Making Sense with Institutions: Context, Thought and Action in Karl Weick's Theory

Klaus Weber and Mary Ann Glynn

Abstract

Karl Weick's sensemaking perspective has proven to be a central influence on process theories of organizing. Yet, one persistent criticism levelled at his work has been a neglect of the role of larger social and historical contexts in sensemaking. We address this critique by showing how institutional context is a necessary part of sensemaking. We propose that there are salient but unexplored connections between the institutional and sensemaking perspectives. We explain how three specific mechanisms — priming, editing and triggering — bring institutional context into processes of sensemaking, beyond a more conventional notion of internalized cognitive constraint. Our contribution seeks to be forward-looking as much as reflective, addressing a critique of one of Karl Weick's key theoretical contributions and offering amendments that extend its reach.

Keywords: sensemaking, institutional theory, mechanisms, context

Klaus Weber
Northwestern
University, USA

Mary Ann Glynn
Boston College, USA

In 1995, Sage published two significant books: Karl Weick's *Sensemaking in Organizations* and Dick Scott's *Institutions and Organizations.* Each became highly influential in the field and, notably, each author referenced the other. In spite of the affinity suggested by their contemporaneity, the two perspectives developed alongside each other on very different trajectories. In the decade following, of the 814 published references to Weick's book (ISI Web of Knowledge), only five reference Scott's book (1995) — and one of these is by Scott himself! (Scott 2003). Weick observes this gulf between the two perspectives in his comment that the 'juxtaposition of sensemaking and institutionalization has been rare' (Weick et al. 2005: 17).

This theoretical distance may be related to criticisms of sensemaking that claim the theory overlooks the role of larger social, historical or institutional contexts in explaining cognition. As a theory of seemingly local practice, sensemaking appears to neglect, or at least lack an explicit account of, the embeddedness of sensemaking in social space and time. Taylor and Van Every opine that:

'what is missing [in Weick's 1995 *Sensemaking in Organizations* version of enactment] … is an understanding of the organization as a communicational construction or an awareness of the institutionalizing of human society that accompanies organization with its many internal contradictions and tensions.' (Taylor and Van Every 2000: 275)

They argue that 'making sense — an interpretation — is not an accomplishment in a vacuum, it is not just context-free networking' (Taylor and Van Every 2000: 251). We agree, and propose that one particular aspect of context, that of
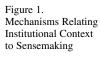
cultural-cognitive institutions, is an implicit but under-theorized component of Weick's depiction of sensemaking.
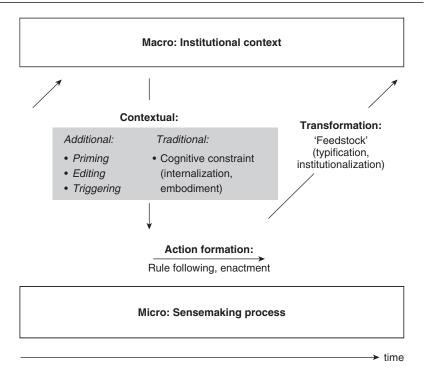
The limited role of institutional ideas in actual sensemaking research stems in part from a scholarly division of labour: work drawing on institutionalism has focused primarily on extra-subjective macro-level structures, while sensemaking research has emphasized local and subjective micro-level processes. Scott (2001: 87) notes this divide when he observes that the scope or 'home territory' of neo-institutionalism, and its 'cognitive pillar', centres on organizational populations, nation-states and the world system. Scott identifies organizational and sub-organizational cognitive processes as largely falling into the domain of research drawing on 'ethno-methodology', a more likely home for sensemaking. Yet, in spite of their divergent dominant use in research *practice*, we submit that neo-institutionalism and sensemaking are not *logically* incompatible. Rather, they are ripe with intriguing connections.

The rarity of conjoining institutional theory to sensemaking correlates with an often heard but somewhat narrow view of how institutions affect sensemaking, one that emphasizes the role of institutions as internalized cognitive constraints on sensemaking ('taken-for-grantedness'). Without denying that institutions play this role, we believe that this view is only part of the story and has gotten in the way of richer theorizing about the interconnections between institutions and sensemaking.

A useful framework for exploring these connections, and addressing the role of institutional context in Weick's work on sensemaking, is that of social mechanisms (Barley and Tolbert 1997; Hedstrom and Swedberg 1998). Mechanisms are small pieces of theory that specify how a specific input will reliably create a specific output (Hedstrom and Swedberg 1998: 25). Mechanisms-based theorizing often builds bridges across macro and micro levels of social analysis by joining them with three general classes of mechanisms: contextual (input macro → output micro), action-formation (input micro → output micro), and transformation (input micro → output macro). Figure 1 shows this basic model (adapted from Barley and Tolbert 1997). The figure also shows the basic mechanisms and our proposed amendments that relate institutional context to sensemaking.

As Figure 1 suggests, sensemaking pivots on mechanisms of action formation at the micro level of inter-subjective processes, while institutions reside at the macro level of extra-subjective structures (Wiley 1988). Institutions are antecedent to (as contextual mechanisms) and emergent from sensemaking (via transformational mechanisms). The primary contextual mechanism recognized in the extant literature is that of 'internalized cognitive constraint' whereby institutions narrow how and what sense can be made (for a more nuanced discussion, see Barley and Tolbert 1997). Our amendments seek to expand the set of contextual mechanisms to consider how institutions also prime, edit and trigger sensemaking. The key difference between internalized cognitive constraint and priming, editing and triggering is that internalized constraint works through the *preclusion* of potential alternatives. Taken-for-granted ways of thinking make alternatives unimaginable or implausible so that action that is in line with institutions follows automatically. By contrast, the additional mechanisms we introduce do not preclude the enactment of deviance and instead focus on the subsequent

Figure 1.
Mechanisms Relating
Institutional Context
to Sensemaking

Macro: Institutional context		

Contextual:

Additional:	*Traditional:*
• *Priming*	• Cognitive constraint
• *Editing*	(internalization,
• *Triggering*	embodment)

Transformation:
'Feedstock'
(typification,
institutionalization)

Action formation:
Rule following, enactment

Micro: Sensemaking process

→ time

social policing of action through institutionalized expectations for others' behaviour. In the remainder of this paper, we outline the theoretical rationale for, and implications of, these amendments. Our purpose is to articulate a more comprehensive view of the role of the institutional context in sensemaking.

Our paper proceeds as follows. We begin by reviewing the predominant notion of institutions as structures that constrain sensemaking by making some actions unimaginable and others self-evident. Using this view as our baseline, we develop an extended view of how institutions surface in sensemaking. We start by revisiting Weick's description of sensemaking processes in light of our project and examine how cognitive-cultural institutions surface in sensemaking processes. From this, we return to the challenge of contextualizing sensemaking to identify and elaborate three additional mechanisms whereby institutional context affects sensemaking — priming, editing and triggering. To anchor our theorizing, we illustrate our ideas with examples drawn from an institution central to organizations, the employment relationship between employers and employees. We then suggest how the proposed amendments may be generalizable to other institutions, such as governance relationships between stakeholders and managers, or market relationships between buyers and sellers.

