

**Social organization, classificatory analogies and logics:
Institutional theory revisits Mary Douglas**

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Abstract

As a social theory of organization, it is unsurprising that institutional theory draws upon the profound and ambitious work of the late anthropologist Mary Douglas. One of the foundational concepts of organizational institutionalism, institutional logics, directly draws upon her work. Yet, in recent times, this foundational role has faded from view as institutional theory itself becomes increasingly institutionalized as a vibrant branch of organization studies. This is unfortunate for there is much continuity in current work with that of Douglas, it now being 50 years and 30 years, respectively, since the publication of two of her formative works. The deep analogies that underpin classificatory systems and the processes by which they are sustained remain significant areas under continued investigation by institutional theorists. Thus, in this paper we revisit Douglas' core arguments and their connections to institutional theorizing. We specifically explore her contribution of 'naturalizing analogies' as a way of accounting for the unfolding of change across levels of analysis, extending, modifying and enriching explanations of how institutional change is reified, naturalized and made meaningful. We do this by providing empirical descriptions of meta-organizing analogies and field-level applications. We explain how Douglas' major theoretical works are of considerable relevance for current institutional theorizing. This aids particularly in informing accounts of institutional logics and the movement between individual cognition and collective signification.

Keywords: *analogies, classifications, institutional logics, institutionalization.*

Introduction

In a review of one of her last major works, *How institutions think* (Douglas, 1986), Kearnl suggested that Mary Douglas was attempting to develop a “sociology of classificatory analogies” (Kearnl, 1988:208). Across her prolific and varied anthropological work, Douglas enquires into why there is such limited plurality of elementary forms of organization. In a foundational piece for institutional organizational theory, DiMaggio and Powell (1983) raise a very similar question as to the homogeneity of organizational forms and practices, showing the family resemblances between Douglas’ work and that of institutional theory. Douglas’ investigation of the production of shared meaning, classifications and social solidarity resonates with institutional theorists, who also recognise the collective rationality of fields (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). The role of institutions is fundamental to her many explanations and ideas: “institutions are explained through culture” (6, Perri, 2014:289), institutions provide classifying devices (Douglas, 1986). Institutions gird and protect societal systems of belief and values and generate certainty (or uncertainty for that matter) (Douglas, 2001).

For institutional theorists, and the social sciences more broadly, Douglas offers “valuable arguments about the ways ideas are conventionalized, the process of legitimation and how institutionalized frameworks shape individuals’ thoughts” (Wuthnow and Witten, 1988:56). Douglas’ work on the production of shared meaning and social solidarity (Douglas, 1966, 1970, 1986) was significantly guided by the work of Durkheim (2001) and Fleck (1935), approaching forms of culture from the standpoint of everyday life and its observable artefacts. By exploring cognitive processes in cultures and societies she shows how people order and make sense of their world (sensemaking and sensegiving), contributing to the replacement of “subjective meanings as the focal points of cultural analysis” (Wuthnow et al.,

Hunter, Bergesen, and Kurzweil, 1984:194) with a concern for language, ritual, categories and classification as inter-subjective socially constructed facts.

The range of Douglas' work is extensive and influential as her obituary in the *New York Times* demonstrated (Martin, 2007). Douglas was recognized as an innovative social theorist for her anthropological analysis of cosmology, consumption, risk and perception (Martin, 2007). Leading anthropologists describe Douglas' oeuvre as "furnishing the social sciences with one of the most profound and ambitious bodies of social theory ever to emerge from within anthropology" (6, Perri, 2014). Across her tomes - *Purity and Danger* (first published 1966); *Natural Symbols* (first published 1970); *The World of Goods* (1979); *Risk and Culture* (1982); *How Institutions Think* (1986) and *Missing Persons* (1998) - as well as her many lectures and articles, she forged "a synthesis of Western philosophical ideas, social scientific theories, and the thoughts of the Lele people of Central Africa", enabling scholars to develop "new ways of observing and understanding the implicit meanings in everyday life" (Fardon, 2007). Some describe her most notable achievement as being to apply anthropology's "techniques of research into non-Western societies" to her own world and in doing so "revers[ing] the established logic of anthropology" in "making the strange familiar, and making the familiar strange" (Rayner, 2015).

Despite these extensive contributions, Douglas at best often receives only a cursory citation in organizational and management papers on sensemaking, culture and identity. There are few attempts to introduce her work (and that of her students) more centrally beyond the grid-group typology in cultural theory. Empirically, this typology has been successfully used to map organizational culture and public policy issues (for example, see Altman and Baruch, 1998; Grendstad and Selle, 1995; Logue, 2009; Thompson, 2008; Thompson and Wildavsky, 1986). The relative neglect of Douglas is even more surprising given that the

foundations of institutional logics outlined by Friedland and Alford (1991), one of the most popular contemporary concepts in institutional theory, directly draws upon Douglas' anthropological insights. Anthropologists are returning to Douglas' work as one of the most profound bodies of social theory, providing a significant source of creativity and theoretically generative reflection (6, Perri, 2014). It is equally timely that institutional scholars in the field of organizational studies revisit the work of Douglas as a possible source for new as well as forgotten insights into institutional theorizing.

This paper is structured as follows. First, we revisit some of Douglas' core arguments and bodies of work in terms of their relevance for organizational institutional theorists. Second, in demonstrating the specific value of returning to Douglas' work, we consider her concept of naturalizing analogies and its role in accounting for the unfolding of change across levels of analysis, extending, modifying and enriching explanations of how institutional change is reified, naturalized and made meaningful. We support these arguments by way of illustration, detailing two empirical examples. Finally, we discuss how Douglas may inform accounts of the movement between individual cognition and collective signification, the strengths and weaknesses of institutional logics within fields, and consequent processes of deinstitutionalization. We conclude by suggesting that this provides sufficient evidence for institutional theorists to revisit and reopen her major theoretical works, thus (re)informing institutional theorizing.

Douglas and institutional theorizing

In what follows, we consider several key themes from Douglas' main works. Addressing her entire body of work, as it relates to and informs institutional theory, is beyond the scope of this paper. However, we will identify several pertinent institutional insights as they are developed in her major volumes and arguments. This prepares the ground for

analysis of her concept of naturalizing analogies, which we elaborate empirically to show how it may inform institutional analysis, specifically institutional logics.

