

1.6 Institutions and Institutional Work

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Introduction

Institutional approaches to organization studies focus attention on the relationships among organizations and the fields in which they operate, highlighting in particular the role of rational formal structures in enabling and constraining organizational behaviour. A key contribution of institutional studies has been the development of strong accounts of the processes through which institutions govern action. This has been accomplished in part through theoretical statements which have delineated key sets of concepts and relationships that tie institutional structures and logics to organizational forms and conduct (Meyer and Rowan 1977; DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Greenwood and Hinings 1996). Also key in the development of institutional understandings of organizational action has been the large set of empirical studies that have documented the connections among institutions, fields and organizations. These studies have catalogued the impact of institutional forces in a wide variety of sectors and geographic contexts, and at varying levels of analysis including intra-organizational (Zilber 2002), interorganizational (Leblebici et al. 1991) and international (Keohane 1989; Meyer et al. 1997). Finally, there has emerged an influential set of reviews of institutionalism in organization studies that have summarized and synthesized the major work in the area into coherent frameworks (DiMaggio and Powell 1991; Tolbert and Zucker 1996; Scott 2001; Schneiberg and Clemens 2006).

Although the traditional emphasis of institutional approaches to organization studies has been on the explanation of organizational similarity based on institutional conditions, there has over the past 10–15 years emerged a new emphasis in institutional studies on understanding the role of actors in effecting, transforming and maintaining institutions

and fields. The role of actors in creating new institutions has been examined primarily under the rubric of institutional entrepreneurship (Eisenstadt 1980; DiMaggio 1988). DiMaggio (1988: 14) argues that institutional entrepreneurs are central to institutional processes, since 'new institutions arise when organized actors with sufficient resources (institutional entrepreneurs) see in them an opportunity to realize interests that they value highly'. The concept of institutional entrepreneurship is important because it focuses attention on the manner in which interested actors work to influence their institutional contexts through such strategies as technical and market leadership, lobbying for regulatory change and discursive action (Suchman 1995; Fligstein 1997; Hoffman 1999; Garud et al. 2002; Maguire et al. 2004). The role of actors in the transformation of existing institutions and fields has also risen in prominence within institutional research. Institutional studies have documented the ability of actors, particularly those with some key strategic resources or other forms of power, to have significant impacts on the evolution of institutions and fields (Clemens 1993; Holm 1995; Oakes et al. 1998; Greenwood et al. 2002), including both institutional transformation and deinstitutionalization (Oliver 1992; Ahmadjian and Robinson 2001). Finally, a more modest amount of research has begun to examine the role of actors in maintaining institutions: although definitions of institution emphasize their enduring nature (Hughes 1936), institutions rely on the action of individuals and organizations for their reproduction over time (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Giddens 1984).

In this chapter, we aim to provide a summary and synthesis of research on what we refer to as 'institutional work' – the purposive action of individuals and organizations aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions. Thus far, research on

institutional work has been largely unconnected as such – literatures on institutional entrepreneurship and deinstitutionalization have emerged as semi-coherent research streams, but the overall focus has remained largely unarticulated. Thus, a key contribution of this chapter will be the provision of a framework that connects previously disparate studies of institutional work and the articulation of a research agenda for the area. By focusing on empirical work that has occurred in the past 15 years and mapping it in terms of the forms of institutional work that it has examined, we are able to both provide a first cataloguing of forms of institutional work and point to issues and areas that have been under-examined.

The structure of the chapter is as follows: (1) a definition and discussion of the concept of institutional work; (2) a map of empirical studies of institutional work; and (3) a discussion of emerging and illustrative approaches to the study of institutional work.

The Concept of Institutional Work

The concept of an institution is at the heart of all institutional approaches to organizational research: central to both theoretical and empirical examinations of organizational phenomena that adopt an institutionalist perspective is the idea that there are enduring elements in social life – institutions – that have a profound effect on the thoughts, feelings and behaviour of individual and collective actors. The literature is replete with definitions of institutions. Scott (2001: 48) describes institutions as consisting of ‘cultured-cognitive, normative and regulative elements that ... provide stability and meaning to social life ... Institutions are transmitted by various types of carriers, including symbolic systems, relational systems, routines and artifacts’ and they ‘operate at multiple levels of jurisdiction’. Fligstein (2001: 108) echoes Scott’s emphasis on regulation and human cognition in defining institutions as ‘rules and shared meanings ... that define social relationships, help define who occupies what position in those relationships and guide interaction by giving actors cognitive frames or sets of meanings to interpret the behaviour of others’. The neo-institutional view of institutions has been criticized for privileging the role of cognition in conceptualizing

institutional action (Greenwood and Hinings 1996; Hirsch 1997; Hirsch and Lounsbury 1997). Institutional economists, by contrast, emphasize the role of human agency in devising institutions. North (1990: 97), for example, describes institutions as ‘humanly devised constraints that structure political, economic and social interaction. They consist of both informal constraints (sanctions, taboos, customs, traditions and codes of conduct) and formal rules (constitutions, laws and property rights)’. Jepperson’s (1991: 143–5) definition comes closest to the position we adopt here; that institutions are the product (intentional or otherwise) of purposive action. Institutions, he argues, are ‘an organized, established procedure’ that reflect a set of ‘standardized interaction sequences’. In contrast to previous definitions of institutions, which view them as the relatively passive construction of meaning by participants, Jepperson points toward the possibility of viewing institutions as patterns of sequenced interaction supported by specific mechanisms of control. Institutions, in this view, are the product of specific actions taken to reproduce, alter and destroy them.

Jepperson’s approach points to an emerging focus within institutional studies. Along with understanding the processes through which institutions affect organizational action, research has become increasingly concerned with the effects of individual and organizational action on institutions. This concern seems to us to represent an important part of the future of institutional studies in management and organization theory. In this section, we introduce the concept of ‘institutional work’ to represent the broad category of purposive action aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions. We do so by discussing two sets of writing, one that articulated the core elements of the study of institutional work and motivated organizational researchers to pursue this direction, and a second that has the potential to provide a robust theoretical foundation for the concept of institutional work.

Agency in Institutional Studies

Our conception of institutional work is rooted in a small set of articles that articulate a broad theoretical outline for the study of institutional work, parallel to the way in which the articles by Meyer and Rowan (1977) and DiMaggio and Powell (1983) provided the underpinnings for the new institutionalism in organization studies. The first of these articles is

DiMaggio's (1988) essay on 'Interest and agency in institutional theory'. Here, DiMaggio describes the concept of institutional entrepreneurship as a means of understanding how new institutions arise. This essay not only re-introduced strategy and power into neo-institutional explanations (Eisenstadt 1980; DiMaggio 1988), but also provided the foundation for a shift in the attention of institutional researchers toward the effects of actors and agency on institutions. The concept of institutional entrepreneurship focuses attention on the manner in which interested actors work to influence their institutional contexts through such strategies as technical and market leadership or lobbying for regulatory change (Fligstein 1997; Hoffman 1999; Rao et al. 2000; Maguire et al. 2004). Thus, it highlights the importance of the practices of individuals and organizations in the creation of new institutions. We believe, however, that such practices go well beyond those of institutional entrepreneurs – the creation of new institutions requires institutional work on the part of a wide range of actors, both those with the resources and skills to act as entrepreneurs and those whose role is supportive or facilitative of the entrepreneur's endeavours (Leblebici et al. 1991).

The other major articles in which agency was first recognized as central in the new institutional theory were Oliver's (1991) discussion of strategic responses to institutional processes, and her (Oliver 1992) account of deinstitutionalization. In the first of these articles, Oliver (1991) presented a framework for understanding the range of responses available to organizations facing institutional pressures, and the contexts under which these different responses would be most likely to occur. Oliver (1991: 145) argued that what the institutional literature was lacking to that point was 'explicit attention to the strategic behaviours that organizations employ in direct response to the institutional processes that affect them'. In response to this gap in the literature, Oliver proposed a five-part typology of such strategic responses that varied in the degree to which they involved 'active agency' on the part of the organization: from most to least passive, the five responses are acquiescence, compromise, avoidance, defiance and manipulation. While the potential for actors to respond to institutional processes and pressures in a variety of ways had been recognized in early institutional theory (Selznick 1949), Oliver (1991) represented the first systematic attempt at

articulating the range of potential responses. This article has since provided the theoretical foundation for numerous empirical studies and theoretical extensions (Rao et al. 2001; Seo and Creed 2002; Thornton 2002; Zilber 2002; Lawrence 2004; Washington and Zajac 2005; Greenwood and Suddaby 2006).

The second key article by Oliver examined the antecedents of deinstitutionalization. Oliver (1992: 564) argued that deinstitutionalization represents 'the delegitimation of an established organizational practice or procedure as a result of organizational challenges to or the failure of organizations to reproduce previously legitimated or taken-for-granted organizational actions'. Although not explicitly focused on action, Oliver's discussion of deinstitutionalization highlights two important categories of institutional work. First, the notion of deinstitutionalization points to the potential for organizational actors to actively engage in the disruption of institutions – to engage in institutional work aimed not at creating or supporting institution but at tearing them down or rendering them ineffectual. Oliver (1992: 567) describes this work as the 'rejection' of an institution: a 'direct assault on the validity of a long-standing tradition or established activity'. As an example, Oliver (1992: 567) points to the example of 'direct challenges to the appropriateness of traditional job classifications on the basis of stereotypical gender roles [which] have led to the deinstitutionalization of this practice in many organizations'.

The second category of institutional work pointed to by Oliver's discussion of deinstitutionalization is the work done by individuals and organizations in order to maintain existing institutions. Oliver (1992: 564) highlights this form of institutional work indirectly when she mentions 'the failure of organizations to reproduce previously legitimated or taken-for-granted organizational actions'. Thus, the reproduction and continuation of institutions cannot be taken for granted, even the most highly institutionalized technologies, structures, practices and rules require the active involvement of individuals and organizations in order to maintain them over time (Lawrence et al. 2001). Zucker (1988) argues that even among institutions, entropy is a natural tendency that needs to be overcome by organized action. Despite the potential importance of this category of institutional work, it has gained relatively little attention. As Scott (2001: 110) notes,

'most institutional scholars accord little attention to the issue of institutional persistence, and those who do disagree over what mechanisms underlie stability'.

Of course, the articles by DiMaggio (1988) and Oliver (1991; 1992) are by no means the only ones that deal with institutional work. Each of these articles has themselves spawned a host of articles and book chapters in which the empirical dynamics and theoretical implications of their ideas has been explored, and that have consequently added considerably to our understanding of institutional work. There have also been a number of attempts to provide more general descriptions of the relationship between action and institutions (DiMaggio and Powell 1991; Beckert 1999; Lawrence 1999; Fligstein 2001). DiMaggio and Powell (1991), for instance, describe a model of 'practical action' in which they emphasize a number of shifts which have occurred between the old and new institutionalisms:

from object-relations to cognitive theory, from cathexis to ontological anxiety, from discursive to practical reason, from internalization to imitation, from commitment to ethnomethodological trust, from sanctioning to ad hocing, from norms to scripts and schemas, from values to accounts, from consistency and integration to loose coupling, and from roles to routines (DiMaggio and Powell 1991: 26–7).

Together, these shifts lead to an image of action as dependent on cognitive (rather than affective) processes and structures, and thus suggests an approach to the study of institutional work that focuses on understanding how actors accomplish the social construction of rules, scripts, schemas and cultural accounts.

Beckert (1999) extends this emphasis on the cognitive links between action and institutions, arguing that institutional rules and 'strategic agency' both act as co-ordinating mechanisms in market situations where actors are attempting to pursue (perhaps institutionalized) goals of profit or competitive advantage. Beckert argues that institutions can provide actors with the ability to act when the 'complexity of the situation and the informational constraints do not allow them to assign probabilities to the possible consequences of choices'; at the same time, however, institutions 'come under pressure from agents who recognize their constraining qualities for more efficient outcomes' (Beckert 1999: 779).

Consistent with this general approach is Lawrence's (1999) concept of institutional strategy, which he describes as: 'patterns of organizational action concerned with the formation and transformation of institutions, fields and the rules and standards that control those structures'. The concept of institutional strategy describes the manipulation of symbolic resources, particularly membership access and the definition of standards, which are key aspects of the type of work necessary in the early stages of an institutionalization project. Fligstein (2001), in a related fashion, uses the construct of 'social skill' to describe the various tactics that social actors use to gain the co-operation of others. Fligstein (2001: 106) further observes that the social skills used to reproduce fields are different from those used in conditions of crisis or change. These latter skills are used by entrepreneurs who 'find ways to get disparate groups to co-operate precisely by putting themselves into the positions of others and creating meanings that appeal to a large number of actors'.

We believe that the theoretical pieces by DiMaggio (1988) and Oliver (1991; 1992) represent a signal shift in the attention of institutional researchers toward the impact of individual and collective actors on the institutions that regulate the fields in which they operate. From these early works has emerged an important tradition within institutional theory that explores theoretically and empirically the ways in which actors are able to create, maintain and disrupt institutions.

Sociology of Practice

The second major foundation for the concept of institutional work comes from research in the tradition of and inspired by the sociology of practice (Bourdieu 1977; 1993; de Certeau 1984; Giddens 1984; Lave and Wenger 1991). This tradition understands practices as 'embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organized around shared practical understanding' (Schatzki et al. 2001: 2). Thus, studies of practice focus on the situated actions of individuals and groups as they cope with and attempt to respond to the demands of their everyday lives (de Certeau 1984). Practice theory and research are most easily understood in contrast to process-oriented studies: as Brown and Duguid (2000: 95) argue, to focus on practice is to focus on the 'internal life of process'. Whereas a

process-oriented theory articulates a sequence of events that leads to some outcome, a practice theory describes the intelligent activities of individuals and organizations who are working to effect those events and achieve that outcome.¹

In organizational research, an interest in practice has begun to be seen in a variety of domains, including organizational learning (Brown and Duguid 1991; Lave and Wenger 1991), strategy (Whittington 2003; Whittington et al. 2003), technology management (Orlikowski 2000), accounting (Hopwood and Miller 1994; Miller 2001), organization theory (Pentland 1992; Dutton et al. 2001) and time in organizations (Orlikowski and Yates 2002). In all of these areas, researchers have begun to examine organizational actors as knowledgeable and practical in their affairs (Giddens 1984). The central tenets of practice theory are consistent with and have the potential to contribute substantially to institutional research. As in institutional theory, the practice perspective locates the concept of a 'field' as central to all things social. Summarizing this issue, Schatzki et al. (2001: 3) argue that 'practice approaches promulgate a distinct social ontology: the social is a field of embodied, materially interwoven practices centrally organized around shared practical understandings'.