Relating Institutions and Sensemaking

Sensemaking involves three main moves (Daft and Weick 1984; Thomas et al. 1993): perceptions, interpretations and actions. Concerned with mechanisms

that would be classified as 'action formation' and 'aggregation' (i.e. transformation) in the Hedstrom and Swedberg (1998) framework, most sensemaking scholars see these elements as part of an ongoing cycle of revisions rather than as a linear sequence (e.g. Porac and Rosa 1996). Sensemaking is thus primarily a process theory, mapping mechanisms and sequences within a general perspective (Weick et al. 2005).

A key contribution of Weick's 1995 book is to identify seven properties that characterize sensemaking processes (Weick 1995: chapter 2): identity construction concerns, retrospective (of experience), enactive of sensible environments, social, ongoing, focused on and by extracted cues, and driven by plausibility rather than accuracy. These characteristic properties of sensemaking serve as our starting point. We first describe the dominant view of institutional context in the literature, i.e. as an internalized constraint on sensemaking. We then examine Weick's formulation of sensemaking and show how it allows for and implies a more diverse role for institutions: how actors make sense *with* institutions, not outside them and despite them.

The Dominant View: Institutions as Cognitive Constraints on Sensemaking

In the framework of mechanism-based theorizing (Figure 1), institutions are both antecedent to, and emergent from, sensemaking processes. In the extant literature, most attention has been focused on the latter, i.e. on transformation or 'bottom-up' aggregation mechanisms. Weick (1995: 35) himself calls sensemaking the 'feedstock for institutionalization', a view shared by Scott (2001: 96), who sees collective sensemaking activities as early processes in the emergence of new institutions. This line of thought has also been elaborated, for instance, by Crossan et al. (1999) from a learning perspective, and several recent studies in the area of institutional entrepreneurship and change (Lounsbury and Glynn 2001; Phillips et al. 2004: 647; Suddaby and Greenwood 2005). Similarly, Barley and Tolbert (1997), as well as Jennings and Greenwood (2003), see the source of institutional change in variations within local enactment (i.e. 'action formation') processes.

Contextual or 'top-down' mechanisms have been studied directly far less often. The contextual influence of institutions in sensemaking processes has largely been cast as institutions supplying the substance of sensemaking. In this model, *institutions function to contextualize sensemaking by imposing cognitive constraints on the actors who do the sensemaking*. Institutionalized roles and templates for action enter sensemaking as shared cognitive structures that are taken-for-granted and imbued with value. People *internalize* these structures either through socialization processes in their current context (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Zucker 1991) or through retaining structures internalized during early socialization into roles within larger fields. Such roles become *embodied* in actors as *habitus* or tastes and dispositions (Bourdieu 1990[1980]), encoded into action scripts that are enacted (Barley and Tolbert 1997), or habitually repeated without much mediating processes (Zucker 1991).

As a result, institutions make the substance of sensemaking less varied and more stable. For example, in social institutions, such as the employment relationship,

people internalize scripts for action early on in their working life, though social-ization on the job, the school system and the media. When such scripts are strongly institutionalized, both employer and employees take them for granted, form normative expectations, and defend their deep notions of what behaviours are appropriate (see, e.g., Rousseau 1995, for an examination of the psychologi-cal contracts formed between employers and employees). With this emphasis on straightforward constraint, both institutions and ensuing actions have often been portrayed as isomorphic, so that the 'content' of sensemaking largely mirrors the 'content' of institutions.

Against this backdrop of internalized constraint, some recent work has begun to examine alternative roles for institutions in sensemaking. For instance, some researchers have re-examined how individual agency can strategically decouple symbolic sensegiving from action (Suchman 1995; Westphal and Zajac 2001), while others have argued that many institutions may be most critical in induc-ing problems and setting agendas, but less constraining in generating the solu-tions to address these issues (Swidler 2002; Weber 2003). Institutions are thus likely to play a broader role in sensemaking than making some things unthink-able and un-sensible.

How Institutions are Implicated in Sensemaking

At a basic level, institutions are part of sensemaking because they shape signi-fication (meaning-making) via interpretation and communication (Giddens 1984: 29). The 'substance' with which sense is made is 'minimal sensible struc-tures', defined by Weick (1995: chapter 5) as abstractions and typifications that are tied to perceptual cues. Although 'minimal', minimal sensible structures are *structures* nevertheless, and institutions are a key source of meaning structures (Berger and Luckmann 1966). 'Cultural-cognitive elements [of institutions] involve the creation of shared conceptions that constitute the nature of social reality and the frames through which meaning is made' (Scott 2003).

Weick clearly acknowledges this connection in his discussion of 'sensemak-ing at more macro levels' (Weick 1995: 70). Weick draws on Wiley's (1988) dis-tinction of levels of social analysis as ranging from the inter-subjective to the generic subjective to the extra-subjective. He links institutions to the extra-subjective level of 'pure meaning', while sensemaking resides in inter-subjective processes among actors. In this framework, institution is akin to a coherent symbolic code, while sensemaking is the practice of using the code. The two levels are connected via the generic subjective level of organization, where institutionally defined roles and scripts connect the structures at the field level to the subjective meaning that arises from individuals enacting these structures in local practice (Weick 1995: 71–72; Wiley 1988: 259).

This view of institutions as abstract structures for meaning is remarkably close to that offered by Barley (Barley 1983; Barley and Tolbert 1997), Giddens (1984) and Sewell (1992). Barley and Tolbert (1997: 96) define institutions 'as shared rules and typifications that identify categories of social actors and their appro-priate activities or relationships'. From a neo-institutional perspective, Scott (1995: 33; 2001: 48; 2003: 879) adds the element of *carriers* to this definition

of institutional *content*. Institutions are 'cultural-cognitive, normative, and regulative elements that, *together with associated activities and resources*, provide stability and meaning to social life', and it is the carriers that move institutional content 'from place to place and time to time' through their resourceful activities (Scott 2003: 879) [emphasis added].

Thus, Weick's work on sensemaking suggests that institutions are present in sensemaking processes, as suppliers of the substance or 'raw material' of sensemaking, and by virtue of 'institutional carriers' mobilizing this material in carrying out sensemaking activities. The available cultural-cognitive raw material affects sensemaking, as does the presence of particular carriers. From this vantage point, we now develop a more expansive view of institutional elements in sensemaking processes.
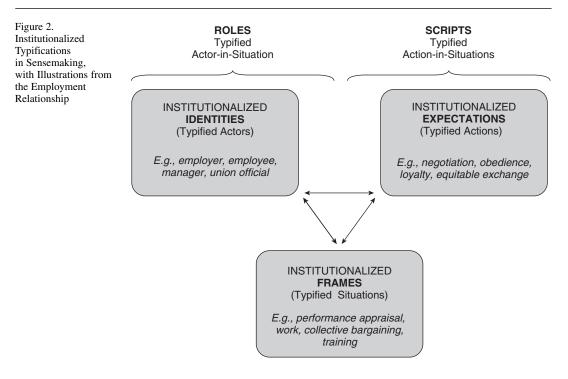
An Extended View of Institutional Context in Sensemaking

Weick's (1995) examination of the properties of sensemaking suggests ways in which institutional context is interwoven with the process rather than constraining it as an external structure. Our argument is that institutions enter meaning-making processes in three ways: first, institutions serve as the building blocks or substance for sensemaking; second, institutions dynamically guide and edit action formation; and third, institutions are continually enacted and accomplished in ongoing sensemaking processes. We discuss each of these propositions, as building blocks of an alternative view of institutions in sensemaking that leads to our expanded set of contextual mechanisms.

