Contemporary Organizational Theory

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Abstract

We review the three perspectives on organizations that have dominated sociological research for the past four decades: demographic, relational, and cultural. They have different conceptions of social structure, and thus different conceptions of what creates opportunities for and constraints on action. The demographic perspective holds that social structure is constituted by distributions of social actors along salient dimensions of social and physical space; the relational perspective, by webs of social relationships; and the cultural perspective, by widely shared and patterned understandings of reality and possibility. The perspectives also have different conceptions of identity, and therefore motivations for action. For demographers, identity derives from position, absolute or relative, along salient dimensions of social life; for relational scholars, from ties among individuals, groups, and organizations; for cultural scholars, from social interaction. All three perspectives have been applied to explain behavior at five different levels of analysis: the individual, small group or organizational subunit, organization, industry or organizational population, and field. Up to the 1990s, these perspectives were generally applied separately to study organizations and the people in them. But over the past two decades, studies have increasingly used multiple perspectives.

Organizational theory evolved from a disparate set of roots in sociology, economics, political science, psychology, and management. In a companion paper (Authors 2018), we laid out its history from classical sociology up to the 1970s. Here, we compare three contemporary perspectives on organizations – demographic, relational, and cultural – that have dominated research on organizations during the past four decades.

A central concern for *demography* – the distribution of individuals, groups, and organizations along salient dimensions of social structure, such as individual age, race and gender, group size and composition, and organizational form and location – characterizes internal organizational demography and organizational ecology (Blau 1977; Kanter 1977; Baron and Bielby 1980; Pfeffer 1983; Hannan and Freeman 1984, 1989). A focus on webs of *relationships* among people, groups, and organizations is most noticeable in research on social capital (Granovetter 1973; Bourdieu 1980; Coleman 1988), power in organizations (Emerson 1962; Pfeffer 1981), and resource-dependence theory (Aldrich and Pfeffer 1976; Pfeffer and Salancik 1978; Burt 1983). An emphasis on *culture*, meaning widely shared norms, values, expectations, roles, and rituals, is reflected in institutional approaches, both micro and macro (Meyer and Rowan 1977; DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Scully and Creed 1997; Scott 1995 [2008]).

These three perspectives propose divergent conceptions of *social structure*, which provides opportunities for and constraints on action, and *identity*, which determines motivations for action. Demographic analysts view social structure as inhering in multiple overlapping or cross-cutting distributions (Blau 1994) and identity as deriving from position, absolute or relative, along one or more dimensions of social life, such as individual age and gender or organizational location and strategy. Relational analysts view social structure as inhering in networks (social and economic ties whose nodes can be individuals, groups, or entire organizations) and identity as constituted by the social and economic ties among individuals, groups, and organizations. Finally, for cultural scholars, social structure consists of shared, patterned understandings of reality and possibility (i.e., beliefs about what is and is not

feasible, acceptable, or valued) that individuals, groups, and organizations use to make sense of and evaluate actions that develop during social interaction, while identity derives from understandings (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). Notwithstanding their differences, all three perspectives have been used to explain behavior at five levels of analysis: the individual, the small group or organizational subunit, the entire organization, collections of organizations in populations or industries, and in fields. Table 1 summarizes these perspectives and explains how they are used at different levels of analysis.

[Table 1 about here]

These three perspectives have been applied to the study of both the formal and the informal features of organizations. The *formal* features of organizations include the configuration of offices and positions, the officially designated linkages between them (the "organization chart"), and written job descriptions, rules, and procedures. The *informal* features include the actual (as opposed to official) communication and influence channels (who really talks to whom, not just who is supposed to talk to whom; who really sways decision-making), actual behavior (what people really do every day, not what their job descriptions say they should do), and informal norms and practices (what is expected and valued). The formal and the informal are often only loosely coupled, as informal social relations, practices, and norms often deviate from formal organization charts, job descriptions, rules, and procedures – something sociologists have known since the 1950s (e.g., Gouldner 1954; Blau 1955).

The next three sections flesh out Table 1. In these, we review major themes in each perspective. Then, we briefly review research that combines perspectives. We conclude with a few speculations on the future of organizational theory.

