

Organizational Implications of Institutional Pluralism

Matthew S. Kraatz

Emily S. Block

College of Business
University of Illinois
Champaign, IL 61820
217 333 7994

kraatz@uiuc.edu

esblock@uiuc.edu

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Hence, social control, so far from tending to crush out the human individual or to obliterate his self-conscious individuality, is, on the contrary, actually constitutive of and inextricably associated with that individuality; for the individual is what he is, as a conscious and individual personality, just in so far as he is a member of society... (Mead, 1934:255)

Institutional pluralism is the situation faced by an organization that operates within multiple institutional spheres. If institutions are broadly understood as “the rules of the game” that direct and circumscribe organizational behavior, then the organization confronting institutional pluralism plays in two or more games at the same time. Such an organization is subject to multiple regulatory regimes, embedded within multiple normative orders, and/or constituted by more than one cultural logic. It is a participant in multiple discourses and/or a member of more than one institutional category. It thus possesses multiple, institutionally-derived identities which are conferred upon it by different segments of its pluralistic environment. An ideal-typical example of such an organization is the American research university. Clark Kerr well-captured the pluralistic character of these organizations when he observed that the American university is “*so many different things to so many different people that it must, of necessity, be partially at war with itself*” (Kerr, 1963:8). In the university, as in many other organizations, it is the broader, heterogeneous institutional environment that imposes these multiple identities, makes these disparate demands, and thus generates these persistent and deep-rooted tensions within the organization itself. Because the pluralistic organization is a unit of multiple institutional systems, its internal functioning reflects the contradictions between the larger systems themselves.

Prior empirical research has uncovered numerous instances of organizations facing institutional environments which appear to exert pluralistic demands. These include hospitals (D’Aunno, Succi, and Alexander, 2000; Denis, Lamothe & Langley, 2001), neo-natal intensive

care units, (Heimer, 1999), rape crisis centers (Zilber, 2002), drug treatment centers (D'Aunno et al., 1991), non-profit and public organizations (Brunsson, 1989; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Stone & Brush, 1996), universities (Cohen & March, 1986; Albert & Whetten, 1985), public schools (Rowan, 1982), public broadcasters (Powell, 1988), arts organizations (Mouritsen & Skaerbaek, 1995; Alexander, 1996), Taiwanese computer firms (Hung & Whittington, 1997), multi-national firms (Kostova & Zaheer, 1999) and small businesses (Pickle & Friedlander, 1967). Much recent research in stakeholder theory, which has increasingly drawn from neo-institutionalism, also emphasizes that corporations, in general, are properly viewed as pluralistic entities (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Mitchell, Agle & Wood, 1997). However, despite this common awareness of the existence of institutional pluralism, there has to date been little apparent effort to systematically assess its practical and theoretical implications. What are the characteristic challenges and opportunities faced by organizations that operate in pluralistic environments? How do organizations typically adapt to these challenges and opportunities (structurally, politically, symbolically, rhetorically)? What broader and more general lessons might researchers take away from the methodical and sustained analysis of organizations that dwell in pluralism's midst? These are the broad questions that we set out to address in this chapter.

We are especially concerned with understanding the theoretical and practical implications of what might be called cognitive, or constitutive, pluralism. The hallmark of the neo-institutional perspective is its focus on cognitive institutions that constitute actors, define social realities and thus shape organizational behavior in subtle but powerful ways (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Friedland & Alford, 1991; Scott, 2001). This perspective on institutions may, at first glance, appear to be incommensurable with the very notion of pluralism. It is relatively straightforward to envision a pluralistic institutional environment if we see institutions as

exogenous forces that exert competing coercive or normative demands on the organization. Indeed, this is the very picture that resource dependence theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) and more strategic variants of institutional theory (Oliver, 1991; Suchman, 1995; Zajac & Westphal, 1995) seem to present us with. However, it becomes considerably more challenging to think about institutional pluralism when we see institutional effects as constitutive and ideational; as suffusing the organization rather than merely impinging upon it. Nonetheless, we believe that some critical insights and images begin to emerge when we embrace pluralism and cognitive institutionalism conjointly. Specifically, we are able to see an organization that may have multiple institutionally-given identities, an organization that may be the structural embodiment or incarnation of *multiple* logics, an organization that may be legitimated by *multiple* mythologies, and an organization wherein very different beliefs and values might be simultaneously taken for granted. In short, we see an organization that may *genuinely be*, like Kerr's university, "multiple things to multiple people."

We are interested in understanding how this is possible. We are also interested in elaborating pluralism's positive and negative consequences for the organization, and in identifying the factors that tip the balance between them. Clearly, pluralism creates the potential for fragmentation, incoherence, conflict, goal-ambiguity, and organizational instability (Stryker, 2000; Heimer, 1999). In an organization with multiple identities, purposes, and belief systems, no group is likely to be fully satisfied, and political tensions are likely to be endemic. Such organizations may even resemble the "organized anarchies" or "garbage-cans" that March and colleagues vividly described (March & Olsen, 1976; Cohen & March, 1986). However, we think that institutional pluralism may create important opportunities for organizations, as well. We will suggest that institutionally-adept organizations are often able to simultaneously meet the

expectations imposed by various institutional spheres in which they operate. Indeed, we see the ability to at least placate diverse external constituent groups as a minimum requirement for bare survival in the face of pluralism. More importantly, we also think that significant complementarities often exist between institutionally given identities, such that the organization's ability to successfully be one thing actually enhances its ability to be others. Thus, we try to show how the same institutional pressures that threaten to divide the organization may, at least in some circumstances, hold it together instead. We focus much of our attention on the search for these circumstances.

We organize the chapter around a discussion of three important organizational problems that have been the focus of much prior organizational research. These are the problems of *organizational legitimacy*, *organizational governance* and, *organizational change*. We will suggest that conventional neo-institutional explanations of these three critical organizational phenomena become rather problematic when we attempt to apply them to organizations operating in pluralistic contexts. More specifically, we will show that these standard accounts remain necessary, but are no longer sufficient in and of themselves. In a pluralistic environment, organizational legitimacy requires symbolic conformity with cultural norms and expectations, but also something more and different than this. In a pluralistic environment, organizational governance is influenced by cultural logics that operate at the field level, but is in no sense *determined* by these logics. In a pluralistic environment, organizational change is also compelled and constrained by field level institutions. But, these institutions combine with one another to yield variations, unintended consequences, and myriad opportunities for organizational action and continuous change. In developing our arguments, we will draw heavily on examples from American colleges and universities, but we will also produce

examples from numerous other contexts. We believe that institutional pluralism is a variable feature of organizational environments, and one that is particularly prominent in American higher education. But, we also believe that baseline levels of pluralism are higher than commonly thought in many other settings. Thus, we hope that this paper's insights will apply well beyond the contexts from which they primarily emanate.

The perspective that we develop on organization-environment relationships in pluralistic contexts draws from several key sources. The first of these is James March's institutionalism (e.g., March, 1994; 1999; March & Olsen, 1995; 2004). His work converges with other neo-institutionalist thought in seeing institutions as basically constitutive of actors and their actions. Specifically, he suggests that much organizational decision making results from an obligatory "logic of appropriateness" rather than a calculative "logic of consequence." Actors following a logic of appropriateness obey institutional rules and strive, often preconsciously, to fulfill the obligations that are inherent in their institutionally-given identities.¹ But, March also stresses that actors possess multiple identities as a direct result of their multiple institutional memberships. His theory is thus (at least implicitly) a pluralistic one.

Our perspective is similarly influenced by sociological theories of identity that have emerged within the symbolic interactionist tradition (e.g., McCall & Simmons, 1978; Stryker, 1980; 1987; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Stryker & Serpe, 1982). These theories offer explanations that are strikingly similar to March's, despite their typical focus on personal, rather than organizational, identity. They also offer additional concepts that have been usefully applied at

¹ March (1999: 228) explains the difference between the logics thusly: "In a consequential logic, a person is "in touch with reality" and asks, What are my alternatives? What are the probable consequences of those alternatives? What are the values to me of those probable consequences? Then the person selects the alternative whose consequences he or she values the most. In an obligatory logic, a person is "in touch with self" and asks, What kind of situation is this? What kind of person am I? What does a person such as I do in a situation such as this?" Importantly, March embraces a sociological conception of identity in this theory. That is, he sees identities as institutionally-derived.

the organizational level (Pratt and Foreman, 2000). Stryker, Burke and other identity theorists parallel March in arguing that actors are multiply constituted, receiving their various identities from different segments of the pluralistic society they inhabit. However, they augment March's perspective by giving explicit attention to processes of *identity verification*. They suggest that actors seek to validate or affirm their identities through processes of *symbolic exchange* with different segments of their heterogeneous environments. It is through these processes that the actor's various identities are legitimated (and de-legitimated) over time. Sociological identity theorists also provide a useful frame for understanding intra-organizational identity conflicts, and for conceptualizing the processes through which multiple, institutionally-derived identities may be prioritized or integrated within the organization as a whole. Specifically, they invoke Mead (1934) in drawing a critical distinction between the notion of *identity* and that of *self*. They conceptualize the self as the whole entity which encompasses an actor's various socially-given identities. As we will show, this distinction may be especially useful for understanding governance amid pluralism. In particular, we will argue that organizational governance can be usefully thought of as the process through which an "organizational self" selects, prioritizes and/or integrates its various institutionally-given identities (and also as the process through which these identities conjointly construct an organizational self).