On classifications and systems of ordering

In her early work, *Purity and Danger* (1966), Douglas presents an analysis of the concepts of ritual purity and impurity in different societies and times. In this volume, Douglas developed important insights about the relationship between schemes of cultural categories and ideas about practices, although Douglas later admitted that the book's ability to integrate the various arguments proposed was not fully worked out (6, Perri, 2014). Douglas saw classifications not as freely constructed by the individual but as embedded in a network of social groups, a part of certain institutions that effectively define whom the individual may be taken to be. Individual thought is social thought writ small: the available categories have recursive provenance; they are a consequence of the social order that sustains that same order. Without shared classifications and judgements, order would collapse.

A central argument of *Purity and Danger* (1966) concerned categories of dirt and understanding how things become (categorised as) dirty. One of her classic examples concerned the placement of shoes, considered dirty when on a table but not when placed on the floor. Although a trite example, it reveals a moral ordering within a social setting. That is, it is not that shoes *are* dirty when on the table as opposed to being on the floor – it is that they *should* be on the floor and not on the table. There is a moral order of right and wrong observable in (and constructed) by everyday practices. “That moral component of assigning reality to different categories becomes particularly apparent when things get out of place” (Douglas, 1966). The social assignment of things to their place, in terms of a cognitive classification system, whether religious rituals or everyday activities of tidying up, denotes a whole universe of moral ordering; for instance, when shoes are removed from the table the

moral order is mobilized and reaffirmed, by rendering this misplacement as a categorical anomaly. Somewhat missing in this volume of work however, was the different ways in which people recognize and manage anomalies in different institutional settings (see Clegg and van Iterson, 2009).

On social groupings and forms

The historical lineage of Douglas' work from Durkheim and Mauss leads some to say that her whole oeuvre begins from their dictum "that the classification of things reproduces the classification of people" (6, Perri, 2014:290). For Douglas, "half of our task is to demonstrate [the] cognitive process at the foundation of the social order. The other half of our task is to demonstrate that the individual's most elementary cognitive process depends on social institutions" (1986:45). There are evident linkages with notions of structuration (Giddens, 1984) and the institutional theory paradox of embedded agency (Battilana, 2006; Battilana and D'auanno, 2009). Douglas observes a limited number of elementary forms of social organization across human activities that compose fundamental dimensions for the ordering of social relations. These are separate to formal institutions that order social relations, such as markets, hierarchies and networks (although we note these forms dominate in institutional thinking). Such thinking led to her creation of the grid-group typology to map (theoretically and, consequentially, empirically) these elementary forms, based on two dimensions of social organizing – integration and regulation.

In *Natural Symbols* (first published 1970) Douglas introduced the interrelated concepts of 'group' (integration) to delineate how clearly defined an individual's social position is inside or outside a bounded social group and 'grid' (regulation) for how clearly defined an individual's social role is within networks of social privileges, claims and obligations. The four-fold grid-group typology went on to be relabelled cultural theory by her

students Thompson and Wildavsky (1986) and Rayner (1991), emphasising the co-constitution of social relations and their justification. In looking at how individuals are configured by socially available ways of understanding shared meaning and thus social reality, the grid-group categorical scheme enabled systematic accounts of social relations in any context, from tribal to industrial society, enabling scholars to address the cultural worldviews at play in various spaces and places. As such, cultural theory suggests a way to examine the construction and dissolution of social solidarity, as well as the kinds of justifications offered when social solidarity is built or contested. The typology is sometimes criticised in terms of questions about what elements compose these dimensions (6, Perri, 2014), despite early attempts to develop measures of each dimension (Gross and Rayner, 1985). Douglas also proffered shifting descriptions of these dimensions and elementary forms, eventually settling on ‘ways of organizing’, arguably similar to the ‘collective rationality’ of fields as referred to (but less explicitly examined) by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) and other scholars within institutional theory.

As with many typologies, cultural theory’s visual simplicity led to it being misunderstood as static and descriptive and the forms or rationalities it described (hierarchy, fatalist, egalitarian and individualist) as mutually exclusive. In proposing what came to be seen as fundamental forms of organizing, Douglas was at times criticized for being a sociological determinist (6, Perri, 2014; Kahan, 2006). Empirical applications reveal, however, that the social relations that constitute this space are fluid and conflictual as, for instance, in Logue’s (2009) application of the grid-group typology to an area of public policy – the migration and mobility of scientists. In this example, the grid-group highlights the cultural worldviews of different groups (policy makers, scientists, university administrators, donor organizations) with respect to scientific mobility. The thought styles of these different groups simultaneously classify such mobility as problematic, inevitable (freedom of

mobility), inequitable (development issue requiring action), brain drain (loss of scientists to other countries), brain in the drain (wasted scientific talent if a scientist stays in a setting/country with poor resources), and brain gain (for those who can attract scientific talent). Thus, while the institutional logics of science and the market serve as a societal level resource from which stakeholders legitimate their respective claims, cultural theory analysis enables a mapping of the local manifestations of social reality, fluidity, and inherent conflict.

The grid-group, as a typology of cultural world views, has also been taken up more broadly under the label of cultural cognition and public policy to understand the relationship between individual decision making, risk perception and their institutional production (Kahan, 2012). Thus, despite focussing on groups and social order, the ideas of Douglas have been used with methodologically individualist work linking cultural values with social psychology (Kahan, 2006). In the institutional production of worldviews, individuals may shift, depending on their place, space, position and the activity with which they are engaged. Linking these institutional ideas to Douglas provides opportunity to theorize the connection between individual cognition and collective signification, and arguably enhance the bottom-up theorizing of institutional logics (see Battilana and Casciaro, 2012). Furthermore, such applications are indicative of the efforts of Douglas and colleagues in directing their writings and ideas to disciplines and readerships beyond anthropology (6, 2014; Hemmer, 1999; Houghton, 1996; Kahan, 2012; Verweij and Thompson, 2006; see Thompson, 2008 especially).

