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Management Communication Quarterly Forum: Institutionalism and Organizational Communication

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Management Communication Quarterly 2011 25: 151

DOI: 10.1177/0893318910389279

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Management Communication Quarterly
25(1) 151–153

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DOI: 10.1177/0893318910389279

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Introduction

Travelers across academic disciplines and subdisciplines generally do not have the benefit of scholarly versions of Lonely Planet or Fodor's guide books. Instead, to find our way, we rely on our intuition, hard work, confidence in scholarly universals, and the hospitality of locals—individuals raised in the disciplines that we visit or to which we move. As someone who was raised in the kingdom of sociology but who immigrated to the land of communication (by way of public health), I have relied on these guides, but I also found a particular strategy helpful. In the disciplines I have visited, I try to find the short list of ideas around which the discipline appears to be organized. In the case of my home discipline, the idea of *institution* remains a well-established organizing idea. In the case of my adopted academic home, communication, I believe one of those ideas is *the message*. In the early years of my residence in communication that was not immediately obvious. Communication mirrors many of the concerns and indeed topical research and

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theory areas of social psychology, sociology, anthropology, and management, to name a few. And communication as a discipline has a very broad range of concerns and emphases within it, just as any human society does. But I do believe that one concept that unifies communication as a discipline, and distinguishes it from other disciplines, is *the message*. So when Jim Barker invited me to contribute to the *MCQ* forum on institutionalism, I was delighted because it offered me an opportunity to share some of my native land with my adopted colleagues. And when he asked that I reach out beyond our discipline to still others, specifically in management schools, I knew I had a task of ecumenical proportions.

The result of these efforts is the subject of this forum. My contribution is the essay on how institutions communicate. For the title, I was inspired (perhaps obviously) by Mary Douglas's book *How Institutions Think* (Douglas, 1986). She concluded her book with an argument akin to mine: "For better or worse, individuals really do share their thoughts and they do to some extent harmonize their preferences, and they have no other way to make the big decisions except within the scope of institutions they build" (p. 128). Yet whereas Douglas tended to shy away from the thesis implied in her title (that institutions have agency), I seek to offer some support for the agency of institutions. I base this argument first not only on the extant ways in which institution is used as an idea in scholarship but also with the constructs of intentionality, endurance, reach, and incumbency. Rather than reiterate the definitions of these ideas here, I would indicate that institutional messages have the power, through their endurance, reach, and incumbency, to influence and regularize human conduct. In particular, as individuals make sense of institutions, we derive logics for our action that in turn reinforce those institutions.

I am very grateful to Stephen Barley, Cynthia Hardy, and Roy Suddaby for their willingness to entertain these ideas and offer responses. Each of them is also a world traveler in at least the disciplinary sense, crossing legal, sociological, communication, engineering, and management frontiers. Each offers as well a counterpoint to the arguments I set forth. Suddaby cautions against "essentializing" institutions, arguing instead that institutions owe their existence to human agents, as an emerging strain of work in organizational discourse and rhetoric attests. Hardy's arguments are similar, translating encumbrance, reach, and intentionality into the discursive production, distribution, and consumption of messages. I believe that both Suddaby and Hardy have confidence that an organizational discourse approach has great promise for sorting out institutional phenomena, and I agree that the new work in this area is making progress. Barley finds echoes of structuration

(remember signification?) in my attempt to specify the communicative function of institutions. He specifically argues with my contention that institutional messages must be unequivocal, noting instead that the equivocality of laws gives them endurance. I think this is a worthy point that might bear empirical study (though I am not sure that I need to be turned “on my head” to get it, as Suddaby contends). In my essay and in each of these critiques, we grapple with the age-old macro-micro problem, though I believe that we move closer to specifying—perhaps discursively—the institutionality of messages. Rather than debate my colleagues here, I will let the readers consider these ideas.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author received no financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article.

Reference

Douglas, M. (1986). *How institutions think*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.

Bio

John C. Lammers (PhD, University of California at Davis, 1983) is an associate professor in the Department of Communication at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. His main research interests include reconciling deterministic sociological theories of institutions with his organizational communication colleagues' strong preference for agency.

Management Communication Quarterly

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How Institutions Communicate: Institutional Messages, Institutional Logics, and Organizational Communication

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Management Communication Quarterly 2011 25: 154

DOI: 10.1177/0893318910389280

The online version of this article can be found at:

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Management Communication Quarterly
25(1) 154–182

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DOI: 10.1177/0893318910389280

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Introduction

Institutional messages provide a conceptual and empirical link between the predominantly macro world of institutions and the micro world of organizational communication. The concept of the institutional message is used colloquially but has not been developed theoretically. The conception that emerges from a review of the scholarly and primitive uses is that institutional messages are collations of thoughts that take on lives independent of senders and recipients. They may have the force of rules, spread intentionally or unintentionally via multiple channels to narrow or wider audiences. This essay considers the institutionality of messages in terms of their endurance, reach, encumbrancy, and intentionality. Institutional messages carry institutional logics—patterns of beliefs and rules. They are collations of thoughts that are intentional, enduring, have a wide reach, and encumber organizational participants to engage in certain behaviors or to take performative responses. It is argued that individuals and organizations develop institutional logics as they make sense of institutional messages. Implications and suggestions for research are included.

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Keywords

organizational theory, institutional theory, organizational communication

I hear it was charged against me that
I sought to destroy institutions;
But really I am neither for nor against institutions;
(What indeed have I in common with them?
—Or what with the destruction of them?)

Walt Whitman, 1904, p. 107

In spite of Giddens' (1979) critique of the "orthodox consensus" that agency and structure were realms that could not be joined, and his solution in the form of the noun-verb *structuration*, the disciplines still toil away on separate sides of the mountain that lies between Whitman's "I" and "institution." As a case in point, the area of scholarship we know as organizational communication began with intraorganizational concerns about managerial effectiveness (Redding, 1985; Redding & Tompkins, 1988) and steadily expanded toward efforts to explain more generally the communicative behavior of organizations (Jones, Watson, Gardner, & Gallois, 2004; Smith, 1993). The field today has developed an interpretive approach to communication in organizations and has also recognized a communicative-constitutive vision of organizations (McPhee & Zaug, 2000), although we are still concerned largely with messages, channels, and interactants in nominally organizational contexts (Lammers & Barbour, 2006). However, recent theoretical moves and empirical findings have brought the field to an impasse. Empirically, organizational communication scholarship contributes too little to the explanation of core problems in organized life such as exploitation, organizational and leadership failure, or global competition. Theoretically, a bias toward strictly interpersonal aspects of interaction in organizations offers irrelevant and circular findings. For example, what good is organizational identification theory if interest rates require the closure of the entire organization? Ultimately, the explanation of organizational phenomena must recognize the wider cultural, political, technological, and institutional environments of organizations. Thus, researchers are exploring the boundaries of organizational communication (Barbour & Lammers, 2007; Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007; Lammers & Barbour, 2006; MCPhee & Zaug, 2000; Monge & Poole, 2008; O'Connor & Shumate, 2010).

In the mean time, scholars in institutional sociology have been tunneling toward organizational communication from another side of the mountain. Institutional theory has become the dominant theoretical framework in organizations studies (Palmer, Biggart, & Dick, 2008). A recent 34-chapter handbook (Greenwood, Oliver, Suddaby, & Sahlin-Andersson, 2008) attests to the substantial development of the institutional enterprise in organizational sociology and management studies. From the perspective of organizational communication, the institutional perspective provides many insights and provocative possibilities for expanding our understanding of organizationally situated communicative behavior (Lammers & Barbour, 2006). However, the sociological account of institutionalism is not complete. Despite the strength and far-reaching implications of institutionalism, the nuts and bolts of message construction, delivery, and exchange in the workplace, a strength of organizational communication research, remains untouched by institutional scholars.

How can the institutional approach be further developed and organizational communication research made more complete? The leading ideas in the institutionalists' arsenal include the institutionalized organization (Meyer & Rowan, 1977), isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), a theory of fields (Meyer & Scott, 1983), institutional entrepreneurship (Hardy & Maguire, 2008), institutional discourse (Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2004), and institutional work (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). None has so many implications for organizational communication, however, as institutional logics (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). Although early neoinstitutionalism was rather vague on precisely what made up an institutional environment (other than similarly situated organizations), Friedland and Alford (1991) offered a specific clue, defining institutional logic as "a set of material practices and symbolic constructions . . . which constitute its organizing principles and which is available to organizations and individuals to elaborate" (p. 248). Moreover, institutional logics are "symbolically grounded, organizationally structured, politically defended, and technically and materially constrained, and hence have specific historical limits" (pp. 248-249). As provocative and intuitively powerful as this definition is, it falls short of empirical accessibility. I argue below that the definition does, however, suggest an opening for organizational communication scholars to investigate and develop. For starters, it implies that institutional logics are communicated. As such, it represents a starting point from which to answer the question posed in the title of this essay, "How do institutions communicate?"

The idea of the institutional message is one that is used in popular parlance but has not been developed theoretically. In some respects, the concept of

message belongs to an older, “conduit” metaphor of organizational communication (Putnam, Phillips, & Chapman, 1996, p. 379). In terms of the “discourse metaphor” of organizational communication described by Putnam et al. (p. 391), the concept of the message may seem reductionistic. An important exception is McPhee and Zaugg’s (2000) discussion of four message flows that contribute to the communicative constitution of organizations. In their seminal piece, they explicitly develop the idea of messages as “the blood, the hormones, the nerve impulses that affect and relate [the] member cells of an organization” (Terms, Assumptions, and Context of the Model section, para. 9). In a Parsonian fashion, McPhee and Zaugg identify four requisite message flows: membership negotiation; self-structuring; activity coordination; and institutional positioning. Yet in their discussion of flows, they avoid complete identification with the conduit metaphor by offering “interactive episodes” or “interactive processes” as alternative conceptions of message flows. In their discussion of institutional positioning, they avoid the explicit use of *message* altogether, instead recognizing the preexisting nature of institutions that requires organizational positioning. Thus, the features of messages that would allow us to see them as institutional remain undeveloped. Sahlin and Wedlin (2008) also imply messages when they refer to the processes of the circulation and editing of institutional knowledge. However, they leapt over the concept of message and directed attention to practices themselves. I see utility in the somewhat more mediating idea of the message because it lies between institutional logics and practices.