Finally, our perspective on the organizational challenges and opportunities created by pluralism also relies heavily on Philip Selznick's institutionalism (Selznick, 1949; 1957; 1969; 1992; 1996). Like March and the sociological identity theorists, Selznick sees the individual organization's environment as politically and ideologically heterogeneous. His early research on the Tennessee Valley Authority vividly reveals the destructive effects that this heterogeneity can have inside the organization (Selznick, 1949). However, he also provides important insights

about how organizations can thrive and prosper in the midst of institutional pluralism, both despite and because of it (Selznick, 1957; 1969; 1992). Most critical among these insights is his argument that some organizations can become institutions *in their own right*, as they harness the otherwise discordant forces in their pluralistic milieu. Selznick argues that such organizations are able to forge identities which are uniquely their own, and which integrate and transcend their various socially-given identities. Interestingly, he also argues that constituent demands play a key role in facilitating this quasi-integrative process (despite their inherently divisive potentialities). Specifically, Selznick emphasizes that these groups value cross-temporal consistency and revealed *commitment*, in addition to the *conformity* which is more typically emphasized in neo-institutional accounts. Constituencies plainly want the organization to symbolize its commitments to their particular beliefs and to fulfill their material needs. But, Selznick emphasizes that they want it to be self-consistent, trustworthy and non-opportunistic, as well (i.e. to evince what he called “organizational integrity”). We will suggest that it is this preference which makes possible the emergence of the autonomous (and distinctively competent) organizational self which Selznick first theorized.

Before we progress to our consideration of the specific problems of organizational legitimacy, governance and change, we think that it may be useful to further clarify our chapter’s purposes and to comment upon its intended relationship to the extant literature. Most importantly, we wish to emphasize that our intent is fundamentally *generative*, rather than critical. Though we do identify several apparent limitations of neo-institutional accounts, we do this with an eye toward promoting future research and theory on the organizational implications of institutional pluralism (rather than to cast aspersions). Second, we wish to stress that our efforts at theorizing are admittedly *partial* and largely *derivative*. We think that the recognition

of institutional pluralism points toward a major void in our collective understanding of the relationship between organizations and institutions. The theory that we put forth here may constitute little more than a drop in very large bucket -- and not an especially novel one at that. Virtually all of the ideas we develop herein are appropriated from somewhere else (although our reapplication of them may constitute something of a contribution). Finally, we would like to re-emphasize that our chapter assumes an avowedly *organization-centric* perspective (as its very title indicates). It is written in the tradition of Barnard, Selznick, March & Simon, Thompson and others who viewed the individual organization as a proper end of study in its own right. It diverges (at the outset) from more recent scholarship that takes a core interest in field-level dynamics and overarching institutional systems. Thus, to the extent that our chapter does criticize neo-institutionalism, it questions the perspective's value as a means to ends that are not necessarily its own. It also proposes new ends toward which the theory's core insights might be productively re-applied. Specifically, our chapter pushes toward the creation of an "institutional organizationalism" which is quite distinct from (but potentially symbiotic with) the "organizational institutionalism" which is the primary focus of this volume. We hope that the outlines of this perspective – and the basic need for it – will become apparent in the following pages.

INSTITUTIONAL PLURALISM AND THE PROBLEM OF ORGANIZATIONAL LEGITIMACY

A natural place to begin our discussion of institutional pluralism's theoretical and practical implications is with the problem of organizational legitimacy. Organizational scholars have long viewed legitimacy as a critical resource for organizations (Parsons, 1956; Pfeffer & Dowling, 1975), and this focus has intensified with the rise of the neo-institutional perspective (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Tolbert & Zucker, 1983). Suchman (1995:574) has

defined legitimacy as a “generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate, within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions.” From a neo-institutional perspective, legitimacy primarily involves symbolic conformity with cultural prescriptions and understandings (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Deephouse, 1999; Ruef & Scott, 1998). The perspective holds that organizations tend to adopt various practices and structures in order to create and maintain this conformity. Importantly, it sees legitimacy as a source of action as well as the product of it (Edelman, 1992; Suchman, 1995; Oliver, 1991). An organization’s institutionally-given identities create behavioral mandates, and its actions can be understood as conscious or unconscious efforts to fulfill these mandates. This notion of legitimacy as taken-for-grantedness parallels March’s logic of appropriateness.

While we believe that this perspective provides a necessary and appropriate starting point for understanding organizational legitimacy, we encounter at least three important problems when we attempt to apply it to organizations in pluralistic contexts. The first and least troubling of these is that the pluralistic organization is compelled to symbolize its commitment to the norms, values, and beliefs of *multiple social systems*. Thus, if taken for granted assumptions are to drive its actions, they can only do so after a specific institutional identity has been invoked (Heimer, 1999). The organization must first be able to answer March’s troublesome question of, “who are we?” before the appropriate institutional rules or scripts can be activated. Further, if the organization tries to deliberately pursue legitimacy through strategic conformity, it can only do so by conforming to multiple sets of institutional rules and successfully embodying multiple categorical standards. Given these complexities, it may sometimes be appropriate to think of the legitimacy of the “whole” organization as the mere sum of the legitimacy of its individual

“parts.” In other words, inasmuch as the pluralistic organization enjoys social approval and acceptance, this may be the cumulative result of its successful performance within its disparate role identities. Clark Kerr is also reported to have quipped that his job as the University of California’s Chancellor was to provide parking for faculty, football for alumni, and sex for undergraduates. While it is doubtful that this comment reflected Kerr’s true thinking about his role or his university, it well-reflects an additive, “part-focused” view of organizational legitimacy.

A second and more difficult problem in applying the conventional account of legitimacy is that pluralistic organizations may not be able to compartmentalize or separate their different institutional identities from one another. The organization’s attempts to comply with the demands of one constituency are likely to be observed by others, who may assign very different subjective values to the same displayed symbols (Stryker, 2000; Glynn, 2000; Golden Biddle & Rao, 1997). In the language of the symbolic interactionists, organizational efforts to verify or validate one identity may invalidate another one (Stryker & Burke, 2000; Pratt & Foreman, 2000). Further, various internal groups with different constitutive beliefs and disparate notions of “appropriate” behavior are likely to come face-to-face in decision situations, particularly strategic ones (Glynn, 2000). For example, hospitals routinely face decisions wherein their institutionally conferred identities as professional actors and market actors are both active. In such situations, the organization’s efforts to fulfill its fiduciary duties are likely to engender resistance and criticism from internal and external constituencies who identify with the organization as a professional entity and expect it to act primarily within this role. Analogously, financial constituencies also regularly criticize corporations when they embrace social responsibilities that appear to fall outside of their narrow role as profit making entities (cf.

Friedman, 1970). In situations like these, organizational actions appear to be *co-produced* by multiple identities and/or *co-evaluated* by multiple audiences. Such situations raise important questions about the actual nature of organizational legitimacy (Heimer, 1999; Stryker, 2000). Taken for granted beliefs and assumptions obviously affect these organizational decisions and influence external responses to them. But, taken-for-grantedness is clearly not sufficient as an explanation for these actions or the reactions they engender.

A final problem with the neo-institutional account of organizational legitimacy is that organizations are typically expected not only to symbolize their agreement with prevailing beliefs and to act in a culturally appropriate manner, but also to evince cross-temporal consistency in their words and deeds. While the organization may indeed be a prisoner of a cultural “iron cage” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), it is also held “hostage to [its] own history” (Selznick, 1992:232). In its search for legitimacy, it thus faces a “commitment problem” in addition to the “conformity problem” which has been our exclusive focus thus far. Early institutional theorists including Commons (1970) and Selznick (1957) well-recognized this problem and argued that displays of commitment were critical in building and maintaining institutions (Stinchcombe, 1997). They similarly emphasized the de-legitimizing effects of actions which violate commitments or otherwise convey opportunism. This concern with “credible commitment” abides in contemporary perspectives which see organizations primarily as solutions to collective action problems (Olson, 1965; Britton & Nee, 1998; Ingram & Clay, 2000). Neo-institutionalism, in contrast, says very little about how consistency and revealed commitment (or lack thereof) might affect organizational legitimacy over time. Neo-institutional accounts often do an excellent job of situating the organization within its broader cultural

context, but they typically extract it from its own unique history of actions and transactions in so doing.

This omission is perhaps understandable, as the commitment problem would appear to mostly vanish in situations where the organization and its constituencies are jointly and wholly nested within a stable and culturally homogenous field which is replete with shared understandings and common scripts. However, the problem appears to re-emerge quite dramatically in the presence of institutional pluralism. When an organization is situated in a pluralistic context, its internal and external constituencies are likely to recognize its capacity to abruptly change direction and reprioritize its identities and values. They can thus be expected to trust it only with hesitation, and to be *particularly concerned* with gauging its predictability and reliability. As a result, they may be especially likely to employ what we will call “second order” evaluative criteria in assessing its legitimacy. While they may react positively when the organization symbolizes its agreement with their values and accommodates their near-term interests (these being “first order” criteria), they are also prone to look for evidence of commitment, trustworthiness, and non-arbitrariness (second order criteria) in the stream of decisions emanating from the organization over time.²

Further, and ironically, some first order actions may send unintended second order signals, such that constituents come to think less of the organization as a direct result of its efforts to please them. Love & Kraatz (2007) provide a rather striking example of this phenomenon. They

² The first order / second order distinction that we create here owes to Frankfurt’s (1971) famous exposition of first order and second order human desires. He suggests that desires of the first order center on particular things or outcomes. Second-order desires, in contrast, concern the things that one “wants to want” (or wants not to want). He suggests the capacity to develop second-order desires is essential to the humanistic concept of a “person.” The (perhaps non obvious) parallel to the current argument about organizational legitimacy is that constituencies do not just want particular things from an organization – they also want *it* to want particular things and to “be” a particular type of organization. This requires that it possess certain types of second order virtues (i.e. desirable traits of “character”). While the idea that organizations might possess character traits is perhaps naïve and objectionable from a social scientific point of view, much evidence suggests that people tend to anthropomorphize organizations and other collective actors. We discuss this evidence and consider its implications below.

show that large American corporations' reputations were badly damaged by their use of the practice of downsizing during the 1980s and 1990s. The irony in this finding is that the reputations they studied were ascribed by stock analysts (who strongly advocated downsizing and publicly praised downsizing firms) and by peer firm executives (most of whom revealed their approval of the practice by engaging in it themselves). Love & Kraatz suggest that downsizing's negative effect on reputation occurred because of the negative signals that it conveyed regarding the trustworthiness and credibility (i.e. the "character") of these firms. Downsizing was an attractive and highly legitimate "part" from the perspective of analysts and peer executives, but it also smelled of opportunism and thus reflected negatively upon the "whole" social actors who employed it.

