1. SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATIONS REVISITED

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Sociological studies of complex organizations chronicle a long history of analytic concern with the linkages between wider societal arrangements and the structure and activities of organizations (Perrow, 1986, 2002). In fact, it is only in recent decades and among some theorists and empirical researchers that attention has narrowed from a focus on institutionally-rich studies of labor unions, schools, firms, government bureaus, social movement organizations, advocacy groups, nonprofit agencies, and sundry varied organizations, to a focus on formal organizations as abstract instrumentally-oriented entities operating in environments that are narrowly conceptualized as material resource spaces. Over the past decade, however, there have been an increasing number of calls to revisit the dynamics of organizations and society (e.g. Friedland & Alford, 1991; Scott, 2001; Stern & Barley, 1996; Stinchcombe, 1997).

This chapter identifies common concerns and research opportunities for contemporary organizational sociologists interested in social structure as a more richly textured n-dimensional space in which organizations navigate. To situate our agenda, we discuss key themes from mid-century organizational sociology in light of current cultural and social theory, highlighting how more recent work builds upon and extends the mid-century social structural tradition and where new work can take shape. In particular, we revisit the 1965 essay by Arthur L. Stinchcombe, “Social structure and organizations,” that anchors a conception of social structure and organization that is useful for an emerging community of structurally-oriented organizational researchers.
The arguments we make and that the chapters in this volume extend are basic: U.S. sociologies of organization into the 1960s argued directly and purposively for understanding how broader social structures, and typically, the politics of resources and authority, shaped organizational actors and activity. This work built on the foundations of mid-century sociological analyses of power, conflict, and authority, itself the legacy of early 20th century "old" institutionalisms in economics and sociology. By the early 1970s, sociologists and, increasingly, colleagues in management and other professional schools had generated a distinctly different set of theoretical arguments and empirical research traditions. This work grappled with and developed two themes that characterize the modern synthesis in organizational sociology: (1) the shift to "open systems" approaches (e.g. focused attention on organization-environment relations), and (2) the burdens of the legacy of narrow readings of Weber on bureaucracy, to the neglect of Weber on domination and other critical traditions. The new theories were varied, but several general analytic features became increasingly prominent as the work accumulated and as researchers sought to develop a more “synthetic” organization theory.

We suggest that social exchange approaches to power and aspirations for more parsimonious quantitative models animated this new work, which in turn, reinforced restricted conceptions of politics, resources, and the interplay among these in societal context. The institutional and legal bases of organizations became implicit, typically unexamined or assumed. Theory and empirical work paid less attention to wider societal patterns and distributions of resources. Concomitantly, midcentury attention to social structure became transformed into conceptions of abstract, exogenous environments that constrained, and in many ways, determined organizational structures and behavior (via functional imperatives such as legitimacy or efficiency).

This introduction provides context for a set of original empirical papers and thematic commentaries. We review the heritage studies of organizational sociology from the 1950s through the early 1970s and probe Stinchcombe’s 1965 essay to sound out analytic legacies and opportunities for contemporary research. We then discuss developments in the organizational research agenda in the 1970s and 1980s, highlighting how a focus on social exchange approaches to power reconceptualized social structure and restricted the intellectual and policy opportunities of organizational sociology. We close with the outlines of an alternative agenda, comprising a set of research reports that highlight opportunities for a renewed social structural approach to organizational analysis that both enriches the conceptions of politics and societal struggle central to the vision of Stinchcombe 1965 and extends this tradition in light of
contemporary trends in social and cultural theory. We see developments in the analysis and theorization of culture as providing particularly promising new directions for social structural approaches to organizations. For instance, we note that emerging new structuralisms in cultural sociology and the study of stratification (e.g. Breiger, 1995; Mohr, 2000) provide key conceptual and methodological developments that could be fruitfully integrated into the agenda of organizational sociology.

We argue that the time is ripe for organizational researchers to renew attention to broader social structures and to bring “society” back to center stage. “Society” here includes social structure in the idiom Stinchcombe (1965) called for and also in ways that more directly engage contemporary emphases on both distributions of resources and meanings along with the everyday social practices that support and can contribute to the reshaping of social structure (Bourdieu, 1984; Clemens, 1997; Friedland & Alford, 1991; Stryker, 1994). Our efforts in this volume aim to bring together a diverse, yet congenial set of sociological approaches to organizational analysis that highlight the vibrancy of the social structural tradition in organizational sociology as well as the value of more consciously recognizing these works as part of an ongoing project.

“SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATIONS” AND MID-CENTURY SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO ORGANIZATIONS

Since mid-century, the scope of research on organizations in sociology has narrowed from a concern about the role of organizations in society with a big “S” (Michels, 1949; Selznick, 1949; Gouldner, 1954; Stinchcombe, 1965) to perspectives that emphasize concrete exchange processes within and between organizations and organizational demography (Hannan & Freeman, 1977; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Williamson, 1985). These developments have greatly enhanced our understanding of the variety of ways organizations are affected by transactions with other organizations in their environment and focused on new levels of analysis and often alternative causal mechanisms. These approaches have also facilitated the development of substantial empirical and theoretical literatures. But one effect of these trends is that the study of organizations has become disconnected from the study of societal stratification, politics and social change that provided core problematics in earlier sociological studies of organizations and society. Further, much empirical research on organizations has come to emphasize a highly rationalized and instrumental conception of interorganizational relations in contrast to views that highlight...
ambiguity over uncertainty and treat these relations as politically-inflected and culturally-embedded (March & Olson, 1976; Dacin, Ventresca & Beal, 1999).

In the 1950s and 1960s, sociologists charted a political economy approach to organizations, informed by middle-range theorizing and rich empirical case studies. These sociological approaches to organizations were informed and intertwined with the study of broader political processes and related societal-level social structures. These studies did not focus narrowly on organizational phenomena, nor did they try to build a synthetic theory of organization. Instead, organizations were seen as sites for understanding the constitution and consequences of modern forms of power. This sensibility was derived from the work of Max Weber and other early theorists of domination and authority, institutional economists such as Veblen, Commons, and Schumpeter who theorized about industry and economic change, and modern sociological theorists such as Parsons and Merton. The research extended classic Weberian concerns with power, domination, authority, and legitimacy, with a focus on organizations as one important kind of social structure.

These works conceptualized social structural forces quite broadly as including patterns of ideas, values, elements of stratification, and social interactions – in essence, the stuff of social organization in its raw form. Social structure was often treated as a social fact, confronting actors with durable but not obdurate patterns of resources and meaning. Empirical research, however, also investigated social structure as emergent – the outcome of intentional choices, strategies, and politics. Pivotal studies in this period provided us with a vivid vocabulary for modern organization theory.