Institutions as Substance for Sensemaking

If minimal sensible structures are the building blocks of sensemaking, then institutions enter the process with them, in the form of institutionalized roles, templates for action, scripts, schemas, logics, and so on. Yet, the internal structure of these 'institutional' elements often is not elaborated, with the result that their connection to sensemaking remains vague. We retain Berger and Luckman's (1966) and Douglas's (1986) notions that institutions are based on typifications and classifications. We further suggest that, from a sensemaking perspective, the 'content' of an institution pertains to a *constellation* of identities (typified actors), frames (typified situations) and actions (typified expectations of performance or conduct). The combination of identity and frame approximates the concept of a situational 'role' (i.e. actor-in-situation), and the combination of frame and actions approximates the concept of a situational 'script' (i.e. actions-in-situations). This conceptualization retains the sensemaking perspective's focus on situational and identity-based priming of action, while opening up space for an institutional emphasis on typification and normative commitment. These basic institutionalized typifications that are used in sensemaking are depicted in Figure 2, along with illustrations of identities, frames and expectations from our ongoing example of the employment relationship. The illustrative identities, frames and expectations shown can be combined into several different variations of roles and scripts.

As Figure 2 illustrates, the institution of employment prescribes typified actor identities, e.g. employer (a legal entity) and employee (a person), that

Figure 2.
Institutionalized
Typifications
in Sensemaking,
with Illustrations from
the Employment
Relationship

ROLES
Typified
Actor-in-Situation

SCRIPTS
Typified
Action-in-Situations

INSTITUTIONALIZED
IDENTITIES
(Typified Actors)

*E.g., employer, employee,
manager, union official*

INSTITUTIONALIZED
EXPECTATIONS
(Typified Actions)

*E.g., negotiation, obedience,
loyalty, equitable exchange*

INSTITUTIONALIZED
FRAMES
(Typified Situations)

*E.g., performance appraisal,
work, collective bargaining,
training*

broadly frame employment as a contract between a person and a legal entity for the exchange of labour and benefits, with expectations of the supply and allocation of work by the employer and performance of duties by the employee. Note that while this notion may seem obvious, historical and local variations have existed, e.g. of the employer as a natural rather than legal person, around the expectation of supply of work and the contractual (vs. communal) nature of the agreement (Jacoby 2004, 2005; Rousseau 1995: 93–95).

More locally and pragmatically, the institutional nexus around employment contains several more specific associated roles (typified actors-in-situation) that pragmatically direct more specific script-based behaviour (typified actions-in-situation). For example, the behaviour of a manager (acting as agent of the employer) during an employee appraisal meeting is based on the situational frame of performance evaluation, while her behaviour during a training session may be based on the situational frame of instruction or development. Challenges to this institutional constellation of identities, frames and expectations can be precipitated, for instance, by a recombination of the institutional elements themselves, and introduce variations that prompt surprise, emotions and sensemaking.

Conceiving of the 'substance' of both institutions and sensemaking as composed of identities, frames and expectations makes the link between institutions and sensemaking more apparent. To begin with, sensemaking is interwoven with *identity construction* (Weick 1995: 18–23). Making sense of 'something out there' is self-referential because what is sensed, and how it is seen, bears on the actor's identity (Gioia and Thomas 1996; Weick 1995). Sensemaking is also

social, so that behaviour is contingent on a web of relationships among different identities. Quite compatibly, institutional theorists generally see identities as being derived from categorical distinctions within a social field, e.g. in social categories, or locations in a more continuous social space (e.g. in Bourdieu's work). Glynn and Abzug (2002) explicitly locate identities in institutionally defined categories, both for organizational actors and their audiences; their studies demonstrate that, in choosing new names, organizations conform isomorphically to institutionalized patterns of nomenclature and, in turn, this conformity makes their names more understandable (or sensible) to audiences. Thus, identities specify relationships that are central to the social nature of sensemaking among diverse actors. Sensemaking research also suggests that behaviour is shaped by framings of the situation (Weick 1995: chapter 5). While identities answer the key sensemaking question — *who am I*? — situational frames answer the equally important question of *what is going on here*? (Goffman 1974). Institutionalized typifications supply the substance to answer both.

Institutionalized identities and frames come with expectations about how actors should *perform* an identity in specific situations (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003). When social identities and frames are put to use in practical performance, their meaning and relevance is reaffirmed as subjective experience. Institutions are thus 'embodied in personal experience by means of roles' (Berger and Luckmann 1966: 74).

Institutions in Action Formation

Institutions supply a contextual influence for sensemaking activities that are part of 'action formation' in Hedstrom and Swedberg's framework. It is worth re-examining the action formation process in sensemaking research, as it contrasts with a simpler view in traditional institutional theory. The cognitive constraint view of institutions assumes a relatively linear and unidirectional pathway from cognition to action. People by and large do what they think. Weick's work, by contrast, is deeply grounded in dissonance theory and a dual-processing model of cognition. The central question of 'how do I know what I think before I see what I say?' is its iconic representation.

The relationship between thinking and acting (including speaking) in Weick's sensemaking perspective is thus more complex than the linear model of cognitive constraint implies. Specifically, sensemaking is *retrospective* and driven by *extracted cues* and *plausibility* (Weick 1995). Embedded in these properties is a dual-processing model that distinguishes near-automatic perceptual processes of action formation from more deliberate reasoning processes (see also Endsley 1995; Kahneman 2003; Klein 1998). Much action is triggered by perceptual cues that evoke certain identities, frames and corresponding performance scripts without much deliberate thought. In this sense, institutions, in the form of institutionalized combinations of identities, frames and performance expectations, may in fact 'steer' action in a direct, taken-for-granted way.

However, there are two important qualifications that the cognitive constraint mechanism does not capture: First, even when institutional norms tightly constrain behaviour within any particular role-frame, the question still remains as to which identity and which frame is perceptually activated in a situation.

Second, according to Weick, speed-to-action is more critical in automatic processing than accuracy or close adherence to norms and expectations, so that discrepancies invariably arise and post hoc justifications are needed to make sense of what has already happened. It is only with hindsight that questions of meaning and appropriateness elicit reasoning. The process is thus neither one of preclusive cognitive constraint nor one of deliberate rule following (deducing action from rules). Instead, institutional content comes in both before *and* after action, which points to more intricate mechanisms through which institutional context enters into sensemaking. Returning to our example of the employment relationship, institutional influence enters not merely from pre-existing internalized notions of one's own employment duties. It also enters in the reactions, justifications and negotiations of partners at work that sharpen understandings of the institutions after unwittingly enacted deviant behaviours (see Rousseau 1995, for an excellent discussion of these processes).

Institutions as an Ongoing Process

Two essential properties of the process of sensemaking are that it is *ongoing* and *retrospective*. Weick maintains that lived experience itself is first pure *durée* (see Bergson 1946[1903]; James 1890; Schütz 1967[1932], for the metaphysical underpinning of this view). 'Sensemaking never starts. The reason it never starts is that pure duration never stops. People are always in the middle of things, which become things, only when those people focus on the past from some point of view' (Weick 1995: 43). Creating meaning is thus retrospective in nature, an 'attentional process ... to that which has already occurred' (Weick 1995: 25). But what aspect of experience garners attention? According to Weick, the answer is in a pragmatist model of knowledge and meaning: the interruption of actors' projects triggers surprise, emotional arousal and, as a consequence, active sensemaking.

