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Making Organizational Theory Work: Institutions, Occupations, and Negotiated Orders

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In this essay I argue that organizational theorizing would benefit from incorporating a richer understanding of work and occupations. To demonstrate how, I turn to recent literature analyzing inhabited institutions, occupations as institutions, and occupations as negotiated orders. I explore the theoretical and methodological implications of these approaches to show how they challenge some of our more abstract images of organizations. They do so by grounding their theoretical frameworks in work practices and interaction, interpretation and meaning, and understandings of occupational membership.

Key words: work; occupations; institutions; professions; negotiated order
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Do our theories of organizations reflect the organizations you know firsthand? Pick three organizations that you have spent time in recently, and think about your experiences with them. Then take a few minutes and consider how your favorite (or least favorite) organizational theory explains those experiences.

Unfortunately, the gap between our concepts and our experiences is bigger than it should be. Because our theoretical images of organizations are not well grounded, they often do not successfully capture the realities of organizational life. I borrowed this exercise from Blumer, who used to ask his students to explain 10 minutes of their own experience using the popular social psychological concepts of the day (described in Becker 1998, p. 11). Half a century later, and applied to a different theoretical domain, the trick still works. Blumer (1969) suggested that the source of this gap rests with our failure to observe social interaction and incorporate it into our theorizing. Because we do not directly examine what happens in social life, our images of organizations reflect our ignorance, resulting in abstract theories that privilege structure and contradict people's experiences.

Organizational theorists are aware of this problem. It is reflected, at least in part, in the repeated calls to develop multilevel empirical approaches to organizational theory (e.g., House et al. 1995, Klein and Kozlowski 2000, Hitt et al. 2007, Gupta et al. 2007). For instance, Hitt et al. (2007) point out that we can attribute the inconsistency of performance effects in the strategy literature to a lack of knowledge about how strategy is actually implemented. Similarly, some lament that within neoinstitutional theory engagement with individual action and interaction amounts to little more than ritual citation (Hallett and Ventresca 2006). Although organizational theory's interest in relationships with the environment has been a fruitful source of theorizing for scholars within a variety of macro-perspectives, this has come at the expense of grounding such theories in the individual action of people in organizations (Barley and Kunda 2001, Gavetti et al. 2007).

Ideally, we would like our theories of organizations to encompass the social processes that take place at different levels of organizational life and to interconnect those multiple sets of activities (Goodman 2000). A means for doing so lies in developing the theoretical middle range (Merton 1957) by making "meaningful connections" between macro and micro levels of analysis explicit (Coleman 1986, p. 1328). Uncovering the social mechanisms that link individuals and social systems creates a fine-grained coupling between cause and effect, showing how effects are produced (Hedström and Swedberg 2001). However, although there is frequent talk about the need to explore the middle range, organizational theory suffers a shortage of explorers with the tools to make this expedition.

We can acquire these tools by grounding organization studies in an understanding of work and occupations. Conceptualizing organizations in the context of occupations and work was common when organizational theory got its start, as there were more porous boundaries between disciplines like industrial sociology, industrial relations, and organizational sociology (Stern and Barley 1996). As these boundaries were more firmly drawn, however, organizational theory became more structural and abstract. To fully ground our understanding of organizations requires acknowledging that people do not directly respond to social structures, but rather to the situations they face and their interpretations of them

(Blumer 1969). In the case of organizations, the situations people find themselves in are closely bound up with their work and their occupations.

Considering work and occupations will help tether theories of organizations to the practice, interaction, and interpretation of the people within them. Because work is the primary activity of people within organizations, examining the practices of people at work positions organizational analyses at the level of individual action. Given that people rarely work alone, exploring what people actually do at work also implicates interaction in our analysis of organizations (Strauss 1988). Occupations also play a role in organizational practice and interpretation. Within organizational fields, members of occupational associations are substantive actors who affect organizational environments through their professional activities (Abbott 1988). Additionally, occupational membership influences action and meaning within organizations. Occupations shape our individual identities, tastes, and affiliations (Bourdieu 1984). We identify with other members of our occupational communities and enact our commitments to these communities in consequential ways at work (Bechky 2003, Orr 1996).