The Demographic Perspective

Two research traditions take the demographic perspective. They differ in the types of units studied. *Internal organizational demography* is microscopic, analyzing individuals and small groups within organizations. *Organizational ecology* is macroscopic, analyzing entire

organizations, populations, or industries. Only a few studies probe connections between micro and macro levels (e.g., Haveman and Cohen 1994; Greve 1994).

Internal organizational demography studies the distribution of people within organizations (generally employees, but sometimes customers or clients, especially in service organizations like schools, hospitals, and investment firms) along salient dimensions of social position (e.g., Baron and Bielby 1980; Pfeffer 1983). It has four theoretical foundations. First, sociological theories of group interaction hold that people prefer to interact with similar others (Simmel 1955; Blau 1977; Kanter 1977) – a phenomenon known as homophily (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook 2001). Second, demography explains rates of entry into and exit from organizations, and rates of social interaction among organizational members in terms of the number of people in different social positions (Ryder 1965; Pfeffer 1983). Third, social-psychological theories of social identity and social categorization hold that we categorize people to understand their behavior, and that our identity and sense of self-worth derives in part from the groups we belong to (Tajfel and Turner 1979, 1986; Tajfel 1982). Together, these processes create in-groups and out-groups and promote in-group biases. Fourth, sociological expectation-states theory holds that different levels of esteem and competence are attributed to people in different demographic groups, creating interactions in which these expectations become self-fulfilling prophecies – conferring higher status and better outcomes on individuals from higher-status groups (Berger, Rosenholtz, and Zelditch 1980; Ridgeway 1991; Ridgeway et al. 1998).

No matter the theoretical foundation, the goal of all internal organizational demography is to attend to "any categorical difference that has a significant impact on group interaction and outcomes" (DiTomaso et al. 2007: 474). Early work in this tradition focused on tenure, meaning how long people had worked in the focal organization (e.g., Pfeffer 1983; O'Reilly, Caldwell, and Barnett 1989) and gender (e.g., Kanter 1977; Wolf and Fligstein 1979). Later research widened the focus to age (e.g., Zenger and Lawrence 1989), race/ethnicity (e.g., Tomaskovic-Devey 1993; Sørensen 2004), sexual orientation (e.g., Tilcsik 2011), social class (e.g., Rivera 2012), and

intersecting identities (e.g., Pager 2003; Correll, Benard, and Paik 2007; Pedulla 2014). Much of this work studies two phenomena that are central to sociology – power and inequality – and shows how nominal demographic parameters, which consist of unordered categories, are transformed into graded parameters, which have hierarchical rankings (Ridgeway et al. 1998). Thus, attributes like gender, race/ethnicity, and age become axes of inequality, determining who gets power, status, and material resources.

At the individual level, the main issue is whether a focal individual is similar to or different from others in his/her/their workplace. People in subordinated groups are harmed by stereotypes and so are not heard or valued as much as people in dominant groups (e.g., Kanter 1977; Konrad, Winter, and Gutek 1992). Moreover, numerical minorities from subordinated groups become "tokens" (Kanter 1977), subject to heightened visibility and social isolation. In contrast, numerical minorities from dominant groups benefit from stereotypes (e.g., Williams 1989, 1995). Finally, "relational demography" (Tsui, Egan, and O'Reilly 1992), meaning similarities or differences between workers and their supervisors, affect communication, performance assessment, commitment, job satisfaction, and turnover.

At the group (or organizational) level, the issue is group composition in terms of salient demographic dimensions. As demographic variation among group members increases, trust and cohesion decline, conflict escalates, communication worsens, commitment falters, and turnover increases (e.g., O'Reilly, Caldwell, and Barnett 1989; Zenger and Lawrence 1989). Yet as demographic variation among group members increases, their social ties and information sources expand; in some circumstances, this fosters creativity and innovation (e.g., Gibson and Gibbs 2006). Together, these costs and benefits of demographic variation affect groups' and organizations' ability to innovate and adapt to changing environments.

In sum, the demographic distribution of individuals in a group or organization is important because it shapes social interactions and thus who has power and how (well) people work together (for reviews, see Williams and O'Reilly 1998; Reskin, McBrier, and Kmec 1999; DiTomaso, Post, and Parks-Yancy 2007; Stainback, Tomaskovic-Devey, and Skaggs 2010).

