Sample 1

From a rational-technical perspective, goal specificity is key for an organization to run effectively (Scott, 2007 p. 36). Goals must be predetermined, adequately stated, prioritized, and in alignment. All individuals involved in the organization must be able to clearly articulate the umbrella goal of the organization (e.g. the mission statement of a school) and understand how the sub-goals on which they work directly contribute to that umbrella goal. This allows all personnel to make rational choices and decisions in their work in the organization. Problems arise when there is disagreement on the priorities and goals of the organization. In general, the goals of educational organizations are unique as compared to other types of organizations. One reason for this is that “output” is always human subjects for which a common goal is hard to assess; a second reason is that that there are often myriad and competing extrinsic goals for educational institutions influenced by politics, societal changes, world events, and economics. Individual organizations must synthesize external, macro-level goals and use them to inform the organizational-level goals.

Sample 2

It is essential that the organization have clearly defined and specific goals to aim toward. Specific goals are a decision-making tool and provide criteria for selecting among alternative activities. The organization’s goals do not need to be moral or reasonable for choices made in service of those goals to be considered rational. Rational choices are those that lead to the efficient achievement of goals, even when the goals themselves may be “irrational or foolish” (Scott & Davis, 2007). An organization could be rational, even as it pursues unreasonable goals. Having clearly defined goals can be a powerful tool for efficient decision-making in complex or ambiguous situations (Scott & Davis, 2007). My workplace’s goal is to support faculty in designing courses. To accomplish this goal, we start by defining the measurable objectives the instructor wants students to meet. After defining the objectives, we work backwards to determine the assessments that will best measure whether students have met those objectives, then the activities and instructional materials that are most essential for students to engage with to succeed on those activities and assessments. Particularly when the content is extensive or complex, focusing on the specific objectives functions as a tool to narrow the focus, prioritize certain topics, and make decisions about what to do, and when and how to do it. The specific goal functions as a target toward which rational decision-making can be oriented.

Sample 3

The second major component of the natural-social lens is informal structure. While the rational-technical lens focuses on formal structure involving written rules and policies, the natural-social lens focuses on the “unwritten rules” of an organization, the informal structure, and its effect upon the formal structure (Scott & Davis, 2007). The natural-social lens requires that we consider the various people involved in an organization and all the ideas, motivations, abilities, and experiences that they bring with them. For example, in the Dewey Elementary School case study, Mrs. Thompson’s formal role is secretary; however, her longevity and experience has afforded her a wealth of information about relationships between staff, which results in her informal authority and political power (Peurach, 2007). Another example of informal structure is ~~i~~nformal peer networks, which affect the classroom norms. Fear of peer disapproval can decrease the amount of participation from students who would usually have no issue being more outspoken (Weaver & Qi, 2005). Classroom settings have unwritten rules, dictated by students, of what is appropriate and what is not within a classroom. Although they are not formalized in handbooks or policies, these informal structures can be just as influential in guiding behavior as formalized roles and procedures.

Sample 4

Informal structure is another element of Natural-Systems theory that influences organizational dynamics. Impacted by individual characteristics and interpersonal relationships, informal structures are norms and behavioral patterns that can contribute to effects ranging from undermining formal authority to facilitating trust and collaboration (Scott & Davis, 2007). A dysfunctional example of informal structures can be observed within the Dean’s Office wherein the administrative assistant subtly complicates the power structure as a result of her personal and long-standing social ties with the Dean himself. Due to their strong relational history, the Dean often avoids assigning her undesirable tasks or negates previous orders assigned by the Assistant Dean so as to not upset the administrative assistant. In turn, the Assistant Dean often feels powerless against the indirect sense of control from her subordinate. Informal structures are not always maladaptive and negative however (Scott & Davis, 2007). In fact, they can be the precursors to some of the most efficient problem solving when formal structures do not operate as intended. In a study conducted on professional culture in schools for instance, teachers who did not feel adequately supported by their formally assigned mentors, instead sought out assistance informally from other available colleagues (Kardos, Johnson, Peske, Kauffman, & Liu, 2001). Despite the lack of expertise that a mentor would have provided, these established relationships enhanced cooperation in identifying solutions and strengthened social bonds that may have otherwise been non-existent.