Organizational Populations and Fields

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Abstract

This essay examines two major perspectives on organizations that have been prominent since the 1970s: ecology and institutionalism, both of which emerged as reactions against rationalist approaches to the study of organizations. Both take as their primary units of analysis collections of organizations, rather than individual organizations: "populations" for ecologists (groups of organizations with the same form) and "fields" for institutionalists (groups of organizations of different forms that interact with each other in some social sector). Ecologists seek to explain the changing distribution of organizations (rates of founding, failure, growth, and change) in terms of the features of organizations' environments. Institutionalists seek to explain organizational legitimacy, variety, and change by reference to cultural norms, values, and expectations about what is the "right" or "normal" way to organize. While ecologists seek general explanations that apply to all populations, institutionalists seek explanations that are sensitive to the peculiarities of the field under study. Ecological and institutional studies of organizations have converged in the past decade, which has yielded studies that minimize the weaknesses of each perspective and maximize their strengths. Ecologists have examined many explanatory factors, such as pressures to imitate legitimate organizational forms, which were originally highlighted by institutionalists. In the same vein, institutionalists have turned their attention to founding and failure, outcomes that were ecologists' original focus, and have used factors such as the number of organizations, much studied by ecologists, to explain these outcomes. We conclude by suggesting potential fruitful avenues for further integration between these perspectives.

INTRODUCTION

This essay examines two major perspectives on organizations that have been prominent since the 1970s: ecology and institutionalism. Rooted primarily in sociology, scholars working in these two perspectives have often debated their strengths and weaknesses. But in recent years, many scholars have incorporated features of each perspective into their studies, which represents a fruitful trend in organizational scholarship. In this essay, we first situate

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the core tenets of ecology and institutionalism with respect to one another. We then summarize foundational research in each perspective and identify their strengths and weaknesses. Next, we discuss recent research that has extended each perspective and then describe work that has integrated them to maximize their strengths and minimize their weaknesses. We conclude with a discussion of key issues for future research, as well as important theoretical and methodological questions that will motivate future studies integrating ecology and institutionalism.

There are fundamental differences between the two perspectives. Perhaps the most obvious divide stems from the fact that ecologists investigate highly abstract models of how organizational populations evolve and focus on a narrow set of outcomes (organizations' vital rates), while institutionalists seek nuanced explanations that are sensitive to the specifics of time and place, and study a wider array of outcomes. This divergence stems from a profound difference in theoretical base: Organizational ecology focuses on demography (the numbers of organizations and their vital rates), while institutional analysis focuses on culture and its empirical manifestations (conceptual schemas, norms and values, rules and regulations, and structures and practices). And this divergence yields, by necessity, different relationships between theory and data: Ecological research seeks to test and extend formal models that have general applicability, while institutional research seeks to apply general theoretical principles to explain particular empirical phenomena.

Despite these differences, ecology and institutionalism have much in common. Both perspectives emerged as reactions against rationalist approaches to the study of organizations that focused on efficiency as the key explanatory variable. Both perspectives investigate many of the same phenomena—organizational form, legitimacy, homogeneity (or, conversely, heterogeneity), and change (or, conversely, stability). To explain these phenomena, both perspectives direct attention toward the external environment and away from internal functioning. Both perspectives take as their primary units of analysis collections of organizations, rather than individual organizations: "populations" for ecologists (groups of organizations with the same form) and "fields" for institutionalists (groups of organizations of different forms that interact with each other in some arena of social life). Finally, there has been some theoretical convergence in the past decade, as ecologists have begun to conceive of organizational populations and forms as cultural constructions and organizations' vital rates as determined by the cultural expectations of internal and external audiences. For their part, institutionalists have begun to use explanatory variables from ecological theory in their own analyses.

FOUNDATIONAL RESEARCH

Ecology

Some refer to organizational ecology as the demography of organizations and industries because it emphasizes demographic analysis of the distribution of populations and their vital rates; others call it the population ecology of organizations because it focuses on populations of organizations more than individual organizations. Whatever the label, scholars working within this perspective propose that organizations' positions in social and physical space determine opportunities for and constraints on their action (Carroll & Hannan, 2000; Hannan & Freeman, 1977). In other words, ecologists seek to understand the distribution of organizations across such important dimensions as age, size, location, and production technology. Introducing ecology, Michael Hannan and John Freeman (1977, p. 936) wondered, "Why are there so many kinds of organizations?" To answer this question, ecologists adapted Darwinian models of biological evolution and applied them to explain the evolution of organizational systems—that is, to explain rates of organizational founding, failure, growth, and change in terms of the material and cultural features of organizations' environments. A second, more purely sociological, progenitor of organizational ecology is human ecology, which involves the study of relationships between humans and their economic, social, and political organization.

