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Institutional Work: A Review and Framework based on Semantic and Thematic Analysis

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Abstract

Institutional work as a concept has evolved and diffused beyond roots in management and organizational studies since it was first defined by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006). A diverse literature and recent criticism call for an extensive review of the field. We conducted a systematic review of 452 peer-reviewed articles in 185 different journals published from March 2006 to December 2019. Semantic analysis revealed changes in topics over time, the rise of institutional maintenance, and a focus on individuals and agency. Using thematic analysis, we inductively categorized the claimed contributions to institutional work as theory combining, actors, contexts, institutional work types, representations, and methodology. The findings led us to develop an integrative conceptual framework for future institutional work study built around setting, motivations, types, and outcomes. We visualized the discourse around institutional work, growth of key themes from early theorizing, and an original process model.

Keywords: *Institutional work; Institutional theory; Leximancer; Systematic literature review; Institutional change; Practices; Institutions; Social actors; Agency; Methodology*

The concept of institutional work (IW) has become a dominant lens, along with other variants of institutional theory (Forgues et al., 2012), in studies of management and organizations. As the IW field matures and expands to include literature (Calvard, 2019), geography (Sjøtun, 2019), and social protest (Agyemang et al., 2018), it has become increasingly manifold. The concept has been criticized for failing to deliver on its promise (Bouilloud et al., 2019), being ill-defined (Alvesson & Spicer, 2019), 'lazy branding' (Alvesson et al., 2019), and ignoring historical perspectives and the 'necessity of systematically putting the analysis of institutional work into perspective' (Daudigeos et al., 2015, p. 257). This calls for an integrated review of the literature to determine the existing past and potential future of the concept (Elsbach & van Knippenberg, 2020).

Previous reviews of IW have limited the scope of analysis to top ranked journals or specific fields (Hampel et al., 2017; Jespersen & Gallemore, 2018; Lewis et al., 2019). An expanded scope offers the opportunity to integrate the diverse literature into a single conceptual framework. Manifold literature requires a multidimensional analysis. We take a dual approach: semantic, to reveal the breadth through a holistic perspective of the concept, and thematic, to show the depth through detail of the most important aspects of IW. We trace the growth of key themes, how scholars engage with and contribute to the theory, and synthesize the important elements to IW.

Origins and ascendance of institutional work

The term *institutional work* (IW) was first coined and defined by Thomas Lawrence and Roy Suddaby as 'the purposive action of individuals and organizations aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions' (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 215). Working from a selective literature review of empirical studies in *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *Academy of Management Journal* and *Organization Studies* over the years 1990–2005, their stated aim was to map out the existing understanding of IW, define it, and lay the groundwork for future studies (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). The origins came from two separate streams of institutional theory (IT): the role of agency and institutional change. The traditional institutional view of institutions 'suffers from a clear lack of nuance' by affording actors little, if any, agency (Suddaby, 2016, p. 53). IT

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trapped actors within the proverbial 'iron cage' (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) or cast them in the role of cultural dolts beholden to the institutions in which they were embedded. Relatedly, the issue of how stable institutions become destabilized remained unresolved. DiMaggio (1988) proposed the idea of an 'institutional entrepreneur', that is, a powerful actor capable of influencing institutional change. Meanwhile, Oliver (1991, 1992) addressed reactions to institutionalization involving degrees of agency, and relatedly, proposed some antecedents of deinstitutionalization. IW would build on this initial theorizing by reversing the emphasis from how institutions govern action to *how actors and actions* affect institutions (Lawrence et al., 2013). An initial taxonomy was developed around 18 types of IW within three broad categories: nine for creation, six for maintenance, and three for disruption (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006).

The ascendance of IW as an explicit concept began steadily through the original authors. They edited a book of early IW essays and studies (Lawrence et al., 2009). Two special issues followed (Lawrence et al., 2011, 2013). The first focused mainly on conceptual development, such as the link between actors and IW (e.g., Hwang & Colyvas, 2011). The second focused on the emerging empirical research, in particular the growing role of materiality (Raviola & Norbäck, 2013). Later, Hampel et al. (2017) observed a shift away from materiality, large-scale institutions, and heterogeneous actors. Recently, the field has grown enough for narrow reviews of IW in human resource management (Lewis et al., 2019) and payments for ecosystems services (Jespersen & Gallemore, 2018).

A vast literature risks becoming 'unwieldy' and splintered into discrete topics (Elsbach & van Knippenberg, 2020, p. 7). With IW, 'the centrifugal expansion of institutional explorations can be bewildering' (Forgues et al., 2012, p. 461). A review can synthesize core topics and overcome disjointedness to suggest a way forward. In such a scenario (e.g., Battilana et al., 2009), concepts are reframed rather than reinvented in order to exploit 'an area of high opportunity for future inquiry' (Suddaby, 2010, p. 17).

This review is guided by three research questions (RQs). First, since IW comes from a social construction ontology, researchers' specific words are important. RQ1: What and how are the main semantic topics within IW research related? Second, contributions 'communicate the distinctive value' of a paper and why it is important to a research field (Nicholson et al., 2018, p. 206). RQ2: How can the core contributions to IW be inductively categorized? Based on our findings, we develop an 'integrative conceptual framework' to answer our final question (Elsbach & van Knippenberg, 2020, p. 9). RQ3: What are the suggestions for future IW research?

The paper is structured in the following way. First, we outline our methodology: selection criteria and data analysis. Second, we present our findings in two parts: semantic analysis using concept mapping visuals and an inductive thematic analysis of IW contributions. Next, we develop our conceptual framework. We conclude with limitations and potential future research directions.

Methodology

Data collection

We selected a systematic literature review approach with two objectives (Danese et al., 2018). First, we wanted to assemble the largest database of IW articles to date, thereby overcoming the selective limitations of previous IW reviews and better capturing the literature diversity. Second, we were interested in articles engaging with IW as a concept. We excluded articles mainly about similar areas like neo-institutional theory, institutional entrepreneurship, deinstitutionalization, and institutional logics. To increase inclusion, we used 'institutional work' as a search term and citations of three conceptual works (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence et al., 2009, 2011). Supplementary Appendix 1 outlines the steps based on generally accepted selection criteria for time period, peer-reviewed articles, and databases (Danese et al., 2018; Mallett et al., 2019; Nicholson et al., 2018).

