# THE CASE FOR AN INHABITED INSTITUTIONALISM IN ORGANIZATIONAL RESEARCH: INTERACTION, COUPLING, AND CHANGE RECONSIDERED

Tim Hallett, Indiana University
Amelia Hawbaker, Indiana University

## Abstract

This paper makes the case for an inhabited institutionalism by pondering questions that continue to vex institutional theory: How can we account for local activity, agency, and change without reverting to a focus on individual actors—the very kinds of actors that institutional theory was designed to critique? How is change possible in an institutional context that constructs interests and sets the very conditions for such action? Efforts to deal with these questions by inserting various forms of individual, purposive actors into institutional frameworks have created inconsistencies that threaten the overall coherence of institutional theory and move it farther from its sociological roots. To provide alternative answers, we turn to the growing line of work on "inhabited" institutions. Our exegesis of this literature has two goals. The first goal is to shift focus away from individuals and nested imagery and towards social interaction and coupling configurations. This move opens new avenues for research and helps to identify the spaces—both conceptual and empirical—and the supra-individual processes that facilitate change. This shift has important theoretical implications: incorporating social interaction alters institutional theory, and our second goal is to specify an analytic framework for this new research, an inhabited institutional*ism*. Inhabited institutionalism is a meso-approach for examining the recursive relationships among institutions, interactions, and organizations. It provides novel and sociologically consistent means for dealing with issues of agency and change, and a new agenda for research that can reinvigorate and reunite organizational sociology and institutional theory.

**Keywords**: Coupling Configurations, Institutional Theory, Loose Coupling, Organizational Sociology, Symbolic Interaction

The 2014 American Sociological Association meetings included a panel titled with the provocative question, "Does Organizational Sociology have a Future?" Although opinions varied, the mood was somber and the general consensus was that the golden era of organizational sociology was over. After the meetings the exchange continued online, and in 2015 the Organizations, Occupations, and Work section published a compendium of the discussion in its newsletter. A recent essay in *Contemporary Sociology* summarized the concerns expressed in the panel and online, articulating the stakes: "many have wondered if it's a subfield on the brink of

irrelevance. Blog posts and a recent ASA session have been dedicated to this question: 'What is the future of organizational sociology?'" (King 2017: 131).

In some ways this pessimism is surprising. Even as organizational sociology might be in decline, one of the main pillars of organizational sociology—institutional theory—has reached its zenith in the broader interdisciplinary field of organizational studies (Greenwood et al. 2017; Vogel 2012). Yet here, too, concern about the direction of institutional theory is growing. Critics warn that, as research has continued to expand, "institutionalism" is becoming a "vapid umbrella term" (Haveman and David 2008: 588), which "can mean anything and nothing" (Alvesson and Spicer 2019: 206). Lounsbury and Wang recently stated that: "the growing variance (or perhaps ambiguity) of ontological commitments within organizational institutionalism over the last three decades has arguably led to some degree of categorical incoherence" (2020: 2). Institutional theory has been, perhaps, stretched too far.

How did we arrive at this combination of decline in organizational sociology, a broader expansion of institutional theory, and signs of wear at the disciplinary seams? Part of the answer, we argue, involves how scholars have attempted to deal with the question of how change is possible in an institutional context that constructs the very conditions for such action (Seo and Creed 2002). That is, "How can actors change institutions if their actions, intentions, and rationality are all conditioned by the very institution they wish to change?" (Holm 1995: 398). Two prominent lines of research emerging largely from schools of business and management—focusing on "institutional entrepreneurship" (Battilana et al. 2009) and "institutional work" (Lawrence and Suddaby 2006)—attempt to answer this question by reintroducing forms of purposeful individual agency into institutional frameworks. These literatures attempt to examine

how, under some conditions, some people are able to realize their interests and alter institutions accordingly, and the explicit effort that goes into creating, maintain, and changing institutions.

The focus on intentional action and individual agency fits well with the raison d'être of business and management schools, but conflicts with the sociological soul of institutional theory: New institutionalism (NI) was developed, in part, to explicitly critique models of individual, interested, rational actors (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991; Meyer and Jepperson, 2000). As Hwang and Colyvas (2020: 379) note, one of NI's most important contributions "was to problematize the main ideology or the modern normative assumption that underpins the primacy of individuals and actors" in organizational analysis. Meyer and his colleagues argue that the very concept of "individualism" is an institutional effect: that people (including scholars) believe individualism exists reflects the power of the western cultural account (Meyer and Jepperson 2000). In other words, "individualism" is a cultural construct, an "institutional myth." In this view, attempts to "bring individuals back in" (Lawrence et al. 2011: 52) are inconsistent with institutional theory, and evidence of academic conformity to the contemporary mythology of individualism. Institutional scholars, it would seem, are not immune to institutional effects.

The expansion and development of institutional theory has exacted a toll on its coherency, and it is confronted with a modified but no less problematic question: How can we account for local activity, agency, and change without reverting to the kind of individual actors that NI was designed to critique? Instead of further splintering the sociological soul of institutional theory—particularly its supra-individual level of analysis and critique of interested action—we develop novel answers to this question. To do so we provide an interpretation and elaboration of research on the "inhabited" nature of institutions (Bechky 2011; Binder 2007).

The goals of this exegesis are twofold: First, to shift to focus away from an emphasis on individual actors and nested imagery (where individuals are internal to organizations internal to institutions) and towards social interactions and configurations of couplings among institutions, interactions, and organizations. This shift helps to identify spaces (conceptual and empirical) and the supra-individual processes (social interaction) that facilitate change, while remaining consistent with sociological institutionalism. This move opens new avenues for research and has important theoretical implications: incorporating social interaction changes institutional theory. As such, our second goal is to specify an analytic framework for this new research, an inhabited institutional*ism*. To accomplish this goal, we revisit, revise, and expand classic comparisons of old and new institutionalism (DiMaggio and Powell 1991; Hirsch and Lounsbury 1997), and examine how inhabited institutionalism joins with and departs from its old and new cousins. We emphasize that old, new, and inhabited institutionalism are all are richly sociological: they all feature a supra-individual level of analysis, provide a critique of utilitarian, atomistic, rational models of action, incorporate sociological understandings of culture, and are open-systems approaches. Inhabited institutionalism is a mesosociological framework for examining the recursive relationships among institutions, interactions, and organizations. It provides novel and sociologically consistent means for dealing with issues of agency and change without reverting to individual, purposive actors.

In what follows, we begin by defining key concepts, and we provide a brief overview of institutional theory as it has evolved during attempts to account for agency and change. We provide a sympathetic critique of research emerging from schools of business and management, work that rightfully grapples with issues of agency but, at times, creates inconsistencies. Then we transition into our analysis of the research on inhabited institutions, and we advance the two

goals discussed above. Finally, we discuss paths going forward and the utility of inhabited institutionalism for reinvigorating and reuniting organizational sociology and institutional theory.

## PRELIMINARIES: DEFINING INSTITUTIONS, MYTHS, AND RATIONALES

In the literature it is still too often the case that institutions remain undefined, or are defined in multiple, and at times inconsistent, vague, and contradictory ways (Purdy et al. 2017; R.E. Meyer and Höllerer 2014). To provide clarity, we draw from Barley (2008) and his exegesis of Hughes (1936). Barley defines institutions as "social forms or templates composed of clusters of conventions that script behavior to varying degrees in given contexts" (2008: 495). We include in these forms or templates the "institutional myths" that Meyer and Rowan describe in their seminal 1977 article. The important concept of "myth" can be confusing, so it merits discussion. Institutional myths are widespread cultural ideals that provide a "rational theory of how" organizations ought to operate (Meyer and Rowan 1977: 342). They are "mythic" in two senses, first, in the anthropological sense of a cultural account for how something works, and second, in the potentially false sense that they may not actually accord with substantive activity.

For Meyer and Rowan, myths are not *necessarily* false, though they tend to be loosely coupled to substantive activity, a condition they famously describe as "myth and ceremony," where ceremonial compliance to institutional myths provides organizations with legitimacy in the eyes of important external audiences. Although myths are not always false, in common parlance "myth" is a loaded term with false implications, and this meaning tends to eclipse the more general meaning of a cultural account (Hallett 2010: 54). Due in part to this confusion, scholars began to refer instead to "institutional logics" (Friedland and Alford 1991). In common parlance a "logic" is a rationale, and DiMaggio (1997) and DiMaggio and Powell (1991) emphasize how such cultural rationales or "schemata" script behavior. Drawing from this

sensibility, Rao and Durand (2003: 797) argue that logics "create distinctive categories, beliefs, expectations, and motives," and are "the organizing principles that furnish guidelines to actors as to how to behave," a definition very similar to Barley's (2008).

The terminology of "institutional logics" is now commonplace among organizational scholars, but it is not without problems. In the past decade the concept of "institutional logics" has ballooned to encompass many things far beyond a "rationale." Thornton et al. (2012: 2) define institutional logics as "the socially constructed, historical patterns of cultural symbols and material practices, including assumptions, values, and beliefs, by which individuals and organizations provide meaning to their daily activity, organize time and space, and reproduce their lives and experiences." This definition subsumes too much (Purdy et al. 2017; Zilber 2012), including - but not limited to - history, the symbolic, the material, individuals, organizations, activity, time, and space. Very little exists outside of this omnibus definition, which creates more confusion as to what is or is not an institution, where institutional analysis stops, or what institutional logics explain if, in the end, everything is an institutional logic (Alvesson and Spicer 2019). This expansion creates tautological reasoning, such that "institutional logics" can no longer explain institutional effects because the outcomes of those effects are endogenous to the definition (Liska 1969: 444). As such, we avoid the term "logics" as we develop inhabited institutionalism. Instead, we use "institution" in the general sense that Barley provides, and we refer more specifically to "institutional myths" and "rationales" where appropriate.

Institutions, myths, and rationales all entail meanings that are often taken-for-granted. The taken-for-granted aspects of institutions were formed in earlier times and places, but they nonetheless involved a process of social construction (Berger and Luckmann 1966).[1] Institutional

[1] This understanding spans Scott's legal, normative, and cognitive pillars (Scott 2014). Institutional meanings have a regulative manifestation when they are codified into laws and rules with formal punishments when broken. They have a normative manifestation when they exist as folk expectations that are informally sanctioned. They have a cultural-cognitive manifestation when people are unable to think in alternative ways.

meanings constrain and shape possibilities, but they are not eternal. They gather inertia when they are not actively problematized, but they can, and do, change. Developments in institutional theory have been driven, in large part, by efforts to address issues of change and human agency.

## INSTITUTIONALISM, AGENCY, AND CHANGE

The last fifteen years have witnessed a changing tide in institutional research. For nearly three decades scholars working in the tradition of new institutionalism were pulled towards higher-order macro phenomenon such as the broader sectors or fields in which organizations exist, organizational isomorphism and legitimacy, the widespread cultural systems that shape organizations, and even the emerging global polity (Meyer et al. 1997; Schneiberg and Clemens 2006; Scott and Meyer 1983). Then, gradually at first, and now with increasing frequency, scholars are being pulled towards phenomenon that, if not granular, are comparatively small (Cardinale 2018; Powell and Colyvas 2008)—activities which take place on organizational floors but bear the mark of the larger institutional waves that flood them.

Part of this sea-change began as scholars grappled with the challenge of explaining change and heterogeneity in the context of a new institutional theory that was designed to explain how macro-cultural pressures create homogeneity and conformity (Scott 2010). One wave of this research examined the larger conditions that facilitate change. There is now an established literature that emphasizes how institutional environments are plural (Kraatz and Block 2008), and how this creates fissures, complexities, and contradictions that compel reflexivity and enable actors to question taken-for-granted meanings and organizational conditions, and challenge the status quo (see Clemens and Cook 1999 and Greenwood et al. 2011 for reviews). This wave of research focused somewhat more on exogenous conditions than it did on the actions themselves, raising further questions about the nature of these actions and their

relation to change (Fligstein 1997; Seo and Creed 2002). Additional waves of research, focusing first on "institutional entrepreneurship" and then "institutional work" began to address these matters more directly (See Hampel et al. 2017 and Hardy and Maguire 2017 for reviews).

The research on institutional entrepreneurship focuses on actors who are able to realize their interests and make or remake institutions accordingly (Beckert 1999). Likewise, research on institutional work examines the "purposive action of individuals and organizations aimed at creating, maintaining, and disrupting institutions" (Lawrence and Suddaby 2006: 216). We provide a critique of these works in relation to our development of inhabited institutionalism, but it is a sympathetic one. We recognize that, together, research on institutional entrepreneurship and institutional work make four important and related contributions. First, they expand the methodological toolkit and promote a qualitative turn in institutional analysis, making extensive use of archival materials and textual analysis (Delbridge and Edwards 2008; Rojas 2010) as well as interviews and ethnography (Zilber 2007). Second, they bring institutional theory to ground by focusing on substantive activity in addition to ceremonial conformity. In doing so they illustrate how institutional processes can operate from the ground up, as well as from the environment down. Third, in grappling with issues of human agency they bring needed dynamism to institutionalism. Fourth, in doing so, they revive the tangible, practical, managerial focus that was key to old institutionalism (OI), but which had gone dormant with NI's emphasis on macro fields (Kraatz 2009). However, the recent incorporation of various forms of interested actors contradicts important tenets of sociological institutionalism.