Our concept of institutional work follows in this practice tradition: we view institutional work as intelligent, situated institutional action. A practice perspective on institutional work is made clearer in its contrast with a process perspective on institutions. The focus of processual descriptions of institutionalization (e.g. Greenwood and Hinings 1996; Tolbert and Zucker 1996) has been on the institutions: what happens to them; how they are transformed; what states they take on and in what order. In contrast, a practice orientation focuses on the world inside the processes (Brown and Duguid 2000; Whittington 2003) – the work of actors as they attempt to shape those processes, as they work to create, maintain and disrupt institutions. This does not mean that the study of institutional work is intended to move back to an understanding of actors as independent, autonomous agents capable of fully realizing their interests through strategic action; instead, a practice perspective highlights the creative and knowledgeable work of actors which may or may not achieve its desired ends and which interacts with existing social and technological structures in unintended and unexpected ways. As

Orlikowski (2000: 407) argues with respect to technology, for example, a practice perspective:

acknowledges that while users can and do use technologies as they were designed, they also can and do circumvent inscribed ways of using the technologies – either ignoring certain properties of the technology, working around them, or inventing new ones that may go beyond or even contradict designers' expectations and inscriptions.

Thus, adopting a practice perspective on institutions points research and theory toward understanding the knowledgeable, creative and practical work of individual and collective actors aimed at creating, maintaining and transforming institutions.

Key Elements of the Study of Institutional Work

We believe that bringing together the interest in agency within institutional theory spawned by DiMaggio (1988) and Oliver (1991; 1992) with the practice turn in social theory provides a solid conceptual foundation for the emerging study of institutional work. Together, they suggest an approach to the study of institutional work with three key elements.

First, the study of institutional work would highlight the awareness, skill and reflexivity of individual and collective actors. Some versions of institutional theory strongly emphasize the 'taken-for-grantedness' of institutions, and thus have the potential to construct actors as cultural dopes (Hirsch and Lounsbury 1997). In contrast, the concept of institutional work suggests culturally competent actors with strong practical skills and sensibility who creatively navigate within their organizational fields. This is not to suggest, however, a return to the rational actor model. Rather, we draw on an understanding of actors as rational in the sense that they are able to work with institutionally-defined logics of effect or appropriateness (March 1994), and that doing so requires culturally-defined forms of competence and knowledge, as well as the creativity to adapt to conditions that are both demanding and dynamic (Giddens 1984; Cassell 1993).

The second element is an understanding of institutions as constituted in the more and less conscious action of individual and collective actors. In an essay exploring the ontological status of macro-sociological phenomena, including institutions,

Barnes (2001) argues that, from a practice perspective, these phenomena are located in the sets of practices people engage in as a part of those macro-phenomena, rather than, for instance, emerging from those practices and existing at some other 'level'. Democracy, for instance, resides in the acts of polling, campaigning and related activities that people do as citizens of a democratic society, rather than describing some emergent property of the society that is separate from those practices. This leads us to suggest that the study of institutional work be centrally concerned with understanding both the sets of practices in which institutional actors engage that maintain institutions, and the practices that are associated with the creation of new institutions and the disruption of existing ones.

Finally, a practice perspective on institutional work suggests that we cannot step outside of action as practice – even action which is aimed at changing the institutional order of an organizational field occurs within sets of institutionalized rules. Giddens (1984: 21) describes rules as 'techniques or generalizable procedures applied in the enactment/reproduction of social practices' – to this we would add that there are techniques and generalizable procedures that are applied in the disruption/transformation of social practices. This in no way suggests a lack of potential innovation in institutional fields, but merely that the practices which might lead to institutional innovations are themselves institutionally embedded and so rely on sets of resources and skills that are specific to the field or fields in which they occur. In the remainder of this chapter, we work from this perspective to begin to outline the terrain of institutional work – the sets of practices through which individual and collective actors create, maintain and disrupt the institutions of organizational fields.

Institutional Work in Organizations

In this section, we examine empirically-based institutional research in order to provide an overview of what we do and do not understand about institutional work. In order to do this, we draw primarily from empirical research published since 1990 in three major organizational journals in which institutional research appears – *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Academy of Management Journal* and *Organization Studies*. Our intention here is not to

conduct an exhaustive overview, nor to provide a definitive schema of institutional work. Rather, our objective is to reveal and illustrate the sediment of institutional work in the existing literature and, thereby, outline the terrain of an emerging object of institutional inquiry. Although relatively few articles within the now voluminous body of empirical research in neo-institutional theory focus solely on institutional work, a significant number of them provide descriptions of institutional work, some directly as they examine the rise and fall of various institutional arrangements, and others in the context of background empirical material intended to aid understanding of institutional processes. Together these studies reveal considerable insight into the often overlooked constituent elements of institutional work.

We organize our analysis around three broad categories of institutional work – creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions. Together these categories describe a rough life-cycle of institutional work that parallels the life-cycle of institutions described by Scott (2001) and Tolbert and Zucker (1996). Our review suggests a set of insights into creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions with which we end each discussion.

Creating Institutions

Of the three broad categories of institutional work we examine, the work aimed at creating institutions has received the most attention by organizational scholars. Building particularly on the notion of institutional entrepreneurship (Eisenstadt 1980; DiMaggio 1988), significant efforts have been undertaken to describe and explain the role of interested actors in the formation of institutions (Dacin et al. 2002). The primary focus of much of this research, however, has been to elaborate the characteristics of, and the conditions that produce, institutional entrepreneurs. Somewhat less evident in these accounts are detailed descriptions of precisely what it is that institutional entrepreneurs do.

In the empirical research we reviewed, we observed ten distinct sets of practices through which actors engaged in actions that resulted in the creation of new institutions. While we do not suggest that the practices we identify provide an exhaustive list of the kind of institutional work used to create institutions, we observe that they reflect three broader categories of activities. The first three types of institutional work, 'vesting', 'defining' and

Table 1.6.1 Creating Institutions

Forms of institutional work	Definition	Key references for empirical examples
Advocacy	The mobilization of political and regulatory support through direct and deliberate techniques of social suasion	Elsbach and Sutton (1992); Galvin (2002)
Defining	The construction of rule systems that confer status or identity, define boundaries of membership or create status hierarchies within a field	Fox-Wolfram et al. (1998)
Vesting	The creation of rule structures that confer property rights	Russo (2001)
Constructing identities	Defining the relationship between an actor and the field in which that actor operates	Lounsbury (2001); Oakes et al. (1998)
Changing normative associations	Re-making the connections between sets of practices and the moral and cultural foundations for those practices	Townley (1997); Zilber (2002)
Constructing normative networks	Constructing of interorganizational connections through which practices become normatively sanctioned and which form the relevant peer group with respect to compliance, monitoring and evaluation	Lawrence et al. (2002); Orssatto et al. (2002)
Mimicry	Associating new practices with existing sets of taken-for-granted practices, technologies and rules in order to ease adoption	Hargadon and Douglas (2001); Jones (2001)
Theorizing	The development and specification of abstract categories and the elaboration of chains of cause and effect	Kitchener (2002); Orssatto et al. (2002)
Educating	The educating of actors in skills and knowledge necessary to support the new institution	Lounsbury (2001); Woywode (2002)

'advocacy', reflect overtly political work in which actors reconstruct rules, property rights and boundaries that define access to material resources. The second set of practices, 'constructing identities', 'changing norms' and 'constructing networks', emphasize actions in which actors' belief systems are reconfigured. The final group of actions, 'mimicry', 'theorizing' and 'educating', involve actions designed to alter abstract categorizations in which the boundaries of meaning systems are altered. We discuss and illustrate each of these in turn. See Table 1.6.1 for a summary of the forms of institutional work associated with creating institutions.

Advocacy

The first type of work important for the creation of institutions is *advocacy* – the mobilization of political and regulatory support through direct and deliberate techniques of social suasion. Holm (1995) provides an excellent illustration of the importance of advocacy work in his description of the way in

which the collective action of fisherman and their mobilization of state power behind their institutional project was key to the ultimate success of the fisherman. Holm (1995: 405–6) observes that it was '[b]ecause of the close ties between the Fisherman's Association and the Labour party' that the Herring Act was ultimately successful in preserving the fishermen's interests in the impending re-engineering of the Norwegian fishing industry. Advocacy is an important component of the institutional work of interest associations or organizations 'that are formally established to make claims for – to represent – important constituencies in an organizational field' (Galvin 2002: 673). One form of advocacy work identified by Galvin involves deliberate and direct representation of the interests of specific actors. This work entails lobbying for resources, promoting agendas and proposing new or attacking existing legislation. It is similar to the forms of institutional work accomplished by political regimes (Carroll et al. 1988) or by social movements (Clemens 1993). The object of such institutional work is to redefine

the allocation of material resources or social and political capital needed to create new institutional structures and practices.

We identify advocacy as a form of institutional work associated with the creating of institutions because it is a key element by which marginal actors initially acquire the legitimacy they may need to effect new institutions. Suchman (1995) observes that different forms of advocacy, such as lobbying, advertising and litigation, allow less powerful institutional actors to actively shape their institutional environment and, ultimately, acquire cognitive legitimacy. Elsbach and Sutton (1992) identify extreme examples of how advocacy offers marginalized actors the opportunity to create institutions by manipulating cognitive legitimacy. The authors demonstrate how two social movements, Earth First and the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, employed controversial forms of advocacy, including coercion and illegitimate activities, to gain legitimacy by first violating existing norms and then articulating awareness of their marginalized position. Advocacy, thus, is a powerful form of institutional work that permits actors to influence when and how institutional norms are perceived. Used effectively, advocacy can determine which norms are followed and which may be violated, both of which are key elements in the cognitive legitimacy of new institutions.

Defining

A second form of institutional work involves activity directed toward *defining*: the construction of rule systems that confer status or identity, define boundaries of membership or create status hierarchies within a field. At the societal level, an illustration of this process is the way in which citizenship rules and procedures confer status and membership (Meyer et al. 1997). More generally, Lawrence (1999) describes the defining of membership rules and practice standards as the two broad categories of institutional strategy.

A rich example of defining comes from Fox-Wolfgramm et al.'s (1998) analysis of institutional change in a sample of banks. Here, a key element of institutional work involved the formalization of rule systems, by bank examiners, to construct definitional categories of compliance. The examiners constructed 12 criteria for categorizing banks as outstanding, satisfactory, need to improve or substantial non-compliance; formal categories that would, ultimately, determine differential access to

resources. Definitional work, thus, extends to formal accreditation processes, the creation of standards and the certification of actors within a field. Certification was the primary form of definitional work identified by Guler et al. (2002) in the emergence and diffusion of ISO practices globally. Russo (2001), similarly, points to the formalization of contract standards and the definition of standard exchange rates between utilities by the federal government as a key component of the success of the emerging independent power industry. Advocates of the new industry were clearly reliant upon the ability of the state to impose standardized cost definitions and contract terms on industry participants.

From the empirical research we examined, it seems that most defining work focuses actors on the creation of 'constitutive rules' (Scott 2001) or rules that enable rather than constrain institutional action. In contrast to the prohibitive nature of most regulatory activity, defining is directed more often toward establishing the parameters of future or potential institutional structures and practices. Rules of membership, accreditation and citizenship engage actors in processes directed toward defining (and re-defining) boundaries and frameworks within which new institutions can be formed.

Vesting

Vesting refers to institutional work directed toward the creation of rule structures that confer property rights (Roy 1981; Russo 2001). Vesting occurs when government authority is used to reallocate property rights, such as occurred in the fledgling independent power-production industry (Russo 2001). The industry was created by US federal mandate that large established utilities had to purchase electricity from independent producers. Previously, large power producers held state enforced monopolies over the generation of electricity. Such monopolies were an historical artifact of the large risks and capital costs required to build and maintain massive hydroelectric projects. To counterbalance the monopolistic power of utilities, state governments conferred the right to set prices on public utility commissions. In this early example of vesting, thus, the government simultaneously divided two elements of exchange (production and pricing) between two distinct sets of actors (utilities and utility commissions). Although this division of vested rights and interests worked well for a time, the oil crisis of the 1970s focused

attention on the need to develop alternative sources of electricity. A second round of vesting legislation, therefore, created a new set of actors and redefined the exchange relations between them. A comprehensive energy plan introduced by President Jimmy Carter required large utilities to purchase power from qualifying independent producers. By changing the pricing formula for energy, the legislation gave immediate status and legitimacy to small power producers that, previously, were shut out of the industry by established energy corporations. Vesting, as illustrated in this case, refers to the micro-processes of creating new actors and new field dynamics by changing the rules of market relations.

A common element of vesting is the negotiation of a 'regulative bargain' between the state or another coercive authority and some other interested actor. This was particularly evident in the 'compact' that developed between large utilities and public utility commissions described by Russo (2001). The vesting process 'yoked' these two sets of actors together in an implicit contract that required one to produce power and the other to set prices that would cover costs and generate a reasonable rate of return. The introduction of independent power producers in this relationship required the creation of a new implicit contract in which exchange relationship was based on the avoidance of risk, rather than assumptions of reasonable returns.

Such regulative bargains also commonly occur in professional fields, where the state, in exchange for the grant of an economic monopoly over a particular jurisdiction, expects the profession to support its own project of state-building (Abbott 1988; Cooper et al. 1994). While vesting is most apparent in the 'public duty' obligations of established professions such as law and auditing, it has also been demonstrated in less established professions such as personnel professionals (Baron et al. 1986) and finance (Lounsbury 2002). Ultimately, the process of vesting involves some degree of sharing of coercive or regulatory authority.

Several general observations can be made regarding these first three forms of institutional work. First, they appear to potentially constitute a mutually reinforcing cycle. Advocacy work is an important precursor to the defining of rules that confer status and privilege, which in turn provide the foundation for vesting work; vesting, in turn, constrains and constitutes those actors with preferential ability

to advocate. Secondly, the forms of institutional change that result from this type of institutional work often involve the dramatic, wholesale reconstruction of institutions or institutional structures and practices – revolutionary rather than evolutionary institutional change (Greenwood and Hinings 1996). Thirdly, while the preceding discussion clearly privileges the role of the state in this form of institutional work, the state is not the only actor with coercive or regulatory authority. Thornton (2002; 2004) describes the work of exogenous actors in the college textbook publishing industry where coercion was expressed financially rather than through regulatory authority. Fligstein (1990: 19), similarly, describes the ability of the emerging field of large industrial multinationals to construct their own coercive mechanisms of governance, albeit 'as a result of strategic interaction between actors in the state and actors in firms'.