This ongoing nature of subjective experience and sensemaking contrasts with the linear model of institutional cognitive constraint, in which institutions are seen as structures that constrain action synchronically at the time it happens, and in which change comes about via a different, diachronic set of transformation mechanisms. The ongoing and retrospective nature of sensemaking, however, suggests that mechanisms of institutional context in sensemaking also act diachronically, as experience is identified, bracketed and evaluated. It also suggests that even stable institutions are best seen as dynamic equilibria that need to be continuously reaffirmed, not as static structures that endure unless dislodged by effort. Returning to our example of the employment relationship, the implicit institutional content may only become salient and articulated when actors experience interruptions, perhaps in the form of fraud, sabotage or other malpractice (Rousseau 1995: 111–137), or in the debates about 'free agent' relationships that replace traditional employment as studied by Barley and colleagues (Barley and Kunda 2004; Barley et al. 2002). It is on such occasions that institutions are 'instituted' in practice.

By revisiting Weick's articulation of sensemaking, we have identified key building blocks of an alternative view of institutions in sensemaking, i.e. in the substance of sensible structures, in dual-processing action formation and in

ongoing retrospective meaning-making. This view of the institutional context from the core premises of sensemaking leads us to propose additional contextual mechanisms that go beyond the view of institutions as cognitive constraint. We draw out the implications of this connecting institutionalism with sensemaking, for making sense *with* institutions.

Institutions in Sensemaking: Priming, Editing and Triggering

We propose an extended model that advances three amendments to contextual mechanisms by which institutions affect sensemaking: (1) institutions prime sensemaking, by providing social cues; (2) institutions edit sensemaking through social feedback processes; (3) institutions trigger sensemaking, posing puzzles for sensemaking through endogenous institutional contradiction and ambivalence. Together, they allow us to show a fuller view of the role of context in sensemaking. We discuss each mechanism, contrast it with the mechanism of internalized cognitive constraint, and then specify the mechanism components of 'inputs', 'throughputs' (or key processes) and 'outputs' (Hedstrom and Swedberg 1998).

How Institutions Prime Sensemaking

The possibility that institutions may prime sensemaking follows from the view of action formation outlined in the previous section. Perceptual filters lead people to extract cues that activate identities, frames and role expectations for particular situations (Weick 1995: 49–55); once noticed, cues set in motion sensemaking processes that cumulate in an overall situational framing and identity which, in turn, carry implications for action and further attention. The key point is that the process is gradual and cumulative rather than immediate and final. This is supported by research that demonstrates how, in natural settings, the link between noticing cues and action is neither immediate nor necessarily straightforward.

Priming differs from internalized cognitive constraint because the situational context that supplies the cues plays a greater role in action formation. The reason is that, in concrete situations, several possible roles and action scripts may be plausible, each one institutionalized. The immediate situation then primes — acts as a guide to identify — the appropriate institutional norm to follow. Priming thus also emphasizes the role of (local) *situational* context over the (larger-scale) macro-institutional setting. By contrast, institutional enactment based on internalized taken-for-granted ideas is quite insensitive to context factors. To illustrate the difference: if an employee had fully internalized being on time for work, then this 'taken-for-granted' behaviour would be elicited regardless of environmental stimuli. With priming, his behaviour is sensitive to situational cues, e.g. the employee is only punctual if cued by everyone else showing up on time.

In Weick's work, the connections between cues, roles and scripts, and action, are not deterministic. Cues have a cumulative effect, gradually winnowing options to arrive at appropriate identities, frames and actions. To illustrate how

perceptual cues seed a larger sense of what is going on, Weick (1995) uses a sentence completion metaphor: the word chosen to begin a sentence starts the process of progressively narrowing the possibilities of the completed statement. The process plays out even when different people contribute to the sentence completion task, because they speak the same language. Linguists using a functional grammar approach to language have termed this starting point of a sentence its 'theme', which starts to organize other possibilities (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004).

In an analogous way, institutions prime meaning-making in three ways. First, they serve up a limited register of typifications (words) that can be used to start to construct a course of action (sentence). For example, the identity of manager may lead to the frame of evaluation and actions following the logic of giving feedback. Second, institutionalized attention structures prime people to start with certain words (to notice certain cues, to attend to certain problems (Swidler 2002; Weber 2003). And third, institutional conventions about grammar and syntax underlie the winnowing effect of early words (connecting cues with identities and frames). Yet, there is inevitably room for slippage and embedded choice at each stage of the process. Priming is thus a weaker and more contextual mechanism than internalized constraint. It is profoundly powerful as cues set the ground very early in the process and institutions supply the 'sensory apparatus' of typifications that shape what is perceived, but priming allows (diminishing) flexibility throughout the process.

The more structural underpinnings of the priming mechanism are the institutionalized codifications of categories and combinatory associations that offer ready-made clusters of actors, situations and actions. Institutionalized associations exist between these conceptual categories and their linguistic or perceptual markers on the one hand, and the behaviours they refer to on the other. The sentence completion metaphor used by Weick is thus more than metaphorical. Institutionalized language and discourse play a central, although not exclusive, role in priming sensemaking. Hence, Weick (1985: 49) informs us that words 'induce stable connections' (also among the corresponding concepts) and such 'labels' induce action. This aspect is perhaps best understood as semiotic in nature, where sensory cues and words are *signifiers* of typified actors, situations and actions (the *signified*) which have *referents* in actual behaviours and people. The connection between the exposure to linguistic and other situational cues as signifiers, their signified concepts and their referents starts to address the question of contingency in institutional enactment, just when and why certain institutionalized schemas and scripts are enacted in a specific situation (Sewell 1992).

An extensive literature in social psychology on cueing, ascription and priming identifies more detailed conditions by which categories become cognitively salient to an actor and also how they translate into outputs of the priming mechanism (Bargh and Chartrand 1999; Fiske and Depret 1996; Fiske and Taylor 1991; Wheeler and Petty 2001). A consistent finding is that linguistic and perceptual processes often work at an unconscious and automatic level, one that we would suggest is driven by institutionalized pairings of cues with typified situational frames and identities (i.e. roles), and of those frames and identities with action repertoires (i.e. scripts). Examples of simple pairings between frames

and action orientations are: it's a threat — avoid it; it's a problem — solve it; it's an opportunity — take it. The priming mechanisms' output is thus the propensity to act in particular ways, but also to subjectively experience a situation in a specific way.

Research by Rafaeli et al. (1997) on professional attire at work provides one example of visual primes evoking certain identities, frames and behavioural propensities among employees, as well as subsequent behaviours and experiences of their employment. Rousseau (1995: 27, 33) similarly treats the employment contract as a 'mental model' that gets shaped by contextual cues that enable the parties to make sense of communications from each other. The role of institutional priming through language can be further illustrated through the following example. Imagine a meeting between a human resource manager and a group of employees. The agenda labels this a session of 'collective bargaining', a cue that likely evokes identities of 'negotiator', a situational frame of 'adversarial negotiation' and action expectations of 'anchor demands beyond the target settlement level', 'keep information secret', and so on. These concepts are then enacted and experienced, in the form of interaction moves, tone of voice and seating arrangements (the behavioural referents of the concepts). Now imagine the same set of people in the room with an agenda item 'training session' — a whole different set of behaviours would be primed.

