

Agenda

1. Administrative
2. (New) institutional analysis
3. Discussion:
University courses as institutions
4. Institutional isomorphism

(New) institutional analysis



What is “institutional analysis”?

- ⋮ Perspective in sociology that aims to explain the forms and behavior of institutions in society

Ok then ... what is an “institution”?

- ⋮ “Institution” is a very broad term in sociology.
- ⋮ At its most general, an institution is a set of persistent regularities in behavior that has some sense of durability.
- ⋮ The “institution” in institutional analysis is usually less abstract than that—most commonly (though not always) refers to formal institutions.

E.g. Religions, legal systems, companies, industries, family, ...

E.g. corporations, governments, militaries, schools, non-profits, hospitals, social movement organizations, student groups, ...

Max Weber

- ‡ One of the earliest theorists concerned with what we would call institutional analysis
- ‡ For Weber, bureaucracy was natural outcome of the rationalization of social institutions
- ‡ Characterized as the “iron cage” of rationalization—a form that would spread to all institutions due to drive toward efficiency



“Old” institutionalism?

- ∴ Before we talk about the “new” institutionalism, we will describe what it is reacting *against*.

Organizational *fields*

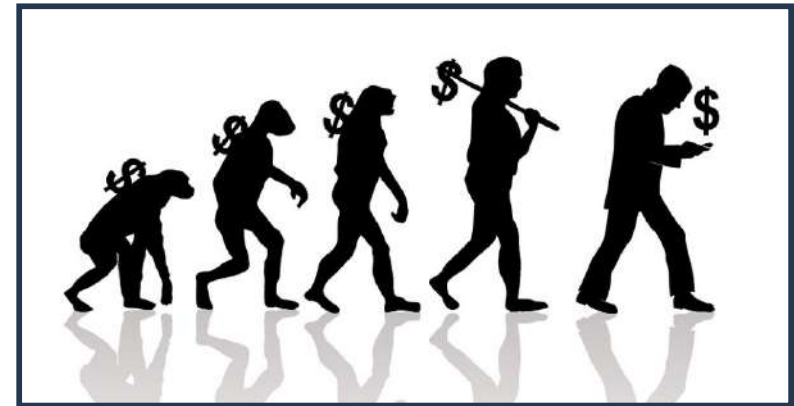
- ∴ Individual organizations of any particular type exist in a *field*.
Defined by similar focus, dependencies, participants, etc.
E.g. higher education, the cell phone industry, hedge funds
- ∴ According to Weber and “classical” institutional analysts, fields define an environment in which organizations compete for access to limited supplies of resources
Raw materials, customers, market share, ...



Classically, *two ways* to explain why institutions look the way they do:

1. Natural selection

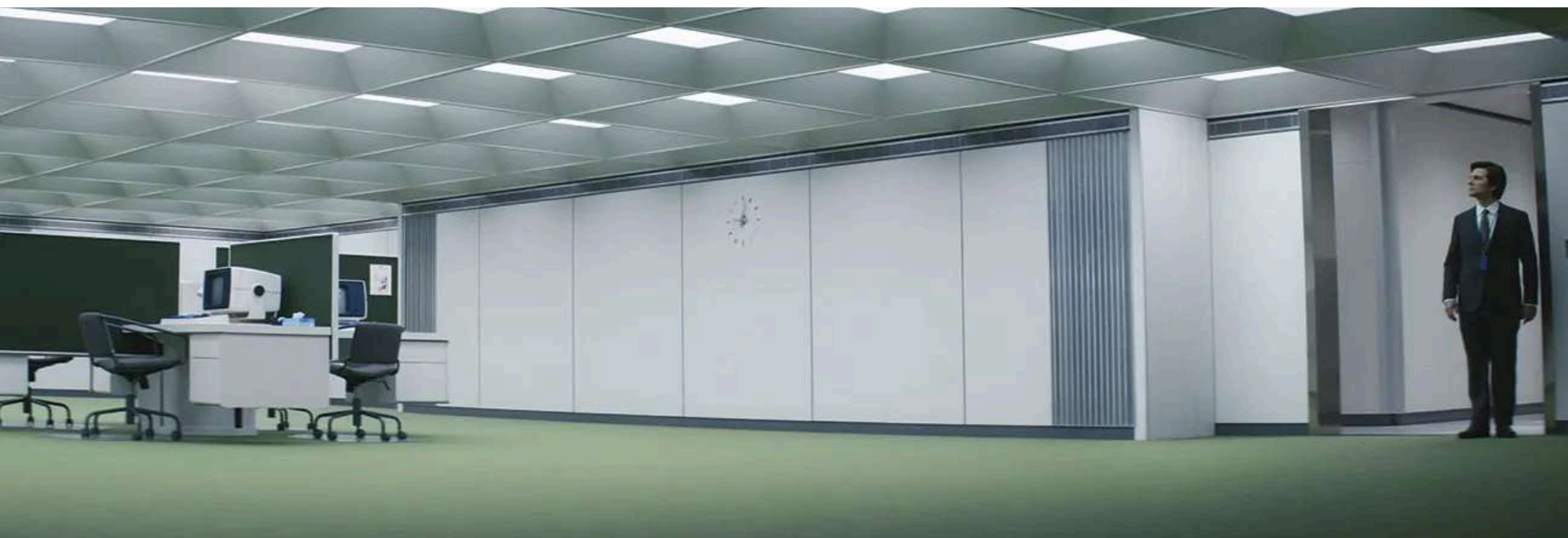
- Pressures of competition mean that only some organizations survive
- Organizations that cannot efficiently acquire resources are no longer around