We coded articles on an engagement spectrum: explicit contribution, implicit contribution, engagement, or other (reference, acknowledgement, and alternate usage). Articles engaging or claiming contributions were included in a final list (see Supplementary Appendix 2 for a complete list). Other articles were excluded (see Supplementary Appendix 3 examples). The finished database consisted of 452 IW articles with 371 claiming a contribution to IW.

Data analysis

The review and analysis progressed in an iterative fashion with several stages added based on unexpected findings, and later, feedback from anonymous journal reviewers. The review approach was qualitative. After charting the growth of IW via citations, we moved onto semantic word analysis and thematic analysis.

We used computer-aided visualization to conduct a semantic analysis of the literature. Being inspired by science and technology studies, we used software and visualization 'images as a form, in its own right, of generating knowledge about the practice and place' of research (Galison, 2014, p. 206). The goal was to provide 'zoomed out' conceptual insight into the articles and to identify important themes (Haynes et al., 2019). We employed Leximancer version 4.5, a 'text analytics tool that can be used to analyse the content of collections of textual documents and to display the extracted information visually' (Leximancer, 2018, p. 3). It works via 'the application of co-occurrence matrices and

clustering algorithms (from computational linguistics), generating concept maps which include a third hierarchical (theme) level' (Crofts & Bisman, 2010, p. 187). Leximancer has previously been validated for content analysis and was chosen for the ability to handle large amounts of text, repeatability of the analysis, and the visualizations (Smith & Humphreys, 2006). Researchers have used Leximancer to analyze academic papers in business (Crofts & Bisman, 2010).

Leximancer analysis was run in multiple iterations (see Supplementary Appendix 4 for map settings). For a time period map, we selected titles and abstracts only, dividing 452 abstracts into approximately three equal time periods by number of articles published (2008–2015; 2016–2018; 2019). Abstracts are lexically compact and allowed us to chart the main issues as defined by authors. Additionally, to reduce skewing the analysis, abstracts provided a more equal number of words for each period than using full text. For the remaining maps, we analyzed the full text of all articles. Once the Leximancer map was created, we adjusted the map settings for concept visibility, theme, and rotation, thereby 'creating mystery' (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007, p. 1270). In line with our qualitative interpretative approach, we returned to the Leximancer findings after completing thematic coding as each technique *complemented* the other (Blanc & Huault, 2014).

In the third stage, we (first author) performed an inductive thematic analysis on the 371 articles claiming contributions to IW (Gioia et al., 2013). We did not judge the quality of individual contributions in either originality or significance but simply categorized contribution claims to the concept, following Nicholson et al. (2018). We derived codes from the literature and grouped them until arriving at six aggregate themes

capturing the vast majority of contributions (see Supplementary Appendix 5 for examples). Occasionally, a single contribution might receive multiple codes, especially in instances of extensive description or multidimensional contributions. Some remaining contributions and outliers are considered in the future research section, while others were consolidated or eliminated after discussion between the authors. We discuss the key themes in the second part of our findings.

Findings

IW research has grown, diffused, and become accepted beyond sociology, organization, and management journals. Our analysis identified 185 different journals with the top journal (*Organization Studies*, 48) publishing more than twice the second most prolific journal (*Journal of Management Inquiry*, 21). Special issues about IW have appeared multiple times (e.g., Lawrence et al., 2013; Patterson & Beunen, 2019). In *M@n@gement*, three of the four articles in an institutional studies special issue focused on IW (Ben Slimane, 2012; Dansou & Langley, 2012; Taupin, 2012). Two things exemplified IW as a legitimate concept across disciplines. First, we identified 119 journals publishing a single IW article. This seems to indicate growth and acceptance of the concept in previously unestablished places. Second, the number of different journals publishing IW for the first time increased almost every year (see Figure 1). Existing IW scholars are taking IW in new directions or new scholars are introducing IW to their areas. An academic field tends to become more intradisciplinary, rather than interdisciplinary, over time (Raasch et al., 2013); however, our findings suggest IW as a contrary example.

Articles Published
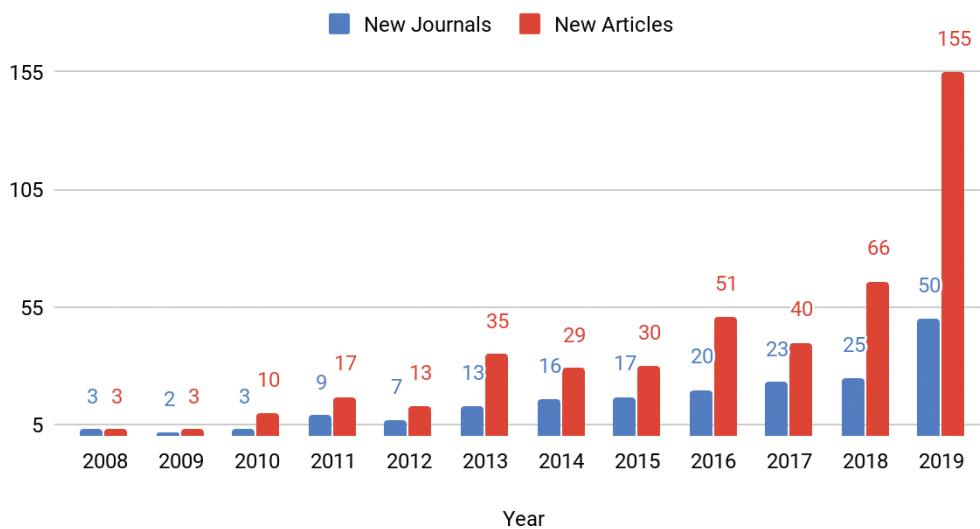
Figure 1. Published institutional work articles and unique journals by year

Mapping the forest via semantic visualization

This section presents the findings in answer to our first RQ and visualizes the output using Leximancer. For space and simplicity, we present three visual maps. Leximancer-flagged concepts are italicized in this section. Later, we build a framework partly based on the semantic findings.