This counterintuitive finding and interpretation calls to mind Groucho Marx's famous comment that he would never join a club that would have him as a member (presumably because of the second order signal that his inclusion would send about the character of the club as a whole). More seriously, it also coheres with a great deal of contemporary research on the psychology of legitimacy, which has consistently shown that legitimacy judgments rest primarily upon perceived *procedural fairness* (a second order criteria) rather than *distributive fairness* (a first order one) (Tyler, 1990; 2002). It is also consistent with a vast body of research in other branches of the social sciences which has revealed the powerful, emotional and evidently pre-conscious responses that displays of commitment (and opportunism) can invoke (Frank, 1988; Nesse, 2001; Hauser, 2006). The upshot is that the organization seeking legitimacy in a pluralistic context is likely to face what we will call the *politician's dilemma*, a conundrum which results from the interplay of the conformity and commitment problems. Constituents obviously want the organization (and the candidate) to espouse *their* values and to pursue

policies that further *their* particular interests. But, they are also attracted to revealed commitment and integrity, and repulsed by obviously opportunistic and arbitrary acts. In other words, they are inclined to pass judgment not only upon the legitimacy of organizational identities, but also upon the legitimacy of (what at least appear to be) organizational *selves*. They evaluate the organization not only as a part of some socially constructed system of meanings and rules, but also as a social actor (which is what its divided social context appears to make it into).³

We see at least four basic ways in which organizations may adapt to pluralistic legitimacy criteria. The most obvious effect of inconsistent expectations is to engender resistance and conflict in and around the organization. In other words, many organizations adapt to pluralism by trying to eliminate pluralism. The organization's leaders may, for instance, deny the validity of various external claims that are placed upon it, attack the legitimacy of the entities making the claims, attempt to co-opt or control these entities, and/or try to escape their jurisdiction or influence altogether (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Oliver, 1991; Suchman, 1995). They may, in short, attempt to "delete" or marginalize some of the institutional identities and attendant obligations that constituencies seek to impose upon their organization (Pratt & Foreman, 2000). A similar dynamic may play out among internal constituencies, irrespective of managerial influence. Groups that identify with the organization for one reason and advocate a particular organizational ideology may try to banish or permanently suppress other groups and belief systems (Selznick, 1949). They may, in fact, succeed in this task, effectively shedding identities

³ While we think that constituencies often *look for* evidence of commitment in addition to symbolic conformity, we are more agnostic about whether they are typically able to discern it. It is apparent that many self-aware organizations attempt to manipulatively "fake" integrity and commitment in the same way that they cynically fake conformity. Audiences may often be taken in by such attempts. Our point here is only that there are *two distinct things* that must (at least) be faked by the organization seeking legitimacy. It is also important to note that these two imperatives are often in significant tension with one another.

and eliminating some of the pluralistic demands that initially gave rise to the conflict. We shall discuss these possibilities in more detail in the subsequent section, as we explore pluralism's implications for organizational governance. For now, we will only note that while no organization can be all things to all people, efforts to completely eliminate, silence, or marginalize constituencies may prove self-defeating in the long run. We suspect that the effective management of pluralism may be a critical organizational (and managerial) capability. Its relative scarcity may be one reason why most organizations do not survive very long.

A second approach to adapting to pluralistic legitimacy standards is to “compartmentalize” identities and relate independently to various institutional constituencies (Pratt & Foreman, 2000). The organization may do this by sequentially attending to different institutional claims, and/or by creating separate units and initiatives that demonstrate its commitment to the values and beliefs of particular constituencies. Such initiatives are often viewed as being decoupled from the core of the organization, or as merely symbolic, rather than substantive in nature (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Lounsbury, 1999; Westphal & Zajac, 1994, 1998). While such characterizations are sometimes apt, we think there may be a need for caution in drawing these conclusions in pluralistic organizations. We do not see how one can invoke the concept of decoupling without presuming to know the organizational “core” from which a thing is decoupled. It seems likewise problematic to describe something as merely symbolic unless we know where true substance resides. As we have already seen, this is a difficult trick in the pluralistic organization with its multiple cores, diverse identities, varied substances, and complex symbolisms. Practices that are highly peripheral and inconsequential to the identity of one constituency may be all-important to the identity and values of a different one.

Intercollegiate athletics in American higher education seem to provide a compelling example along these lines. It is quite difficult to grasp the importance (perhaps even the existence) of “big time” college sports when we view the university as an organizational device for accomplishing its stated goals of knowledge creation and dissemination. Excellence in quasi-professional athletic endeavors is not mentioned in the mission statement of any university that we know of, and athletic departments often seem to be formally cut off from the rest of the university’s structure. Nonetheless, athletics are, empirically speaking, a central part of most American universities’ identities. For better or worse, the majority of people who identify with universities *at all*, identify with them through their sports teams. Further, these identifications are often intense ones that have major implications for university policy and resource allocations. And, while it may be quite easy for many faculty members to imagine a university without football, it is likely the single most taken-for-granted part of the organization from the perspective of other influential constituencies. (One sometimes wonders if society at large would even permit our universities to exist without it). In sum, while college sports may be entirely beside the point from an academic perspective, we do not think they can be accurately classified as peripheral or decoupled. *Loose coupling* would seem to be a more suitable concept to describe the evident reality of the situation, as this concept does not stipulate the existence of a single organizational core (Weick, 1976; Orton & Weick, 1990).

The example of intercollegiate athletics is also useful in demonstrating the *limitations* of loose coupling as an adaptation to pluralism. Because athletic and academic purposes are often almost entirely uncommensurated with one another, the operative goals pursued by athletic and academic constituencies are frequently at odds. Because athletic departments are often structurally and financially autonomous, they are also prone to make decisions that offend

academic sensibilities and interests (e.g. massive investments in athletic facilities and multi-million dollar coaching salaries). Finally, because academic and athletic cultures are so vastly different (and sometimes hostile to one another), faculty and administrators are often reluctant to engage athletic issues directly. This reluctance perpetuates and exacerbates existing rifts (Bowen & Levin, 2003; Shulman & Bowen, 2001; Duderstadt, 2000; Zimbalist, 1999).

A third category of adaptations to pluralism aims at reining in such tensions. Specifically, organizations may also try to balance disparate demands, play constituencies against one another, and/or attempt to find more deeply cooperative solutions to the political and cultural tensions which pluralism creates (Pratt & Foreman, 2000; Oliver, 1991; Donaldson & Preston, 1995). As with loose coupling, these adaptations may result from strategic managerial action or emerge more naturally from the interactions of constituent groups. A degree of internal balance may evolve, for instance, as one constituency grudgingly acknowledges its mutual dependence upon another. This may partially describe the relationship that many athletic departments have with the universities that house them. Some athletics departments seemingly tolerate academic standards without embracing them, and many faculties appear to feel similarly with respect to sports (i.e. to view them as a necessary evil). The same general sort of relationship sometimes seems to exist between the research and teaching identities within business schools. The line separating situations of reluctant mutual acceptance from those of true cooperation is not an especially bright one. We can certainly find specific examples of situations wherein athletics and academics (or teaching and research) are mutually facilitative. Some corporations also seem able to find true complementarities between their social responsibilities and their duties to their shareholders (Hillman & Keim, 2001). Nevertheless, tensions abide. Relationships that are cooperative in their effect may remain quite conflictual in their process (and vice versa).

Balances that are struck among various objectives, constituencies, and role identities are often precarious (Clark, 1956; Selznick, 1951).

This leads us to the final form of organizational adaptation which pluralistic legitimacy imperatives may produce. Specifically, it is possible that some organizations may be able to forge durable *identities of their own* and to emerge as *institutions in their own right*. To the extent that this occurs, many of the organizational legitimacy problems mentioned above may be mitigated, transformed, or even eliminated. An organization that becomes an institution may assume a “social fact” status, become a valued end in its own right, and thus become capable of legitimating its own actions, within limits (Goodstein, Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2006). It may become a self-directing entity which is not only a cultural product, but also a producer of culture (Pedersen & Dobbin, 2006). In the language of relational sociology, it may attain “entitativity” (Campbell, 1958; Emirbayer, 1997) and become a “thing with consequences” or a “site of causation” (Abbott, 1996:873; Emirbayer, 1997:304; White, 1992). It may also obtain the ability to integrate or somehow transcend the individual identities which compose it, and which are imposed upon it from without (Padgett & Ansell, 1993; Padgett, 2001).