What emerges from the following review of the scholarly and primitive uses of the term is a conception of institutional messages as collations of thoughts that may have the force of law, intentionally or unintentionally spread via mediated and face-to-face interactions in organized settings. As such, institutional messages may be seen as elements of discourse, “the structured collections of texts embodied in the practices of talking and writing” (Grant, Hardy, Oswick, & Putnam, 2004, p. 3). In addition, institutional messages can be specified as having varying endurance, reach, and encumbrance; they are exchanged among individuals, organizations, and other institutions, and they influence the behavior of each.

The remainder of this essay will be structured as follows. In the next section, I summarize the developments in institutionalism with a focus on institutional logics. I then review scholarly and primitive uses of institutional messages and related ideas in a variety of social science disciplines. Based on that review, I develop the idea of the institutional messages as carriers of institutional logics. Finally, I consider how people make sense of institutional

messages as institutional logics are developed, shared, and changed. Specific research suggestions conclude the essay.

The Breadth and Challenge of Institutionalism Today

The institutional perspective, once a minor rival of the population ecology (Hannan & Freeman, 1977) and resource dependency (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) perspectives on organizational environments, now dominates organization and management literature (Gmur, 2003; Mizruchi & Fine, 1999; Palmer et al., 2008). A complete summary on institutionalism is beyond the scope of the present article. I will, however, distinguish its earlier and later forms as well as the major elements of recent developments (for a recent and thorough overview of key ideas and the history of the field, see Greenwood et al., 2008).

Older institutional theory (Weber, 1906-1924/1968; Selznick, 1957) stressed specific, local organizations and their internal conflicts, interests, and informal structures as they became established. To use a famous and defining phrase, organizations became institutions as they became “infused with value beyond the technical requirements of the task at hand” (Selznick, 1957, p. 17). Scholarship tended to emphasize the rational efforts of organizational members to advance their interests based on shared values, norms, and attitudes. The seminal works in the field, both by Phillip Selznick (1949, 1957), emphasize the role of leadership in establishing an enduring organization as an institution in the making and strongly hint at the pressure and influence of the external environment.

Neoinstitutional theory was launched by Meyer and Rowan’s (1977) observation that the organizational environment’s influence was profound, substantial, and symbolic. Their work was rapidly followed by DiMaggio and Powell’s (1983) theorizing about the isomorphic pressures of institutionalized organizational fields. This work was followed by a number of important books and articles, including Meyer and Scott (1983), Powell and DiMaggio (1991), and Scott (2001). The years since the early 1990s have witnessed a virtual explosion of contributions to institutionalism by scholars in Britain, Canada, and Australia as well as in the United States in the areas of institutional change (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996), institutional entrepreneurship (Maguire, Hardy, & Lawrence, 2004), and institutional discourse (Phillips et al., 2004). Thus, the field has captured an international audience.¹

However, in a careful review of the new institutionalism (NI) as an emerging theory of “intersubjectively meaningful social constructions,” Palmer et al. (2008) observed that “few NI scholars have elaborated the implications of this view at a micro level” (p. 748). In developing this line of thinking, they argue that institutionalism “must develop a micro-logical orientation that shows the emergence of meaning, its development into intersubjectively agreed-upon classifications, definitions, and values and the development of structures that emerge from these understandings” (p. 749). Thus, we hear the echoes of a call from the other side of the mountain.² Of the theoretical implements that the institutionalists have wielded to specify more carefully how institutions arise or are sustained in interaction, the idea of the institutional logic may be the most ingenious.

Institutional Logics

Friedland and Alford (1991) argue persuasively that “each of the most important institutional orders of contemporary Western society has a central logic—a set of material practices and symbolic constructions—which constitutes its organizing principles and which is available to organizations and individuals to elaborate” (p. 248). They echo Douglas (1986) in observing that institutional logics are multiple, possibly contradictory, and not necessarily rational:

Institutions constrain not only the ends to which their behaviors should be directed but the means by which those ends are achieved. They provide individuals with vocabularies of motives and with a sense of self. They generate not only that which is valued but the rules by which it is calibrated and distributed. Institutions set the limits on the very nature of rationality and, by implication, of individuality. (p. 251)

Thornton and Ocasio (2008) reviewed the literature on institutional logics, identifying precursors (notably Fligstein, 1990; Jackall, 1988). They substantially developed the concept, suggesting some theoretical independence from institutions per se: “The institutional logic approach incorporates a broad meta-theory on how institutions, through their underlying logics of action, shape heterogeneity, stability, and change in individuals and organizations” (Thornton & Ocasio 2008, p. 103).³

A key principle that animates the institutional logic approach is that “the interests, identities, values, and assumptions of individuals and organizations are embedded in institutional logics” (Thornton & Ocasio 2008, p. 103). The idea that agency is embedded in institutions is an important move in the

direction of connecting agency and structure—a tunnel passageway to which I referred above. Embedded agency works as a concept, according to Thornton and Ocasio (2008), because the individual, organizational, and institutional levels of society are nested and interconnected. However, they acknowledged that most studies “tend to emphasize one level over another, so the interconnectedness of the levels remains self evident or theoretical, but undemonstrated” (p. 104). Indeed, they argued that researchers still

need to better understand how macro-level states at one point in time influence individuals’ orientations to their actions, preferences, beliefs; how these orientations influences how individuals act; and how the actions of individuals constitute the macro level outcomes that we seek to explain. (p. 120)

Thus, we arrive in institutional logic at the same point that institutionalism in general, as discussed above, has reached—with a need to better connect the macro and the micro. The problem is how institutional logics are transmitted or how Thornton and Ocasio’s (2008) levels are connected. I suggest that the concept of the institutional message serves as just such a transmitter or connector. To see how this is so, we need first to understand message more generally and then explore and develop the idea of the institutional message particularly.

Explicating “Institutional Message”

Communication Scholarship

The idea of an institutional message is commonly used but is not generally regarded as a technical concept. *Message* is a core concept in the discipline of communication. Nevertheless, not all communication textbooks include message in their glossaries; it is what Chaffee (1991) might have called a primitive term, commonly understood or given. In its earliest sense, message was associated with those who were sent, or, according to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, “the business entrusted to a messenger; the carrying or delivery of a communication; a mission, an errand” (Simpson & Weiner, 1989). Over the centuries the meanings of message have both narrowed and broadened. Whereas it once denoted errands so broadly construed as to include groceries, the meaning of the term has in modern times become more narrowly construed as “some information, news, advice, request, or the like, sent by messenger, radio, telephone, or other means” (Dictionary.com, 2009).

However, the enduring idea of the message also includes something general and abstract, such as “the point, moral, or meaning of a gesture, utterance, novel, motion picture, etc.” (Dictionary.com, 2009) or “the broad meaning of something; an expressed or implied central theme or significant point, especially one with political, social, or moral importance” (Simpson & Weiner, 1989). So we see in message a conveyance that may carry broad meaning beyond a single command or signal.

As the science of communication developed, messages came to be thought of as relatively discrete signals or combinations of signals that served as stimuli for a receiver or receivers (Lasswell, 1948). This is similar to the sense of message in computing and older forms of telegraphy: a signal that indicates a specific sort of command or request. Yet this mechanistic view has been criticized by human communication theorists and researchers, among others (Axley, 1984). O’Keefe and Lambert (1995) argue persuasively that messages are “collations of thoughts” rather than “coherent instantiations of globally defined actions” (p. 55). They conceive of message design as the local [in situ] management of the flow of thought—“both the management of own thoughts by the message producer and the management of other’s thoughts in the service of communicative goals” (p. 55). Thus, both message design and interpretation are interactive.⁴ As technical as message production has become in the modern era, however, the type and variety of messages is for practical purposes infinite, and under constant production and permutation (Jackson, 1992).⁵

A key feature of message, implicit in most common definitions and use, regards the intention of the sender. Perhaps because of the origins of the word in the idea of *sending*, early communication theory about messages developed in a somewhat mechanical fashion (Lasswell, 1948), and the aspect of message that concerns *receiving* was rather less well developed. Indeed, message receipt and interpretation have received less attention among communication scholars than the wide variety of senders’ motivations and types of messages, channels, and contexts. For example, in both message design logic theory (O’Keefe & McCornack, 1987) and speech act theory (Searle, 1969), the formulation of messages tends to get more attention than the reception of messages. However, Searle’s (1975) concept of “indirect speech act” allows for simultaneous multiple yet coherent senders’ meanings and receivers’ interpretations. For example, to the utterance, “Website social responsibility statements are just a management fad,” the reply “We cannot afford not to post a CSR statement” sends a rejection of the claim that social responsibility statements are trivial as well as the intention to develop such a statement.

Finally, one important aspect of messages is the judgment implied in the phrase “getting the message,” especially when it refers to a general directive or a divine revelation. In these instances, the perceived duty of the receiver is to receive, understand, and act on a message. Some messages, once broadcast or documented, release the sender from obligation, and this is especially the case with laws and rules, as demonstrated by the ancient Roman dictum *Ignorantia legis neminem excusat* (Ignorance of the law excuses no one). This has implications for institutional messages, which I refer to as encumbrancy (to be discussed more fully below).

Based on this very brief set of observations, we know that messages are collations of thought transmitted under a wide variety of motivational circumstances. Moreover, messages are interactively understood through a variety of media involving more than specific signals and that receipt and interpretation of some messages may be the responsibility of receivers as much as senders. How are these ideas manifested in the extant usage of *institutional message*?

