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6 Institutions, Institutional Effects, and Institutionalism

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Institution and institutionalization are core concepts of general sociology. Across the social sciences, scholars reach for these terms to connote, in one fashion or another, the presence of authoritative rules or binding organization. As I write, for example, the university where I work is holding a series of symposia on institutional racism. This series presumably differs from one that might be held on racism—or so at least its announcements suggest. The symposia seem to concentrate more on historical, organizational, and structural features of racism—institutional racism—features distinct from the race-related orientations and preferences of individuals.

This usage conforms with what may be the core denotation of *institution* in general sociology, that is, an institution as an organized, established, procedure.[1] These special procedures are often represented as the constituent rules of society (the "rules of the game"). They are then experienced and analyzable as external to the consciousness of individuals (Berger, Berger, and Kellner 1973:11). This most general denotation may help us understand why some scholars have even identified sociology with the study of institutions. Durkheim did so, for example, calling sociology "the science of institutions" (e.g., [1901] 1950:1x). And one commentator on Weber suggests that "the theory of institutions is the sociological counterpart of the theory of competition in economics" (Lachmann 1971:68).

But the import and centrality of the concept of institution (and of its related terms) have not guaranteed clear and thoughtful usage. Some scholars invoke *institution* simply to refer to particularly large, or important, associations. Others seem to identify institutions with environmental effects. And some simply equate the term with "cultural" effects, or with historical ones.[2]

This conceptual variety and vagueness is striking. It is also troubling, given the recent emergence of various "new institutionalisms" across the social sciences: in political science (e.g., March and Olsen 1984), in economics (Langlois 1986), in psychology (Farr and Moscovici 1984), and now in organizational analysis (e.g., this volume). Before such institutionalisms themselves become institutionalized—reified as distinct "theoretical strategies," codified

in textbooks, and taken as given by practitioners—we had better take stock. In this spirit, this chapter is largely concerned with the conceptualization of institutions, institutional effects, and institutionalism. My intentions are twofold. First, I intend to describe a core structure within the semantic field of institutional terms. I recommend that we employ exclusively these core meanings and avoid a number of current conceptualizations, many of which serve only to confound institutional terms with other concepts or build untested empirical claims into our definitions. Second, by employing this clarification, I attempt to specify the distinguishing features of institutionalism as a line of theory.

In brief, I argue that institutionalization best denotes a distinct social property or state (and I attempt to specify this property), and that institutions should not be specifically identified, as they often are, with either cultural elements or a type of environmental effect (sections 1 and 2 below). It then becomes possible to represent institutionalization as a particular set of social reproductive processes, while simultaneously avoiding the opposition of institutionalization and "change" (section 3). And it becomes possible to represent institutionalism in an entirely straightforward way, as arguments featuring higher-order constraints imposed by socially constructed realities, and to distinguish it from other lines of argument (sections 4 and 5).

While this chapter concentrates on basic conceptualization, it is decidedly substantive in its aspirations. I hope to provide materials of immediate utility for communicating about, organizing, and advancing substantive arguments. (Concepts without propositions do not constitute theory, as Homans properly reminded Parsons, but propositions linking ill-formed concepts also can represent much wasted effort.) My examples and applications are drawn from organizational analysis, but the basic conceptual issues are entirely general ones.[3]

1. Institutions and Institutionalization

I begin with examples of objects commonly thought to represent institutions. Consider the following list:

marriage	academic tenure
sexism	presidency
the contract	the vacation
wage labor	attending college
the handshake	the corporation
insurance	the motel
formal organization	the academic discipline
the army	voting

First note some differences between these objects. Some can be referred to as organizations, others not. Some may seem more "cultural," others more

"structural." But the objects share important commonalities that encourage us to group them together. All are variously "production systems" (Fararo and Skvoretz 1986), or "enabling structures," or social "programs," or performance scripts. Each of these metaphors connotes stable designs for chronically repeated activity sequences. This basic imagery is at the core of sociological uses.[4]

We can tighten our conceptualization of institutional terms considerably by pursuing these metaphors. *Institution* represents a social order or pattern that has attained a certain state or property; *institutionalization* denotes the process of such attainment.[5] By *order* or *pattern*, I refer, as is conventional, to standardized interaction sequences. An institution is then a social pattern that reveals a particular reproduction process. When departures from the pattern are counteracted in a regulated fashion, by repetitively activated, socially constructed, controls—that is, by some set of rewards and sanctions—we refer to a pattern as institutionalized.[6] Put another way: institutions are those social patterns that, when chronically reproduced, owe their survival to relatively self-activating social processes. Their persistence is not dependent, notably, upon recurrent collective mobilization, mobilization repetitively reengineered and reactivated in order to secure the reproduction of a pattern. That is, institutions are not reproduced by "action," in this strict sense of collective intervention in a social convention. Rather, routine reproductive procedures support and sustain the pattern, furthering its reproduction—unless collective action blocks, or environmental shock disrupts, the reproductive process.

This qualification ("unless . . . ") is important. The discussion so far might suggest that institutionalization is either equivalent to, or a form of, stability or survival. But this identification is inaccurate. If one holds a pattern to be institutionalized, one points to the presence of ongoing reproductive processes whereby "departures from normal forms of action defined by the [institutional] design tend to be counteracted" through routines (Fararo and Skvoretz 1986:224). But whether these processes actually succeed, and ensure the pattern's survival, is an entirely separate matter. For example, in certain conditions, high institutionalization can make a structure more vulnerable to environmental shock (from internal or external environments). Tocqueville's analysis of the "Old Regime and the French Revolution" provides a classic example: the French state was highly institutionalized, but in a way that made it highly vulnerable to environmental change (it was a "house of cards," in Tocqueville's phrasing) (Tocqueville [1856] 1955).

Consider again the above entries in the list of putative institutions. We consider voting to be an institutionalized social pattern in (say) the United States, while not in (say) Haiti. We do so in large part because voting in the United States is embedded in a host of supporting and reproducing practices and is not highly dependent (as it is in Haiti) on repeated political intervention for its employment. Similarly, the academic discipline is an institution within the modern

university system because it is linked to other similarly institutional practices that, taken together, constitute the university system. These institutional practices require, again, relatively little "action"—repetitive mobilization and intervention—for their sustenance. (More on the differences between institutionalization and "action" in a moment.)

