

# **ARE WE OUR BROTHERS' KEEPER?**

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**The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not reflect the policy or position of the United States War College, the Pennsylvania State University, the Department of the Army, the Department of Defense, or any agency of the United States government.**

**This paper is a work in progress. The purpose of this paper is to elicit comments from fellow scholars and practitioners as to the soundness of the concepts put forth in this paper.**

## **ABSTRACT**

An effort by organizations to influence their external environment is a natural phenomenon. Organization Theory teaches us that all organizations – be they a country like Costa Rica, a for-profit organization as IBM, a religious organization such as the Catholic Church or the family unit – strive to influence their environment in order to sustain their very existence. This continual struggle for survival is no different for the organization considered in this paper – The U.S. Government.

As obvious as this may be, this paper addresses the U.S. Government in dealing with its external environment. Some world citizens (to include U.S. citizens) feel that the U.S. Military, an extension of the U.S. Government should “stick to the knitting,” i.e. defend America’s interests within its own borders. Others, to include the UN view the U.S. Military as a viable organization to be called upon to assist in peacekeeping activities such as the ones in Bosnia in order to provide some sense of stability to the world. If this second position is valid, it begs the question: Are we our brother’s keeper?

### **Introduction**

One cannot pick up the morning paper without reading about the devastating struggles that humanity is having around the globe. Some examples of these struggles as: (1) November 11, 2001 destruction of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center, NYC, New York, U.S.A. and (2) Vivendi’s (former French water utility) unsuccessful attempt to become a global media giant. The focus of this paper is how humanity – as grouped in entities known as organizations – deals with their struggles to survive in their respective environments. In particular, this paper addresses how one specific organization – the Government of the United States of America deals with its environment in order to survive.

### **Research Approach**

The analytical tools used to address the various issues the US Government is derived from the discipline of Organizational Theory (OT). In other words, what concepts in OT can be used to decipher how a country organizes itself in order to promote its own national interest? Three (OT) concepts will be addressed in this working paper: (1) The Nature of Organizations; (2) The Organization(s) Environment; and (3) Quantum Organizations.

#### **Concept #1 - The Nature of Organizations.**

While organizations are traditionally considered to be units of individuals who come together for a common purpose, Bernard (1938), von Bertalanffy (1972) viewed organizations as open systems. Such organizations continually interact with their environment. Human and material (money, raw materials, technology) resources are selected from the external environment. The human resources then work to transform the material resources into some type of product or service. These “finished goods” are then

introduced back to the external environment with the expectation of value creation. Value creation in this investigative effort is defined as the ability of the U.S. Government to influence its environment.

It is a natural phenomena for organizations to establish a place in their respective environments and as importantly -- to survive. Moreover, in our competitive day and age, organizations wish to thrive and eventually come to influence the forces that they must contend with in their respective environments. According to Daft (2001), it is important for open systems to examine the dimensions of these dynamic organizations. Daft contends that these dimensions describe organizations much the same as personality and physical traits describe people. Figure 1 illustrates the two dimensions of an organization – any organization. They are:

(1) **Structural** – these dimensions encompass six internal characteristics:

1. formalization - written rules, and established operating procedures
2. specialization - the division of specialized and non-specialized labor
3. hierarchy of authority - reporting procedures among the rank and file
4. centralization - decision making level(s)
5. professionalism – educational and/or experiential level of employees
6. personnel ratios – comparative number of administrative versus operational employees

(2) **Contextual** - consists of five characteristics. They constitute an organization's backdrop which, in turn shapes the structural dimension(s).