Moreover, the effects of demography are nested, with differences between organizational members affecting their interactions in supervisor-subordinate dyads and small work groups, and these interactions affecting individual, group, and organizational functioning.

At the macro level, *organizational ecologists* conduct demographic analyses where the units of study are organizations, rather than individuals (Carroll and Hannan 2000). As in other demographic analyses, the focus is on numbers (of organizations with specific forms) and rates (of organizational founding, failure, and change). Ecologists study populations of organizations (Hannan and Freeman 1977), which produce similar outputs using similar inputs. Early work in this tradition treated all organizations in a population as similar, and argued that as the number of organizations in a population increased, both legitimacy and competition increased – legitimacy at a decreasing rate, competition at an increasing rate (e.g., Hannan and Freeman 1989; Olzak and West 1991). Later work distinguished organizations by form, based on characteristics such as size, market niche (specialist or generalist), technology, or location, and considered both competitive and mutually beneficial interactions within and between organizational forms (e.g., Baum and Singh 1994; Carroll and Swaminathan 2000; Ingram and Simons 2000; Barnett and Woyvode 2004).

Organizational ecology holds that organizations change slowly because of inertial pressures (Hannan and Freeman 1984, 1989: 66-90). Past investments, information limits, vested interests, entry and exit barriers, and legitimacy considerations all favor organizations that perform reliably and account for their actions, which requires highly reproducible (i.e., unchanging) organizational structures. When organizations do change, they experience harmful process effects stemming from the frictions accompanying change (Barnett and Carroll 1995). They also experience content effects stemming from changing fit with the environment, which are beneficial if fit improves or harmful if fit worsens. Change can benefit organizations if they are performing poorly (e.g., Haveman 1992; Greve 1999). Moreover, ties to external institutions that provide resources and confer legitimacy can buffer organizations from the harmful process effects of change (e.g., Baum and Oliver 1991; Minkoff 1999). Still, most

research has shown that change harms organizations; therefore, change in populations of organizations comes about mostly through selection rather than adaptation. For example, over 60 years, California thrifts changed from club-like associations that valued community and mutual aid to impartial bureaucracies that celebrated efficiency and individual rationality (Haveman and Rao 1997). But most change occurred through the differential founding and failure of different organizational forms, and only a little occurred through existing organizations adopting new forms.

When organizations are founded, they imprint on prevailing social conditions (Stinchcombe 1965; for a review, see Marquis and Tilcsik 2013). Because of inertia, organizations reflect those conditions throughout their lives. For example, in the seventeenth century, the Paris Opera was conceived as a royal academy, a high-status organizational form sponsored by the king and devoted to discussion among academy members (Johnson 2007). But, pushed by the king, whose permission was required to found any organization in that era, the Paris Opera was created as a hybrid of the royal academy and the commercial theatre, a much lower-status organizational form. Not only did the Opera incorporate elements of two existing organizational forms, those elements persisted for centuries. To give a more contemporary example, the organizational "blueprint" of high-tech firms in Silicon Valley reflect founders' imprints many years after founding (Baron, Burton, and Hannan 1999).

The Relational Perspective

Scholars taking the relational perspective hold that social relations are primary and social-unit attributes are secondary. Micro relational research focuses on relationships between individuals or groups; macro relational research, on relationships between organizations or industries. Only a few studies examine cross-level connections between micro and macro (Payne et al. 2011).

There are two main strands of *micro relational research*. The first examines the *social capital* (Bourdieu 1980; Coleman 1988) of individuals within organizations, meaning the

resources people derive from their connections, such as ties to kin and school mates, to current and former coworkers, or to counterparts in exchange-partner organizations. Social capital improves access to information and material resources, which in turn enhances social status, reduces uncertainty, and improves many outcomes for individuals. For example, job applicants who are referred by employee contacts are ten times more likely to be offered jobs than applicants without referrals (Fernandez and Galperin 2014). But social capital also creates mutual obligations, which channel action onto particular paths and foreclose others (Portes 1998; Lin 1999).