Constructing Identities

The construction of identities as a form of institutional work is central to the creating of institutions because identities describe the relationship between an actor and the field in which that actor operates (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). A powerful example of this form of work comes from Oakes et al.'s (1998) study of institutional change in the field of Alberta historical museums. In this case, the government department responsible for museums worked to reorient the identities of museum employees:

people in the organizations [were] encouraged to see themselves, perhaps for the first time, as working in businesses rather than working in museums that are run in a businesslike manner. The desirable positional identity [was] no longer solely curator, researcher, interpreter, or educator. It [was] also entrepreneur, often described as being 'realistic' and becoming 'change-agents' and 'risk-takers' (Oakes et al. 1998: 279–80).

The institutional work of providing new identities is not, however, an unproblematic accomplishment: as Oakes et al. (1998: 277) describe it,

some people to try to remake themselves, while others may stop contributing or withdraw completely. Some, particularly those with curatorial backgrounds, felt uncomfortable and tended to

become less involved as they no longer understood the rules of the game; others not only embraced the new field but helped give it shape.

In institutional theory, the construction of identities as a form of institutional work has been primarily associated with the development of professions, as illustrated in studies of both the emergence of new professions and the transformation of existing ones (Covaleski et al. 1998; Brock et al. 1999). In the literature we reviewed for this chapter, the construction of professional identities was engaged in both from outside of the professional groups in questions (Oakes et al. 1998) and by the groups themselves, as in Lounsbury's (2001) examination of recyclers. This latter study highlights the importance of collective action in accomplishing the construction of identities as a form of normative institutional work:

status-creation recyclers began to forge a new and distinct occupational identity that was connected to the ideals of the broader environmental movement. In the early 1990s, status-creation recyclers began to identify each other through their joint participation in the National Recycling Coalition (NRC) ... In 1993, a group of full-time recycling co-ordinators formed the College and University Recycling Co-ordinators (CURC) occupational association [which] ... established procedures to elect officials and developed committees to study measurement standards, 'buy recycled' campaigns, co-operation between university operations and academics, and other issues related to the construction of campus recycling programmes (Lounsbury 2001: 33).

Changing Normative Associations

A different form of work aimed at creating new institutions involved the reformulating of normative associations: re-making the connections between sets of practices and the moral and cultural foundations for those practices. This form of institutional work often led to new institutions which were parallel or complementary to existing institutions and did not directly challenge the pre-existing institutions but, rather, simultaneously supported and led actors to question them. An interesting example of such work comes from Zilber's (2002) institutional account of a rape crisis centre in Israel. Zilber provides a detailed analysis of the means by which founding practices, based upon feminist

logics and assumptions, were maintained but reinterpreted from an alternative normative perspective – that of therapeutic professionalism. While training routines and rotation procedures were kept more or less intact 20 years after the centre's founding, members no longer remembered the feminist origins and readily accepted the extension of meaning of these practices to incorporate a new ideological understanding of the institution. Practices such as consensus decision-making and rotation of speakers, which were originally adopted by feminists to 'avoid domination and promote an open, respectful dialogue' (Zilber 2002: 243) were extended by therapeutic professionals to promote the re-creation of the centre as a medical rather than a political institution. Feminist practices of consensus decision-making and speaker rotation were relatively easily extended to promote psychotherapeutic practices of open or closed group counselling or interventions.

One version of this form of institutional work that has been observed across a wide variety of domains is the substitution of generalized private-sector, for-profit norms for field-specific norms that focus on such issues as human welfare or professional autonomy (Townley 1997; Hinings and Greenwood 1988; Kitchener 2002; Amis et al. 2004). Townley (1997), for instance, documents the institutional work of university administrators and government agencies as they attempted to institute a private-sector approach to HR in UK universities. A critical piece of work in this regard was the 'Report of the Steering Committee for Efficiency Studies in Universities (Jarratt)': 'For Jarratt, the key to more dynamic and efficient universities lay in the practices and policies associated with private sector organizations, the latter commanding ideological overtones of efficiency and effectiveness' (Townley 1997: 265). Kitchener (2002: 401) describes similar forms of institutional work in the field of US healthcare in the 1980s: in that arena, a group of 'political reformers' wrote a series of policy papers that 'renewed calls for healthcare organizations to adopt "business-like" structures and managerial practices'.

Constructing Normative Networks

Another form of work aimed at creating institutions involves the construction of what we refer to here as 'normative networks', which are the interorganizational connections through which practices become

normatively sanctioned and which form the relevant peer group with respect to normative compliance, monitoring and evaluation. A detailed illustration of this process comes from Lawrence et al.'s (2002) description of how a 'proto-institution' emerged in the field of child nutrition in Palestine from the construction of a normative network including CARE, the University of Oslo, the Australian embassy, a government agency and others. Although each actor had independent motivations and interests, the emerging 'proto-institution' became a repository for each actor's pre-existing institutionalized practices for addressing issues of malnutrition. Thus, the new structure or proto-institution was established in parallel with existing institutional structures, including those of the Ministry of Health, CARE and other organizations, designed to address the same problem.

A number of other studies provide similar accounts of how groups of actors construct normative networks that provide the basis for new institutions. Leblebici et al. (1991) describe the role played by patent pooling arrangements in the early stages of radio, in which networks of prominent and powerful actors such as General Electric, AT&T and others, created a new institutional structure (RCA) that effectively separated the manufacturing and broadcasting activities of the industry. Guler et al. (2002) analyse the diffusion of ISO 9000 practices, and document the early diffusion of ISO 9000 in manufacturing occurring through the work of engineers and production managers in creating a normative network aimed at promoting manufacturing standards and practices. Orsatto et al. (2002: 6748) describe the way in which the institutionalization of recycling in the European auto industry depended upon 'industry groups, such as Renault, the PSA Group and CFF' who believed that 'industry-wide co-operation, collective liability, and commercial relations between the various parties involved, were better principles from which to solve the waste problem of shredder residues'.

The key observation in these accounts is that formerly loose coalitions of somewhat diverse actors construct normative networks which effect new institutions, often alongside pre-existing institutional activities and structures. In some cases, the newly formed institution mimics regulatory activities that one might expect would be performed by the state, such as in the separation of industry activities or the creation of manufacturing and process standards. In

other cases, as in the formation of a proto-institution, the new institutional structure simply supplements and supports activities that were once performed by the state (and by other actors).

The three forms of institutional work identified above share the common attribute of focusing on the normative structure of institutions. That is, they each attend to the roles, values and norms that underpin institutions. The types of institutional work differ, however, in the contextual relationships that define the normative structure of institutions. *Constructing identities*, for example, is a form of institutional work that concentrates attention on the relationship between an actor and the institutional field or fields in which they function. *Changing normative associations*, by contrast, involve work that manipulates the relationship between norms and the institutional field in which they are produced. Finally, *constructing normative networks* describes a form of institutional work that alters the relationship between actors in a field by changing the normative assumptions that connect them. We, thus, observe three different types of interactions (actor-field; norm-field; actor-actor) that provide the foundation for new institutional formation. More significant, perhaps, is the observed need for greater analytic attention to be paid by future research to the ways in which actors work to make these interactions cohere into a consistent and enduring institutional structure.

Mimicry

Actors attempting to create new institutions have the potential to leverage existing sets of taken-for-granted practices, technologies and rules, if they are able to associate the new with the old in some way that eases adoption. One way in which this is done is through mimicry. In Hargadon and Douglas' (2001: 479) rich historical account of Edison's efforts to institutionalize electric light, they argue that, '[b]y designing the incandescent light around many of the concrete features of the already-familiar gas system, Edison drew on the public's pre-existing understandings of the technology, its value, and its uses'. Despite the many practical and technical advantages of electric light, '[Edison] deliberately designed his electric lighting to be all but indistinguishable from the existing system, lessening rather than emphasizing the gaps between the old institutions and his new innovation' (Hargadon and

Douglas 2001: 489). This mimicry was accomplished, in part, through the clever use of skeumorphs – design elements that symbolically connected previous and current technologies – such as bulbs that mimic the shape of flames in gas lamps. Edison engaged in this mimicry to the extent that he intentionally undermined the practical effectiveness of electric light in order to make it more similar to gas: gas jets produced light equivalent to a 12-watt bulb; Edison's designed his bulbs to produce 13 watts, despite having early prototypes that would produce two or three times this amount of light. Similarly, Edison mimicked the gas companies' underground pipes, despite the fact that 'when buried, the bare copper wires leaked electricity and blew out entire circuits' (Hargadon and Douglas 2001: 490).

Mimicry was also an important form of institutional work in the development of the early American motion picture industry, where one group of entrepreneurs, referred to as 'immigrant content entrepreneurs' by Jones (2001: 925), 'imitated high culture symbols and formats of Broadway theatres to evoke accepted cognitive heuristics from consumers, such as providing uniformed ushers, plush chairs, 2-hour shows, and elaborate buildings'. This strategy was in contrast to those entrepreneurs who relied primarily on technical and regulatory strategies, and whose films were primarily short pieces shown in nickelodeons. In order to establish the feature film as an institution in this emerging industry, these entrepreneurs, including Adolph Zukor and Jesse Lasky, who later formed Famous Players Lasky, the forerunner of Paramount Studio, 'specialized in filming established Broadway plays or novels with prominent Broadway actors' (Jones 2001: 925).

Part of the success of mimicry in creating new institutional structures is that the juxtaposition of old and new templates can simultaneously make the new structure understandable and accessible, while pointing to potential problems or shortcomings of past practices. This was the observation by Townley (2002) on changes in Alberta cultural organizations. Layering new business techniques, such as budgeting or performance measurement, on traditional professional practices, actors developed an acute awareness of how past routines became problematized when viewed through the lens of business rationality. Townley (2002: 173) notes that the technique of demonstrating problems of efficiency by juxtaposing old and new templates of organizing,

ultimately, succeeded as actors succumbed, cognitively, to conformity:

The 'causes' of the introduction of these measures, the appeal to efficiency, and hence the legitimacy of government, were not questioned, nor was the legitimacy of the government in making these changes ... Limited attempts at protecting or decoupling internal work activities from formal structures, although initially successful, were inhibited as business planning and performance measures had to be introduced at the increasingly lower unit levels of the division and the sites, and eventually at the individual level.

Theorizing

Theorizing is 'the development and specification of abstract categories, and the elaboration of chains of cause and effect' (Greenwood et al. 2002: 60). An important aspect of theorizing is the naming of new concepts and practices so that they might become a part of the cognitive map of the field. In their study of business planning in Alberta historical museums, for instance, Oakes et al. (1998: 276–7) describe the importance and difficulty associated with such work:

The meaning of everyday words like 'goals' and 'objectives' became precarious. The difficulty in remembering a new language and all its categories – goals, objectives, measures, etc. – was expressed several times. ... Some departments presented their completed business plans to the Legislature only to be told that what they described as objectives were really goals and that what they defined as outcomes were really processes or outputs.

Naming represents a critical first step that provides the foundation for further theorizing, as described by Orssatto et al. (2002: 646) in their study of the evolution of recycling in the European auto industry. A critical naming was by 'VDA', the German automobile industry, which in October 1990 coined the notion a 'concept for the future processing of end-of-life vehicles'. This naming allowed both the communication of the concept and its elaboration through further theorizing: 'the car manufacturers elaborated further on the "VDA concept", communicated it to the BMU and the general public, and engaged in technical and market research to prepare for its implementation'. Naming and theorizing does not, however, necessarily

indicate agreement: in this case, Orssatto et al. (2002: 646–7) argue that the ‘common concept should be seen more as a political stake than a technical document, since all auto-makers endorsed the proposal, despite their preferences for different solutions at the technical level’.

Similarly, Kitchener’s (2002: 402) study of health-care mergers describes the way in which naming and theorizing can have an impact on an entire sector.

members of the Jackson Hole group helped to translate the ideology of market-managerialism into US health policy. In the early 1970s, they coined the term health maintenance organization (HMO), labelled its organizational characteristics, and successfully lobbied the Nixon administration to endorse it as a means of encouraging savings (by managers) as opposed to spending (by professionals).

Kitchener’s study also highlights the narrative component of theorizing (Bruner 1987) in which actors articulate the causal and consequently temporal relationships among institutional elements. Kitchener describes the way in which a variety of actors engaged in storying in support of the adoption of mergers by healthcare organizations: ‘the popular business press (e.g. the Wall Street Journal, Fortune, Business Week and Forbes) conveys tales of industrialists who merge organizations to achieve spectacular turnarounds’; ‘standard economics and management texts ... propose mergers as a rational strategic response to increasingly competitive market conditions’; and the ‘management consultancy industry ... added advice on mergers to the list of services that it offers to health executives’ (Kitchener 2002: 403).

Educating

The final instance of institutional work we found that was aimed at creating institutions involved the educating of actors in skills and knowledge necessary to support the new institution. This was an important form of cognitive work because the creating of new institutions often involves the development of novel practices as well as connecting those practices to control mechanisms. This form of cognitive work was evidenced in several studies, including Hargadon and Douglas’ (2001) discussion

of Edison’s electric light, which demanded the development of significant new skills on the part of workers:

To wire a building for electricity, Edison had to pull up floors and snake wires around doorways, a skill at that time known only, and incompletely, to installers of burglar alarms ... over the first few years, Edison lobbied local schools to develop training programmes in electrical engineering and, when that initiative fell short, started his own training programme (Hargadon and Douglas 2001:487).

Similarly, the institutionalization of recycling programmes in American universities demanded a new set of skills and knowledge on the part of a large population. Consequently, a key role of the SEAC was as an educator: As Lounsbury (2001: 36–7) describes, ‘It sponsors annual student conferences and maintains an elaborate network of experienced student organizers who travel to campuses and hold workshops, provide training and support work on activities such as campus solid waste audits’.

One key strategy employed by the SEAC to educate a large population of students and universities was to create templates – frameworks that provided other actors with an outline, or template, for action. The SEAC facilitated the institutionalization of recycling by providing ‘access to key information such as case studies of other socially similar schools that helped student environmental organizations shape their arguments to administrators’ (Lounsbury 2001: 37). Moreover, the SEAC ‘provided student groups with evidence from comparable schools ... [which] was communicated in formal documents created by student environmental groups that were presented to school administrators in support of their claims’ (Lounsbury 2001: 50).

Templating also includes work done less directly. One important such case involved the creation of a template that helped foster the global quality movement. Woywode (2002: 506–7) examines the introduction of working groups as a formal structural component in the European auto industry, and concludes that:

The decision to introduce working groups coincided more or less with the date of publication of the MIT study by Womack et al. in 1990, which praised the Japanese method of production. This book, *The Machine that Changed the World*, of which, according to the co-author Daniel T. Jones, more

than 500,000 copies were sold, as of June 2000, has been translated into 11 different languages. ... Several interviewees from French as well as from German plants explicitly stated that top managers or production specialists of their car companies had gone to visit Japanese car manufacturing plants prior to the decision to introduce the working-group concept in their home country, and had made repeated visits thereafter. ... Two companies even hired Japanese consulting firms to help them introduce the original Toyota production concept in their company.