Primitive Uses of Institutional Message

The idea of institutional message (or the related terms *institutional voice*, *-interaction*, *-speech*, *-speech acts*, *-knowledge*, *-attitude*, *-message event*, and *-memory*) is referenced in scholarship at each of the levels to which Thornton and Ocasio (2008) refer: in studies of individual behavior in and across organizational settings; in the behavior of organizations as entities; and in the supraorganizational phenomena to which institutionalists often refer. In reviewing these ideas, I collected contributions from a variety of disciplines, including communication, pragmatics, policy science, and even artificial intelligence. The use of institutional message at each of these levels is discussed next.

Institutional Message in Interaction Phenomena

Institutional interaction. At the finest level of human interaction, ethnomethodologists have argued that conversation is an institutional order in its own right (Garfinkel, 1967, cited by Heritage, 1998; Goffman, 1955, 1983). Yet this sense of institution (an “interaction order,” Goffman, 1983) remains different from the institutions of social structure. Rawls (1989) and others (e.g., Barley, 1986) have argued that the stable principles of interaction should be distinguished from the institutions of social structure. For Rawls

(1989), institutions can be invoked by interactants—but institutions by themselves do not explain interaction.

Following in the tradition of closely studying folkways, other conversation analysts have observed differences between ordinary conversation and the special case of everyday conversation termed as *institutional interaction*, *institutional speech*, or *talk at work* (Boden, 1994; Boden & Zimmerman, 1991). The focus of such studies tends to be the management of conversation, however, rather than the message content of such conversation, although the content is sometimes implicated by the setting in which institutional interaction takes place. The distinctive features of institutional talk are said to derive in part from the context (talk at work) and in part from the roles of the interactants. For example,

The study of institutional interaction aims at explicating the ways in which institutional tasks are carried out in various settings through the management of action in context. . . . In institutional settings an agent may orient to expert knowledge or organizational procedures taken-for-granted in the practice in question but not known to outsiders . . . Ordinary conversation (OC) is a speech exchange system in which turn size, order and content are not predetermined [but] institutional interaction [involves] formally distinct, institutional speech events, such as interviews, chaired meetings, and ceremonies. (Arminen, 2000, p. 442)

It can be argued that the “institutional tasks” or “institutional speech events” to which Arminen (2000) refers are actually situated in organizations, although analysts seek regularities like special forms of turn taking that are characteristic of institutional (as distinct from everyday) situations. For example, Drew and Heritage (1992) identify several ways in which the language in work settings differs from ordinary language, including goal orientation, specific turn-taking rules, allowable contributions, professional lexis, specific structure, and power and knowledge asymmetries (see also McIntyre, 2008). Heritage (1998) observes that “specialized turn-taking systems profoundly structure the frameworks of activity” characteristic in institutionalized settings (p. 16). Nevile (2007) argues that studies of institutional interaction are biased toward interaction between professionals and clients, however, rather than between “back stage” or “factory floor” interactants (for example, among physicians or among managers; p. 823). In these instances, institutional messages imply power disparities and situated patterns.

Institutional speech acts. Although the logic may be somewhat circular (institutional interaction occurs in work settings that are defined as institutional

because a special kind of interaction takes place there), others have also identified particular kinds of speech events as institutional. For example, working from a pragmatic perspective, van Dijk (1977) has argued that particular speech acts are institutional:

. . . institutional speech acts, such as baptizing, marrying, convicting or firing (taken as speech acts) are part of often highly conventionalized episodes. Without such frame-knowledge I would for instance be unable to differentiate the utterance I sentence you to ten years of prison when spoken to me by a judge, in a courtroom, at the end of a trial, etc. or as spoken by my friend being angry against me. We would know that the first speech act counts and the second not, because only the first is part of an institutional frame. (p. 216)

In the foregoing example, the individual (i.e., a judge) speaks with the authority of an organization in the organized context that includes the state and its laws. In a somewhat different vein, speech acts may also be thought of as acts *of* an institution. For example, Ahmed (2006) referred to

institutional speech acts [as] those that make claims “about” or “on behalf” of an institution. Such speech acts involve acts of naming: the institution is named, and in being “given” a name, the institution is also “given” attributes, qualities, and even a character . . . They might say, for example, “the university regrets,” or just simply, “we regret” . . . Such speech acts do not do what they say: they do not, as it were, commit a person, organization, or state to an action. Instead, they are non-performatives. They are speech acts that read as if they are performatives, and this “reading” generates its own effects. (Ahmed, 2006, p. 104)

In speech act theory, a performative is an utterance that also accomplishes something, but Ahmed (above) refers to pronouncements on behalf of organizations that give life and personality to the organization and become part of the observers’ world without accomplishing anything substantive. A related critique is offered in the legal literature. Bezanson (1995) argues that institutional speech is categorically different from human speech and therefore should not be afforded protection in the United States under the first amendment to the constitution. Other legal scholars (e.g., Greenwood, 1998) as well have argued that the statements attributed to corporations are “speech that has no speaker—no point of human origin in the voluntary communicative intention of an individual who can be identified and through

whom such critical questions as purpose, intent, and meaning can be answered” (Bezanson, 1995, p. 740).

Similarly, linking institutional message to “bureaucratese,” Watson (1997) argues that an institutional message is disembodied from the speaker:

Through the use of bureaucratese, the listener is “distanced” from the speaker. . . . The rules of the bureaucracy do the talking or communicating for the individual, leaving the speaker as accidental to the message. So, the message becomes an institutional message without a person behind the message. It also reduces the degree of flexibility and reciprocity in the message. . . . The institutional message communicated from bureaucracy is made sterile so as to be protected from humans and, in turn, organizational actors are protected from the reality and responsibility of the act and the message. (Problems with bureaucratese section, para. 2)

At the level of interaction, then, we may conclude that institutional messages are characterized by asymmetries in particular settings and contexts and that people draw on their knowledge of institutionalized interaction rules as they interact, but that interaction may have the consequence of institutional messages becoming disembodied from the interactants. We might say that at the individual level, institutions communicate “the means by which ends are achieved” (Friedland & Alford, 1991, p. 256) in their enduring and seemingly independent (i.e., disembodied) features. I turn now to uses of institutional messages at the organizational level of analysis.

Institutional Messages as Organizational Phenomena

Aligning organizational messages and activities. Perhaps the most common sense in which institutional message is used refers to the efforts of organizations to align their activities with their internal and external images, where the “image” is understood as a message. For example, Rosser and Chameau (2006), in reviewing efforts to institutionalize ADVANCE (a U.S. National Science Foundation program also known as Increasing the Participation and Advancement of Women in Academic Science and Engineering Careers), noted that

[The under-representation of women in university engineering departments] at all levels makes it relatively easy to convey the ADVANCE message of increasing the number and percentage of women tenure-track

faculty in senior and leadership positions in a technologically-focused institution [that is, a university], because the ADVANCE message falls within the broader *institutional message* [italics added] generally conveyed. (p. 338)

“Institutional message” in this sense relates to an aggregate of the organization’s publicly perceived actions (for an almost identical example, see The Regents of the University of California, 2008). In these instances, institutional message refers to an organization’s establishment of certain guiding principles.

External and internal audiences. The institutional (i.e., organizational) message must also be conveyed to internal audiences when that message carries core values or rules at least nominally meant to apply to everyone. For example, in a review of a hospital’s ethical practice guidelines Lyren and Ford observe that “the convening of a large group [of organizational members] also communicates an *institutional message* [italics added] that ethical issues are the business of all parties within the hospital and not just an elite group of leaders or individual ethicists” (Lyren & Ford, 2007, p. 774). The institutional message is seen as applying to all members of a given organization.

Promoting an organization using institutional messages. Institutional message is also used as a representative narrative or label to promote an organization (see Kärreman & Rylander, 2008). In this connection, the idea is sometimes expressed as “institutional voice.” Advertising and marketing consultants recommend that organizations find and express their voices in strong institutional messages: condensed narratives that convey the meaning and value they wish an audience to associate with their organizations. For example, “To hire top talent from competitors, or to attract top talent that has been let go, requires strong delivery of the *institutional message*. Clients should consider using tailored pitch books to support this process” (CTPartners, 2008). This is similar to the sense in which Finet (2001) used the term *institutional rhetoric* to denote the efforts of an organization self-consciously and deliberately to influence its policy environment.

Specifying particular kinds of broadcast messages. Institutional message also is used to refer to very general statements that inform the public about, but do not promote, a particular organization. For example, in describing a message on behalf of a drug company, a U.S. Food and Drug Administration letter outlines a permissible way that a company could announce a drug in advance of its approval:

Institutional messages state that a particular drug company is conducting research in a certain therapeutic area to develop new and important

drugs. The announcement should not suggest any particular drug by name or otherwise suggest that a particular drug will soon be approved for use . . . (Reb, 1997, p. 2)

Note the very general nature of *institutional* asserted in this definition. Similarly the sports broadcasting company ESPN (2010) used “institutional message” to refer to a statement that made no promises: “For purposes of these standards and guidelines, an ‘institutional message’ must be a non-commercial spot comprised of a charitable or informational message only” (p. 12). The institutional message in these instances is a signal about the existence of an entity or the larger auspices under which an activity occurs.

Thus, at the organizational level, the institutional message communicates the core meaning of an organization to internal and external audiences. In addition, the institutional message is understood as aligning an organization’s activities and image with rules established in its environment, quite consistent with the observations of institutional theory (e.g., Scott, 1991).

The Institutional Message as an Artifact of the Institution

In this section, we arrive at uses of the concept of the institutional message most congruent with a sense that institutionalists would recognize: a message created in an interorganizational environment that transcends particular settings, interactants, and organizations (Lammers & Barbour, 2006). Once again, uses of the concept (and the related terms institutional knowledge and institutional attitude) are not informed so much by systematic logic or research (for example, some taxonomy of message types) but instead by the occurrence of phenomena that is offered in some ad hoc explanation.