Ecologists assume that understanding organizational diversity requires scholars to think about organizational populations as fundamental units of analysis. Populations are aggregates of organizations that share a common dependence on the environment and are instances of a single organizational form. Empirically, populations have been identified as sets of organizations that produce similar goods or services, use similar resources, and have similar identities. The populations studied by ecologists are diverse: they include breweries and wineries, labor unions, women's and minority rights movement organizations, automobile and bicycle manufacturers, banks, restaurants, insurance and telephone companies, art museums, day-care centers, baseball teams, radio stations, and newspaper publishers.

Ecologists argue that scholars should focus on change rather than stability in organizational populations; in particular, on what causes the array of organizations to become more or less diverse. The diversity of organizations increases when new organizational populations emerge and expand in size; it declines when existing populations decrease in size and become extinct. Thus, to understand how organizational diversity changes, ecologists study organizations' vital rates—rates of founding, failure, growth, and internal change.

Ecologists explain these vital rates in terms of selection rather than adaptation. Under selection, organizational populations change through the replacement of one kind of organization by another, while under adaptation, they change through the transformation of existing organizations. Thus, under selection, foundings and failures drive population change, while under adaptation, growth and internal organizational change drive population change.

Ecologists' focus on selection stems from the assumption that organizations are highly inert: Once founded, their structures and activities do not change much over time. Such inertia is assumed to be necessary for organizations to account for their performance to external observers such as government agencies and perform reliably for their customers. Ecologists do not assume that organizations never change—just that they change far less than many scholars assume—and when organizations do change, their members must learn to do new things and navigate new structures, and unlearn old activities and abandon old pathways through structures. All this learning and unlearning requires considerable resources to justify new activities and structures which must be done to overcome resistance to change. In turn, expending resources reduces organizational effectiveness and increases the likelihood of failure. To test this argument, many ecologists analyze the causes and consequences of organizational change. For example, most change in California thrifts (savings and loan associations) occurred through births of new types of thrifts and deaths of old ones, not through the transformation of old kinds of thrifts into new kinds. American radio stations resisted changing formats, but did so when they performed poorly and when competing stations had done so; however, format changes reduced stations' market share, especially for large and well-performing ones.

Other ecological studies analyze competitive (win/lose) and mutualistic (win/win) interactions between organizations in a single population or between multiple subpopulations defined by such things as market niche, size, and location. For example, the survival of American minor-league baseball teams was bolstered by being in a large league—but only up to a point, as mutualism among league members broke down in leagues with more than eight members. In contrast, baseball team survival was reduced by competition from teams in leagues outside their own. Similarly, Manhattan hotels competed most intensely against hotels of similar size: as the number of similarly sized hotels increased, hotels' failure rates increased. And French automobile manufacturers competed with other French firms but were legitimated by automobile manufacturers in other parts of Europe.

Institutionalism

Given its label, it is not surprising that central to this perspective are institutions: social facts, phenomena perceived by people as both external to themselves and coercive because they are backed by sanctions. Institutions develop over time, through real and superstitious learning, and they become both highly legitimate and highly stable. This makes institutions durable phenomena that do not require recurrent collective mobilization or authoritative intervention to persist.

To study the institutions that are embodied by and shape organizations, scholars working within this perspective focus on culture: they highlight the norms, values, and expectations that actors inside and outside the organization (employees, oversight agencies, financiers, suppliers, distributors, media, and customers) hold about what is the "right" or "normal" way to operate (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 2008). These are cultural, not just cognitive, phenomena because they are widely shared, although they may be contested and not universally accepted. According to institutionalists, cultural conventions, shared myths, and common schemas make collective action possible by defining the opportunities and constraints organizations face, thus determining organizations' structures and activities.

