

Drawing Boundaries around Airlines and Multipartner Alliances: Institutional Spectatorship and  
the Evolution of MPA-Related Collaboration within the Global Airline Industry

Sean Ship

John Molson School of Business

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Masters of Science (Business Administration) at

Concordia University

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

Thursday September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2013

© Sean Ship, 2013

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

By: **Sean Ship**

Entitled: **Drawing Boundaries around Airlines and Multipartner Alliances: The Emergence and Institutionalization of Collaboration within the Global Airline Industry**

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

**The Masters of Science (Administration)**

complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respects to originality and quality.

Signed by the final examining committee

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Charles Draimin Chair

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Ulrich Wassmer Examiner

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Michael Carney Examiner

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Kai Lamertz Supervisor

Approved by

\_\_\_\_\_  
Chair of Department or Graduate Program Director

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dean of Faculty

Date

\_\_\_\_\_

## **Abstract**

Drawing Boundaries around Airlines and Multipartner Alliances: The Emergence and Institutionalization of Collaboration within the Global Airline Industry

*Sean Ship*

Based on an in-depth analysis of the formation and evolution of multipartner alliances (MPAs) within the global airline industry between 1997 and 2009, I examine the role and usage of stories as meta-linguistic tools for studying changes in the way that airline and MPA collaboration was constructed within the field. The news media, in their roles as spectators and authors were engaged in the construction of shared stories, which in being tracked over time, revealed how social structures change in conjunction with the boundaries drawn around MPAs and their members. These shared stories illustrated 1) at the micro-level of analysis various periods of differentiation between entering and exiting airlines; 2) at the meso-level of analysis the processes through which MPAs developed legitimacy, via the validation of inter-MPA competition and the constitution of the MPA as an organizational form; and 3) at the macro-level of analysis the shift in institutional logics which served to frame the meaning embedded in discursive resources used to shape and reshape collaboration within the field. Collectively, this study helps outline the institutionalization of meaning related to collaboration between airline and MPAs, and the competition generated between MPAs within the field and the industry.

## **Acknowledgements**

Foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Kai Lamertz. His enthusiasm and insights helped make the abstract concepts nested in organizational theory at once challenging, comprehensible and fun. His guidance is felt throughout the entirety of my thesis, and this accomplishment is as much his as it is mine. I could not have imagined having a better advisor and mentor for my M.Sc.

I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Ulrich Wassmer and Dr. Michael Carney. Their practical insights into multipartner airline alliances have enabled me to write and speak with authority and confidence. I hope these words do justice in expressing my gratitude.

Finally, I would like to thank my family, friends and peers for either genuinely expressing interest in my research, or else believably pretending to do so.

## Table of Contents

<b>List of Figures</b> .....	viii
<b>List of Tables</b> .....	ix
<b>Introduction</b> .....	1
<b>Theory</b> .....	4
<b>The dynamism of multipartner alliances</b> .....	4
<i>Entry/Exit practises</i> .....	6
<b>Institutional theory</b> .....	7
<i>Fields</i> .....	9
<i>Legitimacy</i> .....	11
<b>A discursive perspective of institutionalization</b> .....	13
<i>Institutionalized discourse: Discourse as contributing to for the creation of symbolic resources</i> .....	15
<i>Stories</i> .....	17
<b>Author agency</b> .....	18
<i>Institutional spectatorship</i> .....	19
<i>The news media as spectators</i> .....	21
<b>Boundaries</b> .....	22
<i>Spectators as performing boundary-work</i> .....	22

<b>Research Objectives</b> .....	24
<b>Methodology</b> .....	26
<b>Overview</b> .....	26
<b>Empirical Context of the Study</b> .....	26
<b>Data Sources</b> .....	27
<b>Research Design</b> .....	29
<i>Data Collection</i> .....	29
<i>A Grounded Theory Approach</i> .....	30
<i>Data Analysis</i> .....	31
<b>Findings</b> .....	41
<b>Micro-level</b> .....	42
<i>Shared story 1: Airline entry</i> .....	42
<i>Shared story 2: Airline exit</i> .....	55
<b>Meso-level</b> .....	62
<i>Shared story 3: Star Alliance’s evolution into an established, enduring and legitimate organizational form</i> .....	62
<b>Macro-level</b> .....	77
<i>Shared story 4: The institutionalization of MPA-related collaboration</i> .....	77
<b>Discussion</b> .....	84
<b>Core findings</b> .....	84

<i>The structuration of MPA-related collaboration</i> .....	84
<b>Contributions</b> .....	94
<b>Limitations</b> .....	96
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	98
<b>References</b> .....	99
<b>Appendix</b> .....	108
<b>Coding protocol</b> .....	113

## List of Figures

<b>Figure 1.</b> Anticipation, Accommodation And Integration Into Star Alliance.....	44
<b>Figure 2.</b> Membership, De-Accommodation And De-Integration From Star Alliance ..	57
<b>Figure 3.</b> The Mutual Constitution Of Mpa-Related Collaboration Within The Field Discourse .....	85



## List of Tables

<b>Table 1.</b> Summary of the Data Analysis .....	33
<b>Table 2.</b> Shared Story 1: Airline Entry.....	49
<b>Table 3.</b> Shared Story 2: Airline Exit .....	57
<b>Table 4.</b> Shared Story 3: Star Alliance’s Evolution into an Established, Enduring and Legitimate Organizational Form .....	77
<b>Table 5.</b> Shared Story 4: The Institutionalization of MPA-related Collaboration .....	86
<b>Table 6.</b> Coding Exert of the Institutionalization of MPA-related Collaboration .....	108
<b>Table 7.</b> Coding Protocol During Stage 1: Open Coding Period .....	113
<b>Table 8.</b> Coding Protocol During Stage 2: Axial Coding, Period 1 .....	115
<b>Table 9.</b> Coding Protocol During Stage 3: Axial Coding, Period 2 .....	119