Selznick (1949) highlighted how organizational efforts to reshape the environment are explicitly enmeshed in broader political negotiations. In turn, he treated organization-building as a complex endeavor that required leaders to integrate an organization’s goals and operations with the demands, goals and orientations of its institutional milieu (Selznick, 1957). Gouldner (1954) concentrated attention on how formal variations in work situations affected labor relations tactics and developments within a highly stratified industrial bureaucracy. Lipset, Trow and Coleman (1956) showed how a union organization was able to successfully build a monopoly around typographical skills. Stinchcombe (1959) argued that the social organization of work in bureaucracies or more autonomous craft occupations was contingent upon technical features of work processes. Bendix (1956) helped to forge a comparative tradition that highlighted how variations in state-building projects and associated ideas of authority result in distinct institutional and organizational configurations of work and management practices. Duncan (1960) showed how the class structure of resources in metropolis regions shaped industrial organization.
This sampling of studies share a number of analytic features and commitments that were available for organizational sociologies that followed. While eclectic in their treatments of “organizations” as an analytic construct, they provided empirical challenges to the then-prevailing ideal typical conception of organizations as tightly-coupled, integrated, functional, and unitary. They focused on work, on how things got done, and on the varieties of social organization of such activity. They recognized and provided explanations for conflict and change, often through rich case studies of complex organizational systems that focused on both resource and exchange linkages, but also on authority relations that took shape and became manifest in meaningful contexts of beliefs, ideologies, and cultural models. In this way, they stand distinct from much contemporary organizational studies in administrative science and other strands of organization theory that focus primarily on technical contingencies of organizations and inquire into optimal configurations or patterns.

Stinchcombe’s 1965 essay, “Social structure and organizations,” is one foundational statement for a more politically-oriented organizational theory that foregrounds broader societal processes. It is also one of the works from this period that continues to be a pivotal citation in varied contemporary theoretical and empirical research. In current research, Stinchcombe 1965 is usually cited as the source of claims about how social structure imprints new organizational forms in time-inflected ways or how new forms may suffer from a liability of newness. We instead read Stinchcombe 1965 as an essay that, in the words of Merton (1987), aimed to “specify ignorance” for the development of new knowledge of organizations. We believe the richness of ideas and arguments in this paper remain under-explored. The focus of his essay on grounded studies of politics, stratification and resources, ideas, and the societal context of organization importantly informs the agenda that research in this volume charts out. Further, it provides a clear point of engagement with contemporary social theory and analysis of organizations.

Stinchcombe’s analytical lens, often richly soaked in historical detail and informed by the breadth of the Weberian gaze, provides a wide angle view of organizational life as influenced by conflicts over forms of administration (craft, professional, bureaucratic), the social organization of markets and societies, the stability of political regimes, social classes and other kinds of status groups. In his characteristically eclectic style, Stinchcombe defined a brand of organizational analysis that seeks to systematically uncover the “relation of society outside organizations [social structure] to the internal life of organizations” (1965, p. 142). Stinchcombe’s attention to how organizational dynamics are centrally connected to societal values, power structures and related features of stratification, however, is too frequently neglected in the wisdom taken from
his essay, Stinchcombe’s scholarly corpus is remarkable for its breadth, volume, and acuteness with regard to major sociological subfields as well as for its empirical ambitions. Committed to the notion that good sociology involves developing theoretical generalizations, Stinchcombe’s intellectual curiosity has provided us with insights into a wide variety of empirical domains such as construction (1959), police administrative practice (1963), a high school (1964), love (with Heimer, 1980), Eighteenth century French stratification and revolution (1982), third party buying in insurance (1984), careers in computer software firms (with Heimer, 1988), the political economy of the Caribbean (1995), and the social structure of market liquidity (Carruthers & Stinchcombe, 1999).1

The 1965 essay was prominent in the Handbook of Organizations, one of the first efforts to compile and overview research in the emerging field of organization theory. The Handbook assembled an eclectic mix of articles that provided overviews of research streams on different kinds of organizations, of research methods employed, and of how the study of organizations is central to extant disciplinary traditions in sociology, psychology and political science. Stinchcombe makes three points in the first pages of his agenda-calling essay: (1) research and theory on the linkage between social structure and organization, or “the external relations of organizations” is “underdeveloped” and of “little beauty or power” (1965, p. 143); (2) social structure comprises “... groups, institutions, laws, population characteristics, and sets of social relations that form the environments of the organization ... any variables which are stable characteristics of the society outside the organization” (1965, p. 142); and (3) methods can and should draw from eclectic and “strategic” empirical samples to generate propositions about social structure and organization.

The chapter itself is organized as commentary with propositions on five general research questions that develop opportunities at the intersection of social structure and organization, typically based in a few available research studies, and illustrated with new or borrowed data to underscore the import of close empirical work in his version of general theorizing. First, what is the effect of social structure on the rate of foundation of new organizations, particularly organizations of a new kind or structure? Second, how can we explain, in social structural terms, the correlation between the time in history that a particular type of organization was invented and the social structure of organizations of that type that exist at the present time? Third, what is the relation of organizations to the use of violence in the larger society (e.g. revolution), particularly violence and unrestrained competition in the political arena (including organizational stratification as outcome and mechanism)?

Fourth, how do organizational arrangements affect the relations between social classes in the larger society (intraorganizational stratification as the case
where classes meet and define broader working relationships)? Fifth, what is the effect of organizations on social structure (more particularly the effect of the mere presence or absence of organizations on the solidarity and feeling of identity of “communal” groups)? Further, Stinchcombe identified common features in this mix of topics: each has to do with some aspect of the relation of organization to the environing social structure and each treats characteristics of formal organizations as variables, rather than as components of ideal types (a commitment challenged by the paucity of available empirical studies and data sources) (1965, pp. 143–145). While the essay is certainly wide-ranging (perhaps sprawling), it is remarkable to note how distant much of contemporary organizational theory seems to be from Stinchcombe’s concerns about situated historical analysis, the dynamics of social identity and class, and societal transformation.

The citation history of the 1965 paper provides an empirical indicator of its popularity while also raising a provocative set of issues that inform the main arguments of this essay and the empirical work in this volume. We identified and coded over 750 citations to “Social structure and organizations”, from its publication through 2000 in the Social Science Citation Index. These citations are predominantly in social science journals, with the largest proportions over time in sociology and management journals. Substantial citations also occur in journals in political science and international studies, in public health and education, and in over 15 other disciplinary and research fields. Figure 1 reports the annual count of citations disaggregated by academic area journals in sociology, management, and other knowledge domains.

Overall, there is a secular trend of increases in annual citation counts, providing evidence that the paper has increasingly become a key reference for new scholarly work. The specific pattern, a succession of peaks, each followed by a few years of citation counts at that higher level, suggests that different research communities and emerging theoretical traditions have found the paper useful and relevant as a touchstone. When we disaggregate the overall counts by academic area, two further compositional trends become visible. First, a larger share of citations to this paper over the years has typically been in journals other than discipline-identified sociology journals. Second, the substantial increases in citations to the paper since the early 1990s came primarily from citations in articles published in management journals, relative to pre-1980 compositional patterns.