Different types of social ties – strong vs. weak – provide individuals and groups with distinct benefits and challenges. Strong ties, which bond group members tightly, improve knowledge transfer within groups and facilitate norm enforcement, increasing trust and improving group functioning (Coleman 1988; Uzzi and Spiro 2005; Phelps, Heidl, and Wadhwa 2012). Weak ties can bridge holes in networks, connecting otherwise-unconnected groups; because the bridged groups have access to different sources of information, weak ties can provide novel information (Granovetter 1973; Burt 1992, 2000; Yakubovich 2005). People whose networks include such "bridging" or "brokering" ties can spark innovation and control information flow between groups (Burt 2000; Perry-Smith 2006). Brokers can engage in socially beneficial acts like conflict mediation, but also socially undesirable acts like manipulation (Stovel and Shaw 2012). Because their benefits differ, bonding and bridging ties are complements (Burt 2000; Adler and Kwon 2002; Payne et al. 2011). For example, groups perform best when members have diverse, non-redundant ties to people outside the group, but also strong ties to other group members (Reagans and Zuckerman 2001). Similarly, bridging ties can foster creativity, while bonding ties facilitate the diffusion and implementation of ideas (Fleming, Mingo, and Chen 2007). The value of bonding and bridging ties is contingent on goals and context (Adler and Kwon 2002). For example, bridging ties harm individuals' career performance in high-tech companies in China, where the collectivistic culture clashes with brokers' agency (Xiao and Tsui 2007).

The second main strand of micro relational research focuses on *power*. Based on exchange theory, this work assumes that power is an attribute of a relationship, not of an atomistic actor, and that power is the inverse of dependence (Emerson 1962). Consider the power-dependence relationship between two individuals, Pat and Chris. Pat's power over Chris – the amount of pressure Pat can exert on Chris to do what Pat wants – equals Chris's dependence on Pat. The power Pat can exert is a function of Chris's motivation and alternatives: the more Chris wants what Pat can provide, the more Chris depends on Pat, and the more power Pat has over Chris; and the more alternatives Chris has, the less Chris depends on Pat, and the less power Pat has over Chris.

Organizations develop vertical and horizontal power-dependence relations (Pfeffer 1981). Vertically, at every level in the hierarchy, people have formally invested power over lower levels, which resides in the position held, not in the person holding the position (Weber 1968 [1978]). Horizontally, power arises because actors (individuals or groups) in organizations depend on each other to perform their assigned tasks – they are interdependent (Thompson 1967). Horizontal power is activated when interdependent actors have different goals or different beliefs about how to achieve the same goals, the resources needed to achieve goals are scarce, and one actor has more resources than another. Both vertical and horizontal power-dependence relations influence who gets power and what happens when they wield power. For example, changes in antitrust laws and in firms' strategies and structures lead to shifts in the functional backgrounds of executives, from entrepreneurship and manufacturing, to sales and marketing, and then to finance (Fligstein 1987). And strong ties between people promoting organizational change and powerful others who are neutral to the proposed change, allow change promoters to co-opt fence-sitters and get the change approved, but strong ties to powerful others who disapprove of the proposed change reduces the chance of getting approval (Battilana and Casciaro 2013).

Macro relational studies examine how links to other organizations – oversight agencies, competitors, customers, and suppliers – affect organizational structures, actions, and

performance. Work in this tradition is generally labelled *resource dependence* (Aldrich and Pfeffer 1976; Pfeffer and Salancik 1978; Burt 1983).[1] Briefly, this theory holds that organizations rely heavily on suppliers, customers, distributors, and oversight agencies. Extending ideas from exchange theory (Emerson 1962) leads to the proposition that dependence on exchange partners makes organizations vulnerable and generates uncertainty. To reduce vulnerability and uncertainty, and so stabilize operations and improve performance, organizations integrate vertically, taking over suppliers or distributors; diversify to reduce reliance on exchange partners; and create strategic alliances, joint ventures, and director interlocks (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978; Burt 1983; for a review, see Davis and Cobb 2010).