Institutionalists study organizational fields, which are diverse communities composed of organizations that engage in common activities and are subject to similar environmental pressures (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Fligstein and McAdam, 2012). Fields constitute recognized areas of social life, such as health care, education, and financial services; they include competitors, suppliers, customers, regulatory agencies, news media, and advisors. Fields develop through four stages: (i) interaction among organizations involved in some area of social life increases, (ii) hierarchies and coalitions develop, (iii) the amount of information with which field members must contend increases, and (iv) awareness among field members that they are involved in a common enterprise develops. Thus, institutionalists assume, fundamentally, that organizational fields and their constituent elements (organizations and their structures, policies, and practices) are socially constructed, products of social interactions that generate knowledge and belief systems and are shared by most (if not all) participants.

Legitimacy is a central concept in institutionalism. Organizations are more legitimate when they are more comprehensible and taken for granted as natural ways to achieve collective goals, when they are more completely justified and explained on the basis of prevailing cultural accounts, and when those involved have more difficulty conceiving of alternatives. Legitimacy can rest on regulations, including the laws and administrative guidelines that constitute the basic rules governing relationships within and between

organizations, norms such as "expert" sources of information and value judgments about the nature of organizations, and cognitions in the form of shared perceptions of the value of organized social activity. Legitimacy improves access to resources, including funding, employees, equipment and raw materials, and distribution; legitimacy also improves acceptance by customers, thus fueling product demand. For instance, California hospitals that mirrored the prevailing logic of health care (early on, professional dominance—doctors rule; later on, managed care—insurance companies rule) performed better than those that did not. Thus, conformity with institutional expectations, and the legitimacy that organizations derive, contributes to their ability to expand in numbers and facilitates their persistence. But such conformity may conflict with efficient functioning, so organizations try to limit the negative impact of conformity by decoupling what they say they are and do from what they actually are and do. For example, when the Roman Catholic Church in the United States faced a shortage of male priests, women began to preach, counsel parishioners, and serve communion—all activities that were, strictly speaking, the purview of the all-male priesthood.

Although institutionalism arose at the same time as ecology, its orientation is quite different. Rather than focusing on variety, institutionalists focus on similarity, as Paul DiMaggio and Woody Powell asked in their seminal paper: "Why is there such startling homogeneity in organizational structures and practices?" (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 148). To answer that question, institutionalists assess the level of isomorphism (literally, "same shape") among organizations in a field. They argue that as fields evolve, organizations in those fields that play the same role or are tied to each other become isomorphic; that is, they come to resemble one another. The connection to legitimacy is clear: The more an organizational structure, practice, or tactic diffuses across a field, the more legitimate it becomes. Organizations become isomorphic through three processes: mimetic, coercive, and normative. Mimetic isomorphism is, quite simply, the achievement of conformity through imitation. It can result from responses to uncertainty ("when in doubt, do what other organizations facing the same environment do") or from bandwagon effects ("if many organizations adopt a structure or practice, follow their lead"). For example, financial services firms imitated the actions of large and profitable firms. Similarly, hospitals adopted standardized (as opposed to customized) quality management programs when many other hospitals had done so. Coercive isomorphism stems from regulations, administrative guidelines, or mandates from powerful actors that authorize particular organizational structures and strategies and prohibit others; it can also stem from pressure imposed by resource dependencies. For instance, American cities were more likely to adopt civil service reforms when they were mandated by their state legislatures.

Finally, normative isomorphism involves pressures imposed by collective actors such as professional and trade associations, which create informal expectations, if not formal rules, about what organizations ought to be and do. For example, new alternative-energy producers in New York and California became more similar after industry associations began to spread information about "best practices."

Strengths and Weaknesses of these Perspectives on Organizations. Ecology has benefited greatly from being highly paradigmatic: Ecologists agree on what outcomes to study (founding, failure, growth, performance, and change), what explanatory factors to consider (the number of organizations of various forms defined by size, location, technology, and/or niche), and what analytical strategies to employ (quantitative analysis of data covering entire populations over long periods of time). And ecology is arguably the most logically rigorous perspective on organizations; indeed, it has benefited from several logical tests, which have shown inconsistencies and incoherencies in natural-language statements of theory and have paved the way for theoretical refinements. Finally, because ecologists have built on and refined each other's work, they have accumulated much knowledge. But these strengths reveal a critical weakness: Precisely because it is such a "normal-science" activity, some find it too narrow to interest anyone except ecologists themselves. Because much ecological research refines the basic theory without extending it in new directions, this perspective is at risk of becoming ever narrower and less influential.

