations are coordinated interacting groups with a central system of leadership. Because of their precise structure, they play an essential role in society and are sociologically comparable to the individual organism in biology (March & Simon, 1958). Blau and Scott (1962) state that the term "formal organizations" is used to refer to certain organizations because their distinctive feature is that they were formally constituted with the express goal of accomplishing specific objectives. Organizations are social

units intentionally created and modified to achieve specific objectives, as stated by Etzioni (1964).

All these early definitions emphasize that organizations are distinguished from other types of collectivities by two key characteristics: a goal-oriented approach and a high degree of formalization of internal relationships. These features give them a structured and purposeful character, different from informal groups or other forms of human association. In contrast to other forms of collectivities, such as communities or social networks, where interactions may be spontaneous and goals may be multiple and unstructured, organizations operate based on a well-defined direction. For example, an educational institution has clear educational goals, a corporation pursues precise economic goals, and a non-governmental organization may have well-defined social goals. These goals guide the organization's work and enable resources to be allocated efficiently. Formalization implies the existence of clearly formulated rules and procedures that determine how activities are carried out and authority exercised within the organization. Formalization provides stability and predictability, ensuring the continuity of the organization even when people in certain roles change. In a formalized framework, responsibilities and authority are distributed based on the position held, rather than on interpersonal relationships or the social status of individuals. These characteristics provide them with a stable and efficient structure, enabling them to operate in a coordinated manner and achieve their goals systematically and predictably.

The rational system of organization is characterized by the presence of formalization, hierarchical authority, a focus on goals, logical decision-making, standardized processes, and a desire for efficiency (Kaufmann et al., 2018). There are four theories related to rationalization, namely bureaucratization, scientific management, decision-making theory, and administrative theory. The concept of rational organization theory suggests that an organization functions as a tool to achieve clear and measurable goals. The goal of the organization is efficiency, which is achieved through optimization, implementation, and rationalization (a form of control). The main criticism of the rationalist paradigm for defining and analyzing organizations was that people were considered as robots, and the human side of organizations, i.e., the actual behavior of organizational participants, was neglected. Another shortcoming of this perspective was that it approached organizations as closed systems, focusing on processes and relationships within strictly defined boundaries without considering what happens outside the organization.

According to Scott and Davis (2016), the apparent limitations of the rational system paradigm were the primary reason behind the emergence of the natural system perspective. Critics contend that the sensible system approach overlooks the complexity of human behavior, informal structures, and emergent dynamics within organizations by portraying them as goal-oriented, structured, and highly codified entities. To address these issues, the natural system perspective views organizations as natural, flexible systems whose decision-making and operational efficacy are shaped by informal connections, cultural norms, and internal motivations. Organizations operate as social collectives impacted by human interactions and changing internal and external contexts, despite official rules and objectives (Scott, 2003).

This perspective is concerned with the overt behaviour of participants (what participants actually do in the organization) and emphasizes the informal and interpersonal structures of relationships, i.e., the "human face of organizations". The natural system of organizational behaviour comprises four distinct perspectives (Anzola et al., 2017): the human relations school of E. Mayo, the cooperative system of C. Barnard, the institutional approach of P. Selznick, and the AGIL scheme of T. Parsons. Each school of thought stresses the importance of human interactions, social dynamics, and cultural influences within organizations.

Natural systems prioritize employee satisfaction, well-being, and positive working environments. They recognize the importance of cultivating a fulfilled workforce, which boosts morale, commitment, and loyalty. These systems value informal networks and social dynamics within the organization, facilitating knowledge sharing, collaboration, and innovation. However,

an excessive focus on employee satisfaction and informal relationships can create resistance to change and challenge the adaptability of the organization, while teamwork and collaboration are valued. As with the rationalist approach to organizations, the natural systems perspective is also considered to be limited to the structures and mechanisms inside organizations and omits what happens outside, i.e., the environment of organizations.

