WHERE DO WE STAND?

COMMON MECHANISMS IN ORGANIZATIONS AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS RESEARCH

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April 2002

First draft: Comments are welcome.

Prepared for a conference on “Social Movements and Organizations Theory,” University of Michigan, May 2002. Correspondence: John Campbell, 6104 Silsby Hall, Department of Sociology, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH 03755 USA. John.L.Campbell@Dartmouth.Edu. Thanks go to Michael Allen and Joel Levine for comments on the ideas in this paper.
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The premise of this conference is that both organizations and social movements are forms of coordinated collective action and, therefore, ought to be conducive to similar forms of analysis (Perrow 2000, pp. 472-74; Zald and Berger 1978). Furthermore, the organizers suspect that if students of organizations and social movements paid closer attention to each other’s work, then opportunities for creative conceptual and theoretical cross-fertilization might occur, and our understanding of both organizations and movements might improve. To date, researchers in these fields have made limited progress in this direction.

A few organization theorists have used social movement theory to generate new hypotheses for organizational analysis and provide insights into the development of organizational forms (e.g., Davis and McAdam 2000; Davis and Thompson 1994; Lounsbury 2001; Rao et al. 2000). But they acknowledge that social movement theory still has been employed only intermittently to explain these and other organizational phenomena (Swaminathan and Wade 2000). Social movement theorists have been somewhat more ambitious in capitalizing on organizational analysis to explain how social movements emerge and develop (e.g., Clemens 1993, 1997, chap. 2). In particular, the resource mobilization tradition drew on organizational analysis to argue in part that social movement organizations, like many types of organizations, tend toward bureaucratization, professionalization, and conglomeration, and that these organizations often adjust their goals in order to better fit their resource environments and survive (Kriesi 1996; McCarthy and Zald 1973, 1977; Zald and Ash 1966). Another more recent example of the application of organization theory to social movements is the effort to apply population ecology models to the evolution of social movements (Minkoff 1993, 1997). Nevertheless, as contributors to this conference demonstrate, much also remains to be done to integrate the insights of organization theory into the analysis of social movements, particularly with the emergence of new theories of organizations, such as neoinstitutionalism (Powell and DiMaggio 1991).

Scholars might be willing to take the call for integration more seriously if they appreciated, as
This paper does, that the organizations and social movements literatures have already developed striking similarities. Given the extent of these similarities, blending the insights from these literatures is not an especially radical or difficult analytic move. To be sure, scholars who have utilized the insights of one field to shed light on the other occasionally acknowledge that these literatures have things in common. But they typically do this in a narrow or ad hoc fashion focusing at most on only a few characteristics shared by both literatures (e.g., Strang and Soule 1998). Certainly there is much to be learned from the intense scrutiny of one or two commonalities. What is missing, however, is a broad and more systematic mapping of the common ground shared by these fields. This paper provides one such mapping and indicates just how close together scholars in these fields stand. It shows that the organizations and social movements literatures have developed serendipitously along parallel paths and, as a result, share insights regarding several important issues. In particular, there are strong similarities in terms of the mechanisms by which organizations and social movements develop and change. This paper articulates the nature of some of these mechanisms, recognizing how important the identification and elaboration of mechanisms is for both organizations and social movements research (Davis and McAdam 2000, p. 216; McAdam et al. 1999, p. 160).

By mechanism I mean simply the processes that account for causal relationships among variables. Mechanisms are the nuts, bolts, cogs, and wheels that link causes with effects (Elster 1989, p. 3). The specification of causal mechanisms involves more than just establishing correlations among variables. The identification of a correlation may demonstrate that a relationship exists between variables, but unless we understand the underlying mechanism that caused it, we will not know why the relationship exists (Hedström and Swedberg 1998). Mechanisms, then, are the workhorses of explanation (McAdam et al. 2001, p. 30). So, for example, if we determine that the rapid escalation of protests in a population of social movement organizations is associated with a change in the political environment, we may have revealed an interesting correlation between changing political institutions and the diffusion of social movement activism, but we still do not know why this relationship obtains. Among other things, we do not know how the movement organizations recognize that the environment has changed in their favor? This requires that we specify through additional empirical research the causal mechanisms that are
responsible, such as a political learning process whereby the first movement organizations to protest successfully in the new environment spread word of their achievement to other organizations that subsequently follow suit thus triggering the rapid diffusion of protest throughout the movement population (Minkoff 1997).

My purpose here goes beyond helping to integrate the analyses of organizations and social movements. The advancement of social theory, particularly theories of institutional change, depends in part on our ability to identify mechanisms of social change that apply broadly to different realms of society. After all, one of the goals of science is to develop theories that are generalizable. Although no social mechanism is likely to operate in every situation, some mechanisms may operate in several situations, so their specification enables us to generalize beyond atheoretical descriptions of a single case but without making indefensible claims about universal laws (Elster 1998; McAdam et al. 2001, chap. 1; Merton 1967; Stinchcombe 1998). By identifying change mechanisms that already operate in two distinct realms, such as those involving organizations and those involving social movements, we may in fact be identifying mechanisms that operate even more widely. If so, then by identifying these mechanisms we will also contribute to the development of social theory more generally.

Scholars have suggested several general types of social mechanisms (e.g., Elster 1989; Hedström and Swedberg 1998). For example, Doug McAdam and his colleagues (2001, pp. 25-26) identified three that are particularly relevant to the study of organizations and social movements. First, there are environmental mechanisms, that is, external factors that affect actors’ capacities to engage in change. Second, there are cognitive mechanisms that alter how actors perceive their identities, interests, and possibilities for change. Finally, there are relational mechanisms that affect the connections among actors and their networks in ways that enable them to cause change.

I begin by discussing mechanisms associated with the state and political opportunity structures—examples of environmental mechanisms. Second, I examine a cognitive mechanism—framing. Third, I investigate three more cognitive mechanisms, diffusion, translation, and bricolage, which are mechanisms that offer particularly important insights about the processes of evolutionary and path-dependent change. These processes have received much attention in both the organizations and movements literature.
Fourth, I address network mobilizing structures and leadership under the rubric of relational mechanisms. I conclude with some more general thoughts on social mechanisms. Along the way I also suggest some opportunities for cross-fertilization between the organizations and social movements literatures as well as a few instances where they suffer from common deficiencies and blind spots. Because the literatures in both of these fields are vast, I concentrate primarily on the recent trends in each. Specifically, I examine the political process approach to social movements (e.g., McAdam et al. 1996) and the neoinstitutionalist approach in organizational analysis (e.g., Powell and DiMaggio 1991).