Some macro relational studies investigate ties between individuals that span organizational boundaries, notably the long tradition of research on interlocking directorates (e.g., Mizruchi and Stearns 1988; Haunschild and Beckman 1998; Yue 2016; for a review, see Mizruchi 1996). Other macro relational studies examine ties that are not centered in individuals but rather on organizations, such as strategic alliances and joint ventures, supplier/buyer ties, and knowledge flows through patents (*e.g.*, Baker 1990; Uzzi 1997; Sørensen and Stuart 2000; Gulati 2007). Both types of studies investigate a paradox: interorganizational ties both create opportunities for action and impose constraints on action. They can make interactions more predictable (e.g., Dore 1983) and facilitate information exchange (e.g., Helper 1990). They can also improve organizational performance by providing access to resources (Gulati, Lavie, and Madhavan 2011). But they can make firms "overembedded" to the point where the costs of managing ties outweigh the benefits (Phelps et al. 2012). For example, strong ties between organizations can increase trust, information transfer, and coordination, but they also make firms vulnerable to shocks, require time and resources to maintain, and insulate firms from outside information (Uzzi 1997). And ties to

[1] Much of this research is labelled "social-network analysis," referring to the empirical techniques used in data analysis, rather than theory (Salancik 1995). The theory underpinning most network analysis is resource dependence; theories of information exchange and status are also common.

powerful partners create the potential for appropriation and coercion (e.g., Katila, Rosenberger, and Eisenhardt 2008), so a few large organizations can wield outsize influence. For example, changing power dynamics between large American retailers and their suppliers explains why wages have stagnated since the 1970s (Wilmers 2018).

The Cultural Perspective

Research taking this perspective examines shared and patterned understandings of reality and possibility. This perspective is often labelled "institutional" because institutions are central to it. Institutions are social facts, phenomena people perceive to be both external to themselves (shared by others) and coercive (backed by sanctions) (Durkheim 1995). Institutions are also durable phenomena: they persist because they develop routines for reproducing themselves over time, so they do not require recurrent collective mobilization or authoritative intervention to endure (Jepperson 1991).[2] Institutions are embodied in culture (customs, conventions, and normative expectations), regimes (legal systems, professional codes, and technical standards), and organizations. But not everything is an institution: fads in management practices and resistance to authority are not institutions because they are neither broadly accepted nor enduring. Moreover, not all institutions are broadly accepted: some, like organized crime, may be enduring but are accepted by few.

We distinguish between micro cultural research on individuals and groups and macro relational research on organizations and fields, even though some macro cultural research incorporates insights from micro cultural research.

Micro cultural research is built on early micro sociology (Cooley 1902, 1902; Mead 1934), symbolic interactionism (Blumer 1969), and theories of interaction order and framing (Goffman 1959, 1974). These research traditions analyzed the meanings that people develop

[2] Borrowing from economics, some institutionalists emphasize rationality, rules, and risk (e.g., Brinton and Nee 1998). Ingram and Clay (2000) review this work. Another group of institutionalists analyzes the entire globe (e.g., Meyer, Boli, Thomas, and Ramirez, 1997). Clemens and Cook (1999) and Schneiberg and Clemens (2006) review this work, as well as the organizational institutionalism we describe here.

through interactions with others – symbolic systems that guide evaluation and action – and how people (re)interpret these meanings as they continue to interact. But these traditions paid little attention to the larger structures within which groups are embedded, so only a few studies of organizations are built on them. One example is that "emotional labor" (creating desirable emotional displays) is core to flight attendants' jobs; their training inculcates "feeling rules" that guide workers' interactions with customers (Hochschild 1983 [2003]). Starting in the 1990s, these ideas became increasingly reflected in research on "inhabited institutionalism" (Scully and Creed 1997), which studies the meanings workers attach to their jobs, the conflicts and consensuses created and recreated through workplace interaction, and the resulting cultures. For example, a reinterpretation of Gouldner's *Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy* (1954) shows how worker-management interactions infuse bureaucracy with meaning (Hallett and Ventresca 2006). Similarly, different people working in drug courts (probation officers, defense and prosecuting attorneys, and clinicians) use different logics (criminal punishment, rehabilitation, accountability, and efficiency) to negotiate decisions and achieve their particular goals (McPherson and Sauder 2013).