In this paper, I draw attention to the recent work of scholars who use the tools of occupations and work to shape their direct observations of organizational life in ways that enhance their theorizing. The choice of research presented here is not exhaustive but a purposive sample, chosen to show how a grounding in work and occupations improves organizational images and develops richer, well-connected theories. I group the studies into three approaches—inhabited institutions, occupations as institutions, and occupations as negotiated orders—and describe three broad categories of mechanisms they introduce: work practices and interactions, interpretation and meaning, and occupational membership.

Describing these approaches shows how integrating work and occupations can equip organizational scholars both theoretically and methodologically. This research perturbs taken-for-granted explanations in organizational theory by examining what underlies change and stability, tracing how social structures are linked with practical actions and showing the inherent variability of organizational life. Discussing this work provides a basis for understanding what makes robust theorizing difficult and serves as a point of departure for considering how we might theorize better. I hope my discussion of this research will inspire others to follow the path of these explorers and use the study of work and occupations to fully ground their theorizing.

Inhabited Institutions: Where the Work Is in Institutional Approaches

Recent studies of inhabited institutions have extended micro-sociological perspectives on work and occupations to enhance theorizing within organizational institutionalism. Organizational institutionalists consider the relationship between organizations and their institutional context, with a particular eye to the cultural pressures that induce structural conformity. However, as institutional theory has become more established, it has gotten more abstract and has produced a "paradox of embeddedness": How do actors, constrained by taken-for-granted institutions, act to change those institutions (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, Hirsch and Lounsbury 1997, Greenwood et al. 2008)? Frustrated by the uncoupling of institutions and action in organizational theory, institutional scholars have suggested multiple theoretical perspectives to address this dilemma, including structuration and practice theories (Barley and Tolbert 1997, Battilana 2006), ethnomethodology and sensemaking (Powell and Colyvas 2008), and critical realism and dialectical analysis (Leca and Naccache 2006, Seo and Creed 2002).

The "inhabited institutions" approach (Scully and Creed 1997, Hallett and Ventresca 2006, Binder 2007) is one of the most interesting responses to this paradox. It is distinctive in that it employs scholarly traditions of work and occupations to bring individual action back into institutional theory. This perspective draws on the interactionist approaches of Blumer, Hughes, and Strauss to conceptualize the relationships between structure and action within institutions (Hallett et al. 2009, Barley 2008). For instance, Hallett and Ventresca's (2006) reanalysis of Gouldner's (1954) *Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy* shows how new patterns of activity in a mine emerged as the old "indulgency pattern" of management clashed with new bureaucratic practices, and because workers valued the old modes of interaction, a wildcat strike ensued. Exploring these patterns emphasizes the mechanisms by which institutions shape and are shaped by workers' interactions and their interpretations of their work (Hallett et al. 2009).

Several recent studies use this approach to show how focusing on interpretation and action at work grounds theory and uncovers fundamental mechanisms in organizations' relationships to environments. (Also see Appendix A.) Hallett's (2009, 2010) ethnographic research in an elementary school, for instance, explores how loose and tight coupling are enacted. Institutional scholars often investigate how myths spread through ceremonial conformity (Meyer and Rowan 1977, Schneiberg and Clemens 2006) but fail to examine, or even notice, the actual practices underlying the myths. Hallett, in contrast, explores the process by which an institutional myth—in this case, the myth of accountability—is recoupled to local practices inside the school. For a decade, the school's organizational order consisted of loose coupling between regional standards and local teaching practices in which teachers had autonomy in the classroom and created their own unsupervised work routines. Then pressures for improvement

from a newly appointed "CEO" of the city's schools led to the hiring of a new principal, trained in business doctrines of accountability, improvement, and urgency. The principal instituted new work practices such as formal instructional reviews and dropping in during classroom instruction. These reduced teachers' autonomy, and in their bewilderment and frustration, they took action such as tearing up the review paperwork and pouring milk over it and mobilizing a campaign against the principal that culminated in a 119-page volume of complaints about the turmoil at the school. By documenting these changes, Hallett (2010) demonstrates the difficult reality of enacting conformity at the workplace.

