Using the SCRIPTS Framework to Map Diverse Organizational Theory Post-prints

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Abstract

Organizational theory exhibits diverse developmental trajectories, and different theoretical orientations currently lack systematic integration. To address this dilemma, this paper categorizes existing theories into seven perspectives that encompass systematic explorations of both intra-organizational mechanisms and external environments, constructing a "SCRIPTS" framework: Structure, Culture, Relations, Institutions, Professions, Transformation, and Social Conflict. Specifically, Structure focuses on bureaucratic systems, management mechanisms, routines, and decision-making processes; Culture concentrates on value sharing, identity, organizational climate, and meaning construction; Relations addresses the operational mechanisms of interpersonal and interorganizational networks; Institutions analyzes macro-level transformations in institutional fields and isomorphic mechanisms, while examining micro-level practices of institutional entrepreneurship and embedded institutions; Professions encompasses the psychological motivations that regulate individual behavior, as well as the social structures that normatively organize professional practices; Transformation focuses on episodic change and incremental evolution at both organizational and societal levels; and Social Conflict attends to power relations and competitive logics, emphasizing issues of gendering, racialization, and global inequality. By classifying these theoretical perspectives, this paper clarifies their respective foci on the internal and external domains of organizations, thereby highlighting their theoretical significance and practical value in organizational research and application.

Full Text

Preamble

Mapping Diverse Organizational Theories with the SCRIPTS Framework

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This is a Chinese translation of the Sociology Compass article, "Mapping Organizational Theory with SCRIPTS" by Jose Eos Trinidad. It was translated by Jin Zhijie (PhD candidate, East China Normal University, Faculty of Education), Zhang Hong (PhD candidate, East China Normal University, Faculty of Education), and Liang Wanya (PhD candidate, Zhejiang University, Faculty of Education), all currently joint PhD students at UC Berkeley under the supervision of Professor Jose Eos Trinidad.

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Abstract

Organizational theory encompasses diverse intellectual traditions that have yet to be systematically integrated. In response to this challenge, this paper synthesizes existing theories into seven perspectives that systematically examine both internal organizational mechanisms and external environments, constructing the "SCRIPTS" framework: Structure, Culture, Relations, Institutions, Professions, Transformation, and Social Conflict. "Structure"focuses on bureaucratic systems, management mechanisms, routines, and decision-making processes. "Culture" examines shared values, identity, organizational climate, and meaning-making. "Relations" addresses the operational mechanisms of interpersonal and interorganizational networks. "Institutions" analyzes macro-level changes in institutional fields and isomorphic mechanisms, while also examining micro-level practices of institutional entrepreneurship and inhabited institutions. "Professions" encompasses the psychological drivers that regulate individual behavior and the social structures that govern how occupations are organized. "Transformation" focuses on episodic and incremental change at both organizational and societal levels. "Social Conflict" attends to power relations and competitive logics, emphasizing issues of gendering, racialization, and global inequality. By categorizing relevant theoretical perspectives and clarifying their focus on internal and external organizational domains, this paper highlights their theoretical significance and applied value for organizational research and practice.

Keywords: network theory; new institutionalism; organizational change; organizational culture; organizational psychology; organizational theory; relational inequality

1. Introduction

Scholars in sociology, management, public policy, education, healthcare, and social movements frequently draw upon organizational theory to understand the complex organizations they study and seek to improve (Bidwell, 1965; Fligstein 2021; Haveman, 2022; McAdam, 2017). Organizational theory encompasses multiple theoretical orientations that have long exhibited diversified development without systematic integration. Although its origins can be traced to three perspectives focusing on internal organizational dynamics—bureaucracy, management science, and economic theories of the firm—Fligstein (2021) notes that these approaches gradually converged in the 1960s into a "rational adaptation" perspective centered on the co-constitutive relationship between organizations and environments. However, since the 1970s, this orientation has been challenged by emerging theories emphasizing environmental power, represented by network analysis, population ecology, resource dependence theory, and institutional theory. Haveman (2022) recently grouped these theories into three categories—demographic, relational, and cultural-cognitive perspectives. This paper builds upon this foundation by further unpacking the theoretical schools that have been compressed within existing classifications, proposing seven organizational theory perspectives and the key concepts they encompass to reveal the internal and external dynamics these perspectives address.

This paper introduces an analytical framework called "SCRIPTS," encompassing seven organizational theory perspectives: Structure, Culture, Relations, Institutions, Professions, Transformation, and Social Conflict. presents this classification framework. The framework includes theories that understand internal organizational operations as well as those analyzing interactions between organizations and external others (such as other organizations or institutional environments). The first two perspectives primarily focus on internal mechanisms, while the remaining five address both internal and external dynamics. This paper aims to: (1) map various theoretical perspectives in organizational studies; (2) unpack the internal and external organizational dynamics embedded in these perspectives; and (3) elucidate the theoretical value and applied potential of these perspectives and related theories for organizational researchers and practitioners.