The strength of the institutionalist perspective is its sweeping reach. Because institutionalization is both an outcome and a process, institutionalists study both stability and change. They have identified a wide array of mechanisms through which institutionalization occurs: habituation, limitedly-rational imitation, normative conformity, accreditation, social obligation, and coercion. In building theory, they have drawn not only on sociology but also on psychology, philosophy, and linguistics. Finally, they have used a wide array of methodologies: laboratory experiments, statistical analyses of survey and archival data, ethnographies, and qualitative historical studies. But these strengths have also created critical weaknesses. Institutionalism has not adequately accounted for power and inequality. Moreover, institutionalism consists of a loose collection of propositions, some seemingly incompatible and others only tenuously connected, which has made debates unproductive feuds about intellectual origins and definitions rather than substantive arguments about logic or evidence. Therefore, institutionalists have not built systematically on each other's work to the same extent that ecologists have, and so have not accumulated as much knowledge.

CUTTING-EDGE RESEARCH

ECOLOGY

Although they initially assumed that all organizations in a population were alike in that all organizations in a population faced the same environmental demands and had the same effects on other organizations, ecologists now recognize that the strategies and structures of organizations in a population may vary, as may their effects on other organizations. A vibrant stream of recent research has focused on differences between generalists, which serve a wide range of clients with a diverse array of products, and specialists, which serve a limited clientele with a narrower set of products. These differences emerge when there are economies of scale and resources are concentrated in a single rich center and spread thinly in the periphery; under these circumstances, the resource "space" becomes partitioned, with generalists occupying the center and specialists the periphery. Generalists compete on scale—the larger they become, the lower their costs. Specialists avoid direct scale-based competition with generalists by serving market segments that are too small to be exploited profitably by generalists. For example, specialist American newspapers proliferated when general-interest newspapers consolidated, as did specialist American wineries when mass-producer wineries merged, both by serving the particular needs of markets that were too small for generalists to serve profitably. Similarly, specialist audit firms in Holland thrived by focusing on a particular customer segment with changing needs and tailoring products to it.

Another fruitful line of recent ecological research has used concepts and methods from network analysis to explain organizations' vital rates. This work has required conceiving of organizations as being connected by webs of resource overlaps, rather than as independent entities. For example, semiconductor firms' niches (the scientific knowledge on which they build products) were defined in terms of their position in the web of citations among scientific papers; the closer firms were in these networks, the more intensely they competed and the more they reduced each other's survival chances. A more complex case is that of New York garment manufacturers: Those that maintained strong (ongoing and exclusive) relations with contractors had better survival chances than those that maintained weak (arms' length) relations because strong relationships made it easier to forecast demand, which in turn improved manufacturers' ability to match production schedules with those of their contractors.

Institutionalism. Institutionalists have come to recognize that organizations do not just react to environmental demands—they are often proactive and try to control their environments. Accordingly, they now place conformity

on a continuum of responses that includes compromise, avoidance, defiance, and manipulation. Continuing to emphasize culture, this newer research often examines rhetorical strategies to capture these responses to environmental demands. For example, when the Canadian accounting profession was framed as being under threat, a few elite firms successfully presented the expansion of accountants' professional scope as a "natural" solution to evolving client demands through appeals that emphasized the consistency of the proposed new activities with long-held professional values. Similarly, after several widely publicized events reduced its legitimacy, the California beef industry strategically used verbal accounts to repair the damage; accounts acknowledging responsibility were more effective than those denying it.

Strategic action is especially obvious in fields where people are trying to create new kinds of organizations. Such "institutional entrepreneurship" requires the skillful use of social resources to overcome skepticism and persuade others to believe entrepreneurs' representations of social reality and support their new ventures. For example, American art historians and their wealthy patrons cooperated in the late nineteenth century to develop art museums as a distinct form of organization; they succeeded in creating a framework that distinguished vulgar art from high art. Research has shown that even individuals and groups that were marginalized and have little power—such as American women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—could develop new and powerful kinds of organizations; these ventures were successful to the extent they embodied familiar structures and practices.