The research on institutional entrepreneurship is often traced to 1988, when DiMaggio criticized NI for its "chronic use of passive constructions" that obscure human agency (1988:10). To address this problem, he suggested that "new institutions arise when organized actors with

sufficient resources (*institutional entrepreneurs*) see in them an opportunity to realize interests that they value highly" (1988: 14 emphasis in original). Subsequent research developed slowly, perhaps because DiMaggio and Powell provided a strong critique of interested, rational action in their famous 1991 edited volume (which we discuss in upcoming sections). Despite this contradiction, research on institutional entrepreneurs grew in the new millennium, in part through the efforts of scholars in business and management schools (Hardy and Maguire 2008).

Although research on institutional entrepreneurs is "interested," it is not atomistic or utilitarian in a decontextualized sense. An important segment of this research examines how institutional entrepreneurship occurs in emerging fields as compared to mature fields (Greenwood and Suddaby 2006; Lawrence and Phillips 2004; Maguire et al. 2004). Another segment focuses on the social structures and conditions that enable and constrain entrepreneurship, effectively turning the activity into a dependent variable to be explained by independent variables, ironically shifting focus away from the activity itself (Battilana 2006, 2011; Battilana et al. 2009).

While the research on institutional entrepreneurship examines interests and agency in context, the reinsertion of interested actors into the NI framework remains contradictory, because in NI actors and their interests are derivative of the same institutional environments that shape organizations (DiMaggio and Powell 1991; Jepperson 2002; Hwang et al. 2019). The focus on individuals and the broader terminology of individualism creates additional tension. DiMaggio envisioned institutional entrepreneurship broadly, as a variable that ranged from individual efforts to highly communal ones, with activity throughout this continuum contributing to the development of novel institutions.[2] The collective aspect of this vision is evident in DiMaggio's research on art professionals and field formation. Along these lines, some of the research on

[2] DiMaggio, personal communication.

institutional entrepreneurship focuses not on individual people but collective entities, such as firms (Garud et al. 2002; Greenwood and Suddaby 2006) or professions (Greenwood et al. 2002). Nevertheless, even when the focus is not on actual individuals, the texts commonly employ the terminology of individualism, such that individual organizations or firms become anthropomorphized as agency is attributed to them. In other work the focus is indeed on particular individuals (Lawrence and Phillips 2004; Maguire et al. 2004; Misangyi et al. 2008), leading to charges that the research is overly heroic and muscular (Hardy and Maguire 2008).

Regardless of whether the focus is on particular individuals or individual entities, Barley (2019: 20) laments the very terminology of "institutional entrepreneurship," because it is a loaded term that "unnecessarily calls to mind the broader discourse on entrepreneurship which in its most popular form promotes hero worship." Nearly a decade after they first reviewed the literature on institutional entrepreneurs in 2008, Hardy and Maguire (2017) conclude that it is still vexed by heroic, individualist tendencies. Although this research makes progress in revising NI's oversocialized, "dopey" view of behavior (DiMaggio and Powell 1991), it creates contradictions and remains limited in the sense that "heroic actors and cultural dopes are a poor representation of the gamut of human behavior" (Powell and Colyvas 2008: 277).

Subsequent research on "institutional work" (Lawrence and Suddaby 2006; Lawrence et al. 2009) provides a partial corrective. This research replaces entrepreneurial heroism with grit and grime, the "physical or mental effort aimed at affecting an institution or set of institutions" (Lawrence et al. 2011: 53). Instead of restricting analysis to "entrepreneurial" actions that create or change institutions, institutional work also includes purposive efforts to maintain institutions.[3] These scholars make headway in categorizing specific types of behavior associated with the

[3] As with the expansion of the concept of "institutional logic" discussed earlier, this expansion is likewise problematic. As a result, Alvesson and Spicer (2019: 267) lament that "nearly any kind of purposeful action," however ordinary, becomes institutional: "the mailman reliably delivering letters maintains the institution of the post office; a doctor delegating work to a nurse is preserving the institution of the elite medical profession."

creation, disruption, and maintenance of institutions (Battilana and D'Aunno 2009; Lawrence et al. 2013). Although perhaps less heroic, in some ways this research is *more* individualistic, with the express goal of bring "individuals back into institutional theory" (Lawrence et al. 2011: 52). To be sure, research under the institutional work banner varies, ranging from studies that are highly individualistic (Riaz et al. 2011) to those that are much less so (Zilber 2002).[4] Regardless, and as with the research on institutional entrepreneurship, the research on institutional work envisions a world full of intent: "purposive action" is a part of the definition, and a recent literature review examines institutional work as a means to achieve particular outcomes (Hampel et al. 2017).

In both lines of research, the focus on interested actors generates charges of "microchauvinism," where "a sharply defined purposive 'actor'" becomes the theoretical bottom line (Jepperson and Meyer 2011: 57; Wilmott 2011). These charges reveal tensions with NI, which emphasizes a supra-individual level of analysis and a critique of interested action. As Hwang and Colyvas (2020: 379) note, taking the individual as fundamental "goes against the grain of institutional thinking, which has questioned the very notion of the primacy of the individual as actor" (see also Meyer and Jepperson 2000; Meyer 2010, 2017). An approach is not fully institutional if it drifts towards the kind of methodological individualism that institutional theories were designed to critique (Hwang and Colyvas 2011; Wilmott 2011). As a result of this drift, critics argue that institutional theory needs to "move beyond the 'individual actor'" (Lok et al. 2017), which is ironic given that NI's original framework is not the least bit individualistic.

How, then, can institutional theory account for agency and change without reverting to the kind of individual actors that new institutionalism was designed to critique? How can it

[4] Although Zilber has published on institutional work (2013), her deft use of ethnography is richly inhabited. We consider her an inhabited institutionalist, but we do not foist that label on her, especially since her work is wide-ranging.

address what DiMaggio (1988) called NI's "metaphysical pathos" while moving away from heroes, dopes, or any other sort of individual actor? How can it account for local activity and the dynamism that it provides while remaining consistent with its key tenets? Answers can be found, we argue, by shifting attention to social interaction. Sociologists who study interaction emphasize that it is a supra-individual entity (Goffman 1983; Rawls 1987; Strauss 1993).[5] People matter, but the products of interaction are greater than and different from its individual parts. Interactions are not simply aggregates. This is necessarily so because interactions are fundamentally relational and they take place *between* two or more people (Furnari 2019). This inherent dynamic opens possibilities and lines of action that do not exist in isolation, creating what Goffman describes as the "bizarre potentials of social life" (1974: 15). As a result, interactions always provide some room for change, even if it small and unlikely.

Interactions include "heroes," "dopes," agnostics, and others, a dynamic that creates unexpected opportunities but also constrains individual desires. While there might be "purposive" efforts included in such interactions, they are only a part. In a chain of interaction that is relevant to an organization, there are participants that are not so purposive who are still consequential. The challenge is to examine the interplay among the multiple dimensions of agency—habitual, purposive, and practical—not only in the flow of time (Emirbayer and Mische 1998), but also in the flow of interactions among and between people. Indeed, it is during interactions with others that recompositions of agency take shape; it is through interactions that people realize "a fork in the road" (1998: 966) and the chance to shift behavior, to become less habitual and more purposive, to question the status quo instead of taking it for granted. One would be hard pressed to find a case of change that does not involve such interactions.

[5] Goffman (1983) goes so far as to describe interaction as its own "order."

What we think of as "agency" is undoubtedly expressed through and shaped by social interaction. Agency, at least the kind that matters for institutional change, is not individual. Rather, it is collaboratively manufactured in and through social interaction. Although institutional scholars rarely focus on actual interactions, such a focus is consistent with established traditions, however, as we will demonstrate, it creates a somewhat different framework. Selznick spoke compellingly of a "shadowland of informal interaction" (1949: 260), but he and his counterparts did not study actual interactions, and they did not build them into their conceptual apparatus. Meyer and Rowan (1977: 358) drew from Goffman to develop their ideas about myth and ceremony, and in the mid 1980s a number of interactionists noted the affinities between symbolic interactionism and new institutionalism (Dingwall and Strong 1985; Thomas 1984). Nevertheless, NI went in a macro direction, leading Barley (2008) to label interactionism the "road not taken." Research on "inhabited institutions" travels this road, revealing new possibilities for research and thinking.

## RESEARCH ON INHABITED INSTITUTIONS

Scholars who study the "inhabited" dynamics of institutions shift their gaze away from individuals and toward social interactions. In turn they shift away from "nested" imagery and towards the many different ways that institutions, interactions, and organizations are coupled together. The evocative term "inhabited institution" was first used by Scully and Creed in 1997 during a conference presentation which criticized institutional theories of diffusion for failing to address the people who make diffusion happen. In contrast, they argued that people "not only inhabit this process [of diffusion], they actually reshape (and are reshaped by) the objects and dynamics of diffusion."

In 2006 Hallett and Ventresca continued to develop the sensitizing concept of "inhabited institutions" by revisiting Gouldner's classic (1954) ethnography, *Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy*. The rich field observations in *Patterns* illustrate how bureaucracy was put into place and negotiated in a gypsum mine in a way that was neither ceremonial, nor an individual fiat. Instead, distinctive meanings of bureaucracy developed from contentious interactions between workers and a new manager. Hallett and Ventresca use the material and insights from symbolic interactionism to expand institutionalism to encompass a richer understanding of action and meaning as a part of an "inhabited institutional approach."

Hallett and Ventresca argue that institutionalism and symbolic interactionism are broadly compatible because they are both concerned with meaning, and therefore culture, albeit in different ways. NI focuses on external "symbolic systems" that create organizational order by "rendering the experience of time and space meaningful" (Friedland and Alford 1991: 243). These symbolic systems (institutions) are broad categories of meaning that construct activity by providing an idealized cultural account for how organizations ought to operate (Meyer and Rowan 1977: 342). Symbolic interactionism holds that people act towards things based on the meanings those things have for them, and emphasizes that those meanings are established through interactions with others and modified through an interpretive process (Blumer 1969: 2). Hallett and Ventresca (2006: 213) argue that pairing the two as part of an "inhabited" approach yields a doubly constructed view:

> On the one hand institutions provide the raw materials and guidelines for social interactions ("construct interactions"), and on the other, the meanings of institutions are constructed and propelled forward by social interactions. Institutions are not inert categories of meaning; rather, they are populated with people whose social interactions suffuse institutions with local force and significance.

They emphasize not individuals, but "people doing things together" (Becker 1986), whether in conflict or concert. These interactions are a response to institutions, but also shape them.

Binder (2007) develops these ideas by examining ethnographic data that captures how personnel inside a transitional housing program respond to a changing institutional environment and the emergent rationale of non-profit federalism. Binder argues:

> Organizations are not merely the instantiation of environmental, institutional logics "out there"…where workers seamlessly enact preconscious scripts valorized in the institutional environment… Instead, they are places where people and groups (agentic actors, not 'institutional dopes') make sense of, and interpret, institutional "vocabularies of motive"…and act on those interpretations—the central premise of symbolic interactionism. (Binder 2007: 551)

Binder finds that the managers of the housing program did not respond individually, but rather in response to clients and coworkers. In turn they acted in ways that did not reflect their personal "interests." For example, one of the managers willingly embraced restrictive regulations as a way to score points with colleagues and help clients, even though the regulations undermined the professional autonomy afforded by her background in early childhood education. This response was neither ceremonial nor rote, and only made sense in this particular interactional context.

As with NI, research on inhabited institutions has developed from studies of education. Whereas Meyer and Rowan (1977, 1978) focused on myth and ceremony to understand patterns of surface conformity across U.S. public schools, Hallett (2010) asks: What happens when accountability myths become incarnate?[6] Based on an ethnography of an elementary school, he identifies a process of "recoupling," of "creating tight couplings where loose couplings were once in place" (2010: 54). To capture these processes, he focuses on interactions between a new principal and teachers—interactions that gave flesh to the myth of accountability—and the

[6] Accountability is an institutional rationale for educational reform that holds that schools should be held to account for their educational outcomes. This rationale emphasizes surveillance, rewards, and punishments, often based on quantitative measures such as test scores.

development of partisan meanings through which seemingly rational school reforms came to mean irrational and chaotic "turmoil."