These trends confirm the continued recognition of Stinchcombe (1965) as a foundational contribution in the field of organizational theory. We also believe that the citation patterns are suggestive of broader changes that have shaped research on organizations. The sustained, but relatively lower levels of citations
since the early 1980s in discipline-identified sociology journals may track the fate of mid-century sociology research sensibilities in “modern” organization theory. The increased number and proportion of citations to Stinchcombe (1965) in management journals beginning around 1980 provides an indicator of a shift in intellectual and professional venues for researchers concerned with topics linked to the claims of the paper. We argue that as business school faculty became more prominent in driving the growth of organization theory (particularly “macro” approaches and “synthetic” organization theory distinct from the case-study based traditions of research on firms, agencies, or other organizations located in substantive contexts like labor, social movements, education, and the like), and as management journals became central arenas for the construction of organizational knowledge, Stinchcombe (1965) was narrowly appropriated. It has increasingly become a ceremonial progenitor citation in a few lines of research, most vividly in organizational ecology and corporate demography, and in some institutional theories of organization. From this reading, the citation history of this paper tracks important shifts in the field of organization theory as a subfield and its central concerns and commitments (Ventresca & Mohr, 2002).

We next offer an account of how the development of organizational theory as a subfield redirected and fragmented the wider agenda for which Stinchcombe
argued. In the spirit of Merton and Stinchcombe, we then “specify ignorance” by identifying contemporary problematics and opportunities for organizational sociologists interested in the relationship between organizations and social structure, and then introduce empirical papers that develop elements of this agenda.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ORGANIZATIONAL THEORY AS A SUBFIELD: INSTRUMENTAL EXCHANGE APPROACHES AND DISSIDENT VOICES

While some researchers have attended to ideological shifts in core imageries and metaphors of organization (Barley & Kunda, 1992; Morgan, 1998), modern organizational theorists as a whole have aspired to develop research in the idiom of normal science as a strategy to build a professional subfield that would appear respectable among neighboring social science fields. In U.S. sociology departments, organizational theory as a synthetic research tradition has had limited spread, with research and training concentrated among a relatively few universities. The aspiration to build a theory of complex and formal organization, latterly organization theory, has been historically contested by a wider sociological community skeptical of the abstraction. Specialty concentrations in organizational analysis began to appear in sociology departments in the late 1960s, often accompanied by foundation and federal support for research in applied areas (e.g. education, mental health and policy services). In the 1970s, however, sociologists trained in organization theory began to migrate to several companion professional schools, most prominently and consequentially to schools of management and business, also to schools of education, law, and public health. These peregrinations inevitably affected the development of organizational research.

Introductory seminars in contemporary organizational theory often begin with the modern synthesis – especially with the development of contingency theory in the mid-1960s in the work of James D. Thompson and the empirical studies of Lawrence and Lorsch. Instead of focusing on how social structure shaped organizations, contingency theorists built on the administrative theories of Taylor, Barnard and Fayol to identify optimal or necessary structure-context congruence and develop prescriptions about how managers can take effective actions that enhance the performance of their organizations. Initially, administrative-based theories were considered alongside the social structural tradition in sociology. For instance, the inaugural 1956 issue of the Administrative Science Quarterly included articles by the administrative theorist James D. Thompson as well as by the grand structural functionalist sociologist Talcott Parsons. The American Sociological Review in those same years
published works more distinctly in the social structural tradition. Over the next 10–15 years, however, research in organization theory tended to focus on internal organization structure and process and the relationship between organizations and their resource environments, to the relative neglect of studying how organizations are related to broader social structures (Stern & Barley, 1996). One of the main factors driving this shift in research sensibilities towards resources and away from social structure had to do with the efforts of organizational scholars to professionalize around issues of management and organizational effectiveness. This professionalization mainly occurred through the Academy of Management, the leading professional association for management researchers.

The Academy of Management was founded in 1936, but operated very informally up until the 1970s (Wrege, 1988). The first issue of the Academy of Management Journal was published in 1957, and during the 1960s, the Academy grew in membership as management schools began to focus on research and as the number of management faculty overall increased. As a result, the Academy of Management changed from an organization built on close personal friendships to one that was more formalized, differentiated, and professionally run (Wrege, 1988, p. 28). In 1969, seven professional interest subgroups were created: Corporate Strategy, Management History, Operations Analysis, Organizational Studies, Personal and Industrial Relations, Philosophy, Values and Styles, and Social and Public Issues. In 1971, ten professional divisions were put in place including the Division of Organizational Behavior and the Division of Organization and Management Theory.

The creation of the Organizational and Management Theory Division marked the formation of a formal subfield for organizational theorists with all the self-conscious professional apparatus involved in managing and maintaining a jurisdictional boundary – professional prizes, organizations, informal colleges etc. This boundary-making, however, reduced the cross-border trade with subfields in sociology that focused on stratification and culture (with a few notable exceptions among researchers whose work directly engaged both organization theory and other sociological subfields (e.g. Aldrich, Bacharach, DiMaggio, Kanter, Hirsch, Peterson, Zald). The formalization of the Academy and changes in the research aspirations of leading management schools (as well as other professional schools, many of which began to hire social science disciplinary-trained faculty beginning in the 1970s) changed the terms and stakes of research on organizations. In addition, the presence of Academy-affiliated infrastructures supporting research laid the groundwork for the growth of managerially-oriented organizational researchers whose work emphasized instrumental notions of organization and social exchange processes.
The growing prominence of administrative theories in the study of organizations not only gave rise to more managerially-based theories and concepts about organizations, but also redirected research agendas and publishing among sociologists studying organizations in this more synthetic way. For example, William Evan (1963) developed organizational set analysis (from Merton’s role theory, via Blau & Scott, 1962) that was employed to study resource flows in industries (e.g. Hirsch, 1972). In a different vein, Peter Blau aimed to develop propositional theories about formal organizational structure and administrative capacity (Blau & Scott, 1962; Blau & Schoenherr, 1971). Stinchcombe, even with a continued focus on broader relationships between organizations and society, published Creating Efficient Industrial Administrations (1974). The shift in sensibilities was away from asking research questions about organizations and society and towards focusing more concretely on processes of organizational management and how resource connections shape organizational systems (Perrow, 1986).

Nonetheless, many sociologists continued to work on problems having to do with social structure and organizations. Coleman (1974), for instance, put forward provocative arguments about the institutional and legal foundations of modern corporate actors and their role in the “asymmetric” power balance in modern society. The “organizational society” thesis, that maintains that modern societies are actually organizational societies, also emerged (see Perrow, 1991, 2002). Dornbusch and Scott (1975) examined the legitimacy of authority in careful social psychological terms and linked broader societal conditions to the determinants of effective and legitimate exercise of power. Building on Aldrich’s (1976, 1979) emerging evolutionary perspective, Benson (1977) promoted a dialectical view of organizational processes that derided the growing prominence of rational-functional theories of organizations. While this work kept alive the aspirations of midcentury organizational sociologies, new sociological research on organizations took a different form.