Institutional knowledge versus indigenous knowledge. O’Donoghue (2005) contrasts institutional and indigenous knowledge in describing the differences between traditional and modern hand-washing practices and the spread of cholera. He observed that institutional knowledge—a manifestation of governmentality in the Foucauldian sense—is spread by educational practices and enforced with rules and guidelines, whereas indigenous knowledge is culturally imbedded in traditional practices. Although not romanticizing the traditional practices that emanated from indigenous knowledge, O’Donoghue observed that power relationships were nonetheless embedded in the education practices associated with institutional knowledge.

Similarly Teuatabo (2001) contrasts institutional memory with indigenous knowledge about climate change and sea-level changes on the island of Kiribati, noting that the local awareness of sea-level changes, “not counting institutional memory . . . is limited to a lifetime of individuals” (p. 89). These

uses of institutional memory contribute to the sense of the institution as independent of local organization and local interaction.

The institutional attitude. In a similar vein, institutional attitude has been used to express the prevailing posture or orientation of a government in its dealings with the public, as in this report on land use disputes in Peru: “The *institutional attitude* [italics added], especially that of the Ministry of Energy and Mines, is to enforce the law taking into account bureaucratic and formal interests, rather than undertaking proper management of national and local interests” (International Land Coalition, n.d.). Here, the “institution” is a collection of government agencies.

Institutional message events. In a methodological study of access to news about collective protest events, Maney and Oliver (2001) categorized protest events to include protests at “institutional message events,” which they specified as “bill signings; forums, workshops, and symposiums; community service events; large or political meetings; public hearings; larger or political conferences; and press conferences” (p. 148). These were contrasted with protest forms (demonstrations, marches, and pickets or vigils) and other message forms (ceremonies, displays, speeches, fundraisers, or celebrations). They did not offer a precise way of distinguishing event types, other than to observe that it cannot be “assumed that [all] protests are disruptions of normal institutional processes” (p. 148). Thus, in the case of the news about the protests Maney and Oliver studied, the institutional message event is routinized and occurs under the auspices of established organizations in the course of regular or routine activities.

The consultant as the carrier of institutional memory. Routine institutional activities, however, may not be situated only within individual organizations. Scott (2008) makes this point explicitly, and incidental uses of institutional memory and messages bear this out. A number of studies of national development have observed that progress appears to be sustained by virtue of the institutional memory retained by consultants and donors (Rafiqui, 2004; Teuatabo, 2001). For example, Rafiqui (2004), studying Swedish aid organizations, explicitly links institutional memory to the work of external agents:

One . . . aspect of the longevity of the major programs is that much of the so called institutional memory of the sector actually rests with foreign consultants who have worked as technical advisers and assistants to the central ministry . . . for long periods of time. (p. 21)

Similarly, Tillquist (2000) used social rules system theory (Burns & Flam, 1987) to study how consultants carry institutional messages in shaping organizational change:

Consultant firms are intermediaries that translate abstract and institutional-level conceptions into actionable and individual-level realities and thus influence the form and intent of the change initiative. . . . within this translation the intermediary's interests can reform the inherent *institutional message* [italics added]. (pp. 147-148)

Rao (1994, 1998) also developed the idea of institutional intermediaries for carrying or spreading the messages concerning legitimacy standards in an industry, though he did not explicitly use the idea of message.

These examples help to show how institutional messages may endure beyond the experience of individual participants in organizations—or indeed beyond the life of particular organizations—linking organizations to the widely understood “abstract conceptions” to which Tillquist (2000, p. 148) refers.

Re-creating institutional messages: Electronic institutions, virtual institutions, and artificial intelligence. A similarly broad cross-organizational-function meaning attaches to institutional message in the efforts of programmers to make computer-generated virtual worlds more realistic. Bogdanovych, Simoff, and Esteva (2008) employed the institutional message to make nongame virtual worlds more realistic for human players. They observe that the believability of a virtual world is a function of choices available to players; most simulations use choices that are signified by visible cues in interactions between computerized players built into the computerized world and avatars manipulated by human players. Under such circumstances, the main opportunity for improving the artificial intelligence of the computerized players is to program countless contingencies into their knowledge databases, something more feasible in virtual gaming (which involves a limited range of behaviors necessary to win a game) than in virtual worlds simulations (which involve replicating a much wider range of human motives and behavioral choices). Bogdanovych et al. (2008) argue that developing an institutional level of action or frame of reference in addition to the visual level promises to improve the realism of the simulation. They refer to this as “formalizing the environment” (p. 459). The formalized environment is founded on institutional rules, which are specified by conventions in language, activities, and behavior, and in turn built on a three-layer architecture consisting of normative controls, communication, and visual interaction. Thus, institutional messages are signals that consult previously learned institutional rules about anticipated actions and make certain choices more or less likely. In other words, in building a believable virtual world, programmers have uncovered the necessity of developing institutions as “a new class of normative Virtual Worlds, that combine the strengths of 3D

Virtual Worlds and Normative Multiagent Systems” (Bogdanovych et al., 2008, p. 459). Similar efforts were reported by Dignum, Dignum, Thangarajah, Padgham, and Winikoff (2008) and Bogdanovych, Esteva, Simoff, and Sierra (2007). The institutional rules in this case are tapped by certain messages. We see here the application of the conduit metaphor—a discrete signal—that connects individual-level choices with the formalized environment.

Institutional message as policy. Institutional messages may also refer to linkages among organizations and the world of policy in the real as well as the virtual world. For example, in discussing penal reform, Pillsbury (1989) argued that uneven and contradictory policy changes have generated institutional messages:

Policy makers have generally ignored warnings of prison overcrowding and uncontrolled prosecutorial discretion. By now, however, the *institutional message* [italics added] should be clear: if we ask our institutions to do the impossible, they will not only fail, they will probably do something quite different than envisioned. (p. 778)

Similarly, in discussing child health policy in the United States, Seid, Schultz, McClure, and Stoto (2006) argue that lack of a coherent mission has hampered both “institutional memory” and “institutional voice” (p. ix). Thus, we see the institution communicating a contradiction or an unintended consequence: Once the institutional message emerges, it has a life of its own, perhaps carried by some aggregate of actions and choices, but with a trailing reverberation or echo, a kind of lagged effect that continues to have influence because the policies enacted require actions on incumbents.

It is no simple task to connect the meanings of the scholarly and primitive uses of institutional message, but some salient features do seem more or less common across the interactional, organizational, and institutional levels at which the concept has been used. First, uses at each level suggest that institutional messages are independent or disembodied and have some life of their own beyond particular individuals and organizations. Second, we can say that some measure of social power is reflected in institutional messages. Messages obligate recipients to a greater or lesser extent (i.e., asymmetries at the interpersonal level; rule and laws at the organizational and institutional levels). Third, we can observe that institutional messages are sent or exchanged with varying degrees of intentionality. Laws and rules stipulated by powerful organizations and governments (such as the FDA or ESPN examples above) have strong intentionality, while posting CSR statements is an example of complying with nonintentional messages. Finally, institutional messages vary

in their reach—some seem to reach and apply to few (such as the talk at work in specific settings) while others reach many (such as those carried by professionals and consultants). Thus, we arrive at this working definition: An institutional message is a collation of thoughts that takes on a life independent of senders and recipients. It may have the force of rules and is spread intentionally or unintentionally via multiple channels to narrow or wider audiences. In the next section, I will operationalize this definition and link it to institutional logics.

Operationalizing the Institutionalality of Messages

Based on the foregoing discussion, four features describe the institutionalality of messages: establishment, reach, encumbency, and intentionality. *Establishment* typically refers to the enduring nature of institutions (Lammers & Barbour, 2006), but in the case of messages it also refers to frequency and unequivocality. Established messages are unequivocal, sent or exchanged frequently, and thus enduring. Less established messages are open to many interpretations and are infrequent and thus temporary. The *reach* of messages refers to the size of the audience, and more importantly the number of audiences in which the message may be received. Narrow reach involves smaller and fewer audiences while wide spread involves larger audiences and more venues. *Encumbency* refers to the duty—implicated in the message itself—of the respondent to heed and comply with the message (see Weber, 1906-1924/1968, p. 52 on institutions as “compulsory associations”). Finally, institutional messages may be characterized by their *intentionality*. Because institutional messages are collations of thoughts, and rarely discrete signals, the message may or may not be congruent with the conscious, stated purposes of the members of the field in which it is exchanged. Institutional messages take on lives of their own because people work constantly to make sense of their worlds (see below), and that predisposition toward sense making is decoupled from other actors’ intentional efforts to give sense to the world (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991).

As we recognize institutions in terms of their consequences for ongoing social life, establishment and reach are the most salient features of institutional messages. Figure 1 clarifies how some messages may be developed into strong narratives while others are short lived. Messages that are immediately recognizable as institutional are located in the lower right-hand quadrant of Figure 1, characterized by endurance, and exchanged in a wide variety and number of audiences. These include unequivocal statements of and references to federal and state laws, association rules, professional standards and

<u>Reach</u>	<u>Establishment</u>	
	<u>Temporary</u>	<u>Enduring</u>
<u>Narrow</u>	Non-institutional messages; informal speech	Local institutions' codes and laws; local organizations' policies
<u>Wide</u>	Management fashions, fads, and beliefs	Institutional messages; federal and state laws, association rules, professional standards, some propaganda

Figure 1. Establishment and reach of institutional messages

ethics codes, and in some instances deliberate propaganda. Such messages are also likely to be characterized by strong intentionality and encumbency; that is, the laws themselves are products of goal-oriented efforts to obligate members of the community to recognize, know, and conform to certain behaviors. Senders can and often do expect audiences to acknowledge the messages as performative. For example, corporate social responsibility statements may be regarded as constitutive of social responsibility itself (O'Connor & Shumate, in press).