This paper attempts to map multiple research orientations within organizational theory within limited space, and thus offers three clarifications. First, it emphasizes presenting core concepts across various organizational theories rather than deeply analyzing any particular theoretical system. The selected theories derive from an analysis of twenty randomly sampled "organizational theory" syllabi from diverse disciplinary backgrounds and pedagogical contexts, from which the author identified recurrent and relevant core themes (see Appendix A). Second, to encompass broader theoretical perspectives and conceptual frameworks for readers to apply in research design and organizational case analysis, this paper intentionally minimizes empirical examples. Readers are thus encouraged to apply relevant theories in conjunction with their own research contexts and empirical materials. Third, although this paper delineates seven relatively independent analytical perspectives, core concepts across these perspectives are highly intersecting, and their boundaries are not fixed but rather permeable. For instance, some concepts may be applicable to multiple perspectives but are discussed in only one. Despite these limitations, this paper strives to provide a systematic introductory framework for organizational theory research by categorizing relevant theories, extracting key concepts, and clarifying their applicable domains (e.g., internal or external to organizations). The conclusion summarizes these conceptual systems and explores how to effectively apply them in specific research.

2. Structure

Organizational structure constitutes a foundational element of organizational operation, helping coordinate activities, allocate responsibilities, and achieve collective goals (Mintzberg, 1989). This system comprises formal task divisions and power relations that support organizational coordination and control, representing a functional response to organizational needs (Chandler, 1969). Structural arrangements such as hierarchical systems, division of labor, operating procedures, physical structures, and technological configurations may all influence organizational performance, innovation capacity, and environmental adaptation (Meijaard et al, 2005). This section focuses on the theoretical origins of this perspective in the "bureaucracy and scientific management tradition," the routines and incentive mechanisms it encompasses, and its attention to interactions between organizations and external environments.

Research on organizational structure can be traced to early classical theoretical paths focusing on internal organizational operations (Fligstein, 2021). First, Weber (1978) identified the efficacy of bureaucracy in enhancing administrative precision, eliminating ambiguity, strengthening accountability, ensuring legitimacy, and reducing administrative friction. Under this rational system, organizations establish bureaucratic structures characterized by clear power hierarchies, institutional continuity through written documentation, provision of specialized technical training, and implementation of recruitment and promotion through impersonal rules. A second path focuses on how structure serves efficiency and productivity. Taylor' s (1911) scientific management theory emphasizes achieving consistency, predictability, and high efficiency through strict division of labor, task standardization, and enhanced managerial control. In this theory, organizational structure is viewed as a managerial tool for understanding and facilitating optimal organizational operation. Although classic research typically focused on rational systems and efficiency-oriented strategies, subsequent scholars have also attended to potential unintended consequences and unanticipated effects of organizational structure, noting that structure does not always function as originally intended (Merton, 1936).

Building on this tradition of attending to structural consequences, contemporary scholars often focus on internal organizational structures such as routines and reward mechanisms. Routines are recurring and recognizable patterns of action that guide organizational stability, change, problem-solving, and innovation (Feldman et al, 2019). Routines related to recruitment, evaluation, quality control, meetings, internal communication, training, and customer feedback play important roles in achieving organizational goals (Howard-Grenville et al., 2016). Many of these routines later become formally institutionalized or were originally established according to formal rules (Oliveira & Quinn, 2015). In such research, scholars often examine how rules and routines become embedded in organizations and evolve over time while producing effects that: (1) facilitate organizational coordination and control; (2) reduce information processing or decision-making burdens; (3) enhance organizational stability; and (4) build organizational memory (Becker, 2004; Rerup & Feldman, 2011).

Another important organizational structure is reward mechanisms, often implemented through various quantitative forms. The use of "numbers" in evaluation, ranking, scoring, and incentive systems can alter how individuals respond to internal organizational rules and how organizations adjust their behavior based on external metrics. For example, organizations often guide personnel behavior through established evaluation and incentive structures (Ranganathan & Benson, 2020); similarly, organizations adjust their structures, behaviors, and decisions in response to externally conferred material or symbolic rewards such as university rankings (Espeland & Sauder, 2016). Reward mechanisms for individuals within organizations and incentive systems for organizations themselves can manifest as accountability systems, ranking systems, rating mechanisms, algorithmic decision-making, and other quantified forms (Burrell & Fourcade, 2021; Espeland & Stevens, 2008). Such structural arrangements for rewarding and punishing individuals within organizations and organizations themselves may not only affect organizational performance, induce behavioral change, and shape organizational culture, but like other structural mechanisms, may also produce unintended consequences that further exacerbate inequality and efficiency losses (Espeland & Sauder, 2016; O' Neil, 2016).

