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## Review of: Organizations, Uncertainties, and Risk (James F. Short, Jr. & Lee Clarke eds.)

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**Organizations, Uncertainties, and Risk** (James F. Short, Jr. & Lee Clarke eds., Westview Press 1992) Acknowledgements, contributor biographies, author and subject indices, foreword, references. ISBN: 0-8133-8562-8. [383 pp. Cloth \$52.50. 500 Central Ave., Boulder CO 80301-2847.]

The well-written and well-organized essays in this book address risk assessment and competing approaches to its management by organizations such as governmental agencies and corporations. The focus is "organizational decision making under conditions of risk and uncertainty."<sup>1</sup> Most contributors are sociologists or at least involved in the study of law and society, and their papers discuss and critique a wide range of competing concepts and theories believed to guide and explain how organizations manage risk in the U.S. and elsewhere.

In the foreword, Charles Tilly begins:<sup>2</sup>

Sociology is a second-guessing science. Much of its work consists of examining how people account for their own actions, then confronting these accounts with ostensibly deeper explanations.... Some of sociology's subversive reputation results from this will to challenge people's own cherished beliefs about their behavior. ...

Second-guessing does not mean second-rate.

From that alone, it is clear that this book was not prepared for sociologists only. Readers with little or no knowledge of the sociological study of risk will find the materials presented so that they, by the end, can have a better understanding of how risk-related decisions are made. The concepts and theories, however, are discussed at a level that require close attention.

**Organizations, Uncertainty, and Risk** is divided into six parts, each consisting of one or more chapters. In Part One, Short provides an introduction and overview of the study of risk and sets the stage for the remainder by discussing "risk" in the context of identifying and managing risks.<sup>3</sup> Part Two, "Decision Making Contexts and Networks of Risk," discusses two theoretical perspectives regarding risk analysis. Parts Three through Five, "Corporate Contexts of Decision Making,"

1 At *xiii*.

2 At *ix*.

3 At 13 Short details the book's organizational scheme.

“Institutional Responses to Uncertainty,” and “Choosing Technologies, Managing and Regulating Risks,” provide empirical analyses of decision making in organizations faced with risk. Part Six, “Institutionalizing Risk,” attempts to pull everything together, and the final chapter is written by Short and Lee.

Although researchers, particularly sociologists should find this book valuable — particularly in view of its comprehensive reference section — managers, policy makers and lawyers will also find it helpful. Indeed, several chapters are explicitly concerned with sociolegal problems.<sup>4</sup> Because Short and Lee provide both theoretical perspectives and empirical studies, readers without extensive prior knowledge can bridge the gap between decision making practices and theories that attempt to explain processes organizations use in coping with risk and uncertainty. Chapter 4, for example, would be of special interest to in-house corporate lawyers who must advise managers on how adopting and enforcing internal manufacturing compliances rules will increase product safety and help to avoid the legal uncertainties of product liability.

Mehdi Sheikerz<sup>†</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Also, several chapters were earlier published in a special issue of *Law and Policy*; see at *xiii*.

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