Local institutions are characterized by those messages depicted in the upper right quadrant of Figure 1, where enduring, unequivocal messages are exchanged among narrow audiences. Locally enduring messages do not only involve laws, codes, and rules but also give meaning to the idea that a local organization is regarded as an institution. The local institutional message, however, encumbers smaller and fewer audiences than others and may not be recognized beyond a particular organization or community. The messages least likely to be recognized as institutional are neither enduring nor wide-spread in their reach, in the upper left-hand quadrant of Figure 1. They have the character of what conversation analysts might refer to as informal or everyday conversation. Efforts to build institutions that do not involve frequency, unequivocality, encumbency, or intentionality are likely to fail. Conversely, we can say that weak institutions are those that lack those qualities.

	<u>Intentionality</u>	
	<u>Unintentional</u>	<u>Intentional</u>
<u>Unencumbent</u>	Weak impressions; weak or non-existent institutions	Fading or emerging institutions; some social movements
<u>Encumbent</u>	Miscommunication, confusion, perverse outcomes (e.g., racism, sexism)	Institutional messages; Strong laws, easily identified institutions

Figure 2. Intentionality and encumbency of institutional messages

Finally, the messages depicted in the lower left-hand quadrant of Figure 1 are shared in and with widespread audiences but have less frequency, less unequivocality, and less endurance. For organizational purposes, we can recognize these as the messages of management gurus (Abrahamson, 1996) and the popular press, particularly because although they are intentional in their delivery, they do not have the force of laws in their encumbency.

Sending and receiving institutional messages. Institutional messages can be further clarified by examining the intersection of the extent to which they are intentional or purposive on one hand and the extent to which they encumber the receiver on the other. On the sending side, we can distinguish two types: those sent intentionally, and thus involving the problems of clarifying, amplifying, or otherwise getting the message across and those sent unintentionally by virtue of the actions of the organization or organizations that make up the field. On the receiving side, we may also distinguish two types: messages that the receiver has an obligation to receive and act on and messages that do not obligate the receiver to take actions but nonetheless may make certain actions more or less likely (see Figure 2).

Once again, we can identify strong institutional messages as those that encumber responses from receivers, whether that means complying with a law, rule, or code, or recognizing the compliance of another, as in acknowledging the accreditation of an organization. In general, the more intentional and encumbering the message is, the stronger the institution. Intentional messages that do not encumber responses or behaviors from others are characteristic of fading or emerging institutions and some social movements: Membership and participation is voluntary. Unintentional messages that do encumber respondents may be understood as miscommunication, confusion, or perverse outcomes, where the outcome is different from the intended effects. Finally, unintentional messages that do not encumber responses are characteristic of weak institutions.

Institutional messages, institutional logics, and sense making. We are now ready to consider how institutional messages carry institutional logics. Following Friedland and Alford (1991) and Thornton and Ocasio (2008), institutional logics are, at a minimum, patterns of beliefs and rules. Institutional messages carry those patterns of beliefs and rules as collations of thoughts that are intentional, enduring, have a wide reach, and encumber the participants to engage in certain behaviors or take action. Thus, it is appropriate to think of institutional logic as an analytical device or as an archaeological strategy (to borrow from Foucault, 1972). Put differently, people do not use *institutional logics* in their conduct. Instead, they use *institutional messages* to make sense of their ongoing, organized conduct. In practice, institutional logics are composed of messages with varying endurance, reach, and encumbrancy. Analysts subsequently may identify those patterns of beliefs and rules as logics, but participants sort through messages, not logics, in an ongoing way.

This perspective on the conveyance of institutional logics is consistent with recent work on sense making and the institutional approach. Weber and Glynn (2006) worked to reconcile the “prior constraint on action” implications of institutional theory with the “active ongoing interpretation of reality” emphasis of sense-making theory. They suggest that institutions work as mechanisms to “prime, edit, and trigger” sense making (p. 1648). The idea of institutional messages is implied but never worked out in their theory, however. I suggest that considering the message results in some useful additions to their theorizing.

Institutions prime sense making in three ways, according to Weber and Glynn (2006). First, institutions “serve up a limited register of typifications (words) that can be used to construct a course of action.” Second, “institutionalized attention structures prime people to start with certain words.” Third,

“institutionalized conventions about grammar and syntax underlie the winnowing effect of early words” (p. 1649). While Weber and Glynn speculated that “some situations and cues are simply more likely to appear than others” (p. 1650), I suggest that the strength of institutional messages influences that likelihood. For example, a law requiring compliance (having a license to practice medicine) is a much stronger institutional message than the perceived necessity of posting corporate social responsibility statements of company websites. So we might say that to the extent that institutional messages are enduring, have reach, and encumber receivers, they prime sense making (or, in McPhee & Zaug’s [2000] terms, institutions call for positioning).

Institutions also edit sense making according to Weber and Glynn. In this view, “the mechanism by which institutions influence action formation processes is therefore one of retrospective editing of actions and meaning, as much as prospective preclusion of actions in taken-for-granted situations” (p. 1651). Once again, however, I would suggest that the strength of institutional messages plays a role in the editing function. In particular, the encumbrance of the message may strongly predict action. For example, the prohibition of divorce in Roman Catholic doctrine still has the effect of lower divorce rates among Catholics than among the members of other Christian denominations. The Catholic position on divorce is established, applies to all its members, and is unequivocal.

Institutions trigger sense making “by [first] providing dynamic foci that demand continued attention, and second, by creating puzzles that require sense-making due to the contradictions, ambiguities and gaps that are inherent in institutions” (Weber & Glynn, 2006, p. 1653). To the extent that sense making is fundamentally brought about by equivocality, weak and contradictory institutional rules do indeed bring about the creativity, emergence, and unintended aspects of institutions. For it is when messages are not encumbent, have little reach, or are temporary, as opposed to enduringly unequivocal, that human sense making has the most consequence.

Conclusion

By explicating and specifying the nature of institutional messages, I have sought to improve the connection between the micro world of organizational communication and sense making and those obdurate macro structures we call institutions. In particular, I have suggested that institutional messages have varying endurance, reach, and encumbrance. By extension, I have argued that the strength and endurance of institutional logics rests on these messages and the ways that they are interpreted and acted on. In these ways, I hope to have extended some of the work undertaken by communication scholars like

McPhee and Zaig (2000), working from the organizational communication side of the mountain, and Thornton and Ocasio (2008), tunneling from the institutional side.

Following Jackson (1992), a reasonable next step would be to identify exemplars of institutional messages that vary in endurance, reach, and encumbrancy. We might investigate, for example, what underlies encumbrancy. As institutionalization is likely to flow from encumbering messages, determining variations in encumbrancy would be valuable. Similarly, studies that identify an increase or decrease over time in the equivocality of messages could add valuably to our knowledge of the strength of institutions. Research that identifies the spread of messages across different kinds of audiences might also add to our understanding of the viability of institutions. Even Walt Whitman, who eschewed institutions in the first stanza of his poem "I hear it was charged against me," sought to establish one ("The institution of the dear love of comrades") in the second stanza (Whitman, 1904). Whether our aim is to understand, establish, or destroy institutions, understanding institutional messages should bring us a step closer to that goal.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author received no financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article.

Notes

1. It would be difficult to overstate the prolific nature of publications in institutionalism. A Google search for "institutional theory" returns about 138,000 results.
2. To be fair, the emerging line of research in organizational and institutional discourse represents a joint effort of institutionalism and organizational communication (see Grant et al., 2004).
3. Note the similarities between institutional logics and Gee's (1996) ideas about discourse with a "big D" (p. 142).
4. Of course, many scholarly traditions have recognized the role of interaction in social reality, but this discussion focuses on messages, which traditionally have been viewed in a more reductionist fashion.
5. Insofar as an institutional "type" of message is concerned, Jackson (1992) admonishes researchers to recognize that we are rather arbitrarily singling out exemplars rather than members of a priori classes of phenomena. I return to this point in my conclusion.

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Management Communication Quarterly

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How Communication Institutionalizes: A Response to Lammers

Roy Suddaby

Management Communication Quarterly 2011 25: 183 originally published online
13 December 2010

DOI: 10.1177/0893318910389265

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How Communication Institutionalizes: A Response to Lammers

Management Communication Quarterly
25(1) 183–190

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DOI: 10.1177/0893318910389265

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Let me begin by saying how much I agree with the overarching intent of John Lammers' essay. His manifest purpose is to highlight the ways in which a neo-institutional view of organizations might benefit from paying closer attention to communication theory. To accomplish this, Lammers offers a new construct, which he proposes as a means of focusing attention on the role of communication in replicating and diffusing institutional logics.

In this regard, Lammers' essay succeeds. The nub of his argument is that researchers interested in institutions can improve their understanding of key processes of institutional reproduction by attending more carefully to the mechanisms and patterns of formal communication made on behalf of institutions. He terms this new construct "institutional messages," which are defined as communication "created in an inter-organizational environment that transcends particular settings, interactants and organizations" (p. 19). Lammers goes on to describe a program of research that might emerge as a result of the new construct. This research will focus on categorizing the types of institutional messages, analyzing processes of sending and receiving them, measuring their endurance or strength, and so on.

What I Like About "Institutional Messages"

The power of this construct is that it directs sunlight on one of institutional theory's biggest voids—that is, the absence of any mechanism that explains how institutional reproduction occurs. Implicit in much of institutional theory

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is the notion that normative ideals move across time and space. Diffusion, for example, assumes that templates of idealized organizational structures or practices move from one organization to another across organizational fields (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Strang & Meyer, 1993). While much research has been devoted to demonstrating the empirical fact of diffusion and its role in mimetic isomorphism (Tolbert & Zucker, 1983; Davis, 1991; Haveman, 1993), considerably less effort has been devoted to demonstrating how and why diffusion occurs (Suddaby, 2010). Indeed, critics have described diffusion and isomorphism as a “black box” with insufficient attention paid to the process of diffusion from the perspective of the adoptive organization (Boxenbaum & Jonsson, 2008). The key insight of Lammers’ construct of institutional messages, thus, is that it usefully reinforces our understanding that diffusion is a form of communication.