Selznick (1957) provides one important account of how this might occur within the pluralistic organization. As we have noted, he is keenly aware of the problem of pluralism, and he sees institutionalization as a dynamic and natural response to the “anxiety-laden problems” (1957:39) which pluralism creates. In his view, the end result of institutionalization is the emergence of an autonomous and unique “organizational self” (1957:21). This self possesses its own purposes and distinctive competencies, and it is valued as an end in its own right, rather than a mere means for achieving pre-existing or externally-given ends. Importantly though, Selznick does not see institutionalization as a process that somehow extracts the organization

from its constraining external context, or as one that negates the local identities and parochial aims of its constituencies. To the contrary, he paradoxically argues that the organization's acceptance of "irreversible commitments" is the very cornerstone of institutionalization. He likewise sees institutionalization as a largely bottom-up (or outside-in) phenomenon. The Selznickian organizational institution is "infused with value" *by its constituents* and it is institutionalized only in so much as it becomes the *vehicle* through which these groups pursue *their* aspirations and *their* ideals. While it develops a logic of its own and attains the ability to *give* identity to its members, it *accepts* identities and logics from them in at least equal measure.

Accepting binding commitments and effectively surrendering to one's constituents would not appear at first glance to be a probable path to autonomy, distinctiveness, and organizational selfhood (much less adaptability, another presumed benefit of institutionalization which we will discuss below). However, Selznick's would-be institution appears to gain much in return for essentially giving itself up. What must be recognized, we believe, is: a) that it makes *multiple* binding commitments and, b) that these commitments are profoundly *symbolic*, as well as material. While no organization can realistically be all things to all people at all times, this may be the precisely the point. Because the Selznickian institution makes itself the receptacle for the ideals of multiple groups and a vehicle for the realization of multiple identities and purposes, it acquires (of necessity) the capacity to reprioritize and reinterpret "its" identities, ideals, and purposes as circumstances dictate. It also acquires the moral authority (i.e. the legitimacy) to make reciprocal claims upon constituent identity groups. It makes these claims on behalf of the organizational whole (i.e. self) which is, somewhat miraculously, conjured into existence as a result of the binding, constitutional commitments that the organization makes to its various parts. In other words, by agreeing unconditionally to be both "this and that," the organization may

somehow become “the other,” as well. Because its diverse constituents perceive the institution to be “theirs” in some fundamental sense, they come to value it as an end in itself and thus imbue it with purpose and meaning.

We think it is important to emphasize the critical role of symbolism in this hypothesized process. If constituencies were sharply and solely focused upon the tangible outputs and near-term objectives of the organization, creating and sustaining cooperation amid pluralism might well be impossible. However, people’s tolerance of (or even preference for) symbolic displays of commitment and conformity may help things hold together. Symbolism, in short, may be what allows an organization to *be* multiple things to multiple people (Padgett & Ansell, 1993; Ansell, 1997; Zajac & Westphal, 2004). It may enable the creation of a “coalition of identities” that is more robust and more sustainable than a mere coalition of interests could realistically be. It is also important to note, again, that “mere” symbolism is not sufficient according to Selznick’s account. While robust symbols can evoke powerful meanings and provide the institution with needed autonomy, its commitments must be “embodied” and acted out if they are to engender the reciprocal commitment necessary to sustain the institution over time (Stinchcombe, 1997). In other words, second order legitimacy criteria continue to be critical. Obvious disconnects between rhetoric and subsequent actions are the very antithesis of organizational integrity, and can be expected to damage legitimacy accordingly.⁴

INSTITUTIONAL PLURALISM AND THE PROBLEM OF ORGANIZATIONAL GOVERNANCE

⁴ We have painted a relatively positive picture of organizational institutionalization here. This is consistent with our goal of identifying effective organizational adaptations to pluralism. While Selznick also emphasizes institutionalization’s positive aspects, he similarly documents its pathologies and concludes that the process should be seen as a “fundamentally neutral” one. Organizational autonomy is not an unqualified good, and bad things can certainly happen when an organization becomes valued as an end in itself. Some integrative institutions may be better described as unholy alliances.

We are also interested in understanding pluralism's implications for organizational governance. Governance, broadly conceived, has to do with questions of organizational *purpose* and *control* (Hansmann, 1996; March & Olsen, 1995; Williamson, 1996; Selznick, 1992). Studies of governance are thus generally concerned with identifying "who rules" organizations, with understanding the ends toward which they are ruled, and with analyzing the means (e.g. incentives, structures, informal norms) employed to achieve those ends. Questions about the processes through which control and purpose are decided and changed over time are also integral to the study of organizational governance.

Given that institutions are, among many other things, mechanisms of governance, it is not surprising that institutional theories of all types have been widely applied in the effort to explain governance phenomena. The main message of neo-institutionalism as regards organizational governance appears to be twofold. First, and most basically, the theory draws attention to the fact that a great deal of governance takes place *outside the boundaries of individual organizations* (Fligstein, 1991; Friedland & Alford, 1991; Thornton & Ocasio, 1999; Scott et al., 2000). Governance, from a neo-institutional perspective, is largely (not exclusively) a field-level phenomenon. A now vast body of research has shown that the state, the professions, and other field-level entities profoundly influence the control structures, practices, and even basic purposes of individual organizations (see Scott 2001 for a review). Second, the perspective emphasizes that much governance work (perhaps most of it) is actually done by *cultural or cognitive mechanisms*, rather than the coercive, interest-based, or value-based ones featured in other institutionalisms (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). Shared beliefs and understandings are thought to effectively determine much of what goes on in organizations from day to day, and even to deeply influence fundamental decisions about the organization's control, identity, and reason for being

(Friedland & Alford, 1991; Thornton & Ocasio, 1999; Greenwood & Hinings, 1993; Hinings et al, 2004).

Neo-institutional insights regarding organizational governance have manifested themselves in a variety of ways. One influential strand of empirical research has demonstrated that organizational purposes and control structures are transformed over time as the result of broader, historical shifts in institutional logics (Fligstein, 1991; Thornton and Ocasio, 1999; Scott et al, 2000; Lounsbury, 1999; Dobbin, 1994). A second group of studies has emphasized the essentially cultural nature of organizational forms. This work invites us to see organizational forms as the embodiments or incarnations of institutional logics, and argues that cultural understandings imprinted in organizational forms at the time of founding continue to constrain organizations throughout their lives (Haveman & Rao, 1997; Rao, 1998; Rao et al., 2003; Dobbin & Dowd, 1997; Schneiberg & Bartley, 2001). A third manifestation is evident in neo-institutional studies of organizations' legal environments. This research suggests that laws are often "endogenous" to organizational fields, and raises doubts about coercive or functionalist explanations of the law's effect on organizations. Rather, it presents legal compliance as a "special case of institutional isomorphism," and suggests that laws typically govern organizations through mechanisms that are primarily cultural and constitutive (Edelman, 1990; 2002; Edelman and Suchman, 1997; Kelly & Dobbin, 1998; Sutton & Dobbin, 1996). Finally, the neo-institutional perspective on governance is also much evident in a growing number of studies which examine how social movements both create and transform field-level institutions. This research suggests that new cultural frames and governing logics wrought by social movements are instrumental in creating, transforming, and/or extinguishing individual organizations and organizational forms (Davis & Thompson, 1994; Rao, Morill & Zald, 2000;

Davis, McAdam, Scott & Zald, 2005; McAdam & Scott, 2005; Zald, Morill & Rao, 2005; Schneiberg & Lounsbury, this volume). This view of organizational governance represents a major break from earlier theories that tended to see the organization as an unstable coalition of local interests, with goals and internal power balances that are primarily determined by shifting resource dependencies in the task environment (March & Simon, 1958; Cyert & March, 1963; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978).

The elaboration of field-level governance processes represents a major accomplishment of neo-institutionalism. Its demonstration of the importance of cultural and cognitive governance mechanisms is equally impressive. Even institutional economists are now inclined to recognize the importance of such mechanisms (North, 1990). However, the reality of institutional pluralism appears to render neo-institutionalism incomplete as an explanation for organizational governance, as well as for organizational legitimacy. If multiple logics are active in and around an organization, then no single belief system can automatically perpetuate its dominance. If various constituencies hold different notions about the “appropriate” allocation of power, then something else besides a simple logic of appropriateness would seem to ultimately determine who rules the organization. If the organization claims multiple, institutionally defined identities and purposes, it would seem that its governance must (at least minimally) accommodate and validate these disparate identities and purposes. In short, it appears that the recognition of pluralism leads to the re-emergence of some basic political and structural problems that appeared to fade from significance with the rise of neo-institutionalism.

We do not think that an organization which is simultaneously embedded in multiple systems of governance can be adequately understood as a unit of any one of those systems. It is, at the least, a functioning part of each respective system. It is at most a system quite unto itself,

as the preceding section showed. In either case, much governance activity clearly goes on *within* the pluralistic organization. It is responsible for internally settling issues that are unsettled within the broader environment. Further, because it possesses multiple objectives and diverse constituencies, its overall purposes are subject to change (perhaps extreme change) over time. Cognitive mechanisms would also appear to be insufficient as explanations for the control of such an organization. When one set of taken for granted beliefs confronts an alternative one, “legitimacy politics” (Stryker, 2000) are likely to ensue within the organization. Organizational structures and rules seem necessary in order to contain and channel these processes. This need seems particularly acute within those organizations that sit upon cultural and societal fault lines, as inter-identity tensions are likely to be very deep-rooted and recurrent in such settings. The control of such organizations is likely to “circulate” between identity groups over time as a result of political processes (Ocasio, 1994; Ocasio & Kim, 1999). Persons who can credibly claim membership within more than one group may enjoy particular advantages in these perennial internal contests for control (Lazega, 2001; Burt, 1992; Padgett & Ansell, 1993).