These examples remind us additionally that institutionalization is a relative property: we decide whether to consider an object to be an institution depending upon analytical context. The examples just above suggest one dimension of this general relativity: whether a practice is an institution is, (1), relative to particular contexts. But we can extend and formalize this relativity a bit more.

Within any system having multiple levels or orders of organization, (2), primary levels of organization can operate as institutions relative to secondary levels of organization. A microcomputer's basic operating system appears as an institution relative to its word-processing program (especially to a software engineer). In collectivities, constitutional procedures may appear institutional relative to practices of formal organization, and the latter practices institutional relative to unorganized social practices.

Further, whether an object is an institution is (3) relative to a particular dimension of a relationship. In certain respects, Yale University is more institution to New Haven than to most other communities (it is a prominent fixture of the local environment); yet in other respects, Yale is less an institution in New Haven than elsewhere (Paul DiMaggio notes, only half kidding, that the prestige of an Ivy League university seems to equal the square root of the distance from it). Parents are more institutions to their own children, than to other kids, as taken-for-granted realities; yet children may contest their own parents' authority more than that of others' parents.

Finally, whether an object is an institution is, (4), relative to centrality. In systems, cores are institutions relative to peripheries. The regime of international politico-economic coordination is more an external, objective, constraint for Ghana than for the IMF. An association can be more an institution—more a fixed feature of an external environment—for a nonmember than for a member.

The details and dimensions are here less important than the general point—that the same term, "in a different reference" (MacIver 1931:16), may, or may not, denote an institution. Whether we consider an object an institution depends upon what we are considering to be our analytical problem.

How Do Institutions Operate?

Institutions are not just constraint structures; all institutions simultaneously empower and control. Institutions present a constraint/freedom duality (Fararo and Skvoretz 1986): they are vehicles for activity within constraints (thus the imagery of "production systems" suggested by Fararo and Skvoretz). All institutions are frameworks of programs or rules establishing identities and activity scripts for such identities.[7] For example, the formal organization, con-

sidered as an institution (March and Simon 1958:2–4; Stinchcombe 1973), is a packaged social technology, with accompanying rules and instructions for its incorporation and employment in a social setting. Institutions thus embody "programmed actions" (Berger and Luckmann 1967:75) or "common responses to situations" (Mead [1934] 1972:263). Institutionalized programs then produce expectational bonds or "reciprocal expectations of predictability" (Field 1979:59). Put informally: institutions operate primarily by affecting persons' prospective bets about the collective environment and collective activity.[8]

Through their effects on expectations, institutions become taken for granted, in some fashion. The qualifier ("in some fashion") is a crucial one: while most discussions directly associate institutionalization with "taken-for-grantedness" (e.g., Zucker, ch. 4, this vol., and 1983), this phenomenological concept is an ambiguous and underanalyzed one. Taken-for-granted objects are those that are treated as exterior and objective constraints (see, e.g., Berger and Luckmann 1967; Zucker 1983). But such facticity can take on a number of quite different forms. First, taken-for-grantedness is distinct from comprehension, as is well recognized (e.g., Berger and Luckmann 1967:60): a pattern may be treated as exterior, objective, constraining, whether or not persons feel they understand the pattern well. But also, and less recognized, taken-for-grantedness is distinct from conscious awareness: one may take for granted some pattern because one does not perceive it, or think about it; alternatively, one may subject the pattern to substantial scrutiny, but still take it for granted—if in a quite different fashion—as an external objective constraint. Further, taken-for-grantedness is distinct from evaluation: one may subject a pattern to positive, negative, or no evaluation, and in each case (differently) take it for granted.[9]

When analysts refer to institutions as taken for granted, they may have a more specific idea in mind. They are suggesting that institutions are those standardized activity sequences that have taken for granted rationales, that is, in sociological parlance, some common social "account" of their existence and purpose. Persons may not well comprehend an institution, but they typically have ready access to some functional or historical account of why the practice exists. They also have an expectation that further explication is available, should they require it. Institutions are taken for granted, then, in the sense that they are both treated as relative fixtures in a social environment and explicated (accounted for) as functional elements of that environment.[10]

To What Should Institutionalization Be Opposed?

It may further clarify our understanding of what institutionalization is if we consider what it is not. If a social object is not institutionalized, to what analytical class might it be said to belong?

Since institutionalization is a property of an order, it can be opposed, in the

first instance, to the absence of order—in effect, to social entropy. But beyond this rather trivial contrast (and secondly), institutionalization can also be distinguished from the absence of reproductive processes. For example, we may find some social patterns that are the recurrent products of elementary social behavior (as pictured by Homans, or in contemporary biosociology). We may wish to consider some generic prestige or esteem processes, or common social patterns that emerge in cases of institutional breakdown, as examples (Homans 1961: ch. 16). In addition, some social patterns are repeated or persistent unintended consequences of social interaction, rather than chronically reproduced patterns. For example, consider the repetitive operation of some general sociological regularity, like the "social distancing" processes driving some patterns of housing segregation. In these cases, we may find a persisting social pattern, but it is not secured through the self-activating reproduction processes characteristic of institutions.

Third, institutionalization can be distinguished from other forms of reproduction. For example, we may wish to consider deep socialization (e.g., internalization) as a process distinct from institutionalization and as an alternative medium for the reproduction of social patterns. (It would be useful to have a typology of main social reproduction forms.) Here I wish to concentrate on just one contrast: between institutionalization and "action," as I have defined it above, as two different reproduction forms. A social pattern is reproduced through action if persons repeatedly (re)mobilize and (re)intervene in historical process to secure its persistence. In some Latin American countries, democracy is sustained (when it is sustained) by action in this sense, rather than by the institutional processes that largely promote it in (say) the United Kingdom. "Action" is a much weaker form of reproduction than institutionalization, because it faces all the "logic of collective action" problems well established in the literature (e.g., Olson 1965).