From an open systems perspective, organizations are conceived as dynamic aggregates of interdependent flows, including constantly evolving movements, exchanges, activities, and coalitions of individuals (Scott, 2003). They are not fixed entities, but flexible structures embedded in wider environments of material and institutional resources. This approach emphasizes that organizations are part of a larger system (the organizational ecosystem) and are oriented towards change, adaptation, and innovation. The need to match the requirements of the environment with the organizational structure - analyzed as a dependent variable in relation to a number of independent variables (physical, technological, cultural, individual) specific to the context in which the organization operates - is emphasized. This perspective is developed within the "contingency theories" by Lawrence and Lorch (1967) and Lawrence (1993), respectively, who emphasize the need to design organizations according to these characteristics (Vlăsceanu, 2003). In contrast to these theories, Karl Weick (1979) proposes a psycho-social level of analysis and considers that people in organizations construct" the environment (proposes the term enactment - establishment), and the role of management is to select the actions, the experiences that led to the achievement of the proposed goals.

The open systems model assumes that the performance of organizations is affected not only by what happens inside the organizations but also by their interactive relationship with the environment in which they operate. This approach focuses on three elements (inputs, flows, and outputs). Open systems use feedback mechanisms to monitor and regulate their functioning. This feedback loop enables organizations to adjust their actions in response to information received from the environment, ensuring continuous adaptation and improvement (Scott & Davis, 2016).

According to Onday (2016), "these perspectives often complement and interact with each other in understanding organizational behavior, and organizations exhibit elements of all three perspectives to varying degrees". Contemporary organizations adopt elements characteristic of the three organizational systems - rational, natural, and open - in varying proportions, and the effects depend on contextual factors.

3. Characteristic elements of the school as an organization

An organization is defined by five main variables: the organizational goal, technology, structure, participants, and environment, which are constantly interacting. The organizational structure of the school, also called the "organizational map", develops a functional management scheme based on a set of norms that reflect the requirements of an open pedagogical and social environment, exploitable at the level of the managerial relationship (Enache, 2019): "input-output", operable at the macrostructural level (relationship to the objectives of the external social environment) and at the microstructural level (relationship to the objectives of the internal pedagogical environment).

These components are known in the literature as Leavitt's diamond, a model that identifies four elements (purpose, technology, structure, and people). The model was later supplemented by Scott (2003), who added a fifth element considered indispensable in the analysis of organizations, and which reoriented all the other elements: the environment (Figure 1).
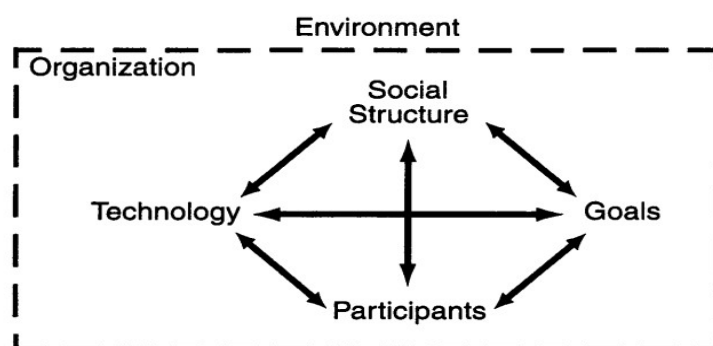
Figure 1. Scott`s adapted version of Leawitt`s diamond: Model of an organization (Scott, 2003)

The organization's purpose relates to the results of the organization's work and describes the direction the organization intends to take to achieve the expected performance. Depending on the activity carried out and the managerial intentions, the organization's purpose may be aimed at: making a profit, increasing customer satisfaction, increasing market share, retaining employees, innovating the goods and services it provides, etc.

Organizational goals can serve different functions: symbolic (to legitimize the organization to the external environment), motivational (to gain employee commitment), cognitive (to guide the organization's internal activities), or evaluative (to establish criteria for evaluating performance) (Vlăsceanu, 2003). Goals can thus be viewed differently by different actors within the organization.

The functions of school differ according to the perspective of analysis. For society, school is the formal setting in which young generations are socialized according to the specific values and traditions of the society to which they belong. School also contributes to the formation of the key skills needed for the functioning and perpetuation of society. For the community and the family, the main functions of school are learning, socializing with peers, and providing opportunities for successful integration into the community and society. For pupils, the school provides opportunities to spend time with peers and to engage in different activities.