Zbaracki's (1998) work similarly upends taken-for-granted conceptions of ceremonial conformity. His research shows how the diffusion of what some scholars conceptualize as an organizational fad, total quality management (TQM), is not a function of mere symbolic adoption but a complicated process characterized by managerial interpretation and accommodation of technical and organizational realities. Hearing success stories in their environment, managers brought TQM into their own organizations, ignorant of its actual practices. As Zbaracki points out, this led to omitting many of the technical aspects of TQM and developing training that was theoretical rather than related to the work done within the organization. As a consequence, many projects failed. However, the few successes were lauded in the stories managers told for outside consumption through their TQM newsletters. Meanwhile, inside the organization these projects produced skepticism and ambivalence from some, such as those who referred to the Deming method as the "Lemming method" (Zbaracki 1998, p. 623). Taking a macrolevel perspective, institutional theorists might view this process as ceremonial conformity, but Zbaracki shows it to be a process of adaptation fraught with meaning, tension, and a lot of work.

Like the other scholars examining how institutions are inhabited, Zilber (2002) draws out the importance of interpretation and meaning in her study of a rape crisis center undergoing a transition from a feminist orientation to a therapeutic one in response to changes in the environment. She shows that when investigating institutional pressures for change, we need to look extremely closely at what happens within organizations—practices may not always change, but meanings often do. The center shifted some of its practices in response to its environment: the acceptance of rape as a social and therapeutic problem increased demand for services, and as a consequence, the center opened its doors to nonfeminist volunteers. Other practices remained the same. The center continued to use consensus-based decision-making practices, and its training encompassed personal story-telling sessions. However, with the center's change in orientation, all of these practices were no longer interpreted through a feminist lens, but were understood and described in therapeutic terms.

The interplay of structure and action in institutional theorizing is highlighted by these scholars' attention to dynamics of occupations and work. In particular, these studies of institutional change demonstrate how the interpretations of individuals within organizations are shaped by the work they are doing and their occupational membership—whether they are managers facing the implementation of TQM standards or teachers facing simultaneous administrative, professional, and practical demands. Disrupting work practices within organizations also has consequences for meaning and can result in skepticism or turmoil. By drawing out these implications, these authors are able to ground their theoretical claims in organizational realities and elaborate on the mechanisms of institutional change.

Occupations as Institutions and Negotiated Orders

Two different traditions in the sociology of occupations have been brought directly to bear on organizational theory in ways that demonstrate how understanding work can better animate our theoretical frameworks. One set of studies, following a macro-sociological tradition of examining occupational systems, focuses on the institutional role of occupations but explores how occupational members act and interact at the workplace to influence the institutional field. The other approach starts with workplace interaction and treats occupations as negotiated orders, highlighting how work practices, framed within social structures, influence organizational outcomes.

An extensive research tradition in sociology demonstrates the role of professions as a societal institution and examines the activities within professional systems. One aspect of this tradition relevant to organizational theory has to do with the ways occupational members create change in their fields (Friedson 1970, Larson 1977, Abbott 1988). Occupations negotiate and contest jurisdiction—the link between an occupation and its work—through public, legal, and workplace claims for control over tasks (Abbott 1988). This research demonstrates how professional fields change as members of occupational groups compete to influence institutional structures such as accreditation and legislation (Halpern 1992, Begun and Lippincott 1987). For instance, optometrists who actively lobbied to change prescription laws and created compelling knowledge claims about their training to the legislature were able to expand their task jurisdiction into ophalmologists' territory (Begun and Lippincott 1987). Occupational membership activates people to change both their professional fields and the work that they do within organizations.

Occupations as Institutions

Recent organizational theorists who explore the role of occupations as institutional systems have identified some mechanisms by which professional organizations act to enable change (Greenwood and Suddaby 2006, Lawrence 2004). For example, Greenwood and Suddaby (2006) show that bridging boundaries with their corporate clients opened the Big 5 accounting firms to new ideas as they tried to become multiprofessional organizations. Conceptually, this approach is directly in line with the classic professions literature; by unpacking occupational dynamics, the cross-organizational mechanisms that shape a professional field become clear. However, in most of the studies of professions as institutional systems, one rarely sees the people within organizations, as evidence is drawn from field-level activities such as regulatory action and association lobbying. As a consequence, individual workplace action is often missing, and thus these frameworks lack conceptual grounding in the work itself.