Building on the foundations of rational-functional approaches to organization science, new social structural approaches increasingly penetrated “mainstream” organizational research in the administrative traditions. From the late 1970s, a novel set of research initiatives in organizational sociology became codified and packaged into standard research strategies that produced research in the idiom of normal science (Ventresca & Mohr, 2002). These included extensions in the institutional analysis of organizations (e.g. Meyer & Scott, 1983; Scott & Meyer, 1994; Powell & DiMaggio, 1991; Scott, 2001), organizational demography (e.g. Hannan & Freeman, 1977; Carroll & Hannan, 2000), and network methods and theory (e.g. Baker, 1984; Burt, 1992; Podolny, 1993; Nohria & Eccles, 1992; White, 2001). Hence, while social structural approaches to organizations have been present in some form all along, the more recent lines of work have
de-emphasized a focus on conflict, situated case analysis, and broader social structural considerations that provided key intellectual commitments for Stinchcombe and his contemporaries.

Specifically, we claim that as organizational theory emerged as a management subfield, the conceptualizations of both social structure and organizations became increasingly materialist and instrumental, animated by the growing allure of social exchange and resource dependence logics (e.g. Emerson, 1962; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). In these treatments, social structure finds expression only in a conception of the “environment” that is abstract, unitary and exogenous to the actual workings of organizations and social life (see Scott, 2001). The instrumental approach de-emphasized the insights of political economy approaches to organizations (Perrow, 2002; Stern, 1979; Zald, 1970) that underscored complex organizational arrangements in heterogeneous relation to varied constituencies; in addition, prominence was given to the notion of “uncertainty” in preference to the recognition of fundamental ambiguity and loose-coupling that animated works in the behavioral and cognitive traditions (Brown, 1976; March & Olsen, 1976; Meyer & Rowan, 1978; Weick, 1995). These shifts reinforced a conception of organizations as goal-driven unitary entities that are interlocked in concrete exchange relations. Absent is the insight that wider environments provide constitutional materials for organizations – particular elements and also ideologies and rationales that are contingent, time-dependent, and potentially in conflict one with another. Further, research began to focus on resources as the main driver of structure and activity, without sufficient attention to how social structure mediates the effects of resources and indeed the very notion of what comprises a resource.

The instrumentalist imagery is quite explicit in organizational demography where empirical analyses have tended to focus on how competitive interactions among producer organizations are modulated by shifts in population-level resource spaces (Hannan & Freeman, 1989). In many variants of network analysis, the life chances of organizations are determined by their network position among resource flows (e.g. Burt, 1992; Mizruchi & Schwartz, 1987). Even organizational institutionalists have focused a great deal of energy on processes of diffusion where organizations tend to become more homogeneous in appearance as a result of isomorphic processes (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Strang & Soule, 1998). Much of this institutional work in the 1980s and early 1990s conceptualized organizations as passive, legitimacy seekers and environments as powerful, obdurate structures (Tolbert & Zucker, 1996). Note that whether organizations are assumed to be legitimacy-seekers or motivated by efficiency or resource dependence logics, all are functional imperatives that involve depicting organizations as instrumental actors.
These sociological perspectives on organizations not only conceptualized social structure and organizations in instrumental terms, but also neglected and left behind the study of work and occupations (Lounsbury & Kaghan, 2001), and eschewed questions related to social stratification and social change. By truncating the sociological imagination in available conceptions of social structure and of organization for more tractable and conventional conceptions, organizational theorists aimed to further their subfield project by developing formal, abstract general theories about organizations that embraced “clean models” over “dirty hands” (Hirsch, Friedman & Michaels, 1990). These efforts had the effect of sideling concerns with history, context, and more situated, relational approaches to social analysis – a central methodological commitment for Stinchcombe (see his 1997 essay on the virtues of early 20th century institutional economics) and to contemporary students of organizations such as (e.g. Abbott, Barley, Breiger, Clemens, DiMaggio, Espeland, Granovetter, Heimer, Hirsch, Padgett, Powell, Stark, Stryker and many of this volume’s contributors).

However, the more instrumentalist and exchange-based accounts today appear to be rejoining a dialogue that is animated by contemporary social theoretic considerations and a concern with broader societal issues. This work comes both from the margins of dominant research strategies and arguments, but also from their cores. For example, organizational demographers have recently expanded their analytical lens to incorporate elements of culture through the study of identity (e.g. Carroll & Hannan, 2000; Carroll & Swaminathan, 2000) and how societal transformations enable new organizational forms to emerge (e.g. Haveman & Rao, 1997; Ventresca & Lacey, 2001). Others have extended ecological insights to analyze the dynamics of labor markets across firms with the intent of explicitly connecting organizational theory to the study of stratification (e.g. Haveman & Cohen, 1994). From a slightly different perspective, Baum and Oliver (1992) have shown how connections between non-profit day care centers and state governmental agencies shape day care survival outcomes. And studies of entrepreneurship in broader social structural context are renaissance (Aldrich, 1999; Schoonhoven & Romanelli, 2001; Thornton, 1999).

While the network analytic tradition has always had a strong connection to the study of stratification and labor markets (e.g. Breiger, 1995; Granovetter, 1974; White, 1970), this richer tradition has only recently begun to influence the study of organizations through concepts such as embeddedness and social capital (e.g. Adler & Kwon, 2002; Dacin, Ventresca & Beal, 1999; Gabbay & Leenders, 1999; Granovetter, 1985; Zukin & DiMaggio, 1990; Uzzi, 1996). Even though some of this research remains sympathetic to more instrumental
notions of organization (e.g. Burt, 1992; Lin, Cook & Burt, 2001), there is great potential for this line of work to generate increased attention towards problems of how organizations are interpenetrated with broader societal concerns (e.g. Breiger, this volume; DiMaggio, 1986; Nelson, 2001; Padgett & Ansell, 1993). For example, Padgett and Ansell advance a multi-network conception of social structure and contingent social action, to underscore how the distinctive patterns of 15th century Florentine social, commercial and political life enabled a style of governance. Powell and colleagues (e.g. Powell, Koput & Smith-Doerr, 1996; Powell & Owen-Smith, 1998) depict the evolution of university-industry relations around the emerging field of biotechnology in analogous terms: a focus on multiplex ties that comprise less obdurate, but still consequential, social structures that shape organizational forms and careers.