Internal organizational structures are influenced by external environments, and organizational decisions are shaped by multiple factors. Although organizational structures can be transplanted across contexts, "contingency theory" posits that organizational effectiveness depends on the fit between structure and "contingency factors reflecting the organization's specific context," including environment, size, and strategy (Donaldson 2001, 1-2). Consequently, organizational structures often depend on particular needs and strategic arrangements (Chandler, 1969). In contrast to approaches focusing on external contingency factors, other scholars emphasize how internal politics, discretionary authority, and decision-making processes shape organizational structure (Perrow, 1986). Bounded rationality theory suggests that firms often make decisions under constraints such as incomplete information. In this context, decision-makers typically adopt a "satisficing" strategy, not choosing optimal solutions but rather selecting a sufficiently satisfactory or "acceptable" solution path (March & Simon, 1993). Building on bounded rationality theory, Cohen et al. (1972) proposed the "garbage can model," which views decision-making processes in organizations as a disorderly, chaotic process where "decision alternatives are looking for problems, solutions are looking for issues to which they might be applied, and decision-makers are looking for something to do." Together, these theories suggest that organizational structure is not always the product of rational design but rather evolves gradually under the dual influence of external environmental constraints and individual decision-making behavior.

Building on the perspective that organizational structure is influenced by environment and uncertainty, transaction cost economics (TCE) provides a structural analytical framework for understanding how organizations respond to ambiguity and cost pressures. Transaction costs refer to negotiation, enforcement, and compliance-related expenses incurred in market exchange processes (Williamson, 1981). This theory abandons assumptions of complete rationality or optimal efficiency, emphasizing that firms achieve economization of transaction costs by constructing organizational boundaries—that is, by choosing between market transactions and internal hierarchies. Consequently, organizations may choose to outsource certain functions or vertically integrate depending on which approach minimizes costs and reduces uncertainty risks (Ketokivi & Mahoney, 2020). From this perspective, the formation of internal structure stems not only from matching environmental contingency factors or bounded rationality constraints but also from strategic managerial efforts to coordinate economic activity costs.

3. Culture

Organizational culture refers to a "shared orientation toward social reality" among organizational members, manifested in shared symbols, norms, values, and material forms (Alvesson, 2011). Organizations may express culture through explicit articulation of corporate values or implicitly convey cultural meaning through shared practices among members. However, culture does not imply that organizational members possess uniform ways of thinking or share identical beliefs; rather, it should be understood as a set of practical and meaning resources that people draw upon when navigating social interactions and specific contexts (Swidler, 1986). Applied to organizational research, members do not merely passively internalize organizational "shared values" but rather draw from diverse cultural elements to guide specific actions. Research adopting this perspective typically focuses on concepts including: the influence of organizational culture and climate on behavior, processes of organizational identity construction, socialization mechanisms aimed at cultural change, and individual meaning-making activities.

Organizational culture shapes organizational performance, stability, innovation, and change (Patterson, 2014). Research indicates that when most members within an organization share common norms and values, culture helps enhance organizational performance and productivity (Shahzad et al, 2012). Cultural elements such as norms and schemas directly affect employee effort and specific behaviors, which are key drivers of organizational productivity (Martinez et al, 2015). Additionally, culture can serve as a stabilizing force in organizations by establishing shared expectations that reduce uncertainty in daily interactions. Organizational performance is also influenced by national cultural differences, such as members'cultural orientations in communication styles, leadership styles, conflict resolution strategies, and group interaction preferences (Taras et al, 2011).

A concept closely related to organizational culture is organizational climate, which refers to organizational members' shared perceptions of the work environment that affect individual well-being and performance (Glisson, 2015). Survey measurements of employees' work environment perceptions, engagement, satisfaction, and sense of security reveal that positive organizational climate is significantly correlated with higher customer satisfaction, better financial performance, and fewer workplace accidents (Schneider et al, 2013). In summary, internal organizational culture types and climate characteristics exert important influences on various organizational outcomes.

Culture affects organizational performance through two core mechanisms: first, through integration that constructs organizational members' shared identity, and second, through control functions that regulate individual behavior and action patterns (Ouchi & Wilkins, 1985). Organizational identity represents both members' self-definition internally and the image constructed for external others (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). It encompasses a set of core values that guide organizational strategy, structure, and decision-making. Organizational identity is often considered to consist of core, enduring, and distinctive characteristics, though scholarly debate persists regarding whether identity is long-term stable or dynamically changing (Gioia et al, 2013). In some contexts, organizational identity is synonymous with "brand," encompassing corporate logos, official histories, visual elements, emotional tones, and meanings ascribed by the public to the organization or its products (He & Brown, 2013). However, organizational identity may not always possess distinctive uniqueness but may instead manifest as more generalized social identities, such as organizational associations with religion, politics, race, gender, and LGBTQIA+ issues (Ressler et al, 2024). Organizational identity is important because it guides behavior and decision-making, shapes organizational reputation, demonstrates developmental continuity, and builds shared purpose.