Similarly, when Dahrendorf speaks of the "institutionalization of class conflict" (1964:267ff.), he is arguing that class action is supplanted: that the political interaction between classes proceeds largely without recurrent attempted interventions by organized classes into social processes and, additionally, that "class conflict" may be sustained in the absence of persisting class subcultures or class consciousness. (Whether he is right or wrong in so arguing is, here, irrelevant.) Class relations become less immediately political, since they become naturalized as a stable feature of constraining environment—they become institutionalized.

This institutionalization/action contrast is a central one. If one participates conventionally in a highly institutionalized social pattern, one does not take action, that is, intervene in a sequence, make a statement. If shaking hands is an institutionalized form of greeting, one takes action only by refusing to offer one's hand. If attending college has become an institutionalized stage of the life course, a young person takes action more by forgoing college than by enrolling

in it. The point is a general one: one enacts institutions; one takes action by departing from them, not by participating in them.

To summarize so far, without attempting a tight definition: institutions are socially constructed, routine-reproduced (ceteris paribus), program or rule systems. They operate as relative fixtures of constraining environments and are accompanied by taken-for-granted accounts. This description accords with the metaphors repeatedly invoked in discussions—metaphors of frameworks or rules. These imageries capture simultaneous contextual empowerment and constraint, and taken-for-grantedness.

Examples of Arguably Less Productive Conceptualizations of Institutional Terms

I have argued that institutionalization is best represented as a particular state, or property, of a social pattern. I now need to distinguish this conceptualization, briefly, from other current depictions.

Some analysts render institutionalization as a "property" idea, as I do here, but associate it with the properties of legitimacy, or formal organization, or contextuality. Each of these associations seems misguided. Legitimacy may be an outcome of institutionalization, or it may contribute to it, but illegitimate elements can clearly become institutionalized (organized crime, political corruption, fraud, etc.).[11] Similarly, while we may wish to consider formal organization as an institution, or argue that formal organization can carry or generate institutions (e.g., Zucker 1987), or that some organizations have become institutions (the Red Cross), it is arbitrary to identify institutionalization with formal organization. We have good reason to consider voting and marriage to be institutions, for example, and they are not formal organizations.

Further, while some analysts equate contextual or environmental effects with institutional ones, they are analytically quite distinct. All institutional effects have contextual qualities, as we have seen (the quality of external, objective, constraint), but not all contextual effects are institutional ones.[12] Many contextual effects are aggregative in character, for example, rather than institutional. We may consider a number of international market effects on national economies as being contextual effects; while such markets have institutional foundations, we typically do not consider their effects as immediately or proximately institutional.

Context invokes a spatial contrast: external, widespread, or global, versus local. Some analysts use institutionalization not to invoke context but to delimit a particular level of analysis, most often a macrolevel. *Macro*, like contextual, can specify a wide span of both time and space, or alternatively—in what I think is a tighter usage—it can invoke an hierarchic comparison: more highly organized versus less highly organized.[13] In any case, identification of institution with any one level of analysis is also misleading. Some institutional effects

are not macro-organized—for example, some of the "interaction rituals" captured by Goffman. These patterns may be widespread and therefore have contextual qualities, but they are institutionalized at submacro orders of organization. (More on these issues in a later section.)[14]

A third category of definitions differentiates institutions by associating them with particular social domains or controls. In organizational analysis, especially, many commentators associate institutions in one way or another with "culture," that is, with normative effects, ideas, conceptions, "preconscious understandings," myths, ritual, ideology, theories, or accounts. This conceptualization greatly confuses discussion and development of institutional arguments because any of the various social control structures can be more, or less, institutionalized; no one in itself encapsulates institutionalization. "Culture"—typically represented as those forms of "consciousness" with socially coordinating effects—may be more or less institutionalized. (For example, one might consider single parenting as a significant cultural pattern, but still not wish to represent it, at least yet, as a highly institutionalized one.) All institutions embody social rationales or accounts, but this is no reason to identify institutions with the class of rationales or accounts. It may be that analysts tend to equate institutionalization with culture for a historical reason: in the modern nation-states, much institutionalization is carried by cultural rules (as argued, e.g., in Meyer, Boli, and Thomas 1987).[15] But institutionalization is better reserved as an abstract property that can characterize many forms of social coordination.[16]

2. Forms and Degrees of Institutionalization

Forms of Institutionalization

One can delimit three primary carriers of institutionalization: formal organization, regimes, and culture. Perhaps most discussion has concentrated on institutional effects emanating from formal organization, for example, studies of the effects of work organization on individual conformity (Kohn 1969).

There are then two primary types of informally organized institutionalization. The first I denote by the term *regimes*, referring to institutionalization in some central authority system—that is, in explicitly codified rules and sanctions—without primary embodiment in a formal organizational apparatus. A legal or constitutional system can operate as a regime in this sense, but so can, for example, a profession (or for that matter, a criminal syndicate). With regimes, expectations focus upon monitoring and sanctioning by some form of a differentiated, collective, "center."[17]

Institutionalization can also be carried by "culture": here simply those rules, procedures, and goals without primary representation in formal organization, and without monitoring and sanctioning by some "central" authority. These rules are, rather, customary or conventional in character. Institutionalizing in culture produces expectations about the properties, orientations, and behavior of individuals, as constraining "others" (Mead) in the social environment.

In saying that institutions can be carried in different ways, I have distinguished between different types of rule or control structures (organization, regime, culture).[18] Institutions can certainly have a complex embodiment: in both regime and culture, for example (citizenship). But we need some such distinctions for a number of reasons. First, they force us to keep separate institutionalization, as a property, from particular types of rule or control structures. Also, institutions having different primary carriers (e.g., the handshake in "culture") may operate in different fashions. Further, we may wish to distinguish collectivities, or historical periods, by their relative reliance on the differing modes of institutionalization. For example, consider the claim that the history of the modern Western world is driven particularly by institutions "devolving from a dominant universalist historical culture" (Meyer, Boli, and Thomas 1987:27).

