Chapter 17
A Potential Application of Actor Network Theory in Organizational Studies:
The Company as an Ecosystem and its Power Relations from the ANT Perspective

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ABSTRACT
In this chapter, an attempt will be made to discuss the place of Actor Network Theory in organizational studies. To narrow the scope of the research, attention will be focused solely on companies. The concept of ANT researched within the corporate setting has been one of the author’s interests for some years. Consequently, in this work the author will try to show some aspects related to Actor Network Theory in contemporary organizations. Since not every concept related to ANT within the corporate environment can be investigated in greater detail, two issues, namely ecosystem and power, have been selected to discuss the possible application of ANT in the studies on corporations.

INTRODUCTION
Modern life is complex and consists of different relations and networks determining the private and social sphere of one’s existence (Castells, 2009). Thus, the issues related to organizational studies can be discussed by taking the network concept into consideration. The idea of networking did not originate in the twentieth century since any sociotechnical system, ancient or modern, primitive or industrialized, stems from the efforts of system builders who attempt to create a network capable of resisting dissociation (Pfaffengerger, 2004 p. 81) and one which is flexible and adaptable (Vuokko and Karsten, 2007). Corporate networking consists of both internal and external networks which determine the organizational capability to be efficient and competitive (Boons, 2009). One of the methods of studying the grids and lattices of corporations is Actor Network Theory.
A Potential Application of Actor Network Theory in Organizational Studies

APPLICATION OF ANT IN ORGANIZATIONAL STUDIES

There are several reasons for the possibilities of using ANT concepts in the discussion on corporations. One of them is the technological advancement of modern companies. Since the study of technology has been incorporating many ideas from the sociology of scientific knowledge and both scientific facts and technological artifacts are to be understood as social constructs (Woolgar, 1989 p. 311), the boundaries between social and technological entities are of secondary importance. What is more, the increasing role of technology has given rise to the appearance of technology-related theories, including ANT (Kien, 2009b) since, among others, they offer the possibilities of studying the complicated relations between technology, human beings and organizations. The author will try to discuss this aspect in greater detail when referring to the two selected notions in the coming sections.

The second reason for the popularity of networking in organizational studies is related to the recognition of postmodern theories in various scientific domains. Taking only management into account, postmodern organizations are changeable in nature since they have to respond all the time to the alternating conditions of their fluid environment (Bauman, 2003). What is more, postmodern organizations are not anchored in one place and their activities are shaped by changing media images, techno-images, finance-images and idea-images (Appadurai, 2005) or the reshaping character of the economic field (Bourdieu, 1990). Consequently, this leads to the fusion of different elements and the creation of hybrid identities (e.g. Bielenia-Grajewska, 2010). Actor Network Theory shares several features with postmodern studies (Breiger, 2003; Grant, 2005; Ward, 1996) since, among other similarities, they both question the existence of strong boundaries, stress the role of process and opt for non-hierarchical approaches. What is more, both Actor Network Theory and postmodernism rely on a semiotic heritage in their studies. Semiotics is defined as the study of signs and codes that make up culture and that organize everyday social existence (Catt and Eicher-Catt, 2010 p. 18). Taking a more dynamic approach, it is the intersubjective mediation by signs (Gunaratne, 2009 p. 49). ANT is defined as a semiotics of materiality (Law in Smith and Jenks, 2006 p. 161) and shares some features with semiotics. For example, as in semiotics, actors have no fixed identity but their individual and social character is created during relations with other network constituents (Barry, 2006). Since a sign is anything which produces meaning (Thwaites, Davis and Mules, 2002 p. 9), both living and non-living entities, regardless of their size, can be very powerful elements, for example, in corporate communication (Pickering, 1995). Communication studied from the perspective of cognitive semiotics can be basically understood as the process of exchanging as well as interpreting signs by using other signs (Origlio, 2007; Rosen-gren, 2000). In the case of companies, it is possible to investigate the role of human (e.g. managers, workers, stakeholders) and non-human signs (e.g. computers, faxes, telephones, interior design) in the speed and efficiency of corporate dialogue. The other reason for looking at corporations through the sign perspective is the state of post-industrial or information goods which have limited material content but are rather perceived as signs, being the embodiment of some aesthetic values (Lash and Urry, 1994). The sign perspective makes it possible to account for the historic context in studying companies through ANT. Some claim that ANT pays attention to the social processes within and outside the network, and, consequently, there often remains a limited exploration of both human agency and its historical construction (Newton, 2007 p. 32). The semiotic perspective offers the possibility to consider the origin and background of studied entities since all communications are taken through semiotic codes which have a history, by which we simply mean that they exist outside of