Given the critical importance of organizational culture, climate, and identity for organizational functioning, organizational leaders are typically assigned the role of "culture shapers," and scholars have paid considerable attention to the phenomenon of "intentional culture change" (Schein, 2010). Although leaders and managers are primarily responsible for rational aspects such as technology and structure, they simultaneously construct culture by creating organizational symbols, language systems, ritual arrangements, and other "expressive components of organizational life" (Pettigrew, 1979:574). Consequently, leaders can influence organizational culture by establishing regular rituals, setting behavioral norms, and formulating shared goals. However, beyond managerial leadership, the socialization process of organizational members also plays a key role in cultural construction. Employees gradually assimilate into organizational culture through onboarding, interactions with others, and exposure to internal organizational subcultures (Kramer & Dailey, 2019). Notably, organizations may also experience cultural change due to sudden external pressures, institutional mergers, leadership transitions, policy changes, or structural adjustments (Appelbaum et al, 2017). Such culture change triggered by structural shifts further reveals the dynamic interaction between organizational structure and culture.

Although this paper primarily focuses on the shared aspects of culture, culture is also characterized by individual interpretation and embodiment (Patterson, 2014). "Sensemaking" refers to the process through which individuals develop viewpoints for explaining and rationalizing their own actions during activity; it is considered "the primary site where meaning is generated, which both enables and constrains identity and action" (Weick et al., 2005: 409). In the interaction between action and interpretation, individuals typically contextualize their experiences by drawing upon conceptual frameworks that are familiar or previously encountered (Holt & Cornelissen, 2014). Organizations and leaders can guide members' sensemaking processes by controlling access to ideas, participating in collective meaning negotiation, and creating conditions for collective learning (Coburn, 2005).

4. Relations

The relational or network perspective examines how connections or interactions among individuals and organizations influence their behavior, decisions, performance, and outcomes. This perspective emphasizes the effects of interpersonal networks on individuals and organizations, and how interorganizational networks affect different levels of broader ecosystems. The core of the relational perspective lies in the visual representation of social networks—using nodes to represent individuals or organizations and ties to represent relationships or interactions between nodes (Borgatti et al., 2009). Sociocentric analysis can focus on overall network structure or on ties surrounding specific nodes (called egocentric analysis) (Chung et al., 2005). By mapping these networks and ties, one can identify central actors in key positions within the network, cliques showing tightly connected groups, isolates lacking connections to other nodes, and bottlenecks controlling information flow (Woodland et al., 2014). The positional characteristics of nodes or overall network structure may significantly influence individual and organizational behavior and outcomes.

At the individual interaction level, social capital refers to resources and benefits individuals obtain from social relations and networks (Bourdieu, 2011; Coleman, 1988). Different theorists define it with varying emphases: Bourdieu (2011) understands it as network resources influencing social stratification and inequality; Coleman (1988) focuses on community trust, norms, and obligations that facilitate collective goals; Putnam (2000) emphasizes community cohesion that promotes civic participation; while Burt (2000) adopts an individualistic perspective, viewing it as advantages people gain by bridging groups. Depending on definitional orientation, social capital may promote cooperation, enhance productivity, and facilitate collective action, or it may exacerbate inequality.

One way to understand the concept of social capital is to distinguish among "bonding," "bridging," and "linking" social capital. In highly homogeneous groups or communities, bonding ties can promote trust, normative support, and internal mutual assistance, but may also lead to groupthink and external exclusion (Pillai et al., 2017; Putnam, 2000). Bridging ties that connect different groups and transmit heterogeneous information can help stimulate creativity, drive innovation, and promote career success, but may also foster corruption and exploitation (Burt, 2004; Stovel & Shaw, 2012). Linking ties refer to connections between individuals at different levels of social or political hierarchies, which can bring benefits to disadvantaged groups but easily devolve into cronyism or clientelism (Claridge, 2018). Additionally, ties between individuals can be distinguished as strong or weak based on intimacy, interaction frequency, and emotional intensity, with each type yielding different specific benefits (Granovetter, 1973).