## Introduction

Since their emergence in 1940s, airline alliances have grown into increasingly variable shapes and sizes, ranging from simple bilateral codesharing agreements to complex multipartner alliances (*MPAs* henceforth). *MPAs* are defined as voluntary, cooperative arrangements between multiple (i.e. greater than two) autonomous and semi-autonomous firms in order to utilize shared resources for the joint accomplishment of individual goals (Rhoades & Lush, 1997; Lavie, Lechner, & Singh, 2007). *MPAs* are not simply comprised of a collection of independent dyadic alliances, nor do they maintain their connections through a single focal firm (Lavie et al., 2007). Instead, *MPAs* entail multilateral interactions among members (Garcia-Canal & Sanchez-Lorda, 2007; Gudmundsson & Lechner, 2006), contributing to their description as complex and dynamic organizations (Kleymann, 2005; Lazzarini, 2007).

Prior research has studied *MPA* dynamics through four primary channels. First, *MPAs* have been studied within the context of their individual formations, beginning with the analysis of their interlinked dyadic alliances and following their culmination into an *MPA* (Kleymann, 2005; Lazzarini, 2008). Second, *MPAs* have been presented as interacting with one another, through inter-*MPA* competition, with one alliance potentially outperforming the other (Gomes-Casseres, 1994; Lazzarini, 2007). Third, *MPAs* have been presented as social spaces of member cooperation (Zeng & Chen, 2003) and competition (Garcia-Canal & Sanchez-Lorda, 2007; Kleymann, 2005). Finally, *MPAs* have been studied as depositories of both common (Lazzarini, 2007) and private member benefits (Lavie et al., 2007).

As Lazzarini (2008) has pointed out previously, MPAs in general are understudied. In light of this dearth of existing research then, my general goal is to move beyond the discussion on dyadic alliances into the exploration of the dynamics which are present in multipartner alliances. Moreover, while the value of MPA arrangements have been studied in some capacity (benefits and competition), alliance processes, stability and evolution are less understood (Gudmundsson & Lechner, 2006).

Therefore, in this study I seek to explore MPA evolution through the entry and exit of its members, particularly (1) because entry/exit distinguishes MPAs from dyadic alliances; and (2) because entry/exit enables me to study changes in stability and growth, allowing me to further analyze MPA evolution. I study change using a discursive perspective of institutionalization (Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2004), according to which discursive acts establish meaning, and are in themselves a method for translating and editing that meaning (Lamertz & Heugens, 2009). MPA evolution is therefore studied through common institutional understandings (Zilber, 2007), which serve to symbolically shape and position these alliances within discourse over time.

My empirical setting is the global airline industry, from 1997 until 2009. More specifically, my time frame begins with the formation of the world's first truly global MPA, Star Alliance. In order to explore discourse and institutional change, I use a qualitative, longitudinal methodology, rooted in an emergent approach to data collection and analysis known as grounded theory. My goal was to develop a set of collectively constructed stories, which is a macro-linguistic concept emphasizing multi-authorship of shared meaning (Zilber, 2007).

In detailing stories, I found that the institutionalization of airlines and MPAs within the field played out at three levels of analysis. At the micro-level, airlines were positioned within the field through the staging of their socialization into and their de-socialization from MPAs. Socialization became a discursive resource for authors to delineate and differentiate the airline entry/exit process. At the meso-level, MPAs became re-positioned through their acquisition and maintenance of legitimacy, and became shaped by the competition that developed between oneworld, SkyTeam and Star Alliance. At the macro-level, I explored the institutionalization of MPA-related collaboration, defined as all the entry and exit of airlines into and from MPAs, as well as subsequent intra-MPA alliances formed during an airline's tenure as a member. Collaboration's evolution helps outline the processes through which airlines and MPAs were shaped and positioned within the field's discourse.

## Theory

### **The dynamism of multipartner alliances**

Historically, one of the first MPAs within the global airline industry was Global Excellence. Formed in 1988 by Delta Air Lines, Singapore Airlines and Swissair, Global Excellence's ideal was to combine each airline's resources and routes to provide *global* services to passengers. This advantaged its members by allowing them to collaborate in order to attract a greater number of potential passengers, thus providing each member with a competitive advantage against rival airlines. This in turn afforded the members of Global Excellence with opportunities which unallied airlines didn't have access to, allowing Delta, Singapore and Swissair to more easily position themselves within their local and target markets.

Though its members technically formed a "global" network, Global Excellence's three-airline MPA was far too sparse to truly warrant its global status. Furthermore, the MPA itself was discussed as decreasingly relevant to its members, who began to express divergent interests, eventually dissolving the MPA in 1997. In the same year, Global Excellence was supplanted by a growing trend manifest in the first of three truly global MPAs. Founded in 1997, Star Alliance, along with oneworld in 1999 and SkyTeam in 2000, contributed to the evolution of the global airline industry. Referred to occasionally as multilateral alliances (Kleymann, 2005; Lazzarini, 2008) constellations (Gomes-Casseres, 1994), or more colloquially as the big three, oneworld, SkyTeam and Star Alliance were differentiated from Global Excellence in both size and scope (discussion about "MPAs" henceforth is limited to oneworld, SkyTeam, and Star Alliance). To this

end, the big three were described increasingly as organizational entities (Gomes-Casseres, 1994; Kleymann, 2005), primarily due to their relative complexity and dynamism in comparison with Global Excellence, as well as more traditional bilateral alliances.