All of these studies examine how institutional myths or rationales become manifest as they are interpreted in social interactions that occur inside of and across organizations, and this research shares an affinity with process oriented research on organizations, a growing line of work that is being advanced by European and Scandinavian scholars (Bakken and Hernes 2006; Schultz and Hernes 2013; Langley et al. 2013; Tsoukas and Chia 2006). While process research corresponds with the "linguistic turn" in organizational studies (Alvesson and Kärreman 2000; Czarniawska 1997), the inhabited approach advances a more explicit interactional turn, one that is always in relation to institutions and organizations. That is, while both approaches cite symbolic interactionism, studies in the inhabited stream evidence a commitment to also take interactions as a central empirical focus.[7]

Research on inhabited institutions (II) has grown to encompass a wide range of topics, spanning forensic science (Bechky 2019) and criminal justice (Ulmer 2019) to hospital architecture (VanHeuvelen 2019) and managerial fads (Huising 2016). Though this growing line of work varies in its foci and points of emphasis, it shares a fundamental concern with how institutions, interactions, and organizations are connected or "coupled" together. It further explores the implications of those connections for organizations, the people who enliven them, and the institutions that shape them (Everitt and Levinson 2016; Haedicke 2012). Collectively, this research has had a prominent role in compelling organizational scholars to reconsider what had been a narrow focus on loose-coupling (Bromley and Powell 2012).[8] This research also has

[7] For a discussion of where II sits relative to various linguistic approaches, see Leibel et al. (2018). The connections between process approaches and II are important and a topic for another paper (see also Reay et al. 2019).

[8] The identification of the many coupling possibilities that are evident in the inhabited institutional research is a legacy to old and new institutionalism, and they share an important kinship. Although Selznick (1943, 1948) did not use the term loose coupling, he described how the short-term contingencies of day-to-day operations generates an informal system of organization and introduces gaps between work practices and official, formal goals. Likewise, NI

conceptual implications, and we argue that it creates an important shift in imagery, from nesting to coupling configurations.

**A Reexamination of Coupling: From Nesting to Coupling Configurations**

Injecting social interaction into existing institutional frameworks promotes a reexamination of coupling, and a departure from "nested" approaches (See Figure 1).

**---Figure 1 Here---**

In recent institutional theory, the individual is viewed as nested inside organizations that are nested inside institutions (Battilana et al. 2009, Battilana and D'Aunno 2009; Thornton 2002; Thornton et al. 2012: 13). As with any conceptual imagery, Figure 1 facilitates some ways of thinking while discouraging others (Silver 2018). For example, Figure 1 focuses some attention on individuals, but disattends to interaction. It also constrains imagined possibilities by definition; however much we might want to shift the representative circles to think of alternative arrangements, individuals remain nested in organizations nested in institutions.

In contrast, II conveys an imagery of linked spheres, or what we call "coupling configurations," where institutions, organizations, and interactions are connected and exert a force on each other, and also retain partial autonomy (See Figure 2).

**---Figure 2 Here---**

The imagery of spheres is important because it aids in the visualization of partially autonomous spaces, and highlights that couplings are dimensional and are chained in different places and in different ways (the areas one through four in Figure 2). While the research on inhabited institutions views interactions as partly autonomous, it does not examine interactions sui generis

developed from local, empirical observations of loose coupling in San Francisco schools (Meyer and Rowan 1977, 1978). To explain the widespread prevalence of loose coupling, Meyer and his colleagues moved up a level of analysis to emphasize the external environment and the legitimacy imperative. As NI continued to evolve in a macro direction so did its data, and studies of field-level diffusion featuring quantitative measures of surface organizational conformity flourished. These studies provided valuable knowledge about the macro dynamics of institutions, but in the process loose coupling became something of an assumption and not a process to be observed or questioned.

(Goffman 1983). Because the interaction order has its own unique properties, interactions are never completely endogenous to the organizations in which they occur, but neither are they disconnected from those organizations. Thus, even though interactions take place inside of organizations, they are never completely enveloped by those organizations, nor are they independent. Moreover, the interaction order is not a space of unbound individuals acting freely. Rather, interactions place further constraints on people (Goffman 1955, 1956), even as the partial autonomy of interactions provides room for creativity and change.

Likewise, even as there are similarities across organizations in a particular field, every organization has a somewhat distinct "opportunity space" of "shared cultural ideals and organizational structures" that provides a context for social interaction (Binder and Wood 2013: 10). For example, Cobb (2017) examines how teachers at three high schools inhabit color-blind mythology as part of local meaning systems that mediate the relationship between institutional myths and school practices. Importantly, the different features of each school (material resources, demographics, and professional culture), create different contexts for teacher interactions, their interpretations of color-blind mythology, and subsequent teaching practices that challenge or maintain racial inequality. Organizations have their own robustness, and they establish the setting for interactions. Institutions, organizations, and interactions are linked but not fully determinative. They are mutually constitutive, but only partly so.

To visualize these relationships, consider Figure 2, which depicts a case in which interactions, organizations, and institutions are rather loosely-coupled to each other. A recent study by Kameo (2015) illustrates the inhabited dynamics of one such configuration. Utilizing archival materials and in-depth interviews with bio scientists in Japanese Universities, Kameo examines how scientists responded to the "Japanese Bayh-Dole Act"--an institutional rationale

for academic entrepreneurship that was diffusing from the U.S. This rationale formalized the relationships between university scientists and industry, fostered transparency, and promised to increase university revenue, but it threatened the prior interaction order that featured informal gift exchanges, friendship, and trust. Kameo shows how scientists "pulled" their old practices of gift exchange into their relationships with industrial donors in order to reestablish trust and close collaboration. As NI might expect, this created a loose coupling between the institutional rationale, universities, and scientist-donor relationships. However, Kameo's point is that these arrangements do not just happen; they are the result of considerable interactive effort.

Although nested imagery is now common in institutional thought, Figure 2 more accurately fits the empirical depiction of schools that was prominent in NI from the late 1970s to the 1990s. However, what has been happening in education is a change from Figure 2 to Figure 3, which depicts a more tightly coupled configuration.

**---Figure 3 Here---**

As an institutional rationale, the rewards and punishments that characterize accountability are coercive and designed to create a tighter connection between organizational policies and school practices (H.D. Meyer and Rowan 2006). Nevertheless, even in the case of tighter couplings, because interactions remain semi-autonomous, people can and do interpret accountability myths in different ways and with multiple implications for organizational and institutional change, including the partisan "turmoil" identified by Hallett (2010).

Coupling configurations may not be uniform, especially when there are multiple institutional pressures. In a trio of publications Everitt (2012, 2013, 2018) examines how teachers inhabit dual mythologies around accountability and compulsory education—where schools are punished if they do not meet benchmarks, and also expected to educate every single

student. Based on an ethnography of a teacher-training program and interviews with teachers at different career stages in three schools, Everitt provides novel explanations for patterns of tight and loose coupling. These explanations have less to do with ceremonial conformity and more to do with training and experience: Novice teachers are taught to comply with accountability, but they are also socialized into an "injunction to adapt" to the diverse needs of students as a part of compulsory education (2013, 2018). As they struggle to make sense of these tensions during interactions with colleagues and students, they develop their own "arsenals of practice" (2012, 2018). In doing so they conform to accountability mandates even as their specific practices vary. The result is a more tightly coupled configuration relative to NI's classic depiction of schools, but loosely-coupled elements also develop—not for the sake of legitimacy, but via socialization.

As another illustration, consider Figure 4, which represents a very tightly coupled case, perhaps one of Goffman's Asylums (1961), with strong psychiatric mythologies, organizational control, and disciplined interactions.

**---Figure 4 Here---**

However, even in such cases there is still autonomous interactional space, as evidenced in the important non-conformity and resistance that Goffman documents: interactions through which inmates presented an image of self that the Asylum could not control.

Although certainly not a total institution, a similar configuration is found in Aurini's (2012) ethnography of a franchised tutoring center characterized by market accountability. The organization was highly rationalized and exhibited tight coupling, with a highly structured curriculum and mandated instructional practices. Tutors conformed to the letter of the law and celebrated the franchise brand, "The Ontario Learning Center Moment," but interactions with

clients also provided slivers of autonomy, through which tutors could selectively interpret, prioritize, and blend the mandated rules that scripted practice, making it their own.

It is also possible to imagine other configurations, for example cases in which institutions and organizations are tightly coupled to each other, but loosely coupled to interactions (See Figure 5), or where interactions and organizations are tightly coupled to each other, but loosely coupled to institutions (See Figure 6).

**---Insert Figures 5 and 6 Here---**

These configurations are less intuitive based on the existing literature and harder to validate empirically, so what follows is somewhat speculative but no less useful as a guide for future research. A case of Figure 5 might be found in a new study of medical education by Judson Everitt and his colleagues (Everitt et al. 2020). While interviewing medical students, they find, quite surprisingly, that the students report *not* going to their classes. Instead, students economize their time by focusing on web-based resources and portions of recorded lectures that are aligned with high-stakes Board exams. At the organizational level, the medical school curriculum remains tightly coupled to institutional rationales as reflected in Board exams, but student interactions with professors in classrooms are loosely coupled (although, and importantly, the strategy of not attending classes develops during interactions with *peers*). Similar patterns may be emerging as more and more schools and universities embrace online learning.

In terms of Figure 6, this configuration might be found in cases of innovation and start-up organizations. As Selznick (1957) noted, new organizations are initially created as a tool to help achieve a goal. In these early phases, interactions and the developing organization are tightly coupled, even as institutional pressures are bracketed in the push for novelty. Scholars may

consider whether the cases of "institutional entrepreneurship" that are celebrated in the research coming from business schools are actually instances of this configuration. In any case, the search for empirical instances of these (imagined) possibilities can drive future research. Much will be learned by identifying and examining the dynamics among institutions, interactions, and organizations in such cases.

All figures illustrate as well as distort (Silver 2018), and a problem with these images is that, for the sake of visualization, they represent interaction, organizations, and institutional myths as entities instead of processes. Empirically, though, they are more dynamic than these figures suggest.[9] Despite this shortcoming, Figures 2-6 depict how, in any particular configuration, organizational, institutional, and interactional affordances and opportunities for action are always present, although the space for these affordances and opportunities varies across the figures.[10] Again, while the spheres help us to imagine these spaces, autonomy is always partial: even in the case of loose coupling (Figure 2), institutional myths, organizations, and interactions remain chained together and exert a pull. There are always encumbrances, but they vary and even in the case of tight coupling (Figure 4) they are not total.

These figures are a starting point, and not an end point. Going further, it is possible to imagine the various configurations as situated among a field (Bourdieu 1984), and against a backdrop of culture. There are a number of ways to envision this, each with different implications for theory. Our preference is to envision a field as a plane that runs through the spheres and thereby exerts influence, but without making the configurations completely endogenous to the field. In this view, the configurations would never be completely outside of culture, nor would they be completely internal to culture. Another approach would be to envision

[9] As processual approaches go, II would probably be characterized as a "weak" processual approach (although we prefer "tempered") instead of a "strong" one, because it does, at times, treat organizations and institutional myths as entities (Chia and Langley 2004), although it does not prioritize entities (see also Reay et al. 2019).
[10] We are indebted to one of the reviewers for this phrasing.

fields as enveloping the configurations, and to see the configurations as internal to culture more broadly, making them endogenous to culture (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003; Kaufman 2004). In the latter scenario culture would have an even greater influence, not only via institutional myths but also through the very conditions of possibility and the tacit understandings that define and enable organization and interaction. In this view interactions, while they remain important, have less of a creative role in generating culture and more of a role in filtering existing cultural representations (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003).

Regardless of how future work might depict the larger backdrops that further contextualize Figures 2 through 6, shifting away from individuals and nested imagery and towards social interaction and coupling configurations opens new possibilities and helps to identify the partially autonomous spaces—both conceptual and empirical—in which change develops as well as the supra-individual processes that promote change. Although existing research on inhabited institutions provides fresh thinking, it lacks a specified analytic framework to guide new research on institutions, agency, and change. We develop such a framework in what follows.

## SPECIFYING AN INHABITED INSTITUTIONALISM FOR NEW RESEARCH

Including social interaction as a key component and necessary part of analysis changes institutional theory in important ways, and the goal of this section is to identify those alterations, sharpen the focus, and create an overarching framework—an inhabited institutional*ism* (II). Towards this end, we revisit, revise, and expand classic comparisons of old and new institutionalism circa the 1990s (DiMaggio and Powell 1991; Hirsch and Lounsbury 1997). We acknowledge the developments in institutional theory since the 1990s—developments critiqued

in previous sections of this paper—but we return to the classic comparisons because doing so reasserts the sociological aspects of old, new, and inhabited institutionalism. Specifically, they all feature a supra-individual level of analysis, they critique utilitarian, atomistic, rational models of action, they incorporate sociological understandings of culture, and they are open-systems approaches. These vital similarities are contra to some aspects of the recent scholarship on institutional entrepreneurship and work.

The rows in Table 1 are inspired by the dimensions used by DiMaggio and Powell (1991) in their specification of NI relative to OI: Focal level of analysis, conflicts of interest, forms of cognition, behavioral emphasis, social psychology, and critique of utilitarian rational models. The lines in Table 1 are dashed and not solid so as to prevent false boundaries and avoid a "family quarrel" (Hirsch and Lounsbury 1997). OI, NI, and II are cousins who do somewhat different things in the service of a larger sociological institutionalism. In Table 1 we position II between OI and NI because, while II's cultural sociology more closely resembles NI, its level of analysis is closer to OI. Despite these similarities, the infusion of social interaction that characterizes II creates distinctiveness, and positions II to answer the question of how to account for agency and change without reverting to the types of individual, interested actors that institutional theory was designed to critique. As we continue our exegesis we focus primarily on II, and we provide an extended review of OI and NI in Online Appendix A.