2. Elite control

- Institutions are controlled by rational, powerful elites with specific desires
- Organizational efficiency helps them achieve their goals





New institutionalists critical of these perspectives

- ⋮ Behavior of organizations is *not always rational*.
- ⋮ Empirically, inefficient organizations (and inefficient practices) can stick around for a very long time.

Bringing culture to institutional analysis

- ⋮ N.I. recognizes that institutions are social.
- ⋮ Institutions act *reflexively*, actors within them understand their own practices in light of practices of others.
- ⋮ Therefore, we should talk about institutions from a *cultural perspective*.

Institutions as meaning-makers

- ‡ John Meyer and Brian Rowan:
"Institutionalized organizations: Formal structure as myth and ceremony" (1977)
- ‡ Institutions do not *just* try to achieve pragmatic goals
- ‡ Institutions *also* provide a framework for making sense of individual actions
"An important part of organizational life [has] to do with the spinning of carefully orchestrated representations of reality." (Mohr 2000)



Institutional logics (revisited)

- ‡ Basis of institutional logics discussed previously
- ‡ Unifying ways of shaping the goals, justifications, relevant facts, and appropriate means of an organization's culture

Course assessments through a neo-institutionalist lens

1. In groups of 2–4:

- ‡ Discuss the graded work (essays, exams, assignments, ...) of the courses you are in right now
- ‡ Consider the specific forms that the assessments take -- *timing, format, weight, grading schemes, how they are distributed and turned in*
- ‡ Consider the assessments and their forms feel typical or unusual
- ‡ For a few *specific* aspects of the assessments, discuss why that form may have been chosen? What might the instructor have been considering when making those choices?

2. As a class:

- ‡ Discuss the similarities across these institutional forms
- ‡ Discuss institutional processes that may lead to convergence

Institutional isomorphism





Corporate needs you to find the differences between this picture and this picture.



They're the same picture.