ENVIRONMENTAL MECHANISMS: POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURES

Political process models have become a cornerstone of social movements research. Key to this approach is the idea that movements confront a political opportunity structure, a set of formal and informal political conditions that encourage, discourage, channel, and otherwise affect movement activity. Political opportunity structures are said to constrain the range of options available to movements as well as trigger movement activity in the first place (McAdam et al. 1996, p. 3). Important dimensions of the political opportunity structure include the degree to which formal political institutions are open or closed to challengers of the status quo; the degree to which political elites are organized in stable or unstable coalitions and alignments; the degree to which movements have allies within the political elite; and the degree to which political authorities are willing to use repression against challengers (McAdam 1996; Tarrow 1996). The conventional view of opportunity structures has been criticized for being too narrow, such as by neglecting how opportunity structures may be gendered so that a change in gender relations may create new movement opportunities (McCammon et al. 2001). Nevertheless, for the sake of brevity, I focus here only on how political institutions, as traditionally viewed in the movements literature, influence how movements and organizations mobilize for action. Political institutions are environmental mechanisms insofar as they constrain actors from pursuing some courses of action and enable them to pursue others.

Movement scholars have shown that political opportunity structures affect the strategy, organizational structure, and ultimate success of social movements. For instance, during the 1970s and 1980s the French movement against commercial nuclear power confronted a closed, insulated, and
centralized set of political institutions that afforded activists little access to policy-making arenas, such as nuclear power plant licensing hearings or the courts, where they might have prevented new plants from being built or brought into service. As a result, they resorted to mass demonstrations and civil disobedience, luring tens of thousands of demonstrators into sometimes violent confrontations with police. They also entered electoral politics where they forged an antinuclear alliance with the Socialist Party. Nevertheless, they managed only to temporarily slow the development of France’s nuclear power industry precisely because policy making was so impermeable to opposition. In West Germany, things turned out somewhat better for the movement. Because West Germany is a federated state, political institutions were more decentralized and porous so in addition to mobilizing through electoral politics and helping to organize a successful Green Party, German antinuclear activists used the courts to delay or stop licensing and construction of several new plants. In Sweden, where policy making typically involves inclusive public discussions of important policy issues, activists worked closely with allies in one of the main political parties to convince the government to hold a national referendum on the future of nuclear power, which passed and required the phasing out of all commercial nuclear plants by 2010. Finally, in the United States, with its two-party, winner-take-all electoral system, party politics were out of the question. Instead, antinuclear forces tried to work through legal channels by creating formal professional organizations, such as the Union of Concerned Scientists, which was staffed by nuclear engineers, physicists, and other technocrats, and which lobbied Congress and regulatory officials. But when their success seemed limited due to government stonewalling, activists formed more radical and informal networks of organizations and turned to non-violent civil disobedience. Eventually, both approaches contributed to a de facto moratorium on new nuclear orders after 1978 (Campbell 1988, chap. 5, 8; Kitschelt 1986; Nelkin and Pollak 1981). In sum, the political opportunities associated with state institutions constrained the options available to activists, affected their strategies for seeking change and the organizational forms through which they chose to pursue it, channeled their efforts toward different arenas for protest and dialogue, and exerted significant effects on movement outcomes.

As this example illustrates, much of the work looking at the effects of political opportunity structures on social movements has been cast in a comparative, cross-national framework (Kriesi 1996;
Rucht 1996). The same is true for some of the literature on the development of organizations. For instance, researchers have shown that the Italian economy developed an organizational structure based on small and medium-sized firms in part because several Christian Democratic governments, whose electoral strength resides among the petty bourgeoisie, provided tax breaks, subsidies, and other incentives that deliberately encouraged the creation and maintenance of small businesses (Weiss 1988). Political elites also intentionally facilitated the organization of regional industrial districts where networks of these firms shared research and development, accounting, marketing, and various other services in a strategic effort to enhance their collective international competitiveness—a strategy that was relatively successful in the 1970s and 1980s insofar as it encouraged an approach to manufacturing based on principles of flexible specialization (Best 1990, chap. 7-8; Piore and Sabel 1984, chap. 9). In contrast, much of the malaise experienced by the U.S. economy during the same period has been attributed to the dominance of comparatively large, bureaucratic, and inflexible business organizations that pursued a mass production strategy. These types of organizations grew in response to a much different set of political opportunities, including the unique American character of property rights law, that facilitated their development (Best 1990; Fligstein 1990; Hollingsworth 1991). Other countries offered much different political opportunities—sometimes intentionally, sometimes unintentionally—and, therefore, generated much different organizational structures, strategies, and records of success (e.g., Chandler and Daems 1980; Doremus 1998; Guillén 1994; Hamilton and Biggart 1988).

Of course, political opportunity structures are not static. Students of both social movements and organizations have recognized that as these structures change, so do the movements and organizations that are embedded within them. Sidney Tarrow (1996) argued that, in order to understand the dynamics by which movements change over time, we must recognize that they are often linked to state building episodes. Recent work on third-world revolutions confirms that protest cycles often correspond to state-building and other shifts in political opportunity structures. Misagh Parsa (2000) showed that changes in political opportunity structures, notably variation in levels of state repression, often caused the ebb and flow of outbursts of revolutionary activity in Iran, Nicaragua, and the Philippines (Parsa 2000; see also Tilly 1978, chap. 4; Della Porta 1996). Verta Taylor (1989) found that the U.S. women’s movement was
dormant and in abeyance until the political climate changed. Similarly, organization theorists have shown that as states redefine business regulations and civil rights law, firms overhaul their organizational structures and governance systems in order to better fit the new regulatory environment (Davis and Thompson 1994; Dobbin et al. 1990; Edelman 1990; Fligstein 1990). Shifts in how states define property rights have also triggered organizational and governance transformations at the level of economic sectors and national economies (Campbell and Lindberg 1990; North 1981; Streeck 1997).