Although the availability of cues may be driven primarily by local situational factors, access to cues is not randomly distributed at the more macro level. Some situations and cues are simply more likely to appear than others just because people do not interact with each other at random. Institutional structures are not unlike rules that structure 'garbage cans' in organizational decision-making (Cohen et al. 1972). They not only connect identities, frames and performances in the substance of sensemaking processes, but also affect the social distribution of actors, cues, identities and frames in a larger social unit. As a result, these elements will come into contact with each other with varying probabilities.

Institutionalized social interaction structures and symbolic boundaries among actors are the key factors in juxtaposing actors to other actors, cues, identities, frames and action expectations. For instance, routine social interaction tends to take place within broad domain categories such as 'the economy' or 'the family' with less frequent interactions across these spheres; exceptions are usually noteworthy, as is the case for family-owned businesses or work-family programmes. Similarly, routine interactions tend to occur within organizational structures of hierarchy, functional specializations and their respective institutional logics (Hoffman and Ocasio 2001; Ocasio 1997). Jacoby's (2004) analysis of the historical transformation of the employment relationship in the United States provides a telling example. Structural factors such as the bureaucratization of personnel management, the rise of unions and the creation of personnel departments strongly patterned the local interactions between employees and employer, and historical legacies repeatedly resurfaced in local events. In a similar vein, Dobbin and Sutton (1998) track the subsequent shift from personnel management (based on an institutional logic of legal compliance) to HRM (human resources management; based on a strategic resource logic), and outline

the corresponding change in available roles and performance expectations. Attention structures thus shape the lived experiences of individuals and pattern the cues, situational framings, social identities and action repertoires that they regularly access.

How Institutions Edit Sensemaking

A second context mechanism we propose follows from the pragmatist model of experience in sensemaking research as described earlier, and from a change of perspective from self to other. The institutionalization of roles and scripts enables individuals to form expectations for the conduct of others as well as derive their own course of action. Yet, people often act quickly in pragmatic rather than logical rule-bound ways, and one's own actions are more likely to be seen as consonant with institutional norms than those of others. The editing mechanism allows deviance from institutionalized expectations to be enacted first and it shifts attention to the subsequent social policing of action. Institutional influences on action work from outside rather than inside the actor, which implies that, without proximate enforcers with sufficient power, institutional prescriptions are likely to crumble. Unless ruled in by others in their social environment, people may get away with actions that logically they could not even conceive of if they simply enacted taken-for-granted beliefs. The difference is between a scenario where an employee cannot even imagine showing up late to work (internalized cognitive constraint) and a scenario where he is confronted to explain himself by the supervisor after showing up late.

Most of the time, it seems, interactions just continue in a competent (taken-for-granted) way and with little reflection. But, on occasions, unexpected feedback to others' enactments cause surprise, emotional arousal and efforts to restore sense. Clearly, there would be no surprise were there not strong expectations in the first place and, in this sense, institutions are prerequisites for this editing process to unfold. It is when such expectations *by others* are broken that conscious plausibility assessments are made, and only when implausibility results are justifications asked for and general principles of legitimacy considered. The implications of the dual cognitive processes that are part of this mechanism (automaticity in initial enactment, then reasoning in social negotiations) have not been explored much by researchers that see institutions as a context of sensemaking. Weick emphasizes the important of social evaluation in sensemaking: 'Sense may be in the eye of the beholder, but beholders vote and the majority rules' (Weick 1995: 6). Institutions influence others' expectations of the performance that comes along with an identity and situational frame as much as they influence the performer himself.

The mechanism by which institutions influence action formation processes is therefore one of *retrospective editing of actions and meaning*, as much as prospective preclusion of actions in taken-for-granted situations. The mechanism 'inputs' are the actions of one actor and the behavioural expectations of interaction partners; the 'outputs' are evaluations of actions and behavioural modifications. These behavioural expectations are grounded in one's role, or the identity that a person assumes in a frame: the employee is expected to behave

differently to his supervisor in a problem-solving staff meeting than in a promotion review or job interview. The institution of employment involves a whole bundle of identities and situational frames (see Figure 2) so that illegitimate behaviours can easily occur due to misalignments of situational expectations in interaction.

In contrast to the notion of cognitive constraint, the process that translates these contextual inputs to action formation outputs is not synchronic but diachronic, evolving in the social interaction sequence. From a social interaction perspective, individual enactments are necessary but not sufficient for institutionalizing environments. 'Only by testing our interpretations back on "the" environment can we know whether they are reasonable' (Weick and Daft 1983: 75). Enactments set in motion feedback processes that may produce self-fulfilling prophecies which are then used as evidence that environments are objective and external (Nicholson 1995). Yet, not all enacted prophecies become self-fulfilling and not all enacted realities stick. Interaction partners hold expectations for actions based on what *they* conceive as others' and their own identities and situational frames. They judge the performance of observed actions accordingly and reward or punish the performer (Collins 1981).

It is at this end of the *evaluation of action,* or more precisely of the interpretations of other actors' action, that institutionalized conceptions come in as constraints on enactments. Self-evaluation is based on subjective experience, but other-evaluation cannot be based on other-experience. It must necessarily draw more on objectifications and typifications. Assessments of plausibility prompt interaction partners to go along with the interaction sequence, which builds emotional energy for future interactions on the part of the focal actor (Collins 1981). Evaluations of implausibility create negative emotional dynamics, break down interactions and deplete emotional energy for similar behaviour in subsequent interactions.

In this perspective, action is thus *prompted* by pragmatic concerns and social cues, but socially *regulated* through feedback loops in the local interaction context that make some enactments more successful than others. It is through the process of interaction chains, others checking their behavioural expectations against their understanding of the identities and situational frames, through giving and receiving feedback, and through negotiating adjustments based on power differences, that action and meaning are contextually moderated (see Rousseau 1995: 111–140, for a detailed discussion of these processes in an employment context). The outcome is one whereby institutions serve to edit, modify or amend the emerging sense in social interactions.

In line with the subject's roots in ethnomethodology and phenomenology, sensemaking researchers often give primacy to locally present audiences in providing these feedback processes. Yet, it is important to bear in mind that what is 'local' is influenced by seemingly remote factors. The locality of local interactions does not come about by chance, but stems from historical and institutional legacies. Local interactions may still be the arena where sensemaking primarily plays out, but institutions and social structures influence what counts as local. This segmentation of interaction opportunities works at two levels: different actors are on stage in different arenas, and the same actors switch roles when they move between arenas. For example, the bargaining for terms of the

employment contract is in many countries the privilege of unions and employer associations rather than individual employees and managers. At the same time, an employee may also be a shop steward for a union, opening possibilities for alternate identities and behaviours in different situational frames (Kelly and Heery 1994). The sense being made in two situations is thus allowed to be quite different and the appropriate selections must be negotiated *in interaction*, even if both parties fully agreed on the institutional prescriptions for each constellation of identities, frames and action expectations.

How Institutions Trigger Sensemaking

Institutions trigger sensemaking when they provide the 'occasion for sensemaking' (Weick 1995: chapter 4). At first blush, this seems to contest the view of internalized constraint, i.e. that institutions reduce occasions for sensemaking through their taken-for-granted nature. However, the two are not mutually exclusive. Rather, we propose that institutions may trigger sensemaking in two fundamental ways: first, by providing dynamic foci that demand continued attention, and second, by creating puzzles that require sensemaking due to the contradictions, ambiguities and gaps that are inherent in institutions.