The purpose of the school in the national context emerges from the mission of pre-university education, namely that of "ensuring the conditions and the necessary framework for achieving the development potential of each primary beneficiary of education, both from a cognitive, socio-emotional, professional, civic and entrepreneurial point of view, so that he/she can participate actively and creatively in the development of society, with a sense of national and European belonging" (*National Education Law*, 2023). Every school develops its mission and purpose in light of the overall goal of pre-university education as well as the unique environment in which it functions.

Technology is the process by which the organization achieves the desired result and presupposes the existence not only of the technical devices or equipment used, but also of the skills needed to operate them. Technology shapes both the physical and social structure of schools. Physically, it influences the design of classrooms, offices, and equipment, directly impacting learning and communication. Socially, it affects organizational hierarchy, workflow, and communication between staff, students, and parents.

School technology is the dynamic component that animates the structure of the organization, and includes the main processes or actions taken by administrators and teachers to achieve the school's purpose: the learning process, communication, and decision-making (Ballantine et al., 2017). As a dynamic component, technology supports both administrative and educational processes. enhancing efficiency through digital tools like online learning platforms and e-assessments. It plays a crucial role in the teaching-learning-assessment cycle, enriching the

teacher-student interaction rather than replacing it, ultimately creating new opportunities for education and collaboration. The learning process aims to transmit sets of knowledge, to train skills, to acquire habits, and to form attitudes with a view to empowering the individual in all aspects (cognitive, affective, behavioral) (Cucoș, 2002). Decision-making and communication are specific components of both the administrative-managerial activity and the teacher's activity. Communication within the school is the vector through which content is transmitted from teacher to pupil, from trainers to trainees, from superiors to subordinates, the delegation of responsibilities and tasks, the sharing of emotions, experiences, needs, aspirations, and organizational and human resource management. Communication is involved in all the processes that take place in the school; each school employee, by his position and role in the organization, gives specificity to the school environment and exerts a certain influence within it.

Bernhardt (2017) groups school-specific processes into three categories: instructional, organizational, and administrative, and provides a comprehensive list of activities carried out on these levels (Table 1).

Table 1. Examples of school processes (Bernhardt, 2017)

Instructional Processes	Organizational processes	Administrative Processes
Academic conversations with students	Data Teams	Attendance program
Classroom assignments (types of tasks, choices, projects, collaboration)	Date use	Class sizes
Classroom discussions (teacher talk, student-to-student talk, student-to-teacher talk)	Inquiry process	Data collection
Differentiated instruction	Instructional coaching	Dropout prevention
Direct instruction	Leadership structure (leadership teams)	Discipline strategies
Flipped classrooms	Mentoring	Effective communication
Grading	Mission	Enrollment in different courses/programs/program offerings
Homework	Parent involvement	Graduation strategies
Immersion	Policies and procedures	Leadership turnover rates
Inclusion	Professional discussions and support	Number and use of support personnel
Inquiry process	Professional Learning Communities	Policies and procedures
Standards implementation	Professional reflection	Retentiones
Student reflection and self-assessment	Response to Intervention	Scheduling of classes
Technology integration	Teaching assignments	Student groupings
Tutoring	Teacher collaboration	Teaching assignments
	Teacher evaluation	Teacher certification
	Teacher hiring	Teacher hiring
	Teacher observations	Teacher turnover
	Teacher renewal (professional learning)	

There are several interrelated processes at work in schools that operate simultaneously to facilitate the effective delivery of educational services, processes that directly influence the organization's social structure. McCarthy et al. (2023) highlight that digital transformation in education involves interconnected processes-leadership, people, technology, and strategy—that work together to enhance educational delivery. These processes shape a school's social structure by influencing relationships, roles, and collaboration among staff. As schools adopt digital strategies, their internal dynamics shift, showing that transformation is both a technical upgrade and a reconfiguration of how people work and interact within the organization.