Importantly, the big three's relative complexity and their organizational properties enabled each MPA to tailor their actions more effectively in order to pursuit joint actions, which they accomplished through a formal infrastructure grounded in a separate governance committee to manage each respective MPA's group affairs among members, as well as through common investment in brand names and technology platforms (Lazzarini, 2007). Examples of joint actions included traffic sharing, expanded bilateral codesharing agreements, improved flight scheduling, comprehensive route networks, pooled frequent flyer programmes (Rhoades & Lush, 1997), in addition to the developing of common marketing programs, the joint use of lounges and the joint purchasing of equipment. Collectively, these actions serve to benefit both passengers and members, with the former experiencing an improved level of seamlessness in their travel experiences, and the latter increasing operating profits and improving cost-savings.

Beyond the added level of sophistication noted, MPAs are also described as dynamic; as being reconstituted, evolving or changing over time. Previously, research has explored the interactions and recurrence processes that shape and constitute multilateral allying, and subsequently, the formation of MPAs (Kleymann, 2005). Similarly, Lazzarini (2007) explored the evolution of bilateral alliances as they formed into increasingly complex networks of interconnected airlines, outlining a predictive model surrounding resource diversity in order to examine the shifts over time as these informal

alliances transform into MPAs. Finally, Gomes-Casseres (1994) has discussed the shift from traditional bilateral alliances into MPAs, and how this evolution has impacted competition. Each of these articles explores MPAs as a source of often frenetic *change*; in other words, as a dynamic, complex organizational entity.

### ***Entry/Exit Practises***

One particularly fascinating and understudied dynamic unique to MPAs is the entry and exit of its members. The reason for this is that entry and exit is not applicable to bilateral alliances, as both partners' time of entry defines the formation and continued existence of the alliance, while the timing of exiting marks the cessation of that alliance (Lavie et al., 2007). Previous research has studied how collaborative dynamics within MPAs are shaped by the timing of entry of their members, achieved by focusing on factors which may explain how certain members benefit more than others based on when they enter and how committed they are to the alliance's goals (Lavie et al., 2007). Regarding exit strategy, Gulati, Sytch and Mehrotra (2008) have developed a generalized framework for drafting exit clauses and timing alliance exiting, suggesting that each member should plan for its possible or eventual exit from its alliance *ex ante*.

Both of these avenues of inquiry, in opting to discuss membership entry or exit, as well as focusing exclusively on the individual firm as a level of analysis, offer a foundational understanding regarding how entry and exit, when studied collectively, could affect the reconstitution and evolution of an MPA over time. Thus, little is actually known about how *both* entry and exit practises affect MPAs as a whole, and the interactions which occur within the MPA between several members—an absence which bears remediation (Lavie et al., 2007).

In order to effectively study MPAs dynamics and particularly, to study the change in MPAs through their reconstitution and evolution via the entry and exit of its members, I have opted to use an institutional theory approach. Institutional theory, though typically identified as focusing on the resilient aspects of social structures, has also become an increasingly effective lens for identifying change in those same structures, as well as in proponents who adopt, are shaped, and thus incorporate these structures in their actions. In other words, “students of institutions must perforce attend not just to consensus and conformity but to conflict and change in social structures” (Scott, 2004, p. 2). To this end, the complexities of MPA dynamics are better understood through a more formal understanding of institutional theory.

### **Institutional theory**

Broadly, institutional theory explores the capacity in which continuous and persistent social, institutional structures are erected (Scott, 2008), maintained (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Giddens 1984) or altered (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996; Hargrave & van de Ven, 2006) within social life. According to Scott (2008), institutions are regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive structures which provide actors with shared meaning and help to define a world which is largely taken-for-granted. First, the regulative pillar emphasizes rules, whether formal or informal, supported by surveillance and sanctioning. Second, the normative pillar emphasizes standards of appropriate behaviour, introducing a prescriptive, evaluative and obligatory dimension to social life. Third the cultural-cognitive pillar is itself divided into two halves: the cultural-half represents a collection of beliefs that, while initially subjective,



eventually develop into symbolic systems perceived as objective and external to the individual actor; and the cognitive-half, which represents the notion that responses to, and comprehensions of, external actions and practises are mediated by an actor's internal representation of its environment. The cultural-cognitive pillar is thus the recognition that internal interpretive processes are shaped by external cultural frameworks. A practise becomes institutionalized to the extent that actors who engage in ongoing relations with one another orient their actions toward a common sets of normative standards, cultural understandings/beliefs, value patterns, laws and regulations (Scott, 2008). Importantly, every pillar does not need to support an institutional structure in order for that institution be maintained within social life: what may begin as being enforced by formal sanctions and normative rules may eventually develop into an attractive and taken-for-granted solution to various industry problems (Beckert, 2010).