1. size – the magnitude or number of people in an organization.
2. organizational technology – tools and techniques involved in generating product(s)/service(s)
3. environment – all elements outside the boundary of the organization, e.g. government, customers, suppliers
4. goals and strategy – mission of the organization; i.e. why it exists.
5. culture – underlying values and traditions that bonds an organization's employees



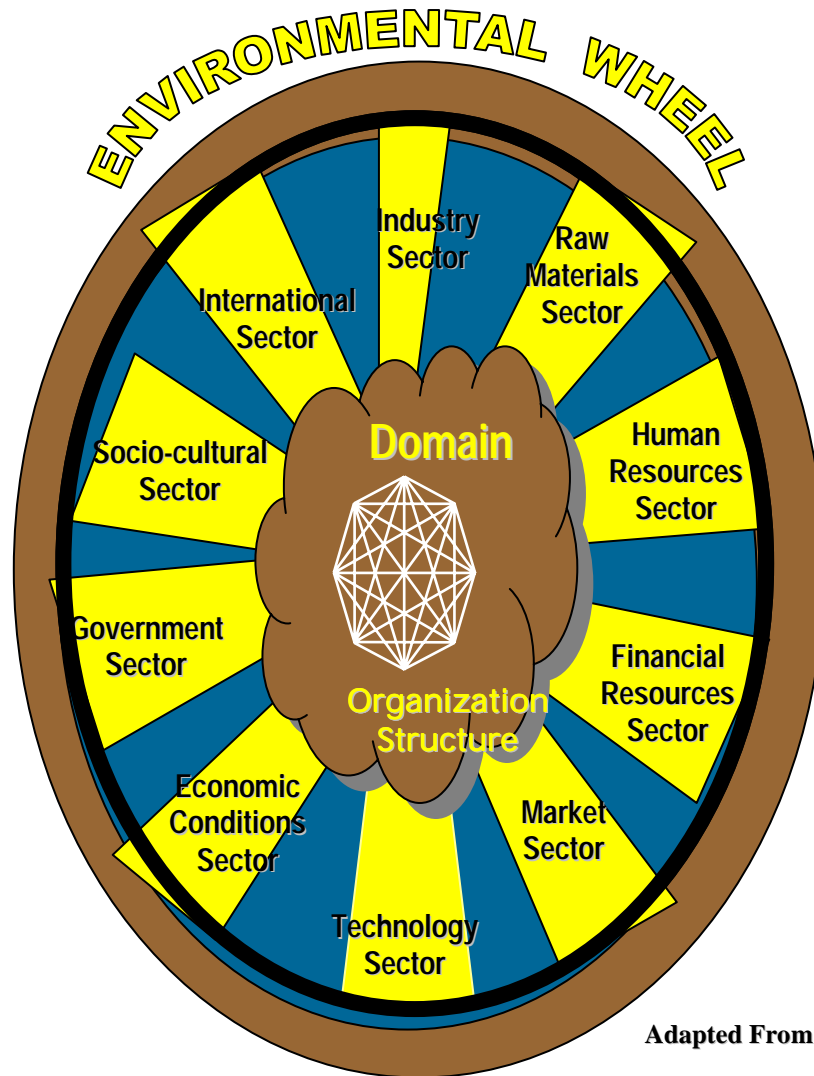
**Figure 1. The Organization, Daft ( 2001, 17)**

### **Concept #2 - The General Environment Wheel**

This concept specifically addresses the environmental characteristic of the contextual dimension addressed. Figure 2 presents a visual of the typical forces that are found in an organization's environment. These forces constitute the spokes of a wheel. The wheel has ten spokes and all are needed for the wheel of organizational life to successfully operate.

1. Industry spoke – competitors, related industries
2. Raw materials spoke – suppliers, manufacturers
3. Human resources spoke – the labor market (universities, training schools, employment agencies)
4. Financial resources spoke – banks, private investors, stock markets
5. Market spoke – customers, clients
6. Technology spoke – computers, e-commerce, info technology
7. Economic spoke – recessions, unemployment rate, area growth, housing starts
8. Government spoke – city, state, federal taxes, courts, laws
9. Socio-cultural spoke – demographics of the outlying community, interest groups (AARP)
10. International spoke – foreign markets, regulations, exchange rates, competition