**---Insert Table 1 Here---**

**Level of Analysis and Conflicts of Interests**

One of the innovations of NI was to shift the level of analysis upwards, from OI's focus on organizational case studies (Clark 1956, 1970; Messinger 1955; Selznick 1949; Zald and Denton 1963), to the broader fields, sectors, and societies in which organizations are embedded

(Schneiberg and Clemens 2006; Scott and Meyer 1983). With this upward shift, the conflicts of interest that were central in OI and treated as a major source of organizational adaptation became peripheral—no longer a main focus. In its pure form, NI holds that interests are socially constructed by the environments in which groups are embedded (Meyer and Jepperson 2000), reiterating the macro gaze (for further discussion see Online Appendix A).

Less macro in orientation, II focuses on the recursive relationships among institutions, interactions, and organizations. The central premise of II holds that institutional myths and rationales are inhabited by people doing things together, and that these interactions are important for organizations and the very myths and rationales that inform them (Bechky 2011). With this, II asks, in any given case: How are institutions, organizations, and interactions coupled together, how do those couplings form, and how do they operate? Importantly, even at its smallest level of analysis, inhabited institutionalism is not "micro," because, as we have seen, interaction is a supra-individual phenomenon. People in organizations are not reclusive, and significant action occurs in relation to others. Goffman was correct: interaction is "where the action is" (1969). Although people matter and II is a "peopled" approach (Fine 2003), it is not an individualistic one. Interactions are supra-individual, as are organizations, institutions, and the links among them. Inhabited institutionalism provides a mesosociological account of these links.

With this meso focus, II extends OI's concern with conflicts of interest and NI's concern with the cultural construction of interests by examining meaning as a battleground and the *local* struggles over meaning through which interests are constructed. Organizational life can be ambiguous and uncertain, and the same is true for interests. Interests are often "figured out" and contested during interactions. These struggles over meaning shape the "interests" that inform activity, including organizational change. In focusing on these struggles, II does not ignore

power. Formal authority is important, as is informal symbolic power (Bourdieu 1991; Hallett 2007), the power to define the very situation in which people interact and the meanings that they act towards [or what Fligstein (2001) terms "social skill"]. Such politics, including symbolic politics, animate organizational life and institutional change. For example, in Hallett's (2010) study of how the myth of accountability became real in an urban school, the school principal had the authority to enforce policies and change teaching practices, but lacked the symbolic power to control the meanings that were assigned to those changes. Instead, the teachers had that power, and they interpreted accountability in a partisan way, contributing to the emergent turmoil.

Thus, in inhabited institutionalism "interests" are doubly constructed, both by the extra-local cultural mythologies that bear on organizations, and by the local interactions through which those mythologies are interpreted and become the basis for political action. For example, in her study of Latino politics in three colleges, Reyes (2015) found that the cultural mythology of multiculturalism was upheld as a basis for action in each setting. However, based on the different locales for group interaction, otherwise similar students responded in different ways, and through these interactions their interpretations of multiculturalism and their efforts to change their campuses utilized contrasting styles of political activism: deliberative, divisive, and contentious.

**Key Forms of Cognition and Behavioral Emphasis**

The view of cognition in OI follows from organizational values, norms, and attitudes (DiMaggio and Powell 1991: 13-14). Values direct reasoning, and the corresponding behavioral emphasis is on commitment to values: a strong behavioral commitment indicates secure values, whereas a weak commitment indicates precarious values (Clark 1956; Kraatz et al. 2010). In NI cognition occurs through taken-for-granted cultural classifications, schemata, and scripts (DiMaggio 1997; DiMaggio and Powell 1991), in other words, the macro institutional myths and

rationales that people think with. The corresponding behavioral emphasis focuses on habits and rules that follow from macro institutions (For further discussion see Online Appendix A). However, this view invited criticisms, even from within the tradition, that NI treated people as oversocialized dopes (DiMaggio 1988; Powell and Colyvas 2008). As we have seen, research on institutional entrepreneurs and institutional work tries to deal with this problem by reinserting forms of individual, interested actors, but this creates theoretical inconsistency.

In dealing with these problems, inhabited institutionalism focuses on two forms of cognition. First, the interpretive meaning-making that occurs in response to organizational disruptions, and second, the post-hoc, rationalized sensemaking that occurs under conditions of continuity. As Tavory and Fine (2020: 372-373) note, disruptions—whether in the form of large-scale exogenous shocks or smaller interactional breaches—prompt reflection and a possible rethinking of situations and relations. It is when an established order is disrupted that people go through the process of (1) determining how to act towards things based on meanings, (2) establishing those meanings through interactions with others, and (3) modifying those meanings through an interpretive process (Blumer 1969: 2; Hallett 2010). However, under conditions of continuity people can interact based on taken-for-granted assumptions and routines (Garfinkel 1967), and they can make sense of their actions post-hoc via established understandings (Weick 1995).

The corresponding behavioral emphasis focuses on interactions based on meanings that can be emergent (particularly in response to disruptions), as well as taken-for-granted, habituated, and routinized (particularly under conditions of continuity). Although cognition is hard to see, these interactions are empirically visible and available to study. Everitt (2012, 2013, 2018) uses this kind of approach in his research on teachers at different career stages. He finds

that novice teachers are in a nearly constant state of disruption, as their schooling provides little help with the practical realities of teaching. Part of the burden of being a novice is the interactive work of simply establishing coherent meanings under these circumstances. However, once meanings are established, veteran teachers are able to use them as basis of ongoing sensemaking and their working lives improve exponentially. Nevertheless, even veteran teachers are subject to disruptions and the burden of new meaning making, particularly in the face of major reforms premised on accountability. Eventual changes depend, in part, on this new meaning-making.

**Social Psychology**

Whereas OI's social psychology is informed by Parsonsian action theory, such that values are the ends towards which action is oriented (Parsons 1937), NI's social psychology is a kind of macro phenomenology (Meyer 2010, 2017), where taken-for-grantedness is writ large and exists in the cultural categories that script action (DiMaggio and Powell 1991) (See Online Appendix A). Reflecting its commitment to examine social interaction, II features a dual social psychology that utilizes aspects of ethnomethodology and its emphasis on taken-for-granted routines and assumptions (Garfinkel 1967), as well as Chicago style interactionism and its emphasis on emergent meanings (Blumer 1969). However, II does *not* attempt to integrate ethnomethodology and symbolic interactionism (Denzin 1969). Instead, as discussed above, it uses them to understand interactions under different conditions—continuity and disruption.[11] This dual social psychology helps scholars to reflect on the processes that underlie both "the instituted" (temporarily stabilized forms) and "the instituting" (change and the re-formation of forms) (Bouillioud et al. 2019). In sum, if in OI people act towards values, and if in NI people

[11] As Garfinkel (1967) has shown, a small disruption can go a long way in upending a social order. Garfinkel's methodological strategy was to use such disruptions to gain insight into the routine, taken-for-granted order that is made visible by the disruption, and the continuity that existed *prior* to the disruption. Instead of viewing Chicago style interactionism (Blumer 1969) as a competing view, II uses it to examine something else—the emergent meanings that may arise *after* such disruptions (see also Tavory and Fine 2020).

act according to institutional myths and rationales, in II people act through social interactions, they do so based on meanings that are both routine and emergent, and which are shaped by, in dialogue with, and in response to institutional myths and rationales.

**Critique of Utilitarian Rational Models**

Old institutionalism's critique of utilitarian, rational models reflects Merton's (1936) emphasis on the unintended consequences of purposeful action: organizations are purposefully created to achieve human values, yet in their operation they introduce dysfunctional irrationality into the system (Selznick 1948). New institutionalism's critique is more radical and breaks from the functionalism of Parsons and Merton (DiMaggio and Powell 1991): Organizations do not adopt formal structures because they are, in fact, technically rational tools; they adopt them for the sake of cultural legitimacy, even if those structures are irrational from a technical perspective. Thus, whereas OI locates irrationality in the organization, NI locates it in the environment. Going further, the very notion of rational action and homo economicus is an institutional myth, a part of the western cultural account (Meyer and Jepperson 2000). Rationality is not simply enabled, constrained or "bounded" by the organization (Simon 1957). Instead, rationality itself is socially constructed, as are "rational" actors and their "interests."

As we have seen, in II action is not atomistic. Rather, it is expressed via interactions. Those interactions are not based on a rational calculus or a priori interests. Instead, they are based on taken-for-granted or emergent meanings that develop (in part) during previous interactions. Current interactions are a venue for the further stabilization of meanings, or change. Those meanings are likewise shaped by the extra-local institutions that bear on organizations. Indeed, institutional pressures may be the subject of the interactions, as when people are coming to grips with mythologies regarding accountability (Everitt 2018), multiculturalism (Reyes

2015), achievement ideology (Nunn 2014), cultural conceptions of sexuality (Pham 2019), or other such myths. Importantly, in II institutions are not "neutral," as some versions of interactionism hold.[12] Rather, institutions shape the very content of interactions, influencing what we attend to and how we do so (Espeland and Sauder 2007), even as interactions retain partial autonomy. In this way, interactions are thoroughly social, but never overdetermined.

To specify an inhabited institutionalism, the above discussion focuses on II while providing thumbnail sketches of OI and NI (for a fuller review see Online Appendix A). These sketches nevertheless show that old, new, and inhabited institutionalism are related, but distinct. As such they are useful for different things. OI is at its best in explaining how organizations acquire their distinctiveness, and the practical problems that emerge with any effort to organize (Selznick 1996). Of the three, OI is the most organization-centric. NI is at its best in explaining the surprising surface similarities evident across organizations. Of the three it is the most field-centric. The worldwide spread of formal organizations—often in the place of effective informal relations—is a phenomenon that cannot be explained without a macro approach (Bromley and Meyer 2015). NI is well-suited to this task.

II is at its best in examining the dynamics of coupling, how the meanings and implications of institutional myths and rationales get worked out in social interactions, and how those meanings become the basis of ongoing organizational activities which have implications for the very institutions that shape organizations and the people who enliven them. Of the three, II is best equipped to deal with issues of agency and change in ways that are consistent with key tenets of sociological institutionalism: action is expressed not through individuals but in social interaction, thereby retaining a supra-individual level of analysis and expanding the critique of

[12] For example, Blumer argued that even large-scale social changes such as industrialization were 'neutral' in the sense that they are 'indifferent to what follows socially in its wake' (1990: 9).

atomistic, utilitarian, rational action. Change is enabled by the semi-autonomous spaces that always exist, however small, across institutions, organizations, and interactions. By focusing on these recursive relationships, II mitigates the "interactionist fallacy," (Emirbayer and Johnson 2008: 9), the notion that interactions can be understood without reference to their extra-interactional parts. It likewise mitigates the structuralist fallacy, the notion that organizations and institutions can be understood without regard to interaction. This reflects II's well-developed social psychology, which, when paired with the cultural sociology espoused by NI, provides a rich account of the couplings among institutions, interactions, and organizations.

## PUSHING FORWARD WITH INHABITED INSTITUTIONALISM

In making the case for an inhabited institutionalism, we have argued that the solution to the problem of agency and change in institutional theory is not a return to various forms of individual, purposive actors, but rather, a robust consideration of social interaction. Instead of bringing "individuals back into institutional theory," (Lawrence et al. 2011: 52), II brings social interaction back into institutional theory. Because interaction is a supra-individual level of analysis, II remains consistent with key tenets of sociological institutionalism while adding dynamism and a form of partial autonomy that creates space for change. While people matter, they matter not as individuals but as part of the dynamic whole of interaction.

The specified analytic framework for an inhabited institutionalism provided here sets a foundation for new research on institutions, agency, and change. Although existing research on inhabited institutions examines numerous cases of organizational change (Aurini 2012; Binder 2007; Haedicke 2012; Hallett 2010; Hallett and Ventresca 2006; Kameo 2015), a skeptical reader could fairly argue that it does not examine broader institutional change. A challenge for II

moving forward is to examine such changes, to work "up" from social interactions in addition to working down "through" interactions (Purdy et al. 2017).

Future research that seeks to build on this foundation can draw from two studies that take an inhabited approach to examine institutional change. Hallett and Meanwell (2016) focus their gaze on the mythology of accountability in K-12 education, and how the meanings of accountability and the signature policy associated with it—"No Child Left Behind"—have changed since the early 2000s. Hallett and Meanwell emphasize the symbolic politics of reform, and they focus on interactional data from verbatim transcripts of 20 congressional hearings during the failed attempt to reauthorize No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2007. They document how, through interactions on the floors of congress, accountability in the form of NCLB came to mean, ironically, "Children left behind." They argue that the hearings provided "a key moment in the arc of accountability from a rationalized policy trope with high legitimacy to a potentially irrational means of school organization" (2016: 375). Hallett and Meanwell direct attention to how, via interaction in key venues, taken-for-granted meanings are subject to interrogation. Their findings underscore that the broad social meanings associated with institutional myths—and not merely the localized organizational meanings—can, and do, change.