Figure 2 shows article titles and abstracts grouped by time period ('files' on the map, e.g., FILE_2019). The location on the map indicates the relative relationship between time periods and the theme balloons. Closer proximity indicates a stronger relative relationship, and warmer colors (red and orange) indicate more dominant themes. We interpret the map in relation to the difference in time periods, institutional maintenance, accounting, and contributions. First, the time period 2008–2015 shows a strong connection to *work*. In early development, scholars engaged in conversations around the concept and what it meant (see Hwang & Colyvas, 2011; Lawrence et al., 2011). The time period 2016–2018 appears more closely connected to practical implications (business, managers, and accounting). This is likely influenced by emphasis on practical implications and context (see Dover & Lawrence, 2010; Lawrence et al., 2013). The third period (2019) is near policy and governance. This is likely influenced by a special issue on environmental governance (Patterson & Beunen, 2019) and other articles around policy (Kylä-Laaso & Koskinen Sandberg, 2019). Second, the IW category of maintenance appears within overlapping balloons and relatively close to *theory*, *institution*, and *contribute*. Analyzing article titles as indicative of topic, maintenance appears more (44 times) than either
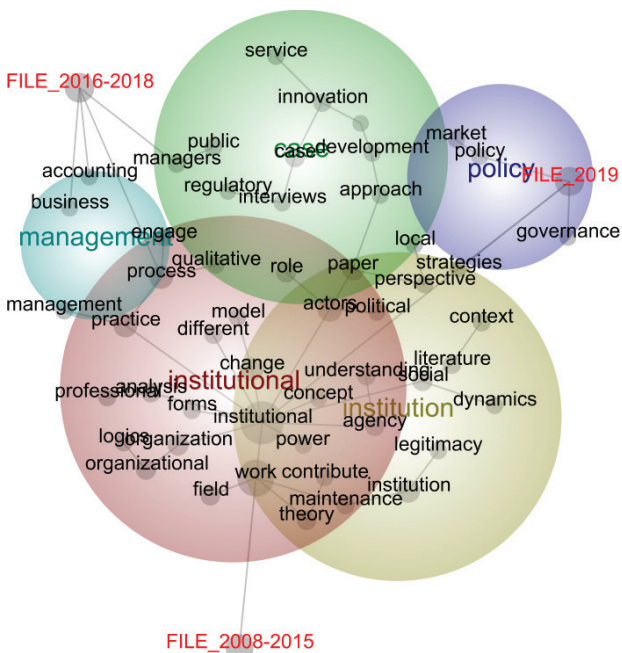
creating (28) or disrupting (12). Although Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) found few descriptions of IW maintenance, this no longer appears to be the case. Third, *accounting* is the only industry to appear on the map and leans toward the 2016–2018 time period. IW articles have appeared in 12 different accounting journals suggesting usefulness in the context. Finally, the terms *power*, *context*, *model*, and *process* took on new relevance after thematic analysis. Other themes (*case* and *legitimacy*) reappear in our next sets of Leximancer maps.

Figure 3 displays a Gaussian map emphasizing indirect relationships for the full text of all articles. The largest theme includes concepts *institutional*, *work*, *actors*, and *change*. We note three interesting observations. First, several empirical settings appear in Leximancer, including *professional*, *government*, and *markets*, and further down the list *health*, *financial*, and *accounting* (not visualized). The findings support previous research identifying empirical concentrations in traditional areas (Hampel et al., 2017). On the other hand, *context*, located in the red balloon, is closely associated with the concepts *particular*, *local*, and *institutional*. This suggests researchers use context to differentiate their studies, which was also supported by thematic analysis. Second, there are common methods to study IW. Most prominently, and visualized in the purple balloon labeled *case*, researchers use case study, interviews, and qualitative methods (not visualized). The concepts appear separated from the core themes, indicating they are likely relegated to method sections rather than directly discussed next to theoretical concepts. Finally, Lexminacer flagged *management* in multiple iterations (blue balloon). This suggests that despite IW spreading beyond the core literature, management remains an important topic for the theory. The top-associated
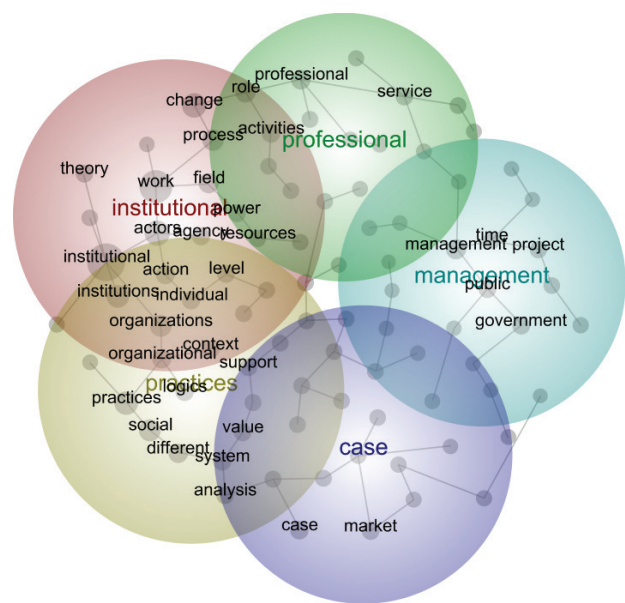

Figure 2. Titles and abstracts grouped by time period

Figure 3. Findings for all articles

Original Research Article

concepts are *workers*, *accounting*, *control*, *firms*, and *professionals*. Next, we narrow the focus by examining fewer concepts.

Figure 4 focuses on the 15 most common concepts co-occurring with IW in the previous map. Individually, *change* is the top term, followed by *practices* (91%), *actors* (88%), *institutions* (73%), and *action* (48%). However, within the largest (red) theme of actors, all concepts connect through the two concepts of *institutions* and *actors*, and although appearing in separate balloons, both are the top association for *change*. The map visualizes the intention of IW to bridge the divide between institutions and actors (Lawrence et al., 2009). Additionally, the map illustrates the close connection between discussions of individuals and action. For example, Blanc and Huault (2014, p. 15) describe 'the interactions between artefacts and individuals in their purposive endeavors to maintain institutional arrangements.' Interestingly, Hampel et al. (2017) note the prevalence of organizations in IW study; however, Leximancer highlights actors and individuals, but not organizations. As mentioned above, power and IW take different forms. In Figure 4, *power* displays closer to institutions than actors. For example, 'the Church remains a powerful institution even in secular societies' (Styhre, 2014, p. 106).