The center of the wheel is its hub and it is amorphous to the extent that its shape depends upon the spoke/s to be addressed at any point in organization time. Essentially, then, the hub is an organization's domain. The domain, in turn, is basically an organization's



Adapted From: R. Daft, Organization Theory and Design

**Figure 2. The Environmental Wheel**

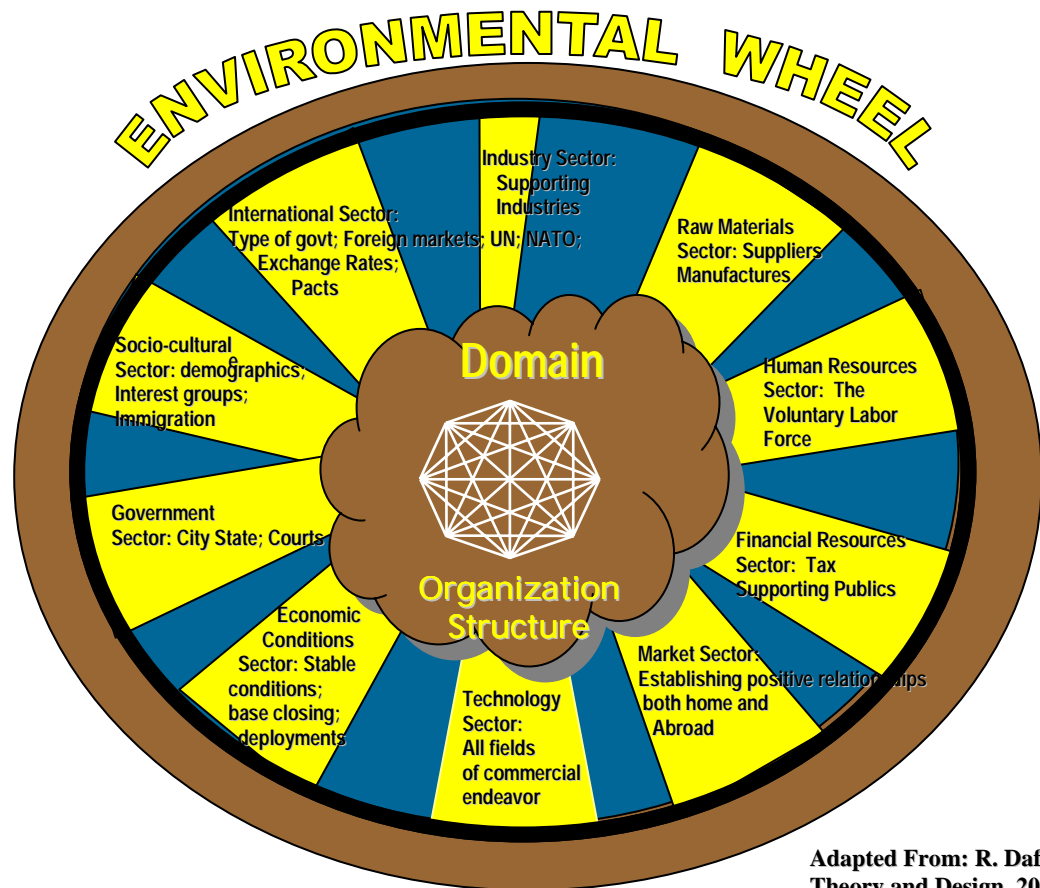
structure. As the wheel turns in its day-to-day efforts to address its external environment, the domain is being formed and reformed. The organization of the U.S. Government also

Presently, the U. S. Government's environmental forces include:

1. Industry spoke – supporting industries (steel, airline, moving & storage)

2. Raw materials spoke – suppliers, manufacturers (plumbing, hardware)
3. Human resources spoke – the “voluntary” labor market (John Q Public)
4. Financial resources spoke –tax supporting public(s)
5. Market spoke – U.S. citizens, client states.
6. Technology spoke – computers, e-commerce, info technology
7. Economic spoke – (base closings, recessions)
8. Government spoke – city, state, federal taxes, courts, laws
9. Socio-cultural spoke – demographics of the states’ citizens, interest groups (AARP), immigration
10. International spoke – foreign governments (type of government, military support units), foreign markets, regulations, exchange rates