Each of the organizational adaptations that we described in the prior section can be rightfully seen as approaches to organizational governance, in addition to being strategies for pursuing legitimacy in the face of pluralism. Attempts to delete institutionally-given identities, to loosely couple them, or to balance them against one another are all different ways for a pluralistic organization to cope with the twin problems of deciding organizational purpose and control. The Selznickian institutionalization process can be seen in the same light, and this adaptation merits additional discussion under the governance rubric.

We think that the single most important feature of the pluralistic organization may be its inchoate capacity to govern itself – and its parallel ability to develop a self which becomes the

focal point of its governance efforts. More tangibly, the pluralistic organization has the capacity to constitute itself by choosing its identities and commitments from the menu of choices presented by its would-be constituencies, and by society at large. This is an opportunity which is clearly not available to the organization that is a mere incarnation of an externally given cultural logic, or which is otherwise imprisoned within the iron cage of a monistic and totalizing institutional field. The pluralistic organization similarly has the opportunity to gain autonomy from its constituencies, to reprioritize its identities as needed, and to arbitrate between the claims of the identity groups that jointly constitute it. Perhaps most importantly, it may also obtain the ability to harness and channel the divergent energies of these constituencies. Under all circumstances, these groups can be expected to coexist somewhat uneasily as the mere result of their divergent beliefs, values, and near-term objectives. But, in the ideal circumstance, the substance of intergroup conflict may shift away from narrow questions about what the organization should do or provide, and toward larger (i.e. second-order) questions about what it should be and aspire to. The focus of conflict may simultaneously shift from near-term concerns to long-term ones. As these shifts occur, the organization may begin to become an end in itself, and thus an institution in its own right (Selznick, 1957; 1969; 1992; 1996). Ongoing conflicts between identity groups subsequently become intra-institutional rather than extra-institutional. That is, they happen “for” the organization, and within the constitutional framework it creates, rather than against or outside of it.⁵

We do not know the frequency with which successful institutionalization processes actually unfold in organizations. There are numerous reasons to believe they might be rare and

⁵ In discussing political coalitions and parties, Lyndon Johnson is reported to have said that it is better to have people “inside the tent pissing out, than outside the tent pissing in.” The Selznickian institutionalization process might be thought of as the social mechanism creating the tent itself.

difficult. To begin, pluralism itself is a major threat to such processes as well as their chief enabler. Workable identity coalitions (i.e. reasonably coherent organizational selves) likely become more difficult to maintain as identities proliferate within an organization. Further, powerful identity groups have the opportunity and incentive to short-circuit institutionalization by using their power to narrow or rationalize organizational purposes and effectively cut weaker identities out of the coalition. Such efforts may often be well intentioned, though ultimately shortsighted. It is also important to remember that self governance is an ongoing process; one which is only set in motion when a nascent institution makes constitutional commitments. If the self-governing institution is to flourish, it must actually follow-through on these commitments over time (i.e. act with integrity). It must also develop integrative mythologies and “robust” symbols that manage to satisfy the individual parts of the organization at the same time they draw these parts together into an emergent whole (Selznick, 1957; Clark, 1970; Ansell, 1997; Bernstein, 1971, Atkinson, 1985; Padgett & Ansell, 1993). The creation of formal and informal structures is likewise integral to any successful institutionalization project (Selznick, 1949, 1957). Finally, institutionalization also affords a large degree of influence to human selves -- who appear as “leaders” within the process. The autonomous and self-governing organizational institution can be a profoundly cooperative, socially integrative, and highly durable entity. It can also undergo a radical subversion of purpose, become an instrument of elite domination, and/or become insular and inertial in the face of a changing environment. Selznick (1957) holds that institutional leadership (i.e. “organizational statesmanship”) is often required to ensure the former outcomes and avoid the latter ones. But, he also suggests that such leadership is often most notable by its absence.

These challenges notwithstanding, we see an important opportunity for institutional research which gives renewed attention to integrative processes of governance at the organizational level. Whether or not pluralism ultimately leads to the development of a self-directing organizational institution, its minimal effect is to make individual organizations into important arenas of governance. Institutional researchers might learn much by peering more deeply into these arenas. However, we do not suggest that they should lose sight of broader, embedding institutions in so doing. As we have emphasized, the individual identities which contend for influence within the pluralistic organization have societal roots.⁶ These roots are not severed even when an organization becomes an institution in its own right. Its autonomy and self-awareness may make it a more effective and formidable player within its pluralistic institutional context. But, it likely remains a creature of its social environment and it probably needs to be understood this way. The ability to tie together disparate institutional worlds may be a major source of organizational distinctiveness and competence. But, this governance capability cannot be understood unless we also attend to the broader institutional orders which the organization must actually bridge. This may be an important insight for stakeholder theorists. While these scholars express much optimism about the benefits to be realized from collaborative organizational governance, they have said relatively less about the profound ideological and political challenges cooperative governance entails. Organizations may be able to integrate their societally-given identities to a significant extent, but society itself remains divided. Neo-institutionalism helps us understand the nature and significance of these divisions (Friedland & Alford, 1991).

⁶ Selznick was clearly aware of this fact himself: "...although organizational controversy may be directly motivated by narrow personal and group aims, the contending programs usually reflect ideological differences in the larger arena. In this way, the internal struggle for power becomes a channel through which external environmental forces make themselves felt" (1957:20).

INSTITUTIONAL PLURALISM AND THE PROBLEM OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Our chapter's final section focuses on the problem of organizational change, and particularly on understanding change of the radical or transformative sort. We believe that institutional pluralism has significant implications for this phenomenon and for our theoretical understanding of it. In order to understand these implications, it is first useful to consider some key neo-institutional insights about organizational change.⁷

To begin, the perspective helps us understand the main reasons why change is likely to be problematic for the organization. Specifically, it suggests that prevailing institutions are apt to constrain change, and draws special attention to the role that institutionally-given identities play in subtly perpetuating the organizational status quo (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Greenwood & Hinings, 1993; 1996; 2006; D'Aunno et al., 2000). Second, the theory helps us understand how change is likely to unfold within an organization. The most typical expected pattern is one of punctuated equilibrium. In ordinary times, the organization is likely to engage in incremental changes that basically converge with its core identity and cohere with its constitutive logic. However, these convergent periods are intermittently punctuated by shorter episodes of divergent and revolutionary change (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996; Greenwood & Hinings, 2006). These disruptive spates are most likely to be exogenously precipitated, to involve significant conflict, and to be spurred on by marginal or disadvantaged actors (as revolutions typically are) (Leblebici et al., 1991; Kraatz & Moore, 2002; Hirsch, 1986). Finally, the perspective also offers important insights about the actual nature of radical organizational change. Because neo-institutionalism conceptualizes the organization as a fundamentally cultural entity, transformation is thought to

⁷ Much recent research in institutional theory has also examined processes of institutional change at the field level (Scott, 2001, Thornton & Ocasio, 1999; Dacin et al, 2002). We do not review this literature here, given our central concern with organization-level processes.

occur when one set of constitutive beliefs ultimately gives way to another one. It is at this point that the organization is truly reconstituted, becoming something radically different than it once was (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996; 2006). This general account of organizational transformation shares appreciable similarities with other punctuated equilibrium models of change (Tushman & Romanelli, 1985; Gersick, 1991; Meyer, Brooks & Goes, 1990), with configurational approaches to organization (Miller & Friesen, 1984; Meyer, Tsui & Hinings, 1993), with models of organizational learning that emphasize the deep tension between exploitation and exploration (March, 1991; 1994, 1999), and with recent research in organizational ecology which sees organizations' socially-given identities as key sources of inertia (Baron, 2004; Hannan et al., 2006).

We believe that this perspective is quite useful as a starting point for understanding organizational transformation. But, we also think it becomes increasingly unsatisfactory as institutional pluralism grows. Pluralism's basic implications for organizational change are largely foreshadowed in our earlier discussions of governance and legitimacy. First, pluralism has the effect of problematizing organizational stability and of making change somewhat less rare and remarkable than it may appear from a neo-institutional perspective. The deep-rooted tensions that are built in to the pluralistic organization seem to make its mere ability to hang together something of a mystery. It appears more likely to be fraught with excessive change than to be burdened with inescapable inertia. Stability may thus be seen as a sort of achievement (and perhaps a tenuous one). Second, pluralism problematizes the meaning of any given organizational change. Categorizing a particular organizational change as convergent or divergent becomes a troublesome task, one which requires substantial judgment on the part of the research (and perhaps on the part of the change agent as well). Because the same change

often conveys different symbolic meanings to different constituencies, it may be highly convergent (legitimate) with respect to one identity, deeply divergent (illegitimate) with respect to another, and wholly irrelevant or unnoticed by a third. Finally, pluralism compels us to see particular changes not just in relation to multiple external institutions, but also in relation to the institution that the organization itself may have become. This means that we need to ask how a given change fits with the organization's unique history and claimed purpose. Is it at odds with the commitments that the organization has itself embraced and evinced? How will it affect the balance of power within the organization's coalition of identities? We also need to ask how and if the change fits with the organization's own unique mythology and espoused mission, which have presumably developed in order to integrate its identities and sustain the coalition among them. The answers to these questions are likely to determine not only the local meaning actually assigned to a given change, but also the organization's ability to implement that change and its ultimate consequences, as well.