Given the intellectual connections and affinities between the “new” and “old” institutionalisms (Hirsch & Lounsbury, 1997), it is no surprise that institutional scholars have more directly tried to build on and extend research mandates laid out by Stinchcombe and others. One important strand of institutional analysis developed research strategies grounded in diffusion processes, but others engaged the broader comparative-historical tradition to examine state-society relations and their effects on organizations (Djelic, 1998; Schneiberg & Clemens, forthcoming; Schofer & Fourcade-Gourinchas, 2001). For instance, Dobbin’s (1994) study of the development trajectories of railroads in the U.S., Britain and France linked differences in the governance, funding, and overall industry strategies among these three cases to characteristic and chronic polity differences and their expression in policy styles. Moving up a level of analysis, Meyer and colleagues (e.g. Meyer, Boli & Thomas, 1987; Frank, Hironaka & Shofer, 2000; Strang, 1990; Ventresca, 1995) have focused a good deal of attention on how cognitive models and beliefs emerge at the world system as a result of actions by transnational NGOs, international political arenas such as the United Nations, and other policy experts who are authoritatively credentialed. Moving to lower levels of analysis, many contemporary institutional scholars have also begun to focus on problems of institutional transformation and practice variation in an effort to redress the earlier analytical focus on organizational homogeneity (e.g. Lounsbury, 2001; Ruef & Scott, 1998; Thornton & Ocasio, 1999).

In addition to these shifts toward a richer conceptualizations of social structure and organizational process, there have been important discipline-wide methodological advances in the analysis of social structure that may help to expand organizational sociology while also reuniting it with other sociological subfields such as those that focus on politics and culture. Of course, at mid-century, there were few subfield boundaries that segregated the analysis of organizations from
politics, culture, social movements and stratification. Today, at the intersection of the sociology of culture and institutional analysis, new structuralist methods such as Galois and tripartite lattice analysis have been developed to measure meaning systems (e.g. Breiger, this volume; Mische & Pattison, 2000; Mohr, 1998, 2000). Those methods take inspiration from network analysis, but have been used to study the evolution of practices in a way that takes seriously the dual relationship of structure and action (Bourdieu, 1984; Breiger, 2000). While the emergence of these new analytical approaches have fostered “a new structuralist project in cultural analysis” (Mohr, 2000, p. 57), these methods may also help to fuel a new structuralism in organizational theory by providing a way to represent the complex interrelationships among the multi-dimensional cultural and resource spaces (i.e. fields) in which organizations and practices take shape and change. Ragin’s (2000) fuzzy set analytical approach can also be extended to important problems having to do with categorization and boundary dynamics (e.g. Bowker & Star, 1999; DiMaggio, 1997; Lamont & Molnár, forthcoming).

Further, methodological and conceptual developments in the analysis of time via event history analysis and sequence analysis also promise important reorientations in modeling and analysis that move us beyond the limitations of assuming a general linear reality (Abbott, 2001). While event history analysis has been a staple in institutional and ecological approaches to organizations since the early to mid-1980s, sequence analysis has been absent from the toolkit of organizational researchers. Also, on the horizon are important new breakthroughs in the development of more dynamic forms of network analysis as well as agent-based and related evolutionary modeling techniques (see research emerging from Santa Fe Institute workgroups) that will no doubt help to expand our ability to theorize about mechanisms of institutional change in a much more grounded, yet non-reductive way. In general, organizational theory has much to gain by reaching out to these disciplinary-wide developments that can be used to generate new insights about organizational process in a way that gives primacy of structure, but can appreciate its complexity and multidimensionality while also attending to the role of actors in generating shifts in structural composition.

Hence, as we scan empirical and methodological developments across organizational theory and the wider discipline, we are encouraged by the growing sensibilities towards richer sociological analyses of organizational phenomena that take society and societal level dynamics more seriously. These developments give credence to and support our interest in further expanding the scope of organizational theory to embrace richer notions of social structure and organizations. We believe that the most exciting work going forward will
be less paradigmatic and, in a sense, will involve blending across previously closed perspectives in organizational theory such as organizational demography, network analysis and institutionalism, while also reconnecting the study of organizations to the core of the discipline and increasing traffic among various subfields. To wit, we call for organizational theorists to engage more fully with contemporary social theoretic and methodological developments and to use our well-developed organizational lens to explore big questions about social change that speak to broader audiences in sociology, across the social sciences, and in policy circles (Fligstein, 2001). The chapters in this volume, to which we now turn, move us further in this direction by reporting on careful empirical studies that engage and extend theory on social structure and organization in important new ways.

**REVISITING STINCHCOMBE 1965: THE CHAPTERS THAT FOLLOW**

Our commitment is this volume is to encourage re-engagement with the classic concerns of Stinchcombe and mid-century organizational sociology, but to do so in the idiom of contemporary social and cultural theory. This stance is congenial with other recent statements of new directions and available research opportunities in organization theory (e.g. Aldrich, 1999; Schneiberg & Clemens, forthcoming; Scott, 2001) but motivated by a distinct concern: the relationship between social structure and organization. Stinchcombe’s “environing social structure” has been supplanted by the rise of overly instrumentalist and at-times determining conceptions of social structure and by overly instrumentalist and purposeful conceptions of organizations. We offer the arguments and empirical chapters in this volume to redress this situation. We have assembled research reports that engage, celebrate, critique, and redirect Stinchcombe’s 1965 essay in the service of crafting three broadly defined research streams.

First, we offer empirical papers on politics and organizations that are concerned with the institutional struggles that occur in the midst of making new organizational forms, as well as with the conflicts that penetrate organizational life from the outside. Second, a section on embeddedness and entrepreneurship breathes fresh life into the analysis of new organizational forms and their environing social structure by linking context and stratification processes to the simple “newness” issues. Finally, in a section on culture and organizations, we explore how organizational fields support ideas like religious doxa and how orthodoxies of belief configure interorganizational relations. In addition, we conclude each section with thematic commentaries by Robin Stryker, Ronald
Breiger and Elisabeth Clemens, respectively, that further highlight research questions and directions that are promising. Finally, Arthur Stinchcombe provides a closing essay on his own reflections and ideas about future research in a postscript to the volume.

While all empirical contributions to the volume find inspiration in the social structural approach that Stinchcombe’s work exemplifies, the chapters differ in their conceptualization of social structure and approach to institutional analysis. Some chapters are more sympathetic to the “old” institutional sensibility in economics à la Veblen and Commons (Van deVen, 1993; Stinchcombe, 1997; Yonay, 1998) and sociology à la Merton and Selznick (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991) that animates Stinchcombe’s approach to social analysis. Other contributors are more clearly influenced by contemporary trends in social and organization theory that include a focus on cultural analysis, discourse, meaning systems, and the interplay of resources and meanings (Bourdieu, 1984; DiMaggio, 1997; Mohr, 1998; Sewell, 1992). We see this more culturally-oriented work as an extension of the social structural tradition in a contemporary idiom of culture post-Parsons, rather than as a fundamental break with a longer tradition of studies of society, politics, and change. Many of the chapters specifically focus on the interplay of culture, politics, and organization.