There are also interesting parallels in how the social movements and organizations literatures view the dynamics underlying political opportunity structures. For instance, both literatures understand that the motivation for change can come from at least two directions. On the one hand, both recognize that change in political opportunity structures may be driven by political authorities in ways that transform the structure, strategy, and success of groups in society. As noted above, sometimes this is deliberate, such as when the Italian Christian Democrats moved to cultivate vibrant small and medium-sized businesses. Other times it is not. The U.S. Congress passed the Celler-Kefauver Act in 1950 to limit the size of vertically integrated business firms, but inadvertently created a legal environment that led to the growth of a new organizational form—the highly diversified conglomerate (Fligstein 1990). Similarly, political elites have manipulated the opportunities available to social movements in ways that reduce the level of social protest, coopt movement leaders, or otherwise undercut activism. The West German government cracked down on social movement activism in the 1970s with increased levels of police repression in order to better control terrorism. So did the Italian government in the 1950s to control leftist groups of all sorts as part of the government’s campaign to repress the labor movement and rebuild the economy with low-wage labor (Della Porta 1996).

On the other hand, societal groups may provide the impetus for changing political opportunity structures, either as a means to some greater end, or as an essential goal itself. Dairy farmers successfully pressed the U.S. Congress to pass the Capper-Volstead Act in 1922, which permitted them to organize producer cooperatives, a new organizational form in the industry, and successfully counteract the power of milk distributors (Young 1991). Corporate shareholders managed to alter the law on proxy voting during the 1980s so as to transform corporate governance in ways that counteracted the power of
corporate managers (Davis and Thompson 1994). Social movements also often seek to change their political opportunity structures, such as when the U.S. civil rights movement succeeded in opening new opportunities for itself by winning passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965—a legislative milestone that dramatically altered both the structure and strategy of the movement (Piven and Cloward 1979, chap. 4).

Two points require further elaboration. First, there is a remarkable similarity in how researchers in both the fields of organizations and social movements specify political opportunity structures. In the organizations literature, for instance, Frank Dobbin (1994) writes about how variation in the degree to which political institutions were open or closed, centralized or decentralized, and strong or weak contributed to the development of different organizational arrangements in the French, British, and U.S. railroad industries (see also Campbell and Lindberg 1990; Lindberg and Campbell 1991). Precisely the same distinctions are prevalent in the movements literature (e.g., Kriesi 1996; Gamson and Meyer 1996, p. 281). Second, the causal effects of political opportunity structures are cast in two different ways in these literatures. On the one hand, political opportunity structures motivate actors by creating grievances or other incentives for them to seek change, as occurred when the government stimulated the creation of small firms in Italy and when the discriminatory policies of the government fueled the U.S. civil rights movement. On the other hand, political opportunity structures also constrain the range of strategic actions from which actors are most likely to choose as they pursue change. This was evident in the channeling of nuclear power protest to different arenas in different countries depending on the prevailing political institutional arrangements. It was also evident in antitrust and other forms of property rights law that limited the range of organizational forms that businesses could adopt in the United States.

**COGNITIVE MECHANISMS: FRAMING**

Social movement scholars have argued that in order to be successful activists must frame issues in ways that resonate with the ideologies, identities, and cultural understandings of supporters and others who might be drawn to their cause (Snow and Benford 1992; Snow et al. 1986). Frames are metaphors, symbols, and cognitive cues that cast issues in a particular light and suggest possible ways to respond to these issues. Framing involves the strategic creation and manipulation of shared understandings and interpretations of the world, its problems, and viable courses of action. Framing is a cognitive mechanism
of social change because it affects how actors perceive their interests, identities, and possibilities for change. Hence, frames mediate between opportunity structures and action because they provide the means with which people can interpret the political opportunities before them and, thus, decide how best to pursue their objectives (McAdam et al. 1996, 1999; Zald 1996). So, for instance, some researchers have argued that leaders of the U.S. civil rights movement framed their efforts in the broad language of equal rights in part because it resonated with traditional American political rhetoric—a rhetoric that was shared by the black middle class, the movement’s main constituency, as well as white sympathizers. This sort of rights discourse is typical of movements in the United States, but not in other countries whose basic political rhetoric is different (Tarrow 1994, p. 129; but see Morris 2000, p. 448).

The emphasis on framing emerged as part of a larger effort among scholars to bring issues of culture and identity back into the analysis of social movements (e.g., Johnston and Klandermans 1995). For instance, Verta Taylor and Nancy Whittier (1992) showed how the lesbian feminist movement struggled mightily to define and frame its identity, and how it ended up with several identities depending on how different groups defined their boundaries and consciousness. The consideration of framing also emerged as a corrective to earlier work that failed to recognize that the interests of movement supporters were not objectively given by their social circumstances, including political opportunity structures, but had to be defined, interpreted, and socially constructed (McAdam et al. 1996). In this way, scholars saw that framing had significant consequences for movement outcomes. So, for example, prior to passage of the Nineteenth Amendment women’s groups in the United States were more likely to win suffrage rights at the level of state government when they argued that women would use their voting rights to protect children, homes, and families. In other words, they were more successful when they framed their demands in ways that convinced people that granting women the right to vote would reinforce rather than undermine women’s traditional identity and gender roles (McCammon et al. 2001).

Students of organizations, most notably neoinstitutionalists, have taken a similar cultural turn insofar as they recognize that changes in organizational structure and strategy are driven by a logic of appropriateness where proposed changes are only likely to catch hold—or even be recognized as viable possibilities in the first place—if they are consistent with local customs, habits, schema, and routines.
(DiMaggio and Powell 1983; March and Olsen 1989). For example, Mauro Guillén (1994) explained how the adoption of different models of corporate management varied cross-nationally in part due to how well they resonated with national tradition and culture. This was one reason, he argued, why during the early twentieth century the Germans embraced scientific management, which fit their Prussian bureaucratic experience, but rejected the human relations model, which was steeped in a Catholic ideology much less familiar to them. Conversely, managers in Spain welcomed the human relations approach because it was consistent with their Catholic and liberal-humanist traditions, which emphasized the importance of social participation, education, and training, but they were reticent to use scientific management, for which there was little resonance due to a relative lack of national bureaucratic traditions at that time.