Present day (amorphic) shape of the hub of the U.S. government’s external forces (see Figure 3) might look something like:

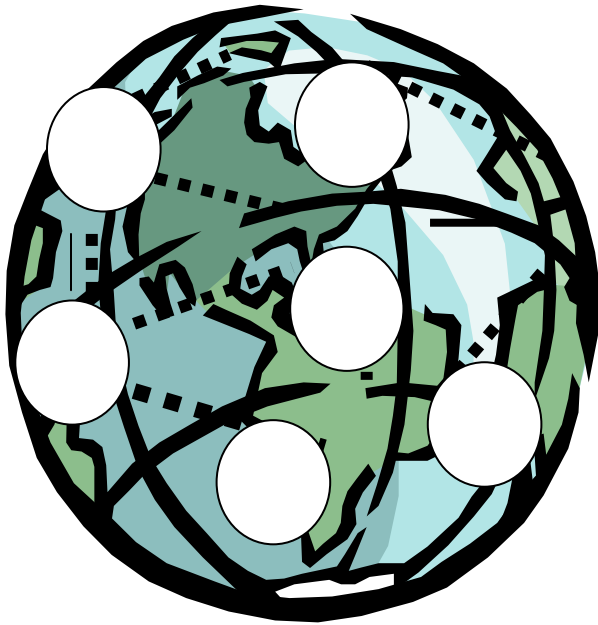


Adapted From: R. Daft, Organization Theory and Design, 2001, 131.

Figure 3. Government External Forces Wheel

### **Concept #3 - Quantum Organizations**

While the construct of organization as a living entity – an organic organization – is certainly not a new one, Senge (1990), Wheatley (1999), Hock (2000), Bar-Yam (2000), and Kilmann (2001) have incorporated the world of the physical scientist into their organic view of organizations. Furthermore, Kilmann (2001) provides an example of such an organization (see Figure 4):



Source: Ralph Kilmann, Quantum Organizations, 2001, 68.

1. The inclusion of consciousness  
In self-designing systems
2. Organizations as conscious  
participants actively involved in  
self-designing processes
3. Cross-boundary processes as  
explicitly addressed and infused  
with information
4. The conscious self-management of  
a flexibly designed organization
5. The internal commitment of active  
participants
6. The empowered relations among  
active participants
7. The eternal self-transformation of  
flexibly designed organization

**Figure 4. The Quantum Organization**

Looking at Kilmann's quantum view of an organization one can almost imagine a cerebral nexus of activity that is effective because of its continuity of motion. In other words, the goal of this thoughtful lifespace is survival. It accomplishes this goal by attempting to influence (external) forces that might confront it at any given point in time. In this context, it behooves the U.S. Government to take the global pulse and determine if activities in the environment are internationally life threatening or simply internally managed missteps in the construct of organizational life.

## Conclusions

All too often, the U.S. Government appears to be dealing with events and activities all over the world. Frequently, such activities are viewed as being all over the place and irrelevant. Domestically, U.S. citizens view these involvements as both costly and confusing. Simply put, they feel as if the U.S. Government should concentrate on spending (tax-payer) monies and providing support within its home borders as opposed to assisting people living on the other side of the world, whose country we are unfamiliar with and whose beliefs we do not identify with. Internationally, the world community frequently presents the U.S. Government with a wide array of (external) activities in which to consider engaging our human and material resources. Of course, pro-U.S. opinion(s) might reflect appreciation of our involvement while anti-U.S. opinion(s) provide a negative perspective on our influencing efforts; i.e. that we should not become involved in other peoples' business of organizational survival. The writers of this article feel that the (three) concepts presented herein provide the conceptual parameters to address the U.S. government's efforts to influence and ultimately survive in the environment in which it operates.

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