These final three forms of institutional work aimed at creating institutions focus primarily on the cognitive side of institutions – the beliefs, assumptions and frames that inform action by providing meaningful and understandable interaction patterns to be followed. *Mimicry* draws on existing patterns of action in order to articulate and legitimate new practices and structures; *theorizing* develops concepts and beliefs that can support new institutions; *educating* provides actors with the knowledge necessary to engage in new practices or interact with new structures. Each form of institutional work supports the creating of new institutions by leveraging the costs that actors might bear if they seek to engage in new practices or develop new structures on their own; mimicry, theorizing and educating provide actors with alternatives to the effort and risk associated with isolated innovation.

Insights into Creating Institutions

The existing literature on institutional change provides some useful insights into the institutional work necessary to create institutions. In enumerating these forms of institutional work, our intention here is not to suggest that we have uncovered any exhaustive list, but rather to sketch the terrain associated with the creating of institutions by interested actors. As with all of our observations in this section, we draw our insights regarding institutional work associated with the creating of institutions from a small sample of research, primarily case studies, and have been unable to gauge their generalizability.

The concept of institutional work highlights the effortful and skillful practices of interested actors, and so our sketch provides several insights regarding the actors involved in the creation of institutions, the skills and resources on which they draw in

order to create institutions, and the institutional dynamics associated with each form of work. Key to creating institutions is the ability to establish rules and construct rewards and sanctions that enforce those rules. Only some actors in any given field will have that ability tied directly to their position; in many fields, such a role is restricted to the state or a delegate of the state, such as a professional body. That ability can however be gained through political and economic processes in which an actor establishes a superior position in the field. This position might be based either on the resource dependence of other actors (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978). It might also reflect a specialized identity relative to an issue, and thus emerge out of the normative work described above in terms of constructing identities.

An important insight with respect to the differences between forms of institutional work that focus on rules (i.e. vesting, defining and advocacy) and forms of institutional work that effect changes in norms and belief systems (i.e. constructing identities, changing norms and constructing normative networks), in terms of creating institutions, is the far greater potential for rules-based work to lead to the *de novo* construction of new institutions. Unlike the remaining types of institutional work, work that focuses on rule systems is much more likely to be associated with the relatively wholesale construction of new institutions: vesting and defining, in particular, can lead to the relatively immediate institutionalization of practices, technologies and rules, so long as the putative agent has the authority to enforce those institutions.

In contrast, work that focuses on changing norms or belief systems is more often associated with creating of institutionalized rules, practices and technologies that parallel or complement existing institutions. This may be because this type of work is the most 'co-operative' of the three approaches to creating institutions. Unlike rules-based work, which depends on the ability of some actor to enforce compliance, normative work relies on cultural and moral force, which is embedded in communities of practice. Consequently, the forms of normative work all depend significantly on the co-operation of those communities to make real the intended new institutions. The clearest example of this is the forming of normative networks which are crucial to lending an institution some cultural or moral force; these networks are by their nature a co-operative enterprise and so creating them involves

a form of institutional work that depends heavily on the ability of actors to establish and maintain co-operative ties. This does not mean that normative institutional work can not be highly conflictual as competing communities vie for legitimacy and influence with respect to a particular issue (Zietsma et al. 2002). The constructing of identities as a type of institutional work, for instance, is also often a highly co-operative endeavour since the actor whose identity is being constructed will often depend on others to sanction, formally or informally, that identity. Along with the social connections that co-operation requires, normative work is also facilitated by discursive legitimacy (Hardy and Phillips 1998), a perceived 'right' to speak on a particular issue; this is in contrast to the authority and material resources that make possible rule-oriented institutional work.

From our review of the empirical literature, it seems that creating institutions through work that changes abstract categories of meaning (i.e. mimicry, theorizing and educating) may involve well-established actors in a field, but at the same time hold the greatest potential for institutional entrepreneurship on the part of relatively small, peripheral or isolated actors. Less powerful actors are particularly associated with this type of work which involves associating new practices with existing institutions. Mimicry can provide a powerful means for new entrants into a domain to legitimate and institutionalize new practices, rules and technologies employ: Edison's imitation of gas lighting; the cultural mimicry of Zuckor and Lasky as they entered the motion picture industry. Theorizing and educating, on the other hand, seem to be associated primarily with larger, central actors in a field – those actors with the resources and legitimacy to articulate cause and effect relations provide peripheral actors with templates for action and educate whatever publics are relevant to an institution. While marginal actors do, on occasion, mobilize the resources and social capital necessary to engage in theorizing, templating and educating, this can only occur when they act collectively, in the form of a social movement, thereby elevating their position from atomistic marginal players to a unified and central actor (Clemens 1993; Lounsbury et al. 2003). Templating, theorizing and educating forms of institutional work, in contrast to work that focuses on reconstructing rule systems, are associated more strongly with the extension and elaboration of institutions than with the creating of

strikingly new institutions; as Edison's example illustrates, even when a new technology represents a breakthrough advance, reliance on cognitive work to institutionalize may mean highlighting its continuities with the past as much as its distinctiveness. Templating and theorizing, in particular, appear to incorporate elements of *bricolage*, or the 'makeshift, improvisatory and creative' (Gabriel 2002) capacity of entrepreneurs to use existing social material to reconfigure structures and institutions (Clemens and Cook 1999).

Maintaining Institutions

The issue of how institutions are maintained by actors in organizational fields has received significantly less attention than how institutions are created (Scott 2001: 110). Nevertheless, the question of what forms of institutional work are associated with maintaining institutions is an important one: although institutions are associated with automatic mechanisms of social control that lead to institutions being relatively self-reproducing (Jepperson 1991), relatively few institutions have such powerful reproductive mechanisms that no ongoing maintenance is necessary. As an example, consider the institution of 'democracy'. Jepperson (1991) argues that democracy is highly institutionalized in the US and relatively less institutionalized in some other countries: taking the recent example of the 2004 national election in Afghanistan (the country's first), the low level of institutionalization was evidenced by the large amount of work necessary by a range of governmental and non-governmental actors in order to mount the election. In contrast, Jepperson (1991) argues, democratic elections in the US are not exceptions but rather taken-for-granted parts of contemporary life. However, this does not mean that the maintenance of democracy, or even of democratic elections, goes on without significant institutional work. One example of such work is the organizing of voter registration drives, which are an important example of institutional work aimed not at creating or disrupting institutions, but at ensuring that elections remain democratic processes. Voter registration drives have been a historically important form of institutional work toward maintaining democracy in the US, with the 1964 'Freedom Summer' campaign being among the most famous. Voter registration drives are not, however, simply a remnant of a less democratic time in

Table 1.6.2 Maintaining Institutions

Forms of institutional work	Definition	Key references for empirical examples
Enabling work	The creation of rules that facilitate, supplement and support institutions, such as the creation of authorizing agents or diverting resources	Leblebici et al. (1991)
Policing	Ensuring compliance through enforcement, auditing and monitoring	Fox-Wolfgramm et al. (1998); Schuler (1996)
Deterring	Establishing coercive barriers to institutional change	Holm (1995); Townley (2002)
Valourizing and demonizing	Providing for public consumption positive and negative examples that illustrates the normative foundations of an institution	Angus (1993)
Mythologizing	Preserving the normative underpinnings of an institution by creating and sustaining myths regarding its history	Angus (1993)
Embedding and routinizing	Actively infusing the normative foundations of an institution into the participants' day to day routines and organizational practices	Townley (1997); Zilber (2002)

the US: as we wrote this chapter, the US was preparing for a presidential election in the fall of 2004, with voter registration drives being organized by a wide variety of organizations, from the League of Women Voters of Monroe Township (Harvie 2004) to local chapters of the NAACP (Campbell 2004). These drives remain an important means through which individual and collective actors are able to bolster the institution of democracy, and more importantly represent just one of a wide range of forms of institutional work that are necessary to maintain democracy as an institution in any democratic state, including technical work that ensures the validity of vote collecting and counting, etc. Thus, a large amount of institutional work is needed to maintain even highly institutionalized phenomena such as democratic elections in the US and other Western democracies. Considering the sorts of institutions that are typically examined in organizational research, we expect that even greater amounts of institutional work are necessary for their maintenance.

In general, institutional work aimed at maintaining institutions involves supporting, repairing or recreating the social mechanisms that ensure compliance. Thus, in reviewing the empirical institutional literature for instances of such work, we searched for any concrete description of an actor engaged in some activity that was intended to maintain the controls which underpinned an institution. As with our review of the descriptions of creating institutions, the descriptions we found of maintaining institutions

were often located as often in the sections providing background and context for an empirical study as in the 'results' sections. Overall, we identify six types of institutional work devoted to maintaining institutions. The first three, 'enabling', 'policing' and 'deterring', primarily address the maintenance of institutions through ensuring adherence to rule systems. The latter three, 'valourizing/demonizing', 'mythologizing' and 'embedding and routinizing', focus efforts to maintain institutions on reproducing existing norms and belief systems. Each of these types are elaborated below. See Table 1.6.2 for a summary of the forms of institutional work associated with maintaining institutions.

Enabling Work

Enabling work refers to the creation of rules that facilitate, supplement and support institutions. This may include the creation of authorizing agents or new roles needed to carry on institutional routines or diverting resources (i.e. taxation) required to ensure institutional survival. Examples of enabling work come from Leblebici et al.'s (1991) study of the radio industry and Guler et al.'s (2002) study of the international diffusion of ISO 9000. A key set of institutions in the field of radio transmission involves the legitimate use of the radio spectrum: in order to maintain the legislated institutional framework that governs the spectrum, the US federal

government has, since 1925, created regulatory agencies with the power 'to control the allocation, use, and transfer of spectrum rights' (Leblebici et al. 1991: 341). Similarly, the ISO authorizes various organizations to act as 'registrars', including 'government laboratories, private testing organizations, firms that were early adopters of ISO, industry trade groups, and accounting firms': these organizations are 'qualified to conduct audits and award certificates' with respect to ISO 9000 compliance. These examples illustrate the importance of distributed authority and responsibility for maintaining institutions in large or geographically dispersed fields. Enabling work also maintains institutions by introducing certainty into institutional arrangements which allows actors to avoid intra-institutional conflict. Professional associations often engage in this type of work with the 'construction and maintenance of intraprofessional agreement over boundaries, membership and behaviour' (Greenwood et al. 2002). By introducing constitutive rules (of membership, standards or identity), associations 'function in a primarily regulatory capacity ... as they enable the formation, dissemination and reproduction of shared meanings and understandings in an organizational arena' (Galvin 2002: 677).

Policing

A second category of work aimed at maintaining institutions involves ensuring compliance through enforcement, auditing and monitoring. We term this form of institutional work 'policing'. Policing can involve the use of both sanctions and inducements (Scott 1994; Russo 2001), often simultaneously and by the same agents, as illustrated by the US government's attempts to stabilize labour during the war effort (Baron et al. 1986), and the state's use of both penalties and incentives in maintaining common economic institutions such as property rights, corporate status and control over economic production (Campbell and Lindbergh 1991). An example of a non-state actor engaged in policing work comes from the early years of the American film industry, when key technologies were institutionalized through patents and copyrights, many of which were held by Thomas Edison: as a means of enforcing compliance, Edison 'initiated 33 suits on patent rights and copyrights at federal level between 1897 and 1905' (Jones 2001: 933). This use of state apparatus by a non-state actor to police an institution is similar to what Schuler (1996) describes in

his analysis of political strategies in the carbon steel industry: an important strategy of these firms for maintaining institutions was the launching of petitions to international trade bodies appealing to have a regulation or agreement enforced. In a very different context, managers of a coal mine in Newfoundland enforced institutionalized but unsafe work practices by punishing those who refused to comply: one worker who 'refused to work in these types of unsafe conditions ... [was] assigned more denigrating tasks such as working on the roof or at the coal-face'; another was 'suspended for refusing to stay in the mine because his colleagues were using torches in unsafe conditions' (Wicks 2001: 672).

Less overtly conflictual enforcement strategies for maintaining institutions have also been described, particularly in professionalized fields where auditing and monitoring are often enough to ensure compliance. Fox-Wolfgramm et al. (1998), for instance, describe the role of auditing in the field of banking when new regulation was established to ensure non-discriminatory lending procedures:

In mid-1987, the bank was given an official [regulatory] compliance examination, due to its holding company starting the process of acquiring another bank in the Southwest. ... A full crew was sent to the bank, and several weeks were spent assessing compliance. The bank was found 'below average' in [regulatory] compliance and was prohibited from further branching until compliance was shown' (Fox-Wolfgramm et al. 1998: 107-8).

Similarly, Guler et al.'s (2002) study of ISO 9000 diffusion documents the importance of regular monitoring as a means of maintaining institutionalized practices: the ISO 9000 'certificate is typically awarded for a period of 3 years', with regular audits 'conducted after awarding a certificate to make sure that the firm is in compliance with the standards' (Guler et al. 2002: 209-10). As well as periodic auditing, actors working to maintain institutions may demand ongoing disclosure of information on the part of those participating in the institution: in response to the concerns of record producers, recording agents and artists that records played on the radio would hurt their record sales, 'the Secretary of Commerce sanctioned large stations for using records and required stations to disclose whether their programmes were transcribed' (Leblebici et al. 1991: 347).

Deterrence

A final category of work aimed at maintaining institutions by compliance with rules focuses on establishing coercive barriers to institutional change. We call this category of institutional work ‘deterrence’, which involves the threat of coercion to inculcate the conscious obedience of institutional actors. The best example of this category comes from Hargadon and Douglas’ (2001: 485) study of Edison’s introduction of electric lighting, and the responses by politicians who were interested in maintaining the institutionalized lighting system based on natural gas:

When Edison first applied for an operating license, the mayor of New York flatly opposed even granting the company an operating franchise. When that opposition failed ... the Board of Aldermen proposed Edison pay \$1000 per mile of wiring and 3% of the gross receipts ... Gas companies, by comparison, were permitted to lay their mains for free and paid only property tax to the city.

Another example of such tactics comes from Holm’s (1995) study of the Norwegian fisheries, in which the Fisherman’s Association was able to subvert the government’s attempt to industrialize the industry, and hence maintain the institutions of system of small-scale fishermen and coastal communities.

Effective deterrence is highly dependent upon the legitimate authority of the coercive agent. Townley (2002: 173) describes the effective deterrence work of the Alberta government in ensuring compliance of actors in provincial cultural institutions:

Formally, there was acquiescence or compliance with the requests to introduce strategic performance measurement systems. This took the form of conscious obedience rather than incorporation of norms of the institutional requirements. Although the planning exercise was of some use in clarifying organizational goals, performance measures were rejected as being valuable in evaluating the outcomes of organizations ... Although there was compliance with coercive isomorphism, there was resistance to mimetic isomorphism.