Despite Guillén’s attention to issues of cultural fit, he did not examine whether advocates of the adoption of these managerial models actually engaged in strategic framing to press their interests. In fact, most organizational theorists who stress the importance of cultural and cognitive fit also ignore the issue of framing (e.g., Scott and Meyer 1994; Nelson and Winter 1982, pp. 99-107), perhaps because their work tends to be so structuralist that it does not theorize the importance of actors and agency (e.g., Hirsch 1997; Hirsch and Lounsbury 1997). Nevertheless, given the competition among models that Guillén reported in his cases, one would assume that strategic framing likely occurred and that an analysis of it could have been fit comfortably into his argument. Yet despite the apparently natural opening for an analysis of framing, particularly in research based on detailed case studies (e.g., Fligstein 1990; Soysal 1994), only a few organizations researchers have taken the issue of framing seriously. For instance, Dobbin (1994) argued that if proposals for the construction of national railway systems did not resonate with national culture, they typically failed to garner much support. So when British policy makers failed to frame rail policy proposals in terms of their national cultural tradition of individual sovereignty, when French policy makers failed to frame rail policy in terms of their tradition of state sovereignty, and when U.S. policy makers failed to frame rail policy in terms of their traditions of local self-rule and community sovereignty, they lost the policy-making struggle.

Dobbin did not unpack the details of the framing process itself and often reiterated the frequent
neoinstitutionalist claim that organizational innovations tend to fail if they do not fit well with their normative environments. Perhaps sensing the need for elaboration, at least a few organization theorists have tried more deliberately to examine the framing process. Neil Fligstein’s (1997; Fligstein and Mara-Drita 1996) work on the creation of the European Single Market Project is a good example. He shows that members of the European Commission, in particular its President, Jacques Delors, who sought to develop a single European market, were careful to frame this institutional project in terms deemed appropriate by European governments and business elites. They emphasized how this new institution would only involve new rules of exchange rather than new property rights or governance structures, which would threaten national sovereignty and the interests of industrial actors. Until Delors managed to frame the issue in this manner, the Single Market Project had difficulty gathering momentum.

Organization theorists have also intimated how framing has been crucial to the development of new industry niches, such as microbrewing in the United States, where the success of microbrewers depended heavily on their ability to convince consumers that their products had a uniquely desirable identity steeped in the traditions of small-scale craft production rather than the mass production techniques that characterized most beers on the market (Carroll and Swaminathan 2000). Indeed, framing is often about establishing discursive oppositions like this, as also occurred in France when the characteristics of classical and nouvelle cuisine were juxtaposed by renegade chefs seeking to establish an identity and niche for the latter within their profession (Rao et al. 2001). In some cases framing can be extraordinarily strategic involving much trial and error testing of frames and much counter framing vis-a-vis the opposition’s frames (Campbell 1998; Noakes 2000). Sometimes framing can also be a hotly contested process within a movement or organization, such as when feminists fighting for the Equal Rights Amendment struggled over whether to connect the ERA with abortion rights issues (Mansbridge 1986).

The point is that framing is a very complex set of processes (e.g., Benford and Snow 2000). Insofar as only a few organization theorists have begun to take the issue of framing seriously, they could still benefit from greater familiarity with this vast and important part of the social movements literature. The results of such cross-fertilization can be impressive. For example, Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink (1998, chap. 1) explicitly blend the insights of neoinstitutionalism with the social movements
framing literature to show how institutional practices, such as policies and practices regarding human rights and environmentalism, diffuse internationally due in part to the efforts of transnational organizations who frame their issues in ways they hope will be irresistible for the governments whose practices they want to change. By stressing the importance of symbolic politics and strategic framing, Keck and Sikkink seek to inject a much stronger dose of agency into the analysis than do most neoinstitutional diffusion theorists (e.g., Boli and Thomas 1999). As a result, their approach is an explicit attempt to better specify the causal mechanisms of diffusion (Risse and Sikkink 1999, p. 4)—a subject elaborated later in greater detail.

Another area where cross-fertilization might be fruitful involves the more careful specification of the different parts of frames that organizational and social movement entrepreneurs deploy. Some movement scholars have argued that frames consist of at least two important parts. The diagnostic part concerns how problems are defined and where blame for them is located, and the prognostic part concerns how solutions and appropriate strategies for attaining them are defined (Benford and Snow 2000; McCarthy et al. 1996). To my knowledge, relatively few organizational theorists have thought much about the different parts that constitute a frame and how these parts relate to the possibilities for change. One exception is the work done by organizational sociologists on the development of Health Maintenance Organizations (HMO) in the United States. They show that this new organizational form began spreading during the 1980s only after the problems of cost escalation in the health care delivery system were framed as stemming from the organizational inefficiencies of the old system, and after the HMO solution was framed as being based on a system of private, for-profit, competitive health plans whose operation was consistent with free-market principles. In other words, the HMO innovation was only institutionalized after both the health care delivery problem and solution were framed to fit the dominant neoliberal rhetoric of the day (Scott et al. 2000, p. 41, 218; Strang and Bradburn 2001).

The fact that frames are rarely constructed out of whole cloth, but rather are fabricated out of bits and pieces of already available repertoires and cultural artifacts is widely acknowledged in the social movements literature (e.g., Tarrow 1994, pp. 130-31; Swidler 1986). The general idea that people rarely create something truly new but more often cut and paste in innovative ways is an insight shared by
organizational theorists that can shed light on another mechanism of social change—diffusion.

**COGNITIVE MECHANISMS: DIFFUSION, TRANSLATION, BRICOLAGE**

As noted above, social movement scholars have documented how movement structures and strategies often migrate from one setting to another diffusing across movement organizations (Minkoff 1997). Diffusion refers to the spread of practices through a population of actors. For example, the innovative strategies and tactics of the civil rights movement in Birmingham, Alabama were so successful in 1963 that they served as a new model for civil rights leaders in dozens of cities throughout the South (Morris 1993, p. 633). Similarly, Anthony Oberschall (1996) showed how there was a diffusion of opposition frames and popular protest strategies across borders in Eastern Europe as the communist regimes began to collapse in 1989. And McAdam (1996) argued that spin-off movements often emerge through a diffusion process whereby the ideational, tactical, and organizational lessons of initial movement organizations spread among subsequent challengers. Organization scholars report much the same thing and have developed complex quantitative models to identify the conditions under which organizational practices diffuse within fields of organizations ranging from groups of business firms to nation states (e.g., Dobbin 1992; Edelman 1990; Strang 1990; for reviews of both literatures see Strang and Soule 1998).

The emphasis in these literatures is on specifying the conditions under which diffusion occurs, the rate at which it happens, the degree to which a new practice permeates a field of organizations or movements, and so on. However, it also involves specifying the mechanisms by which diffusion occurs, such as through coercive, normative, or mimetic processes (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Diffusion is a cognitive mechanism insofar as it facilitates the dissemination of ideas and models that cause actors to perceive new possibilities or imperatives for action (e.g., Strang and Meyer 1993).