At the organizational interaction level, scholars also examine network relationships between different organizations. Resource dependence theory explains how organizations depend on other organizations such as suppliers, clients, funding agencies, and regulatory bodies (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Organizations controlling key resources often possess greater power advantages, so other organizations employ strategic initiatives such as building alliances, implementing mergers, conducting lobbying, and diversifying supply chains to reduce dependency (Hillman et al., 2009). Although power dynamics play a key role in interorganizational network construction, such networks can also generate positive benefits when participants engage in reciprocal support actions (for example, biotechnology R&D alliances that promote innovative learning) (Powell et al., 1996). Interorganizational interactions typically present two forms: cooperating to achieve common goals (Pouwels & Koster, 2017), or competing to obtain resources, legitimacy, and market dominance (Arora-Jonsson et al., 2020). Recent research also explores the role and positive effects of "coopetition" —where organizations cooperate in specific domains while competing in others (Bouncken et al., 2015; Xie et al., 2023). While existing research has focused on the outcome effects of interorganizational networks, some scholars also examine the formation mechanisms of network governance: governance models of interorganizational networks dominated by member organizations, lead organizations, or network administrators (Provan & Kenis, 2007). Thus, the relational perspective integrates understanding of both intra-organizational actor networks and cross-organizational networks while deepening comprehension of their internal mechanisms.

5. Institutions

Organizations not only possess their own structures, cultures, and networks but are also embedded in more macro-level institutional systems—those normative arrangements that shape and constrain behavior (Glynn & D' Aunno, 2022). Institutional systems include both formal institutions such as laws, government agencies, and educational systems, and informal institutions such as cultural traditions and social expectations. According to new institutional theory, organizations obtain legitimacy essential for their survival by conforming to institutionalized rules (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). In some contexts, organizational actions appear efficiency-driven, such as data-based decision-making, but may involve "loose coupling" where formal structures and actual practices are weakly linked (Orton & Weick, 1990). This "loose coupling" phenomenon means that organizational structures function "ritualistically" to some extent, creating a "logic of confidence" that the organization follows institutional norms (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Thus, the core value of institutional theory lies not in explaining individual or organizational performance but in explaining why organizational fields exhibit homogeneity or undergo change. While the theory originally focused on macro-level dynamics and isomorphism in interorganizational fields, it has recently expanded its analytical dimensions through microfoundational research on institutional entrepreneurship, institutional logics, and inhabited institutions (Powell & Colyvas, 2008).

An organizational field consists of a set of organizations that interact based on shared norms and common activity domains, such as the education field or healthcare field (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012). Organizations within a field often gradually develop similar characteristics, a phenomenon theorists call isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Isomorphism manifests in three types: coercive isomorphism, where organizations conform to norms due to external pressures such as government regulations and funding requirements; mimetic isomorphism, where organizations imitate others due to environmental uncertainty or conformity effects; and normative isomorphism, driven by professional standards established by professional associations or industry networks (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Imitation of more successful organizations is considered a key pathway for organizations to respond to social expectations (Boxenbaum & Jonsson, 2017). As convergence deepens, these structures become taken-for-granted and resistant to change—in other words, they become institutionalized.

However, institutional theory not only attends to macro-level dynamics such as stability and isomorphism but also provides theoretical tools for examining micro-level changes within organizations or institutions. In particular, "institutional entrepreneurship" focuses on individuals and organizations that overcome pressures for stasis, mobilize resources, and create new institutions or transform existing ones (Battilana, 2006; DiMaggio, 1988). Organizational researchers note that institutional entrepreneurship is crucial for promoting new organizational forms. A multi-level perspective emphasizes that institutional entrepreneurs can identify change opportunities at the micro level, design new organizational forms at the meso level, and legitimate new forms by connecting them with macro-level discourses (Tracey et al., 2011; Trinidad, 2025). Additionally, existing research distinguishes between the "visible work" and "invisible work" of institutional entrepreneurship: the former is crucial for driving symbolic change, while the latter plays a central role in recruiting allies, experimenting with practices, strategic coordination, and constructing political pressure (Canales, 2016). Whatever the form, institutional entrepreneurs share the characteristic of breaking existing institutional rules and attempting to institutionalize alternative rules, practices, and norms (Garud et al., 2007).

Institutional change often occurs through the convergence, conflict, or hybridization of different elements. Institutional logic, as a core element of organizations, refers to the system of norms, practices, and beliefs that guide behavior within specific institutions (Haveman & Gualtieri, 2017). Within organizations, multiple competing logics may coexist—for example, a medical logic emphasizing patient care coexisting with a business logic emphasizing cost-effectiveness (Styhre et al., 2016). At the societal level, individual behavior often follows logics matched to specific institutions such as the state, market, family, religion, or community (Thornton et al., 2012). These logics typically influence not only social behavior patterns but also guide organizational decision-making; for example, universities may negotiate between an academic logic (emphasizing knowledge inquiry) and a market logic (emphasizing knowledge commercialization) (Berman, 2012). Moreover, interaction and competition between different institutional logics may generate new hybrid structures, trigger organizational change, and cause "loose coupling" between policies and practices (Pache & Santos, 2013). Recent research also proposes the concept of inhabited institutions, emphasizing that individuals in organizations and institutions are not passive rule-followers but actively influence organizational and institutional change through interpretation, shaping, and practice (Hallett & Hawbaker, 2021).