On thought styles

A core argument running through Douglas' work is that social organization shapes thought style, in terms of repertoires for human cognition. Important here is the connection to institutional theory and its cognitive turn in past decades. This notion of thought style derives

from Fleck's (1935) work. In what some describe as an avant-garde fashion (Hacking, 1986), Douglas pairs Durkheim's work with that of Ludwig Fleck's 1935 work *Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact*. Fleck's sociology of scientific facts was work that Kuhn (1962) was later to draw upon; hence, it is not surprising that scholars draw parallels between Kuhn and the efforts of Douglas to build classificatory analogies. Fleck (1935) explored shared meaning through notions of thought collectives and thought styles, examining the work of scientists and the production of scientific knowledge. He described the work of scientists as characterised by a tradition of shared assumptions, which are largely invisible to members and thus are rarely questioned. He labelled these as a 'thought style', in a precursor category to Kuhn's (1962) 'paradigms'. Fleck used the concept of 'thought collectives', or 'thought worlds' as they were labelled by Douglas (1986), to describe those who share a thought style. Each thought collective has a thought style "which leads perception and trains it and produces a stock of knowledge" (Douglas, 1986:12). As noted by Hacking (1986: 17) "[w]hat brings these disparate figures together [Fleck and Durkheim] is the theme that Douglas shares with them: the notion that ways of thinking derive from and sustain what is social". Douglas' argument "was that institutions explained culture, or at least those cognitive aspects of it which could be described as thought style" (6, 2014: 289). There is a recursive element to her arguments that is reflected in Douglas' (2001) later work on uncertainty and risk, where she argues that it is through cultural learning and institutions that we gain confidence in certain forms of knowledge. We use knowledge to gain power over risk and uncertainty by making probabilities more calculable (Eddy, 1996). Recursively, these build through social organizing into thought styles which are natural to their place and time. They are the circuitry of power (Clegg, 1989; Lukes, 1974).

On institutions

So far we have highlighted several key insights of importance to institutional theory in Douglas' work: (1) classification systems, which are observable through the everyday practices of individual members of social groups as they maintain order and systems of belief (by working to address any anomalies or deviances); (2) investigation of the elementary forms of organizing social relations, beyond markets, hierarchies and networks, that shape human cognition; (3) that individual cognition is inscribed in the thought styles and thought worlds of various social groups, similar to collective rationality in institutional studies. The common thread across these insights is the structuration that occurs between individual cognition and social structures. It is perhaps unsurprising then, that in her final major work, *How Institutions Think* (1986), Douglas draws conclusions concerning how institutions shape and mould human cognition. Given the benefit of hindsight, she described *How Institutions Think* (1986) as providing the theoretical and logical anchoring for her earlier work on *Purity and Danger* (1966) and *Natural Symbols* (1970). In this latter work, analogies that are non-rational, in as much as they are reflexively unconscious in terms of knowing agency, are taken to undergird conceptions of reality.

Douglas' institutional theory is quite particular: she uses the term 'institution' to reflect a form of legitimised social grouping (Douglas, 1986:46). Minimally, an institution is a convention (Douglas, 1986) which, "to turn into a legitimate social institution ... needs parallel cognitive convention to sustain it" (Douglas, 1986:46). Conventions that rest their "claims to legitimacy on their fit with the nature of the universe" (Douglas, 1986:46) – noting here that nature is itself a social construction – are better institutionalized to sustain challenges. Douglas examines how institutions do the work of classifying, remembering and forgetting, conferring identity, cultivating, selecting and underpinning meaning systems.

Fardon (2007) argues that in *Natural Symbols* (1970) Douglas attempts to relate features of institutional organization to patterns of belief and morality. People project social organization on to what they come to classify as natural. A core example used by Douglas is the human body, where symbols grounded in the human body are used to express social experience and, vice versa; what the human body is becomes something taught to individuals socially and inter-generationally. By understanding how the body works in specific contexts, we understand how the society framing it works. This is a particular instance of a general point. Specific devices enable connection between individual cognition and collective signification, the most important of which is analogy and it is this that underpins institutions and guides practice. Analogy can be broadly described as a cognitive process that transfers information or meaning from a particular subject to another particular subject and as a linguistic expression corresponding to such a process (Shelley, 2003).

Douglas suggests various ways in which the connection between individual cognition and collective signification occurs. For example, Douglas draws on Durkheimian analysis of the role of ritual and symbol in the production and reproduction of social relations. Douglas focused on the role of language and ritual in affirming and reproducing social reality and commonly held values. “Ritual carries or transmits collective information, like language” and language also acts as a ritual: “its structure – its codes – are part of society’s arsenal of ritual utilised in the periodic reaffirmation of social order” (Wuthnow et al., 1984:104). Ritual and language form a key part of what Bauman (1976) referred to as the second nature of culture. Douglas also uses examples drawn from music, food and art to show the variety of symbolic systems that communicate meaning and that can be considered as analogous to languages. In this regard she anticipated the expansion of the notion of a language, something that is illustrated in the focus of recent institutional studies on ‘visuality’ in the communication, creation and maintaining of institutions (Meyer, Höllerer, Jancsary, and Van Leeuwen, 2013).

For example, Douglas (2001) analyses the issue of certainty in regard to public perceptions of risk and distrust of the UK government, as occurred during outbreaks of Mad Cow Disease and Foot and Mouth Disease. Risk experts advise the government to overcome this distrust by releasing more information, on the assumption that more information would create certainty. Douglas' premise is that certainty is an institution, or an outcome of institutions, rather than a mood or feeling, and that doubt is blocked institutionally, thus creating certainty. She goes on to explain that certainty could never be the result of scientific fact; indeed, it is impossible for it to be so given mathematical theorems on the principles of indeterminacy. It is therefore agreement in knowledge, not knowledge per se, that produces certainty; thus, certainty is politically not factually secured. The act of a Minister of Agriculture, John Gummer, in having his daughter eat a beef burger while the cameras roll was significant at a time of heightened anxiety about the food safety of beef products in the midst of the moral panic about Mad Cow Disease. Confidence in certainty comes from cultural training and experience. Some training involves engaging in ritualized practices that honour institutional beliefs and reinforce agreement. Hence, such an act by a father is immediately more visual than any amount of information released by a Minister in creating more certainty. Certainty is sought because it is necessary, in holding together a community, to provide social solidarity. Experience assists us to draw similarities, understanding that one situation or thing is similar to another. In seeking certainty "we create institutions that protect our valued ideas. We use analogies to build them up like a house of cards, one weak and fragile idea balanced against the another, with a few central ideas holding them in place like a roof" (Douglas, 2001:148). In the case of Minister Gummer, his daughter and Mad Cow Disease, the analogy between food and love, food and care, food and family created more certainty in the midst of anxiety.