The most obvious pattern of organizational change that pluralism may produce is one of ongoing and largely uncontrolled flux. This rather extreme consequence is especially likely to occur in loosely coupled organizations. Under loose coupling, autonomous identity groups can pursue their respective aims with little interference from other groups and little oversight from a central authority. This situation would appear to promote the type of organizational dynamics that March and colleagues had in mind in their discussion of organizational anarchies (Cohen & March, 1986; March & Olsen, 1976). Another important effect of pluralism is to create change processes that are rife with unintended consequences (Merton, 1936; Selznick, 1949). Though constituent groups within the pluralistic organization may be able to act autonomously, their actions are apt to reverberate throughout the larger system as a result of unrecognized (or

disregarded) interdependencies. Thus, organizations may sometimes be transformed almost by accident. Kraatz & Ventresca (2007) provide one good example of such a change process in the context of American higher education. They study the diffusion of enrollment management (EM), a now-controversial set of marketing practices and structures designed to increase enrollments, improve college rankings, and maximize net-tuition revenues. Enrollment management's wide adoption has transformed the admissions function, fundamentally changed the purpose of financial aid, and helped make universities considerably more "market-driven," among other consequences. However, Kraatz & Ventresca find that this change was adopted rapidly and widely with little apparent controversy. Admissions personnel embraced the practice because it was an effective solution to technical problems, because it allowed them to realize their job-specific goals, and because it was increasingly deemed "appropriate" by the emerging logic of the growing EM profession. Though EM was (and is) highly *illegitimate* with respect to the values and beliefs of many other identity groups in and around the university, this conflict remained latent until after EM was in wide use. Change processes like this one suggest that the problem of *controlling* organizational change may be of equal importance with the problem of initiating it (at least in pluralistic organizations). March (1981) and Tsoukas & Chia (2002) have previously theorized similar change processes, though their accounts are less closely linked to institutional arguments.

Pluralism is likely to affect change somewhat differently in an organization that has developed a stronger sense of itself and thus become institutionalized in the Selznickian sense. One possibility for such an organization is that its chosen commitments will become anchors, constraining it in basically the same way that an externally imposed identity might. Selznick (1957) himself warns of this potential, noting that the creation of distinctive competencies is

often accompanied by the parallel emergence of distinctive incompetencies. However, this is clearly not Selznick's dominant message. To the contrary, he sees institutionalization as a process that tends to promote adaptation; one which not only allows an organization to change, but which may also allow (or even compel) it to change *intelligently*. We have already elaborated the basic explanations for this proposition. To review, the Selznickian institution: 1) possesses multiple institutionally-derived identities, thus escaping the constitutive iron cage that a monistic field may impose, 2) is an autonomous "organizational self" which is capable of reprioritizing, reinterpreting, and mediating between its identities according to necessity, 3) has constitutional commitments that put limits on its flexibility and compel it to act responsibly with respect to its constituents and its history and, 4) is valued not only as a means through which constituents pursue their individual aims but also as a *non-expendable* end in its own right. Together, these characteristics provide the organizational institution with the necessary motivation and opportunity for change. In the right combination, they may also enable it to change intelligently, as we shall discuss further below.

Selznick and his contemporaries provided numerous examples of organizational transformations resulting from institutionalization processes (Selznick, 1949; Clark, 1956; Zald & Denton, 1963; Messinger, 1955). The recurrent theme in these studies was that individual organizations essentially took on lives of their own, obtaining remarkable fluidity as their constituents infused them with value and strived to ensure their survival amid changing circumstances. More current examples of similar processes are common. Kraatz & Zajac (1996), for instance, found that American liberal arts colleges widely adopted professional degree programs (which were seemingly antithetical to their missions and identities) in the effort to survive declining enrollments and changing student degree preferences. Suspitsyna (2006)

shows how economics departments in Russian universities have transitioned to the teaching of western economics, which they officially categorized as a false, “bourgeois science” during the Soviet era. Perhaps even more striking is the Chinese communist party’s recent push to integrate prominent capitalists within its ranks (Kahn, 2002). What is noteworthy about all of these change processes is not only that organizations have changed in ways that appear antithetical to their (apparent) core identities, but that they have made these changes without renouncing those identities (and often in the very name of them). We think that the occurrence of such changes points to the existence of deliberative and adaptive organizational institutions. These organizations appear to have been capable of escaping the constraints imposed by their institutional identities, and even of reinterpreting those identities in order to serve their own changing needs and purposes. Organizational change processes like these are difficult to conceive through the lens of either neo-institutionalism or organizational ecology, both of which tend to portray identities as externally imposed sources of constraint.

The organizational ability for self-transformation is sometimes tragic, sometimes ironic, and sometimes merely absurd. But, it is also sometimes genuinely desirable and emulable. The same basic processes which allow organizational purposes to be subverted and displaced in some organizational institutions allow other institutions to intelligently adapt to changing environments and thus continue to serve their constituents. An effectively self-governing institution must, after all, be able to determine (and adapt) its basic purposes. Though Selznick viewed institutionalization and its accompanying changes as “fundamentally neutral,” he had much to say about the factors that might push the process in a positive or negative direction. In the ideal circumstance, the organizational institution is *responsive* to the demands of its pluralistic environment but also *responsible* to its defining commitments and its history

(Selznick, 1957; 2000). When these pressures effectively counterbalance one another, the organization is unlikely to change too much or too little. The diversity which pluralism builds into the system provides the variation and conflict necessary to avoid competency traps (March, 1991), which result from excessive homogeneity and a disproportionate emphasis on convergent, exploitative change. At the same time, the organization's historical commitments and sense of self keep it from engaging in excessive exploration and thus falling victim to the obverse problem of the "failure trap" (March, 1991). The relational structure of the institution may also be instrumental in promoting intelligent adaptation, in that it brings diverse identity groups into dialogue with each other and ultimately directs their energies toward a shared (if necessarily emergent and robust) organizational purpose (March & Olsen, 1995; Moore & Kraatz, 2007).

Institutionalization is likely to follow a less therapeutic path to the extent that these forces are not in balance with one another. One way in which this balance may be disrupted is through "opportunistic" adaptation. Selznick (1957) conceptualizes opportunistic changes as "irresponsible" ones that are undertaken without sufficient consideration of organizational commitments and competencies, and without necessary regard for their longer-term consequences. Attempts to pander to constituencies and cash in on current fads may, for instance, fall in this category. The flipside of opportunism is what Selznick calls utopianism. This occurs when the organization becomes caught in its past and holds to ideals that it can no longer effectively realize. Importantly, Selznick sees utopianism, as well as opportunism, as a key threat to his master ideal of organizational integrity. Within his pragmatist framework, integrity requires the continued existence of the entity. It is not a virtue one ascribes to martyred organizations or doomed idealists. Of equal importance is the fact that integrity can only be assessed on a case by case basis (and even then only tentatively). An organization's choices may

cause us to reasonably question its integrity, but it may also have commitments and reasons for its actions that are not accessible to the analyst. Integrity (to the extent it exists) is a characteristic of a dynamic organizational self. All selves remain unique and somewhat mysterious in the final analysis.

We think that it is quite telling that Selznick, as a sociologist, chose to make leadership the focal point of his most influential work on the process of institutionalization. Clearly, he recognized that the complexities of institutionalization provide individual persons with a great ability to influence organizational change processes, both for better and worse. His work, especially *Leadership in Administration*, is largely concerned with providing practical and moral guidance to these persons. Though Selznick's advice seems primarily directed at the powerful, we believe his perspective may also be of great use to those trying to create change from within or outside the organizational institution. Its major implication is that the organization is a relational entity which can become whatever its constituents make it into (within some broad limits imposed by its history). Its robust identity and emergent purpose may allow the powerful to co-opt it, but they also allow the marginalized to subvert it. While neo-institutional perspectives on change tend to focus on precipitating organizational revolutions, Selznick's theory suggests that revolution may be both unnecessary and ultimately counterproductive. It suggests that the organizational vehicle might be taken in many different directions by those who know how it works.

DISCUSSION: SCHOLARLY, PRAGMATIC, AND HUMANISTIC IMPLICATIONS

Our purpose in this chapter has been to draw greater attention to the phenomenon of institutional pluralism and to lay out some of its organizational implications. We think that the problem is an important one for organizational researchers, for would-be organizational leaders,

and for other organizational constituents and members. We will discuss these complementary implications in turn as we close the chapter.

Scholarly Implications

We have already said much about pluralism's implications for organizational legitimacy, governance and change. Nevertheless, it may be useful to review and elaborate some of our key points with an eye toward promoting future research. We will also consider our chapter's possible implications for a few other areas of study that we have not yet explicitly discussed.

Organizational legitimacy. Meyer & Scott (1983:202) proposed that “the legitimacy of a given entity is negatively affected by the number of different authorities sovereign over it and by the diversity or inconsistency of their accounts of how it is to function” (reprinted in Scott, 2001:60). Our discussion of the legitimacy problems faced by organizations in pluralistic contexts began in a very similar place, but ended up somewhere quite different. We acknowledged that pluralism problematizes legitimacy, but we also suggested that organizations may benefit from it and thrive in its midst. We think that future research might give more attention to the possibility that organizational legitimacy can be additive or even multiplicative rather than zero-sum as Meyer and Scott seem to propose. We see no obvious reason to predict that an organization cannot fulfill multiple purposes, embody multiple values (or logics), and successfully verify multiple institutionally-derived identities. Indeed, we think that organizations that embody multiple values and are successful at more than one thing (e.g. research *and* teaching, satisfying shareholders *and* environmental groups, upholding professional standards *and* serving clients) may be *especially* legitimate for that very reason. The contradictory standards and expectations which are imposed by different constituencies no doubt put limits on these hypothesized integrative benefits, and thus block any path to organizational utopia. But, as

we have also suggested, the organization may attain substantial autonomy from institutional authorities (who may not be most accurately described as “sovereign” over it) (Selznick, 1957; Oliver, 1991). Further, the very fact that different institutional actors care enough about an organization to levy multiple demands upon it may be the more telling indicator of its actual legitimacy. Consider the counterfactual situation wherein no demands are imposed and no support or endorsement is offered in return.