Dorado (2013) utilizes an inhabited approach to understand the creation of an institutional rationale: the development of commercialized microfinance in Bolivia in the early 1990s. Until this time microfinance was the province of NGOs and state banks, but the emergence of the commercialized form revolutionized the field and diffused internationally. How did this rationale for lending take shape? To find answers Dorado utilizes interviews with over 70 inhabitants who participated in the development of the commercial form. Dorado's research is important because it not only shows that interactions have a key role in institutional

creation; she goes further to explain *how* interactions matter. Specifically, interactions motivate engagement, compelling people to become involved and aware. In the process, interactions inspire the identification of opportunities, helping inhabitants to realize chances and act towards opportunities that are not apparent in isolation. Moreover, interactions enable access to resources and forms of support that are material as well as social and emotional. Dorado's insights about interaction compel her to reject the "heroic" imagery associated with the research on institutional entrepreneurship. Instead, she argues that entrepreneurship "is not an individual-bounded endeavor…but a group-bounded one, at the hands of social individuals inhabiting groups which motivate, inspire, and enable their engagement" (Dorado 2013: 533). No "entrepreneur" has ever created an institution by acting alone. Instead, success depends on and flows from interaction.

Future research should build from Dorado and continue to articulate exactly how interactions matter for organizational and institutional change. Another challenge is to more clearly identify *where* and *when* interactions matter. We have argued that, conceptually, interactions always maintain some autonomy from institutions and organizations, even in the case of tightly-coupled configurations (See Figures 2 through 4), and that these autonomous spaces, however small, create room for creativity and change. These conceptual spaces correspond to empirical spaces, but where are these spaces, precisely, and how do they work? Kellogg (2009, 2011) argues that such spaces are not characterized by a specific kind of physical location, but rather their relationality.

Kellogg examines how two similar hospitals responded to new work regulations designed to improve safety and quality of life by restricting the number of hours that surgical residents could work (limited to 80 hours a week). Using a comparative ethnographic approach, she finds that the first hospital responded with myth and ceremony, resulting in no genuine change. The

second hospital, however, did change. Kellogg attributes this to the presence of a "relational space." Relational spaces are interactional venues that build efficacy by including some people, while excluding others. The second hospital had one such space, the "afternoon rounds," which operated in a way that excluded high-status opponents who were defending the status quo (macho veteran surgeons), and included those in favor of the change (the residents and other lower-status employees). The supportive interactions that occurred in this space had a central role in the genuine implementation of the 80-hour week at the second hospital. Future work needs to draw from this research to specify the where, the when, and the how of interactions.

One of the virtues of NI is that it lends itself to the creation of formal, deductive hypotheses that can be tested in future research. Because II is inherently processual and draws extensively from interactionist sociology, it is a challenge to deduce specific hypotheses. Nevertheless, as scholars continue to identify the how, the where, and the when of interaction, they will be able to cross-reference those findings and treat them as conceptual conditions and begin to construct hypotheses about organizational and institutional change. Figures 2 through 6 are also useful for deductive purposes and can be used to develop hunches that can be explored in new research. For example, we can think about what kinds of coupling configurations lend themselves to change. More loosely-coupled configurations (Figure 2) provide more autonomous space for interactions, but in such configurations institutional and organizational conditions become less relevant to those interactions, perhaps becoming less conducive to change. Tightly-coupled configurations (Figures 3 and 4) may constrict (but not eliminate) the partial autonomy of interaction, but they also increase the amount of overlap across institutions, interactions, and the organization. This could be more conducive to change.

In this way, scholars can ponder and then study the optimal combination of interactional constriction and autonomy that is most conducive to organizational and institutional change. As a starting point, we suggest a Goldilocks proposition: if the coupling configuration is too tight, there is not enough space for the creative interactions that are necessary for change; but if the coupling configuration is too loose, then mutual relevance across institutions, interactions, and organizations declines, as does the impetus for change. This proposition is preliminary, and begs a number of questions, including but not limited to how these dynamics might vary by particular fields. It also treats coupling as a condition and not as an ongoing process. Despite these limitations, our intent is to demonstrate how the II framework can be used for deductive reasoning and the development of propositions for new research.

Future research is bound by II's focus on the recursive relationships across institutions, interactions, and organizations. To be inhabited, research must capture interaction, and this imposes limits. A challenge in moving forward is to analyze the interactions that occur across organizations in addition to those that the occur inside them, that is, field-level interactions (Zilber 2014). To do so II must expand its methodological scope. The approach is built from organizational ethnographies, but other methods can also be used. For example, Haedicke (2012, 2016) combines archival research, interviews, and fieldwork at industry conferences in order to examine the field of cooperative food grocers. Haedicke's creative approach to data allow him to identify the inhabited processes through which co-ops translate (Czarniawska and Sevon 1996) the market rationales that had become dominant in the broader environment, interpreting them in ways that make them compatible with their organizational missions. Through a web of field interactions, the co-ops responded by emphasizing efficiency in delivering healthy sustainable foods, while rejecting profit, thereby "keeping our mission, changing our system" (2012: 44).

Haedicke's work is an exemplar for II scholars who want to take their research to the field level. As with Dorado (2013), his data capture the interactions that provide connectedness across a field. New research should also identify and study what Furnari (2014) calls "interstitial spaces." Interstitial spaces are informal, small-scale settings where inhabitants from *different* fields have the occasion to interact. These spaces may appear frivolous and include such things as hobbyist clubs, hangouts, and meet-ups, but by brining diverse people together they create space for novelty and innovation, catalyzing institutional creation. Furnari emphasizes that interstitial spaces are interactional venues, and the development of new institutional forms depends, in part, on the establishment of successful interaction rituals inside these spaces.

Inhabited institutionalism has room to expand, and its value is not limited to institutional theory. In his assessment of the decline of organizational sociology, King (2017: 131) argues: "If organizational sociologists are becoming irrelevant, it is because we are increasingly disconnected from the conversations most central to sociology as a discipline." One such core matter is social inequality, and recent scholarship uses II to connect institutional theory to this central sociological concern. In a comparative ethnography of students, teachers, and administrators at three high schools, Nunn (2014) examines how these inhabitants respond to institutional mythologies about achievement that reflect cultural notions of "effort" and "intelligence." She shows how the meaning of success cannot be read simply from achievement mythology. Rather, based on the socio-economic status of the students and the local organizational culture, schools interpret achievement, hard work, and intelligence differently, creating distinct "success identities." Going further, Nunn shows how the *students* respond to their school's success identity, especially through interactions with peers. Finally, she demonstrates how the success identities and student responses shape expectations and slot the

students into stratified college trajectories, reproducing the very inequality that the general achievement mythology obscures. Cobb (2017) uses a similar approach to examine how teachers at three high schools interpret color-blind mythology, how they respond through their teaching practices, and how those practices challenge or maintain racial inequality.[13]

Tomaskovic-Devey and Advent-Holt (2019) go further still, theorizing systems of inequality and the vital role that organizations play in these systems. In their new book *Relational Inequalities: An Organizational Approach*, they draw extensively from II as a means to understand inequalities between people, how inequalities are created via enduring social relations, and how inequality comes to inhere in social relationships across people, positions, and organizations. Inhabited institutionalism is just a part of their impressive theoretical whole, but it is a vital part, demonstrating the capacity for II to engage with core sociological concerns.

The general sociological value of II is apparent in the many subfields that it is planted across, including but not limited to organizational sociology, inequality, education (Everitt 2018), and politics (Hallett and Meanwell 2016; Reyes 2015). Inhabited institutionalism has a robust view of culture and a well-developed social psychology, and this combination speaks to the growing dialogue between these two subfields (Collett and Lizardo 2014). It has value for institutionalists and symbolic interactionists alike. It has a combination of both general utility for sociologists and specific worth for organizational scholars.

## Conclusion

In closing, we return to the 2014 ASA meetings and concerns about the future of organizational sociology. Its golden era appears to be over, and while institutional theory has been expanding in the interdisciplinary field of organizational studies, there are signs that it has become overextended. With this, problems have emerged that threaten the coherency of

[13] Nunn and Cobb demonstrate that II can be as effective for examining reproduction as it is for examining change.

institutional theory. Recent scholarship has labored to overcome the oversocialized treatment of actors inherent in NI's conception of human action. In doing so it has moved from a conception that was criticized for viewing people as cultural dopes, to a view that has been criticized for lionizing heroic individuals. At the center of these developments are questions that continue to vex institutional theory: how can we account for local activity, agency, and change without reverting to a focus on individual actors—the very types of actors that institutional theory was designed to critique? How is change possible in an institutional context that constructs interest and sets the conditions for such action?

In engaging these questions, we have sought answers in the growing line of research on inhabited institutions. Our exegesis of this literature has had two goals. The first goal has been to shift focus away from individuals and nested imagery and towards social interaction and coupling configurations. We argue that doing so provides novel and sociologically consistent means for dealing with issues of agency and change. In the inhabited approach, individual, purposive actors are not the baptismal font for change. Rather, change flows from the partially autonomous spaces that continue to exists between and across interactions, organizations, and institutions, even in the cases of tight coupling (see Figure 4), and from the dynamic play of social interaction that likewise creates spaces (however small) for creativity and change, as well as unanticipated, complex combinations of joint activity. What we think of as agency is collaboratively manufactured in social interactions that are dynamic and supra-individual, but also and always linked to institutions and organizations. One would be hard pressed to find an instance of change that occurs in the absence of social interactions.

Focusing on interactions—rather than heroes, dopes, villains, or any other kind of individual actor—opens new avenues for research, and our second goal has been to specify an

analytic framework for this new research, and inhabited institutional*ism*. We argue that the incorporation of social interaction into institutional theory has important implications, and to articulate these implications and develop the approach, we have compared II to its old and new institutional cousins. The central premise of II holds that institutions are inhabited by people doing things together, whether in conflict or concert. This may sound like a truism, but it underscores the prevalence of approaches that are either uninhabited—where unmitigated external forces do the work of society—or approaches that have become too individualistic.

The case for inhabited institutionalism is strong because it provides a means to answer questions about agency and change while remaining consistent with key tenets of sociological institutionalism. As with its old and new institutional cousins, II features a supra-individual level of analysis, it provides a critique of utilitarian, atomistic, rational models of action, it incorporates sociological understandings of culture, and is an open-systems approach. It offers a mesosociological framework for examining the recursive relationships among institutions, interactions, and organizations. It entails a commitment to study couplings empirically, and not to assume them, and a commitment to take social interactions seriously, both empirically and conceptually.

"Does organizational sociology have a future?" There are many answers to this question, and there are many types of organizational sociology, but if the answer proves to be "yes," and we think it will be, we anticipate that inhabited institutionalism will play a role. Inhabited institutionalism solves problems for institutional theory, and with research that uses the inhabited approach already spread across numerous sociological subfields, it has the potential to reinvigorate and reunite organizational sociology and institutional theory.

**Acknowledgments**

We thank the Indiana University Institute for Advanced Study and Beth Bechky, Nahoko Kameo, Gary Fine, Mark de Rond, Brayden King, and Esther Leibel for their comments.

**Figure 1. Nested Imagery**

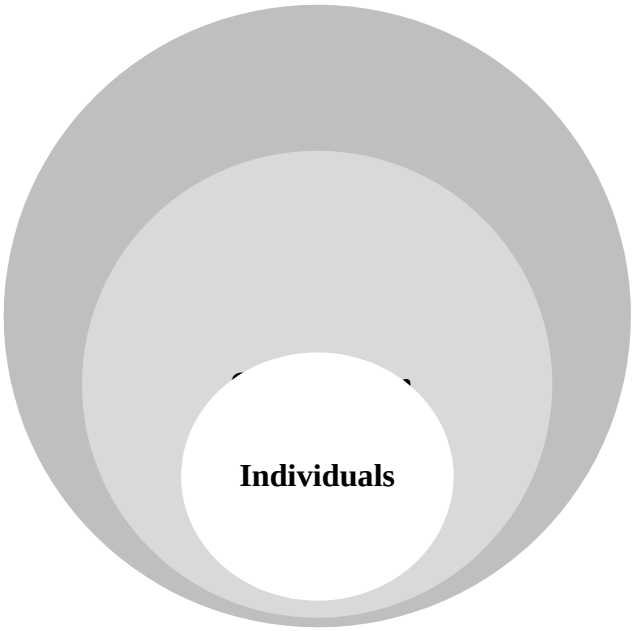
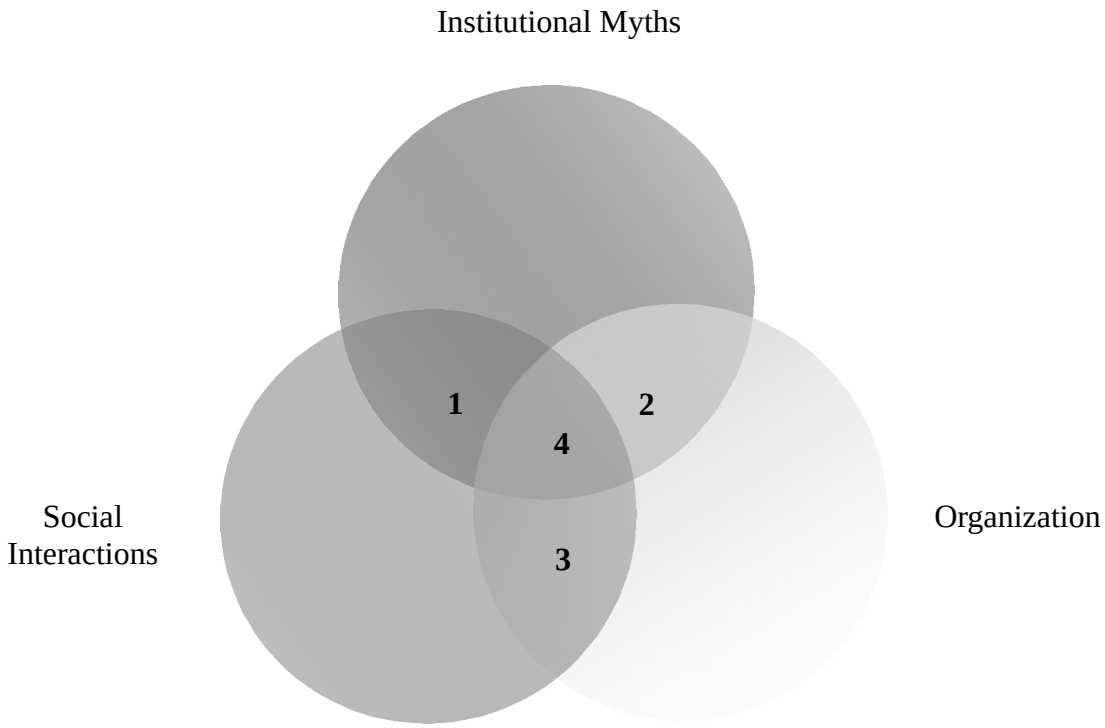