At the level of the organizational field, recent studies have moved beyond what was originally a very structural view of fields and have shown how fields are structured by meaning systems. For instance, the field of corporate finance was fundamentally restructured by the development of new mathematical models that allowed financial services firms to expand their activities and gain power *vis-à-vis* their clients through selling complex derivative securities. Recent scholarship has also shown that fields are often characterized not by single coherent schemas but often by multiple, sometimes competing, logics. For example, in the field of medical education, two competing logics—science and care—have waxed and waned throughout the twentieth century. Finally, similar to ecologists, institutionalists have adapted concepts and tools of network analysis to bring the issue of power and inequality into their work. For instance, when American and French bankers had social (not just business) relations with clients, they offered lower interest rates on loans because the former promoted sharing of private information and increased trust.

Integrating the Perspectives. To maximize the strengths and minimize the weaknesses of the ecological and institutional approaches, some researchers have combined them. Recall that ecologists originally defined populations as groups of organizations that depend on the same resources and identified them empirically through observation of their inputs and outputs. In contrast, institutionalists originally classified organizations according to the cultural schemas they embodied—the shared beliefs and values on which they were based. The sharp distinction between resource flows and cultural underpinnings is disappearing, however, as ecologists have come to conceive of organizational forms as identities evaluated by internal and external audiences, which is much closer to the conception of form used by institutionalists. For instance, American microbreweries were able to defend their turf against mass-producer breweries by closely connecting their identities to the values held dear by their core customers—people who loved "craft" beer and shunned "factory" beer. And American film companies, whose films targeted multiple genres (such as science fiction, comedy, and Western) attracted larger audiences but were less appealing to those audiences than those marketed in a single genre. Audiences' perceptions of a film's fit with targeted genres drove this trade-off: multigenre films were more difficult for audiences to make sense of.

Ecologists have also considered many determinants of organizational founding and failure, such as isomorphic pressures, that were originally highlighted by institutionalists. For example, a study of change and inertia among California thrifts found that these firms were more likely to enter new markets when large and profitable firms were active there—they overcame inertia by "following the leader." For their part, institutionalists have turned their attention to founding and failure, outcomes that were ecologists' original focus, and have used factors such as the number of organizations, much studied by ecologists, to explain these outcomes. For instance, founding rates of Finnish newspapers depended on both the number of newspapers in print and rising nationalist sentiments. And the impact of the number of existing railroads on founding rates of new American railroads varied across periods defined by government regulation. Similarly, differences in state regulation of alcohol shaped the geographic distribution of the founding and failure of American breweries.

KEY ISSUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Further integration of ecological and institutional research on organizations will require both ecologists and institutionalists to move in new directions. One potentially productive direction that scholars in both camps could take involves shifting the level of analysis up to study entire organizational fields

or communities. For ecologists, this would entail studying communities composed of multiple populations that interact in some region, rather than a single population and/or its subpopulations. For institutionalists, this would require studying fields as a whole, rather than groups of organizations within fields.

Shifting the level of analysis up would be a novel move for both ecologists and institutionalists. There have been very few recent ecological studies of the properties of communities, except by the few urban sociologists who study formal organizations in big-city neighborhoods. They have shown, for example, that poor neighborhoods in American cities tend to contain more organizations than rich ones, but that this is more likely for neighborhoods that are home to immigrants than those that are home to blacks. Differences in organizational density across communities composed of different racial/ethnic groups may explain why ethnic enclaves, neighborhoods where immigrants congregate, are prolific producers of new enterprises. Similarly, the vast majority of institutional studies have tested organization-level hypotheses, and very few have tested any field-level hypotheses—even though DiMaggio and Powell's foundational paper, written in 1983, proposed a slew of field-level hypotheses. One exception is a study of the independent power field in California and New York, which found that state financial support, a supportive court ruling, and positive media coverage of the field all increased the diversity of entrants while the establishment of a trade association reduced diversity.

Shifting the level of analysis up would bring scholars in the two camps closer together because communities of organizational populations are similar to organizational fields in all but one respect: community boundaries are defined by geography, field boundaries by interaction within some arena of social life. But a more careful view of these two constructs reveals that this difference is inconsequential. Although modern transportation and communication systems have reduced spatial barriers to interaction, people and organizations remain situated in distinct places characterized by local laws and cultures, site-specific resource constraints, and localized information flows. As a result, organizational fields tend to be bounded in space just like organizational communities. Moreover, the different populations in an organizational community will interact to the extent that their activities overlap in some social arena. Thus, for all intents and purposes, communities and fields are identical; recognizing this, we use them interchangeably in the rest of this essay.