However, several recent studies within the tradition of examining professions as an institutional field have enhanced our understanding of organizations by looking at individual action at the workplace. These scholars consider how occupational action is involved in institutional and organizational change, but they achieve theoretical depth by paying attention to work practices and exploring individuals' occupational memberships and their attendant meanings and actions. (Also see Appendix B.)

In Chreim, Williams, and Hining's (2007) longitudinal case study of a Canadian health clinic, changes in the occupational role identities of physicians were followed as the clinic implemented a project creating an integrated approach to health services. Chreim et al. (2007) describe an age-old dynamic in the occupations literature: physicians have the requisite professional power and status in the medical hierarchy to resist change. What is interesting in this study is that the authors show how the participants in this project worked their way around this dynamic. Getting professional association support for the experiment, hospitals were able to change incentive structures and colocate patient services, placing physicians close to other team members and creating new patterns of interaction and negotiation among the staff. Physicians still directed the pace of change and maintained their feelings of control over patient care, but as one noted with team-based care, "My role as a physician has changed for good. I tend to think less autonomously" (Chreim et al. 2007, p. 1523).

Reay, Golden-Biddle, and GermAnn's (2006) longitudinal study of nurse practitioners also examines role change in the context of institutional entrepreneurship. In contrast to prior research, which argued for the constraining effects of embeddedness on institutional change (Greenwood and Suddaby 2006, Maguire et al. 2004), Reay and her colleagues show that embeddedness can create conditions for change. The nurses' long years of experience working within the hospital system enabled them to craft opportunities to alter the work and organizational practices and structures along multiple dimensions. For instance, they worked to incorporate the role of nurse practitioner within established payroll categories and job descriptions, and they ensured that the information technology system could accommodate nursing as well as physician orders. They mobilized to make changes at moments when they could emphasize the physician shortage and advocate for the new nursing practitioner role within the local community.

Both of these studies exhibit the traditional macrosociological approach to professions, linking organizational outcomes to occupational actions at the field level such as professional association involvement, activism in the field, and task-force membership. However, they go a step further, fruitfully bringing work and action into their theorizing by showing how occupational shifts are integrated within organizations through everyday work practices of colocation and negotiation. Although some individuals in these settings participated in activities in their professional fields, occupational membership also framed their practice, action, and interpretation at the workplace. For instance, physicians were willing to support a new approach to health services because they kept occupational control over the pace of change and maintained an occupational identity that reinforced their feelings of control over patient care (Chreim et al. 2007). By bringing the institutional occupations approach into the workplace, these studies uncover theoretical connections rooted in occupational membership, work practice, and interpretation.

Occupations as Negotiated Orders

A second set of occupational studies follows the interactionist tradition within the sociology of work and occupations, taking a negotiated order perspective on how members of occupational groups construct their worlds. Most often associated with the work of Anselm Strauss, the negotiated order approach to occupations starts with workplace interaction and explores how work processes both constitute and are situated in organizational dynamics and structures (Maines 1982). For instance, Strauss et al. (1963) show how rules and structures in a psychiatric hospital are interwoven into the working arrangements of doctors, nurses, and administrators, who alternately draw on and ignore them as they go about their work. By showing how the structural and organizational context influences and is influenced by processes of negotiation, this approach roots organizational theory in the dynamics of work.

Two recent examples of organizational studies draw on this tradition and ground their analyses in the

everyday activities at the workplace. They offer an alternative conception of organizational structure by tracing how work practices and the interaction order influence organizational outcomes. These studies also contribute to theories of organizations and occupations through the nature of their sites of investigation. Many scholars who study the organization of occupational systems look at established arenas of multiprofessional conflict such as medicine, accounting, or law. In contrast, these studies engage in novel theorizing by investigating workplaces and occupations outside of the traditional professions. (Also see Appendix B.)