We also think that future research on organizational legitimacy might give more attention to the “commitment problem” that we discussed and to the related idea that organizations may acquire some capacity to legitimate their own actions as they become institutions themselves (Goodstein, Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2006). We suggested that constituents attribute entitativity (Campbell, 1958; Hamilton & Sherman, 1996) to organizations and apply second order criteria in ascribing legitimacy. In other words, they are likely to anthropomorphize organizations and look for evidence of integrity and self-consistency in their actions (Selznick, 1957; Stinchcombe, 1997). If this is true, the legitimacy seeking organization needs not only to be multiple things to multiple people, but also something unto itself. It is hostage to its own history and to the identities and ideals it has claimed as its own (Selznick, 1996). While this dual imperative is the source of the “politician’s dilemma” we identified, we also suggested that this dilemma may carry the seeds of its own solution. The organization that recognizes its commitments and takes responsibility for them may gain needed autonomy and support from its constituents, even when its decisions are at odds with their near-term interests and parochial values. At the same time, the practical necessity of responding to the changing needs of constituents may liberate the organization from the dead weight of its past. We think that future research examining

organizational attempts to navigate the politician's dilemma (both successful and unsuccessful ones) may be revealing.

Organizational Governance. Our discussion of institutional pluralism also led us to the conclusion that institutional governance is an ongoing process which transpires within the boundaries of individual organizations (as well as at higher levels). In some cases, the pluralistic organization may merely serve as an arena wherein diverse identity groups with different values and logics vie for influence and wherein recurrent bouts of "legitimacy politics" occur (Ocasio & Kim, 1999; Stryker, 2000). Such an organization may constitute a sort of "garbage can" which is filled with institutional refuse (Heimer, 1999). However, we also suggested that a more durable and stable "coalition of identities" may emerge as identity groups learn to co-exist and recognize their symbiosis. We further noted that some organizations may become effectively self-governing as they become institutions and develop distinctive "organizational selves" that somehow encompass, integrate, or transcend their externally-given identities (Selznick, 1957).

We think that the examination of such integrative processes poses a particularly important opportunity for future research. We find it unfortunate and somewhat ironic that much contemporary research on governance seems to rule them out by assumption. The dominant focus on governance as *control* (whether by ownership, incentive, coercion, or cultural hegemony) often appears to blind researchers to the very possibility of cooperation (i.e. of what Mary Parker Follett called the "power with" rather than "power over") (Graham, 1995). Prevailing theories seem particularly ill-suited to the analysis of organizations wherein constituencies cooperate in order to achieve wholly distinct purposes (e.g. making money and saving lives, scientific research and professional education etc.). We think that the organization with such diverse purposes might be productively conceptualized as a sort of "pluralistic social

dilemma.” Its constituencies are mutually dependent as in the archetypical social dilemma (Hardin, 1968). They require cooperation from other groups in order to achieve their own ends, and each group has some ability to block the others’ attempts at goal attainment. But, because the purposes and values of each group are wholly distinct (and perhaps fundamentally incommensurable) the recognition of mutual dependence and potential symbiosis is greatly hindered. Purposes that are merely different are likely to be viewed as oppositional. The close association of group identities with group objectives likely exacerbates this problem (Kramer, 1991).

We would like to see more theory and research which looks for organizational and managerial solutions to this basic dilemma of governance. How do successful organizations realize what Collins and Porras (1994) optimistically call “*the genius of the and*” while avoiding its obverse (“*the tyranny of the or*”)? Is loose coupling a sufficient solution? Is the creation of quasi-democratic structures and processes which grant voice, due process and autonomy to diverse constituencies a viable option? Can organizations create integrative mythologies and missions that effectively bind together diverse constituents and somehow allow for the joint realization of incommensurable values? Can (or must) they develop robust and multivocal identities that allow them to be multiple things to multiple people (and to change) while appearing to be unified and self-consistent? If so, what sorts of rhetoric and symbolism are effective at facilitating this quasi-integration? Finally, what role do people play in holding together the pluralistic organization? What kind of a mindset enables a person (particularly a leader) to effectively function in the presence of so much diversity? We would also like to see more research that examines failed attempts at cooperative governance (and which describes them this way, rather than as the mere result of power politics or inexorable cultural forces).

Selznick (1949) reminds us that organizations are recalcitrant tools and shows how cooperation and idealism can give way to elite domination and goal displacement. But, he also reminds us that the iron law of oligarchy is not iron and not a law (Selznick, 1992). He stresses that ideals are called ideals for a reason. The revealed impossibility of perfect cooperation is no reason to abandon cooperative aims or to devalue organizations which achieve them only imperfectly and partially.

Organizational Change. Our discussion of organizational change yielded at least three key insights for future research. First, we suggested that pluralism problematizes stability and makes organizational change less unusual and difficult than it often appears when viewed through a neo-institutional lens. The same institutional forces which might create organizational inertia (operating in isolation) can produce dynamic tensions and a potential for near-constant change through their conjoint operation (March, 1981). This effect is likely to be especially pronounced when an organization is loosely coupled, thus allowing various identity groups to pursue their distinct purposes in relative isolation (Weick, 1976; March & Olsen, 1976). We suggested that the unintended consequences of such change processes may produce organizational transformation without revolution (Kraatz & Ventresca, 2007). We think that this implies a need for research which rethinks processes of radical organizational change (and perhaps expands the concept itself) (Greenwood & Hinings, 2006). Second, we showed that pluralism may facilitate organizational processes of institutionalization and identity formation that actually enable and productively guide adaptation. The organization that becomes valued as a non-expendable end in itself may acquire a significant (perhaps extreme) degree of flexibility. But, institutionalization and identity formation may also put appropriate limits on adaptation and allow the organization to avoid failure traps that result from excessive and ill-considered changes

which take it too far from its existing competencies and historical commitments (Selznick, 1957; Moore & Kraatz, 2007). These insights may have significant implications for contemporary change research, especially in organizational ecology and neo-institutionalism. These literatures emphasize that organizational identities affect change, but they tend to see these identities as externally imposed, fully constitutive and therefore constraining (Zuckerman, 1999; Hannan et al, 2006). Finally, our discussion of change also offered some tangible advice for would-be change agents. Specifically, it suggested a practical need to justify changes with respect to the organization's own claimed ideals, espoused identity, and distinctive history (and with respect to the ideals and identities of particular groups and persons therein). Revolutionary rhetoric is likely to produce counter-revolutionary responses. This is highly problematic when change recipients have the power to resist or ignore change initiatives (as they most often do in pluralistic organizations). In contrast, even extreme changes may be more readily accepted when they are framed in a way that allows people to conserve their own sense of personal and organizational identity. This principle of "identity conservation" may be a useful one for change researchers to explore.

Organizational Leadership. Our chapter has also made numerous references to leadership (or "organizational statesmanship"). While this concept was a notable casualty of the neo-institutional revolution, we think that institutional pluralism has the effect of making leadership both practically necessary and philosophically possible. The pluralistic organization does not automatically hold itself together. Naturally occurring social and political processes may facilitate institutionalization and the formation of an organizational-self. Political structures and integrative mythologies may likewise help sustain this emergent self. But, these processes and structures are not deterministic or final. Persons who find themselves at the top of (or in the

middle of) pluralistic organizations have much work to do in knitting them together (Selznick, 1957; Gardner, 1990). We are also inclined to attribute agency to these persons. Because they work at the nexus of multiple identities (and multiple normative orders), they regularly find themselves in situations where they have “no choice but to choose.” Their choices (even their default, taken-for-granted choices) may have very significant consequences for the evolution of their organizations (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). We think it is reasonable to treat such persons as “sites of causation” (Abbott, 1996). We also think it is appropriate to assign moral praise and blame to them (as all research which invokes the value-laden and inescapably moral concept of leadership inevitably does) (Burns, 1978; Ciulla, 2004). Kraatz (2007) considers institutional pluralism’s implications for leadership in more detail.

Organizational Identity. We have also said much about organizational identity in the preceding pages. Our chapter may have some implications for the narrower literature on this topic, despite our broader aims (and despite our acknowledged ignorance of that literature’s subtleties) (see Glynn’s chapter in this volume for a more nuanced discussion). We think that our notion of the organization as a coalition of identities and as a (potentially) integrated “self” may be particularly generative. The identity literature has historically conceptualized organizational identity as that which is “central, distinctive and enduring” about an organization (Albert & Whetten, 1985). This idea rests rather uneasily alongside more sociological conceptualizations which see identities as institutionally-derived, externally-imposed, and categorical in nature. According to the latter view, identities are certainly central and enduring, but they are in no real sense distinctive or possessed by the organization. We have provided some insights about how an organization may develop a distinctive and robust identity of its own by embracing and embodying its various institutionally-given role identities (rather than

escaping or eschewing them). Institutional pluralism is what seems to make this possible. Identity scholars might further explore this proposed process and more effectively unpack the abbreviated theoretical account we have developed here.