What is notably absent here is much discussion of what happens when a practice arrives at an organization or movement’s doorstep ready and waiting for adoption. Here the story often ends and it is assumed that the practice is simply adopted uncritically and in toto. The implication, often explicit for organization theorists (e.g., DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Mizruchi and Fein 1999), is that diffusion results in homogeneous or isomorphic outcomes where organizations or movements within a field gradually
converge with respect to their form and function. For instance, John Meyer and his colleagues (1997) argued that the development of a global scientific discourse, embracing the concept of a world ecosystem, caused many national governments to establish environmental ministries during the late twentieth century. However, their analysis omitted any discussion of the national-level political processes that were responsible for this institution building. The problem is that we are left with a black box in which the processes whereby new practices are actually adopted and institutionalized on a case-by-case basis are left unspecified. In this sense, diffusion appears to be a mindless mechanical transfer of information from one place to another (Rao et al. 2001; see also Haveman 2000, p. 477). It seems that such neglect is common in the literatures on both social movements and organizations. In a comprehensive review of how the concept of diffusion has been used in these two literatures there is virtually no work mentioned that examines what this process might look like (Strang and Soule 1998). To be fair, quantitative studies of organizational innovation and diffusion often employ a population ecology perspective and event-history models, which are not designed to capture the processes that I have in mind. Yet if we accept that variation in things like political opportunity structures and framing cause variation in the structure, strategy, and success of movements and organizations, then it stands to reason that these sorts of things will also cause variation in how the structure, strategy, and success of movements and organizations diffuse across sites (e.g., Andrews 2001).

What is required, then, is a specification of the mechanisms whereby models of organization and action that diffuse through a field are translated into practice on a case-by-case basis. By translation I mean the process by which practices that travel from one site to another are modified and implemented by adopters in different ways so that they will blend into and fit the local social and institutional context (Czarniawska and Sevon 1996). For example, as neoliberal ideas diffused among countries during the 1980s and 1990s, individual governments tended to adopt different elements of the neoliberal model and blend them into their already existing institutional traditions in ways that resulted in less convergence and isomorphism than most diffusion theorists might expect. So in Denmark, where policy making was traditionally negotiated at the national level between the state and an array of social organizations, policy makers reformed nationally coordinated labor market institutions by decentralizing but not abandoning
them. Labor market policy became coordinated through negotiations between employers and state authorities at the regional level (Swank and Martin 2001). Similarly, Danish industrial policy making was decentralized rather than abandoned so that close negotiations were still conducted between government authorities, business, and labor unions but at a regional rather than national level (Kjaer and Pedersen 2001). Other countries took much different approaches depending on their own traditions so reform in the areas of economic regulation, labor market institutions, welfare policy, and fiscal policy took a number of different neoliberal forms (Campbell 2001; Kitschelt et al. 1999; Vogel 1996). A few social movement researchers have also suggested that when ideas, practices, or frames diffuse from one place to another they are strategically adapted and fitted to the new context (Benford and Snow 2000, p. 627). There are enough empirical examples of variation in how these things are translated into practice that we should pay closer attention to specifying at a conceptual level the causal mechanisms involved (e.g., Djelic 1998; Guillén 1994; Lounsbury 2001; Marjoribanks 2000; Soysal 1994).

The foundation for such an analysis of translation already exists in the social movements and organizations literature insofar as both recognize that change in practices generally results from a blending of bits and pieces from a repertoire of elements. This may entail the rearrangement of elements that are already at hand, but it may also entail the blending in of new elements that have diffused from elsewhere. In either case the result is a bricolage, that is, an innovative recombination of elements that constitutes a new way of configuring organizations, social movements, institutions, and other forms of social activity (e.g., Douglas 1986, pp. 66-67; Levi-Strauss 1966, pp. 16-33).

The notion of bricolage is probably more familiar to social movements theorists than organization theorists, particularly those who study the discursive processes associated with framing. Notably, Elisabeth Clemens (1996, 1993) showed that during the early twentieth century labor organizers blended elements of several organizational models that were available to them, including fraternal organizations and the military militia, to construct the craft-based union. She also showed that women blended organizational elements of traditional men’s clubs, political precinct models, and professional bureaucracies to create new women’s political organizations. Symbolic as well as technical elements may be involved in a bricolage. For instance, Martin Luther King Jr. composed a frame for the civil rights
movement by blending the Christian doctrine of love with the moral principles of freedom and justice—a frame that resonated with the culture of the African-American church whose members he was trying to mobilize (Morris 2000, p. 448). A few organization theorists have also acknowledged how new organizational practices are formed through the process of bricolage (Campbell 1997; Stark 1996). Others have described this process without actually labeling it bricolage as such (Nelson and Winter 1982, pp. 128-34). For example, Haveman and Rao (1997) showed how the California thrift industry evolved through five different organizational forms as a result of the incremental blending and rebrending of elements of several important social institutions: principles of mutuality and enforced saving, bureaucracy, and voluntarism. Symbolic as well as technical considerations drove the process, as is often the case (e.g., Campbell 1997). The point is that these studies show how the diffusion of various models and concepts through fields of movements and organizations involved the critical step of being dove-tailed into already existing practices by innovative bricoleurs.

The fact that symbolic and technical elements may be blended into a bricolage leads to a more general point. Thinking about diffusion as a process of translation qua bricolage should be particularly amenable to students of both social movements and organizations. After all, it is a process that can involve all the different rationalities of action that have drawn attention in these literatures. Social movements and organizations theorists seem to agree that action can be shaped by self-interests, norms, and cognitive understandings (McAdam et al. 1999; Scott 1994, chap. 3). Analyses of translation can accommodate all three. First, translation may involve powerful actors struggling in pursuit of their political and economic interests. Notably, German industrialists and politicians after the Second World War were forced by the United States to adopt antitrust policy based on the U.S. model, but maneuvered to adopt it in a form that did not fundamentally undermine the cartels and business groups that had long been part of the German institutional landscape and in which they had a vested interest (Djelic 1998). Second, translation may involve actors trying to adapt new practices to already existing normative assumptions about how organizations or movements ought to be organized. This was an important reason why during the late twentieth century different European governments devised dramatically different ways to translate a new internationally accepted model of citizenship into institutional practice—a model
based on the idea that people living in a community have a right to participate in the politics and public life of the polity regardless of their historical or cultural ties to that community (Soysal 1994). Third, translation may involve actors trying to maintain their cognitive identities. This was a factor that helps explain why unions in different countries decided to oppose different aspects of neoliberalism. Italian unions resisted the elimination of cost-of-living adjustments; Swedish unions resisted the abolition of centralized wage bargaining; German unions resisted an attack on co-determination practices. In each case, they resisted those aspects of the neoliberal attack that most threatened their organizational identities (Locke and Thelen 1995). The fact that a variety of rationalities may be involved is an especially important lesson for organizational diffusion theorists who tend to assume that diffusion results from a cognitive process of imitation when, in fact, it can involve a variety of rationalities that need to be disentangled theoretically as well as empirically (Mizruchi and Fein 1999; Suchman 1997). But the more important point is that the concept of bricolage ought to be amenable to scholars regardless of their preference for theories rooted in an analysis of interests, norms, or cognition.