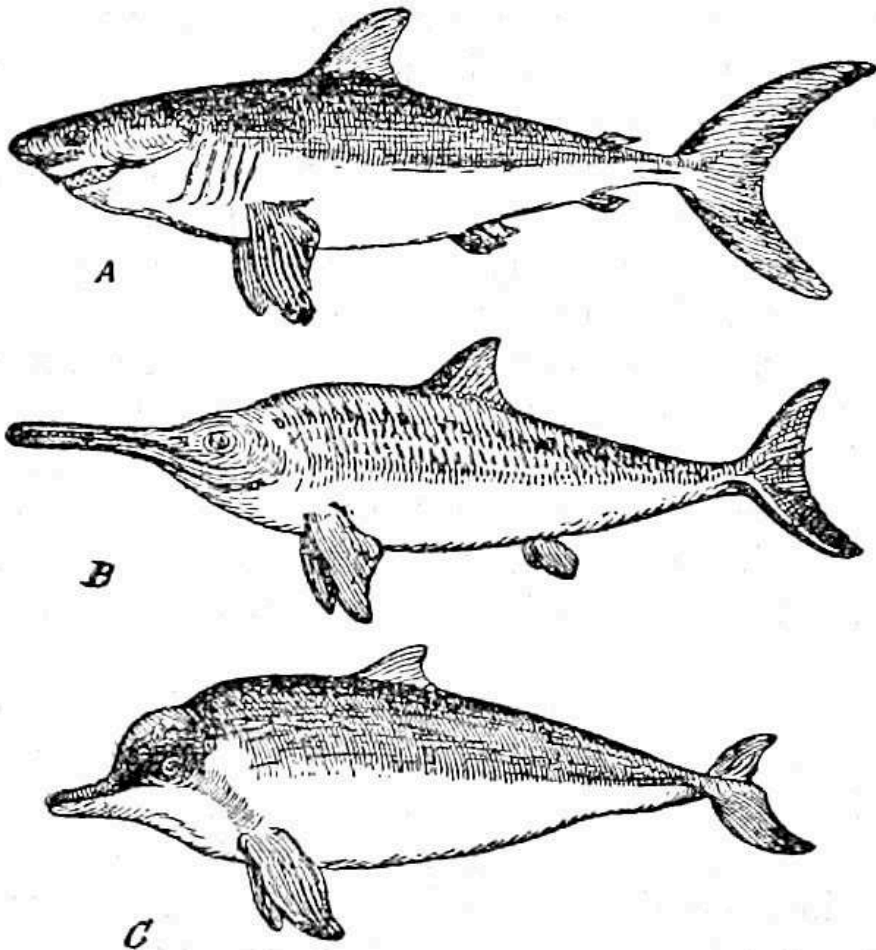
DiMaggio & Powell (1983)

- ‡ "*The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields*"
- ‡ A defining piece in organizational analysis and new institutionalism
- ‡ Seeks to explain *institutional isomorphism*

Institutional isomorphism

- ‡ "Isomorphism is a constraining process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions." (149)
- ‡ Traditionally seen in terms of the *natural selection* narrative of institutional behavior.
- ‡ DiMaggio and Powell argue for a *different explanation*.

Convergent evolution

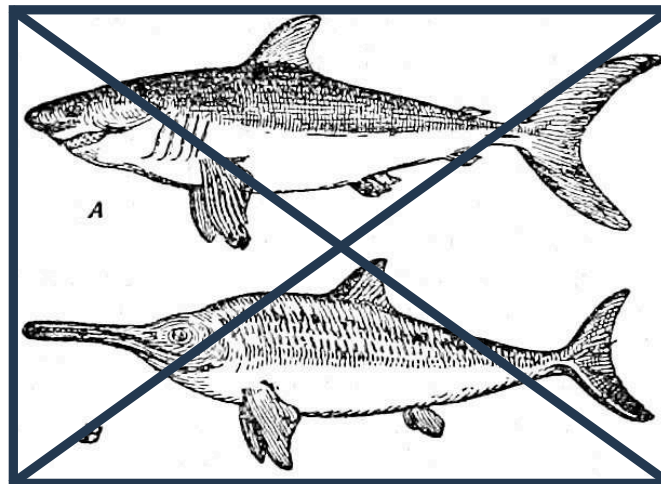


Inst. Isomorphism



DiMaggio and Powell: Explaining isomorphism *without* natural selection

- “Organizations compete not just for resources and customers, but for political power and institutional legitimacy, for social as well as economic fitness” (150)
- DiMaggio and Powell describe three mechanisms of “institutional isomorphic change”
- *Coercive*, *mimetic*, and *normative* isomorphism



Mechansisms of institutional isomorphism

DiMaggio & Powell's (1983)

Coercive isomorphism

- ∴ “formal and informal pressures exerted on organizations by other organizations upon which they are dependent and by cultural expectations in the society within which organizations function” (150)
- ∴ E.g. legal requirements preventing country clubs from excluding people based on race or gender

Mimetic isomorphism

- ∴ “When organizational technologies are poorly understood... when goals are ambiguous, or when the environment creates symbolic uncertainty, organizations may model themselves on other organizations” (151)
- ∴ Safety in imitating organizations understood to be as successful

Normative isomorphism

- ∴ Professionalization of a field leads to norms of conduct that are adhered to just because that is the way it is done
- ∴ Filtering of personnel: only allowing the “appropriate” type of people in (based on personal history, viewpoints, etc.)
- ∴ Legitimation through credentials