Leximancer reveals some latent themes, but others remain conspicuously absent from multiple visualizations. In no iteration did Leximancer automatically flag categories of IW (creating, maintaining, and disrupting) as concepts. As this was
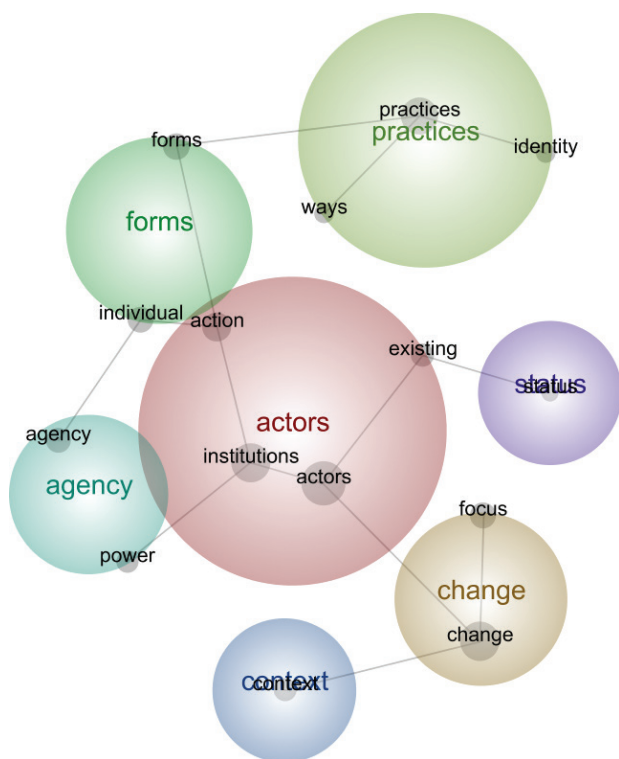
Figure 4. Relationship among top 15 concepts associated with 'institutional work'

unexpected, we ran a version with the categories and derivatives as user-defined concepts. In multiple iterations of this, all three categories were closely grouped around IW in the dominant red sphere. *Creating* and *maintaining* were of similar prominence, while *disrupting* was about half as common, thereby suggesting the ratio in the literature. Possibly, researchers might use disruption almost exclusively to mean institutional disruption, whereas the other categories might be used in different ways. This reinforces the view of Leximancer as a tool requiring researcher interpretation (Haynes et al., 2019). Also, *types* appear neither as individual types nor as the term itself. We found this odd since the identification of new IW types represents a distinct form of contribution (see next section). When we added 'type' as a user-defined concept, it appeared toward the bottom of the list of Leximancer concepts. Finally, legitimacy appears in the abstracts (Figure 2), but not in the full text maps (Figures 3 and 4). This is somewhat surprising since legitimacy underpins all IW (Suddaby et al., 2019). This suggests a shift in concerns among IW researchers. We explore this in the next section on contributions to IW.

Grouping trees via thematic analysis

This section answers our second RQ by exploring the claimed contributions to IW. We found six aggregate themes: theory, actors, context, types, representations, and methodology. Figure 5 visualizes the findings as a 'highly variegated tree' with the themes growing from the core works of the trunk (Forgues et al., 2012, p. 460). To provide breadth, the supplementary material overviews the subthemes. To provide depth, important and interesting findings are highlighted for each aggregate theme.

Theme 1: Theory – Shooting buds of interdisciplinarity

The first theme of claimed contributions is *theory combining*. Leximancer hinted at other theories by visualizing 'theory' and 'legitimacy' (see Figure 2), but without explicit connections. IW shares a close relationship with IT variants and spans disciplines, thereby creating a field ripe for incorporating other theories. Supplementary Appendix 6 summarizes the subthemes, and we focus on the relationship between IW and other branches of IT.

An IW approach complements institutional logics and institutional entrepreneurship. First, since IW deals with action, it could be assumed that work to change logics would dominate the literature (e.g., Chang & Huang, 2015; Gawer & Phillips, 2013); however, this appears as a lesser area of contributions. Instead, researchers tend to use an IW lens to explore institutional complexity (McPherson & Sauder, 2013), that is situations of multiple logics. IW explains how logics compete, coexist, or both (Bévort & Suddaby, 2016; Fuenfschilling & Truffer, 2016). Institutional
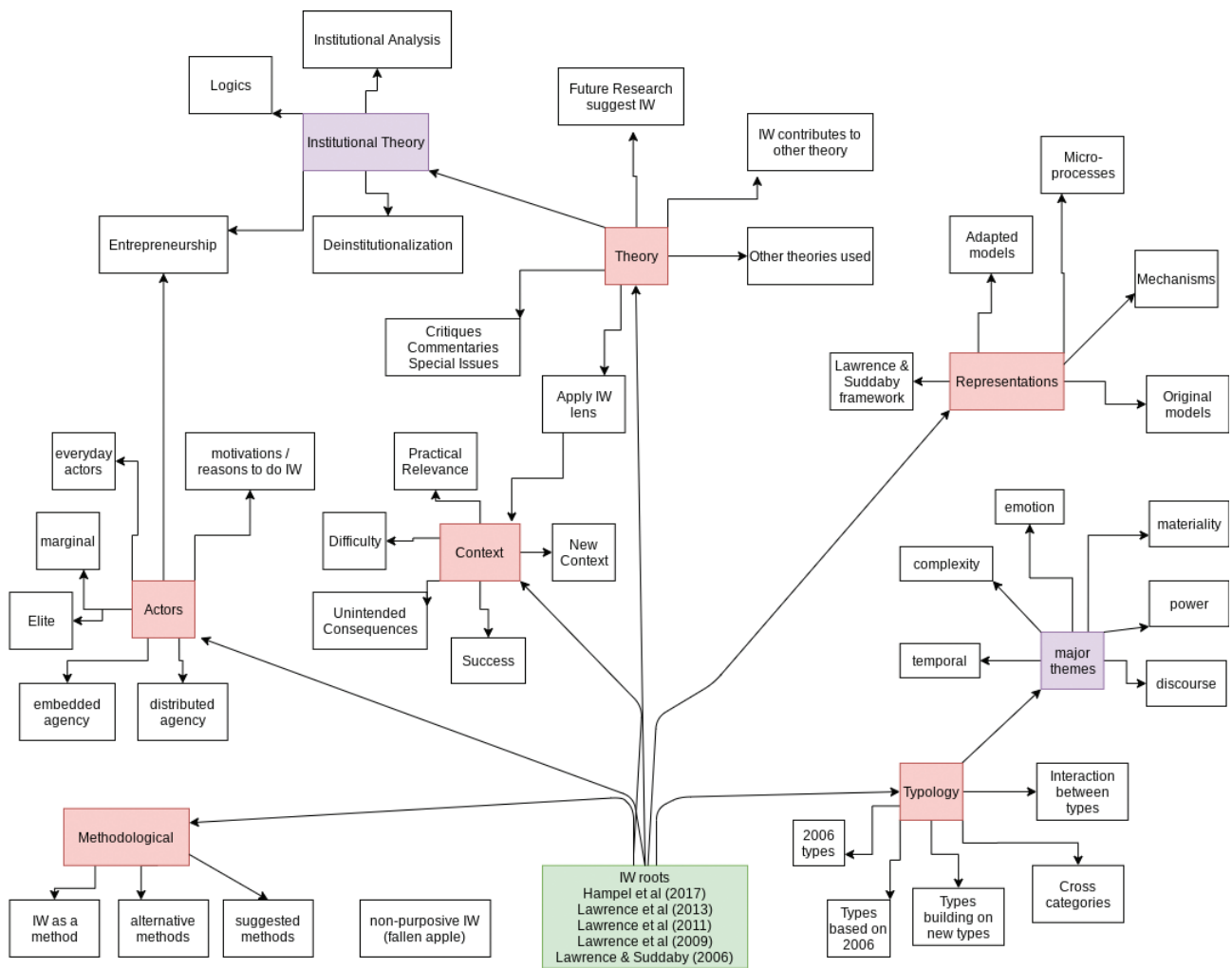
Figure 5. Institutional work contributions visualized as tree and branches