6. Professions

While structural, cultural, relational, and institutional perspectives often center their research on organizations and their environments, the professions perspective highlights the "individuals" who constitute organizations. Although this perspective uses "professionals" as an entry point, its research scope is relatively broad, encompassing both organizational psychology research centered on individual motivation, job satisfaction, and team dynamics, and sociological research on work and occupations focused on how work is organized, employment relations, and professional groups. The former emphasizes internal organizational dynamics of work and welfare, while the latter focuses more on external organizational dynamics of work, occupations, and professions at the societal level.

In organizational psychology research, scholars explore multidimensional aspects of individual careers, including motivation, well-being, satisfaction, and engagement, as well as factors supporting these psychological states (Chen & Kanfer, 2024; Deci et al., 2017; Ilies et al., 2024). Self-determination theory posits that employees need to experience competence, autonomy, and relatedness, and that satisfaction of these needs enhances individual motivation, performance, and well-being (Deci et al., 2017). Job demands-resources theory emphasizes that jobs involve unique physical, emotional, or cognitive demands while also providing resources to achieve goals and overcome these demands; balance between the two is essential for reducing burnout, enhancing engagement, and improving work outcomes (Bakker et al., 2023). Goal-setting theory notes that specific, challenging goals can significantly enhance motivation and performance when individuals possess necessary capabilities and maintain commitment to goals (Locke & Latham, 2006). Together, these theories focus on how social factors in organizational contexts affect individual psychological outcomes such as motivation, satisfaction, and performance (Ilies et al., 2024).

Beyond examining predictors of individual performance, organizational psychology also addresses team dynamics—how teams can operate more effectively. Work teams are the most immediate contextual factors influencing employee motivation and behavior, providing important cues and outcome feedback for team members' actions (Chen & Kanfer, 2024). Scholars study team operations by parsing the different roles individuals assume in teams, which are typically associated with behavioral dimensions such as dominance, sociability, and task orientation (Driskell et al., 2017). Team climate or cohesion is also considered an important predictor of team processes and performance outcomes (González-Romá et al., 2009). Recent research further examines how team dynamics operate in virtual teams and how related technologies support team interaction (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2020). These studies and theories collectively emphasize that beyond focusing on individual psychology, attention must also be paid to the direct impact of teams as micro-environments on individuals.

Unlike psychological perspectives on work that focus more on individual characteristics, sociological research on work and occupations emphasizes structural arrangements in broader society. Abbott (1993) notes that research in this area has traditionally followed two main directions: one focusing on gender, inequality, and career development issues; the other focusing on unions and industrial relations. Most of this research originates from feminist and Marxist critical traditions that attempt to center the labor of groups often marginalized in organizations (Halford & Strangleman, 2009). For example, Hochschild (1983) proposed the concept of "emotional labor," treating emotion management as part of job requirements (such as flight attendants' emotion regulation); Burawoy (2012) revealed how industrial workers in capitalist workplaces actively participate in their own "exploitation"; Bunderson and Thompson (2009) noted that the excessive pursuit of "meaningful work" is a double-edged sword—for instance, zookeepers who view their work as a calling are often willing to sacrifice salary and personal time. These core concepts in the sociology of work will be further elaborated in subsequent sections on organizational transformation and social conflict.

Furthermore, sociological research on the professions perspective presents three theoretical orientations: first, a structural-functional perspective focusing on occupational characteristics and tasks socially controlled by authoritative bodies; second, a power/privilege perspective taking a critical approach that connects professions to capitalism and control over labor markets; and third, a practice perspective that treats professions as open systems continuously changing with work and demands (Fry, 2018). A core concept closely related to the third perspective is "jurisdictional boundaries," which posits that professions emerge from competition among different groups vying for legitimate dominance over knowledge and practice in a domain (Abbott, 1988). This boundary work is crucial for understanding how professions adjust, expand, or contract in response to domain changes and how they establish and consolidate their social status and credibility. In summary, the professions perspective encompasses both psychological dynamics of workers within organizations and sociological research on occupational organization, boundary construction, and inequality.

7. Transformation

Different aspects of organizations—such as structure, culture, relations, institutions, and the individuals within them—all change over time. Although many of the aforementioned theories already involve concepts of change, a distinct set of theories explicitly examines such intentional change processes. This section proposes a continuum from "episodic or radical change" to "continuous or incremental evolution" (Michel, 2014), emphasizing the distinction between change initiated from within organizations and change influenced by or acting upon external factors.