Other anthropologists and sociologists have also noted the role of analogy in understanding societal ways of organizing: Evans-Pritchard (Douglas' doctoral supervisor) described the grand cosmic-analogies of the Nuer people of Sudan that underpin their belief systems and practices; Bourdieu regarded his Berber-speaking Kabyle people as having a logic of practice whose major categories of knowledge were embodied in their daily routines of agriculture. For the Kabyle, the agricultural year is the master analogy grounding this logic of practice, from sowing and harvesting to the division of labour. The agricultural year is "the core model for all other relationships with each other and with objects" (Douglas, 2001:150), providing certainty and clarity on how one ought to behave. The analogy is embodied within practice; language wraps itself around the classifications; each single category supports the rest; "together, the analogies make a solid frame for thought" (Douglas, 2001:150). These are insights drawn upon by Friedland and Alford's (1991) description of institutional logics as "a set of material practices and symbolic constructions – which constitutes ... organizing principles ... available to organizations and individuals to elaborate" (Friedland and Alford 1991:248). They suggest that the rationality contained in institutional logics, the 'thought style' in Douglas' terminology, depends upon the extent to which "classifications, logical operation and guiding metaphors" are held in common (Friedland and Alford 1991:248). Specific analogies used in sensemaking derive cognitive power and develop a degree of seductiveness if they fit, reinforce and protect dominating social conceptions.

So if an analogy is natural, all embracing, involving classification systems, language and rituals, and is reinforced through the practice of a community as it provides them with certainty, how may change or innovation occur? While an analogy compares things in terms of similarity there will always be areas of greyness and ambiguity amongst those common properties analogized. Recent arguments suggesting that institutional scholars should consider the endogenous and continuous dynamism of institutional logics and other ways of

understanding unfolding social order echo Douglas' insight (Quattrone, 2015). Douglas (2001:151) describes how ambiguity is overcome (as commitment to certainty pervades):

[A]nalogies are drawn from practice; the practice bears witness to the reliability of the knowledge; and certainty arrives to close the circle when the knowledge is used to justify the action. By this time something has happened to cancel the ambiguity of analogy. The action in which it is embedded makes its meanings publically visible. The public scheme of great interlocking analogies stabilizes the categories of culture .

What Douglas describes is reflective of processes of institutionalization in institutional theory. Thus, to the extent that it is held in common, if an analogy is fundamental to ways of organizing in society it is surprising that its role has faded from view in recent institutional studies. The processes by which analogy, as a fundamental element of logics (Thornton et al., 2012), achieves its naturalness (Douglas, 1986) could assist institutional scholars in elaborating the process of institutionalization, deinstitutionalization and the connection between individual cognition and collective signification. Additionally, it directs attention to the circuits of power at play in achieving this perception of naturalness (Clegg, 1989), and that consequently makes it harder to deinstitutionalize or challenge the social ordering created. Thus, we next ask, in what ways do naturalizing analogies inform and extend existing understandings of institutional logics and the generation of field-level meaning systems?

Naturalizing analogies

Institutions use analogy as an important mechanism to constrain and mould human cognition. For Douglas, the most stable analogies will be anthropologically grounded in nature. Douglas (1986) offers the example of the complementarity of the right and left hand

as an analogue for the complementarity of men and women. Effective analogies enable social relations to be naturalized and embedded “anywhere, so long as it is not seen as a socially contrived arrangement” (Douglas, 1986:48). The more it is grounded in notions of nature, the less contrived social reality is seen to be in everyday life; a naturalizing analogy can work as an essential aid obscuring the social nature of institutions (Etzion and Ferraro, 2010). From Douglas’ classic works *Purity and Danger* (1966) and *Natural Symbols* (1970), the focus is on how ideas about nature can be used to justify, reinforce and challenge moral and political preferences (Rayner, 2015). For Douglas, what Weick (1995) was to call individual sensemaking is at its strongest when it is grounded in a social cosmology that is premised on naturalization. Rather than start from the ad hoc and improvisational work that members of organizations engage in to make sense, as do Weick (1995) and Garfinkel (1967), Douglas considers the cosmological systems within which sense can be made. While these more phenomenological scholars see order as an emergent phenomenon, for Douglas order is categorically transcendent.

Analogy can be broadly described as a cognitive process that transfers information or meaning from a particular subject to another particular subject. Several institutional studies have examined naturalizing analogies in this narrow way (Cornelissen, Holt, and Zundel, 2011; Etzion and Ferraro, 2010; Haveman, Rao, and Paruchuri, 2007; Cornelissen, Holt, and Zundel, 2011). Douglas, however, offers a much broader perspective: for her, the role of analogies is something central to the existence of meaning; the use of analogy is not merely a micro-social discursive habit but is the very ground of what it means to inhabit a social, constructed world of meaning. As described by Etzion and Ferraro (2010), naturalizing analogies ground novel institutions in the “natural order of things, be it physical (or metaphysical) reality or dominant taken-for-granted social practices” (2010:1094), and are therefore crucial in providing legitimacy in processes of institutionalization. Reason, as it is

socially and immanently constructed, together with nature as the realm of the real, is the categorically transcendent basis for order. In this respect Douglas claims that “institutions are founded on analogy” and “to acquire legitimacy, every kind of institution needs a formula that founds its rightness in reason and in nature” (Douglas, 1986:45). Reason is not something that is acontextual but consists of situated chains of plausible and contextually legitimate accounts – or institutional logics.