For example, social hierarchies and status orders are often kept in place by symbolic distinctions and patterns of cultural consumption that are dynamic rather than static (Bourdieu 1984[1979]; Gartman 2002). As formerly 'high culture' becomes 'low culture' and higher status actors move on to the new 'high culture' in order to maintain their distinctiveness from the masses, much sensemaking is required to remedy surprises from new patterns of cultural consumption and to tell different actors and symbols apart. The institutionalized status order and its roles are stable, but to stabilize them an ongoing sensemaking process is required. A converse process is sometimes observed when former colleagues are promoted to managerial roles where they are expected to act as representatives of the employer rather than as a fellow employee. Here, the expectations for different positions remain the same but there is individual mobility that requires sensemaking around the changed identities.

Sewell (1992) discusses occasions when institutions produce gaps, ambiguities or puzzles that require sensemaking, due to multiple or polysemic institutional structures. Swidler (2001) provides a particularly apt example in the institution of marriage: in present Western societies, marriage as durable commitment comes face to face with an alternative framing, of love as romantic passion, which scripts marriage not as a social arrangement but as an indicator of the free will of the couple. At some stage, the roles of husband/wife and romantic lover began to fuse, but the situational definitions and action implications of the two institutional compounds were not compatible. Swidler documents the wealth of sensemaking tactics that help people justify their apparently inconsistent behaviours and experiences to themselves and others.

Striking parallels exists between this example of marriage and changes in the employment relationship, e.g. when a more paternalistic, communal notion of long-term employment comes head to head with the emphasis on flexibility and contractarian shareholder rights (Jacoby 2005). In a more general organizational

example, Hoffman (1999) points to competing institutional logics in the chemical industry as requiring organizations to make sense of conflicting identities, frames and action expectations. In another example of institutions providing puzzles, Rao et al. (2003: 802) examine the role of ambiguous language in institutional prescriptions around 'proper' cuisine as providing occasions for sensemaking among French chefs.

Seo and Creed (2002) go further to propose a dialectic approach that sees contradictions as *inherent in* institutions. The same processes that make identities, situations and action expectations coherent enough to be typified and institutionalized prompt actors to experience contradictions. This is because typified identities and situations are always selective and incomplete ways to access actor and situation-specific flows of experience. For example, Engestrom (1987) and others (e.g. Blackler 1993) who work within the paradigm of 'activity theory' alert us to tensions, frictions and contradictions both within and between different spheres of activity that promote dialectical inquiry and transformation. Blackler (1993) describes the coexistence of contrasting conceptions of activity that Engestrom observed within institutions as varied as the theatre (by different actors in the field, e.g. directors, dramatists, actors and drama teachers), the medical field (by different conceptualizations of work by the same doctors, i.e. as healers, administrators and social-medical professionals) and universities (where the outputs may be directed to a number of other institutional systems, e.g. the job market, new technologies or managerial knowledge and innovation).

The 'input' of the triggering mechanism in all cases is institutionalized expectations that are either contradictory between or within institutions (e.g. two identities suggest two different performance expectations), ambiguous (e.g. the same performance may be indicative of different identities or frames) or inadequate (e.g. expectations that are not complex enough to incorporate dynamic equilibria or stochastic uncertainty). The throughput or 'transformation' process is the experience of a loss of meaning or understanding prompted by institutional gaps, contradictions, multiplicities and ambiguities. The mechanism 'output' is increased sensemaking activity and a desire to restore meaning. Barley and Kunda's (2004) study of the sensemaking of individuals who switched from traditional employment to contract work illustrates the struggle to reconcile the tensions between different institutions that still govern their work (which tellingly is called both 'contingent *employment*' and 'free agency').

To summarize this section, institutions not only induce regularity and homogeneity in sensemaking through cognitive constraint but also by priming, editing and triggering sensemaking. The inclusion of these additional mechanisms suggests that institutions are intricately woven into sensemaking and that the role of institutional context should be explicitly considered in research that draws on Karl Weick's sensemaking perspective.

Discussion and Conclusion

We began with the notion that, counter to how it has been used in organizational studies, institutional theory is not irrelevant to, but informative of, sensemaking

research. Moving beyond the theorization of institutions as taken-for-granted cognitive constraints, we advance an enlarged framework of cognitive-cultural institutions as a context that also primes, edits and triggers sensemaking.

Essentially, we suggest that, not only can sensemaking be the feedstock for institutionalization as others have suggested, but that *institutions may be the feedstock for sensemaking*. Our inspiration for advancing this view draws directly from work by Karl Weick, along with collaborators Kathleen Sutcliffe and David Obstfeld:

'people who talk about sensemaking may exaggerate agency … An example of such exaggeration might be the statement, "sensemaking is the feedstock for institutionalization" (Weick 1995: 36). Institutionalists might well argue that the causal arrow in this assertion points in the wrong direction. The causal arrow neglects evidence showing that organizational members are socialized (indoctrinated) into expected sensemaking activities and that firm behavior is shaped by broad cognitive, normative, and regulatory forces that derive from and are enforced by powerful actors such as mass media, governmental agencies, professions, and interest groups (Lounsbury and Glynn 2001). In other words, "no organization can properly be understood apart from its wider social and cultural context" (Scott 1995: 151).' (Weick et al. 2005: 417)

Our objective in this paper was to elaborate this role of context in Karl Weick's sensemaking perspective. We chose to focus on neo-institutional theory because it offers a rich and well-developed model of cognitive-cultural dynamics at a macroscopic level, as well as some mechanisms by which macro-level contexts influence micro-level actors. Most importantly, the new institutionalism, like sensemaking, is fundamentally concerned with the link between meaning and action. This is not to suggest that other theories of context could not inform sensemaking. For instance, studies of how situations influence the construction of meaning and the incentives to act, such as the classic studies of prisons by Zimbardo or recent inquiries into sensemaking and sensegiving during strategic change in an organization (Gioia and Thomas 1996; Gioia et al. 1994), also illuminate contextual aspects of sensemaking. In addition, non-cognitive context, in structural forms, for instance such as those in social networks and power relations, can be expected to supply contextual mechanisms that affect sensemaking. And lastly, our initial inquiry into how institutions affect sensemaking drew a sharp distinction between synchronic and diachronic linkages; clearly, there is scope for alternative conceptualizations of the temporality in dynamics of sensemaking and institutional change and reproduction.

Our theorizing suggests several promising avenues for future research. A useful starting point for a more fine-grained examination of institutions in sensemaking might be the fundamental question about what types of institutions become prominent or salient in sensemaking processes. In for-profit firms, 'the stock market' is likely to be a prominent theme in organizational attempts to make sense of their environments. However, we may also see institutionalized repertoires of 'family' prominent when organizations seek to implement work-family programmes or extend worker benefits to family members. Research in cultural psychology on frame-switching by bi-cultural individuals (e.g. see Lehman et al. 2004 for a review) and Goffman's (1974) frame analysis may be good starting points to examine the processes and skills involved in switching between interactions governed by different institutional identities, frames and action expectations, or the ability to maintain multiple versus singular dominant identities.