Macro cultural research focuses on entire organizations or organizational fields, defined as the organizations that constitute a social arena: suppliers, distributors, consumers, regulators, and competitors (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; cf. Fligstein and McAdam 2012 on strategic action fields). This work emphasizes cognition, unreflective and ritualized activity, and social constructionism, which holds that organizations and the roles individuals play in them are created through social interaction, generating shared knowledge and belief systems (Berger and Luckmann 1967). People develop recipes for understanding and action through habituation, come to recognize actors and situations as types through typification, and institutionalize typifications by sharing them widely. These institutions stabilize social relations by establishing expectations for behavior – norms, values, and roles. Thus, organizations are confronted with "institutionalized rules" maintained by social interaction; organizations' legitimacy, and ultimately their survival, stems from demonstrating conformity to these rules –

even though such conformity can conflict with efficient functioning (Meyer and Rowan 1977). When conformity conflicts with efficiency, organizations decouple what they claim they are and do (formal structures) from what they actually are and do (everyday practices), and maintain a logic of confidence or good faith through avoidance of inspection, discretion, and overlooking anomalies (Weick 1976; Meyer and Rowan 1977). For example, in hospitals, health care is defined as care provided by medical doctors, not care that alleviates pain or cures disease.

Much macro cultural research seeks to understand why organizations are so similar (DiMaggio and Powell 1983), by investigating institutional isomorphism (literally, "same shape"). As communities of organizations evolve, interorganizational power relations, the state, the professions, and competition promote isomorphism among organizations that are tied directly to each other or play similar roles. (Note this often-overlooked connection between the cultural and relational perspectives.) There are three kinds of isomorphism. Mimetic isomorphism is the achievement of conformity through imitation. It can result from efficient responses to uncertainty ("when in doubt, do what other organizations facing the same environment do") or from bandwagon effects ("if many organizations adopt a structure or course of action, then follow their lead"). Coercive isomorphism stems from the pressure imposed by state regulations that authorize particular organizational structures and activities and prohibit others. Normative isomorphism involves pressures imposed by collective actors such as professional and trade associations, which create informal expectations (if not formal rules) about what organizations should look like and how they should behave. Organizations facing great uncertainty tend to imitate successful organizations (e.g., Haveman 1993; Strang and Still 2004) or similar organizations (e.g., Soule 1997), while organizations respond to pressures from funding sources and state authorities by adopting practices and structures those actors approve (e.g., Mun and Jung 2018).

Over time, isomorphic pressures make structures, products, and practices become legitimate – comprehensible and taken for granted as natural ways to achieve collective goals, justified on the basis of prevailing cultural models and accounts (Meyer and Rowan 1977;

Zucker 1983). Alternatives are literally inconceivable. But change can occur if a new structure, product, or practice meets a technical need; if so, the innovation diffuses rapidly through direct contact between organizations. Early-stage diffusion tends to be "rational," driven by coercion or technical need, while later-stage diffusion tends to be symbolic, driven by imitation or norms (Tolbert and Zucker 1983; Fligstein 1985; Edelman 1992). As a result of symbolism-driven innovation, the structures, products, and policies that diffuse widely are often ineffective; for example, although organizations develop legally acceptable human-resources policies that spread widely, these policies do not always ameliorate inequalities (e.g., Dobbin, Schrage, and Kalev 2015).

In the 1990s, work on institutional logics emerged, studying "systems of cultural elements (values, beliefs, and normative expectations) by which people, groups, and organizations make sense of and evaluate their everyday activities, and organize those activities in time and space" (Haveman and Gualtieri 2017: 1). At first, logics were defined at the societal level, such as the (capitalist) market vs. the (democratic) state (Friedland and Alford 1991), mutual co-operation vs. bureaucracy and individual rationality (Haveman and Rao 1997), or professional vs. state authority (Scott et al. 2000). Later, logics were seen as due to the agency of individuals and small groups inside a single organization (e.g., Dunn and Jones 2010; Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury 2012), and more explicitly informed by symbolic interactionism (e.g., Binder 2007; Berman 2012; McPherson and Sauder 2013). This line of work integrates micro and macro cultural research on organizations.

Combining Perspectives

The three perspectives on organizations complement each other, so it is not surprising that scholars have increasingly combined them. Here, we describe some notable examples of such work.

Demographic and relational. Some work combining the network and demographic perspectives brings to light network mechanisms for diversity effects on group performance.