First, we focus on internal organizational change. Organizational research often treats change as an exceptional event and conceptualizes it as intentional action. Theories emphasizing episodic change highlight the role of individuals or organizations in initiating or catalyzing change (see also the earlier discussion on institutional entrepreneurs). One way to understand episodic change is through Lewin' s (1947) planned change model, which encompasses the dynamic process of "unfreeze-change-refreeze." This model views planned change as a temporary disturbance in a stable system, a transitional stage from one equilibrium state to another (Purser & Petranker, 2005). Organizations "unfreeze" by demonstrating the harm of the status quo, dramatic environmental changes, or the necessity of remaining competitive, thereby breaking existing structures and mindsets (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2018). Subsequently, "change" occurs as new behaviors, processes, and systems are introduced and established (Hussain et al., 2018). The final stage is "refreezing," where new behaviors are formalized, institutionalized, and taken for granted. Some scholars criticize this "three-step" change model as overly simplistic and disconnected from Lewin' s original "quasi-equilibrium" theory, which posits that organizations exist in continuous adaptation (Cummings et al., 2016). Nonetheless, the theory' s continued use suggests resonance with people' s experience of episodic change.

Another research perspective emphasizes that change is gradual and evolutionary. This organization-focused perspective views change as a normal and inherent component when organizations encounter new experiences and information (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). Organizational learning emphasizes groups encoding knowledge to create new routines and processes that guide future behavior, particularly necessary when personnel turnover is frequent (Levitt & March, 1988).

On one hand, organizational learning requires exploration and mutual learning; on the other hand, it involves exploitation and competitive advantage (March, 1991). This dynamic is also related to absorptive capacity, where organizations "absorb knowledge" from the environment, assimilating, transforming, or exploiting it into routines, policies, and practices that yield comparative advantage (Zahra & George, 2002). In healthcare and education, some scholars emphasize the importance of improvement science, which focuses on incremental changes that improve patient or student experiences and outcomes (Bryk, 2015; Roberts et al., 2019). It emphasizes contextual differences and the necessity of incremental change driven by frontline practitioners.

From the perspective of external organizational change, similar episodic and continuous dynamics exist in social movement and population ecology theories. Social movement theory conceptualizes episodic change as the result of marginalized and disadvantaged groups demanding material and symbolic change, typically responding to perceived crises and windows of opportunity (Armstrong & Bernstein, 2008). The relationship between social movements and organizations is described as: "Organizations are targets, actors, and arenas of social movement activity. Social movements are often represented by formal organizations, while organizations themselves resemble episodic 'movements' rather than clearly bounded actors" (Davis et al., 2008). Understood this way, social movements are crucial for intentionally transforming organizations, and conscious social change is influenced by the organized activities of social movements and their organizations (King & Carberry, 2020).

Population ecology emphasizes evolutionary change in organizational populations as ecosystems change—less adaptive organizations fail while more adaptive ones survive—thereby illustrating how enterprises gradually adapt or are forced to adapt to remain relevant in their ecosystems (Carroll, 1984; Hannan & Freeman, 1977). From this perspective, industries and organizational fields evolve with experimental variation, and selection mechanisms determine which organizational forms survive (Hannan & Freeman, 1977). Rather than viewing change as planned intervention, population ecology emphasizes how pressures from external forces (such as regulatory changes, market fluctuations, and technological advances) shape organizational survival.

8. Social Conflict

Organizations are arenas of inequality, which may stem from design (e.g., hierarchical division of labor) or from outcomes (e.g., key groups gaining more opportunities). Various aspects of organizations may benefit some groups while disadvantaging others. Within organizations, scholars examine the dynamic mechanisms of relational inequality, particularly focusing on marginalized groups such as women and ethnic minorities. Outside organizations, scholars also study how global and social inequalities shape the forms of work and organization.

Social conflict may occur when one group attempts to gain advantages over others. Social science research reveals homophily—the tendency for people to associate with similar others (McPherson et al., 2001). This dynamic creates in-groups and out-groups, affecting which individuals achieve higher status and better outcomes in organizations. This can be explained by relational inequalities: when categorical distinctions between individuals or groups—such as class, age, or education—become naturalized in organizational division of labor, resource and opportunity distribution, inequality is formed and maintained (Tilly, 1998). Research identifies four mechanisms generating and maintaining inequality in organizations: exploitation occurs when some actors extract value from others' efforts; opportunity hoarding occurs when specific groups monopolize positions, resources, and opportunities for themselves; resource pooling occurs when some organizational domains have resource surpluses while others suffer shortages; and finally, claims-making occurs when resources are allocated to actors who can successfully make claims (Tomaskovic-Devey, 2014).