**Figure 2. Linked Spheres**




1: The coupling between institutional myths and interaction
2: The coupling between the organization and institutional myths
3: The coupling between interaction and the organization
4: The coupling between institutional myths, interaction, and the organization

**Figure 3: A More Tightly Coupled Configuration**

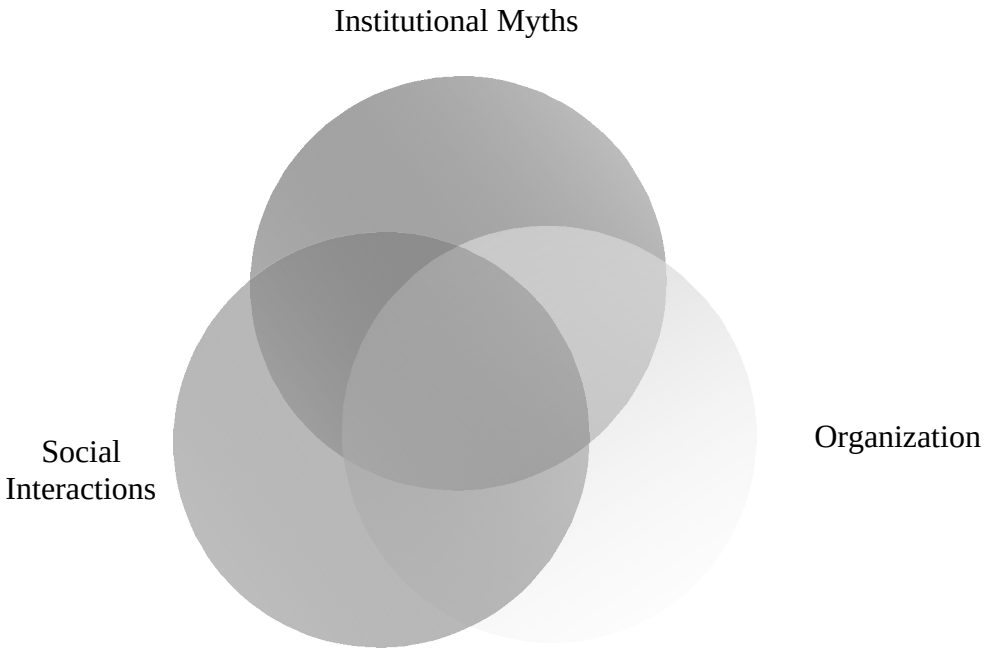



**Figure 4: A Very Tightly Coupled Configuration**

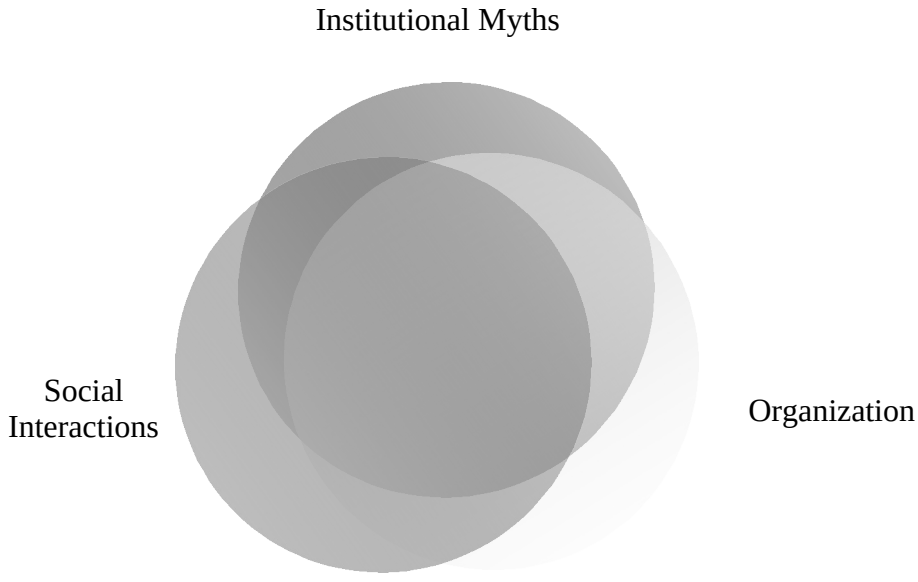


**Figure 5. Institutional and Organizational Tight Coupling, Loosely Coupled to Interactions**

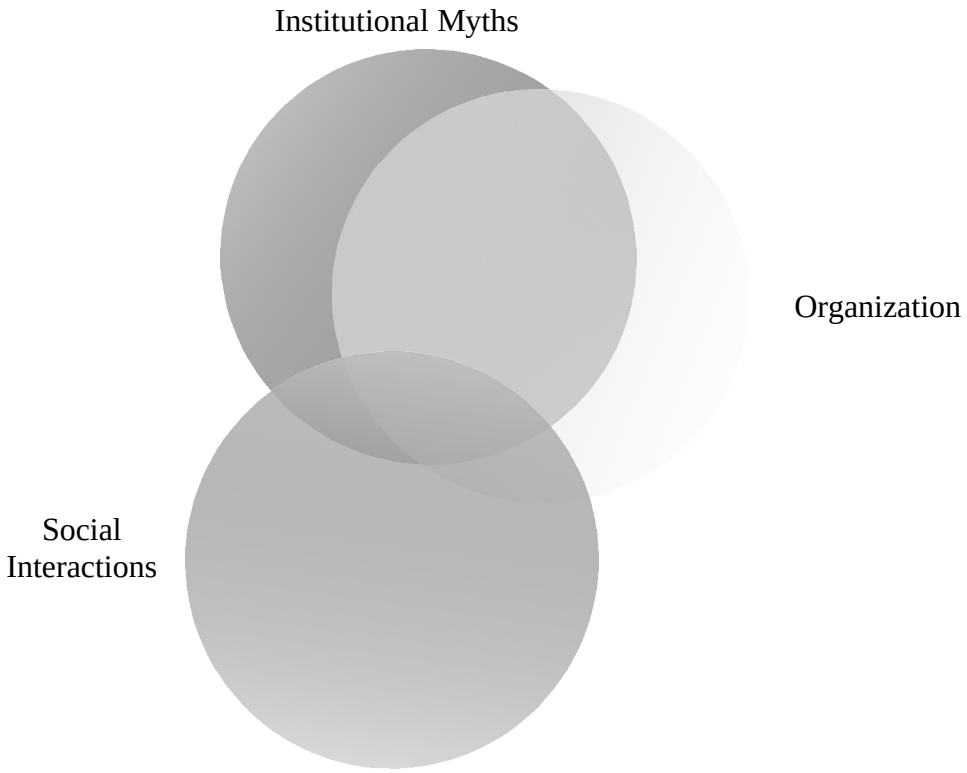



**Figure 6. Interactional and Organizational Tight Coupling, Loosely Coupled to Institutions**

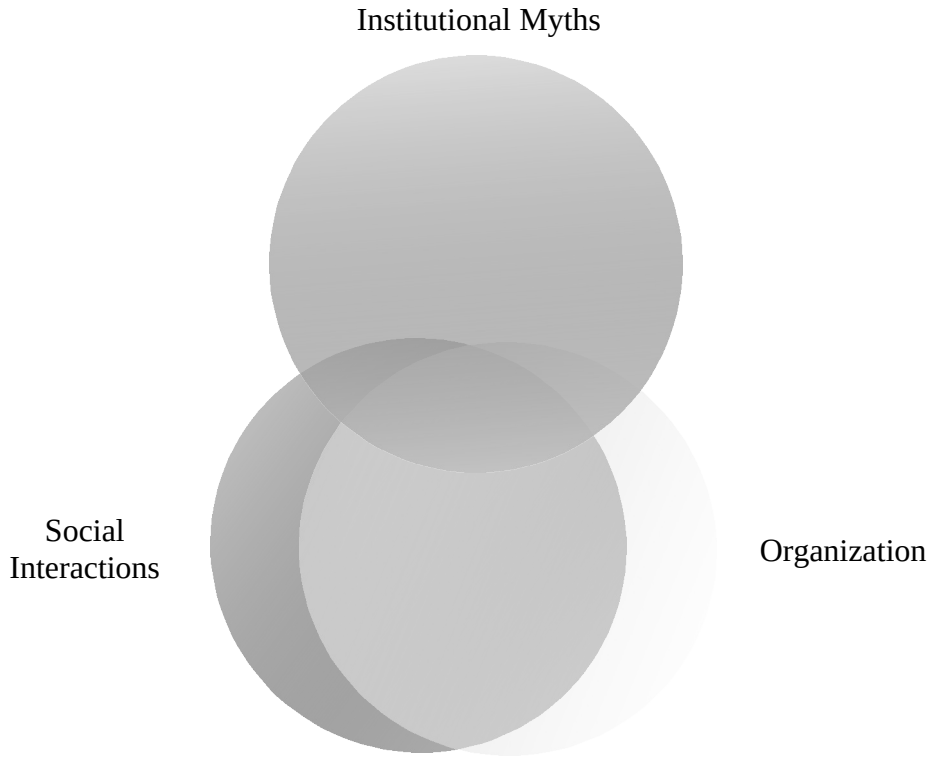


**Table 1. Sociological Institutionalism: Old, New, and Inhabited**[14]

| **Dimension** | **Old ("OI").** | **Inhabited ("II").** | **New ("NI").** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Primary level of analysis | Focal organization | Recursive relationships among institutions, interactions, and organizations | Field, sector, society |
| Conflicts of interest | Central | Struggles over meanings | Peripheral |
| Key forms of cognition | Values, norms, attitudes | Responsive meaning-making, reflective sense-making | Classifications, scripts, schemata (rationales) |
| Behavioral emphasis | Commitment | Social interactions | Habits, rules |
| Social psychology | Parsonsian action theory | Symbolic interactionist and ethnomethodological | Macro-phenomenology |
| Critique of utilitarian, rational models | Unintended consequences of purposive action | Interactions based on meaning | Theory of action, unreflective activity |

[14] Elaborated from DiMaggio and Powell (1991) and Hirsch and Lounsbury (1997)

## REFERENCES


Alvesson, Mats, and Dan Kärreman. 2000. “Taking the Linguistic Turn in Organizational Research: Challenges, Responses, Consequences.” *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 35(2): 136-158.

Alvesson, Mats and André Spicer. 2019. “Neo-Institutional Theory: A Mid-Life Crisis?” *Organization Studies* 40(2): 199-218.

Aurini, Janice. 2012. "Patterns of Tight and Loose Coupling in a Competitive Marketplace: The Case of Learning Center Franchises." *Sociology of Education* 85(4): 373-387.

Bakken, Tore, and Tor Hernes. 2006. “Organizing is both a Verb and a Noun: Weick meets Whitehead.” *Organization Studies* 27(11): 1599-1616.

Barley, Stephen. 2008. “Coalface Institutionalism.” Pp. 490-515 in *The SAGE Handbook of Organizational Institutionalism* edited by Royston Greenwood, Christine Oliver, Thomas B. Lawrence, and Renate E. Meyer. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

--------. 2019. “Working Institutions.” Pp. 199-218 in *Institutions and Organizations: A Process View* edited by Trish Reay, Tammar B. Zilber, Ann Langley & Haridimos Tsoukas. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Battilana, Julie. 2006. "Agency and Institutions: The Enabling Role of Individuals’ Social Position." *Organization* 13(5): 653-676.