Deterrence may also derive from the threat of economic coercion. Thornton (2002: 87) describes the policing work of parent corporations in the college textbook publishing industry in which policing was primarily accomplished through accounting practices. Annual profits of the college divisions were

closely monitored and each year’s profits had to ‘be better than the previous year’.

Looking across the categories of rules-based work that maintains institutions, we see that such work is concerned with preserving the mechanisms through which rewards and sanctions were associated with institutional compliance on the part of actors in a field. Enabling work, policing and deterrence act together to make real the coercive underpinnings of an institution: without such work, the coercive foundations for institutions are likely to crumble, becoming empty threats or promises rather than self-activating means of institutional control. Notably, the coercive work used to maintain institutions is more visible and apparent than cognitive or normative equivalents. Those actors who engage in such work, as well as the actors that comply, are conscious of the effects of such work and its purpose in maintaining and preserving institutions.

Valourizing and Demonizing

This work maintains institutions by providing for public consumption especially positive and especially negative examples that illustrates the normative foundations of an institution. Good examples of this category come from Angus’ (1993) study of a Christian Brothers College in Australia – a boy’s school in which competition, machismo and violence were key institutions. An important way in which the ‘Brothers’ – the ordained teachers who dominated the school – maintained these institutions was through public demonstrations of what was right and what was wrong. Successes in athletic competition, for instance, ‘were publicly recognized at CBC and formed a large part of the agenda for school assemblies’ (Angus 1993: 241); this public recognition provided a clear indication to all participants of what it meant to be a proper CBC boy. In contrast, students who failed to live up to the competitive and macho ethic of the school were widely demonized: ‘The greatest insult a pupil could deliver to another was to doubt his masculinity by referring to him as a “poofter” or as a “girl”. At all year levels there was continual joking about “poofters”, both inside and outside classrooms, by male teachers as well as by boys’ (Angus 1993: 242). Valourizing and demonizing represent institutional work in which actors identify and evaluate the moral status of participants in the field, both as an enactment of institutionalized beliefs and as a way of maintaining the power of those beliefs.

Mythologizing

A related category of institutional work focuses on the past, rather than the present: a key way in which actors work to preserve the normative underpinnings of institutions is by mythologizing their history. Again, key examples of this category of work come from Angus' (1993) study of the Christian Brothers School. To create and sustain a myth, one needs a story and an occasion to tell it: Brother Cas Manion

in his editorial to the hundredth issue of the Christian Brothers' journal, *Studies*, in which he reflects upon the Brothers' schools of the 1930s: 'The objective of the school was to hand on the Faith intact and ready to fight; to raise the working class boy to a level of prestige in Public Service or Profession; and to attain high levels of examination success in open competition' (Angus 1993: 242).

This mythologizing work provides to all those concerned with the school a normative understanding of why competition is and should be such a central facet of the school's culture. Similarly, Angus (1993) describes the ways in which teachers in the school mythologized the school's principals: 'one soon became aware of legends of "great men" who have been principals of Brothers' schools – tireless, dedicated and inspiring leaders who have followed in the footsteps of the Irish founder of the Order' (Angus 1993: 251–2).

Embedding and Routinizing

Whereas, valourizing, demonizing and mythologizing provide discursive resources, this category of institutional work involves actively infusing the normative foundations of an institution into the participants' day-to-day routines and organizational practices. Institutions, thus, are maintained and reproduced through the stabilizing influence of embedded routines and repetitive practices such as training, education, hiring and certification routines and ceremonies of celebration. In Townley's (1997) study of the implementation of performance appraisal in UK universities, for example, the institutionalized myth of appraisal and accountability was maintained by the universities, particularly in their formal, documented rhetoric, as in this university document:

The university has a general responsibility to the community for the provision of high quality

teaching and research within the funds allocated from the public purse. ... By considering the achievements and needs of each of its staff on an individual basis it can build up at department, faculty and university levels an assessment of what steps are needed to motivate and retain staff of high quality (University document, quoted in Townley (1997: 270).

More active forms of embedding and routinizing were evidenced in Angus' (1993) study of the Christian Brothers School:

It was not unusual for the feast of Immaculate Conception, March 25, to be a day on which boys in various cases received instruction about sex, manners and appropriate relationships with girls, and the 'mysteries' of female biology. The general message conveyed was that girls and women are 'special' people deserving special care and respect (Angus 1993: 243).

While this example illustrates explicit education as a means of normative maintenance, vivid though implicit examples were also used in the school to maintain normative understandings of gender: 'At an assembly of Years 7 and 8 students ... a number of boys who had committed various offences were lined up and strapped by Brother Sterling. ... [The] group of women who taught Years 7 and 9 ... [were] asked to leave the scene of public humiliation before the strapping could proceed'. This incident 'emphasized the stereotypical division of male toughness and female delicateness and sensibility', 'women's lack of belonging in the mail domain of the school, and marked them out as not being real teachers' (Angus 1993: 247).

Institutional work can also maintain institutions by routinizing the reproduction of shared frameworks of members, through recruitment practices. Zilber (2002: 242) describes how feminist norms were maintained in a rape-crisis centre by routinely recruiting from a close-knit network:

[V]olunteers highlighted the atmosphere of friendship and warmth. The importance of friendly, positive and equal relations among volunteers, staff and board members, and between these groups, was perceived as part of the feminist struggle against domination. The centre aimed at being a 'woman's space', where not only the victims of sexual assault, but the volunteers as well, would feel empathy and acceptance. As recruitment was based on social networks—that is, spreading the word in closed

circles of feminist supporters (at demonstrations, rallies and other political activities) – members felt affinity with each other. Many were friends, both in their daily life and in the general feminist sense of ‘sisterhood’.

Other practices, such as talking in rotation and making decisions by consensus, were also routinized in the centre. By embedding these practices in routines, the practices continued to be ritually reproduced long after the original purpose or intent had been forgotten. The routines, however, provided comfort and assurance to members. As one volunteer noted

Someone, at the beginning, there were [feminist] women here, and they decided how we would do certain things ... [these procedures] take care of us. I think [that they] guard us, without our knowing ... Some of us don't know where it came from or what is its meaning, or whether its feminist (Zilber 2002: 242).

Insights into Maintaining Institutions

Echoing Scott (2001: 122), we observe that, while institutional research has been attentive to the mechanisms of institutional diffusion, the work required to maintain institutions remains a relatively unstudied phenomenon. We clearly need to focus more attention on the ways in which institutions reproduce themselves. Indeed, this may be a more fundamental question for institutional research, in many respects, than the question of how institutions are created. While institutional entrepreneurs are interesting because of the scale and scope of the product of their actions, the real mystery of institutions is how social structures can be made to be self-replicating and persist beyond the life-span of their creators.

In our review of the empirical literature describing the ways in which actors maintain institutions, we found a range of strategies. One of the immediate observations that can be made based on this review is that the range of institutional work used to maintain institutions can be ordered on a continuum of ‘comprehensibility’. Clearly, the work used to maintain rule systems (enabling, policing and deterring) is distinguished by its high degree of comprehensibility in the sense that the actors engaged in, and subject to, this type of work are aware of its purpose and influence. On the other end of the spectrum, maintenance of institutions through reproduction of

norms and belief systems (valourizing/demonizing, mythologizing and embedding/ routinizing) is generally less comprehensible; the actors engaged in the routines and rituals of reproduction appear to be largely unaware of the original purpose, or the ultimate outcome, of their actions. A useful line of inquiry, thus, would be to examine the processes by which institutional participants ‘forget’ or lose the comprehensibility of their actions.

A second important observation based on the research reviewed above concerns the relationship between institutional maintenance and change. From our review, it seems that the maintaining of institutions must be distinguished from simple stability or the absence of change: rather, institutional work that maintains institutions involves considerable effort, and often occurs as a consequence of change in the organization or its environment. That is, in order to maintain institutions, actors must cope with the entrance of new members into the organization or the field, the evolution of the field in new and unexpected directions, and changes in pan-institutional factors such as technology and demographics. Consequently, actors need to develop specialized techniques by which new members are engaged and socialized, and new norms, demographic patterns and changes in the external environment incorporated into pre-existing routines and patterns. Understanding how institutions maintain themselves, thus, must focus on understanding how actors are able to effect processes of persistence and stability in the context of upheaval and change.

Disrupting Institutions

Although institutional research and theory did for a period of time emphasize the processes and forces that led to the diffusion and endurance of organizational structures, practices and technologies, the possibility of institutions being disrupted by the work of individual or collective actors has been highlighted in institutional theory both in the early work of Selznick and in more recent research that has focused on institutional change in fields and organizations (Holm 1995; Greenwood and Hinings 1996; Scott et al. 2000; Greenwood et al. 2002; Maguire et al. 2004; Suddaby and Greenwood 2005).

More broadly, research on the dynamics of organizational fields suggests that there will very often be actors whose interests are not served by existing

Table 1.6.3 Disrupting Institutions

Forms of institutional work	Definition	Key references for empirical examples
Disconnecting sanctions	Working through state apparatus to disconnect rewards and sanctions from some set of practices, technologies or rules	Jones (2001); Leblebici et al. (1991)
Disassociating moral foundations	Disassociating the practice, rule or technology from its moral foundation as appropriate within a specific cultural context	Ahmadjian and Robinson (2001)
Undermining assumptions and beliefs	Decreasing the perceived risks of innovation and differentiation by undermining core assumptions and beliefs	Leblebici et al. (1991); Wicks (2001)

institutional arrangements, and who will consequently work when possible to disrupt the extant set of institutions (Abbott 1988; DiMaggio 1991; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Bourdieu 1993). As Bourdieu (1993) argues, the differential allocation of capital based on institutional structures embeds conflict in organizational fields: actors will compete to gain privileged positions or disrupt the institutions which restrict their access to capital. Abbott's (1988) analysis of professional fields highlights this dynamic in the form of inter-jurisdictional conflicts in which professional groups compete for the right to engage in particular forms of activity (Dezalay and Garth 1995; Covaleski et al. 2003). See Table 1.6.3 for a summary of the forms of institutional work associated with disrupting institutions.

Institutional work aimed at disrupting institutions involves attacking or undermining the mechanisms that lead members to comply with institutions. In order to catalogue these forms of institutional work in the recent empirical institutional literature, we searched for concrete descriptions of actors engaged in activities intended to disrupt the controls which underpin institutions. Although Oliver (1992) established the importance of deinstitutionalization as a process, and several studies allude to the dynamics associated with institutions being disrupted, concrete descriptions of the institutional work that actors must engage in to make this happen are relatively rare in the empirical literature we examined. Where institutional change is examined, the emphasis is primarily on the creation and emergence of new institutions, rather than the work that is done to disrupt existing ones. Although it may be the case that an important way

in which existing institutions are disrupted is through the development of new ones, we believe that this is not the only, or even the dominant process through which the disruption of institutions occurs. Oliver (1992) argues that deinstitutionalization is a distinct process with its own antecedents; we similarly believe that the disruption of institutions involves institutional work that is distinct from that associated with the creation of new institutions. Although few in number, the descriptions of such work in the empirical literature are consistent with this belief.

Disconnecting Sanctions/Rewards

Most of the institutional work aimed at disrupting institutions that we found involved work in which state and non-state actors worked through state apparatus to disconnect rewards and sanctions from some set of practices, technologies or rules. The most direct manner in which this occurs is through the judiciary, which is capable of directly invalidating previously powerful institutions. In Jones' (2001) study of the early American film industry, for instance, the courts played an important role in disrupting key institutions: Edison and the Trust had worked hard to create and maintain technical institutions that provided their firms with a competitive advantage, but these institutions were disrupted by the courts invalidating their foundation in a series of decisions: 'In 1902, Judge Wallace of the Court of Appeals declared: "It is obvious that Mr Edison was not a pioneer ... He dismissed Edison's patent right and legitimacy claims"' (Jones 2001: 924); in

reaction to an FTC anti-trust complaint, 'Judge Dickson ... ruled that the Trust had violated the Sherman Anti-Trust Act' (Jones 2001: 927). these rulings effectively razed the institutional basis for Edison's and the Trust's competitive advantage, eliminating their ability to control the use of key technologies.

Along with this kind of direct disruption, the state can also be an important lever for actors to work to disrupt institutions by undermining the technical definitions and assumptions on which they were founded. In the early American radio industry, for example, an important institution was the set of technical standards for local radio stations, which effectively restricted small markets to a single station. Following World War II, Congress pressured and veterans' groups lobbied the FCC to relax these standards, challenging 'the long-held belief that numerous local stations would create interference' which led to 'the allowable ranges for local stations [being] reduced, enabling growth in small markets' (Leblebici et al. 1991: 354). A similar dynamic occurred in the Norwegian fisheries (Holm 1995: 414), when the government adopted an approach to fisheries regulation based on 'science-based recommendations of a total allowable catch (TAC) for each of the most important commercial fish stocks': this undermined both the Main Agreement, the dominant regulative institution, as well as the MSO system through which fishermen dominated the sector, while at the same time freeing processors and exporters from 'the fine-meshed system of regulations in which they were entangled'. Thus, a redefinition of the basis on which the permitted catch was calculated disrupted the regulative basis of the institutional arrangements of the sector.

From looking at these few examples, it seems that an important aspect of coercive work aimed at disrupting institutions involves defining and redefining sets of concepts (Suchman 1995) in ways that reconstitute actors and reconfigure relationships between actors. This definitional work seems to often effect large-scale, revolutionary change (Greenwood and Hinings 1996; Lawrence and Phillips 2004). Consequently, this type of work may be easier to accomplish in contexts in which significant social upheaval is perceived as necessary by important stakeholders. War is one such context (Baron et al. 1986). Imminent economic failure, as occurred in the Depression, is another (Lounsbury

2001). In either context, the conditions are such that actors are willing to accept the massive mobilization of power necessary to produce radical new boundaries, new actors and new rules for the distribution of resources.

Although both the state and professions are likely to be involved in disrupting institutions, their relationship is quite different from that associated with their work in maintaining institutions. Whereas the state and the professions often work together to maintain institutions, this is not necessarily the case when one of them is working to disrupt institutions. When professional groups or bodies work to disrupt institutions, they are often observed to do so by challenging the prevailing regulatory structure (Abbott 1988), as was the case when professional curators worked to disrupt the existing templates for US art museums (DiMaggio 1991). Dezalay and Garth (1995) similarly describe the work of multiple professions to dislodge control over commercial disputes from state judicial systems when they created the field of international commercial arbitration. On the other hand, the state may also work against professions as it redefines and re-regulates, as observed in Holm's (1995) Norwegian fisheries study.