Politics and Organizations

A central theme in institutional analysis has to do with how organizations are important actors that shape and are shaped by broader political processes (Gouldner, 1954; Perrow, 1991; Selznick, 1949). Stinchcombe discussed organizations as providing important tools for societal stratification in the era of Gesellschaft. That is, “the system of stratification among organizations, rather than the class system of individuals and families” (1965, p. 144) provides the foundation for elites to engage in political competition. Building on this imagery, he then developed an argument about the relationship between organizational stratification and the sociology of revolution (pp. 169–180). This passage opens up a variety of questions about how competition among organizations and organizational forms is embedded in political struggle, how the creation of new kinds of organizations requires modifications to extant institutions or the building of new institutions that support those new forms, and how changes to an organizational stratification system or the emergence of new organizational forms is fostered by political crises.

The empirical papers in this section restore attention to the institutionally- and politically-contested nature of social structures, both patterns of resources and systems of meanings that configure economic and social worlds and the
sources of change in them. Marc Schneiberg’s (this volume) chapter on mutual
fire insurers, for example, highlights how new organizational forms are forged
within the crucible of broader societal conflicts over economic development.
Linking old and new institutional arguments, Schneiberg shows that mutuals
simultaneously embodied particular “problem-solving” strategies and a theory
of economic order – a vision of a “cooperative commonwealth” of farmers,
merchants and independent producers that directly challenged corporate liberal
visions of combinations, trusts and economic centralization. Struggles among
these competing visions within fire insurance took place on varied terrain,
hastened under conditions of crisis occasioned by fires that ravaged cities
throughout the nineteenth century. But in the end, the viability of mutual forms
rested on a socio-industrial order characterized by a specific balance of political
power, anti-corporate social movements, a supportive ecology of churches and
local organizations, and the availability of mutual templates.

Andrew Spicer (this volume) builds on Stinchcombe’s notion of the
“revolutionary situation” to explore the rise and fall of mutual funds associated
with mass privatization in Russia. Moving beyond standard ecological analyses
of organizational form growth and decline, Spicer highlights how organizational
forms that are made possible by revolutionary situations are inextricably
bound up in, even imprinted by, broader political struggles to resolve societal
conditions of ambiguity and instability. Spicer tells a persuasive story about
how the absence of institutional structures inhibits new forms and hence, how
the legitimacy and survival of organizational forms may require proponents to
be actively engaged in state-building projects that ultimately provide ground
rules for organizations in a society. He argues that mutual funds in Russia in
the early 1990s lost out at the organizational level because they were inept at
the institutional level.

Maureen Scully and Amy Segal (this volume) focus attention on intraorga-
nizational social-movement activity in a way that harkens back to mid-century
sociologies of organizations by conceptualizing organizations as contested sites
where broader societal conflicts play out. They integrate organizational and
social movement perspectives in their investigation of how activist employees
in a particular firm mobilize identity claims (in this case, race and gender)
and resources to challenge organizational elites in an effort to reconstruct their
organizational context in a way that would be more hospitable to their identity
concerns. Building on Zald and Berger (1978), an underappreciated call
for research on social movements in organizations, Scully and Segal argue for
attention to employee activism as an activity that can enhance our understanding
of how social movements penetrate organizational life and facilitate organiza-
tional and personal change in important and consequential ways.
These three chapters importantly push organizational theory towards questions about collective action that become manifest in the rise and fall of organizational forms as well as the construction of workplace environments. As such, this work connects to a growing interest in combining the study of collective action with organizational analysis (e.g. Balser, 1997; Clemens, 1997; Creed & Scully, 2000; Davis & McAdam, 2000; Fligstein, 1996; Lounsbury, 2001; Rao, 1998; Rao, Morrill & Zald, 2000). In the spirit of revisiting Stinchcombe, we believe that there are exciting opportunities for organizational researchers to empirically study how organizations are bound up in the politics of stratification, enabling further theorization about the conditions and mechanisms that give rise to new kinds of actors and practices, remake the beliefs and material resource distributions that underpin societal stratification, and facilitate organizational and societal changes. The empirical chapters in this section further highlight that we need to be attentive to how these dynamics play themselves out at many levels of analysis. A focus on the rise and decline of organizational forms provides insights into macro level politics, but, according to Scully and Segal, we also need to pay much more attention to how social movement processes take place in the everyday workings of organizations.

The Embeddedness of Entrepreneurship

A second broad theme in the study of social structure and organization is how social structure affects the founding of new organizations. On this general topic, Stinchcombe (1965, pp. 145–169) proposes an historical perspective on organizational creation that emphasizes the conditions under which certain organizational forms are created and how those forms are influenced by social structures that exist at the time of organizational founding. Despite the wide-ranging discussion of these issues that focuses attention on how entrepreneurship is embedded in broader societal institutions such as regulatory structures, stratification systems, labor markets and the like, organizational theorists have tended to selectively draw on his idea that entrepreneurial firms and organizations tend to suffer from the liability of newness (pp. 148–150) without fully appreciating how that theoretical claim was conditional upon broader social structures.

For instance, Stinchcombe focuses on the capacity for new organizations to develop new roles and routines that vary based on the distribution of generalized skills outside an organization, the initiative of employees in the labor force, the degree of trust among workers based on competence in work roles, and the competitive relations among producers and consumers. All of these elements, in turn, are to some extent rooted in broader institutions that shape variation among these factors. Over the past couple of decades, however, organizational
ecologists have cast doubt on Stinchcombe’s liability of newness proposition by rigorously studying the effects of organizational age and size as populations evolve. Many of these studies have shown that after controlling for size, the liability of newness effect dissipates and is replaced by liabilities of old age (see Carroll & Hannan, 2000; also Ruef, this volume). Many of these studies, however, are relatively inattentive to the social structural conditions that delimit entrepreneurial efforts, or render aged organizations unfit.

The papers we offer in the section on *The Embeddedness of Entrepreneurship* extend a broader social structural sensibility to the study of organizational creation. Ruef (this volume), for instance, draws on earlier Stinchcombian insights to study how entrepreneurship is influenced by factors having to do with status, the processes by which resources are mobilized and legitimacy attained, and organizational imprinting. Ruef argues that by attending to these broader forces and processes in which entrepreneurs are embedded, we may develop insights into the conditions under which certain kinds of organizations may experience the liability of newness vis-à-vis other liabilities associated with organizational age. As such, Ruef contributes to the development of a richer institutional ecology (e.g. Baum & Powell, 1995; Haveman & Rao, 1997) that is attentive to the constitutive aspects of society.

Burton, Sørenson and Beckman (this volume) track the organizational origins of the founders of new ventures to investigate how industry stratification can inform the ecological analysis of start-up organizations. They draw on a sample of Silicon Valley start-ups to highlight how founders who come from prominent firms are more likely to be innovative and attract external financing. This paper is novel because it provides insights into how organizational dynamics are fueled by the flow of particular people. This is part of a growing line of work that connects the tradition of organizational demography to studies of labor markets and strategic human resources (Baron, Hannan & Burton, 2001; Hannan, Burton & Baron, 1996; Haveman & Cohen, 1994; Phillips, 2001). This direction of research is particularly promising and has usefully contributed to our understanding of how intraorganizational processes relate to broader macro organizational dynamics.