--------. 2011. "The Enabling Role of Social Position in Diverging from the Institutional Status Quo: Evidence from The UK National Health Service." *Organization Science* 22(4): 817-834.

Battilana, Julie, and Thomas D’Aunno. 2009. "Institutional Work and the Paradox of Embedded Agency." Pp. 31-58 in *Institutional Work: Actors and Agency in Institutional Studies of Organizations*, edited by Lawrence, Thomas B., Roy Suddaby, and Bernard Leca. Cambridge University Press.

Battilana, Julie, Bernard Leca and Eva Boxenbaum. 2009. "How Actors Change Institutions: Towards a Theory of Institutional Entrepreneurship." *The Academy of Management Annals* 3(1): 65-107.

Bechky, Beth. 2011. “Making Organizational Theory Work: Institutions, Occupations, and Negotiated Orders.” *Organization Science* 22(5): 1157-1167.

--------. 2019. “Evaluative Spillovers from Technological Change: The Effects of ‘DNA Envy’ on Occupational Practices in Forensic Science.” *Administrative Science Quarterly* https://doi.org/10.1177/0001839219855329

Becker, Howard. 1986. *Doing Things Together: Selected Papers*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Beckert, Jens. 1999. “Agency, Entrepreneurs, and Institutional Change: The Role of Strategic Choice and Institutionalized Practices in Organizations.” *Organization Studies* 20(5): 777-799.

Berger, Peter and Thomas Luckmann. 1966. *The Social Construction of Reality*. New York, NY: Doubleday.

Binder, Amy. 2007. “For Love and Money: Organizations’ Creative Responses to Multiple Environmental Logics.” *Theory and Society* 36(6): 547–571.

Binder, Amy and Kate Wood. 2013. *Becoming Right: How Campuses Shape Young Conservatives*. Princeton, NJ: University Press.

Blumer, Herbert. 1969. *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
--------. 1990. *Industrialization as an Agent of Social Change*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
Bouilloud, Jean-Philippe, Mar Perezts, Thierry Viale, and Valentin Schaepelynck. 2019. "Beyond the Stable Image of Institutions: Using Institutional Analysis to Tackle Classic Questions in Institutional Theory." *Organization Studies* https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840618815519
Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Bourdieu, Pierre. 1991. *Language and Symbolic Power*. Harvard University Press.
Bromley, Patricia, and John Meyer. 2015. *Hyper-Organization: Global Organizational Expansion*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
Bromley, Patricia, and Walter Powell. 2012. "From Smoke and Mirrors to Walking the Talk: Decoupling in the Contemporary World." *Academy of Management Annals* 6(1): 483-530.
Cardinale, Ivano. 2018. "Beyond Constraining and Enabling: Toward New Microfoundations for Institutional Theory." *Academy of Management Review* 43(1): 132-155.
Chia, Robert. and Ann Langley. 2004. "The First Organization Studies Summer Workshop: Theorizing Process in Organizational Research." *Organization Studies* 25: 1486.
Clark, Burton. 1956. "Organizational Adaptation and Precarious Values: A Case Study." *American Sociological Review* 21: 327-336.
--------. 1970. *The Distinctive College.* Chicago, IL: Aldine.
Cobb, Jessica. 2017. "Inequality Frames: How Teachers Inhabit Color-blind Ideology." *Sociology of Education* 90(4): 315-332.
Collett, Jessica, and Omar Lizardo. 2014. "Localizing Cultural Phenomena by Specifying Social Psychological Mechanisms: Introduction to the Special Issue." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 77(20): 95-99.
Clemens, Elisabeth and James Cook. 1999. "Politics and Institutionalism: Explaining Durability and Change." *Annual Review of Sociology* 25(1): 441-466.
Czarniawska, Barbara. 1997. *Narrating the Organization: Dramas of Institutional Identity*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
Czarniawska, Barbara, and Guje Sevon. 1996. *Translating Organizational Change*. New York, NY: Walter de Gruyter.
Delbridge, Rick, and Tim Edwards. 2008. "Challenging Conventions: Roles and Processes During Non-Isomorphic Institutional Change." *Human Relations* 61(3): 299-325.
Denzin, Norman. 1969. "Symbolic Interactionism and Ethnomethodology: A Proposed Synthesis." *American Sociological Review* 34(6):922–934
DiMaggio, Paul. 1988. "Interest and Agency in Institutional Theory." Pp. 3–21 in *Institutional Patterns and Organizations: Culture and Environment*, edited by Lynne Zucker. Cambridge, MA: Ballinger Publishing Co.
--------. 1997. "Culture and Cognition." *Annual Review of Sociology* 23(1):263-287.
DiMaggio, Paul and Walter Powell. 1991. *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Dingwall, Robert and Phil Strong. 1985. "The Interactional Study of Organizations: A Critique and Reformulation." *Urban Life* 14(2): 205-231.

Dorado, Silvia. 2013. “Small Groups as Context for Institutional Entrepreneurship: An Exploration of the Emergence of Commercial Microfinance in Bolivia.” *Organization Studies* 34(4): 533-557.
Eliasoph, Nina and Paul Lichterman. 2003. “Culture in Interaction.” *American Journal of Sociology* 108(4): 735-94.
Emirbayer, Mustafa and Victoria Johnson. 2008. “Bourdieu and Organizational Analysis.” *Theory and Society* 37(1): 1-44.
Emirbayer, Mustafa, and Ann Mische. 1998. “What is Agency?” *American Journal of Sociology* 103(4): 962-1023.
Espeland, Wendy and Michael Sauder. 2007. "Rankings and Reactivity: How Public Measures Recreate Social Worlds." *American Journal of Sociology* 113(1): 1-40.
Everitt, Judson. 2012. "Teacher Careers and Inhabited Institutions: Sense-Making and Arsenals of Teaching Practice in Educational Institutions." *Symbolic Interaction* 35(2): 203-220.
--------. 2013. "Inhabitants Moving In: Prospective Sense-Making and the Reproduction of Inhabited Institutions in Teacher Education." *Symbolic Interaction* 36(2): 177-196.
--------. 2018. *Lesson Plans: The Institutional Demands of Becoming a Teacher*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
Everitt, Judson, and Bradley Levinson. 2016. "Inhabited Institutions in New Destinations: Local Sense-Making and Institutional Work in Community Response to New Immigration." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 45(2): 115-142.
Everitt, Judson, James Johnson, William Burr, and Stephanie Shanower. 2020. “Examining Healthcare Institutions by Bringing Qualitative Data from Two Eras into Empirical Dialogue.” Ethnography online first https://doi.org/10.1177/1466138120913062
Fine, Gary. 2003. “Towards a Peopled Ethnography.” *Ethnography* 4(1): 41-60.
Fligstein, Neil. 1997. “Social Skill and Institutional Theory.” *American Behavioral Scientist* 40(4): 397-405.
--------. 2001. “Social Skill and the Theory of Fields.” *Sociological Theory* 19(2): 105-125.
Friedland, Roger and Robert Alford. 1991. "Bringing Society Back in: Symbols, Practices, and Institutional Contradictions. Pp. 232-263 in Walter Powell & Paul DiMaggio (Eds.), *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Furnari, Santi. 2014. "Interstitial Spaces: Microinteraction Settings and the Genesis of New Practices between Institutional Fields." *Academy of Management Review* 39(4): 439-462.
--------. 2019. “Situating Frames and Institutional Logics: The Social Situation as a Key Institutional Microfoundation.” *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* 65B: 193-209.
Garud, Raghu, Sanjay Jain, and Arun Kumaraswamy. 2002. “Institutional Entrepreneurship in the Sponsorship of Common Technological Standards.” *Academy of Management Journal* 45(1): 196-214.
Garfinkel, Harold. 1967. *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Prentice-Hall.
Goffman, Erving. 1955. “On Face-Work: An Analysis of Ritual Elements in Social Interaction.” *Psychiatry: Journal for the Study of Interpersonal Processes*. 18, 3: 213-31.
--------. 1956. “The Nature of Deference and Demeanor.” *American Anthropologist*. 58: 473-502.
--------. 1961. *Asylums*. New York: Doubleday.
--------. 1969. *Where the action is*. London, UK: Lane, Penguin Press.
--------. 1974. *Frame Analysis*. Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press

--------. 1983. "The Interaction Order" *American Sociological Review* 48(1): 1-17.
Gouldner, Alvin. 1954. *Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.
Greenwood, Royston, Christine Oliver, Thomas Lawrence, Renate Meyer (eds). 2017. *The SAGE Handbook of Organizational Institutionalism*, 2nd ed. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
Greenwood, Royston and Roy Suddaby. 2006. "Institutional Entrepreneurship in Mature Fields: The Big Five Accounting Firms." *Academy of Management Journal* 49(1): 27–48.
Greenwood, Royston, Mia Raynard, Farah Kodeith, Evelyn Micelotta, and Michael Lounsbury. 2011. "Institutional Complexity and Organizational Responses." *Academy of Management Annals* 5(1): 317-371.
Haedicke, Michael. 2012. "'Keeping Our Mission, Changing Our System': Translation and Organizational Change in Natural Foods Co-Ops." *The Sociological Quarterly* 53(1): 44–67.
--------. 2016. *Organizing Organic: Conflict and Compromise in an Emerging Market*. Thousand Oaks CA: Stanford University Press.
Hallett, Tim. 2007. "Between Deference and Distinction: Interaction Ritual through Symbolic Power in an Educational Institution." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 70(2): 148–171.
--------. 2010. "The Myth Incarnate: Recoupling Processes, Turmoil, and Inhabited Institutions in an Urban Elementary School." *American Sociological Review* 75(1): 52–74.
Hallett, Tim, and Marc Ventresca. 2006. "Inhabited Institutions: Social Interactions and Organizational Forms in Gouldner's Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy." *Theory and Society* 35(2): 213–236.
Hallett, Tim, and Emily Meanwell. 2016. "Accountability as an Inhabited Institution: Contested Meanings and the Symbolic Politics of Reform." *Symbolic Interaction* 39(3): 374-396.
Hampel, Christian, Thomas Lawrence and Paul Tracey. 2017. "Institutional Work: Taking Stock and Making it Matter." Pp. 558-590 in *The SAGE Handbook of Organizational Institutionalism*, 2nd ed., edited by Royston Greenwood, Christine Oliver, Thomas Lawrence, Renate Meyer. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
Hardy, Cynthia, and Steve Maguire. 2008. "Institutional Entrepreneurship." Pp. 198-217 in *The SAGE Handbook of Organizational Institutionalism*, edited by Royston Greenwood, Christine Oliver, Roy Suddaby, Kerstin Sahlin-Andersson. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
--------. 2017. "Institutional Entrepreneurship and Change in Fields." Pp. 198-217 in *The SAGE Handbook of Organizational Institutionalism*, 2nd ed., edited by Royston Greenwood, Christine Oliver, Thomas Lawrence, Renate Meyer. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
Haveman, Heather, and Robert David. 2008. "Ecologists and Institutionalists: Friends or Foes?" Pp. 573-595 in *The SAGE Handbook of Organizational Institutionalism*, edited by Royston Greenwood, Christine Oliver, Roy Suddaby, Kerstin Sahlin-Andersson. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
Hirsch, Paul, and Michael Lounsbury. 1997. "Putting the Organization Back into Organization Theory: Action, Change, and the 'New' Institutionalism." *Journal of Management Inquiry* 6(1): 79–88.
Holm, Petter. 1995. "The Dynamics of Institutionaization: Transformation Processes in Norwegian Fisheries." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 40(3): 398-422.
Hughes, Everett. 1936. "The Ecological Aspect of Institutions." *American Sociological Review* 1(2): 180-189.