Degrees of Institutionalization

Can we generate a rough metric of institutionalization? For example, how might we compare the relative institutionalization of the following institutions in contemporary American society: the liberal state, racial discrimination, the corporation, sexism?[19] This topic represents a persistent weak point in institutional discussion, and I do little to remedy the problem here, beyond delimiting the issue.[20]

We can pull together some clues about how to proceed from the literature. Goffman's "total" institutions are entirely encompassing structures, highly sequestered from environments and tightly integrating various aspects of life around a singular plan (Goffman 1961). Berger and Luckmann provide more general imagery when they suggest that total institutionalization is, archetypically, liturgy—the total absence of "action." All "problems" are common; all "solutions" socially constructed and reified; all expectations common and publicly hegemonic (Berger and Luckmann 1967:80).[21] With total institutionalization, "the only distinctive contribution an individual can make is in the skill and style of performance" (Shibutani 1986:16).

This imagery suggests that one can perhaps best conceive of degrees of institutionalization in terms of relative vulnerability to social intervention. An institution is highly institutionalized if it presents a near insuperable collective action threshold, a formidable collective action problem to be confronted before affording intervention in and thwarting of reproductive processes.

A given institution is less likely to be vulnerable to intervention if it is more embedded in a framework of institutions. It is more embedded if it has been long in place (so that other practices have adapted to it) or more centrally lo-

cated within a framework (so that it is deeply situated). It is more embedded if it is integrated within a framework by unifying accounts based in common principles and rules. Further, the greater the linkage of this institution to constraints conceived to be socially exogenous—namely, to either socially exogenous (transcendental) moral authority or presumed laws of nature—the less vulnerability to intervention.[22]

The degree of institutionalization is also dependent on the form of taken-for-grantedness. If members of a collectivity take for granted an institution because they are unaware of it and thus do not question it, or because any propensity to question has halted due to elimination of alternative institutions or principles (e.g., by delegitimating them through reference to natural or spiritual law), the institution will be decidedly less vulnerable to challenge and intervention, and will be more likely to remain institutionalized.[23]

3. Institutional Change

There are a number of distinct types and processes of institutional change. Remembering the principle that every entry is an exit from someplace else, we can distinguish four major types of institutional change: institutional formation, institutional development, deinstitutionalization, and reinstitutionalization.[24]

Institutional formation is an exit from social entropy, or from nonreproductive behavioral patterns, or from reproductive patterns based upon "action." Examples of these three exits, respectively, might be the institutionalization of the self, as it is differentiated from nature and the gods (e.g., in the Greek period [Snell 1960]), of sexuality (as discussed by Foucault 1978 or Elias 1978), and of class conflict (Dahrendorf 1964).

Institutional development (or elaboration) represents institutional continuation rather than an exit—a change within an institutional form. An example might be the expansion of citizenship, as charted by Marshall (1964).

Deinstitutionalization represents an exit from institutionalization, toward reproduction through recurrent action, or nonreproductive patterns, or social entropy. The crescive deinstitutionalizations of gender, or of community corporate structures, as central socio-organizational vehicles, are examples.

Reinstitutionalization represents exit from one institutionalization, and entry into another institutional form, organized around different principles or rules. The long-term transformation of religion in Western societies, captured in discussions of secularization, is an example of the reinstitutionalization of a persisting social force.

There are a number of distinct ways in which institutions, once established, can change (i.e., develop, become deinstitutionalized, be reinstitutionalized) (see generally the discussion in Eisenstadt 1968:418–20). Institutions can develop contradictions with their environments (as pictured in ecological thinking), with other institutions (as pictured by Marx), or with elementary social behavior (as pictured by Homans 1961: ch. 16; see also Friedland and Alford, ch. 10, this vol.). These contradictions, or, separately, exogenous environmental shocks, can force institutional change by blocking the activation of reproductive procedures or by thwarting the successful completion of reproductive procedures, thus modifying or destroying the institution. Institutions can embody endogenous change as well: for example, procedural rationality, as a social institution itself, drives social change by routinizing it.

4. Institutional Effects and Institutionalism

Institutional effects are those that feature institutions as causes. The imagined institutional effects may be upon institutions, as dependent variables (e.g., the effects of the state on science), or upon dependent variables that are not in themselves represented as institutions (e.g., the effects of changes in the educational system upon consumer choices). One can thus identify two major classes of institutional effects.

Institutional *explanations* are those featuring institutional effects, or that weight institutional effects highly relative to other effects, or that isolate institutionally caused features of an analytical object. Institutional *theories* then are those that feature institutional explanations. *Institutionalism* is a theoretical strategy that features institutional theories and seeks to develop and apply them.

It may be best to try to capture institutionalism by contrasting it with other lines of theory. One way to differentiate sociological arguments is by noting the degree to which they represent units as socially constructed, and by the levels of analysis most commonly employed in their causal propositions. The "levels" dimension distinguishes roughly between methodologically structuralist and individualist imageries; the "constructedness" dimension distinguishes between phenomenological and realist conceptions of causal units and processes. These two dimensions define a simple table of lines of theory (see fig. 6.1).[25] Institutionalism invokes institutions as causes, so it necessarily emphasizes both high social construction and higher-order effects. In the catchphrases employed here, institutionalism thus tends to be both "phenomenological" and "structuralist." I first discuss the two dimensions abstractly and then explicate each cell of the figure with examples; I provide fullest development of the institutionalism cell.