Institutional theory, thus, has always had an implicit theory of interorganizational communication but has never offered an explicit account of how this might occur. A clear strength of Lammers’ essay, therefore, is that it not only identifies this gaping hole in institutional theory, but also offers a way forward—that is, by focusing research attention on the mechanisms by which field-level communication occurs.

What’s Missing

While I’m very supportive of the broader objectives or manifest intent outlined in John Lammers’ essay, I struggle considerably with its latent intent. I see three distinct issues. First, Lammers adopts a fairly narrow view of institutional theory—one which defocalizes agency and interests away from individuals or organizations. In doing so, Lammers re-creates many of the fundamental problems of contemporary neo-institutionalism. Second, Lammers overlooks a growing stream of research within neo-institutional theory that actually does take communication seriously. Third, and perhaps most important, Lammers subordinates communication theory to institutionalism by making communication practices mere conduits of institutional logics. As a result, Lammers overlooks a strong historical tradition in communication theory that makes the opposite argument—that is, suggests that institutions and their associated logics are the product or outcome, rather than the determinant, of communication practices. I elaborate each of these three points in the balance of this essay.

A Narrow View of Institutions

A close reading of Lammers’ definition of institutional messages reveals that he views institutions and organizations as agentic entities. That is, according

to Lammers' definition, institutional communication originates from institutions and "transcends . . . interactants" (Lammers, this volume). He argues that such institutional messages reflect and contain within them broader social logics or templates and that the act of communication provides a form of institutional reproduction.

Like most neo-institutionalists, Lammers both essentializes institutions and avoids defining them. Thus we have no idea who crafts institutional messages, which interests they are intended to serve, or who benefits from their diffusion. As a result, Lammers adopts the relatively dystopian view of neo-institutionalism where human agency is subordinated to ambiguous and shadowy social constructions—that is, institutions and institutional logics—and the individual disappears.

With this argument Lammers recreates a fundamental paradox of neo-institutionalism. If human agency is subordinate to institutional pressures, how do we explain institutional change? How are institutions created? Who maintains and reproduces them? Where do logics come from? Who benefits from the advocacy of a given logic or a given institutional message?

In elaborating a theory of institutional communication, Lammers must be careful not to repeat the problems of neo-institutional theory. Specifically, we must be careful not to essentialize organizations and institutions as actors and we must be careful to avoid defocalizing notions of power and agency by ceding control and intent to organizations and institutions. Rather, we must be attentive to the fact that there are real individuals and interests that underpin institutional agency and action. Who are the individuals who create institutional messages? Whose interests do they represent? What are the processes by which institutional messages are vetted, parsed, and disseminated?

Institutional messages serve specific interests and purposes. Communication is not a passive vessel or conduit for logics. It is persuasive and stimulates action. The creative attractiveness of the construct of institutional messages is that it is a form of communication filtered by committees and editors and a host of individuals who occupy official positions and whose role is to ensure that the interests of a macro-collective entity, an institution, are protected.

Overlooks New Streams of Institutional Theory

In fact, institutional theory has started to address these serious questions of power, agency, and the nature of social actors in processes of institutionalization. One promising stream, termed "institutional work," attends to the role of individuals and organizations in creating, maintaining, and changing institutions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence, Suddaby, & Leca, 2009). By treating the processes of institutionalization as the primary focus of research,

institutional work helps correct the current tendency to reify organizations and institutions as “actors” in institutional processes.

The construction of institutional messages appears to be a form of institutional work. That is, institutions are often maintained by different patterns or genres of communication. This is the key insight of Yates and Orlikowski (1992), who argue that genres of organizational communication (the memo, the meeting, the resume, the proposal) are a key means of maintaining institutionalized order within an organization. Like Lammers’ notion of institutional messages, Yates and Orlikowski’s (1992) concept of communicational genres refers to highly typified and socially embedded forms of communication that mediate between the individual and larger social structures. Organizational genres are used to convey legitimacy, authority, and norms of appropriateness, in much the same way as institutional logics are conveyed in institutional messages. Apart from the differences in levels of analysis, the two constructs share similarities and both appear to describe forms of institutional work. It would be helpful in clarifying the boundary conditions of the construct, thus, if Lammers were to position institutional messages against the backdrop of this related literature.

Perhaps a bigger issue, however, is Lammers’ oversight of an emerging interest in the role of rhetoric or persuasive communication in institutional theory (Sillence & Suddaby, 2008). A growing stream of research has focused on how persuasive communication is used strategically by actors to construct legitimacy (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005; Erkama & Vaara 2010), enhance the diffusion of institutionalized practices (Green, 2004; Ozen & Berkman, 2007), or to manipulate institutional logics (Meyer & Hammerschmidt, 2006).

This research not only bridges institutional and communication theory, but it helps address the serious weaknesses of agency, power, and essentialism in institutional theory identified above. Rhetoric not only forms the intellectual and historical roots of communication theory, it also offers an obvious means of connecting communication and institutional theory. It ought, therefore, to form an essential part of the development of the construct of institutional messages.

Turning Lammers on His Head

A key strength of Lammers’ argument is that it draws a clear causal relationship between institutional processes and patterns of communication. That is, the essay firmly establishes the idea that institutions determine types and patterns of communication. This is a laudable insight and offers a new direction for researchers interested in understanding the influence of institutions on social life.

I think, however, the argument might be more powerful if the causal arrows were reversed. By implication Lammers places institutions at the causal base and communication at the superstructure of this theoretical model. That is, the construct of institutional messages are presented as mere conduits or vessels for the much more causally determinative institutional logics. Thus, Lammers motivates the construct of institutional messages as a means of addressing the question of “how institutional logics are transmitted.”

As I note above, this grants far too much causal agency to institutions. The focus is on sender and receiver, message strength and bandwidth. Here Lammers is clearly leaning heavily on Weaver and Shannon (1963), Lasswell (1948) and others who built communication theory from the metaphor of technologies of broadcast—that is, radio, television, loudspeaker. In this view, the mechanism of communication is interesting only in its technical proficiency in moving messages from one entity to another. The actual message, in this case the logic of an institution, remains relatively intact and immutable, untouched by the fact of communication.

A more provocative argument might be to place communication at the causal base and make institutions the epiphenomenon. Thus, one might argue that patterns of communication determine social institutions.

This is not a new idea for communication theory. As early as the 1930s, theorists in the “Toronto School” developed the idea that communication practices and technology were the primary causes in shaping human culture and social institutions. Havelock (1963) thus formulated the argument that the shift from oral to written communication in Greek society exerted a profound influence over the form of government, commerce, and other dominant social institutions in western society. Havelock’s basic thesis is complemented by Harold Innes (1949; 1950) and Marshall McLuhan (1951, 1962) who developed the idea that patterns of communication play an essential role in shaping social and cultural institutions and profoundly influence the direction of institutional change.

The point is that these theories of society (and, yes, they are as much theories of society as they are theories of communication) position human agents and their mechanisms of communication at the base of their theoretical explanations of social change with ideology forming the superstructure. That is, they recognize that logics and institutions are as much the product of, or are determined by, patterns of communication as they are causal elements. The Toronto School of Communication, thus, might acknowledge that the idea of institutional messages is well founded but argue that it subordinates the power of communication to institutions. I suspect they would reverse the causal assumptions of Lammers’ construct and reframe his central question from “how do institutions communicate” to the more provocative question “how does communication institutionalize.”

Conclusion—The Primacy of Communication

Lammers' proposed new construct holds considerable potential for those of us interested in institutions. The notion of institutional messages ought to remind us that, at its core, institutional theory is a theory of communication. Roger's (1995, p. 5) definition of diffusion, thus, was the "process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time . . ." Normative rules, social orders, status hierarchies and, yes, institutional logics are all key mechanisms of institutional theory that lean heavily on an implicit but largely unarticulated theory of communication. Lammers' contribution, therefore, is to point out this (now) obvious insight.

But the insight should not be wasted. Lammers' key contribution is not just the observation that institutions communicate logics. The key contribution is that institutions are formed by, maintained, and changed by communication and that, by conceptualizing institutions as underpinned by practices of communication, we can begin to address some of the fundamental contradictions of neo-institutional theory.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author received no financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article.

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Management Communication Quarterly

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How Institutions Communicate; or How Does Communicating Institutionalize?

Cynthia Hardy

Management Communication Quarterly 2011 25: 191

DOI: 10.1177/0893318910389295

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Management Communication Quarterly
25(1) 191–199

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DOI: 10.1177/0893318910389295

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Cynthia Hardy¹

Introduction

John Lammers' article on institutional messages provides some interesting ideas for exploring the conceptual and empirical link between the macro world of institutions and the micro world of organizational communication. Let me take the liberty of turning those ideas on their head. Rather than just asking how institutions communicate, let us ask, "How can processes of communicating serve to institutionalize?" In addition to taking a next step of identifying institutional messages that vary in endurance, reach, and encumbrance, as Lammers suggests, let us also explore how messages are *made* to endure, reach, and encumber. Besides focusing on institutional messages as thoughts that take on a life independent of senders and recipients, let us instead consider how institutional messages have no life *except for* the communicative interactions between senders and recipients. To explore these other issues and show how they can shed light on the links between macro institutions and micro communication, I will draw on organizational discourse theory, which foregrounds the co-constitutive nature of this relationship. Through organizational discourse theory, I believe, we can avoid the reductionism of "message," which, as Lammers himself points out, has been

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eschewed by the “discourse metaphor” (Putnam, Phillips, & Chapman, 1996) and, at the same time, develop his idea that institutional messages can, indeed, be seen as elements of discourse.