Two interconnected components characterize the social structure of an organization. Normative structure encompasses values, norms, and role expectations, comprising unwritten rules and shared beliefs that govern members' behavior in interactions and activities. Interactions are based on a negotiated order determined by implicit agreements among participants about the meaning of interactions, the expectations for each role and position, and the behaviors considered appropriate. Behavioral structure refers to the actual behavior of the participants and includes activities and interactions that take place regularly, showing constancy and consistency. Behavioral structure analysis involves identifying situations that create patterns of behavioral order.

According to Scott (2003), the social structure of an organization differs according to the degree of formalization. A formal social structure assumes that positions and their relationships are clearly defined and established independently of the personal traits or connections of the individuals occupying those positions. In an informal social structure, it is impossible to distinguish clearly between the traits of the established roles and relationships and those of the personal interactions between members. In such an informal setting, personnel changes lead to the adaptation and transformation of roles and relationships, as individuals' characteristics and interpersonal connections evolve.

The school's social structure comprises the collection of connections and exchanges between the school community's members, including parents, teachers, students, and administrative personnel. Two primary components can be used to analyze it: the formal structure and the informal structure. The formal social structure of the school is defined by officially established regulations, rules, and institutional hierarchies. This includes well-defined roles, such as those of the headmaster, teachers, educational counselors, and pupils, each with clear responsibilities and duties. The relationships between these positions are governed by explicit rules, such as the school's internal regulations, educational programs, and Ministry of Education policies. Informal social structure encompasses the networks of relationships and interactions that naturally form between members of the school community, based on personal affinities, friendships, shared interests, or social influences. For example, groups of friends among pupils or informal collegiality among teachers contribute to a social dynamic that can influence school life beyond the formal rules. This informal structure can have a significant impact on the overall atmosphere in the school, perceptions of authority and discipline, and pupils' motivation. The interaction between the formal and informal structure of the school helps shape the educational climate, influencing both the academic performance and the social and emotional development of pupils.

Bridwell-Mitchell et al. (2023) focus on the external social capital of schools, particularly partnerships with organizations. Their research indicates that interorganizational relationships can provide vital resources and support, thereby influencing school capacity and educational equity. This highlights the significance of external social structures in shaping internal school environments and opportunities. The participants are individuals who actively contribute to the accomplishment of the organization's objectives, as well as social actors who, through their presence and involvement, help structure and shape the organization. People are one of the basic elements of an organization: "Organizations are made up of two fundamental elements: people and organizational variables (structures, goals, strategies, technologies, environments)", and the

task of organizing and coordinating human and technical resources falls to management (Vlăsceanu, 2003).

From the traditional perspective of analyzing organizational behavior, social structure is a stable system through which social interactions and relationships can be controlled and constrained. Modern theories, on the other hand, view social structures as flexible and dynamic systems that, through the repeated actions and interactions of social actors, foster and produce change.

Two basic activities are carried out simultaneously in the school: the managerial-administrative activity (aimed at the management and administration of the school) and the instructional-educational activity (organization and conduct of the teaching-learning-assessment process), so that the school is characterized by the presence of several types of participants: members of the managerial-administrative component: the headmaster, deputy headmaster, middle managers (those in charge of permanent committees), members of the administrative-financial and secretarial departments and members of the pedagogical component (teachers and pupils). The diversity of participants also implies a high level of complexity in roles and role expectations. The teacher has to fulfill multiple role expectations, of a restrictive or coercive nature, managerially generated by those in higher positions in the organizational and institutional hierarchy (head of department, headmaster, inspector), and pedagogically generated by peers (colleagues, pupils, parents), the latter being more flexible in nature. These extrinsic role expectations can be superimposed on the teacher's intrinsic role expectations (e.g., the degree of satisfaction offered by a teaching career). Given that these expectations from different directions are often contradictory, a certain ambiguity of the teacher's role in the school organization leads to role conflicts (Păun, 1999). These role conflicts are present to varying degrees among all categories of members and contribute to the quality of the climate in the organization, a factor that can facilitate or, on the contrary, slow down or hinder the performance of the school as a whole.