Highly socially constructed units are opposed to putatively natural or noncontextual ones. That is, high constructedness denotes that the social objects under investigation are thought to be complex social products, reflecting context-specific rules and interactions. In low-construction (here, "realist") imagery, units may enter into social relations that influence their behavior, but the units themselves are socially pregiven, autochthonous.[26] In high-construction (here, "phenomenological") imagery, the units' existence is itself a framework-

Degree to Which Units Socially Constructed	Featured Levels of Analysis: Low Order (Individualist)	Featured Levels of Analysis: High Order (Structuralist)
High Construction (Phenomenological)	1 "Organizational culture"; symbolic interaction	2 Institutionalism
Low Construction (Realist)	3 Actor &/or functional reduction attempts: neoclassical economics; behavioral psychology; most neoinstitutional economics; some network theory	4 Social ecology; resource dependence; some network theory

Fig. 6.1. Lines of theory in organization analysis.

specific social creation—in phenomenological parlance, units are "constituted." These units may then be separately influenced by social ties as well.[27] In high-construction imagery, one cannot isolate subunit "foundations" of social organization; one rather seeks deep or core rules. The causal imageries are quite distinct: a natural base, a social superstructure, in realist lines; a nested system of social programs, in phenomenological ones. This fundamental difference is not captured by conventional (and questionable) idealist/materialist or structure/agency distinctions.[28]

By levels of analysis, the second dimension, I refer to the levels of social organization most commonly featured in causal propositions, namely, higher versus lower orders of organization. This dimension taps differences over how social influence or construction processes take place. Methodologically individualist lines try to invoke only low orders of social organization in their explanations and thus seek single-level explanations; they give relatively micro-orders causal primacy over more macro-orders of organization in this fashion. Structuralist lines allow for independent and unmediated effects of multiple orders of organization, and often, though not necessarily, see higher orders as having greater causal potency than lower orders.[29]

Figure 6.1 can be put to quite general use, but here its cells present examples from organizational analysis. Consider the cell entries as ideal-typical tendencies. The lines of theory represented in cell 3, for example—low-low: individualist/realist—attempt to reduce organizational properties directly to primitively social units (low construction), linked primarily by interactions within a single, usually low, order of organization. With low values on both dimensions, the cell entries, not surprisingly, tend to come from outside of sociology—these lines of argument, at the limit (e.g., in the neoclassical theory of the firm) admit neither social content nor structure. So firms in this line of

argument are represented as units showing little social construction (at the limit, as "black boxes"), affected primarily by each other (homogeneous units), and linked by causal processes operating through low orders of organization (at the limit, through markets conceived as aggregative containers, without much structure).[30]

The lines of argument in cell 4 (higher levels, low construction: structuralist/realist) differ from cell 3 primarily by injecting additional, and higher, orders of organization into their causal imageries. In these lines, firms may be the organizational counterpart to "fruit flies"—that is, largely natural entities—but they face environments having substantial structure and heterogeneity (e.g., multiple types of resource and selection constraint, represented at different orders of organization—as in resource dependence and ecological ideas). Interactional ties can be networks linking heterogeneous units (e.g., firms to individuals or states as well as to other firms).

The lines of thought in cell 1 differ from those in cell 3 in a separate way. In these individualist/phenomenological lines of argument, rather than adding levels and considering higher-order causal effects, cell 1 ideas depart from the "black box" imageries. Firms here can be histories, or cultures. In phenomenologically inspired social psychologies, for example—as in the ideas of Weick (1969), or in "organizational culture" research—the entities linked to one another are highly constructed: for example, identities or roles with complex local histories and specificity. In the "levels" dimension, however, the cell 1 ideas run parallel to those in cell 3. Causal imagery typically invokes single rather than multilevel analysis, and the primary causal forces invoked seem to operate at a relatively local level, linking a fairly homogeneous set of units (e.g., local negotiation of identities, or effects of past organizational culture upon the present one).

Cell 2 represents institutionalism (high-high: structuralist/phenomenological), departing from the reduction attempts of cell 3 along both dimensions. In institutionalist imagery, firms can be, among other things, embodied cultural theories of organizing (March and Simon 1958:2–4; Stinchcombe 1973; Meyer and Rowan, ch. 2, this vol.). Some examples of institutionalism may help clarify its characteristics. I start with some examples from outside of organizational analysis and then suggest some from within.

In historical sociology, institutionalism is apparent in the recently reinvigorated exploration of the formation and development of capitalism, individualism, and democracy. For example, arguments that individualism emerges as part of collective political and religious frameworks (and in part from the substantive contents of Christian doctrine), rather than from aggregations of persons' reactions to microlevel and immediate social experiences, are characteristically institutionalist ones. So are arguments that hold Christendom to be a driving force in the development of Western capitalism, not just by "pacifying" social relations by providing some normative framework (Mann 1986), but by

constructing and stimulating economic relations through specific institutionalized cultural tenets (Meyer 1988a). Institutionalist arguments are apparent in those depictions of "modernization" as the incorporation of an ideological package of institutions and accounts rather than a threshold effect of accumulated experiences and reactions (Inkeles and Smith 1974). In social psychology, Swanson, Goffman, and Berger and Luckmann all develop institutionalist lines in emphasizing the ways in which variation in collectivity types can constitute different forms of self (e.g., Swanson 1986; Goffman 1974; Berger, Berger, and Kellner 1973). Distinct institutionalist arguments are also apparent in the study of institutions themselves, such as education or the family. Note the argument that education affects society not only indirectly through socialization or credentialing of individuals, but also directly through the (higher-order and social construction) effects of education on other institutions, for example, through the creation of an educated society, theories of personnel, and a "scientized polity" (Habermas 1970; also see Meyer 1977).

This volume provides a number of examples of institutionalist argumentation in organizational analysis (and Scott, ch. 7, this vol., catalogs a range of institutionalist causal mechanisms). The institutionalist emphasis on constructedness and high-order effects is apparent in its recurrent stress upon the dependence of formal organizing on special institutional conditions (e.g., Stinchcombe 1965; Meyer and Rowan, ch. 2, this vol.); in arguments about the incorporation of organizational practices from environments rather than the intraorganizational generation of such practices (Tolbert and Zucker 1983); in institutionalist emphasis upon the import of social as well as ecological ties between organizations (e.g., DiMaggio and Powell, ch. 3, this vol.; perhaps also White 1981); in the argument that differences in firms across nation-states may represent instances of broader forms of organizing specific to types of polities (Jepperson and Meyer, ch. 9, this vol.); in the suggestion that while contemporary societies may be full of organizations, and that while formal organization may be an institution within them, these societies are not best considered to be "societies of organizations" (Jepperson and Meyer, ch. 9, this vol.).