logics is a 'supra-level' theory, but IW allows for exploring logics at the microlevel of individuals (Kurtmollaiev et al., 2018; Suddaby, 2010). The contradiction in logics, as seen through IW, can be internalized in individuals (Bévort & Suddaby, 2016) or put into action (McPherson & Sauder, 2013). Second, combining an IW lens with institutional entrepreneurship accesses previously untapped areas. Incorporating IW opens up the possibility of examining cases of institutional entrepreneurial failure, or at least questioning if Institutional Entrepreneurship (IE) works (Heiskanen et al., 2019). For example, Pelzer et al. (2019) use IW to cast Uber as a failed institutional entrepreneur in the Dutch taxi market. In the case, failure results not from what and how Uber did IW but when and where. The study shows how IW shifts the focus away from individual 'hypermuscular institutional entrepreneurs' (Lawrence et al., 2009, p. 1). In some cases, the focus moves to collective actors carrying out IE. For example, Sherer (2017) shows how actors from different social institutional positions acted together to change Major League Baseball.

In turn, he links this to a collective form of IE not usually portrayed in the literature. Additionally, roles, carried out by a collection of individuals, can act as institutional entrepreneurs, such as in the case of headhunters (Doldor et al., 2016).

Theme 2: Actors – Branches into intersectionality

The second theme of the contributions revolves around *actors* and agency. Leximancer analysis flagged the importance of actors in each of our maps (see also roles, individuals, and managers). Hampel et al. (2017) classify actor types as heterogeneous actor networks or homogenous actors in an organization or field; however, within contributions, actor types stem from early IW theorizing (Lawrence et al., 2013; Martí & Mair, 2009). Supplementary Appendix 7 summarizes the subthemes while we highlight actor types and motivation.

Contributions based on actor type centered around marginal, elite, and everyday actors. Martí and Mair (2009, p. 96) define

marginal actors as 'poorly resourced, less powerful, and peripheral actors.' While there is overlap, we separate marginality into two categories: power and group identity. Marginality based on institutional power commonly relates to roles, such as newcomers (Bourlier-Bargues & Valiorgue, 2019), and social location, that is degree of institutional periphery (Doldor et al., 2016). Roles come with power and vice versa (Creed et al., 2010; Zucker, 1977). Additionally, marginal group identities include historically and structurally disadvantaged categories like gender, race, or class. These marginal actors are 'socially vulnerable' due to socioeconomic conditions and their 'subordinate' relationships within the institution (de Lima et al., 2019; Xiao & Klarin, 2019). Simplified, actors are assigned (role) or possess (identity) marginalization, but marginality is socially constructed and, therefore, socially changeable. Fulton et al. (2019, p. 271) argue the IW of 'sufficiently empowered' marginal actors becomes more effective. Others concur that the 'social position and power' of elite actors enables certain dynamic IW (Gibassier, 2017; Micelotta & Washington, 2013, p. 1158). In contrast, Riaz et al. (2011, p. 196) describe a 'mixed bag' of institutional positions taken by elite actors during the 2007–2010 financial crisis. Partly, we attribute this to how researchers define actors in relation to other actors, such as 'nonelite' actors (Kulkarni, 2018; van Bochove & Oldenhof, 2018). The choice to focus on elites intentionally or from necessity impacts actor types.

All kinds of actors engage in IW, but *why* receive less attention. Intentionally is one of the foundations of IW and one of the main differentiators from taken-for-granted institutional scripts. The literature supports 'idiosyncratic' motivations for undertaking IW (Lawrence et al., 2009, p. 6) and points to motivations at two levels: individual and field. Emotions dominate motivations at the individual level, in particular, negative emotions like shame or fear (Clemente & Roulet, 2014). At the field-level, institutional logics and inter-field resource dependence motivate organizations as actors (Furnari, 2016; Palmer et al., 2013). Bridging multiple levels, both Sherer (2017) and Palmer et al. (2013) connect various individual motivations to institutional (organizational) and field-level motivations. The studies reinforce the embeddedness of actors within institutions and hint at the difficulty in separating intrinsic individual motivation from institutional socialized motivations. For example, Agyemang et al. (2018, p. 587) show that regardless of race, actors reacted the same to the 1968 Olympic Games protests; however, they still concluded '*race matters*' in IW (emphasis in original). Furthermore, different individual motivations might coalesce into collective IW (De Lima et al., 2019; Sherer, 2017). Overall, we found motivation undertheorized in the current literature.