Environment

Recent approaches to organizations emphasize the role of the environment, the characteristics of which influence the other components (purpose, structure, participants, technology). Each organization operates in a specific environment that interacts with the global environment. The study of the relationships between organizations and the environment or environments (economic, social, political, legal, cultural, technological, natural) in which they operate is concerned with, for example, how demographics influence the structure of the organization, how the economic level of the area in which the organization operates reflects on the fluctuation of the workforce, how the organization adapts to changes in legislation or technology, etc. The environment provides the resources an organization needs to produce goods and services. At the same time, the environment is a source of both opportunities and threats for the organization, which can either create opportunities to improve its performance level or undermine it.

The school environment comprises groups, organizations, other institutions, and even society outside the school that influence the school's functioning. According to Taddei (2009), the environment is considered to be the "third teacher" (after parents and teachers) because it can greatly influence learning and innovation, and schools are considered to be "organisms" that provide the context in which students, teachers, and the community interact. In the ecosystem approach to schooling, there is a dynamic relationship between actors and means, between the social structure and the physical structure of the organization by constantly relating to the external environment. Actors interact in a given geographical area, and their behaviours, responses, and actions are influenced by a set of social, political, cultural, and economic conditions" (Toutain & Mueller, 2015).

Daly et al. (2022) conceptualize schools as complex, multidimensional systems consisting of relationships between all members of the school community, in which professional learning is

constantly influenced by interactions between stakeholders from the microsocial to the macrosocial level. Principals are primarily responsible for the microdynamics of schools and act as mediators between the political environment and the organization they lead. Achieving professional learning in these contexts is considered challenging due to the inevitable uncertainty. The authors emphasize that uncertainty must be accepted as a characteristic of schools as complex systems and valued as a source of learning. From this perspective, the school needs to be aware of its existence within an ecosystem and to create relationships between internal and external actors that can impact the learning outcomes and performance of the organization.

The normative perspective of analyzing school organization is placed in the specialized literature on the "objectivist position," which highlights, in particular, "interactions with the environment" and complex relationships regulated in terms of the "input-output" relationship (Enache, 2019). This perspective expresses "the need for the school to adapt to the evolutions of society". It stimulates a type of school organization that tends to become "a miniature society", which can no longer be reduced "to a simple conglomerate of subjects brought together accidentally".

In conclusion, organizations, including the school organization, are systems made up of several interdependent elements: the social structure (the way relationships, internal rules and processes are organized), the participants (the people working in the organization), the objectives (the goals the organization wants to achieve), the technology (the means, equipment and methods used), the environment - the external context (economic, social, legal, technological) in which the organization operates). All these elements are interconnected, and an organization, such as a school, must be viewed as a comprehensive system whose elements all interact with one another.

4. The school's organizational models

Schools are seen as organizations due to the organized manner in which they function, with different components working together to achieve common goals. Organizational learning at the school level is not reducible to what the members of the organization learn, because it refers to a coordinated learning system, each of them, taken separately, not being sufficient to make the whole work, because the overall result depends on their synergy (Iosifescu, 2018). According to Etzioni's (1964) classification, the school is a utilitarian-normative organization, which performs services and has as its main beneficiaries clients (students), and power is exercised through normative means.

Bidwell (2013) formulates three hypotheses about the specificity of schools as formal organizations: (1) schools are social units that provide services to a particular clientele and have as their primary goal the preparation of students for adult status; (2) within schools there is a fundamental demarcation between the roles of students and the roles of staff: pupil roles are recruiting roles (children are obliged to enter schools as pupils and are placed in classes by age groups); staff roles are performing roles (members of the teaching and administrative staff enter the role voluntarily, based on training, licensing and technical competence); (3) schools exhibit bureaucratic characteristics: functional division of labor, definition of staff roles as offices, hierarchical ordering of offices, functioning according to rules of procedure, streamlining of activities to ensure efficiency.