Bechky (2006) examines cross-occupational dynamics among the technical crew working on temporary projects in the film industry. Bechky's (2006) research challenges conceptions that temporary projects, in contrast with traditional bureaucratic organizations, provide unstructured and flexible environments for workers (Meyerson et al. 1996, Baker and Faulkner 1991). She shows how coordination in film productions depended on role structures that were enacted through day-to-day work, "like jump rope rhythms passed from child to child" (Bechky 2006, p. 9). Crew members reinforced role enactments through their interaction order, engaging in enthusiastic gratitude and praise, frequent correction, and task humor. For instance, grips, electricians, or set dressers asked to perform a task joked, "Do you think I'm a production assistant?" to indicate when it was outside of role expectations. By repeatedly enacting their roles this way, individuals recreated a strong role structure over multiple projects, which stabilized the organizational structure within the industry. Crew members did not experience these projects as flexible and loosely structured because the interaction order constrained their behavior. In contrast with macro-structural studies showing the role making of top executives in the film industry (Baker and Faulkner 1991), this study shows how the interaction order limits role latitude for many other members of this industry.

Nelsen and Barley (1997) also look at a negotiated order, using their attention to workplace interaction to compare and contrast the work of paid and volunteer emergency medical technicians (EMTs). By showing how EMTs developed a cultural mandate as paid work, they create new theoretical insights into the early institutionalization of an occupation, a process not easily accounted for by structural theories or methods. Because paid and volunteer EMTs had similar institutional resources—they had access to the same training, credentials, and technical equipment—the daily interaction order at the workplace was key to developing an occupational mandate. There were clear differences in the ways paid and volunteer EMTs practiced the work and interacted with patients. Paid EMTs acted more authoritatively and dressed in uniform, and they constrained volunteers from doing important tasks with patients as they also denigrated them to nurses and doctors and wrote their activities out of the reports they gave to hospitals. Nelsen and Barley (1997) show how the everyday practices of dispatch in this locality gave paid EMTs an advantage by enabling them to respond to more calls. Because they were interacting more often with medical professionals inside hospitals, they also had greater access to the rhetoric of medicine. With these interactions, paid EMTs convinced nurses and doctors that they were more skilled and, therefore, more legitimate practitioners. These findings demonstrate that the role of organizations in legitimation can sometimes be seen most clearly through the interaction order as it unfolds within the larger field. This may happen long before an occupation is officially recognized in the public sphere and accessible to archival study.

Both of these studies depict workplaces in which the work practices and the negotiated order of occupational groups matter. They illustrate how the daily work of film crews and EMTs—jokes about roles or reports about patient care—is linked to social structures. This work and talk, repeated day after day, constitutes the activity on which both organizational change and stability are built. Analyzing the impact of the variation of work practices within organizations and examining specific places and times where action matters enables these studies to unearth new mechanisms. By drawing out the implications of these work practices, these scholars develop a deeper, richer, and more accurate understanding of organizational processes such as role change and occupational legitimation.

Implications of a Work and Occupations Approach

Bringing these approaches together reveals several ways in which situating organizational theory within work and occupations can make our understanding of organizations less abstract, better specified, and more interesting. These studies succeed in enriching theory by teasing out the implications of occupational membership, tracing work practices and interactions, and digging into meanings and interpretations. Scholars investigating organizations with these perspectives use different points of entry into organizational theory but illustrate similar themes. They offer unique views of change and stability in organizations and institutions by investigating relationships between action and structure and using variation in process to stimulate theory development.

These studies offer original insights into change and stability by showing us how those processes are embedded in what happens at the workplace. Changes to organizational fields, although influenced by occupational activities, are enacted on the ground at work as well as in established, institutionally visible realms. For instance, role changes enable institutional changes,

and it is through people's understanding of their workplaces and their colleagues' interpretations that they take action to make such changes acceptable (Reay et al. 2006, Chreim et al. 2007). Change and stability are both rooted in the interaction order, which draws on, maintains, and confronts social structures. Thus, Nelsen and Barley (1997) find that EMTs daily interactions with doctors and nurses, structured by the dispatch practices, helps legitimate their work as a paid occupation. By showing the relationships between structure and action, these studies tease out the interactive mechanisms that underlie organizational outcomes.