The ideas that comprise organizational discourse theory have been widely accepted in organizational communication (see Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001), organization studies (see Grant, Hardy, Oswork, & Putnam, 2004), and, to a lesser extent, institutional theory (e.g., Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2004). Much of this work has converged in conceptualizing discourses as bodies of knowledge that “systematically form the object of which they speak” (Foucault, 1979, p. 49). Discourses are constituted from interrelated bodies of texts that define “who and what is ‘normal’, standard and acceptable” (Meriläinen, Tienari, Thomas, & Davies, 2004, p. 544), thereby institutionalizing practices and reproducing behavior (Phillips et al., 2004). The texts that bring discourses into being take the form of a wide range of symbolic expressions that are inscribed by being spoken, written, or depicted in some way (Taylor & Van Every, 2000) and include talk *and* text (van Dijk, 1997). This inscription serves to make them “accessible to others” (Taylor, Cooren, Giroux, & Robichaud, 1996, p. 7). Accordingly, discourse theorists study patterns in the production, distribution, and consumption of texts to understand organizations and institutions alike.

Institutions are held in place by structured, coherent discourses that produce widely shared, taken-for-granted meanings (Phillips et al., 2004). Conversely, changes in the ways in which texts are produced, distributed, and consumed have the potential to destabilize existing institutions and create new ones (Maguire & Hardy, 2006, 2009). Consequently, the production, distribution, and consumption of texts are integral to any study of institutionalization. In the remainder of this commentary, I explore some of the different ways in which patterns in the production, distribution, and consumption of texts account for the ability of communications to institutionalize by constructing the encumbrance, reach, endurance, and intentionality of the message.¹

Encumbrance: A Matter of Production

Encumbrance refers “to the duty—implicated in the message itself—of the respondent to heed and comply with the message” (Lammers [this issue]). From a discursive perspective, encumbrance is likely to be influenced by the positioning of text producers within the particular discursive context. As Lammers points out, speech acts take on different meanings depending on who is uttering them. In other words, only certain actors “warrant voice” in

a particular discourse (Hardy, Palmer, & Phillips, 2000; Potter & Wetherell, 1987) and certain subject positions are advantaged over others in their ability to produce texts (Deetz, 1992; Fairclough, 1992).

Institutionally, this means that the text producers who are most likely to produce incumbent messages are those who are already privileged by occupying dominant positions in the field (Phillips et al., 2004). Institutional fields are “relational spaces” (Wooten & Hoffman, 2008, p. 138) that is, “structured systems of social positions within which struggles take place over resources, stakes, and access” (Maguire, Hardy, & Lawrence, 2004, p. 658). These positions provide the actors that occupy them with institutional interests and opportunities (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) and, in some cases, the “capital” or resources to exert power over the field at a particular time (Battilana, 2006; Bourdieu, 1986). Organizationally, whether a message has incumbence is likely to depend on actors being positioned appropriately within the organizational hierarchy. For example, senior managers have greater “declarative powers” (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002) to produce discursive templates that shape organizational outcomes because of the authority vested in them. Thus, the effects of a range of communicative practices may depend on actors also deploying authority and invoking hierarchy (Thomas, Sargent, & Hardy, 2010).

Reach and Establishment: A Matter of Distribution

The *reach* of a message refers to the size and number of audiences. In discourse terms, reach depends on the discursive space in which it is distributed. Hardy and Maguire (2010) have shown how different discursive spaces exist in any institutional setting and that these spaces differ in terms of the particular sets of rules and understandings regarding text production (who may author texts and of which type), distribution (when, where, and how texts may be distributed), and consumption (who is the target audience, who may access and act on texts). As discursive spaces are institutionally embedded, it is likely that central members of the institutional field in question will be privileged in securing reach for their messages (Hardy & Maguire, 2008). However, other discursive spaces can provide opportunities to open up “an alternative interpretation of reality that relaxes taken-for-granted assumptions, thereby creating a place where new things can be said and new social structures envisioned” (Fletcher, Blake-Beard, & Bailyn, 2009, p. 84). Thus there may be opportunities for a range of actors to secure significant reach as they distribute texts.

Established messages are “unequivocal, sent or exchanged frequently, and thus enduring” (Lammers). Texts that produce such enduring meanings are those that are “taken up,” that is, distributed sufficiently widely to act as trans-situational organizing mechanisms (Cooren & Taylor, 1997). Such texts go through successive phases of “textualization” (Taylor et al., 1996) or “recontextualization” (Iedema & Wodak, 1999) by being distributed among multiple actors. This repeated reinscription results in the text becoming increasingly distanced from the particular local circumstances of its production. It is no longer a situated set of conversations but, instead, a “template so abstract that it can be taken to represent not just some but *all* of the conversations it refers to” (Taylor et al., 1996, p. 26). Thus, as text moves away from its original production—as it is distributed more widely and more often—more enduring meaning is created.

Intentionality: A Matter of Consumption

Finally, consumption is important in relation to *intentionality*. “Messages may or may not be congruent with the conscious, stated purposes of the members of the field in which it is exchanged” (Lammers). Whether a message achieves intentionality has less to do with the circumstances of its production and more to do with its consumption and, specifically, the way in which it is “translated” (Czarniawska & Sevón, 1996; Zilber, 2006). As mentioned above, if it is to endure, a particular message has to be taken up and restated in other texts (Maguire & Hardy, 2009). During this process, however, the meaning of the message is likely to change because, as it is reproduced, it is also translated, and translations are never completely faithful—even attempts to reproduce the message will change it in some way (Brown, 2002). Only those meanings that survive from the multiple acts of consumption are likely to affect the institutional field, and they are not necessarily those intended by the original author (Maguire & Hardy, 2009).

Consumption is thus integral to understanding a message’s effects. As Mumby (1997) notes, “Disjunctures always exist between dominant readings and individual interpretations” and “tactics of consumption” (p. 361) may be used to resist producers of texts (de Certeau, 1984, p. xvii). Resistance can lie in the very act of consumption if the original text is consumed in ways not intended by the original producers—if the message is subverted as it is consumed (e.g., Ezzamel, Willmott, & Worthington, 2001). Such resistance may then lead to the production of alternative texts, such as “hidden transcripts” (Murphy, 1998), “counter-narratives” (Zilber, 2007), or “counter-texts” (Maguire & Hardy, 2009). In other words, the meaning of a text is not

pregiven, regardless of how powerful the producer of the text may seem and no matter how wide its reach is or how well established it is. Ultimately, the meaning of a text—the ability of a message to institutionalize—depends on *consumption*. Yet, ironically, as Lammers points out, “Message receipt and interpretation have received less attention among communication scholars than the wide variety of senders’ motivations and types of messages, channels, and contexts.”

Summary

It is certainly the case, as Lammers argues (quoting Thornton & Ocasio, 2008, p. 120), that researchers need to understand better “how macro-level states at one point in time influence individuals’ orientations to their actions, preferences, beliefs; how these orientations influences how individuals act; and how the actions of individuals constitute the macro level outcomes that we seek to explain.” This commentary argues that one way to explore these processes is by studying patterns in the production, distribution, and consumption of texts. As Taylor and Van Every (2000) argue, “Discourse is built up progressively” (p. 96) as texts move from the local to the global. Hardy (2004) calls this the question of “scaling up”—the processes whereby locally and individually produced texts are adopted and incorporated by other organizations and actors to become part of standardized, categorized, generalized, and institutionalized meanings. Texts also “bear down” (Hardy, 2004) as grand, institutionalized discourses shape localized behaviors (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000).

Organizational discourse theory helps to place the co-constitutive nature of communicating, organizing, and institutionalizing centre-stage. In doing so, it pinpoints another area, that which seems ripe for further research—examining the ways in which these co-constitutive relationships are permeated with power. Neither the communication nor the institutional literatures have been entirely comfortable with concept of power (Cooper, Ezzamel, & Willmott, 2008; Putnam et al., 1996). Yet without an appreciation of power relationships, it is difficult for us to understand either stability or change in institutions or organizations. For example, if encumbrance is related to position, how are actors who are institutionally or organizationally marginalized able to send encumbent messages? How do we theorize change from the margins, and what options are open to those at the periphery should they wish to bring about change? If reach is determined by discursive spaces that are institutionally or organizationally embedded, how do new spaces open up where alternative interpretations can be expressed? If establishment rests

on distribution, how do new discourses survive and endure? Perhaps, understanding acts of consumption offers the best way forward. Consumption turns intentionality on its head—it takes the focus away from the message and the medium, from those producing and distributing messages and texts and, instead, forces us to consider the myriad of recipients who may or may not hear the message; who may or may not give it meaning; and who may or may not challenge, transform, or sabotage it. Agency, determinism, and domination are replaced by serendipity, resistance, and subversion, offering interesting new possibilities for communication, organization, and institutional scholars alike.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author received no financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article.

Note

1. For my purposes, I assume that a “message” is one among a number of possible meanings of a text. Messages rely on texts: To become accessible to others—to be sent or received—a message must be inscribed in the form of text. However, any text has multiple meanings—whether a particular message is sent or received depends on the particular meaning that is constructed for it.

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Management Communication Quarterly

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Signifying Institutions

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Management Communication Quarterly 2011 25: 200 originally published online
13 December 2010

DOI: 10.1177/0893318910389434

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Signifying Institutions


Management Communication Quarterly
25(1) 200–206

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DOI: 10.1177/0893318910389434

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 SAGE

Stephen R. Barley¹

In “How Institutions Communicate,” John Lammers argues that students of organizational communication and organizational theorists of an institutional stripe should join forces to explore the *terra incognita* of organizing: The territory between structure and action otherwise known as the missing micro–macro link. Lammers implies that these two groups of researchers would make for a compatible expeditionary force because both are social constructionists who have been working for too long on opposite sides of the wilderness. Institutionalists would bring to the expedition concepts of social structure that scholars of communication purportedly lack. Students of communication would contribute an understanding of coordinated human action and interaction that institutionalists have recently been struggling to reinvent (Barley, 2008; Hallett & Ventresca, 2006; Powell & Colyvas, 2008).