Stakeholder Theory. As we have noted, stakeholder theorists also argue that organizations (specifically corporations) should be seen as pluralistic entities with multiple purposes and responsibilities (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Jones, Wicks & Freeman, 2002). They similarly argue that corporations will realize practical benefits if they respect the legitimate interests of their multiple constituencies and deal fairly with them (Jones, 1995; Donaldson & Dunfee, 1994). Stakeholder theorists have based their arguments upon moral philosophy, upon practical reasoning, and to a lesser extent upon empirical research. The implicit or explicit objective of most work in this area is to bring an end to shareholder hegemony and to promote a more democratic and cooperative social order within the modern corporation. However, research in this area says relatively less about how stakeholder governance might be achieved if and when shareholders are deposed from their preferred status. It also often appears somewhat naïve as to the political, ideological and cultural challenges involved in creating and sustaining cooperation in any complex, pluralistic organization. The stakeholder literature's arm's length relationship to social scientific theory and research appears to be a particular liability in this regard. Our chapter has explored many of the challenges facing pluralistic organizations and has identified some possible solutions to them. We hope that it might serve as a resource for future stakeholder research and help build bridges between this perspective and other theories of organization.

Neo-Institutionalism. Our chapter has no necessary implications for the neo-institutional research agenda. That perspective, as we interpret it, has a core commitment to understanding higher-order institutions and field-level processes of institutionalization and institutional change.

It's central empirical concern has been with explaining the legitimation and diffusion of various practices, structures and forms (and more recently changes therein). The "whole" organizations which are our explicit focus here do not even clearly exist when we view the organizational world through a neo-institutional lens. The perspective does not tend to support the idea that organizations are (or can be) autonomous, integrated or self-governing entities (i.e. ends in themselves). Rather, it leads us to view them more as the means that powerful institutional actors use to achieve their purposes, or perhaps as the slates upon which larger cultural institutions (and institutional entrepreneurs) leave their mark. While much recent work in this tradition has focused on the same inter-institutional tensions and conflicts that we have discussed here, it has primarily sought to understand these tensions' implications for fields, rather than for individual organizations (e.g., Lounsbury, 2007; Marquis & Lounsbury, forthcoming; Schneiberg, 2007; Schneiberg & Soule, 2005; Thornton, Jones & Kury, 2005; Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2006).

We think that field-level and societal-level institutions are certainly an appropriate focus for sociological research, and we have learned much from studies examining them. We also agree that demonstrating these institutions' effects upon organizations is a compelling way to document their existence and importance. Nonetheless, we think it is essential to clearly distinguish the neo-institutional research endeavor from the program of research that we inherited and have tried to further in this chapter. Scholars committed to understanding organizations as ends in themselves will never discover answers to the questions that legitimately preoccupy neo-institutionalists. But, we think the obverse is equally true and perhaps much less well-understood. We hope that our chapter provides some evidence of the great potential symbiosis between neo-institutionalism and the "organization-centric" theories of organizations

that predated it and that continue to persist alongside it. But, we also hope that it demonstrates the continued need for separation, lest our respective purposes and competencies become attenuated and confused (and lest further tensions between the two scholarly camps be needlessly perpetuated and exacerbated). It is for this reason that we have proposed the idea of an “institutional organizationalism” which is distinct from the “organizational institutionalism” that is the primary focus of this volume. The means of the latter are the ends of the former (and vice versa). The one’s figure is the other’s ground.

Pragmatic and Humanistic Implications

While our chapter’s primary implications are for organizational scholarship, we believe that our discussion of institutional pluralism may also have some practical and humanistic implications. We are obliged to discuss these. In writing this chapter, we have been much influenced by the philosophy of American pragmatism (James, 1907; Dewey, 1929; 1938). This influence is neither superficial nor incidental. William James, who first popularized this philosophic stance, was also an early proponent of pluralist thought (James, 1909). Pragmatism pervades the work of Selznick, of Mead, and of the sociological identity theorists whose ideas have also much influenced us (Selznick, 1992; Mead, 1934; Stryker, 1980). Pragmatist themes are also much apparent (though less explicit) in March’s work and elsewhere in the canon of American organization theory dating to Barnard (Thompson, 1956; Ansell, 2002). Many stakeholder theorists have been influenced by this philosophy, as well (Wicks & Freeman, 1998).

One of pragmatism’s central messages is that theories should be judged (at least in part) according to their practical implications for the people who may ultimately come to believe them (James, 1907; Peirce, 1878). Pragmatism highlights the continuities between thought and action, and between academic and practical knowledge. It also emphasizes that the practical

consequences of academic ideas can be momentous. Taking pragmatism seriously thus has the effect of putting scholars and organizational participants on the same side of the fence (as fellow humans trying to understand and live in an ambiguous and unfolding world). We believe that this both ennobles and humbles the theoretical enterprise. The ennoblement comes from the recognition that theories can and do matter. Organizational scholars have the opportunity to participate in the ongoing construction of reality by creating metaphors that escape the academia and “become true” as people use them to make sense of themselves and their ambiguous organizational worlds (James, 1907). The humility has the same essential source. Bad metaphors can have frightening consequences for people and institutions. These consequences can be particularly strong when scholarly theories are boldly forwarded in scientific guise, or when theorists display a disregard for empirical evidence and the lessons of history (Ferraro, Pfeffer & Sutton, 2005; Ghoshal & Moran, 1996). Theorists’ preoccupation with abstract analytical truths (or political agendas) can also have the deeply ironic effect of making practically soluble problems into theoretically or ideologically irresolvable ones (Selznick, 1992; Krygier, 2002).

Pragmatism thus suggests that we theorize cautiously lest we help create the very world we fear (or the one that we naively think we want). It also suggests that social science should be seen as a humanistic (i.e. moral) enterprise (Zald, 1993; Selznick, 1992). Scholars are implicated in their theories and share some responsibility for the ends which they ultimately render (or fail to render). Importantly, this philosophical position does not imply that organizational scholars should wake up in the morning thinking about how to change the world (or fearing that they inadvertently might). It also does not imply that researchers should take their marching orders from corporations or management consultants. Administrative science (like science in general)

needs autonomy from its constituencies if it is to deliver anything of actual value to them (Thompson, 1956; Selznick, 1992). But, autonomy is not to be confused with total independence, and the legitimate need for it should not be used as a cover for irresponsibility. Pragmatism thus implies that organizational theory needs to be responsive to its different constituents, even if it ultimately keeps its own counsel and decides its own purposes. Scholars need to be aware of the consequences their metaphors may create, even if they develop those metaphors for purposes that are primarily (and justifiably) academic (Selznick, 2000).

In light of this philosophical background, one way to read our paper is as an attempt to put forth some new metaphors (and some recovered metaphors) that might put people in better relation to their organizations and perhaps positively affect those organizations, as well (if only on the margins). Institutional pluralism is itself a metaphor. It is not an innocent one. We have willfully used it to name an apparent reality which could be (and has been) described much differently (e.g. as fragmentation or the postmodern condition). We find the pluralism metaphor compelling because it suggests the possibility of symbiosis and latent cooperation among distinct identity groups, even in organizations where conflict and dissensus are very real and perhaps much more clearly evident. It is also appealing because it suggests the possibility of an emergent organizational whole that is capable of accommodating, encompassing, and governing its various distinct parts. The idea of an organizational self (or a human self) obviously points to a similar possibility (Selznick, 1957; Wiley, 1994). These notions are equally metaphorical.

We think that these (somewhat) integrative metaphors are scientifically tenable ones, based on the available data and the academic arguments we have presented above. Organizations do seem to hang together (however imperfectly), and the centripetal forces that integrate them are no less scientific than the centrifugal ones that tend to fragment. But, we also

think that integrative metaphors are of substantial practical and humanistic value. This tends to tip the balance in their favor to the extent one takes pragmatism seriously. Any person who has spent time in a position of organizational authority likely recognizes the need for some notion of shared purpose, common good, and/or collective identity, however vague and robust those notions might be. These integrative and idealistic notions are not only useful for elites who are looking to consolidate, legitimize, and perpetuate their own power (though history shows they are certainly valuable as means to those ends). Rather, we think they are also essential resources for leaders who are actually trying to do justice, achieve diverse purposes, act responsibly, and realize the common good within their organizations (i.e. to achieve something vaguely resembling substantive cooperation) (Selznick, 1969; 1992; 1996; 2000; Krygier, 2002).

Such ideals may be equally indispensable to lower level participants who are striving to achieve similar ends on a smaller scale, or trying to reform unjust organizations from structurally disadvantaged positions (Badaracco, 2002; Meyerson, 2003). Cynicism about the motives of organizational leaders (and about the legitimacy of organizations in general) may be a very useful outlook for the person looking to incite disruptive change and organizational reform. But, this same skepticism may foreclose real opportunities for cooperative change. It may also ultimately turn inward, leading the reflective revolutionary to examine his own motives and to question his own ability to build a more just and respectful organizational order in the wake of the revolution (Stever, 2000). The yearning for a new and better form of cultural hegemony is not, after all, the sort of ideal that tends to animate and sustain the romantic mind. (“Meet the new boss. Same as the old boss.”). Thus, of all the real barriers to cooperation which clearly exist, we suspect that a lack of belief in the very possibility of the thing itself may be the most thoroughly devastating. We do not think that organizational theorists should let go of this

theoretical possibility thoughtlessly or carelessly. We also think they should be very cautious about propagating organizational metaphors that might lead people to take hegemony for granted as inevitable. This chapter represents, among many other things, a modest effort to sustain belief (however minimal) in the prospects for cooperative organization, without disregarding the huge challenges it involves or the estimable empirical evidence which has been amassed against it. Pluralism may ultimately devolve into fragmentation or give way to domination regardless of what we call it. But, these possibilities seem all the more likely to the extent that organizational theorists abandon integrative theoretical metaphors altogether. At minimum, these idealistic notions provide a standard against which the more disturbing empirical realities of organizational life can be judged. But, they may also be necessary if those realities are to change for the better.

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