More generally, Marxist perspectives emphasize that organizations are spaces of class domination, exploitation, solidarity, and resistance (Marx, 2024). This perspective critiques traditional organizational theory, with some scholars arguing it replicates and legitimates capitalist structures (Heydebrand, 1977). Additionally, organizations are arenas where different stakeholders (e.g., owners, managers, employees) struggle for control, often leading to labor disputes, resistance to authority, and struggles around decision-making power (Pfeffer, 1993). Research on unions and labor disputes is a key area of the Marxist approach, which has subsequently shifted from focusing on industrial unionism to examining service sector jobs, immigrant and vulnerable workers, and new forms of organization (Burawoy, 2008). Although this perspective is crucial for understanding various forms of conflict in organizations, these general theories do not deeply explore the role of personal identity in organizational conflict.

More specific theorization of inequality focuses on women and ethnic minorities, who often face systematic disadvantage in organizations. The concept of gendered organization emphasizes that income and status inequality often follows gendered lines—manifested in women's career development, performance evaluation, and fit with organizational culture (Acker, 1990). This experience of gender inequality at work is attributed to gender bias, difficulties in male-dominated environments, and other organizational features or policies that create barriers for women (Williams et al., 2012). The concept of racialized organization points to how internal organizational structures and cultures can enhance or diminish the agency of racial and ethnic groups, systematically reducing opportunities and resources for minorities (Ray, 2019). Thus, racial inequality is not merely interpersonal or social but is concretized and reproduced within organizations. A common example illustrating both organizational gendering and racialization is the pay gap between men and women and between whites and other races (Mandel & Semyonov, 2016). Although various training and mentoring programs have been implemented to support affirmative action and reduce gaps for women and minority workers, some of these measures have minimal effectiveness in correcting workplace inequality (Kalev et al., 2006).

Although much theorizing has concentrated on internal organizational dynamics, scholars have also examined global dynamics of inequalities. Organizational realities such as deregulation, outsourcing, and subcontracting have driven the rise of precarious work and human trafficking worldwide (Quirk et al., 2020). Differences in recruitment, promotion, and reward distribution between individuals in the Global North and Global South typically maintain and exacerbate global inequality (Amis et al., 2018). In particular, transnational labor inequalities are especially pronounced along racial, class, and gender lines—for example, immigrants or undocumented workers, female domestic laborers, outsourced services, low-wage foreign factory workers, and multinational corporate executives in the Global North (Poster & Wilson, 2008). Current forms of protectionism may also affect this global division of labor. For many, these global inequalities are not merely conceptual but are everyday organizational realities.

9. Conclusion

This paper aims to map the contemporary research landscape of organizational theory by integrating related topics, distinguishing between intra-organizational and extra-organizational dynamics, and proposing seven perspective types summarized by the acronym SCRIPTS (Structure, Culture, Relations, Institutions, Professions, Transformation, and Social Conflict). summarizes the core concepts and theories discussed in organizational research.

In writing this paper, I have sought to unpack the multiple perspectives available for understanding organizations—perspectives constructed along seven core concerns (SCRIPTS) and two fundamental domains (intra-organizational and extra-organizational). Determining which theoretical perspective or concept is most applicable begins with understanding the range of available options—precisely what this paper attempts to map. Students of organizational theory can use this list to identify aspects they wish to study in greater depth or to find theoretical frameworks for their research. Organizational leaders can use this mnemonic framework to reflect on factors within and outside their organizations that they can influence, transform, or improve. For both researchers and leaders, this paper organizes a wealth of theoretical perspectives that can be used to deepen analysis, inform decision-making, and drive organizational change.

Organizational theory has advanced in multiple directions, with various theories responding to and diverging from one another (Fligstein, 2021). For example, attention to rational structures has been challenged by bounded rationality and contingency theories; discussions of organizational culture and identity (often considered more stable) conflict with ideas of organizational change and learning; and institutional theory focusing on normative forces has also been questioned by social conflict theories emphasizing individual interests, exploitation, and opportunity hoarding. This paper attempts to reveal these differences and, in doing so, help readers determine which perspectives are most applicable to specific cases, research, and organizational problems. In short, this paper serves as an important map marking the terrain of organizational theory to help readers explore new paths forward.

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Footnotes

1. Other scholars also divide these theories into three or four major categories. Scott and Davis (2015) distinguish rational, natural, and open systems perspectives in understanding organizations. Hatch and Cunliffe (2018) propose dividing group theory into modern, symbolic, and postmodern perspectives. Bolman and Deal (2021) highlight four major frameworks: structural, human resource, political, and symbolic.

2. I refer to extra-organizational dynamics rather than interorganizational dynamics, which includes not only relationships between organizations but also relationships between organizations and their environments and larger society.

3. While formal structure is important, informal structure (such as informal negotiations and informal relationships between management and employees) is also important and can interact with formal structures in organizations. However, due to space constraints, a more comprehensive discussion of informal structures and elements in organizations is not possible.

5. The term "professions" is used because it aligns with the SCRIPTS acronym, but this perspective includes broader issues related to workers, managers, employees, and professionals.

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.