Friedland’s (2012; 2013) descriptions of institutional logics examine how they are sustained through personal identification with lay members’ values. Friedland (2013:17) writes that, “just as institutional logics operate as an oscillating movement between transcendence and immanence, they also operate through a movement between internal identification and external objectification”. Yet this endogenous dynamism of institutional logics is often absent in recent accounts (Quattrone, 2015). As noted by Thornton et al. (2012:124), categorical elements “transpose across different institutional orders by being associated with an institution that has an analogy to the natural world” . For elements or ideas to diffuse and garner legitimacy they need to be nested and aligned with an account of the natural embedded in the prevailing culture: “it is not nature that makes the match, but society” says Douglas (1986:90), echoing Durkheim. Society, of course, is a huge abstraction: better to say it is the global and networked elites in and across societies that are best able to mandate those analogies that are to be taken seriously. In earlier and more settled societies spiritual and magical elites largely played this role; today, while religious elites remain highly institutionalized, their legislative power is vastly reduced. Other circuits of power interpret the world from relations of power in institutions such as science, the media and politics (Fleming and Spicer, 2014; Logue and Clegg, 2015), creating new powerful, naturalizing analogies. Most notably, the market society, as a human invention in which individual freedom of choice is paramount, is a Western analogy that has trumped other

historical systems of reciprocity and redistribution (Polanyi, 1944), whether based on potlatch, religious solidarity or some other norm. We will explore the market analogy later in this paper.

With analogy, a practice can be stretched from one field to another, naturalizing and reifying by extension. Naturalizing analogies sustain an institution by “demonstrating its fit with the natural order, providing scripts for appropriate behaviour [as] a potent rhetorical resource for ordering social arrangements” (Davis, Diekmann, and Tinsley, 1994:551). As surmised by Rayner (2015), Douglas’ contention that nature is the ultimate trump card to win any argument, when all other stratagems have failed, was central to much of her work. For example, in *Purity and Danger* (1966) the affinity of practices with a sense of natural order shapes their reception. Douglas notes the role that reflexivity plays in the emergence and sustenance of an institution: “when the analogy is applied back and forth from one set of social relations to another and from these back to nature, its recurring formal structure becomes easily recognised and endowed with self-validating truth” (Douglas, 1986:48). Reification occurs when that which is socially constructed is taken for granted as something natural. “Practitioners, if not external audiences, must perceive over time that the categories and systems of practices are generated not as direct products of human invention and agency, but as the natural order of things ... It is through reification that actors become culturally embedded by the institutional logics they engage” (Thornton et al., 2012:160). Naturalization provides a mechanism that connects collective significations with individual cognitions.

Douglas demonstrates that it is through analogy (as constitutive of the core meaning of an institutional logic and also as a language device) that meanings and practices are brought together. For example, Sillince and Barker (2012) describe how, at an organizational level, analogies can be seen to be at work in business process reengineering, by establishing

“that the organization is a machine that can be reengineered into logically connected processes” (Sillince and Barker, 2012:13). Analogical language, or its linguistic expression, may include comparisons, metaphors, similes and allegories (Alvesson and Karreman, 2000; Loewenstein, Ocasio, and Jones, 2012), and be used as a deliberate tool by actors (see Etzion and Ferraro, 2010; Haveman et al., 2007) but that is not the primary focus of this paper. We do not focus on the micro-discursive role of analogies but rather consider their role as a mechanism and source of legitimacy for deeper held systems of field-level meaning.

Empirical examples of naturalizing analogies

Through work on naturalizing analogies and their centrality to meaning systems, Douglas (1986) shows how the naturalness of institutional social construction is reproduced. Building a more specific theoretical conception of shared meaning is necessary to provide richer and more accurate accounts of institutionalization, the processes and devices that connect individual cognition and collective signification, and so enable institutional logics to cohere. When it is at its deepest level, shared meaning framing routine action (and recognition of its violation) is institutionalized (Scott, 2001). Lounsbury (2007:301) suggests that institutionally shared, deep performative consensus can “systematically structure localized practices and identities, as well as ... contribute to the editing and reformulation of broader cultural ideas and discourse in more interactive and discursive ways”.

Meta-organizing analogies

Douglas posits that the physical body is a microcosm of the social body, that symbols grounded in the human body are used to express social experience and vice versa. By understanding how the body works, we understand how society works. Natural symbols are derived from the nature of the human body, as for example blood, breath, or excrement. As

symbols these analogizing devices become progressively applied to ideas, practices, rituals, institutions and societies, acquiring social meaning. Building on Douglas, we argue that certain analogies play a meta-ontological role across discursive fields because of their rootedness in symbols that have attained cosmological significance as ultimate values; for instance, analogies such as survival of the fittest have an immediate resonance for those exposed to natural history. The meta-ontology of survival of the fittest connects two of the most pervasive root metaphors of recent times: ‘the body’ and ‘the market’. First, we shall discuss the body.

Perhaps the earliest and most famous use of the body analogy in political theory came in the 17th century with Hobbes’ discussion of the state as a body made of many subjects. Sewell (1980) provides an account of how the body has legitimated organizational arrangements since the Middle Ages (see also Davis et al., 1994). In France, prior to the Revolution, new social groupings were established by the king, *en corps et communaute*, a body and community subsequently considered a single person under law. All these bodies were composed of a variety of organs and members, which were hierarchically arranged and were placed under the command of the head. Each body was distinct from every other, with its own will, its own interests, its own internal order, and its own *esprit de corps*. Each body was made of a single internally differentiated but interconnected substance and harm inflicted on any member was felt by the whole (Sewell, 1980:36-37).

Coleman (1974) provides further documentation of how the *corps* developed into a sovereign actor in subsequent nineteenth century legal conceptualisations of the corporation. It relied upon (and institutionalized) the naturalizing analogy of the organization as body. Coleman (1974) describes how legal theory, in addressing problems of social organization, reshaped society into comprising natural and juristic persons, or individuals and corporations.

The legal entity of the modern corporation created societies with very different structures to those that had existed previously in collectives such as guilds, manors, and the village.