We also believe that our expanded framework of how institutions surface in sensemaking offers several avenues for future research in specific areas of organizational studies. Building on the three contextual mechanisms that we advanced on how institutions affect sensemaking — priming, editing and triggering — should be a useful way for further investigating the role of institutional context in Weick's theory and research on meaning-making more broadly. Conversely, such studies would also inform institutional theory, particularly in terms of the pragmatics and micro-dynamics that underscore and transform institutions in organizations and industries.

Examining how institutions *prime* sensemaking can help connect existing substantive domains of research. For instance, historical analyses of national systems of employment (Jacoby 2004, 2005) may inform the dynamics of psychological contracting (e.g. Rousseau 1995) in intricate and specific ways rather than as a general background condition. Similarly, closer study of sensemaking processes that entail industry or field-level institutions (White 2000) offers ideas to identify the constitutive rather than epiphenomenal roles of discursive dynamics and signification for status orders in markets (e.g. Podolny 1993), strategic groupings (e.g. Porac and Rosa 1996), organizational symbolism (e.g. Glynn and Abzug 2002) or consumer categories that cluster along class divisions (e.g. Bourdieu 1984[1979]).

Research looking at the process of retrospective *editing* of meaning and actions through social feedback processes to enactments appears particularly promising. Judgements of plausibility in notions of cultural competence (Bourdieu 1984[1979]) or frame resonance (Snow and Benford 1988) provide a starting point for elaborating plausibility as central for triggering resistance to enactments and institutional policing at the micro level. Process models of repeated interactions, such as escalation of commitment, conversation analysis or interaction ritual chains may shed more light on the selection mechanisms that winnow representations of initial enactments as well as action responses. The questions opened up in this area have implications for organizational practice, as well, particularly for cross-functional teams or international management, where the meanings and expectations of identities and frames diverge.

In terms of investigating how institutions trigger sensemaking, researchers might draw from related work in sociology and anthropology to further our understanding of this process. For instance, Sahlins' (1981) work on the original encounters between Hawaiians and Western explorers illustrates the notion that contradictory institutions work smoothly when actors do not interact, but trigger creative sensemaking when actors are brought into proximity. When James Cook arrived on the islands, Hawaiians had to make sense of the new arrival and managed to do so by seeing Cook as the incarnation of their god Lomo and acting accordingly. Sahlins' analysis shows the dynamic of how old recipes create unintended consequences and novel combinations when applied in a different interaction setting. Cook was ultimately killed upon his return to the island as the mythical rule of Lomo had passed in the Hawaiians' calendar. The encounter of the two cultures is a story of misunderstanding and illusionary shared understanding that was workable for some time but ultimately failed. Similar sensemaking dynamics may occur in an organizational context, e.g. in mergers, globalization of markets or the fusion of public and private sectors of the economy.

To conclude, when looking more closely at the role that institutional context plays in sensemaking, we discover that the connection may be under-researched but that institutional ideas are certainly not incompatible with a sensemaking perspective. Instead, we showed how institutions are woven into sensemaking. At the same time it should also be noted that institutional frames, identities, roles and performance expectations become 'alive' through their practical use. Thus, in sensemaking, institutions are also continually re-accomplished and enlivened in practice. In this essay, we tried not only to take seriously a central contribution of Karl Weick's scholarly work but also to uncover some additional and often overlooked implications. We approached the task as one of making sense of institutions in sensemaking, and let our inquiry be driven by what we sensed to be a silence in his scholarly work. Rather than deconstruct it, we sought to pragmatically make sense of it. Our simple conclusion is that people make sense *with* institutions, not *in spite of* them.

References

Bargh, John A., and Tanya L. Chartrand
1999 'The unbearable automaticity of being'. *American Psychologist* 54: 462–479.

Barley, Stephen R
1983 'Semiotics and the study of occupational and organizational culture'. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 28: 393–413.

Barley, Stephen R., and Gideon Kunda
2004 *Gurus, hired guns, and warm bodies: Itinerant experts in a knowledge economy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Barley, Stephen R., Gideon Kunda, and John Evans
2002 'Why do contractors contract?' *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 55: 234–261.

Barley, Stephen R., and Pamela S. Tolbert
1997 'Institutionalization and structuration: Studying the links between action and institution'. *Organization Studies* 18: 93–117.

Berger, Peter L., and Thomas Luckmann
1966 *The social construction of reality*. New York: Doubleday.

Bergson, Henri
1946[1903] *The creative mind: An introduction to metaphysics*. New York: Kensington.

Blackler, Frank
1993 'Knowledge and the theory of organizations: organizations as activity systems and the reframing of management'. *Journal of Management Studies* 30: 863–884.

Bourdieu, Pierre
1984[1979] *Distinction: A social critique of the judgment of taste*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre
1990[1980] *The logic of practice*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Cohen, Michael D., James G. March, and Johan P. Olsen
1972 'A garbage can model of organizational choice'. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 17: 1–25.

Collins, Randall
1981 'On the micro-foundations of macro-sociology'. *American Journal of Sociology* 86: 984–1014.

Crossan, Mary M., Henry M. Lane, and Roderick E. White
1999 'An organizational learning framework: From intuition to institution'. *Academy of Management Review* 24: 522–537.

Daft, Richard L., and Karl E. Weick
1984 'Toward a model of organizations as interpretation systems'. *Academy of Management Review* 9: 284–295.

Dobbin, Frank, and Robert I. Sutton
1998 'The strength of a weak state: The rights movement and the rise of the human resources management divisions'. *American Journal of Sociology* 104: 441–476.

Douglas, Mary
1986 *How institutions think*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.

Eliasoph, Nina, and Paul Lichterman
2003   'Culture in interaction'. *American Journal of Sociology* 108: 735–794.

Endsley, M. R.
1995   'Toward a theory of situation awareness in dynamic systems'. *Human Factors* 37: 32–64.

Engeström, Yrjö
1987   *Learning by expanding: An activity-theoretical approach to developmental research*. Helsinki: Orienta-Konsultit.

Fiske, Susan T., and Eric Depret
1996   'Control, interdependence and power: Understanding social cognition in its social context' in *European Review of Social Psychology*. Stroebe and Hewstone (eds), 31–61. London: Wiley.

Fiske, Susan T., and Shelley E. Taylor
1991   *Social cognition*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Gartman, David
2002   'Bourdieu's theory of cultural change: Explication, application, critique'. *Sociological Theory* 20: 255–277.

Giddens, Anthony
1984   *The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration*, 1st edn. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Gioia, Dennis A., and James B. Thomas
1996   'Identity, image, and issue interpretation: Sensemaking during strategic change in academia'. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 41: 370–403.

Gioia, Dennis A., James B. Thomas, Shawn M. Clark, and Kumar Chittipeddi
1994   'Symbolism and strategic change in academia: The dynamics of sensemaking and influence'. *Organization Science* 5: 363–383.

Glynn, Mary Ann, and Rikki Abzug
2002   'Institutionalizing identity: Symbolic isomorphism and organizational names'. *Academy of Management Journal* 45: 267–280.

Goffman, Erving
1974   *Frame analysis*. New York: Harper & Row.

Halliday, Michael A. K., and Christian M. I. M. Matthiessen
2004   *An introduction to functional grammar*, 3rd edn. Baltimore, MD: Hodder Arnold.

Hedstrom, Peter, and Richard Swedberg
1998   'Social mechanism: An introductory essay' in *Social mechanisms: an analytical approach to social theory*. R. Swedberg (ed.), 1–31. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Hoffman, Andrew J.
1999   'Institutional evolution and change: Environmentalism and the US chemical industry'. *Academy of Management Journal* 42: 351–371.