Rationalization is considered essential for two reasons: the requirement for uniformity of educational outcomes (the acquisition of a minimum level of competencies) and the need to coordinate educational activities in coherent and sequential ways. The educational technology typical of schools (methods of instruction) requires permanent interaction between teachers and pupils so that the division of labor in school systems is both temporal (school activities are divided into school year, semesters, terms) and functional (pupils are placed in classes according to age): the teacher interacts with a single group of pupils, in all phases of instruction, for a school year or a semester (in primary schools)/ teachers, instruct' several groups of pupils in a single

subject (in secondary schools). Another important feature of the school system organization, in Charles Bidwell's perspective (2013), is the autonomy given to the teacher as a professional to make discretionary decisions about the procedures to be used during activities with students in the classroom. Similarly, the school is considered to be largely an autonomous organization with a defined population from which students are recruited and in which the principal and teachers have some control over the services, programs provided, and the manner in which they are delivered (teaching methods). The administrative staff in schools work in specialized offices and are paid according to their position (head teacher, deputy head teacher, administrator). Teachers, on the other hand, do not usually have specialized offices according to the temporal and functional differentiation of the teaching activities they provide, and are paid mainly according to their training and seniority.

Davidoff & Lazarus (2002) emphasize that schools are a special type of organization, with specific educational goals and ways of pursuing those goals, and therefore with special characteristics and relationships among the elements of organizational life. The educational purpose of schools and a particular country's vision of schools influence the specific way in which the school as an organization is structured and functions. The process of understanding the school organization must start from understanding the social factors specific to the school, the local community, and from identifying the characteristics of the education system (national and regional policies) in relation to global trends. From the perspective of these authors, the school as an organization can be understood and analyzed with reference to several interrelated and interdependent elements: culture, identity, strategy, structures and procedures, technical support, human resources, leadership, management, governance, and context.

Cristea (2017) defines the school as a "social organization specialized in education/ instruction" and emphasizes that "the school as an organization expresses a characteristic of managerial leadership, asserted in the information society, based on knowledge, different from the formula of the school as an institution, established at the level of the administrative-birocratic management model, standardized in industrialized society". The primary distinction between the two viewpoints is how the school is managed and adjusted to the needs and changes in society: the traditional model focuses on rigid structures and standardized processes, conformity and efficiency, while the information society model promotes flexibility and adaptability, innovation, and participative management.

The arguments presented highlight distinct aspects that are useful to explore the different valences of school and that can contribute to a possible definition of school as an organization that integrates the three perspectives. Thus, schools are complex collectivities with multiple purposes, differentiated according to the national and local context, and which have the capacity to transform a planned order, through negotiation, into a spontaneous order: schools function as an organism in which several specialized subsystems interact and work together to ensure their efficiency and sustainability.

Conclusions

Organizations have evolved from rigid, hierarchical structures to dynamic, adaptive, and people-centric entities. As societies have become more complex, the way organizations have been defined has involved different phenomena and a shift in focus from the formal, objective aspects of organizations, such as structure, hierarchy, bureaucracy, to the subjective aspects that characterize human nature, inter-human relationships, and have included the impact that organizations have on different social groups and the environment. Theorists have progressively moved from considering organizations as closed systems to understanding them as complex, open, and interconnected systems that need to learn, adapt, and promote values. The analysis of organizations implies a complex approach, using multiple perspectives and covering different levels of analysis. Current educational systems are looking for management models that allow the

progressive substitution of the traditional, bureaucratic and hierarchical vision of administration with an approach better adapted to the needs of effectiveness and quality.

While the literature on schools as organizations in Romania is scarce, future research should take into account the specific challenges and characteristics of the education system in this country. Future studies should use a methodological framework that combines a qualitative perspective with quantitative data from a variety of stakeholders (principals, teachers, students, parents, local community members, business representatives, non-governmental organizations, decision-makers at different levels) to provide the most complete understanding of how schools function as organizations. The main actors involved – teachers, principals, inspectors, trainers – are not insensitive to the attempt to implement new approaches that allow the best results for students to be achieved. By examining the relationship between the components of the school organization from an integrative perspective, we can gain a better understanding of how Romanian schools function.

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