Shifting the level of analysis up—studying entire fields rather than groups of organizations within fields and communities rather than single populations—would require much more data. Although in the past that may have been a formidable barrier, such data are becoming increasingly

accessible through the Internet. For example, organizational scholars could study the entire field of educational organizations in the United States or another industrialized country. In the United States, they could use data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, http://nces.ed.gov/), which range from preschool institutions to graduate and professional schools. Within the subfield of higher education, organizational scholars could take a cue from some sociological studies of the professions and trace the rise and fall of individual disciplines over time, as well as relations between them. They could also link NCES data on higher education (the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, or IPEDS) with data on prestige rankings of educational institutions and college sports team standings and titles, which would allow them to pinpoint the positions of various members of this subfield. Within the subcommunity of primary and secondary educational organizations, scholars could trace how the boundaries of school districts have shifted, and the impact of such shifts on school enrollment levels, funding, teacher characteristics, student demography, and student achievement. They could also examine relationships between regular public, charter public, secular private, and religious private schools.

Thinking more macroscopically, beyond a single nation, scholars could use existing data on from the Correlates of War databases (http://www.correlatesofwar.org/), which detail all wars fought between 1816 and 2007. They could assess interactions among states as actors in a worldwide community of nations by analyzing inter- and intrastate conflicts; whether the combatants were states or other groups; which states were involved; the duration of the conflict; the geographic location and scope of conflict; whether there was a winner or the conflict ended in stalemate; if there was a winner, who won and who lost; whether the conflict was ended by a treaty and if so, who signed the treaty, and so on.

The outcomes of such macroscopic analyses would be very different from the outcomes of current institutionalist, ecological, and hybrid research. Ecological work on organizational communities might highlight the rise and fall of various interdependent organizational populations (what bioecologists call population succession) or the shifting diversity of organizations in the community. Institutionalist studies of fields might study the similarity of organizations in the focal field—the flip side of ecological analysis of organizational diversity. Institutionalists might also trace the rise and fall of institutional logics, which could be framed as the cultural analog to the rise and fall of organizational populations studied by ecologists.

Such macroscopic analyses could also assess the positions held and roles played by different types of organizations, and see how those positions and roles have changed in response to internal or external forces. For example, a

study of the financial services field, which includes financial services firms, regulatory agencies, and retail and commercial customers, might trace the falling prominence of commercial banks and the rise of investment banks and privately held investment firms (private equity firms and hedge funds). Such a study might assess the impact of prominence in the field on profits or other performance measures. Similarly, a study of higher education in the United States might assess the consequences of declining state support for public education and the rise of for-profit colleges and universities.

Finally, we note that studying organizational diversity in communities and similarity in fields will require scholars to grapple with interorganizational power structures and stratification processes, which will be necessary to delineate community and field cores and peripheries. One possible consequence of attending to power and stratification processes more closely is an incorporation of ideas about how community and field structures affect entire nation-states or stratify substate regions. For example, a study of shifts in the field of higher education in the United States might also shed light on how attractive different regions are to "knowledge" industries, such as high-technology research and manufacturing firms or professional service firms. Such a study might also explain regional differences in socioeconomic stratification.

CONCLUSION

Although organizational ecology and institutionalism have both shown us important things about organizations, their full potential has by no means been realized yet. Working more closely together, ecologists and institutionalists could continue to develop even more useful insights.

Ecologists and institutionalists are not the only scholars studying organizations. Many scholars outside sociology—most notably, strategy researchers, industrial-organization economists, and social psychologists—also often study organizations. All of these outside research traditions are highly rationalist compared to the two sociology-based perspectives discussed here. When scholars in these outside traditions study organizations, they usually focus on assessing and improving organizational performance. Both institutionalists and ecologists care deeply about theory, methodological rigor, and building an understanding of organizations that goes beyond a narrow focus on optimizing performance. Because institutionalism and ecology arose as antidotes to rationalism within the sociological study of organizations, they might very well be seen as allies within the multidisciplinary study of organizations. As such, scholars in both traditions should continue to forge alliances and expand their knowledge of organizations, both within the discipline of sociology and across disciplines.

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