These institutionalist arguments generally not only stress the structuring quality of rules or frameworks, but also attribute causal import to the particular substantive contents of the rules invoked—frames are not just formal structures. Fararo and Skvoretz usefully distinguish institutional from network theory by indicating that institutional arguments are structural ones that also "[preserve] the content of social action and interaction"; "social relations are content-filled control structures" (Fararo and Skvoretz 1986:242, 230). For example, we can observe the emphasis placed upon the social history of elements; in practice, this can amount to invoking lagged dependent variables as causes. In addition, emphasis on construction entails attention to social reflexivity as itself an independent source of social structuration, that is, the operation of publicly prominent social analysis of and discourse about social processes, as, in

itself, a potential structuring force.[31] In this dimension (degree of constructedness), institutionalist arguments then differ markedly from those that posit units with largely autonomous and naturally emanating experiences, reflections, choices, preferences, actions—both by calling the autonomy and inevitable emanation into question and, independently, by questioning and restricting the causal potency of these non- (or less-) constructed elements. Neither actor nor activity is thought to be primordial; there is then little tendency to consider either as foundational of social structure. Rules or frames are the basic elements of social structure, in institutionalist imagery, rather than some class of asocial subunits.

In its emphasis on multilevel causal connections and on high or macroorder effects, institutionalism differs from arguments that rely primarily on aggregative processes (e.g., the collective as largely an additive outcome of microlevel states), on "demographic" depictions of structure (structural features as reflecting relative proportions of sets of subunits [Stinchcombe 1968: ch. 3]), and on causal models that largely feature single-level explanations (e.g., microlevel outcomes associated with microlevel causes). The higher-order effects can operate in a contextual or environmental manner, or as a strict collective effect, that is, as in the effects of a "center" or core of a system, represented as a higher order of organization, on a periphery of the system.

5. Institutionalism and Actors

This discussion has attempted to explicate the distinctive character of institutionalism in organizational analysis and to link these properties to a general institutionalism in social science. Note I have not attempted to assess the relative merits or explanatory success of institutionalism versus the other lines of argument represented in figure 6.1 (though I have suggested some distinctions that should have immediate utility for evaluating the logical status of various arguments). Nor have I attempted to assess the scope relations of the various lines, that is, to determine whether the lines of theory directly compete, or have different explananda, or reveal any complementarities. At the very least, however, the above discussion should raise strong suspicions about common oppositions of institutional and "actor," or "interest," arguments. Such a contrast may confound a number of quite distinct issues.

Consider institutional and "rational-choice" arguments; they are often said to exist in sharp opposition. But note that self-proclaimed rational-choice arguments often feature institutional constraints (in connection with opportunity costs) as central causes (Friedman and Hechter 1988; Elster 1986), and institutional arguments often invoke adaptive responses to change in institutional conditions (see Scott, ch. 7, this vol.). Do these two lines of argument truly amount to competing paradigms? Alternatively, they might represent competing ways to invoke institutional effects, or reflect disagreements about proper

microfoundations of macroeffects, to mention just two alternatives. The literature is unclear.

Some issues seem straightforward. Institutionalism, like any set of causal arguments, must be capable of providing "microtranslation" (Collins 1981) of its propositions, that is, samples of the lower-level processes embodied in higher-order effects (in effect, statements about activities or behaviors of persons). Some institutionalist lines of argument—particularly the early institutionalism of, for example, Durkheim, or those institutionalist arguments advanced by Parsons, or the primitive institutionalism of "culture and personality" studies—largely neglected microtranslation, or failed the microtranslation test (e.g., the childhood socialization arguments of the early culture/personality studies). But the new institutionalisms seem no less capable of providing microtranslations than noninstitutionalist arguments, though they may provide different ones. Institutionalism may not advance conventional arguments about "actors" or "action" (more on this in a moment), but such conventions by no means define the totality of legitimate causal arguments.[32] Similarly, successful influence attempts by a delimited "actor," carrying a specific "interest," represent only one category of possible social change explanations, and successful change arguments need not be limited to it. Institutionalism also contributes a distinctive set of ideas to the class of change arguments (e.g., the idea of institutional contradiction, in Marx, or in Friedland and Alford, ch. 10, this vol.). (See the conspectus of institutionalist causal mechanisms provided by Scott, ch. 7, this vol.)

The conceptualization suggested in section 1, above, opposed institutionalization, in part, to "action"—in the specific sense there defined—but not to actors. Institutional arguments need not be directly contrasted with actor and interest accounts; rather, they represent, in part, a distinctive line of argument about actors and interests. Institutional accounts argue, as discussed above, that actors cannot be represented as foundational elements of social structure.[33] They suggest, typically, that actors and interests are highly institutional in their origins and operation and, moreover, that in modern polity forms they are often constructed institutions themselves (as, e.g., in Jepperson and Meyer, ch. 9, this vol.). Institutionalism suggests that social systems vary in the extent to which "action" is carried by actors, in the canonical sense of autonomous rational egoists, operating in private capacities. In modern systems much action is conducted by authorized collective agents of one sort or another. Systems also can vary in how much "action" they sustain, and in the degree to which social reproduction is dependent upon action, relative, for example, to institutional processes.

Action references often become the social-theoretic analogue to the economist's automatic (and nonexplanatory) invocation of preferences and utility. In response, institutionalism has tended to "defocalize" actors (DiMaggio 1988a) purposefully, because undue focus on actors has seemed to impair the production of sociology. But this discussion is not yet well developed by either those in or outside of institutionalism, so debate on these matters has been shallow.

6. Reprise

Institutions and institutional effects are core to general sociology rather than peripheral to or competitive with it. Institutional effects should not be narrowly associated with explanations of stability or thought to be irrelevant to change; institutions can be powerful sources of both stability and change. And while institutionalization can be opposed, in part, to "action," it is not well distinguished from actor or interest effects.