These studies also suggest that being attuned to variation is critical for developing fully fleshed out theories. Examining the inhabitants of organizations, for instance, brings to light the messy dynamics underlying any appearance of field-level conformity: conformity is enacted in a variety of ways through concerted workplace activity, and is fraught with meaning. As both Zbaracki (1998) and Hallett (2010) demonstrate, to produce institutional conformity means wrangling not only with technical workplace realities but also with workers' perceptions and tensions. Explanations of change that do not explore these workplace meanings and practices at all levels of an organization risk missing important theoretical mechanisms.

Organizational theory would be enhanced by an effort to sincerely and seriously incorporate the workplace in our analyses of organizations, institutions, and occupational systems. We need to consider the inside of organizations as an important locale for understanding institutional- and field-level dynamics. That is where much of the action is happening between people, and the variation in meanings and practices within organizations provides the necessary texture for theorizing. These theoretical concerns also imply certain methodological choices that will help scholars to draw out meaningful theoretical connections.

Situated Understandings of Organizational Life

The first step is to get grounded because without attention to practice and meaning, we may remain mired in abstract images of organizations. One hallmark of the approaches reviewed here is the richly detailed understandings the authors bring to bear on their research questions. By taking seriously the implications of occupations and work, these scholars situate their organizational theories in the everyday relationships, talk, and work of organizational life. To deeply explore and relate social structure and action, they begin by gathering qualitative data to create thick descriptions. As Geertz (1973, p. 23, italics in original) suggests, thick description enables us not only to think concretely about sociological concepts, but to "work creatively and imaginatively *with* them." Situating theorizing in thick descriptions of organizations generates bodies of data that can be mined to discover patterns in work practices and interpretations.

Laying out these patterns requires a focus on the materiality and language of work. Specifically, scholars engage in direct encounters with organizations by watching how people do what they do and listening to what they say about what they do. For instance, Hallett's (2009, 2010) presence in the classrooms and teachers' room enabled his access to teachers' work practices and their interpretations of the changing administrative requirements. As an ethnographer, by seeing the action his informants took in response to how accountability was realized in their organization and hearing them talk about it, Hallett was in a position to uncover the mechanisms underlying the turmoil at the school. A further way to explore materiality is by tracing how the artifacts and representations in organizations are used and created (Bechky 2008); explicitly focusing on the material elements of work helps ground theoretical explanations in practice. Lawrence (2004), for example, used newsletters to understand how accountants positioned themselves in the field of environmental audit, and Zbaracki (1998) examined TQM materials, training manuals, and internal publications and documents, asking managers and workers how these were used.

Watching action and listening to talk within organizations are two important means by which the studies here develop theoretical connections; another is to uncover informant meanings through interviews. Disentangling meaning and action is particularly important for countering any explanation that assumes that organizational structures or actions are fully representative of the interpretations of the people in those organizations. In Zilber's (2002) work, for instance, asking volunteers at the rape crisis center about the feminist roots of their practices, which sometimes resulted in silence or blank stares, was essential to her conclusion that although practices in the center such as consensus decision making stayed the same, they were interpreted differently by members. Studies that do not consider the micro level of action, interaction, and meaning may overlook important dynamics relevant to understanding any organizational outcomes.

Using Comparative Analysis to Uncover Mechanisms

Incorporating situated understandings of organizations enables rich and nuanced images, but these images of organizations are complicated. Introducing the work and interaction of all the members of a workplace—teachers, principals, and school boards (Hallett 2009, 2010); physicians, nurses, and administrators (Reay et al. 2006); and paid and volunteer EMTs, patients, and hospital staff (Nelsen and Barley 1997)—can get messy. As a result, when considering how the practices and interaction order of organization members constitutes the social structure of the organization, it can be difficult to untangle particular actions and consequences. This messiness may accurately reflect the entanglements of organizational life but

requires neatening up to develop robust theory. Thus, these scholars of work and organizations build on their thick descriptions to pinpoint relationships and patterns of interaction that uncover the mechanisms operating between levels of analysis. By using comparative analysis, they make sense of the variation in their data and draw out theoretical connections.