Historically, institutional theory has focused on structural convergence, a concept fostered initially in the works of Meyer and Rowan (1977) and DiMaggio and Powell (1983), together helping to shape subsequent research in the field (Mizruchi & Fein, 1999). DiMaggio and Powell (1983) in particular focused on the processes of homogenization through the concept of *isomorphism*, defined as a force or process which constrains an actor, structure or symbol into resembling other actors, structures or symbols within the same population, facing the same environmental pressures. Isomorphic change occurs through the involvement of three potentially overlapping mechanisms: coercive isomorphism, which results from the exertion of pressures from other organizations, and from external authoritative (political, governmental and/or legal) influence; mimetic isomorphism, which results from task, environment and/or

technological uncertainty influencing one organization to model itself on other organizations within the same institutional environment; and normative isomorphism, which results from constraint and obligation to professional rules and norms within an institutional environment. Therefore, in order for an organizational actor to survive within an institutional environment, it must conform to the rules and belief systems prevailing in that environment (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

### ***Fields***

Sets of organizations share sets of institutions, with both structure and actor co-existing within their environments (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2004). These environments are known more commonly as organizational/institutional fields (simply referred to as *fields* henceforth), and are defined as an aggregated concept comprised of two complimentary definitions (Owen-Smith & Powell, 2008). In one view, a field is described as a community of relevant actors who share a common meaning system, are subjected to similar reputational and regulatory pressures and who cooperate more willingly amongst themselves rather with those outside the field boundary (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). In another view, a field is a social space qualified simultaneously by the configuration of actors and power struggles of those who interact and reside within it (Bourdieu, 1985). Fields are thus recognizable arenas of social action, with positions within awarding different opportunities for some actors while constricting possibilities for others. The overall shape of the field, however, is moulded by the rules, pressures and structures that define legitimate activities and attractive positions in it.

Fields provide an analytic framework situated between the level of organizations and society, and is particularly useful when being drawn upon to study *communities* of actors (Wedlin, 2006), such as MPAs. Furthermore, the field approach directs attention toward processes formed between and among organizations rather than individual actors, and it provides opportunities for explanations about MPA dynamics that move beyond the MPAs themselves. For instance, the movement of airlines into and out of MPAs hints at larger communities of actors within the field. Understanding MPAs as part of a field thus provides different perspectives than earlier studies which focused more on bilateral or multilateral alliances from the perspective of individual airlines. First, the field approach demands added attention to the interactions between organizations and institutions. With regards to MPA dynamics particularly, the field thus serves as a conceptual platform to help detail the interactions between MPAs and institutions, as well as how the latter catalyzes change in the former (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Second, a field approach enables a greater perspective when studying the interaction between MPAs and external stakeholders, such as the news media, airline commissions, regulators, and governments, each of whom serves as members of the field who are involved, in one way or another, in affecting airline entry/exit, and thus as affecting an MPA's evolution. Thus, the study of fields, in demanding an orientation toward macro-level (the field itself) and meso-level (communities within the field) concepts, in addition to micro-level processes (airline entry/exit), serves as a conceptual scaffold to help analyze the degree in which MPAs are affected by their environments.

## ***Legitimacy***

Conforming to institutional structures, including complacency with schemes, rules, norms, routines and practises, allows an actor within a field to be perceived as legitimate. Legitimacy is defined as “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions.” (Suchman, 1995, p.574). Legitimacy is instrumental to the success of organizational actors, as a significant deficit may lead to external claims describing this actor as negligent, irrational or unnecessary, potentially resulting in it incurring additional costs (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). For instance, regulators and commissions within the global airline industry occasionally interfere with airlines attempting to enter into an MPA. They do so in part because they are designed to mitigate and control the growth of MPAs, the nature of which limits competition between airlines (notably, the presumed competition between the entering airline and the remaining members within the MPA) in favour of cooperation between actors. MPAs which are perceived as illegitimate, either through rapid expansion or negative publicity, may incur greater additional costs than legitimate MPAs, which have proven that their alliance with an entering airline doesn't impede greatly on competition in the region, while attempting to integrate a targeted airline.

Organizational actors' *identities* are important resources in maintaining perceptions of legitimacy (Brown, 1997; Glynn & Abzug, 2002; Sillince & Brown, 2009). Previous research on identity as it relates to *legitimacy* has explored how symbolic content is produced by organizations in order to appear legitimate to constituents. Specifically, Glynn and Abzug (2002) charted organizational name patterns, which they

described as a cogent identifying symbol, to demonstrate two separate, but interconnected conclusions: first, how institutional conformity shapes organizational identity; and second, how isomorphism, which allows constituents to recognize an organizational actor's actions as being understandable, interpretable and desirable, secures organizational legitimacy for targeted audiences. Other researchers analysed the social and symbolic production of "official" identity claims by studying rhetoric used on police websites (Sillince & Brown, 2009). Rhetoric, which the authors define as the production of persuasive discourse, was argued to be used in this context to construct legitimacy claims around a projected, collectively articulated official identity—as opposed to the individual, less official identity claims circulating within and around the organization. Importantly, studying the symbolic construction and management of an "official" identity using a website allowed for insights into how an identity claim can be designed for both internal and external consumption—by members within the police force who themselves have ideations of how they view their organization and by external constituents who consume the official identity claim while viewing the police force's website.

Taken together, both of the above research streams suggest that organizational identity is often symbolic and mutable (Brown, 2006; Brown & Humphreys, 2006; Harrison, 2006), and that it is often constituted through the demands of an external audience. That identity is mutable suggests that an actor exists in *relation* to other actors, when identified as distinguishable from those other actors within the field. In this sense, identity serves to position actors within the field. For instance, within the global airline industry, actors include unallied airlines, MPA members and MPAs themselves. Each of these actors' roles is not singular, unitary, nor static (Harrison, 2006). Rather, each is

shaped and re-shaped by external stakeholders, who seek to validate or question their legitimacy and their identities within the field (Lamertz & Heugens, 2009). To this end, a desirable *identity position* is acquired through the conferral of legitimacy, which serves to position actors as such as to award them with greater opportunities (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Owen-Smith & Powell, 2008).