When diversity undercuts cohesion and trust (thus reducing the number of bonding ties within a group), performance declines, but when diversity exposes group members to non-redundant sources of information (through bridging ties to people outside a work group), performance improves (Reagans and Zuckerman 2001). In this way, network mechanisms mediate the impact of diversity. Other work reveals how demographically segregated networks alter employment opportunities for members of different demographic groups (for a review, see McDonald and Day 2010). For example, black job-seekers' contacts are less likely to refer them to prospective employers than are those of white job-seekers (Royster 2003; Smith 2005). Moreover, black job-seekers are less likely than white job-seekers to have high-status social ties (Lin 2001; McDonald 2011), so even when black job-seekers obtain referrals to employers, they gain get fewer advantages from these referrals than do comparable white job-seekers (Silva 2018). In sum, these lines of work show that network processes can be sources of (dis)advantage for different demographic groups, and demography can condition network processes.

Demographic and cultural. Work on organizational forms as identities that observers use to evaluate organizations and their products combines insights from both the demographic and cultural perspectives (Hannan, Pólos, and Carroll 2007; for reviews, see Negro, Koçak, and Hsu 2010; Durand, Grandqvist, and Tyllström 2017). Organizations are sorted (by themselves or observers) into categories of forms that delimit what organizations should (not) be and do, based on observers' understandings. Being perceived as straddling rather than fitting within such categories generates penalties for organizations (e.g., Zuckerman 1999; Hsu 2006), while being perceived as members of high-status categories generates benefits for organizations (e.g., Sharkey 2014). Other, more micro, work reveals how the social (e)valuation of the categories individuals are placed in (usually, but not always demographic) is shaped by organizational and industry norms. For example, in leveraged buyout firms, gender is a more relevant criterion for social exclusion than race/ethnicity because women do not fit the "ideal worker" profile (Turco 2010), while in consulting and law, social class is more relevant than race/ethnicity because decision makers sort job applicants on cultural similarity (Rivera 2012).

Relational and cultural. Institutionalist research increasingly attends to the interplay between culture and power. Some work reveals how power-dependence relations affect which novel ideas and practices are adopted. For example, organizations adopt frames of strategic change that reflect the interests of those who control financial resources (Fiss and Zajac 2006). Other work shows how network ties affect diffusion and isomorphism. For example, different network ties promote isomorphism through different mechanisms (Guler, Guillén, and Macpherson 2002), and network ties promote customized adoption of new practices early in the institutionalization process but conformity-driven adoption later on (Westphal, Gulati, and Shortell 1997). Still other work shows that culture conditions network effects; for instance, by influencing the value of different types of network ties (e.g., Xiao and Tsui 2007).

Conclusion

Our review reveals only a tiny fraction of the breadth and depth of contemporary research on organizations. A search of the Web of Science (http://webofknowledge.com), which counts citations in academic journals, reveals the impact these ideas have had – and continue to have. For example, Kanter (1977), foundational for micro demographic research, has been cited 5,000 times since its publication; Granovetter (1974), foundational for micro relational research, has been cited 11,000 times; Pfeffer and Salancik, basic to both micro and macro relational research, has been cited 8,000 times; and Meyer and Rowan (1977), foundational for the cultural perspective, has been cited 7,000 times. Across all foundational works, half of their citations have been in articles published 2010 onward, suggesting that the study of organizations remains central to sociology, management, and many other fields.

Yet, over the past four decades the study of organizations has grown fastest in professional (especially business) schools. This has generated complaints that research on organizations increasingly attends to efficiency and effectiveness, making it a tool of capitalism; see, for example, Harlan Prechel's comment on Work in Progress, the blog of the Organizations, Occupations, and Work Section of the ASA (http://wp.me/p2Obbg-PX). This may be true, but

comments by Elisabeth Clemens, Martin Ruef, Ezra Zuckerman, and me on that blog suggest how to make the study of organizations more central to sociology: we should focus on explaining organizations' impact on outcomes that are central to many sociological subfields, not just inequality (as discussed above), but also race and ethnicity, culture, education, religion, etc. For inspiration, consider Mora (2014), who showed how social-movement organizations, churches, government agencies, and media businesses jointly defined "Hispanic" as an ethnic, not racial, category; this work fundamentally reorients the study of race/ethnicity and immigration. Many other subfields of sociology await reorientation by organizational scholars.