Comparison is facilitated by sampling, study design, and analytic methods. A typical approach in studies of occupations as institutions, for example, is to generate comparisons by sampling longitudinally, examining data across time as people go about changing the institutional order of a field (Chreim et al. 2007, Reay et al. 2006). Other scholars generate comparisons by designing studies of multiple organizations. Both Zbaracki (1998) and Bechky (2006) aggregate the data from the organizations they studied in their analyses, making use of the similarities in processes and dynamics across sites. Even more effective comparative designs provide a window into theoretical mechanisms through an exploration of differences. Nelsen and Barley's (1997) work is a great example: they leverage an explicitly comparative case design by showing the impact of differences in how paid and volunteer EMTs talk, work, and act.

In addition to sampling strategies, comparative methods that introduce differences into theoretical analysis are critical for uncovering mechanisms. The key to leveraging variation lies in the comparative exploration of causes, actions, and interactions, and consequences of events in the data (Strauss and Corbin 1990). The constant comparative method is a tool for discovering how action and structure are linked; it helps uncover distinctive patterns by comparing "data on structural conditions, consequences, deviances, norms, processes, patterns, and systems" (Glaser and Strauss 1967, p. 18). Grounded theory entails more than gathering qualitative data to thickly describe organizations; these scholars engage in specific theory development about the situations they are studying, using their data to uncover ambiguities in the literature and challenge abstract conceptualizations.

In grounded theorizing, researchers comparatively examine data, instance by instance, considering how people act and interact in response to events, and relating those processes to the structural and intervening conditions in the organization or field that influence particular outcomes. Bechky (2006), for example, closely analyzes the organizational processes that might have an effect on individual action on film sets, including conditions such as the expectation of future interaction and the status of people's positions, to link individual role enactments to the structural context. Explicitly laying out the variation in the data across different types of organizations, occupations, and individual statuses helps to untangle the complexities of organizational life by showing how levels of analysis are related. This results in richly connected conceptualizations of organizations that also remain true to the experiences of the people within them.

Conclusion: Incorporating Work and Occupations into Organization Theory

Examining empirical studies of inhabited institutions and occupations as institutions and negotiated orders demonstrates that there is energy and enthusiasm for creating theories of organizations that are grounded in the study of occupations and work. We should take inspiration and guidance from these efforts, as they show that although rich and grounded theorizing is challenging, it has a powerful payoff. By focusing on meaning and interpretation, occupational membership, and work practices, scholars working in this area have offered new perspectives that respond to theoretical challenges in understanding change and stability, organizational formation, and relationships between structures and action.

Although many structural organizational scholars already draw on the insights of this approach to ground their theoretical arguments in organizational life, some may be hesitant to go out into organizations themselves. For those scholars, a work and occupations approach plots useful directions to overlooked places and moments to gather data. When doing studies of institutional change, for instance, incorporating data that reflect variation within organizations and early moments of formation would help to expand the boundaries of theories in both space and time. Considering work and occupations not only provides ideas about where to look for data but also suggests particular types of mechanisms to explore. Specifically, processes that incorporate the meaning and practice of organization members are critical to understanding how social structures evolve. However, it is clear that the most direct line into practice and meaning is the people doing the work and interpretation. Therefore, as Blumer might, I urge you all to get off campus, get into organizations, and improve our theories by directly engaging with the members of the social worlds we study.

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Appendix A. Studies of Inhabited Institutions: Theoretical Connections