Finally, Sacks (this volume) offers a perspective on entrepreneurship that focuses on more classical sociological concerns having to do with stratification. Based on extensive fieldwork and research on the venture capital industry, Sacks echoes Ruef’s findings by deconstructing the notion of the liability of newness – how the social status of a founder (e.g. as proxied by race and gender) differentially affects the experience of newness, in this case access to venture capital. In particular, he illustrates how venture capitalists, operating under conditions of extreme uncertainty and ambiguity rely on cues associated
with social, financial and reputational capital to make judgments about financing prospective ventures.

The papers in this section extend our understanding of organizational creation and entrepreneurship by specifying how societal forces embed and shape those processes. These papers, therefore, not only provide fresh insights but new directions that help forge a deeper synthesis between the sociological study of organizations, societal stratification, and institutions (Stinchcombe, 1986). Pioneering work in the study of stratification and organizations (e.g. Baron & Bielby, 1980) identified the research potential here. In recent years, studies of market transitions and organizational mechanisms of stratification in post-socialist societies further highlighted the institutionally-contingent features of stratification (Guthrie, 1999; Keister, 2000; Li & Walder, 2001; Nee, 1996). We believe, and as these papers differentially highlight, that a focus on the intersection of labor market processes and organizations that accounts for the role of professionalization processes, occupational expertise and personnel flows is particularly promising. This line of work will also help to further reunite the study of organizations with that of work and occupations and other important ethnographic traditions linked to subfields such as science and technology studies (e.g. Barley & Kunda, 2001; Hargadon & Douglas, 2001; Lounsbury & Kaghan, 2001; Owen-Smith, 2001) as well as culturally-oriented approaches to stratification (Bourdieu, 1984; Breiger, 1995; Tilly, 1998).

Culture and Organizations

For mid-century sociologists, norms and values provided key components for explanations of social structural stability and change (see DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). Stinchcombe, for instance, discussed norms as an element that helps to maintain institutional stability and the reproduction of stratification systems through socialization. Conversely, it is uncertainty about societal norms or weak commitment to institutional norms that provides the condition for social transformation and revolution. Values and beliefs, however, did not provide a focal point for analysis (but see Stinchcombe, 1968, pp. 107–118). Instead, they were often conceptualized as a glue that holds together other, more material, social structural elements. As institutional analysis has developed over the past three decades, however, attention to broader belief systems has come to center stage (e.g. Clemens, 1997; Dobbin, 1994; Powell & DiMaggio, 1991; Scott, 2001). New institutionalists in organizational sociology, for instance, make claims about how social structures of resources and meanings, anchored in particular cultural rules and patterns of relationships affect organization and field-level structures and behavior. They use a definition of institutions as “cultural rules”
(Meyer, Boli & Thomas, 1987) that identify categories of social actors and their appropriate activities or relationships (Barley & Tolbert, 1997). This perspective points to a conception of institutions as generative of interests, identities and appropriate practice models that take shape at the interface of wider sociocultural contexts and particular social systems (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Dobbin, 1994; Scott & Meyer, 1994).

The chapters in the Culture and Organizations section of the volume extend the institutionalism of Stinchcombe and other mid-century organizational sociologists by highlighting how processes of organizational creation and building are importantly informed by and contribute to broader scale cultural dynamics. Focusing on the rise of a radical group of scientists in the 1960s, Science for the People, Moore and Hala (this volume) shed light on the symbolic processes by which organizational actors are constituted. They highlight how a group of “radical” scientists who dissented from the mainstream scientific community constructed a social movement organization with precarious boundaries that spanned the fields of professional science and the New Left. Sympathetic to the constructivist strands of mid-century social structural analysis, updated with contemporary social-theoretic insights, Moore and Hala provide a content-full social structural analysis that is attentive to the micro-relational processes that comprise organizations.

Stevens (this volume) reports on how ideas and broader field social structures support the vitality of U.S. conservative Protestant organizations. Extending Stinchcombe’s (1965) discussion of the organizational production of solidarity, he argues that the robustness of conservative Protestantism has to do with the successful embedding of the faithful in dense and nested organizational relations and the ability of that movement to spawn new organizations that reinforce the faith through practices and routine everyday interactions. Contributing to both organizational theory and the sociology of religion, Stevens provocatively expands the purview of organizational analysis and provides a grounded, relational perspective on how ideas are organizationally sustained.

Investigating the emergence of gay and lesbian identity organizations in the San Francisco area, Elizabeth Armstrong (this volume) highlights the processes by which societal transformation related to the rise of the New Left fostered an “identity logic of political organizing,” which in turn enabled new kinds of lesbian/gay organizations to emerge. Like Schneiberg and Stevens, she sees the cultural templates available to actors as limiting the ways they can organize. Before the emergence of the New Left, homosexual activists lacked a model of organizing that could successfully produce widespread organizational growth. The New Left, by providing a context of collective creativity, made possible the creation of a new organizational model. She theorizes that contexts of
collective creativity, characterized by the intersection of multiple cultural strains, dense interaction, and uncertainty, may play a role in accounting for the emergence of innovative organizational forms.

These papers in the section on culture and organizations are at the cutting edge of research that draws on currents in social theory and cultural sociology to expand the social structural tradition by emphasizing the importance of symbolic boundary processes and commensuration (Espeland & Stevens, 1997; Lamont & Molnár, forthcoming). This work extends analyses of political processes and embeddedness by highlighting how broader belief systems constrain and enable the actions that are possible (Bourdieu, 1984). All three chapters in this section highlight how broader symbolic ideas constitute actors and their identities, but also shed light on how collective action and other forms of micromobilization can help to reshape symbolic meaning structures (Fligstein, 2001). While our knowledge of the dynamics of symbolic structures is still quite limited, these chapters provide solid leads on the kinds of mechanisms that can inform a broader theory of institutional emergence and change (Clemens, this volume). More pointedly, no theory of institutional change can claim to be complete without attending to the broader cultural ideas that provide the symbolic gridwork that consequentially define and shape social organization.