A RELATED NOTE ON EVOLUTIONARY CHANGE AND PATH DEPENDENCE

Recognizing the mechanisms of translation and bricolage offers another benefit. It can help us better understand the dynamics of evolutionary change. Social movement and organization theorists alike have recognized that change is often gradual and evolutionary. Even change that may result from volatile, highly contested processes and that might appear at first to be quite radical and revolutionary often turns out, upon further examination, to be more gradual and evolutionary in the long run (McAdam 1996, p. 30; Scott et al. 2000, pp. 24-27; see also Campbell and Pedersen 1996). Some argue that such evolutionary change occurs through a process known as path dependence in which apparently small or insignificant events or decisions result in an organizational or institutional change that persists over long periods of time and that limits the range of options available to actors in the future (e.g., Clemens 1997, p. 58-59, 237; Davis and McAdam 2000, p. 216; Guthrie 1999, p. 85; North 1990, pp. 93-95; Powell 1991, p. 192; Roe 1996; see also Stinchcombe 1968, pp. 101-118).

For instance, the initial decision by Thomas Edison and his colleagues to obtain European rather than American financing for the development of early electricity generating technology had profound and
largely irreversible consequences for the organizational evolution of the U.S. electric utility industry. The Europeans favored a centralized electricity generation model. As a result, rather than developing small household generators, Edison created big central station technology that gave rise to today’s huge electric utility companies and a few large suppliers, such as General Electric and Westinghouse, that provided most of the important products for the industry ranging from massive generators to common light bulbs. In turn, this precluded subsequent efforts to introduce decentralized technologies, including those that might have been more efficient. Once Edison had made his financial choice the industry evolved along a path that was not easily altered (McGuire et al. 1993).

Economic historians and rational choice theorists have argued more abstractly that path dependence stems from a series of mechanisms that “lock in” actors to a particular developmental path (e.g., Arthur 1994; David 1985; North 1990). Applying this approach to politics, Paul Pierson (2000a, 2000b) has argued that path dependence occurs as a result of several feedback mechanisms through which actors gain increasing returns for behaving in ways that are consistent with how they have acted in the past and, therefore, encourage them to behave similarly in the future. First, political institutions have large start-up costs so that once they are established actors are not likely to seek to change them, especially if they perceive that the chances of other actors joining them to innovate are increasingly slim given the costs involved. Second, sometimes politicians deliberately build institutions in ways that make them difficult to dismantle. They may, for instance, impose procedural obstacles to prevent others from later changing the institutions that they create. Hence, framers of the U.S. Constitution stipulated that subsequent changes to the Constitution would require not only Congressional approval, as does normal legislation, but also ratification by three quarters of the states. This was an important obstacle to ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment in the late 1970s (Mansbridge 1986). Third, once a particular policy style or decision-making approach has been institutionalized, actors accumulate knowledge about how it works. The more familiar and comfortable they become with it, the more hesitant they are to deviate from it. Fourth, beneficiaries of legislative or institutional largess reinforce institutional behavior that will continue to provide them with benefits. Notably, senior citizens organize to re-elect politicians who support old-age pensions and oppose those who favor cutting their benefits and programs.
Scholars who use the path dependence concept often maintain that the operation of these sorts of lock-in mechanisms account for evolutionary change (Pierson 2000a, p. 84; Roe 1996). Most notably, Douglass North (1990, chaps. 1, 8) maintained that institutions that are locked in feedback and constrain actors’ choices in ways that generally permit only incremental changes at the margins. These changes accumulate over time altering institutions in an evolutionary fashion. The problem is that this blurs an important distinction between the two concepts. Evolution is a concept that depicts change; path dependence is a concept that depicts stability. Once we specify the lock-in mechanisms involved in path dependent processes it becomes clear that this concept is far better suited to explaining the persistence of organizational and movement forms and behaviors rather than their transformation (e.g., Pierson 2000b, p. 265; Thelen 1999, 2000a, 2000b). In other words, path dependence arguments are too deterministic; they specify only the mechanisms that keep history on a particular path, not those that cause it to switch paths (Haydu 1998; see also Roe 1996, p. 665). How can the situation be improved?

To better link the analysis of change with the notion of path dependence, some theorists have introduced the concept of critical junctures—that is, major shocks and crises that disrupt the status quo and trigger fundamental changes (Haydu 1998; Thelen 1999). By itself, this concept is inadequate for explaining change in organizations and social movements. Shocks of the sort that constitute critical junctures explain why major changes occur, but not why more incremental or evolutionary change happens (Thelen 2000a, 2000b). Moreover, the critical juncture approach tends to focus our attention on the key events that may cause actors to want change of some sort, but it sheds little light on the subsequent search process whereby actors weigh their options and decide what sort of specific change they want to pursue now that they confront a critical juncture (e.g., Campbell and Lindberg 1991).