There are ironies here. Perhaps the discussion of both institutions and action has remained insufficiently developed due to institutional processes. American sociology's long-standing reification of action (Münch 1986), rooted in the larger institutional matrix of American society, has promoted the taken-for-grantedness of action and has simultaneously hindered scholarly perception of institutional effects.

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Notes

1. MacIver 1931:15–17 distinguished sharply between an association, as an organized group, and an institution, as an organized procedure.

2. See Eisenstadt 1968 for a catalog of uses of the term, Znaniecki 1945 for a rich historical discussion of institutional thinking, and Scott 1987b for an overview of the use of the concept in organizational analysis.

3. This chapter draws on a large number of works, but especially upon Fararo and Skvoretz 1986; Zucker, this vol. and 1983; and Meyer, Boli, and Thomas 1987. Also, Sartori 1984 and Cohen 1980: ch. 7 provide powerful and complementary insights on the requisites of good conceptualization—insights this chapter attempts to employ.

4. This imagery is reflected in the work of a great variety of social theorists, including Mead 1934:261ff., Parsons 1951, Gerth and Mills 1953, Berger and Luckmann 1967, Durkheim [1901] 1950, Davis 1949, Hayek 1973, Goffman 1974, Buckley 1967, Eisenstadt 1968, March and Olsen 1984, Douglas 1986, MacIver 1931, Giddens 1984:375 and 1982:10, Bierstedt 1970:320, Shibutani 1986:16, and Stinchcombe 1986a:904–5.

5. Here I follow Zucker 1983 in representing the terms as process and property variables, though I do not follow her in the details of conceptualization.

6. I have freely adapted a characterization provided by Fararo and Skvoretz 1986. I have also drawn upon Przeworski and Sprague 1971. I should add that institutions are not equivalent to norms. Many theorists have distinguished norms from institutions by making the latter, but not the former, self-policing. See, e.g., Schotter 1981:10–12; also Parsons, e.g., 1951:20; a norm is institutionalized, according to Parsons, *if* it is rewarded and sanctioned.

7. "Institutionalized situations with their moral and practical arrangements create individuals' obligations and powers, create activities" (Stinchcombe 1986a:905).

8. For examples of many additional, parallel, formulations, see Berger and Luckmann 1967:60 (institutions embody "what everybody knows," "recipe knowledge"); Lachmann 1971:13 (they are "orientation maps" of the future actions of others); and Parsons (institutions produce agreement on specific courses of action that a situation demands).

9. It seems especially arbitrary to associate institutions (as current discussions often do) with absence of thought or with positive evaluation. This practice smuggles untested empirical claims into our conceptualization and then impairs theoretic debate. For example, both Mary Douglas and Lévi-Strauss seem to associate institutions with absence of thought (with "unthink") (Douglas 1986; Lévi-Strauss 1966). So modern societies, revealing greater discourse about social practices, are presumably less institutionalized than nonmodern (e.g., tribal) ones. (Tribal systems for Lévi-Strauss are "cold" cultures, with their social institutions enmeshed with nature and without the endogenous contradictions generating change.) Contrast Stinchcombe, who argues that modern societies have both greater reflexivity and greater institutional self-replicating capacity (1968:115). We need to treat such differences as substantive theoretical ones, to be adjudicated empirically, rather than eliding them by treating them definitionally.

10. Comments by Francisco Ramirez, on a previous version of this chapter, stimulated this paragraph. He provides an excellent example, discussing the pre–Vatican II mass: "No one would dispute its institutional character. The mass was always enacted, never the product of collective action. The mass was celebrated in Latin; the sequence of events was rigidly prescribed. Each event had a name. What the priest had to do in enacting a given event was set forth in a written script; what the undifferentiated others had to do in reaction (stand, kneel, bless yourself) was also carefully prescribed. The only variable was the content of the sermon (now called a homily) and whether the script was sung. . . . From an alien perspective a zombie-like production. But without attributing a high degree of comprehension to the participants (not everyone took a course in liturgy or even knew that the color of the vestments used in a given day had precise symbolic meaning), just about every participant could tell you that the mass was about worshiping God and that you were supposed to go to mass on Sundays and other days of obligation. The participants were not merely going through standardized interaction sequences without having some shared story-line as to what the practice was all about."

11. Walter Buckley is compelling in his insistence upon distinguishing institutionalization from legitimation: some "social problems," he says, "are so pervasive, stable, and difficult to root out precisely because they are 'institutionalized.' That is, they involve complex interpersonal, and often highly organized, networks of expectations, communications, normative interpretations, interests, and beliefs, embedded in the same sociocultural matrix as are 'legitimized' structures" (1967:161, also 145, 129–30).

12. That is, contextual effects often refer to effects of the proportional distribution of individuals across groups within a collectivity, or to the rates of interaction between individuals in different social locations. See, e.g., Przeworski 1974. For examples of such arguments, see Blau 1977.

13. *Macro* can refer to spatial extensiveness or large numbers, but also to a high order of organization within a structure having multiple orders of organization (a high order being a complex of lower orders: chapters are in part complexes of paragraphs, which are themselves organizations of sentences). Thus *macro* can refer to effects of a collective or system "center," relative to a periphery, as well as to global (extensive) effects upon a locality. The two usages are often conflated.

14. Note the ambiguous usage of *environment* in the organizational literature. Sometimes the term invokes context imagery (e.g., fields of organizations), other times macro (hierarchic ordering) imagery (e.g., references to law), sometimes both (e.g., "the institutional environment"). This is confusing.

15. A number of authors, including those just cited, may in fact confound these historical arguments with conceptual ones. This conflation was certainly a core impairment of Parsons' theorizing.

16. It is difficult to categorize and evaluate Stinchcombe's discussion of institutionalization—roughly, the process of binding power to a value (1968, esp. pp. 181–88). For him, an institution is best considered a structure in which powerful people are committed to some value (p. 107), or those values and norms that have high correlations with power. This imagery is evocative, but I do not find it sufficient for conceptual purposes, for two reasons: the imagery ties institution too closely to two relatively unstable concepts (power and value); it also directs one to focus unduly on formally organized institutions (as in Stinchcombe's own examples). In a recent book review, Stichcombe employs a conceptualization much closer to the one recommended here (1986a).