**VOLUME POSTSCRIPT AND FURTHER RESEARCH**

In a postscript, Stinchcombe (this volume) reflects on developments in organizational theory over the past four decades and offers some of his own suggestions for future research. This essay emphasizes familiar themes – situated analysis, the specificity of cases and grounded mechanisms, but also charts out terrain that is particular to recent cultural and social analysis. Stinchcombe argues for primary attention to a sociology of commensuration, the politically-inflected activity that establishes comparable metrics among disparate elements of social life and hence renders these tractable to authority and power (Espeland & Stevens, 1998). He focuses on “evangelism,” or the proselytizing work done by existing organizations (including social networks) to sponsor and replicate themselves. He proposes this process as an alternative to conventional mechanisms of institutional change that neglect the activities of existing organizations. Finally, he refreshes a network theory of legitimacy and truth-telling with a statement of the socially-generated and situated nature of “truth” in a community of practice. In short, Stinchcombe revisits Stinchcombe 1965 in the spirit of contemporary studies of culture, politics, and organizations. Epistemologically, he continues to push us towards the study of
mechanisms that connect variation in social structure to variation in organizations, practices and other entities and flows at a lower level of analysis.

To reprise our main argument, we believe that a common intellectual commitment that runs throughout many of the empirical chapters in this volume and is emphasized in the postscript has to do with a resounding rejection of overly reductive, materialist and instrumentalist notions of organization and social structure. Instead of conceptualizing organizational behavior as primarily influenced by exchange relationships, the essays here advocate a more culturally- and politically-rich focus on how broader elements of stratification and societal beliefs embodied in category schemes such as logics, models, and frames constitute social actors and change as a result of multi-level political processes that involve not only producer organizations but also state agencies, trade associations, social movement organizations and other field-level organizations. Hence, we agree with Stinchcombe (this volume) that cultural approaches to social structure can usefully extend the mid-century structural tradition and foster the development of novel theoretical insights by focusing our attention on important new problems and questions. The politics of commensuration (Carruthers & Stinchcombe, 2000; Espeland & Stevens, 1997; Heimer, 2001) and associated processes of boundary making, maintenance and erosion (Lamont & Molnár, forthcoming) provide important avenues for future research, but in no way exhaust the variety of ways that a focus on cultural processes can reorient and renew a broader social structural approach to organizations. Empirical chapters in this volume highlight multiple directions that include the study of organizational forms, societal logics, social movements, flows of ideas and people, and more generally, the dynamics of social organization.

We do not advocate for the replacement of a one-sided view of organizations as mainly influenced by instrumental exchange processes with another one-sided view of organizations as culturally constituted. We view symbolic and material realms as mutually constituted (Bourdieu, 1984; Sewell, 1992). Nonetheless, given the historical marginalization of cultural perspectives in organizational theory, it may be useful to valorize that dimension of analysis given the current imbalance in the literature. For instance, we know very little about how collective forms of rationality emerge, erode and become transformed (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). While institutionalists in the 1980s tended to distinguish between the ideas of technical efficiency and institutional forces, more attention needs to be directed towards the social construction of performance and how the ability to judge performance or efficiency depends upon the kind of institutional infrastructure that is built (Fligstein, 1990; Powell, 1991; Strang & Macy, 2001). Further, we know little about how social and organizational change is influenced and shaped by multiple forms of rationality (Friedland &
Alford, 1991; Stryker, 2000; Weber, 1978), how actors manipulate symbol systems to gain or reproduce social status (Bowker & Star, 1999; Breiger, 1995; Hirsch, 1986; Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001; Tilly, 1998), and how organizations come to define their interests in the first place (Clemens, this volume). These kinds of problematics can help to restore broader societal sensibilities to the study of organizations and renew the social structural tradition in light of contemporary developments in social theory.

More concretely, we believe that organizational sociology can make headway in these directions by focusing on the study of variation. While the new institutionalism in organizational analysis became prominent through the study of isomorphism and the winnowing of variation (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991), much could be gained by systematically investigating how variation is created (Stinchcombe, 1997). This means that instead of looking for broad patterns across many cases, we must dig deeper into our empirical research sites by disaggregating populations into types and identifying dimensions of variation (Ragin, 2000). A focus on variation leads us away from aspirations of grand theory (Parsons, 1949; Kiser & Hechter, 1998) and towards a more middle range focus on mechanisms and boundary conditions (Granovetter, 1985; Hedström & Swedberg, 1998; Merton, 1957; Somers, 1998; Stinchcombe, 1983).

Already fruitful empirical avenues include the study of how variation in practices becomes instantiated (DiMaggio & Mullen, 2000; Lounsbury, 2001; Schneiberg & Bartley, 2001), how the actual practices of organizations deviate from their symbolic claims (Brunsson & Jacobsson, 2000; Meyer & Rowan, 1977), how organizational forms and practices shift or get transformed over time (Leblebici et al., 1991; Scott et al., 2000; Thornton & Ocasio, 1999), how new kinds of organizational forms emerge (Haveman & Rao, 1997; Rao, 1998; Ruef, 2000), and how comparable kinds of practices diffuse differently (Davis & Greve, 1997; Strang & Soule, 1998). Per the arguments of this chapter and the articles in this volume that contribute to these research directions, future research must continue to focus on the interplay of action and structure, but in ways that take both the political and cultural components of structure seriously (Brieger, this volume; Mohr, 2000; Stryker, this volume) while also attending to the role of invention, innovation and the origins of change (Clemens, this volume; Moore & Hala, this volume). While it is unlikely that simple rational choice approaches to organizational action will contribute to our further understanding of these kinds of questions, more direct attention to the role of actors is needed. For instance, it would be particularly fruitful to continue developing linkages between structural approaches to organizations and Carnegie school insights that emphasize how choice is shaped by time-inflected flows of people,
solutions, problems and decision situations that occur in more or less ambiguous environments (Heimer, 1985; Heimer & Stinchcombe, 1999; March & Olsen, 1976; Ocasio, 1997; Powell & DiMaggio, 1991). These theoretical efforts should be facilitated by methodological advances such as those involving the modeling of structure (Breiger, 2000, this volume).

Stinchcombe 1965 charted out terrain in organizational analysis of sociological concern. Among other tasks, his essay was an exercise in “specifying ignorance,” that is, in identifying research opportunities neglected or ignored because there was little intellectual infrastructure to guide the questions or because empirical sources were uncongenial. In short, being the good pragmatist that he is, he worked with the resources and tools at hand to chart a set of questions that gave voice to the institutionalisms of early 20th century U.S. social science (Stinchcombe, 1997; Scott, 2001: chapter 1). The papers in this volume make headway in this project – creating new analytic and methodological language, exploring novel data sources, and speculating about new directions in the sociological study of organizations. The social structural tradition of organizational analysis has proven to be a robust, progressive tradition and is alive and well.

NOTES

1. While obviously leaving a lot of major works out of that abbreviated list, this is neither the place nor the purpose for a full celebration of Stinchcombe’s body of research. Instead, we concentrate our attention on and revisit the well-cited 1965 paper, “Social structure and organizations” in an effort to uncover and highlight aspects of the social structural tradition that could usefully extend and invigorate contemporary sociological approaches to the study of organizations.

2. We used SSCI to identify all citations of this paper between 1964 and 2000, using both computerized indexes and a handcheck to capture citations to the paper using variant versions of the title and author name.

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