The compass that Lammers offers for the expedition is the “institutional message,” which he defines as “a collation of thoughts that takes on a life independent of senders and recipients.” The formulation certainly bears a family resemblance to the various “taken-for-granted” that populate institutionalists’ papers. Moreover, the notion of a collation suggests that the ideas that make up the discourse surrounding an institution need not cohere, either logically or as a narrative. Rather, they are more like a collage, which calls to mind Everett C. Hughes’ definition of institutions as “clusters of conventions” woven together to form what he and other Chicago School sociologists continually referred to as a “social fabric” (Hughes, 1971, p. 52).

Lammers proposes that we conceptualize institutional messages as mediators that tie the institutional logics that organizational theorists write about to

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the practices that students of communication more commonly study. Based on a comparative analysis of how scholars have previously used “institutional message,” Lammers adduces four attributes that cut across the various usages regardless of the level of analysis at which they were originally employed. He submits that institutional messages vary with respect to their reach, their encumbrance, their endurance, and the intentionality of their sender. Messages become more institutional the longer they endure, the greater their reach, the more they encumber, and the more intentionally they are sent.

Lammers’ claim that institutional messages mediate has a Giddensian ring. In one of the most ambitious theoretical attempts to bridge the abyss between the micro- and the macrosocial, Giddens (1984) proposes an analogous topology. He envisioned three entwined axes of structuration. One pole of each axis existed at the structural or institutional level of analysis; the other was grounded in the ongoing flow of everyday action and interaction. Between the two poles of each axis lay what Giddens called a *modality*: A type of resource on which actors draw as they go about doing their lives collectively. One of Giddens’ axes tied systems of signification (institution) to communication (interaction) through interpretive schemes (modality). Another linked systems of domination (institution) through facilities or resources (modality) to power (interaction). The third tied legitimation (institution) to sanctions (interaction) by way of norms (modality). According to Giddens, if analysts wish to untangle how institutions constrain action and, conversely, how actions create, sustain, and alter institutions, they must attend to the interplay up and down as well as across the three axes. Lammers’ essay orients our attention to the axis of signification (i.e., an institutional logic) and communication (i.e., a practice) and posits the institutional message as a modality.

Historically, institutionalists have mostly concerned themselves with issues of legitimation, perhaps secondarily with signification, and least commonly with power. I believe that Lammers is correct in arguing that recent theorizing about institutional logics and categorization signals a growing interest among institutionalists in the role that signification plays in creating, maintaining, and altering institutions. I also concur that analyses of how institutional logics constitute and are constituted by everyday actions have been relatively rare and are sorely needed (but see Barley 1986; Orlikowski 1992, 2000; Yates & Orlikowski, 1993), although the emerging literature on institutional work may begin to address this void (Lawrence, Suddaby, & Leca, 2009). My concern is with whether institutional messages, as formulated by Lammers, will take us where we need to go. I want to suggest several modifications that might provide better declination for using institutional

messages as a compass for venturing into the wilderness between the micro- and macrosocial.

First, I would recommend shifting the emphasis from messages to messaging. If one adopts Giddens' notion of the duality of structure, the idea that structures both constitute and are constituted by action, then Lammers' essay addresses half of the dynamic. He proceeds from the premise that institutions have already formed and that from them emanate messages that shape action and practices. But if institutional messages are a modality (or a moderator), then people should deploy them wittingly and unwittingly as they try to achieve their objectives in the here and now. In other words, institutional messages should not only constrain, they should also enable action and, in the process of enabling, become a mechanism for creating, maintaining, and changing institutions. I suspect that fashioning and articulating messages are integral to how people craft institutions. As Hardy puts it in her comment, institutions do not simply communicate; communication institutionalizes.

Because Hardy and Suddaby have expounded so well on the role communication plays in forming, preserving, and shifting institutions, I will simply refer you to their essays for elaboration. I want to add, however, an important and related methodological point. If one wants to study institutions in action, to examine how they constrain, or how they are constituted by human action (including speech), longitudinal data and a historical bent are required. Institutions happen through time, which Lammers certainly appreciates because he takes endurance to be a property of institutional messages. Although typologies of the sort Lammers offers can be useful for sharpening our thinking, studying the communicative aspects of institutionalization demands moving beyond static to dynamic analyses of how people craft and respond to messages over a *longue durée*. My suspicion is that from a more dynamic perspective, the attributes of messages are likely to matter less than the nature of their crafting, saying, hearing, and responding. This is not to say, however, that messages' attributes are likely to be inconsequential.

My second modification, therefore, concerns the notion of a message's endurance. Lammers claims that endurance depends on the frequency at which the message is sent and its lack of equivocality. Frequency is certainly relevant to endurance. Unless the ideas associated with an institution are said and heard over and over again, it is difficult to understand how they could become embedded in everyday life to the point where they become taken-for-granted. I am less convinced that being unequivocal contributes to the endurance of an institutionalized message or ideology. In fact, I would expect precisely the reverse: That equivocal messages are more useful for institutions.

Institutional rhetorics and the rhetorics of social movements are built around statements of value that often pivot around abstract nouns such as honor, freedom, equality, fairness, equity, merit, safety, efficiency, property, and so on. Abstract nouns and equivocal messages have a distinct advantage: People who hear them can act as if they concur with the message (or more accurately the value it expresses) although holding different understandings of what has been said. Love is, as they say, a many splendored thing and so are honor, equity, and freedom. Put differently, I would expect institutional messages to work like boundary objects (Bechky, 2003a, 2003b; Starr & Griesemer, 1989); they bring together disparate social words by allowing people to proceed as if they were all talking about the same thing. The possibility of a multiplicity of readings creates the flexibility necessary to redefine a variety of situations within a frame.

Because Lammers repeatedly associates unequivocalty with law (pp. 25, 26) I wonder if the notion of encumbrance has not somehow bled into the idea that institutional messages lack equivocality. Although there can be no doubt that people subject to a law must comply with it (i.e., the law encumbers), what compliance means is open to interpretation and negotiation. Laws are notoriously ambiguous, precisely because they are constructed with words. In fact, it is the equivocality and ambiguity of law that affords lawyers a living. Edelman, Fuller, and Mara-Drita's (2001) study of how managers fashioned a broader concept of diversity in the workplace in the context of complying with Equal Employment Opportunity law provides an instructive case. In fact, Edelman (1992, 1999) has written extensively about how the inherent ambiguity of law offers organizations considerable leeway in negotiating what actions constitute compliance.

The third modification I would suggest concerns the concept of intentionality. Do senders of strong institutional messages have to seek to affect practices explicitly or, for that matter, do they even need to send institutional messages knowingly? Undoubtedly, spokespersons for institutions sometimes intentionally craft messages to garner support for their institutions. Similarly, one would expect members of social movements whose agenda is to establish or undermine an institution to formulate messages strategically. But are all strong institutional messages intentionally sent? Berger and Luckman (1967) and ethnomethodologists such as Garfinkel (1967) and Heritage (1993) would argue otherwise. Some messages that communicate deeply entrenched institutions, such as gender, are continually communicated unwittingly. This was why Garfinkel (1967) found the transsexual, Agnes, to be instructive. Agnes was so adept at communicating the signs and symbols of femininity that she passed as a woman totally undetected in most

circumstances. Although Agnes employed her messages knowingly, intentionally, and with incredible care, Garfinkel's point was that most of the rest of us send and receive the same messages in a taken-for-granted manner as we go about doing gender in daily life. Consequently, I wonder if intentionality is crucial for institutional messages, especially those messages that support the well-ensconced institutions that underwrite the grammar of everyday life in a society.

Intentionality also seems to pose a problem for the consistency of Lammers' conceptualization of institutional messages. Central to his argument is the useful idea that institutional messages become disembodied from both sender and receiver. But if so, then how are we to reconcile intentionality with disembodiment? In the case of a liturgy, a ritual induction into an organization, the recitation of an oath, or a rhetorical statement such as the invocations of freedom and sacrifice often heard on July 4, coupling intention with disembodiment might be possible. On such occasions priests and other officials intend to do something (save a soul, confer membership, or establish the tone of an occasion) without claiming authorship for their words and, in some cases, even meaning what they say. I am fairly certain that most Boy Scouts are probably thinking about something else when they open their meetings with the Scout Oath. Who knows what priests, not to mention members of the congregation, think about when they drone through a liturgy? But intentionality of a conscious sort seems irrelevant for communicating key institutional messages.

As noted above, the irrelevance of intentions is integral to the notion of agency in the tradition of ethnomethodology. Ethnomethods are how people do social life without being aware of what they are doing. One can not lack an awareness of what one thinks one is doing and at the same time be intentional. (One can, of course, intend one thing, but get another.) Intentionality also seems unnecessary for the routine use of an institutional rhetoric, for example, the free market rhetoric that has come to suffuse the policy statements of conservative politicians since the 1980s (Smith, 2000). Rather than treat intentionality as a defining attribute of an institutional message, I would counsel treating it as a variable or condition. This would allow analysts to ask under what circumstances are institutional messages intentionally and unintentionally deployed. My guess is that the more institutionalized a discourse or rhetoric becomes, the less intentional becomes usage.

None of these concerns, however, should detract from importance of Lammers' key point: Institutional theorists have paid insufficient attention to signification. Institutional messages, however defined, are tightly tied to ideologies which, without doubt, are composed and carried by the kinds of

statements that comprise them. As Bendix (1956) showed us more than 50 years ago, ideologies are crucial for understanding how institutions are sustained and modified over the course of history.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author received no financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article.

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Bio

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