### **A discursive perspective of institutionalization**

Discourse has been discussed in the literature as an effective method for studying institutional phenomena (Phillips et al., 2004) at the level of organizations (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000; Phillips & Brown, 1993). Broadly, *discourse* is a composite term comprising all manner of spoken interaction, whether formal or informal, and written texts of any kind (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). More specifically, discourse is the process by which these language-based interactions interrelate, are produced, disseminated and received along with how they bring objects and ideas into social being (Hardy, Lawrence, & Grant, 2005). Discourses cannot be studied directly, they can only be explored by examining the texts which constitutes them (Phillips et al., 2004). Therefore, discourse analysis involves the study of bodies of text.

Three major components surrounding discourse include its function, variation and construction (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). First, authors of texts use their language to *do* things. Such a function can be to persuade, accuse or influence others. Discourse calls into mind the idea of action, however direct or indirect, rather than simply being commentary existing merely to describe something (Heracleous & Marshak, 2004). Furthermore, texts are written by authors, from a particular point of view for a particular

audience and are thus imbued with motive (Brown, 2006), which enables discourse to serve a particular function.

Second, an author's written description of particular events or situations (known henceforth as an "account") varies according to the purpose of the text; two authors may provide very different accounts of the same organizational action, as each actor is influenced by the situation and their targeted audience differently, and articulates themselves differently. To this end, textual features inherent in each author's writing create further differences in the accounts which they eventually write up. Examples of textual features include the way an author structures a text, emphasizing certain angles of an event while deemphasizing others, as well as that author's integration of metaphors, which may be interpreted differently, altering the meaning surrounding an event (Heracleous & Marshak, 2004). This *variability* in discourse denotes a manner of flexibility in language and context dependency. Importantly, many different accounts by various authors can help flesh out a situation, acting as a meaning-creation device which members can come to identify with (Alvesson & Karreman, 2007). This is to say that many actors author accounts surrounding the same social action—such as the entry or exit of an airline into or out of an MPA—but do so using different points of view, depending on their audience and its expectations, as well as the author's purpose, interests and motives (Brown, 2006).

Third, authors often use language to provide their accounts with meaning, thus *constructing* the social worlds around them. In embellishing texts with meaning, accounts become known as narratives (Brown, 2006; Gabriel, 1995), and authors become *symbol* creators, generating content which can be consumed by constituents (Heracleous &

Marshak, 2004). In also being infused with intent and thus variability, narratives serve as meaning-making vehicles (Brown, 2006), allowing organizations within the field to become exposed to widespread ways of thinking (Gergen & Thatchenkery, 1996). Accordingly, discourse outlines widespread and patterned way of viewing organizational actions, such as airline entry/exit. What results is an emphasis on authors as interpreting organizational actions, and thereafter constructing a social reality that encases them (Heracleous & Barrett, 2001).

***Institutionalized discourse: Discourse as contributing to for the creation of symbolic resources***

In this sense, discourse is a valuable platform for discussing the capacity in which authors can use institutions as symbolic resources. Previously, Phillips, Lawrence and Hardy (2004) proposed a model centering on how language plays an active role in establishing and shaping patterned organizational actions (for instance, airline entry/exit). In their model, institutionalization is said to occur not through the imitation of an action by observers (airlines), but rather through the creation of relevant texts (by authors). According to Phillips and his colleagues (2004), organizational actions are connoted through written accounts and texts, which are imbued with meaning and legitimacy before being embedded within a larger discourse. First and as was previously discussed, accounts are often embellished with meaning, which contributes to the construction of narratives (Brown, 2006). Second, narratives are often embedded with explanations, validations or resistance surrounding the actions of the organizations they are authored about (Brown, 1997). Accordingly, narratives are often embedded with actions that attempt to gain, maintain, or repair legitimacy (Phillips et al., 2004; Suchman, 1995).



Discourse, in connecting variable narratives, potentially culminates in the eventual agreement over proscribed behaviour surrounding action, reflexively enforcing these actions in relevant organizations (which thereafter contributes to yet further narratives and discourse), thereby institutionalization them within discourse. Institutionalized discourse thus becomes the usual manner in which authors interact with and constitute discursive assumptions and vocabularies (Miller, 1994). From this perspective, texts which are patterned and which discuss commonalities in actions are related to the stability of those actions, with stability being linked with the official, legal or legitimate state of such actions (Smolka, 2005). Stability is thus linked with credibility and serves to enforce the legitimacy in actions (Suchman, 1995).

Two examples are provided. First, airlines which eventually enter into an MPA are first assumed to form a number (usually one, though sometimes several more than that) bilateral alliances with a member airline (s) before eventually entering into the MPA. This assumption, which is inherent in texts discussing airline entry/exit, outlines the stability in the entry/exit practise within the field; moreover, in being stated as matter-of-fact, texts which outline airline entry/exit legitimize that entering/exiting practise in MPAs which tailor their growth toward maximally accommodating this option. Second, common vocabularies are often used when describing airline entry/exit. For instance, an entering airline is described as signing a memorandum of understanding, which usually precipitates the forming of codesharing alliances, eventually resulting in that airline's entry into an MPA. Similarly, exiting airlines are often described as creating gaps in an MPA's network, with their exiting being consistently construed through their absence from the alliance. At the field level then, discourse is notable for containing institutional

and symbolic resources used by institutional authors to legitimize organizational actors, construct their identities, and position them within the field.