	Inside organization	Outside organization
Hallett (2010) Explores how the institutional myth of accountability is actually recoupled to local practices inside an elementary school, resulting in turmoil and partisan battling.	*Interpretation and meaning*: • Principal is convinced that accountability works; teachers value autonomy and are bewildered and frustrated by changes *Work practices and interaction*: • School board hires principal and supports her actions • Principal enacts practices such as surprise observational visits to classrooms and review of daily curriculum plans • Teachers voice frustrations in 119-page leaflet decrying principal, and some quit	*Interpretation and meaning*: • Drive for accountability in the field influences new finance-oriented school board to hire this particular principal *Occupational membership*: • Professional norms of accountability in training program shape rhetoric and practices of principal
Zilber (2002) Shows that under institutional pressures, some previously feminist practices of a rape crisis center change as others remain. All, however, are reinterpreted in ways that are more professional and therapeutic than feminist.	*Interpretation and meaning*: • Volunteers develop a professional worldview • Staff and volunteers interpret former feminist practices in decision making and training from a therapeutic perspective • Staff and volunteers speak in therapeutic and professional terms about the work of the organization *Work practices and interaction*: • Organization prefers hiring professionals; the status of professionals within the organization is higher	*Interpretation and meaning*: • Social acceptance of rape as a social and therapeutic problem leads to increase in demand for services *Work practices and interaction*: • Center begins to let nonfeminists volunteer *Occupational membership*: • Center holds professional conferences and is represented by professionals rather than feminist volunteers
Zbaracki (1998) Shows how the adoption of TQM was not mere ceremonial conformity but a complicated process by which managers interpret rhetorics from the environment, adopt particular practices given their organization's technical and practical realities, and then create new success stories about TQM on which other organizations can draw.	*Interpretation and meaning*: • Managers create new success stories and only provide positive messages rather than portray difficulties • Some members of some organizations see TQM as a "dog and pony show" and become ambivalent or hostile *Work practices and interaction*: • Selection of particular practices depend on managers' commitment to TQM • Ignorance and skepticism of members sometimes leads to a lack of integration of practices • Managers provide theoretical training rather than work-based training	*Interpretation and meaning*: • Managers get a sense of what others in the field are doing by hearing success stories *Work practices and interaction*: • Managers hire experts, often TQM consultants, to help develop training programs

Appendix B. Studies of Occupations: Theoretical Connections

	Inside organization	Outside organization
	Occupations as institutions	
Chreim et al. (2007) Explores how a new project to provide holistic team-based health care succeeds in changing roles by working around the physicians' professional prerogatives and identity.	*Work practices and interaction*: • Colocation of patient services • Team structures are negotiated among staff • Interaction of staff provides alternative templates for patient care *Interpretation and meaning*: • Physicians maintain feelings of control over patient care and giving up some autonomy	*Occupational membership*: • Professional association allows experimentation with incentive structure and advises cautious change, retaining physician control • Members advocate across region to have project used as a platform • Physicians advocate at association meetings
Reay et al. (2006) Shows that embeddedness in a work system helps create a new role for nurse practitioners (NPs) by enabling them to cultivate opportunities for change, fit the role into prevailing systems, and prove the value of the new role.	*Work practices and interaction*: • Colocation in organization encourages interaction • NPs' work practices legitimated through reassurance and stellar performance • Role classified as nursing position and incorporated into organizational and human resource structures	*Occupational membership*: • NPs engage in activism in the local and professional community—advertising to legitimate their role, emphasizing physician shortage—to encourage adoption • Nursing leaders active in task force to change legislation to support role
	Occupations as negotiated orders	
Bechky (2006) Explores coordination as enacted role structures, showing how practices of joking, thanking, and admonishing coordinate work and facilitate the structure of temporary projects in the film industry through the reinforcement of role expectations.	*Work practices and interaction*: • Film crew members' work practices of joking, thanking, and correcting relay role expectations that coordinate work and construct a role structure • Duration in role, visibility of work, and expectation of future interaction influence how crew members interact	*Work practices and interaction*: • Interorganizational career paths across projects expose crew members to multiple roles and enable the quick learning of role expectations • Repeated enactments of the role structure across projects stabilize the organizational structure across the film industry
Nelsen and Barley (1997) Shows that the ways paid and volunteer EMT work, talk, and interact with others in the field facilitate the development of an occupational mandate and the commodification of the EMT occupation.	*Work practices and interaction*: • Paid and volunteer EMT organizations exhibit different ways of doing the work and interacting with patients and others *Interpretation and meaning*: • Paid volunteers frame their role as seasoned public servants, and volunteers frame it as an altruistic community obligation • Paid and volunteer EMTs dress differently and use different language	*Work practices and interaction*: • Dispatch practices in region allow paid EMTs more access to calls, and their increased interaction with others in the field provides them with medical rhetoric • Paid EMTs exclude volunteers from scene and denigrate them in talk to others in field, giving paid EMTs advantages in developing a mandate

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