Disassociating Moral Foundations

Institutional work has the potential to disrupt institutions by disassociating the practice, rule or technology from its moral foundation as appropriate within a specific cultural context. Although the empirical literature that we reviewed contains relatively few concrete descriptions of such work, those that we found were consistent in their description of such work as being focused on the gradual undermining of the moral foundations of institutions, rather than their wholesale turnover.

One of the most detailed examinations of the disruption of an institution is Ahmadjian and Robinson's (2001) study of the deinstitutionalization of permanent employment in Japan. In this study, they found that institutional factors shaped the pace and process of the spread of downsizing, a practice that was completely antithetical to the institution of permanent employment. Ahmadjian and Robinson (2001: 622) argue that normative factors affected which firms downsized sooner and later: 'Large, old, wholly domestically owned, and high-reputation Japanese firms were resistant to downsizing at first, as were firms with high levels of human

capital, as reflected by high wages, but these social and institutional pressures diminished as downsizing spread across the population.' This description represents the institutional process, but the practices associated with downsizing were much more fine-grained and subtle, slowly undermining the normative basis of permanent employment:

Along the path to layoffs, firms also resorted to hiring freezes. While employers may have viewed hiring cuts as a means to protect the jobs of existing employees, hiring freezes were nevertheless threats to the permanent employment system in several ways. Since the permanent employment system depended on successive cohorts of new employees entering each year, a hiring freeze meant a gaping hole in a firm's age and promotion hierarchy (Ahmadjian and Robinson 2001: 625).

Thus, what we see from this study is the way in which the normative foundations of an institution are disrupted by indirect sets of practices which go around and undermine, rather than directly attack, those foundations.

The actors most likely to adopt disassociative techniques to disrupt institutional practices are elites. This was the observation of Greenwood and Suddaby (2006), who identified the largest firms and professional associations as actors most likely to disrupt institutional practices. Sherer and Lee (2002: 115), similarly, observe that it was the elite law firms that first adopted the Cravath system of human resources management in the legal profession. They observe that 'these initial innovators were particularly adept at using their prestige to develop and disseminate technical rationales that justified being different'. Notably, while elites first adopted new practices on the basis of technical reasons, Sherer and Lee (2002: 116) observe that 'late adopters appear to have faced moral coercion to reform'.

Undermining Assumptions and Beliefs

The final category of institutional work we consider here is the work done to disrupt institutions by undermining core assumptions and beliefs. Institutions are kept in place by the costs associated with actors moving away from taken-for-granted patterns of practice, technologies and rules (Scott 2001): these costs include the effort associated with innovation and the risks of differentiation. Thus,

work aimed at disrupting institutions is effective when it removes those costs in some way, facilitating new ways of acting that replace existing templates, or decreasing the perceived risks of innovation and differentiation. In the institutional research we examined, there was little documentation of institutional work of this type. Two kinds of such work, however, did emerge: innovation that broke existing, institutional assumptions, and gradual undermining through contrary practice.

In Leblebici et al.'s (1991) study of the American radio industry, small independent radio stations disrupted taken-for-granted templates of how radio was financed through their production of alternative forms of radio content:

independent stations, like WOR (Newark, New Jersey), WLW (Cincinnati), and WMAQ (Chicago), evolved the practice of spot advertising. Spots were advertising announcements inserted between programmes. They offered an alternative to national and regional advertisers who could not afford the expense of sponsoring the production of an entire programme. These independent stations also began to produce their own local shows to draw listeners from the networks in their area. But lacking the enormous resources of the networks, they violated some precepts of the industry, producing cheap quiz shows and using recorded music (Leblebici et al. 1991: 352).

Thus, located outside of the positions that benefited from the financing templates of the industry, independent stations were able to disrupt existing institutions.

An example of the gradual undermining of an institution comes from Wicks' (2001) study of the Westray coal mining disaster. This example is interesting because the institutional work done focused on assumptions or beliefs to undermine an institution that was previously supported primarily by regulative means. The institution in this case was the set of safety rules that were meant to control the level of coal dust that accumulated in the mine (the greater the amount, the more likely an explosion might occur):

A situation had resulted in which although a regulatory system was in place, it had failed to accomplish its health and safety objectives. Over time, these repeated violations of rules became the norm, with the rules being in place only to the extent that they created the veneer of legitimacy

necessary to avoid sanctions from government regulators. The coal-dust accumulation became commonplace and was only dealt with when inspection visits were anticipated (Wicks 2001: 675).

Insights into Disrupting Institutions

The first insight from this section is that we simply do not know much about the work done by actors to disrupt institutions. Despite the prominence of Oliver's (1992) discussion of deinstitutionalization as a process, very little research has documented the practices through which actors purposively engage in the disrupting of institutions. What we do know comes mainly from studies that are focused on the creating of new institutions, and which only incidentally discuss the disruptive institutional work done by actors in the same domain. We see that institutional work aimed at disrupting institutions focuses primarily on the relationship between an institution and the social controls that perpetuate it: disconnecting rewards and sanctions, disassociating moral foundations and undermining assumptions and beliefs all disrupt institutions by lowering in some way the impact of those social controls on non-compliance. This set of categories, however, only describes a small subset of the potential strategies available to actors intent on disrupting institutions.

A substantive insight that we can take from this review of the institutional work associated with disrupting institutions concerns the relative influence of institutional pressures on different types of actors. Some institutional research has characterized institutions as 'totalizing' structures that hold their subject actors captive to unremitting coercive, normative and cognitive pressures for conformity. Our review, however, suggests that institutional pressures are less 'totalizing' for some actors and in some contexts. For instance, the ability to disconnect rewards and sanctions from behaviours is most directly associated with the state and the judiciary, as well as with those professions and elites that have the financial and intellectual resources to harness the capacity of the state and the judiciary to disrupt institutions that de-privilege them in some way. This suggests that state actors and some other elites may operate with a heightened awareness and potential for strategic response to societal rewards and sanctions. From the instances we observed of institutional work that disrupts institutions by disassociating behaviours from their moral foundations, it is difficult to associate such work clearly with any

particular actor, but we can make some general observations. The ability of an actor to engage in practices that exist just outside of the normative boundaries of an institution reflects a high level of cultural competence; thus, normative work of this sort is mostly likely to be accomplished by members of a field or organization with sophisticated understanding of the cultural boundaries and meanings of institutions. We are similarly constrained regarding any generalizations about actors who disrupt institutions by undermining beliefs or assumptions, but the empirical literature, along with our own conjecture, suggests another sort of actor – not a powerful or culturally sophisticated actor, but one capable of working in highly original and potentially counter-cultural ways. Thus, the different forms of institutional work demand different categories of actor, ones that are immune or somehow less affected by the governance mechanisms of their institutional environment. This issue suggests a rich basis for research into why and how these actors gain such immunity.

A second observation from this category of institutional work is that the activities that these actors engage in to disrupt institutional structures are largely discursive and relate to what Lamont and Molnar (2002) have described as 'boundary work'. Lamont and Molnar make a distinction between social and symbolic boundaries. Social boundaries would include those that refer to economic, physical and political location. Symbolic boundaries include moral boundaries, socioeconomic boundaries and cultural boundaries. In the work we have described, both types of boundaries are the focus of institutional work. Actors appear to disrupt institutions primarily by redefining, recategorizing, reconfiguring, abstracting, problematizing and, generally, manipulating the social and symbolic boundaries that constitute institutions.

Studying Institutional Work

In this last section of the chapter, we turn to the issue of studying institutional work – the research approaches we might use to document, analyse and understand the practices through which actors create, maintain and disrupt institutions. We believe a wide range of approaches are potentially well suited to the study of institutional work, ranging from traditional qualitative methods such as ethnography and oral

history, to quantitative approaches including the statistical analyses of event histories and social networks. Along with a new focus within institutional studies, there may also be the emergence of new forms of institutional research. In this section, we highlight three approaches which have only begun to be applied to institutional research, but which represent important potential sources of insight into the dynamics of institutional work: discourse analysis, actor-network theory and semiotics. Each of these domains represents far more than a methodology; each is associated with a significant theoretical and empirical tradition, a review of which is well beyond the scope of this chapter. The aim of this section, therefore, is to provide an overview of some of the key ideas from each approach, examine how the approach might be applied to the study of institutional work, and illustrate some of the benefits that might stem from such an application.

Discourse Analysis and the Study of Institutional Work

One of the observations we have made is that institutional work is often language-centred – many forms of institutional work we have identified involve practices of speaking and writing that are aimed at affecting the institutional context within which those practices occur. We reviewed institutional work that included composing legislation, telling stories, writing histories, making jokes and insults, writing memos and letters, writing legal opinions, writing and making speeches and making announcements, among other discursive acts. Thus, we argue one approach to the study of institutional work that holds significant promise is discourse analysis.

Discourse analysis describes a wide range of methods and approaches to organizational analysis, the common element among which involves a focus on ‘organizational discourse’, which Grant et al. (2004: 3) define as

structured collections of texts embodied in the practices of talking and writing (as well as a wide variety of visual representations and cultural artifacts) that bring organizationally related objects into being as these texts are produced, disseminated and consumed.

By organizationally related objects, Grant et al. (2004) are referring to the range of discursive

elements that constitute the linguistic and symbolic life of organizations – concepts, ideas, names, roles, strategies, products, plans, stories, places, people, things (or at least their discursive representation). These objects from a discourse analytic perspective are constructed in and through discursive practices that create new texts and connect them to existing texts (Grant et al. 2004). Objects become institutions when they are associated with sets of social controls that ensure the object’s ongoing reproduction (Phillips et al. 2004). Thus, discourse analysis fits neatly with our interest in institutional work: it provides methods and theories to aid in understanding how linguistic and symbolic practices create new objects and associate those objects with social controls that institutionalize them.

Discourse analysis is a highly heterogeneous intellectual domain which points to several forms of organizational discourse, each of which might highlight particular categories of institutional work. Here we consider just three forms of organizational discourse identified by Grant et al. (2004): rhetoric, narrative and dialogue.

Rhetoric

One important form of discourse in organizations is rhetoric, which refers to ‘the use of symbols to persuade others to change their attitudes, beliefs, values or actions’ (Cheney et al. 2004: 79). Suddaby and Greenwood (2005) argue that, in contrast to other forms of language-centred analysis which tend to focus on the content of discourse, rhetorical analysis analyses the effectiveness of specific linguistic moves by contrasting the interplay of emotional impact (pathos), character (ethos) and logical content (logos). A focus on rhetoric shares the broader interest of discourse analysis in the role of language in structuring social action, but is distinguished by a very specific focus on suasion and influence. Rhetorical analysis ‘restricts its focus to explicitly political or interest laden discourse and seeks to identify recurrent patterns of interests, goals and shared assumptions that become embedded in persuasive texts’ (Suddaby and Greenwood 2005: 8).

The importance of persuasion as a form of institutional work has been highlighted in a range of studies (Heracleous and Barrett 2001; Greenwood et al. 2002; Suddaby and Greenwood 2005). Suddaby and Greenwood (2005) identify two elements of the role of rhetoric in a contest over the legitimacy of a new

organizational form in the professions. First, actors adopted 'institutional vocabularies' or clusters of identifying words and referential texts that were used to expose contradictions in institutional logics embedded in historical understandings of professionalism. Secondly, actors employed recurring 'rhetorical strategies' designed to connect the innovation to broad templates or scenarios of change. Heracleous and Barrett's (2001) study of the role of language in promoting the adoption of electronic communication in the London Insurance Market focused similarly on identifying enthymemes or 'arguments in use' by competing stakeholders at different stages of a change effort.

Applying rhetorical analysis to the domain of institutional work would involve an examination of the forms of argument associated with creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions. An analysis of the rhetoric associated with various attempts at advocacy, for instance, might help to illuminate why some attempts to gain political or regulatory support are successful while others fail. In a situation described by Holm (1995: 405–7), the Norwegian fishermen and fish exporters each attempted to persuade the Norwegian government of the cause of and potential solution to economic problems in the industry. The fishermen argued that the problem was with the 'free market', that it 'was the fundamental problem' and should be replaced by 'a system of centralized fish export under government control'. In contrast,

[t]he fish exporters opposed this vehemently. The problem, they claimed, was international in character. There simply was no internal Norwegian cause for or solution to the crisis. In the absence of international agreements, government intervention in Norwegian fish exports could only magnify the problems. Any restraints on the Norwegian fish exporters would advantage their foreign competitors (Norway, Director of Fisheries, 1928).

Holm's (1995) analysis highlights the importance of several facets of rhetoric in the creating of new institutions. The outcome of this rhetorical battle was a win for the fish exporters – they were not put under government control, but gained the government's protection. Holm (1995: 406) explains this result in terms of 'the class bias of Norwegian politics at the time', with the fish exporters being 'core constituents of the ruling liberal-conservative coalition', while fishermen, peasants and workers were but marginal

groups within the Norwegian polity. This analysis points to an important aspect of rhetoric – the role of social position, or ethos, clearly plays an important role in the institutional dynamics described by Holm. The analysis might have benefited from a deeper incorporation of a broader set of rhetorical tools, bringing out the roles of reason (logos) and emotion (pathos) more fully in explaining this result. While an analysis of social position is often critical to understanding institutional outcomes, the force of such positions usually needs to be channelled through persuasive arguments based on both reason and emotion in order to effect institutional change. This channelling is the institutional work that we are interested in studying – how actors leverage their positions through the construction of persuasive arguments is a central question for this domain of research.

Narrative

The analysis of narrative has emerged as an important feature of discourse-oriented organization studies (Czarniawska 1997; Phillips and Hardy 2002). Narratives constitute a particular form of discourse characterized not by its intent, as with rhetoric, but by its structure: 'narratives involve temporal *chains* of interrelated events or actions, undertaken by characters' (Grant et al. 2004: 63). The analysis of narratives can involve a wide range of techniques from formal analyses of narrative structure, to interpretive analyses which emphasize the cultural meanings and locations of a narrative (Czarniawska 2000). As we have seen in our review of institutional work, actors interested in creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions often rely on narrative devices to do so (Angus 1993; Kitchener 2002). Thus, research on institutional work could utilize narrative analysis, for instance to investigate the relationship between narrative structures or cultural associations and their effectiveness as institutional devices.

Some forms of institutional work that are obvious candidates for narrative analysis include advocacy, constructing identities, theorizing, educating, valourizing and demonizing, mythologizing and undermining; each of these forms of institutional work is likely to rely at times on persuasive or compelling stories which lead actors to support the creation, maintenance or disruption of some institution. In our examination of 'mythologizing', for

instance, we discussed the way in which a Brother in the Christian Brothers School relied on narrative to provide a compelling foundation for the school's institutionalized devotion to competition. This example illustrates both the use of narrative to support and maintain institutions, and the work required to establish an enduring, stable narrative: as Czarniawska (2000: 14) argues, 'the "petrification" of narratives is not the result of the myopia of the researcher, but of intensive stabilizing work by the narrators'. From our perspective, this stabilization of narrative is an important form of institutional work; if narratives are to underpin institutions, then those narratives themselves must be stabilized, either through the employment of some enduring media or through a nested process of institutional work in which the narrative itself is institutionalized.