Hoffman, Andrew J., and William Ocasio
2001   'Not all events are attended equally: Toward a middle-range theory of industry attention to external events'. *Organization Science* 12: 414–434.

Jacoby, Sanford
2004   *Employing bureaucracy: Managers, unions and the transformation of work in the 20th century*, 2nd edn. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Jacoby, Sanford
2005   *The embedded corporation: Corporate governance and employment relations in Japan and the United States*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

James, William
1890   *The principles of psychology*. New York: Dover.

Jennings, P. Devereaux, and Royston Greenwood
2003   'Constructing the iron cage: Institutional theory and enactment' in *Debating organization: Point-counterpoint in organization studies*. Robert Westwood and Stewart R. Clegg (eds), 195–207. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Kahneman, Daniel
2003   'Maps of bounded rationality: A perspective on intuitive judgment and choice' in *Les Prix Nobel 2002*. T. Frängsmyr and B. Lundeberg (eds), 449–489. Stockholm: Almquist & Wiksell International.

Kelly, John, and Edmund Heery
1994   *Working for the union: British trade union officers*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Klein, Gary A.
1998   *Sources of power*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Lehman, D., C. Chiu and M. Schaller
2004   'Culture and psychology'. *Annual Review of Psychology* 55: 689–714.

Lounsbury, Michael, and Mary Ann Glynn
2001 'Cultural entrepreneurship: Stories, legitimacy, and the acquisition of resources'. *Strategic Management Journal* 22: 545–564.

Nicholson, Nigel
1995 'Enactment' in *Blackwell encyclopedic dictionary of organizational behavior*. Nicholson (ed.), 155–156. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.

Ocasio, William
1997 'Towards an attention-based view of the firm'. *Strategic Management Journal* 18: 187–206.

Phillips, Nelson, Thomas B. Lawrence, and Cynthia Hardy
2004 'Discourse and institutions'. *Academy of Management Journal* 29: 635–652.

Podolny, Joel M.
1993 'A status-based model of market competition'. *American Journal of Sociology* 98: 829–872.

Porac, Joseph F., and Jose Antonio Rosa
1996 'Rivalry, industry models, and the cognitive embeddedness of the comparable firm'. *Advances in Strategic Management* 13: 363–388.

Rafaeli, Anat, Jane Dutton, Celia Harquail, and Stephanie Mackie-Lewis
1997 'Navigating by attire: The use of dress by female administrative employees'. *Academy of Management Journal* 40: 9–45.

Rao, Hayagreeva, Pierre Monin, and Rudolphe Durand
2003 'Institutional change in Toque Ville: Nouvelle cuisine as an identity movement in French gastronomy'. *American Journal of Sociology* 108: 795–843.

Rousseau, Denise
1995 *Psychological contract in organizations: Understanding written and unwritten agreements*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Sahlins, Marshall D.
1981 *Historical metaphors and mythical realities*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Schütz, Alfred
1967[1932] *The phenomenology of the social world*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Scott, W. Richard
1995 *Institutions and organizations*, 1st edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Scott, W. Richard
2001 *Institutions and organizations*, 2nd edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Scott, W. Richard
2003 'Institutional carriers: Reviewing modes of transporting ideas over time and space and considering their consequences'. *Industrial and Corporate Change* 12: 879–894.

Seo, Myeong-Gu, and W. E. Douglas Creed
2002 'Institutional contradictions, praxis, and institutional change: A dialectic perspective'. *Academy of Management Review* 27: 222–247.

Sewell, William H.
1992 'A theory of structure: Duality, agency and transformation'. *American Journal of Sociology* 98: 1–29.

Snow, David A., and Robert D. Benford
1988 'Ideology, frame resonance, and participant mobilization'. *International Social Movement Research* 1: 197–217.

Suchman, Mark C.
1995 'Managing legitimacy: Strategic and institutional approaches'. *Academy of Management Review* 20: 571–610.

Suddaby, Roy, and Royston Greenwood
2005 'Rhetorical strategies of legitimacy'. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 50: 35–67.

Swidler, Ann
2001 *Talk of love: How culture matters*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Swidler, Ann
2002 'Cultural repertoires and cultural logics: Can they be reconciled?' *Comparative and Historical Sociology* 14: 1–6.

Taylor, J. R., and E. J. van Every
2000 *The emergent organization: Communication as its site and surface*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Thomas, James B., Shawn M. Clark, and Dennis A. Gioia
1993 'Strategic sensemaking and organizational performance: Linkages among scanning, interpretation, action and outcomes'. *Academy of Management Journal* 36: 239–270.

Weber, Klaus
2003   *Does globalization lead to convergence? The evolution of organizations' cultural repertoires in the biomedical industy.* Ann Arbor, MI: Dissertation, University of Michigan.

Weick, Karl E.
1985   'Sources of order in underorganized systems: Themes in recent organizational theory' in *Organizational theory and inquiry: The paradigm revolution.* Y. S. Lincoln (ed.). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Weick, Karl E.
1995   *Sensemaking in organizations.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Weick, Karl E., and Richard L. Daft
1983   'The effectiveness of organizational interpretation systems' in *Organizational effectiveness: A comparison of multiple models.* K. S. Cameron and D. A. Whetten (eds), 71–93. New York: Academic Press.

Weick, Karl E., Kathleen M. Sutcliffe, and David Obstfeld
2005   'Organizing and the process of sensemaking'. *Organization Science* 16: 409–421.

Westphal, James D., and Edward J. Zajac
2001   'Explaining institutional decoupling: The case of stock repurchase programs'. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 46: 202–228.

Wheeler, S. Christian, and Richard E. Petty
2001   'The effect of stereotype activation on behavior: A review of possible mechanisms'. *Psychological Bulletin* 127: 797–826.

White, Harrison C.
2000   'Modeling discourse in and around markets'. *Poetics* 27: 117–133.

Wiley, Norbert
1988   'The micro-macro problem in social theory'. *Sociological Theory* 6: 254–261.

Zucker, Lynne G.
1991   'The role of institutionalization in cultural persistence' in *The new institutionalism in organizational analysis.* Walter W. Powell and Paul J. DiMaggio (eds), 83–107. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Klaus Weber   Klaus Weber is an assistant professor in management and organizations at the J. K. Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University. He received his PhD in organization theory from the University of Michigan. His research concerns the role of sensemaking and cultural pragmatics in processes of organizing.
Address: Northwestern University, Management & Organizations, Kellogg School of Management, 2001 Sheridan Rd, Evanston, IL 60208–2001, USA.
Email: klausweber@northwestern.edu

Mary Ann Glynn   Mary Ann Glynn (PhD Columbia University) is professor of organization studies and the inaugural Fellow of the Winston Center for Leadership and Ethics at Boston College, and, by courtesy, professor of sociology. Her research focuses on the representation of meaning in organizations, cognition and culture, and leadership processes and dynamics in organizations. She has studied organizational naming practices over time, identity dynamics in organizations, and leadership and entrepreneurship in evolving organizations and markets.
Address: Boston College, Organization Studies, Carroll School of Management, 140 Commonwealth Avenue, Chestnut Hill, MA 02467–3808, USA.
Email: glynnmg@bc.edu