Huising, Ruthanne. 2016. "From Adapting Practices to Inhabiting Ideas: How Managers Restructure Work Across Organizations." *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* 47: 383-413.
Hwang, Hokyu and Jeannette Colyvas. 2011. "Problematizing Actors and Institutions in Institutional Work." *Journal of Management Inquiry* 20(1): 62-66.
--------. 2020. “What Do We Talk About When We Talk About Microfoundations?” *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* 65B: 377-352.
Hwang, Hokyu, Jeannette Colyvas, and Gili S. Drori. 2019. “The Proliferation and Profusion of Actors in Institutional Theory.” *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* 58: 3-20.
Jepperson, Ronald. 2002. “The Development and Application of Sociological Neoinstitutionalism.” Pp. 229-266 in *Contemporary Sociological Theory: New Directions*, edited by Joseph Berger and Morris Zelditch. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
Jepperson, Ronald and John W. Meyer. 2011"Multiple Levels of Analysis and the Limitations of Methodological Individualisms." *Sociological Theory* 29(1): 54-73.
Kaufman, Jason. 2004. “Endogenous Explanation in the Sociology of Culture.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 30: 335-357.
Kellogg, Katherine. 2009. “Operating Room: Relational Spaces and Microinstitutional Change in Surgery.” *American Journal of Sociology* 115(3): 657-711.
--------. 2011. *Challenging Operations*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
Kameo, Nahoko. 2015. "Gifts, Donations, and Loose Coupling: Responses to Changes in Academic Entrepreneurship among Bioscientists in Japan." *Theory and Society* 44(2): 177-198.
Kraatz, Matthew. 2009. "Leadership as Institutional Work: A Bridge to the Other Side." Pp. 59-91 in *Institutional Work: Actors and Agency in Institutional Studies of Organizations*, edited by Lawrence, Thomas B., Roy Suddaby, and Bernard Leca. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
--------. 2011. “Two Cheers for Institutional Work.” *Journal of Management Inquiry* 20(1): 59-61.
Kraatz, Matthew and Emily Block. 2008. “Organizational Implications of Institutional Pluralism.” Pp. 243-275 in *The SAGE Handbook of Organizational Institutionalism*, edited by Royston Greenwood, Christine Oliver, Roy Suddaby, Kerstin Sahlin-Andersson. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
King, Brayden. 2017. “The Relevance of Organizational Sociology.” *Contemporary Sociology* 46(2): 131-137.
Langley, Ann, Clive Smallman, Haridimos Tsoukas, and Andrew Van de Ven. “Process Studies of Change in Organization and Management: Unveiling Temporality, Activity, and Flow.” *Academy of Management Journal* 36(1): 1-13.
Lawrence, Thomas B., Bernard Leca, and Tammar B. Zilber. 2013. "Institutional Work: Current Research, New Directions and Overlooked Issues." *Organization Studies* 34(8): 1023-1033.
Lawrence, Thomas B. and Nelson Phillips. 2004. “From Moby Dick to Free Willy: Macro-Cultural Discourse and Institutional Entrepreneurship in Emerging Institutional Fields.” *Organization* 11(5): 689-711.

Lawrence, Thomas B. and Roy Suddaby. 2006. “Institutions and Institutional Work.” Pp. 215-254 in *The Handbook of Organization Studies* (2nd ed), edited by Stewart Clegg, Cynthia Hardy, and Thomas Lawrence. London, UK: Sage.

Lawrence, Thomas B., Roy Suddaby and Bernard Leca. 2009. *Institutional Work: Actors and Agency in Institutional Studies of Organizations*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

--------. 2011“Institutional Work: Refocusing Institutional Studies of Organizations.” *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 20(1): 52-58.

Leibel, Esther, Tim Hallett, and Beth A. Bechky. 2018. “Meaning at the Source: The Dynamics of Field Formation in Institutional Research.” *Academy of Management Annals*. 12, 1: 154-177.

Liska, Allen. 1969. “Uses and Misuses of Tautologies in Social Psychology.” *Sociometry* 32: 44-457.

Lok, Jaco, W.E. Douglas Creed, Rich DeJordy and Maxim Voronov. 2017. “Living Institutions: Bringing Emotions into Organizational Institutionalism.” Pp. 591-620 in *The SAGE Handbook of Organizational Institutionalism*, 2nd ed., edited by Royston Greenwood, Christine Oliver, Thomas Lawrence, Renate Meyer. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Lounsbury, Michael, and Milo Shaoquin Wang. 2020. “Into the Clearing: Back to the future of constitutive institutional analysis.” *Organization Theory* 1: online first https://doi.org/10.1177/2631787719891173

Maguire, Steve, Cynthia Hardy and Thomas Lawrence. 2004. “Institutional Entrepreneurship in Emerging Fields: HIV/AIDS Treatment Advocacy in Canada.” *Academy of Management Journal* 47(5): 657-679.

Merton, Robert. 1936. "The Unanticipated Consequences of Purposive Social Action." *American Sociological Review* 1(6): 894-904.

Messinger, Sheldon. 1955. “Organizational Transformation: A Case Study of a Declining Social Movement.” *American Sociological Review* 30: 3-10.

Meyer, Heinz-Dieter, and Brian Rowan. 2006. “Institutional Analysis and the Study of Education.” Pp. 1-13 in H.D. Meyer and Brian Rowan (eds) *The New Institutionalism in Education*, edited by Heinze-Dieter Meyer and Brian Rowan. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Meyer, John. 2010. "World Society, Institutional Theories, and the Actor." *Annual Review of Sociology* 36: 1-20.

--------. 2017. “Reflections on Institutional Theories of Organizations.” Pp. 831-852 in *The SAGE Handbook of Organizational Institutionalism*, 2nd ed., edited by Royston Greenwood, Christine Oliver, Thomas Lawrence, Renate Meyer. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Meyer, John and Ronald Jepperson. 2000. ‘‘The ‘Actors’ of Modern Society: The Cultural Construction of Social Agency.’’ *Sociological Theory* 18: 100–120.

Meyer, John and Brian Rowan. 1977. “Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony.” *American Journal of Sociology* 83(2): 340-363.

--------. 1978. “The Structure of Educational Organizations.” Pp. 78-109 in *Environments and Organizations* ed. Marshall Meyer et al. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Meyer, John, John Boli, George Thomas and Francisco Ramirez. 1997. “World Society and the Nation State.” *American Journal of Sociology* 103: 144–81.

Meyer, Renate and Markus Höllerer. 2014. "Does Institutional Theory Need Redirecting?" *Journal of Management Studies* 51(7): 1221-1233.

Misangyi, Vilmos, Gary Weaver and Heather Elms. 2008. “Ending Corruption: The Interplay Among Institutional Logics, Resources, and Institutional Entrepreneurs.” *Academy of Management Review* 33(3): 750-770.
Nunn, Lisa. 2014. *Defining Student Success*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
Parsons, Talcott. 1937. "The Structure of Social Action." *Sociology. Thought and Action* 1(1): 32-46.
Pham, Janelle. (2019). Campus Sex in Context: Organizational Cultures and Women's Engagement in Sexual Relationships on Two American College Campuses. *Sociological Forum, 34*(1): 138-157.
Powell, Walter W. and Jeannette A. Colyvas. 2008. “Microfoundations of Institutional Theory.” Pp. 276-298 in *The SAGE Handbook of Organizational Institutionalism*, edited by Royston Greenwood, Christine Oliver, Roy Suddaby, Kerstin Sahlin-Andersson. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
Purdy, Jill, Shaz Ansari, and Barbara Gray. 2017. “Are Logics Enough? Framing as an Alternative Tool for Understanding Institutional Meaning Making.” *Journal of Management Inquiry* online first.
Rao, Hayagreeva, Philippe Monin and Rodolphe Durand. 2003. “Institutional Change in Toque Ville: Nouvelle Cuisine as an Identity Movement in French Gastronomy.” *American Journal of Sociology* 108: 795-843.
Rawls, Ann. 1987. “The Interaction Order Sui Generis: Goffman’s Contribution to Social Theory. *Sociological Theory* 5(2): 136-149.
Rojas, Fabio. 2010. “Power through Institutional Work: Acquiring Academic Authority in the 1968 Third World Strike.” *Academy of Management Journal* 53(6): 1263-1280.
Reay, Trish, Tammar Zilber, Ann Langley, and Haridimos Tsoukas (eds). 2019. *Institutions and Organizations: A Process View*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
Reyes, Daisy Verduzco. 2015. "Inhabiting Latino Politics How Colleges Shape Students’ Political Styles." *Sociology of Education* 88(4): 302-319.
Riaz, Suhaib, Sean Buchanan, and Hari Bapuji. 2011. "Institutional Work amidst the Financial Crisis: Emerging Positions of Elite Actors." *Organization* 18(2): 187-214.
Schneiberg, Marc and Elisabeth Clemens. 2006. “The Typical Tools for the Job: Research Strategies in Institutional Analysis.” *Sociological Theory* 24 (3): 195-227.
Scott, W. Richard. 2010. “Reflections: The Past and Future of Research on Institutions and Institutional Change.” *Journal of Change Management* 10(1): 2-21.
--------. 2014. *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas, Interests, and Identities* (4th edition). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
Scott, Richard and John Meyer. 1983. “The Organization of Societal Sectors.” Pp. 129-154 in *Organizational Environments: Ritual and Rationality*, edited by John Meyer and Richard Scott. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
Scully, Maureen and Douglass Creed. 1997. ‘Stealth Legitimacy: Employee Activism and Corporate Response during the Diffusion of Domestic Partner Benefits’. Paper presented at the Academy of Management Meetings, Boston, August.
Schultz, Majken, and Tor Hernes. 2013. “A Temporal Perspective on Organizational Identity.” *Organization Science* 24(1): 1-21.
Selznick, Philip. 1943. “An Approach to a Theory of Bureaucracy.” *American Sociological Review* 8(1): 47-54.

--------. 1948. “Foundations of the Theory of Organization.” *American Sociological Review* 13(1): 25-35.
--------. 1966 [1949]. *TVA and the Grass Roots*. New York: Harper and Row.
--------. 1996. “Institutionalism "Old" and "New".” *Administrative Science Quarterly* 41(2): 270-277.
Seo, Myeong-Gu and W.E. Douglas Creed. 2002. "Institutional Contradictions, Praxis, and Institutional Change: A Dialectical Perspective." *Academy of Management Review* 27(2): 222-247.
Simon, Herbert A. 1957. *Models of Man: Social and Rational, Mathematical Essays*. New York, NY: Wiley.
Silver, Daniel. 2018. “Figure it Out!” *Sociological Methods and Research* online first https://doi.org/10.1177/0049124118769089
Strauss, Anselm. 1993. *Continual Permutations of Action*. London, UK: Routledge.
Tavory, Iddo, and Gary Fine. 2020. “Disruption and the Theory of the Interaction Order.” *Theory and Society* 49: 365-385.
Thomas, Jim. 1984. “Some Aspects of Negotiated Order, Loose Coupling and Mesostructure in Maximum Security Prisons.” *Symbolic Interaction* 7(2): 213-231.
Thornton, Patricia. 2002. "The Rise of the Corporation in a Craft Industry: Conflict and Conformity in Institutional Logics." *Academy of Management Journal* 45(1): 81-101.
Thornton, Patricia, William Ocasio and Michael Lounsbury. 2012. *The Institutional Logics Perspective*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
Tomaskovic-Devey, Donald and Dustin Avent-Holt. 2019. *Relational Inequalities: An Organizational Approach*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
Tsoukas, Haridimos, and Robert Chia. 2002. “On Organizational Becoming: Rethinking Organizational Change.” *Organization Science* 13(5): 567-582.
Ulmer, Jeffrey. 2019. “Criminal Courts as Inhabited Institutions: Making Sense of Difference and Similarity in Sentencing.” *Crime and Justice* 48: 483-522.
VanHeuvelen, Jane. 2019. “Isolation or Interaction: Healthcare Provider Experience of Design Change.” *Sociology of Health and Illness* 41: 692-708.
Vogel, Rick. 2012. “The Visible Colleges of Management and Organization Studies: A Bibliometric Analysis of Academic Journals.” *Organization Studies* 33(8): 1015-1043.
Weick, Karl. 1995. *Sensemaking in Organizations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
Willmott, Hugh. 2011. ““Institutional Work” for What? Problems and Prospects of Institutional Theory." *Journal of Management Inquiry* 20(1): 67-72.
Zald, Mayer, and Patricia Denton. 1963. “From Evangelism to General Service: The Transformation of the YMCA.” *Administrative Science Quarterly* 8: 214-234.
Zilber, Tammar. 2002. “Institutionalization as an Interplay between Actions, Meanings, and Actors: The Case of a Rape Crisis Center in Israel.” The Academy of Management Journal 45(1): 234-254.
--------. 2007. “Stories and the Discursive Dynamics of Institutional Entrepreneurship: The case of Israeli High-Tech after the Bubble.” *Organization Studies* 28, 7: 1035-1054.
--------. 2012. "The Relevance of Institutional Theory for the Study of Organizational Culture." *Journal of Management Inquiry* 21(1): 88-93.
--------. 2013. “Institutional Logics and Institutional Work: Should they be Agreed?” *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* 39A: 77-96.

--------. 2014. “Beyond a Single Organization: Challenges and Opportunities in doing Field Level Ethnography.” *Journal of Organizational Ethnography* 3(1): 96-113.

**Tim Hallett** is Associate Professor of Sociology at Indiana University. He does research at the intersections of culture, organizations, and social psychology. He is most known for his research on “inhabited institutions” (2010 *American Sociological Review*, 2006 *Theory and Society* with Marc Ventresca). He is currently working on a project that develops an inhabited institutional approach for understanding professional socialization via an ethnography of a Masters of Public Affairs program. In addition to his research on inhabited institutions, he has a new line of work that examines how social science ideas become public ideas, contributing to a sociology of public social science (2019 *American Sociological Review* with Orla Stapleton and Michael Sauder).

**Amelia Hawbaker** is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Sociology at Indiana University. Her research emphasizes the intersections between contemporary organizations and trends in medicine through the lens of institutional theory. Amelia’s primary research examines medical decision-making among healthcare professionals in the context of hospital-based reproductive care. In addition to her primary research, she is currently involved in a study of autism spectrum disorders among college and university students, examining their strategies for academic success (2020 *Autism*, 2019 *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* with Jane McLeod and Emily Meanwell).