Narrative analysis can, therefore, help to illuminate the processes through which actors are able to fashion, communicate and embed stories that support the creating, maintaining or disrupting of institutions. Kitchener's (2002) study of institutional change in healthcare, for instance, highlights the ways in which the popular business press, academic textbook writers and consultants all engaged in the production of narratives that helped to institutionalize the merger as a solution to organizational problems of competitiveness and efficiency. Understanding the nature of this institutional work might be furthered through a more systematic analysis of the narratives produced by these actors. One interesting and useful form of narrative analysis might focus on the tropes or 'stock narratives' (Washbourne and Dicke 2001) from which these new narratives are fashioned. All narratives are constructed from existing stocks of discursive objects, so this form of analysis might help illuminate the narrative strategies employed by institutional actors as they work to create a new institution, as well as the connections between this 'new' institution and existing institutions.

Dialogue

Dialogue is distinguished from other forms of discourse by its collective accomplishment: unlike rhetoric or narrative, which can be attributed to a single actor, dialogue is always constructed by multiple actors (Gergen et al. 2004). Investigations of dialogue range from highly technical forms of

conversation analysis (Sacks 1992) to studies of appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider and Srivastva 1987). What is of interest to the study of institutional work is the generative potential of dialogue (Weick 1995; Taylor and Van Every 2000). As Gergen et al. (2004: 45) explain, a focus on generative dialogue illuminates 'those kinds of dialogic moves that may bring realities and ethics into being and bind them to particular patterns of action'. From our perspective, generative dialogue is a potentially powerful form of institutional work, creating mechanisms of social control and associating them with sets of interaction sequences to effect institutions. Although dialogical processes have not been a central feature of institutional research, a number of studies have highlighted the degree to which dialogue can be a central element in the creating, maintaining and disrupting of institutions (Sharfman et al. 1991; Lawrence et al. 2002; Everett and Jamal 2004; Mahalingam and Levitt 2004). Of the forms of institutional work we have examined in this chapter, several are likely to include dialogue and thus may be open to a dialogical analysis: these include constructing identities, constructing normative networks, educating, enabling, disconnecting and disassociating.

Gergen et al. (2004) suggest four key components of dialogue that contribute to its taking on a generative quality, and consequently provide a foundation for understanding the relationship between dialogue and institutional work: affirmation, which they argue 'may stand as the key building block to creating conjoint realities' (Gergen et al. 2004: 45); the construction of productive differences, which extend, bridge, amplify and illustrate previous statements in the dialogue; the creation of coherence through statements which 'enable preceding expressions to create a singular, ordered world about which to organize' (Gergen et al. 2004: 47); and narrative and temporal integration, which involves the use of past accounts to 'fortify the present, fill out its contours, add to its dimensions, and/or ratify its value' (Gergen et al. 2004: 48). These four aspects of generative dialogue provide an analytical basis for investigating the potential for actors to engage in institutional work through dialogue: they suggest describe the practices in which actors need to engage in order to utilize dialogue as a means of creating, maintaining or disrupting institutions. A fruitful approach to studying institutional work through dialogue, therefore, would involve the

detailed analysis of a dialogical process over time. Such a study might be done through real-time observation of an interorganizational collaboration, an archival analysis of the dialogues associated with a public issue, or an ethnography of intra-organizational dialogues. In any case, the focus would be on the practices through which participants accomplish (or fail to accomplish) the production of generative dialogue aimed at creating, maintaining or disrupting institutions.

Actor Network Theory (ANT) and the Study of Institutional Work

Actor Network Theory holds considerable promise for extending our understanding of institutional work. Derived from efforts to understand the ways in which scientific ideas emerge out of interactions embedded in social networks (Callon 1986; Latour 1987), ANT offers a combined theory and method based on the observation that social structure 'is not a noun but a verb' (Law 1992: 5). ANT focused on social processes, rather than structures, and thus offers support for a renewed focus on the social practices associated with institutionalization, rather than institutions as reified social structures (Tolbert and Zucker 1996). ANT is distinguished by its analytic focus which emphasizes the micro-interactions of both human and non-human 'actants', including technologies, media and any object that mediates social interaction (Callon 1987; Lee and Hassard 1999). From this perspective, actants vie to construct networks of social support in an ongoing competition; networks of support emerge and grow as key actants mobilize support for their position and, simultaneously, for their network of supporters. Over time, the object of interaction and the network become indistinguishable (Lee and Hassard 1999) or, in neo-institutional terms, become taken-for-granted.

ANT offers a fresh perspective for neo-institutionalists interested in understanding how institutions are created, maintained and disrupted, in several respects. First it draws attention away from the reified elements of institutions and focuses on the struggles and contests that generate and reproduce them. From an ANT perspective, the stable and enduring elements of institutions are a 'relational effect' (Law 1992) that mask an ongoing and dynamic internal struggle between competing actor-networks. Instead of studying the ephemeral outcome of institutions

(i.e. norms), an ANT perspective suggests that we might instead focus on the interactions that produce and contest those outcomes. So, for example, rather than tracking the diffusion of a managerial practice through time and space (Abrahamson 1991), institutional researchers adopting an ANT perspective would focus on exploring the processes of interaction through which the adoption of similar practices can support and reinforce coalitions and alliances between distinct networks of actants with different objectives or goals.

In this respect, ANT offers a means of addressing a particularly thorny issue for institutional research, in general, and institutional work, specifically. The agency that underlies institutional work is most visible and accessible during times of profound institutional change – when institutions are being created or destroyed. It is during those moments that the institutional fabric of taken-for-grantedness is torn and the inner workings of institutions and the intentions of actors are made available for all to see. However, it is the long periods of apparent institutional stasis, during which institutions are routinely and habitually reproduced, that present a problem for traditional empirical investigation. The epistemological issue faced by neo-institutional research is, 'how can a traditionally trained empiricist investigate a phenomenon that has become reified and is, therefore, unavailable to conscious perception?'²² The way forward, offered by ANT, is to avoid being distracted by outcomes of institutional processes and focus, instead on how distinct networks develop around conflicting definitions and interpretations that produce those outcomes. In this respect, ANT offers a useful research strategy or methodology that is well suited to extending our understanding of institutional work by problematizing the common view of institutions as concrete and enduring social structures and reminding researchers that institutions and organizations are fictions actively created and re-created by actants.

ANT's concept of 'translation' offers a second avenue for research into institutional work. A key construct within ANT, translation refers to the process by which actants within a network mobilize support by making a unified whole from different interpretations, meanings and motivations. As Law (1992: 6) describes it:

[Translation] is the core of the actor-network approach: a concern with how actors and organizations mobilize,

juxtapose and hold together the bits and pieces out of which they are composed; how they are sometimes able to prevent those bits and pieces from following their own inclinations and making off and how they manage, as a result, to conceal for a time the process of translation itself and so turn a network from a heterogeneous set of bits and pieces each with its own inclinations, into something that passes as a punctualized actor.

A key observation is that the translator-actant, itself, becomes an object of translation as the network congeals and becomes taken-for-granted. Through this process, the power structure that generates a network becomes hidden or masked through the process of translation, in much the same way that agency structures in institutions become masked as the institutions that surround them become cognitively legitimated (DiMaggio 1988; Fligstein 2001).

Translation offers both a conceptual and methodological way forward for researchers interested in moving beyond the totalizing view of institutions and institutional outcomes. Most traditional research on institutions, for example, has focused on processes of diffusion, or the ways in which organizations become isomorphic through the transmission of common templates (DiMaggio and Powell 1983) or practices (Abrahamson 1991). So, for example, researchers have traced the movement of common personnel systems (Baron et al. 1986), poison pills and golden parachutes (Davis 1991) and market entry patterns (Haveman 1993) across time and space. An ANT perspective, however, would accept that common organizational practices have diffused, but would be more attentive to local variations in motivations for adopting similar practices and would also look for local variations in the use and outcome of adopting isomorphic practices. The key distinction here is in avoiding the assumption that all actants within an emerging network behave the same way for the same reasons.

Some institutional researchers have already adopted a version of translation to avoid an oversimplified view of diffusion (Rovik 1996; Sahlin-Andersson 1996). Sahlin-Andersson (1996: 69) adeptly identifies the weakness of traditional notions of diffusion in ignoring the role of actants:

The impression is that new organization models spread almost automatically; organizations are regarded as passive entities which simply react and adapt to the latest trends. If we acknowledge that

organizations consist of thinking and acting persons, and that each change in organizational practice or organizational form requires that people act, we will find that the mechanical explanations leave unanswered most of the questions about why organizations adopt new trends.

Sahlin-Andersson reminds us that, not only do different actants adopt similar forms or practices for different reasons, in the process of adopting they also introduce subtle changes to them. That is, the process of translation means that actants adopt similar institutional practices based on different meanings, and, in the process, introduce the potential for future institutional change. A key distinction between diffusion and translation is that, while the former connotes the movement of a physical object through time and space, the latter emphasizes the changes that occur in meanings and interpretations as a physical or social object moves through a network (Czarniawska and Sevón 1996).

A third contribution ANT offers for the study of institutional work is to re-conceptualize power in processes of institutional creation, reproduction and demise. Power is less a property and more a diffuse product of network interactions in ANT (Callon and Latour 1981). That is, power is referential and distributed amongst actors within a network and it is the collective interaction that produces the power (of an idea, a position or an institution) rather than any individual actant within the network. Viewing power as a distributed process within a system (rather than a property possessed by some and not others) changes the way in which we perceive institutional change. Rather than seeking the locus of change (i.e. core or periphery) or the agents of change (i.e. institutional entrepreneurs), research should focus on the manner in which actor networks grow in size, complexity and influence. ANT theorists describe this process as four moments of translation (Denis et al. 2004: 7):

'problematization' in which translators attempt to define an issue and offer an 'obligatory passage point' drawing an initial set of actors together to solve it; 'interessement' in which translators determine and fix the interests of key actors so that they are willing to stay with an emerging project; 'enrolment' in which representatives of main groups of actors are assigned 'roles' and drawn together to build an alliance; 'mobilization' in which the actor-network is extended beyond an initial group.

These terms draw attention away from power used to mobilize resources within an institutional field, and focus attention on the social practices and skills needed to mobilize competing frames or interpretations that, in turn, define the resources and actants that comprise the field. ANT, in this respect, offers a political perspective of power in which institutions appear as powerful and stable social structures, not because of their intrinsic or material nature, but only because the network of actors that produced them see them as such. Power and agency, thus, are products of a capacity to stabilize networks and researchers interested in understanding institutional work ought, therefore, to attend to the 'social skills' (Fligstein 2001) used by actants to form associations, construct normative meaning systems and advocate new rule structures.

Semiotics and the Study of Institutional Work

The final approach to the study of institutional work that we consider is semiotics. Most simply, semiotics is the study of signs (Deely 1990; Copley and Janz 2004). More broadly, semiotics focuses on ways in which meaning is constructed (Sebeok 1976), and so is connected to though distinct from discourse analysis. A 'sign' is the dyadic relationship between 'signifier' and 'signified', where the signifier is some material manifestation (i.e. the vocalization or writing of a word) and the signified is the abstract idea or mental concept it represents (Saussure 1974). A key idea in semiotics is that signs are arbitrary or social constructs: there are no necessary or 'natural' relationships between the sounds/images of a signifier and those things signified. Instead, signs reflect meaning by accepted understandings of how systems of signs fit together. Individual speech acts gain meaning by virtue of how they fit with or differ from other speech acts.

An important extension of semiotics that bridges with existing approaches to neo-institutional research is the shared interest in mythologies. Barthes (1972), in particular, observed that sign systems become aggregated in myths. He demonstrated how the denotative content of signs in popular culture was built on connotations drawn from larger sign systems of mythologies; cultural understandings that underpin not only societal conventions, but also the means by which individuals come to understand and experience the world they inhabit.

Mythologies, similarly, occupy a central place in neo-institutional theory, with Meyer and Rowan (1977) having identified myths about rationality as the primary context within which institutions exert social control. Such myths reflect subject positions that confer legitimacy (and thus material resources) on actors, and provide the meaning system by which actors interpret and adopt practices and structures that reflect assumptions about 'rationality'. A more recent extension of this central concept is a growing awareness of other, subsidiary or possibly competing mythologies within organizational fields. These have been variously described as 'institutional logics' (Friedland and Alford 1991), 'institutional myths' (Townley 2002); 'interpretive schemes' (Ranson et al. 1980) or 'legitimizing accounts' (Creed et al. 2002).

Although recent research on processes of institutional change has advanced our understanding of the importance and diversity of mythologies in creating and dismantling institutions, we still lack a detailed understanding of precisely how mythologies communicate to actors and how skilled actors can appropriate and manipulate myths during processes of institutional stasis and change. Semiotics offers some important opportunities to address these issues. According to Barthes, mythologies communicate to actors in three ways. First, they offer a 'linguistic message' – the overt meaning communicated, for example, by the text in a magazine advertisement. Secondly, they offer a 'coded iconic message' embedded in the images that surround the text. The meaning from the coded iconic message must be deconstructed by relating the specific images in the advertisement to the overall sign system in the social field that produced the ad. Finally, mythologies present 'non-coded iconic messages' or the literal denotation of the images contained in the ad that are independent of the meta-societal code or sign system.

Some neo-institutional research has adopted elements of semiotic analysis to understand the ways in which myths are used to construct legitimacy. Zilber (2006), for example, used newspaper articles and advertisements to track the ways in which broader societal myths of Israeli culture were appropriated and manipulated to legitimate actions in the burgeoning high-technology industry. Zilber identifies four distinct myths (the individual, the state, information and the 'enchantment of technology') each of which echo pre-existing myths of Israeli

culture, but were skillfully modified by different sub-communities to appropriate the legitimacy of technology for their own purposes. More interesting, perhaps, is her meticulous analysis of how these underlying myths change over time and in reaction to changes in the marketplace (described as 'moments of translation'). The key observation offered by this research is that the signs and symbols that comprise rational myths are connotatively related to broader social and cultural myths and these relationships form and contribute significantly to a toolkit of institutional work.

A related application of mythologies to institutional work occurs in Suddaby and Greenwood's (2005) analysis of the emergence of multidisciplinary practices (MDPs) in the professions. Proponents and opponents of MDPs drew on common mythologies of 'professionalism' to advocate their position for change or stasis. Those opposing the new form drew on the accepted and dominant myth of professionalism as a public service or a form of 'trusteeship'. Opponents, by contrast, offered an emerging myth of 'professional expertise' in which commercial interests were viewed to support, rather than detract from, the public interest. Suddaby and Greenwood (2005) conclude that institutional change is predicated on actors' skill in exploiting the contradictions inherent in the myths that underpin institutions.