Theme 3: Context – Expanding growth rings

The third theme of claimed contributions is *context*, foreshadowed by Leximancer (see Figure 3). Our findings show

researchers built on early IW theorizing on 'the importance of perspective and context' (Dover & Lawrence, 2010; Lawrence et al., 2009, p. 19). Indeed, IW changes depending on context (Almond, 2015). Supplementary Appendix 8 shows the three subthemes, and we elaborate on new contexts and consequences.

Context within IW takes on different meanings: geography, industry, population, institutional, time, and other factors. Researchers frame context contributions in two ways. First, the application of an IW lens or framework to a new context served as a contribution. Researcher constructed labels of the context that has led to exceedingly specific labels, such as a 'disaster-affected community' (Farny et al., 2019), and ambiguous labels, such as 'extreme' (Barin Cruz et al., 2016; Martin de Holan et al., 2019). For example, there are context contributions based on rural sports (Oja et al., 2019) and youth sports (Riehl et al., 2019). Together, the aggregation of IW in new contexts reinforces the theoretical transferability. Second, IW is context dependent or 'context specific' (Adamson et al., 2015, p. 34). Most commonly, context was shorthand for geography at the local or national level (Canning & O'Dwyer, 2016; Goodstein & Velamuri, 2009). Cross country comparisons illustrated the similarities and differences of various geographic contexts (Gond & Boxenbaum, 2013; Troshani et al., 2018). In other cases, context was essential for understanding the institution, such as the class system in Britain (Dacin et al., 2010) or gender in places like the Middle East or Sweden (Karam & Jamali, 2013; Styhre, 2014). However, Ometto et al. (2018, p. 1006) warn about assuming an 'organization and its context remain unchanged', thereby speaking to the limited, but growing, contributions to spatiality and IW. Despite the importance of context, only a few contributions examine the specific role of place, space, and IW (Lawrence & Dover, 2015; Farny et al., 2019; Siebert et al., 2017). Overall, context constrains actors while also placing limits and boundary conditions on the generalizability of individual cases.

Context includes contributions related to consequences despite early IW differentiating from IE by attending 'more closely to practice and process than to outcome' (Lawrence et al., 2011, p. 57). IW provides an opportunity to explore 'mutual dependencies,' leading to failure or at least difficulty in accomplishing IW (van Bochove & Oldenhof, 2018, p. 113). Examining IW might contextualize the failure of institutional entrepreneurs (McGaughey, 2013). For Malsch and Gendron (2013, p. 873), IW is 'a fragile and unpredictable process of experimentation.' In its simplest form, failure is an unintended consequence of IW. Consequently, failed disruption reinforces existing institutional arrangements (Lok & de Rond, 2013; Yngfalk & Yngfalk, 2019). On the other hand, Herepath and Kitchener (2016, p. 1,134) demonstrate that failed repair work might lead to the 'institutionalization of misconduct.' In contrast to the grand work of institutional entrepreneurs, consequences

are often subtle because, as Harmon (2019, p. 566) notes, IW 'performed too explicitly' might self-destruct.

Theme 4: Types – From invasive species to archetypes

The fourth theme of claimed contributions rests in IW *types*. Leximancer did not mention types, but Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) devote almost half their chapter to developing a 'preliminary' taxonomy of IW. Researchers have generously expanded the taxonomy, adding interactional explanations across grand themes (see Supplementary Appendix 9). We focus on the development of new types.

Several authors propose new dimensions to the IW taxonomy (Hampel et al., 2017; Zvolska et al., 2019). In particular, the framework by Perkmann and Spicer (2008) serves as the foundation for several later studies (e.g., Yngfalk & Yngfalk, 2019). New IW types are presented in three ways. First, new empirical settings reveal new types. For example, Jespersen and Gallemore (2018) provide a cross reference of Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) types found within the payments for ecosystem services literature. Going further, Ozcan and Gurses (2018) add depth and dimension to advocacy work, an existing type, by identifying mechanisms and sequences of action. Second, new types are developed or appropriated from other theories. Karam and Jamali (2013) draw from social movement theory to articulate several new types of IW, including institutional issue raising (see also Hasselbalch, 2016). Third, several new types are well articulated, indicating importance within the field. Originally, Maguire and Hardy (2009) focused on written texts in developing defensive work; however, verbal discourse to 'de-problematise and deconstruct' the disruption or simply voice an opinion can be defensive work (Ben Slimane, 2012, p. 170; Clemente & Roulet, 2014). Alternatively, Cannon and Donnelly-Cox (2015, p. 373) show how defensive work might be futile in the face of a 'dying institution' and distract from alternatives. Overall, IW type identification and articulation represents a substantial contribution area.

Theme 5: Representations – Seeds of an idea

The fifth theme of claimed contributions is around *representations* of IW. We identify three subthemes: models, mechanisms, and processes (see Supplementary Appendix 10). Authors often use multiple subthemes together to make a contribution to this theme, such as a process model (Drori & Honig, 2013). Leximancer cannot analyze visuals in an article, so we discuss models below.

Models in claimed contributions to IW appear in three ways. First, new or adapted models of IW feature IW first and foremost. Broad models address the interaction among multiple types or categories of IW, such as dynamic models (Gibassier, 2017) or relational models (Cloutier et al., 2016; Smets &

Jarzabkowski, 2013). Narrower models explicate aspects related to a certain type of IW, such as identity work (Leung, Zietsma, & Peredo, 2014). Second, models feature IW as one part of a larger model. For example, in her model of professional misconduct, Harrington (2019) situates IW between triggering events (contestation) and possible outcomes (self-authorization). The model places IW as one step in a process. Similarly, Martin de Holan et al. (2019) present a model of projective self as a precursor to IW while omitting IW within the model. Third, although rare, authors test models involving IW. In one exception, Rae and Provan (2019) first adapted an existing model of IW from Cloutier et al. (2016) to fit their context. Later, Provan et al. (2019) tested the newly developed model empirically. Testing allows for expanding and detailing previously theoretically developed concepts; however, most models reinforce a contribution and orient the reader rather than test theory.

Theme 6: Methodology – Secret garden of contributions

The sixth theme of claimed contributions is *methodology*. By highlighting 'case' and 'interviews' (see Figure 3), Leximancer analysis prepared us for an underdeveloped branch of contributions. Few studies utilize suggested or alternative methods despite early work (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence et al., 2011). We identify three subthemes: suggested, alternative, and developing methods (see Supplementary Appendix 11). We explore the value of using diverse methods.