The body analogy provides a way of thinking about what an organization is – a bounded social structure composed of members, an *organon* – as well as a set of *desiderata* (e.g. growth and survival) that guide action and provide a basis for the adoption of organizational practices and forms (Davis et al., 1994:551). The new institution of the corporate organization was cognitively legitimated because social actors could relate to it as fitting a traditional way of understanding (i.e. as grounded in their expectations of the nature of things). Hence, towards the end of the nineteenth century the body corporate joined other abstractions, such as the sovereign body, as an extension of an everyday analogy drawn from a living organism in nature.

With the notion of a corporate body we join one analogy, that of the body, to another, that of the market. Friedland and Alford (1991) observe that the market is one of the central institutions of the capitalist West and is a key institutional order in society. We agree but would also stress the meta-analogical role of the market as it has become naturalized across many sectors of society, compared to other central institutions such as the bureaucratic state, democracy, nuclear family and Christian religion, which do not play such a pervasive analogical role (see also Polanyi, 1944). As Judt (2011:179) notes, the market analogy is an abstraction that functions, simultaneously, as “at once ultra-rational (its argument trumps all) and the acme of unreason (it is not open to question)”. The analogy of a market specifies a place in which diverse economic actions and diverse transactions occur and in which the fittest or most efficient survive in a political economic discourse that pivots around the sanctity of competition. Efficiency, a mechanical and measurable concept quantitatively determined by the ratio of output to input, is rendered as a rational relation of efficient

markets, when the most output is achieved from the least input through competition. Given increasing naturalization of the market analogy, a “collective inability to imagine alternatives” (Judt 2011:179) has prevailed from the 1960s onwards, as the global financial market has been constituted in terms of an efficient markets hypothesis. The idea of efficient markets became the central analogy for organizing in Wall Street and other centres of neo-economic liberalism. With the development of digital stock markets in the wake of the City of London’s 1987 ‘big bang’ the real business of truck and trade has become, to a large extent, a realm of floating signifiers, of values fixed only for the nano-second.

The analogy naturalized by the term ‘efficient markets’ was that although individuals may behave irrationally, markets – by their very nature – do not. The idea of efficient markets became naturalized as a hypostasized entity, something capable of knowing, the brain guiding the ‘invisible hand’, to use Adam Smith’s theological analogy (Dean, 2013). It was the collective knowing exhibited in market judgements that made them efficient, according to the market rationalists: market judgements, by definition, could not be wrong. This was despite the very emotional and contagious nature of market sentiment, as markets crashed from speculative highs, situations not normally associated with rational judgement, as documented by Pixley (2004). There were central, powerful actants critical to the creation, translation and domination of the idea of efficient markets and its manifestation in forms of innovative business practice. These included rational market theory, with its presupposition that there was a random ordering to the stock market that mathematics could predict (Modigliani and Miller, 1958). In 1973, Black and Scholes’ *The Pricing of Options and Corporate Liabilities* drew on key elements of rational market theory to produce a standardized way of pricing options that offered the prospect of neutralizing investment risk through dynamic hedging, leading to the sustained growth of the derivatives industry and culminating in the 2008 global financial crisis. These ideas moved rapidly through corporate elites, aided greatly by the

institutional legitimation of Scholes and Black provided by the Nobel Prize in Economics (awarded by The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, funded by the Bank of Sweden, designated as a Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel). Economics increasingly becomes an actant and engine of economic innovation remaking reality in its image (MacKenzie, 2006).

The extent to which a key role was played by the market as a naturalizing analogy is evident in Davis' (2009; 2010) accounts of how banking was remade as an institutional field from the 1980s onwards. He sees the collapse of the US mortgage market as just one part of a broader shift in the economy toward a finance-centred system premised on increasing securitization that packages capital assets (essentially any claim on future cash flows) into tradable securities. As he remarks, "many financial innovations are created by analogy: if bonds can be backed by mortgage payments, why not auto loans, or insurance payoffs?" (Davis, 2009:81). Behind the scenes, the key metaphor enabling such naturalization was that of the efficient market, with its presumed collective rationality.

Markets are no longer confined to the staples of economic transaction. Virtually anything can become a market in the globalizing neo-liberalizing project that has dominated recent times. In part this is because the market has become the key institution in a meta-analytic discourse. The only possible societies that can be imagined from these auspices are those with efficient markets so the remit to extend them everywhere has the highest form of legitimation. The naturalization of the market as a key institution of science has, in the collective thought of liberal economic policy, become analogous to the role of evolution in biology: it is an institutional fulcrum on which all else depends.

Field-organizing analogies

Methodologically, identifying, capturing, and examining naturalizing analogies of institutions and fields has been done successfully by using historical data over substantial periods of time, often employing ethnographic and documentary analysis, occasionally supplemented by interviews. Changes in language may be traced using archival analysis, as demonstrated by the work of Abrahamson and Hambrick (1997), Ocasio and Joseph (2005), and Colyvas and Powell (2006). Quattrone's (2015) recent rich historical study of the development of accounting also demonstrates the role of longitudinal historical analysis of language in understanding cultural and institutional change, in this case in relation to the Jesuit Order. These studies all show the effectiveness of longitudinal historical data in analysing the unfolding of rationality and the incompleteness of and complexity between and within institutional logics (Meyer and Höllerer, 2014).

We include two empirical examples of how naturalizing analogies may be essential for understanding processes of institutionalization (and deinstitutionalization), diffusion of surface-level practices and sources of legitimacy for institutional logics in various fields, drawing on a historical perspective to do so. First, Davis et al. (1994) provide one of the few studies that directly applies the concepts of Douglas to explain rapid and widespread deinstitutionalization of organizational structures by understanding shifts in deeper meanings systems. Using the organization as body analogy, Davis et al (1994) explain the rapid adoption and abandonment of the multi-divisional form of organizational structure in connection with deeper changes in the naturalizing analogies of firms. Referring directly to Douglas (1986) they examined field-level discourse (including the business press and academic writing) related to Fortune 500 firms over a twenty-year period. They show that the deinstitutionalization of the conglomerate firm across large US manufacturing organizations was connected to the (over)stretching of the organization as body analogy. "Conglomerates strained the body analogy because they offered no credible basis for a myth of identity" in

which the diverse parts were not related by any natural link (Davis et al., 1994:566). In the break-ups of conglomerates a new naturalizing analogy was emerging, consistent with trends in business discourse, oriented to an unbounded network model of an organization. As described by Davis et al. (1994:566):

The repeated reference to the “corporation without boundaries” would be meaningless unless the default model were (sic) a corporation with boundaries. Once the special status of the organizational boundary was repudiated, a range of new social structural possibilities for regularised economic exchange was opened ... the emerging naturalizing analogy for recurring structures of economic activity would seem to be the network, which makes possible a broad array of new quasi-organizational forms that do not conform to the body analogy.