### ***Stories***

In emphasizing the institutionalization of discourse through narrative convergence and agreement, my particular interests lie in a macro-linguistic concept known as *stories*. Multiauthored and co-narrated, stories result from an aggregation of multiple narratives and emerge through various bits and pieces by various authors (Zilber, 2007). For instance, what various authors would constitute as “Star Alliance’s identity position” within the field is the result of various narratives which collectively form a relatively cohesive understanding of that position. Zilber (2007), in her article on the discursive dynamics of institutional agency, outlines a number of processes through which two groups, each occupying the same field, came to make sense of the dot-com crash of 2000. It was Zilber’s belief that each group collaborated in the crafting of an officially shared story, the purpose of which was to help the field’s inhabitants unify and conform to the field’s existing order. However, Zilber noted that each group also authored two primary counter-stories which served to contest this official order. These three primary stories allowed both groups to make adequate sense of what lead up to the crisis, how it would be confronted and surmounted, and the effects of its aftermath on the field’s inhabitants. Collectively then, each story served to constitute and manipulate the meaning of this crisis, in order for the field’s inhabitants to make adequate sense of its happening.

Stories are also effective concepts to the extent that they contextualize individual narratives (Leitch & Palmer, 2010). Importantly, stories unfold over *time*, and are often effective resources for collectively altering, shifting or imposing new understandings

over existing social processes; in other words, stories contribute to the *changing* way that discourse constitutes organizational entities, over time, such as member entry/exit and the resulting evolution and reconstitution of MPAs. In being co-narrated, stories are comprised of various, often more detailed narratives, each of which singularly only contributes to a marginal portion of the expanding shared story. Moreover, institutionalized discourse surrounding airline entry/exit within the field, in serving as a basis for agreement between authors and thus as a foundation for shared stories, provides authors with the symbolic resources to *multi-author* shared meaning based on actor-identity, positioning and legitimacy.

In summary, my objective is to use a discursive perspective of institutionalization (Phillips et al., 2004) in order to effectively analyze an MPA's identity position and legitimacy within the field. This would allow me to explore the dynamics of MPA growth and evolution through airline entry/exit. Field discourse enables authors to craft symbolic resources, which are rooted in multi-author agreement. Agreement and the subsequent convergence of narratives over time serves to constitute and eventually change shared stories (Zilber, 2007), which contextualize individual narratives, as well as housing institutional and symbolic resources.

### **Author agency**

The discursive perspective of institutionalization generally, and the concept of stories more specifically are rooted in the assumption that authors possess institutional *agency*. Broadly, agency is the ability for an actor's actions to have some effect on the social world, resulting in the alteration of rules and norms which govern prevailing ways

of thinking within a given institutional environment (Christensen et al., 1997; Giddens, 1979; Giddens, 1984; Sudaddy & Greenwood, 2005; Scott, 2008). Importantly, emphasis is directed away from the macro-level creation of social practises—such as how rules and norms are institutionalized within the field’s discourse—toward the explicit role that actors play in the process of institutionalization (Christensen et al., 1997). The end result is a more integrated approach (Beckert, 2010) where actors are recognized as being able to break away from social constraint (Lamertz & Heugens, 2009), while still recognizing that that constraint is both a product and platform of social action (Giddens, 1984).

### ***Institutional spectatorship***

Of particular importance in this study are a subset of actors known as institutional spectators (*spectators* henceforth), whose roles as authors include utilizing discourse to confirm, criticize or alter identity positions within the field. More specifically, spectators engage in the performative process of observing scripted organizational actions (such as airline entry/exit), evaluating it against a specific standard and reproducing it in edited form (Lamertz & Heugens, 2009). In stressing performativity, Lamertz and Heugens (2009) suggest that spectators demonstrate agency in being able to shape and institutionalize organizational actions, contributing to the *construction*, rather than the mirroring, of the field (Owen-Smith, 2001).

Spectatorship is linked closely with Goffman’s (1959) concept of dramaturgy. Briefly, organizations within the field seek *validation* from spectators, which is accomplished in part through the *performances* of the former in the texts authored by the latter. The term “performance” refers to “all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers

and which has some influence on the observers” (Goffman, 1959, p.22). Within the context of this study, performances by airlines include their entry and exit into and from MPAs. Spectators, in authoring accounts about industry events, regularly *dramatize* elements of them in their narratives, highlighting or conveying information that might otherwise remain obscured (Goffman, 1959; Lamertz & Heugens, 2009). In presenting organizational actions in dramatic fashion, spectators often translate, validate, legitimate or criticize actors and their actions. More specifically, *validation* refers to a response wherein spectators make valid, confirm or acknowledge the performances of actors. Validation is often noted in choice language adopted by spectators, particularly through the complimenting of an action’s entry/exit actions. Validation is an effective discursive vehicle for spectators, specifically because it enables them to re-position actors (both airlines and MPAs) more centrally within the field discourse.

As authors within the field, spectators utilize these various dramaturgical techniques when producing symbolic content, in the form of narratives, which they accomplish through a variety of roles, including being translators, legitimators, editors and arbiters (Lamertz & Heugens, 2009). More specifically, field constituents are involved in a negotiation which determines the legitimacy of the positioning-actions of airlines and how these actions, as events, are finally transmitted through the *translated* narratives authored by spectators (Zilber, 2006). Spectators face pressures to maintain legitimacy from other constituents (Durand & McGuire, 2005), such as those who consume their authored narratives, which spectators mitigate by validating symbolic claims through public testimony (Lamertz & Heugens, 2009). This allows spectators to maintain their own relevancy within the field as well *legitimizing* the actions of the

airlines and MPAs which they author about. Moreover, by translating and legitimating entry/exit practises, spectators *edit* their narratives to appeal to targeted constituents, thus increasing its attractiveness to those consumers (Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008; Lamertz & Heugens, 2009). Finally, spectators assess the compliance of discursive claims by airlines and MPAs with field-level norms, thus *arbitrating* their practises (Lamertz & Heugens, 2009).