Three studies of institutional repair work illustrate the advantages of diverse methods. Micelotta and Washington (2013) use a traditional case study approach to explore how Italian professions restored institutional arrangements after government disruption. The study focuses on large-scale longitudinal efforts by elite actors, echoing traditional IT studies. On the other hand, Heaphy (2013) uses ethnomethodology to explore how frontline workers repair everyday breaches in roles. The small-scale setting shows the minutiae of daily institutional maintenance that goes unseen in retrospective case studies. For Heaphy (2013, p. 1,292), ethnomethodology allows for going 'beyond conflict-free portrayals of socialization or the discussion of direct assaults on institutions (e.g., external jolts).' Finally, Wallenburg et al. (2016) utilize a mixed-methods approach to study changes in surgical training. In one of the few instances of quantitative analysis in IW, they show statistically the ambivalence of actors to institutional change. This helps explain the negotiation of repair work in contrast to Micelotta and Washington (2013).

Discussion

The study objectives were to provide a broad analysis of researchers' semantic interests and deep analysis of claimed

contributions to the concept. We answer our third RQ by considering both sets of findings in order to develop an integrative conceptual framework for IW. By building on and going beyond the collected data and analysis, we highlight four core aspects of IW as a concept: setting, motivation, types, and outcome. Figure 6 visualizes the interaction within the framework. The dimensions discussed below can be imagined as 2 × 2 boxes.

A framework for institutional work

Setting

The first category of the framework is *setting*. As noted previously, context within IW has a broad meaning. In order to provide a platform for aggregating IW in the future, we use setting, whether theoretical or empirical, as a combination of institution type and actor type. Both components allow for transferability by placing both structure and agency in context. Finally, there is a place for local flair, but the idiosyncratic nature prevents typification.

For the institution type, there are two important aspects for understanding IW. First, what is the level of institutionalization? For analytical purposes, the framework divides institutionalization into strong and weak. We adapt this from the spectrum view (see Zucker, 1977). Akin to full institutionalization, strong institutions are long lasting, rigidly structured with clear pressure and enforcement. Most IW research has been conducted in strong institutions, such as state bureaucracies (Goodstein & Velamuri, 2009; Xiao & Klarin, 2019). Weak institutions are less developed, such as proto-institutions and institutional voids (Gong & Hassink, 2019; Smolka & Heugens, 2019). Our findings suggest differences in IW between the two. Second, what is the formality of the institution? Formal institutions are defined by regulatory or organizational structures, and informal institutions are defined by norms and values (Purtik & Arenas, 2019; Scott, 2008). Formality likely impacts the other aspects of the framework, from motivation to outcome, but it has been more common in political institutional research than organizational (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004).

For the actor type, there are two important aspects related to IW, both based on the findings. First, how embedded are

the actors? By this, we refer to actors' social distance from the institutional center. Central actors are deeply entrenched in the institutional structure, such as professions (Suddaby & Viale, 2011). Peripheral actors are on the sidelines. Examples include challenge organizations and hospital risk managers (Bertels et al., 2014; Labelle & Rouleau, 2017). A study might include both central and peripheral actors, such as familial relations in family-run businesses (Lingo & Elmes, 2019). Second, how powerful are the actors? Elite actors possess greater and marginal actors possess lesser institutional power and resources. The study of Nazis and Jews during the Holocaust by Martí and Fernández (2013) illustrates the dichotomy within a single study. Power has been shown as important in the various other aspects of IW (Palmer et al., 2015; Peton & Pezé, 2014).

Motivation

The second category of the framework is *motivation*. Our findings show the diversity of motivations; therefore, we consider reasons to engage in IW across two dimensions: scale and origin. First, the motivation scale relates to the unit of analysis, divided in the framework into personal and environmental based on the findings. Institutional studies treat both organizations and individuals as actors. Motivation must follow suit, so personal motivation equates to a single actor. Environmental motivation arises at the field-level. Most obviously, this might be isomorphic pressure (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). As described by Rojas (2010, p. 1264), 'evolving environments make some types of IW advantageous, while nullifying others.' Second, motivation might be endogenous or exogenous to the studied institution. We adapt this based on the need to acknowledge both institutional complexity and multiplicity. As Meyer and Rowan (1977, p. 345) note, motivational 'building blocks' are 'littered around the societal landscape.' Endogenous motivation arises internally from the institution or actors, such as emotions. Exogenous motivation arises externally to the studied institution, such as external shocks to the institutional structure or the introduction of new actors to the institution (Bourlier-Bargues & Valiorgue, 2019; Riaz et al., 2011).

Institutional work types

The third category of the framework is *institutional work types*. Our framework uses dimensions based on effort and visibility. First, how hard was it to do the IW? We slightly adapt the findings and divide effort into easy and difficult so as to problematize traditional 'linear narratives of successful field level change' (Lieftink et al., 2019, p. 280). As Fuenfschilling and Truffer (2016) show, the effectiveness of IW varies across types and actors. A few texts discuss the difficulty and effort in performing IW (e.g., Nicklich & Fortwengel, 2017); however, others give the impression of ease without explicit discussion.
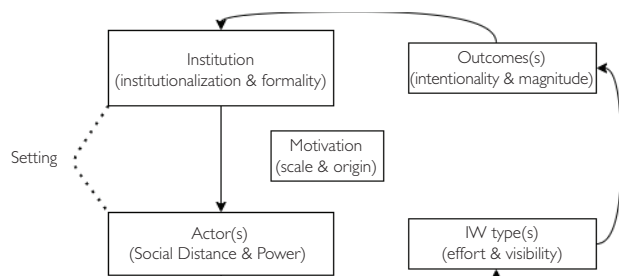
Figure 6. Model of the process of institutional work

Second, how visible was the IW? We divide categories into subtle and obvious. In line with Harmon (2019), subtle work includes rituals and everyday work that often goes unnoticed (Dacin et al., 2010; Kulkarni, 2018; Smets & Jarzabkowski, 2013) or work in shielded experimental spaces (Cartel et al., 2019; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010). On the other hand, obvious work is deliberately visible, such as an Olympic Games protest (Agyemang et al., 2018). Our example of repair work in the previous section provides a contrast between subtle (Heaphy, 2013) and obvious (Micelotta & Washington, 2013).