The dilemma of explaining how evolutionary change occurs in path dependent ways is resolved when we realize that change often occurs through the process of bricolage. When we acknowledge that new organizational or social movement structures, strategies, and frames are created by recombining elements that are already available in an innovator’s repertoire, then we can see how change is simultaneously evolutionary and path dependent. The process is path dependent insofar as the range of choices for recombinant innovation is fixed by the set of elements already at their disposal. The process
is evolutionary insofar as what is created is a new combination of elements, but one that still resembles the past by virtue of the fact that it is made from elements that were already available in the existing repertoire. Indeed, this is precisely how Joseph Schumpeter (1983, chap. 2) conceived of the industrial innovation process and, as noted earlier, this is how students of organizations and social movements have begun to think about change (e.g., Haveman and Rao 1997; Stark 1986). In addition, the more new elements diffuse from elsewhere, become part of the available repertoire, and are translated into the bricolage, the more revolutionary and less evolutionary change becomes. The implication here is that change is a more complex process than sometimes appreciated; that it is not well represented by a simple evolutionary versus revolutionary dichotomy; and that, instead, it should be thought of more as a complex matter of degree best represented along a continuum (Campbell 2002).

RELATIONAL MECHANISMS: NETWORK CULTIVATION AND LEADERSHIP

Students of social movements have recognized that in order for collective action to occur activists must utilize mobilizing structures to recruit members, obtain other resources, and disseminate information. By mobilizing structures they generally mean, “collective vehicles, informal as well as formal, through which people mobilize and engage in collective action” (McAdam et al. 1996, p. 3). One of the most important aspects of mobilizing structures is the formal and informal networks that connect individuals and organizations (Tilly 1978, chap. 3). Networks are social structures, that is, sets of social relationships, that shape and constrain people’s behavior and opportunities for action. Networks constitute the conduits through which new models, concepts, and practices diffuse and become part of an organization or movement’s repertoire and, therefore, become available for use in framing and translation by bricoleurs (e.g., Keck and Sikkink 1998). Networks also help determine the sources of mass support that activists can mobilize. For instance, Roger Gould (1993) found that urban insurgency was mobilized in the Paris Commune in 1871 through social networks that existed in Parisian neighborhoods. Neighborhood ties facilitated mobilization by providing a basis upon which to forge a collective identity against the French government’s efforts to control the city through military repression. Similarly, academics and other intellectuals affiliated with movements for new social policies have mobilized through their social networks with policy makers to press for political institutional change (Schweber
Of course, organization theorists also understand that networks provide the foundation for all sorts of organizational innovation and activity. Following Mark Granovetter’s (1985, 1974) classic discussions of network embeddedness and strong and weak ties, Brian Uzzi (1996) showed how firms in the New York City garment district utilized informal networks to mobilize resources, including steady supplies of materials, customers, business information, and more. Uzzi reported that firms that performed the best were those whose networks included both long-term personal relationships and more impersonal, short-term, arms-length relationships. Similarly, Michael Useem (1984) documented how networks of interlocking corporate directors provided an important means by which business leaders mobilized in response to political threats to their interests in the 1970s. And Annalee Saxenian (1994) showed that the phenomenal success of the computer and microelectronics industries in Silicon Valley was due to the dense web of cooperative inter-firm relations that facilitated all sorts of collaboration, information sharing, and cutting-edge technological innovation. Like Gould’s analysis of the Paris Commune, Saxenian’s story is very much about how success depended on the ability of entrepreneurs to forge a collective identity through tight-knit community networks. Some researchers have recognized that the notion of networks as mobilizing structures offers an important point of cross-fertilization between the organizations and movements literatures (Davis and McAdam 2000).

It is important to see that networks are not always taken as given by activists or entrepreneurs. They may also be cultivated deliberately in order to obtain critical resources, new organizational models, and the like. The process of network cultivation is an example of a relational mechanism because it is a process through which networks and thus mobilizing structures are altered (e.g., McAdam et al. 2001, p. 26). In the social movements literature Keck and Sikkink (1998) showed that international non-governmental movement organizations often seek to expand their networks to include actors whose resources could be put to work on behalf of the movement to change the policies of recalcitrant governments. Mark Warren (2001) argued that in order for community organizers in the southwestern United States to develop the sorts of social capital required to obtain political resources they had to create networks that bridged diverse racial, religious, and class constituencies and organizations, such as faith-
based congregations. In the organizations literature scholars have shown that networks of inter-firm alliances are created intentionally so that firms can get the money, market access, technical expertise, and other resources they want (Gulati and Gargiulo 1999).

Organization theorists have also found that networks are formed sometimes in the hope that they will generate resources and innovations in the medium- to long-term. I have in mind here something akin to what academics do when they “network” at conferences. That is, they try to make new contacts with people who they suspect might be useful to them later, even though they are not sure how or when these contacts will yield benefits. In this case the creation of networks is an investment in the future, rather than a means for obtaining specific payoffs in the present. For instance, local networks of firms have been created sometimes in the hope that the network will eventually generate collective resources even though it is not clear at the time what those resources will be. By the late 1970s Pennsylvania was reeling from industrial decline. Policy makers offered a set of grants and other incentives to bring representatives from business, labor unions, communities, and local colleges and universities together to evaluate the situation and generate new and more effective approaches to the problem. The idea was to create a network of trusting social relations by which new programs could be designed and administered in a more associative and cooperative fashion than had previously been the case, but leaving it up to the network participants to define their goals and solutions for themselves (Sabel 1993). To my knowledge, the intentional creation of networks as investments in the future has not been explored much in the social movements literature, although some scholars have suggested why movements might want to consider doing so in order to forge new identities that might more effectively realize important political gains (Piore 1995). Warren’s (2001) work is a notable exception insofar as he shows that community organizers create networks in part to facilitate a needs assessment process in which local community groups are mobilized to determine what the important issues are for them and then to figure out how to act on these issues. In other words, networks are not created with specific pre-defined goals already in mind, but rather to help people define what their goals for themselves in the first place.

All of this raises the issue of leadership. After all, leaders are the ones often responsible for cultivating networks for their organizations or movements. Researchers have argued that the social
movements literature has failed to theorize the role of strategic leadership—even though leadership is perhaps the most important mechanism linking political opportunities, mobilizing structures, framing processes, and outcomes (Ganz 2000; Morris 2000). Specifically, Marshall Ganz (2000) suggests that the movements literature has not understood how the strategic capacities of leaders, which are crucial in determining movement success, depend on their biographies, networks, and repertoires as well as the organizational contexts within which they operate. As a result, social movement scholars have trouble explaining why some movements with poor resource endowments succeed where those with greater endowments fail, and how some movements succeed and others fail where both confront similar political opportunity structures. Just as Uzzi discovered that a mixture of strong and weak ties was crucial for organizational success in the New York garment industry, Ganz showed that the resource poor United Farm Workers (UFW), whose leaders were able to cultivate both strong ties to constituencies and weak ties across constituencies, was more successful in organizing Californian agricultural workers than organizations, such as the resource rich AFL-CIO, that did not have such ties. Strong ties to constituencies provided UFW leaders with information about where to find important resources and support. Weak ties across constituencies provided them with information about people, ideas, and routines that could help them form broad-based political alliances. Similarly, the civil rights movement was most successful in places, such as Montgomery, Alabama, where movement leaders were located at central nodes of several indigenous community networks, which provided them with vast communication channels, cultural frames, material resources, and organized followings (Morris 2000, p. 450). Conversely, opposition against the Equal Rights Amendment ran into trouble in states like Maine where anti-ERA leadership, notably Phyllis Schlafly, was not well connected to the citizenry, was out of tune with the citizenry’s attitudes, failed to appreciate how socially liberal the state was, and thus erred in presenting the ERA as something that would encourage homosexuality, gay marriage, and the like (Mansbridge 1986).