Davis et al. (1994) provide methodological insights into, as well as evidence for, the underlying shift in the naturalizing analogy, a shift from the organization as body, which had been in place for centuries, to the organization as network. The new analogy challenged existing notions of organizational boundaries and sovereignty, significantly providing legitimation for new organizational forms.

Second, analogy played a key role in an account that has become regarded as a classic of organization analysis. Leblebici, Salancik, Copay and King (1991) researched the emergence and evolution of the US radio industry from 1920 to 1965, making use of extensive public archival sources. The US Navy, a major developer and user of the technology, introduced the first analogy for radio as an institution. From the Navy perspective radio was a natural monopoly and so should be treated as a utility. During the First World War (1914-1918) wireless telegraphy came under the control of governments for security and strategic reasons as its military significance became apparent globally. In the

post-war period, when commercial opportunities arose, a second analogy was proposed: radio was analogous to a newspaper or magazine of the air. In the US radio stations were often owned by newspapers whose primary mandate was selling advertising space in print media as well as being vehicles for expressing the opinions of the owners; hence, the magazine analogy was consistent with private owners selling a radio that would receive only their signal (sealed sets) as a point of reception for their product while simultaneously locking out competitors. However, the then US Secretary of Commerce, Herbert Hoover, came up with a new but natural analogy – a transportation model – that supplied the definitions needed for allocating radio spectrum on the model of a public conveyance. Airwaves could then be considered as conduits through which different vehicles – radio stations and the shows they carried – could move and which consumers could choose to use or not.

Leblebici et al.'s (1991) research shows how any analysis of the changes in this inter-organizational field would be limited without an understanding of the founding analogy and its encapsulation in devices such as the US Constitution which afforded a corresponding language of freedom of choice, enabling clear reasoning. It was this analogy, selected by the politically powerful Hoover, that provided shared categories that all actors in the field could come to understand (noting that the manufacturers of the locked boxes were initially resistant to the idea of radio as a medium of public choice), providing a mechanism to introduce new practices into this field.

Discussion

Themes in Douglas' work are reflected in institutional studies that show how social structure shapes cognition, while her insights into the processes by which individual cognition is connected to collective signification are foundational for accounts of institutional logics. We argue that revisiting the insights of Douglas enables us to “to rearticulate the

building blocks of institutional logics, such as sources of legitimacy, authority, and control” (Quattrone, 2015:27). In particular, we see the concept of naturalizing analogy as central for future theorizing in each of individual, organizational and field levels. In this section we consolidate several of Douglas’ insights as they relate to institutional theorizing.

First, we suggest that naturalizing analogies are a conceptual mechanism with which to understand the primary source of coherence of material and symbolic practices of an institutional logic; that is, how it is made natural and taken-for-granted. Understanding naturalness and the power that holds it in place enables consideration of how it may change or be deinstitutionalized. A central aspect of Friedland and Alford’s (1991) original account of institutional logics was a concern with how analogies ground new practices and narratives achieving naturalness (Douglas, 1986). Crucially, this insight has faded from more recent institutional work. Indeed, more abstract models of logics have been produced, consisting of various elements acting as ultimate values, such as ‘root metaphor’, ‘source of legitimacy’, ‘sources of authority’, ‘sources of identity’, ‘basis of mission’, ‘basis of strategy’ and so on (Thornton, 2004; Thornton and Ocasio, 2008). While providing valuable insights, these abstractions lack the primacy of analogy; consequently, the processes through which naturalness is achieved (and institutions sustained) is missing, making it difficult to ground analysis in those taken-for-granted elements that provide members’ certainty.

Second, consideration of naturalizing analogies, especially in studies of institutional logics, provides a mechanism to appreciate the internal dynamism of logics (that is, naturalizing as an ongoing process). Interestingly, Douglas (2001) notes the fragility of analogies – indeed, otherwise how could we ever observe change and innovation if analogies were so naturalized? The flexibility in interpretation of analogy by social groups is both a source of their strength and weakness. The ambiguity inherent in an analogy, or sets of

analogies, from which institutions may derive their naturalness, provides this fragility, assisting in explaining how one analogy may win out over another. How an analogy loses its naturalness, or is challenged, reveals how institutions may decay (Douglas, 2001), eroding belief systems and weakening social structures. Drawing upon Friedland and Alford (1991), Thornton et al., suggest that “within each institutional order, individuals are confronted with different types of instrumental choices ... their interpretation of rationality may change depending on how the individual locates or references their sensemaking and decision making within the context of a particular institutional order” (Thornton et al., 2012: 44). Choice situations are dynamic, political, with changing odds, such that ordering is constantly in contest: while disorder threatens patterns it also has the potential to recreate order.

In ambiguous circumstances the structure and range of extant powers are unknown but where there is institutionalized ritual it demarcates the boundaries of powers; for instance, the power of sorcery and witchcraft are always correlated with social patterns, disclosing dominant rules in each society. As noted by Douglas (1986:112), “beliefs which attribute spiritual power to individuals are never neutral or free of the dominant patterns of social structure”. When ritual powers and the anchorage of the formal social system drift apart, with ritual becoming weakly institutionalized, the system does not have a strong formal structure. It is under these circumstances that rituals can become subject to pollution from dangerously uninstitutionalized ideas, threatening structures that seek to protect themselves.