Outcome

The fourth category of the framework is *outcome*. IW consequences matter (Lawrence et al., 2013). Our framework incorporates two dimensions: intentionality and grandeur. First, how were the outcomes intended or unintended? Based on our findings, this goes beyond simple success or failure to analyze the 'unexpected ramifications' on other actors and institutions (Song, 2019, p. 18). For example, Slager et al. (2012, p. 764) show how unintended outcomes can still be 'recaptured to strengthen the standard in counter-intuitive ways.' Second, were the outcomes grand or minor? We develop this to address a gap. Unlike much of the IE or IT literature, IW does not value greater magnitudes of institutional change or impact. As such, this dimension serves to better understand the outcome in relation to the rest of the framework whether grand changes, like creating a new religion (Almond, 2015), or minor maintenance, like bending training rules (Lok & de Rond, 2013).

Lastly, one important aspect not displayed is *how* researchers study IW. Our Leximancer analysis showed a propensity for certain methods, but as we showed with repair work, different methods provide different insights into IW types. The same applies to the other areas of the framework. Since a variety of methods work in institutional studies, research should consider how to satisfy the theory-method fit of a particular methodology (Zilber, 2020).

This review provides a position from which to consider criticism of IW. Alvesson et al. (2019) accuse authors of inappropriately adopting IW. Our findings show some authors use IW as a lens or apply IW to a new context; however, whether that is negative is a matter of interpretation (Kraatz, 2020). Alternatively, IW might provide explanatory power not available otherwise. If IW is a brand, it is a diverse one with changing concerns, empirical contexts, contributions, and methodologies. Hampel et al. (2017) lament the lack of IW research aimed at 'big' institutions, specifically mentioning gender and race. We found counterexamples (Fulton et al., 2019; Karam & Jamali, 2013) as well as geographic and temporally expansive institutions (Almond, 2015; Hasselbalch, 2016); however, greater incorporation of intersectionality could deepen understanding (Choo & Ferree, 2010).

Continuing with our tree metaphor, we consider some fallen fruit. An anomalous segment of contributions redefines IW as non-purposive. At first, it may appear pedantic, but these new 'types', including 'unconscious institutional work' (Zhao et al., 2017, p. 305), fundamentally change the theory. In comparison, 'indirect institutional work' retains intention while describing work done in a roundabout way (Bertels et al., 2014, p. 1,172). Purposiveness separates IW from taken-for-granted actions or everyday work in service of an institution. The difficulty in studying intention in IW does not detract from the necessity of intention and effort (Dansou & Langley, 2012; Lawrence et al., 2009).

Contributions

Our review contributes to the literature on IW in two ways. First, our systematic review of the literature builds on previous reviews (Hampel et al., 2017; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Lewis et al., 2019) while assembling previously disparate literature into the largest database of IW articles to date. Inspired by others (Nicholson et al., 2018; Suddaby et al., 2015), we employ a unique methodology to analyze IW studies. Our semantic analysis using Leximancer visualizes what is, and is not, important to IW scholars. Visualization of theoretical concepts is important in developing and refining bodies of literature (Galison, 2014), not least because it helps to chart the common discussion around a theoretical concept. We use Leximancer in an unusual way as a means to manifest mystery, to question what we know and to discover new things. Our thematic analysis of claimed contributions categorizes theoretical development across six themes. Visualization in the form of a tree links gaps identified in early works. The combination of methods triangulates the findings and compensates for deficiencies in the individual approaches. The findings lay the groundwork for our second contribution.

Second, we contribute a process framework to direct future IW research toward elaborating on the core concepts. We identify setting, motivation, types, and outcome as the essential foundation of IW research. Dimensions for each are based on the existing contributions and promising gaps. Two aspects (setting and types) are prevalent in the review, and two important new directions (motivations and outcomes) help enhance a holistic understanding of IW. Our process framework expands the connection between actors and institutions to include *why* actors would want and the *consequences* of trying to change institutions. The framework brings the intrinsic linkage to the surface as a means to understand core aspects of IW in conjunction rather than in isolation.

Conclusion

We conclude IW remains an impactful and evolving theoretical concept. Semantic analysis highlighted discussions around

actors, maintenance, and practice. Thematic analysis showed IW contributions grew around theory combining, actor types, new contexts, new IW types, representations, and methodology. We developed an original framework for future research into IW based on setting, motivation, types, and outcomes. These strengths do have limitations.

First, while assembling a large database, our systematic search eliminated some possibly relevant literature. Like some other systematic reviews, our review excluded books, book chapters, gray literature, and non-peer reviewed articles (Danese et al., 2018). Also, some potentially relevant articles were not yet indexed in our search criteria (e.g., Rodner et al., 2020; Taupin, 2019). Second, since we examined what authors claimed, we ignored some articles potentially detailing IW without explicitly engaging with the theory. There is the danger that claimed contributions alone may not always include the 'great empirical work that discovers and conveys things that are genuinely worth knowing' (Kraatz, 2020, p. 3); however, we sought literature explicitly engaging with IW as a concept rather than as a tangible phenomenon. Considering these limitations, we consider potential saplings, or possible ways forward.

Several issues and questions were raised by our findings and framework: (1) Knowledge of IW in proto-institutions and institutional voids remains underexplored (see Gong & Hassink, 2019; Smolka & Heugens, 2019). The same goes for industries not commonly studied with IW theory, such as the creative industries (see Blanc & Huault, 2014). (2) How might addressing the spatial aspects, either place (Lawrence & Dover, 2015) or space (Siebert et al., 2017), impact the material and context aspects of IW (see also Rodner et al., 2020; Taupin, 2019)? (3) Is it time for IW to apply intersectionality to institutional actors? (4) We know little about 'dark' IW, motivations, or outcomes (see Clark & Newell, 2013; Harrington, 2019; Harmon, 2019). (5) Has the time for classifying and cataloguing new IW types come to an end? What lies beyond it? What about cases of no IW (see Nicklich & Fortwengel, 2017)? (6) Is researcher intervention in the field needed to probe deeper into institutions and embedded actors (see Dover & Lawrence, 2010; Gidley, 2020)?

The application of IW to other fields simultaneously adds to its relevance and drift. We conclude researchers use IW as a theory of how institutions do (not) change or as a lens to explore a type of action in institutions. We suggested an integrative conceptual framework to further knowledge into IW as a concept.

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Appendices 1-11