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Table 1: Three Contemporary Perspectives on Organizations

Perspective	Demographic	Relational	Cultural
Basic principle	Position in social and physical space determines patterns of action by defining opportunities for action and constraints on action.	Relationships determine patterns of action by defining opportunities for action and constraints on action.	Shared understandings/mental models determine patterns of action by defining opportunities for action and constraints on action.
Social structure inheres in…	… the demographic distribution of individuals and collectives – i.e., along salient dimensions of social and physical position.	… the relationships between individuals and collectives (organizations, families, etc.) involving exchanges of valued items (material or symbolic).	… the system of understandings of reality and possibility – *culture* – meaning norms, values, and expectations of what is and what is not done/possible/good.
Identity…	… derives from actors' positions, absolute or relative, along dimensions of social life; the relational perspective.	… is constituted by the social and economic ties among individuals, groups, and organizations.	… is a social construction, arising from social interaction.
Central logic at different levels of analysis			
Individual: *your social, psychological, and economic experiences as an organizational member depend on….*	… internal organizational demography: (a) demographic characteristics (gender, race, age, etc.) and (b) your demographic characteristics relative to other people in the organization (and in the labor force/population).	… interpersonal relations: (a) a focal individual's relationships with other people – affective and instrumental, voluntary and involuntary, current and past; and (b) the structure of relationships among people and groups within a focal organization and among other organizations.	… individual sense-making and learning; symbolic interaction: cognitive representations of what is and should be (schemas), which can be tinged with strong emotions, and which develop over time, through real and superstitious learning.
Group/subunit *behavior and effectiveness (conflict, innovativeness, creativity, ability to make good or timely decisions, turnover, …) depend on…*	… internal organizational demography: the composition of the group, in terms of demographic characteristics (gender, race/ ethnicity, age, time in the organization/ group, education area and level)	… intraorganizational networks: the structure of relationships among people and groups within and between organizations. Note that the "nodes" in these networks can be individuals or groups (e.g., mapping how work flows through a focal organization).	… social cognition and symbolic interaction: the meanings people have toward other people and things, which are derived from social interaction and modified through interpretation.

Table 1 (continued): Three Contemporary Perspectives on Organizations

Perspective	Demographic	Relational	Cultural
Organization: *an organization's functioning, behavior, and performance (structural change, growth/shrinkage, economic performance) depend on…*	… organizational ecology: the focal organizations' characteristics (e.g., age, size, technology) and the characteristic of other organizations in the focal organization's environment (e.g., their numbers, variety, relative size).	… interorganizational networks: (a) relationships between the focal organization and other organizations – affective and instrumental, voluntary and involuntary, current and past; and (b) the structure of relationships among organizations in the focal organization's environment. Note that the "nodes" in these networks can be individuals or organizations.	… the social construction of reality: what people in the focal organization have learned about what works and doesn't, what is right and wrong, what is good and bad about rules, laws, and resources/power (coercive forces); norms, values, and expectations (cultural forces); and relative frequency/rareness of role models (mimetic targets).
Population/Industry: *the structure and vital rates of populations/ industries depend on…*	… population ecology: the number of organizations in the focal population, their aggregate size, their distribution in terms of salient characteristics (age, size, technology, *etc.*), and their identities (forms as social codes, involving both recognition and imperative standing).	… interorganizational networks: the structure of relationships among organizations within the focal population/ industry. Note that the nodes in these networks can be individuals or organizations.	… the social construction of reality: what people in the organizations in the focal population or industry have learned about what works and doesn't, what is right and wrong, what is good and bad – not merely dry fact, but rather also what they have learned about rules, laws, and resource dependencies (coercive/ regulatory forces); norms, values, and expectations (cultural forces); and relative frequency/rareness of role models (mimetic targets).
Field/Sector: *the emergence and structure of fields/sectors depend on…*	… community ecology: the number of organizations in the multiple populations in the field/sector, their aggregate size, their distribution in terms of salient characteristics (age, size, technology, *etc.*), and their identities (forms as social codes, involving both recognition and imperative standing).	… interorganizational networks: the structure of relationships among organizations in a sector or field. Note that the nodes in these networks can be individuals or organizations.	… the social construction of reality: what people in the focal sector or field have learned about what works and doesn't, what is right and wrong, what is good and bad – not merely dry fact, but rather also what they have learned about rules, laws, and resource dependencies (coercive/ regulatory forces); norms, values, and expectations (cultural forces); and relative frequency/rareness of role models (mimetic targets).