### *The news media as spectators*

Within the context of this study, the focal spectators are the news media, a collective term describing any element of the mass media whose focus is on delivering news to the general or a target public. There are two primary reasons for choosing the news media as spectators. First, spectators are conceptualized as actors whose vantage allows them to effectively disseminate widespread symbolic content. Achieving this level of dissemination is important when considering that spectators are performatively capable of constructing the field (Lamertz & Heugens, 2009). If texts become ineffectively disseminated, then authors are unable to affect the discourse in the field (Phillips, et al., 2004), diminishing these actors' ability to participate in the contribution of field. The news media, as a shared reference for knowledge transfer among constituents whose interests surround a particular industry (Nederhof & Meijer, 1995), are positioned effectively regarding the widespread dissemination of airline entry/exit actions, allowing them to readily embody their roles as spectators. Second, the news media are accomplished storytellers whose jobs revolve around drawing on discourse in order to dramatize and/or relay information to targeted constituents, with their institutional claims often being validated through public testimony.

## **Boundaries**

Discourses, in any capacity, are often acknowledged as enabling actors to construct boundaries (Friman, 2010). Broadly, boundaries are distinctions that establish categories of objects, people or activities (Lamont & Molnar, 2002). Previous boundary issues have centered on class (Bourdieu, 1985), culture (DiMaggio, 1987), professions (Carlile, 2002), knowledge (Carlile, 2002) and science (Emirbayer, 1997), for instance. In this study, I will initially adopt a narrower conception of boundaries, using them to reference distinctions made between groups of airlines. When studying all members within an MPA as a collective group, boundaries are analyzed to the extent that they encase and serve as a means of identifying that MPA, distinguishing its members and practises from other MPAs in the industry. When studying groups of airlines within an MPA, then boundaries are analyzed to the extent that they distinguish that group from other groupings of airlines within the same MPA. To this end, boundaries are drawn around identities in relation to other identifiable actors. This serves to create identity-positions within the field.

### ***Spectators as performing boundary-work***

Within the context of this study, spectators are noted for their performativity (Lamertz & Heugens, 2009), which enables these actors to socially construct activity, identities and positions in their individual narratives and shared stories. More specifically, in being co-authored by various sources, shared stories are themselves embedded with symbolic resources which are produced and reproduced by various spectators, enabling closure in the ideations surrounding a specific organizational activity and actor, reducing the desirability of alternate interpretations.

Accordingly, spectators are noteworthy for their capacities in creating, shaping and disrupting boundaries around groups of actors (such as airlines), activities and social structures, a social process known more generally as *boundary-work* (Gieryn, 1983; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010). Boundary-work is valuable as, “social entities come into existence when social actors tie social boundaries together in certain ways. Boundaries come first, then entities” (Abbott, 1995, p.860). In other words, MPAs and groups of member airlines become distinguishable from each other as well as from other actors within the field based on the boundaries authored around them. Boundary-work is accomplished through the authoring of narratives and stories related to airlines and MPAs, subject matter which houses symbolic resources capable of performing this boundary work (the discussion of, and delineation of, insiders from outsiders).

Boundary-work is variable, depending on the criteria used to operationalize the demarcation process, with boundaries themselves often being distinguished into either *symbolic* or *social* variants (Lamont & Molnar, 2002). According to Lamont and Molnar, symbolic boundaries are “conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practises and even time and space. They are tools by which individuals and groups struggle over and come to agree upon definitions of reality” (2002, p.168). Symbolic boundaries represent the dynamic dimensions of social relations, in that groups, such as various spectators, compete or cooperate in the production, diffusion and institutionalization of alternative assumptions, themselves determining acceptable and desirable behaviours within the established boundary (Gergen & Thatchenkery, 1996; Phillips, Sewell, & Jaynes, 2008). An example of a symbolic boundary would be the meaning attributed to the collaboration between airlines and MPAs. Initially, spectators



may have disagreed over how the collaboration between entering or exiting airlines and MPAs was constituted within the field. However, this shared understanding may change over time, revealing an evolution in the symbolic boundaries demarcating the meaning surrounding collaboration within the field discourse.

Social boundaries, on the other hand, focus on objectified forms of social differences, brought about through equal access to, but unequal distribution of, material and nonmaterial resources and opportunities (Lamont & Molnar, 2002). Examples of social boundaries include race, gender and social class (Lamont & Molnar, 2002; Pachucki, Pendergrass, & Lamont, 2007; Swarts, 2011), though the definition can be expanded to include MPAs, which can be distinguished based on each MPA's aggregated flight network, the total number of members in the alliance and their respected positions within their respective markets. To this end, each MPA is equal, in that they are each capable of acquiring the same resources—namely, financial capital, geographic coverage and passenger traffic quantity—though they are unequal, in that MPAs are often differentiated based on their size, global reach and the seamlessness of their travel services.

### **Research Objectives**

In summary, my core research objective is to track spectatorship over time, which should reveal how social structures change in conjunction with the boundaries drawn around MPAs and their members. In this way, I intend to map stories over time and observe how they change as the discursive resources about legitimate actions and valuable positions themselves change. Accordingly, several research questions are

considered. First, does boundary-work performed at the level of airlines enable spectators to construct various differentiable periods of airline entry and exit? Second, how are boundaries linked with the identity-positioning of MPAs, and in what capacity does this elucidate how these actors acquire and maintain legitimacy? Third, how do the previous two levels of boundary-work contribute to the institutionalization of the field discourse?