Although the business management literature has not neglected the issue, within the neoinstitutionalist camp, organizational theorists also have a blind spot regarding leadership. Despite calls for a theory of the role of institutional or organizational entrepreneurs in organizational analysis
(DiMaggio 1988), only a few scholars have begun to pay serious attention. Notably, Fligstein (1997) briefly articulated a variety of strategies that entrepreneurs will likely deploy depending on whether their organizational fields are well organized and stable or not. Some strategies, he argued, are better suited and effective to certain organizational environments than others. Yet, unlike Ganz, he did not attempt to specify the conditions that influence what sorts of strategic capacities or social skills leaders are likely to develop in the first place. For Ganz, this is the key to developing a theory of leadership.

This is important for issues raised earlier. On the one hand, as both Ganz and Fligstein acknowledge, better understanding the relationship between network structure and leadership can go a long way in bringing agency back into what have typically been rather structuralist accounts of social movement and organizational change, success, and failure (see also Morris 2000). On the other hand, specifying more closely how different network structures influence the strategic capacities of leaders may shed additional light on the process of bricolage and the degree to which it results in evolutionary or revolutionary change. After all, if leaders have only limited ties to their constituency and others outside their immediate movement or organization, then they are less likely to come into contact with new ideas that might expand their repertoires and provide the tools and insights for more creative thinking, innovation, and bricolage (Ganz 2000). This is why being located at the borders and interstices of several networks or organizational fields can enhance the probabilities for relatively dramatic change (Morrill forthcoming; Piore 1995; Rao et al. 2000). In short, network structure may influence why leaders create one bricolage instead of another.

Finally, a brief remark is in order regarding usage of the concept embeddedness in the movements and organizations literatures. As initially formulated by Granovetter (1973, 1985), actors and organizations were said to be embedded in social relations that afforded them certain opportunities and precluded others. What mattered here were actors’ structural relations with each other. That is, embeddedness referred to the position of actors within a network of strong and weak ties. As we have seen, this idea has begun to catch hold in the social movements literature too. However, the concept of embeddedness has been elaborated in several directions (e.g., Streeck 1997). Scholars working in both fields have recognized how being embedded in different institutional milieu can have profound effects on
organizational and movement development. These insights can be organized along the lines suggested by Richard Scott’s (1994, chap. 3) distinction among the regulatory, normative, and cognitive dimensions of institutions. Cognitive structures limit the range of practices that leaders of organizations (e.g., Fligstein 1990) and social movements (e.g., Ganz 2000) can imagine. Once imagined, normative structures limit what is considered acceptable or appropriate practice for organizations (e.g., Dobbin 1994; Guthrie 1999) and movements (e.g., Skrentny 1998). Lastly, regulatory structures, particularly political ones, as noted above, limit the range of practices that actors can get away with and institutionalize in organizations (e.g., Campbell and Lindberg 1990) and movements (e.g., Della Porta 1996). The point is that there are at least four types of embeddedness that receive attention in both literatures (network, regulatory, normative, cognitive) so there may be insights gleaned in one field about how these operate that may be useful in the other.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper has been to identify some of the mechanisms that appear to be operating in common in the worlds of organizations and social movements. This paper is not exhaustive. There are probably other mechanisms operating in both worlds. One mentioned briefly above involves the mechanisms associated with population ecology models. Of course, there is a long tradition in organizations theory based on this approach, which specifies how the availability of resources in a field of organizations affects the birth, death, and survival rates of those organizations, and how organizations that are able to establish a resource-rich niche for themselves tend to thrive more than those that do not establish such niches (Hannan and Freeman 1989). Only recently have social movement theorists started to apply these models to their work (e.g., Minkoff 1993, 1997), even though the attention to resource constraints on movements resonates with their earlier resource mobilization tradition.

Another place to look for parallel mechanisms is in work on the development of organizational forms. Much organizational theory is devoted to identifying the mechanisms through which different organizational forms emerge, such as hierarchies, decentralized networks, and markets. Several theories have been developed accordingly (e.g., Chandler 1977; Perrow 1986, chap. 7; Williamson 1985). Scholars have also been interested in identifying how social movements assumed various organizational
forms, again including hierarchy, decentralized networks, and a spontaneous, leaderless form without much organization at all—a form that may bear some resemblance to a market (Gerlach and Hine 1970; Kriesi 1996; Piven and Cloward 1979). Given these strong similarities it may be worth investigating whether the mechanisms identified in one of these literatures can be applied to the other. We might wonder, for instance, whether the mechanisms identified by transaction-cost or principle-agent theorists (or their critics) might shed light on the organization of social movements.

Surely there are other areas of parallel development in these two literatures that might be explored fruitfully. In any case, the important point is that there is already much in common between these two literatures, particularly insofar as they identify similar causal mechanisms, and therefore significant opportunities for cross-fertilization.

Calls for cross-fertilization within the social movements and neoinstitutionalist literatures have been issued recently. In both cases, strong arguments have been made that by identifying important causal mechanisms it may be possible to find some common ground that will help to better integrate, synthesize, or at least establish the possibility for rapprochement among contending theoretical perspectives, notably rational choice, historical process, and cultural approaches (Campbell and Pedersen 2001; McAdam et al. 1999, 2001). This paper suggests that a search for causal mechanisms can also facilitate cross-fertilization between these two literatures. Insofar as this leads to the identification of relatively generic mechanisms that apply across a broader realm of social phenomena than just organizations and social movements, then their identification will also contribute to the improvement of social theory in general.
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