17. *Center* in the sense of Shils 1975 or Eisenstadt 1968, not in a geographic sense.

18. These distinctions are not meant to represent different levels of analysis or organization.

19. One cannot properly engage in holistic comparison of institutionalization; the question What is the relative institutionalization of the contemporary United Kingdom and France? as historical particulars, does not lend itself to pursuit. It seems more legitimate (and in principle productive) to compare the relative institutionalization of institutions within collectivities, or types of institutions across societies, or of analytical types of social orders. One can compare, for example, the degree to which types of political regimes are institutionalized across comparable societies (as many often do; Huntington 1968 is largely on this topic). Or one can try to compare the relative institutionalization of various "nonmodern" (e.g., tribal, feudal) versus "modern" (i.e., the rationalized, rich, individualist) types of societies.

20. Most treatment of this topic in the literature has been implicit or, if explicit, informal and cursory. Parsons 1982 discusses the issue en passant and informally; Eisenstadt 1968 does so as well. Meyer, Boli, and Thomas 1987 provides a provocative but one-paragraph discussion. Huntington 1968 provides an extended treatment of degrees of political institutionalization. He associates greater institutionalization with greater adap-

tiveness, complexity, differentiation, insulation, and unification. He also provides some operationalization of these ideas, for comparing the institutionalization of governmental regimes. Welfling 1973 uses Huntington's work in an empirical study of the institutionalization of African party systems. Huntington's ideas may have broader utility, but they would seem to require greater tightening and generality. Wuthnow 1987: ch. 8 discusses the institutionalization of science in the seventeenth century and associates this institutionalization with organizational autonomy, procurement of a resource base, development of an internal system of communication and organization, and external legitimation. Shefter and Ginsberg 1985 provides an insightful, but entirely informal, discussion of the "institutionalization of the Reagan regime," associating institutionalization with a secure resource coalition, successful performance, agenda control, a legitimating ideology, and policies benefiting supporters. (However, they tend to confound institutionalization with survival, as do many treatments.)

21. Compare: "When everything is institutionalized, no history or other storage devices are necessary: 'The institution tells all' " (Schotter 1981:139).

22. Compare Mary Douglas (1986:46ff., I paraphrase): a convention is institutionalized if any question about it receives an answer discussing the nature of the universe.

23. Meyer, Boli, and Thomas 1987:37 discusses the elimination of alternatives.

24. DiMaggio 1988a provides a similar listing.

25. In working out this figure, I have drawn upon conversations with John W. Meyer.

26. I am unhappy with the label "realist," but have no better alternative at hand. "Realism" has taken on the connotations I wish to suggest. There are actually two distinct forms of realism. The first, a naturalistic realism, exemplified in rational-choice-type arguments, sees units as having high social autonomy and represents them as primordial building blocks of social structure. The second, social structural realism, sees units as highly constrained by the positions they occupy within networks of statuses and roles (e.g., White, Boorman, and Breiger 1976). But these latter arguments remain a variant of realism because they do not see the units themselves (or the networks) as outcomes of social construction or constitution processes. They see the networks as representing "concrete" patterns of interactions (a common word, indicative of realist imagery); the units linked by these infrastructural networks are exogenous to the theory.

27. Phenomenological arguments allow for two distinct types of institutional effects: institutions can act as rules or instructions generating and defining social objects; they can independently operate as regulators of social processes. Compare Fararo and Skvoretz 1986:243.

28. Thus this "constructedness" dimension should not be conceived as representing differences on "where to draw the exogeneity/endogeneity line" or on where to stop trying to explain. The dimension captures far more substantial differences: differences over what the exogeneity is. In "realist" lines, the exogenous domain (of explanatory variables) is nonsocial—composed of asocial psychological states, or givens of nature (see Langlois 1986: ch. 10 on the aspirations for exogeneity in general equilibrium theory). "Phenomenological" arguments differ by calling into empirical question the supposed nonsocial character of the realist's exogenous variables, and thus by greatly restricting the range of nonsocial exogenous variables. In phenomenological arguments, the exogenous variables driving social endogenous variables can also be social ones—

but represented at a different level of social organization, or reflecting some different dimension of sociality, than the endogenous social variables.

29. Structuralism denies that a microtranslation (Collins 1981) of a structural effect is equivalent to a set of macro-organized variables linked by an intervening microrelationship (and thus would deny Coleman's 1986 treatment of structural effects). The difference between this methodological structuralism and individualism thus centers on the number and proper treatment of composition effects in social orders. (For a rare polemic in favor of methodological structuralism, see Mayhew 1980).

30. Neoinstitutional economics, as represented, e.g., by Williamson, begins to depart from cell 3 along the "constructedness" dimension, but remains largely within this cell.

31. Thus institutional propositions include (but are not limited to) "theories of theorization effects" (Bourdieu 1977:178). For example, Pfeffer, in his organizational analysis text, following Zucker, gives a number of examples of institutional effects that occur because a process is viewed by organization members as institutionalized in formal structure (Pfeffer 1982:241, 242, 244).

32. I need to reiterate that microtranslation must be distinguished sharply from microreduction. The capacity for such translation is a requirement for a causal theory, and a guard again obfuscation; reduction, in contrast, represents perhaps an ultimate theoretic aspiration, but is not a requirement of theoretic adequacy. Further, providing microtranslations does not require provision of microfoundations, if this term is taken literally. *Foundations* may be a misleading metaphor for social science. The foundations of a building can stand without a superstructure; in the social world, however, the typical "foundations" imagined do not have this free-standing capacity. This point is behind Marx's excoriation of the "Robinson Crusoe" reasoning in classical economics, and behind Durkheim's reminder that there would be no modern "individual" without the (collective) "cult" of individualism.

33. It goes without saying that persons are the only ontological elements of social structure—unless one follows Hegel, of course. But this is a matter entirely separate from the epistemological and methodological issues we are discussing.