In her thesis that certainty is an outcome of institutions, Douglas (2001) highlighted how certainty is produced through closure. Certainty is provided through agreement and consensus, which professional expertise constructs (Stampnitzky, 2013). The argument that analogy and systems of meaning achieve closure and defend boundaries stands in contrast to the current open-endedness in the analysis and application of institutional logics. The

potential open-endedness of logics is one limiting factor to their theoretical usefulness. How institutional logics are “joined together in the social imagination” to make them “real, available, good to think and act with” (Friedland, 2013:24) may be achieved through various empirical mechanisms. Yet “practitioners, if not external audiences, must perceive over time that the categories and systems of practices are generated not as direct products of human invention and agency, but as the natural order of things ... It is through reification that actors become culturally embedded by the institutional logics they engage” (Thornton et al., 2012:160).

Thus, we argue that analogy is a central device in reification: we should understand institutional logics not as something that is given and stable and with which actors engage (Voronov, De Clercq, and Hinings, 2013), but as more reflexive and inhabited (Hallet and Ventresca, 2006; Quatronne, 2015) providing an appreciation of individual cognition and collective signification. In doing so, this shifts attention to logic boundaries and strength, to inter- and intra-logic complexity (Meyer and Höllerer, 2014), which would address the aforementioned open-endedness of institutional logics as analysed in contemporary empirical studies.

Third, Douglas’ notion of thought styles provides another way to understand shared meaning systems of groups and collective rationalities. The grid-group typology shifts attention to social relations within a shared space, in terms of roles, claims, positions and the language (or communication systems) used to do so. We suggest collective rationality may be another conceptual mechanism worth reinvigorating to understand ways of organizing that are not at the societal level of an institutional logic, and to extend or complement studies of institutional logics. Institutional logics have been helpful in directing attention to deeper societal-level meaning systems as they occur in fields that are rather independent of time and

space. Collective rationality suggests that the construction of shared meaning systems and practices or worldviews, as described by cultural theorists, will be contextualized in time and space by certain groups. A collective rationality constructs relations and expectations, capacities and constraints on action, across an eco-system or field, providing a shared or dominant understanding of how things are done by multiple groups, within and beyond a (traditional) field, that is less embedded and more temporaneous than logics suggest.

Finally, we see a return to the work of Douglas as supporting increased institutional attention to language, rhetoric, argument and communication systems, including visuality, in analysing social order (Cornelissen, Durand, Fiss, Lammers, and Vaara, 2015). In considering how individual cognition connects to collective signification her work offers insights for institutional scholars in grafting understandings and studies of change across multiple levels of analysis (Smets, Morris and Greenwood, 2012). For example, while analogies are often a key part of early claims to legitimacy they are not sufficient to sustain it: for this to occur there have to be rituals and power relations that reproduce legitimacy.

Analogy is much more than just a linguistic device, although it is this indubitably, and much more than a micro-process of change, although it may also equally be considered as that. Naturalizing analogies that change root metaphors (or thought styles) can be conceived of as devices for organizing sensemaking in a collective mode (Davis, 2009; 2010; Fox, 2010) and for understanding how surface-level practices change (Leblebici et al., 1991). In this vein, several recent papers analyse the role of analogies used by institutional entrepreneurs and social movements (see Etzion and Ferraro, 2010; Haveman et al., 2007). For example Logue (2011; 2014) examined one prominent aspect of change in universities: the dramatic shift in their senior leadership rubric and structures. Examining 90 years of field-level discourse to make sense of the spread of organizational practices across a diverse

population of organizations (540 universities across 37 countries), Logue (2011) used quantitative content analysis to show how a changing conception of the university reflected an ‘organizational turn’ (Krücken and Meier, 2006), hinging on a conception of universities as economic institutions (Bess, 2006; Czarniawska and Gennell, 2002), analogous to corporations operating in markets. Coupled with powerful translation devices such as global rankings, research and teaching metrics, economic pressures to commercialize research and vocabularies reconceptualizing students as customers, the meaning of being a university was translated, travelling the globe via international conferences, associations and publications. The university shifted from being a collection of bodies of knowledge embedded in independent and collegial relations to becoming a corporate body, much closer to an economic model. Logue’s (2011) account shows the adoption of more managerial and corporate practices coevolving with deeper shifts in meaning systems. As old understandings broke down, new analogies emerged, as indeed, they must, if the institution is to be sustained.

Conclusion

Berger and Luckmann (1967) established that the world of meaning is ineluctably a social construction, the objective and factitious qualities of which are the more taken-for-granted the more they appear to correspond to “a solid, external and influential entity” (Tsoukas, 1993: 324). Some taken-for-granted institutional aspects of everyday life are structurally substantive, such as norms covering turns in talk or question and answer responses in specific settings (Molotch and Boden, 1985), while other forms of institutionalization exhibit deeper, shared meaning systems that recursively guide organizational life. Their taken-for-grantedness is such that they become cultural reifications that furnish the experience of everyday life.

At the centre of Douglas' work was the fundamental role of rituals and symbols in the production and reproduction of social relations, with much of this work carried out by daily rituals and totemic artefacts. For future research agendas we would direct attention to the importance of analogies taken to be natural in organizations and organizational fields, and the rituals and totems that sustain them. As analogies are extended over time into new fields or used more heavily within specific fields, particular meaningful claims are consolidated and contested. Douglas advises us that those analogies grounded in nature are seemingly more legitimate and stable over the longer term. The implications these analogies and their power relations have for understanding processes of institutionalization and the strength, coherency and legitimacy of logics and their elements (see Thornton et al., 2012:73) are suitable objects for longitudinal analysis.

In their analysis of the relationality and duality of institutions, Mohr and White (2008) argue that an effective analysis of institutions needs to take account of three analytic sites. They suggest analysis is needed of how "linkages occur between different orders of social experience; those specifying the linkage of agency to structure, of culture to practice; and of linkages across levels of social organization" (2008:488). We contend that the collective works of Mary Douglas attends to these three analytic sites in significant ways, offering great potential insights for future institutional theorizing. Revisiting Douglas' work is timely, not just theoretically for institutional theory because it is also 50 years and 30 years respectively since the publications of her major works (*Purity and Danger* in 1966 and *How Institutions Think* in 1986). Douglas remains a foundational theorist of social organization across social science disciplines, albeit one too easily forgotten.

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