Semiotics offers both a methodology and a language for describing and understanding mythologies. Mythologies, in turn, offer a key point of access for enriching our understanding of institutional logics, interpretive schemes and other constructs that have been identified as key to creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions. While current research has paid attention to describing the characteristics of institutional logics and demonstrating their spread through organizational fields, considerably less attention has been focused on the social practices by which actors identify and respond to the appropriate symbolic trappings of rational structure among the myriad of signs and signifiers available to them. Research on institutional work could draw on semiotics to attend to the denotative and connotative elements of rational myths, and the social and cultural practices which erect and maintain those myths.

The semiotic approach offered by Charles Saunders Peirce differs from that of Saussure by its more 'realist' assumptions about the origins of signs.

That is, unlike Saussure, Peirce thought that the sign was a 'real' object independent of the linguistic process required to encode or decode it. Two significant bridges may be built from a structuralist approach to semiotics and our understanding of institutional work. The first is the potential for the inclusion of non-linguistic matter in the semiotic analysis of institutional work. Physical symbols, object and artifacts form an important but relatively unexplored element in the chains of activities that constitute institutional work (Mitroff and Kilmann 1976; Morgan et al. 1983). Physical symbols have long been understood as an important method of understanding relationships between individuals and organizations: dress codes (Rafaeli and Pratt 1993; Pratt and Rafaeli 2001), office arrangement and design (Elsbach 2004) and even contracts (Kaghan and Lounsbury 2006) have been identified as important indicia of power structures and cultural interactions within organizations. All of these physical objects represent potential sites of institutional work, as they are designed, crafted, modified and destroyed in relation to sets of institutions that give them meaning and power (Pratt and Rafaeli 2001). Semiotic analyses could help to unpack the relationships between these physical artifacts (signifiers), their institutional meanings (signified) and the institutional work that establishes these connections.

A second contribution of semiotics to the study of institutional work stems from Peirce's structuralist orientation to meaning systems. Implicit in Peirce's complex and formal semiotic system is an assumption that meaning structures are both formal and logical. That is, the patterns of relations between signs within a larger sign system exist objectively and can be accessed empirically. As such, researchers ought to be able to capture and compare the cultural meaning systems embedded in various semiotic codes. As Mohr (1998: 345) has argued, researchers adopting a strong structuralist perspective of semiotics ought to be able to measure the meanings 'that are embedded within institutions, practices and cultural artifacts'. Applying diverse relational methods such as lattice and correspondence analysis (the former was first developed by C.S. Peirce) to textual data, Mohr has developed a unique methodology and body of work that measures and maps the basic structures of meanings within discourse communities (Mohr 1994; 1998; Mohr and Duquenne 1997). While clearly acknowledging the risks and dangers of reducing meaning

systems inappropriately, Mohr's body of work offers a useful impetus to formally quantify semiotic technique and make the comparison of discursive relationships more systematic and transparent. More significantly, Mohr's work demonstrates the refreshing absence of 'methodological dogmatism' (Mick 1986) within semiotic approaches.

A third contribution of semiotics to the study of institutional work is the focus on meaning. Although researchers have analysed the role of the symbolic in institutional processes, such research has often been based on relatively dismissive assumptions about the role of symbols in opposition to the technical or material environment that produces them. In such research, symbolic action is described as an empty gesture that decouples ceremony from function, as when companies adopt long-term incentives plans but do not actually use them (Westphal and Zajac 1998). Rather than dismissing such action as 'merely symbolic', however, semiotics reminds us of the value of making symbolic aspects of experience primary in our analyses. It is insufficient to show that a managerial practice is adopted ceremonially. We need to know what message this action communicates, to which audiences it is intended, and why this 'signal' was selected from the entire strata of symbolic material available. Elevating the empirical status of symbols and signs, in turn, creates many new research sites and questions for researchers interested in how meaning can be manipulated to effect institutional change or maintain institutional arrangements. The work associated with such symbolic phenomena as corporate logos, board meetings, product design, corporate architecture and corporate art collections can be interrogated to provide useful data on how sign systems construct meaning and maintain or alter institutional understandings. Adopting semiotic approaches to institutional work can, therefore, draw attention to 'the quotidian and most institutionalized behaviours' and 'the replication of symbolic orders' which, as Friedland and Alford (1991: 250) observe, underpins the way that institutions are reproduced and changed.

Other Approaches

By focusing on discourse analysis, actor-network theory and semiotics as approaches to the study of institutional work, our aim has been to open up the analytical space of institutional theory. We are not

suggesting that these represent any kind of exhaustive set of methodologies or analytic frames, or that they are incompatible with the data collection and analysis techniques familiar to most institutional scholars. Indeed, we believe most research on institutional work will tend to 'look' very much like traditional institutional research, relying on archival analyses, qualitative field-work, ethnographic observation and hopefully incorporating quantitative techniques such as social network analysis and correspondence analysis. What discourse analysis, actor-network theory and semiotics offer is an additional set of lenses for institutional scholars to try on in order to more clearly see and describe the dynamics of institutional work, which have only begun to be revealed using our traditional frames.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have begun to document a new direction in institutional research – the study of institutional work. We have argued that this direction stems significantly from a small set of articles by DiMaggio (1988) and Oliver (1991; 1992) which highlighted the important influence of actors on institutions – purposefully creating, maintaining and disrupting them. We further argued that the emergence of practice theory provides a theoretical foundation for understanding institutional work. In reviewing the empirical institutional research in three major journals over the past 15 years, we found that scholars have indeed been paying attention to institutional work; instances of each category of institutional work – creating, maintaining, disrupting – were in evidence. Thus, we were able in this chapter to develop a preliminary taxonomy of institutional work which outlines specific forms of work undertaken to create, maintain and disrupt institutions. In doing so, this chapter provides a foundation for future research into the active agency and specific tasks undertaken by actors in institutional contexts. Our review also points out, however, that our understanding of institutional work is formative at best. Large gaps exist in our ability to describe institutional work, let alone explain it. The study of institutional work has the potential to provide organizational scholars with a fascinating and important arena for theoretical and empirical work for many years. To conclude the chapter, we discuss a set of issues that are illustrative

of the potential that the study of institutional work has to reinvigorate institutional research and theory.

Opening up the Black Box of Diffusion

The concept of diffusion is central to institutional theory, and particularly to the empirical research that makes up the central core of this tradition. A range of institutional writings have located diffusion as a central dynamic in the institutionalization of a structure or practice (Zucker 1987; Tolbert and Zucker 1996; Greenwood et al. 2002). The pattern of events and relationships among them that define the process of institutionalization involves an object first being recognized, then accepted by relatively few actors, and then widely diffused and broadly accepted within a field (Stinchcombe 1965; Meyer and Rowan 1977; Zucker 1987; Leblebici et al. 1991). For many years, an archetypal form of institutional research has been based on this model, examining the diffusion of some organizational structure or practice, and attempting to explain the factors that led organizations to take on that structure or practice (Tolbert and Zucker 1983; Baron et al. 1986; Hinings and Greenwood 1988; Davis 1991; Haveman 1993). In their study of the diffusion of civil service reform, for example, Tolbert and Zucker (1983) found that this pattern of diffusion involved two sets of mechanisms, with early adopters basing their decisions on technical grounds and later adopters responding primarily to legitimacy pressures.

What these discussions of diffusion tend to gloss over, however, is the practical, creative work necessary to make diffusion happen: organizations rarely take on the structures and practices of other organizations wholesale, without conflict and without effort. Rather, the diffusion of innovation throughout a field involves substantial institutional work on the part of organizational actors who must persuade others in their organizations of the merits of the innovation, experiment with the innovation in an effort to understand it and how it might apply to their own situations, modify it in order to gain internal legitimacy, and forge practical connections for the new structure or practice. These forms of work are especially important when diffusion involves the translation of institutions across domains, such as from work to non-work life, or from market-based fields of activity to previously non-market arenas, such as healthcare, education or social welfare.

Institutional Work as a Critical Approach

A second set of issues that are raised by attending to institutional work concern the power dynamics in fields and organizations. One of the important facets of the 'old institutionalism' that has largely been lost with the shift in emphasis associated with the 'new institutionalism' is the highlighting of power relations and their relationship to institutions in organizations and societies (Selznick 1949; Gouldner 1954). This move away from power has mirrored a more general move away from considerations of power in organization theory following the demise of Marxist and neo-Marxist analyses that were prominent in the 1970s. Neo-Marxist perspectives lent to organization theory a political perspective from which critiques of organizational structures and practices could be launched (Clegg and Dunkerley 1980). Absent from this perspective, institutional studies since the 1980s have tended to remain apolitical in their analyses of power in social life (Hinings and Greenwood 2002).

The concept of institutional work provides an opportunity for the re-injection of political critique into institutional research and theory. The focus of institutional work on the micro-practices of actors in relation to organizational and societal institutions is consistent with the broader shift in social theories of power: the work of such scholars as Foucault (1979) and Bourdieu (1977; 1993) has prompted scholars from across a range of disciplines to examine the micro-level routines, practices and habits of power. A critical approach to institutional work could examine a number of issues in relation to the role of power and politics in creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions. At a most basic level, all of the practices we described above as institutional work require resources, which are available to some actors and not others. A critical view of institutional work could begin to examine how those resources are distributed and controlled, and by whom. Although we argue that institutional life incorporates the work of many actors, we do not imagine it does so in anything but a highly structured and hierarchical manner – many of the forms of institutional work we have highlighted, such as vesting and policing, for instance, often require the involvement of the state or other elite agencies with the capacity to rely on force or domination to effect institutional ends (Lawrence et al. 2001).

A second level of critical analysis might begin to look at the relationship between institutional work and the contradictions (Seo and Creed 2002) that are inherent in organizational fields. Seo and Creed (2002: 225) argue that 'multilevel processes produce a complex array of interrelated but often mutually incompatible institutional arrangements' which together 'provide a continuous source of tensions and conflicts within and across institutions'. Seo and Creed link these institutional contradictions to the potential for transformational action, but another equally likely possibility is that institutional contradictions will engender a host of practices aimed not at institutional transformation, but at repairing or concealing those contradictions. Since all institutional arrangements privilege some actors, it will be in the interest of those actors to try to maintain such arrangements even, or especially, when they recognize the contradictions constituted by the overlapping institutions and fields which effect their own situations. A critical analysis of institutional work could highlight that repairing and concealing work, who is doing it and why, what resources are being drawn on, which actors are suffering because of it, and what conditions might change should those contradictions be more widely exposed, discussed and potentially addressed.

In sum, adopting a critical perspective of institutional work should reacquaint theorists with the primary research question of political economy – 'who benefits from existing institutional arrangements?' Unlike traditional approaches of political economy, however, a critical approach to institutional work concentrates attention on the act of production, rather than the product itself. That is, a critical view is premised on the assumption that no institutional outcome is to be regarded as material, stable or enduring. Rather, institutional work must be conceived of as the production of unity and attention must be paid to the means by which such unity is achieved. A critical methodology should seek to strip away the 'naturalizing' effects of taken-for-grantedness away from institutional research and address the core problem of how man-made products and events come to be perceived and represented as natural social orders.

Bridging Levels of Analysis

The third direction for research on institutional work that we want to address here stems from the

status of institutions as nested systems (Holm 1995). A nested systems perspective is completely consistent with the notion of institutional work: as Holm (1995: 400) explains, from a 'nested-systems perspective, a distinction is made between action guided by institutions, on the one hand, and action aimed explicitly at manipulating institutional parameters, on the other'. If we take a broad view of institutions, then we see that they exist in nested systems across many levels, from micro-level institutions in groups and organizations that regulate forms of interaction among members, to field-level institutions such as those associated with professions or industries, to societal institutions concerned with the role of family, the nature of gender and the status of religion. The study of institutional work provides a distinctive way of understanding and examining the relationship between institutions at these different levels. From an institutional perspective, levels are not 'aggregate' phenomena. Fields are no more a collection of organizations than organizations are a collection of individuals; rather, higher-order social collectives are accomplishments of their members, socially constructed and discursively maintained. The nested relationship between institutions at different levels, therefore, involves particular forms of institutional work – translation, interpretation, modification, accommodation – that connects institutions across levels, potentially drawing one level to create new institutions at another level.

Adopting a nested view of institutional work means that researchers will have to become accustomed to viewing institutional phenomena as a homologous microcosm of broader social structures (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). So, for example, if we are to know anything about the institutional logic of a particular organizational field, we cannot understand that logic without exploring and gaining insight into the logics of the social fields that surround it. Similarly, researchers must shed the unfortunate structural assumption that an actor engages only in a single organizational field. Rather, actors occupy simultaneous (and Bourdieu would add, homologous) positions in multiple fields and it is really the intersection and contestation of multiple logics within nested fields that provide actors the resources to engage in activities of contestation and reconceptualization that we refer to here as 'institutional work'. Institutions, thus, are to be viewed as the ongoing product of a

series of integrated and semi-autonomous social fields, each of which has a distinct history, logic and structure. While such fields are somewhat distinct, they are best described as open systems whose boundaries are always in dispute. Research on institutional work must attend specifically to the conflict that exists between contested fields and the ways in which boundaries are maintained in fields where the conflict is less overt.

To conclude, we suggest that the concept of institutional work provides a new way of seeing institutions. We urge researchers to focus on the interstitial elements of institutions: the gap between structure and action, the moment that separates agency from unintended consequences or the frenetic production of meaning that generates the illusion of stasis and permanence in institutions. Most emphatically, we want to break the dramatic spell of institutions and draw attention behind the scenes, to the actors, writers and stage-hands that produce them. In this sense our call to attend to institutional work draws a distinctly political approach to institutions in which our core puzzle is to understand the ways in which disparate sets of actors, each pursuing their own vision, can become co-ordinated in a common project. By paying attention to institutional work, theorists can avoid the subjective illusion of institutional outcomes and begin to unpack the relational and interactive moments of institutional production.

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Notes

1. There is a variant of practice theory employed by more structuralist neo-institutionalists (see, for example, Mohr 1998; Lounsbury and Ventresca 2003). This strand of practice theory involves a shift of traditional structuralist approaches toward richer conceptualizations of social structure and process that occur at the intersection of the sociology of culture, stratification, politics and institutional analysis. This work often draws on network methods and draws inspiration from Bourdieu's 'field' construct.

2. The extent of this empirical problem is reflected in the relatively high number of instances of institutional work we were able to identify in the literature for creating new institutions as compared to the low number of observed instances of maintaining or disrupting institutions.

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