How is the field construct useful for organization theory?

Why fields?

- The declining significance of organizations
  - Eastman Kodak (1889-2012) vs. Flip (2007-2011)
  - Projects and incubator-mania
- The declining significance of industry
  - What are "manufacturing" and "service" today?
    - Is Apple a manufacturer?
    - Is Facebook a service?
    - Antitrust implications: are Apple and Google competitors?
- "Activity" or "function" as an appropriate organizing construct

A brief and rude digression

- New Institutional Theory has hindered the development of the field construct
- Vague definitions:
  - "By organizational field, we mean those organizations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life: key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services or products"
  - But: "Fields only exist to the extent that they are institutionally defined."
  - So: "fields" are defined by being recognized and defined

Brief and rude digression (cont’d)

- Useless measures that are impossible to operationalize:
  - "The process of institutional definition, or 'structuration,' consists of four parts: an increase in the extent of interaction among organizations in the field; the emergence of sharply defined interorganizational structures of domination and patterns of coalition; an increase in the information load with which organizations in a field must contend; and the development of a mutual awareness among participants in a set of organizations that they are involved in a common enterprise."
Brief and rude digression (cont’d)

- Hypotheses about a mysterious “dependent variable” that can never be tested:
  - B1: The greater the extent to which an organizational field is dependent upon a single (or several similar) source of support for vital resources, the higher the level of isomorphism.
  - B2: The greater the extent to which organizations in a field transact with agencies of the state, the greater the extent of isomorphism in the field as a whole.
  - B3: The fewer the number of visible alternative organizational models in a field, the greater the rate of isomorphism in that field.
  - B4: The greater the extent to which technologies are uncertain or goals are ambiguous within a field, the faster the rate of isomorphism.
  - B5: The greater the rate of professionalization in a field, the greater the amount of institutional isomorphic change.
  - B6: The greater the extent of structuration of a field, the greater the degree of isomorphics.

Where might “fields” advance?

- Transaction cost economics
  - Relevant unit of analysis is not pre-defined as the “organization” but as the “configuration of stuff leading to a product or service”
    - Value chain, network, ecosystem
    - E.g., Vizio
  - What you might see if you don’t require countable “organizations” as units
    - Occupy Wall Street
    - The Komen Foundation insta-opposition movement

Future evolution

- An opportunity and some threats
  - Opportunity: thanks to ICTs, the world is awash in data on social organization → possibilities for new discovery
  - Threats
    - We could be like 10-year-olds at an all-you-can-eat buffet
    - Soon our undergrads will have the WRDS iPhone app
- Prospects for problem-driven work
  - The 18th Brumaire
  - The hazards of “managerial relevance”
  - Organization theory as a junk drawer for mechanisms