Additionally, I hope to contribute to institutional theory, identity and spectatorship by considering (1) how social and symbolic boundaries constructed by the media in their coverage of MPA evolution helped shape the new and emerging MPA form and (2) the role that the media play as intermediaries who shape collective identity stories, an area where little research has been done (Wry, Lounsbury & Glynn, 2011).

In order to study these questions/objectives a methodology grounded in *discursive pragmatism* will be used (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000). As an intellectual scaffold governing research dealing with discourse, discursive pragmatism advances that discursively produced outcomes, such as texts, should be studied, not *per se*, but in an attempt to work toward interpretations beyond this specific level. For instance, in studying texts about airline entry/exit, my intentions are to work toward the interpretation of boundary-work embedded within these discourses. In using this methodology, I assume that the institutional environment is to some extent constituted through texts, narratives and discourse (Phillips et al., 2004). In analyzing these texts, I assume further that I can more effectively understand something about the institutional context of airlines entry and exits, in addition to MPAs dynamics. Thus, I seek to analyze the production of meanings and concepts used by social actors in real settings and over time (Suddaby, 2006).

## **Methodology**

### **Overview**

The following is a qualitative, longitudinal study that employs an emergent approach to collecting and analyzing archival data. Known more specifically as grounded theory, this emergent approach advocates a constant comparison between data collection and analysis (Suddaby, 2006). Accordingly, while each of these sections is presented below in a discrete and sequential manner, both stages were in fact handled simultaneously. Furthermore, *time* is a core aspect in my design because I track the emerging construction and the ongoing change of stories about boundaries in and around MPAs through spectatorship.

### **Empirical Context of the Study**

The global airline industry was chosen as the empirical context of this study because it represents an ideal setting to study my research objective. In seeking to study the dynamics of MPA evolution, I required an industry in which (1) MPAs are a common collaborative form among industry players and (2) data on airline entry/exit can be collected from public secondary sources. For these reasons, I chose the global airline industry as the empirical setting for my study. Moreover, MPAs have become a ubiquitous phenomenon in this industry (Gomes-Casseres, 1994; Lazzarini, 2007), and data on MPA-related collaborations is widely available.

To observe the evolution of MPA-related collaboration within the field discourse, I required an MPA (or a collection of MPAs) which offered enough instances of airline

entries and exits, enabling me to capture how spectators constructed the dynamics of membership growth and decline. For this reason and in order to make the collection and analysis of my data more manageable, I collected data exclusively on Star Alliance. This MPA was chosen over oneworld and SkyTeam for reasons being that it is both the oldest and largest of the big three MPAs. The culmination of Star Alliance's age and size have enabled for a large sample of airline entry and exit. For instance, since its inception until 2009, 29 airlines have entered into Star Alliance, while 3 member airlines exited from it. In the same time period, oneworld has seen 12 entries and 2 exits, and SkyTeam has seen 13 entries and 2 exits. Moreover, the five founding airlines (Air Canada, Lufthansa, Scandinavian Airlines, Thai Airways International and United Airlines) offered 6,223 daily flights to 578 cities in 106 countries in 1997. These numbers have since expanded to 25 members, offering a combined 19,500 flights daily to 1,071 cities in 171 countries, by 2009.

### **Data Sources**

The research centers around a concept known as *industry-level attention*, which is defined as the process by which industry participants, through their discourse with other industry participants, selectively focus their attention on a limited set of practises which are meaningful for that industry (Hoffman & Ocasio, 2001). In defining industry participants, I employ a field-level perspective (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) and include not only producer organizations in the industry, such as airlines and alliances, but also other organizations who share a common meaning system, such as the news media, air transport commissions, governments and other regulative bodies.

To capture data on industry-level attention, I focused on how attention is situated within business press articles. In employing the term “business press”, I am referring to news publications which focus on the commercial dealings within the global airline industry. More specifically, my chosen dataset comprised industry specific journals, the importance of which is noted in their structural position as a shared reference for knowledge among industry constituents, which enables them to act as a common source of available information and interpretations (Hoffman & Ocasio, 2001). To this end, attentional processes are embedded within industry journals, readily offering its readership an outlet to focus their attentions on (such as airline entry/exit practises), while providing a frame to meaningfully analyze these events.

Limitations in this data source are well known. Industry journalists often engage in impression management and are prone to editorial bias, both intentionally and by cultural assumption. These actors, in their role as spectators, are often subject to various pressures exerted on them by powerful figures, such as various governments, organizations, and other valued constituents, within the industry (Lamertz & Heugens, 2009; Molotch & Lester, 1975). What results is a biased interpretation and construction of events and issues, where this bias is likely reflected by the interests of its core readers, as well as its sources of information (Hoffman & Ocasio, 2001; Molotch & Lester, 1975).

Given these limitations, the analysis of industry journals was supplemented by corresponding coverage of the same events by the news media. The primary purpose in doing this was twofold. First, because of plurivocality (Brown, 2006), analysis of events (airline X enters or exits from Star Alliance in year Y) should be done through the study of multiple sources, rather than just through one perspective, or voice. Second,

successfully elucidating how entry and exit airline practises affect the composition of boundaries demands critical analysis of how each text coexists within its greater context (Leitch & Palmer, 2010). In order to determine how entry/exit relates to boundary-work performed by spectators, multiple narrative-sources should be assessed, with the goal of revealing the greater context surrounding each individual airline event. Accordingly, press releases and major U.S. news publications were used as complimentary data sources in order to provide different field-level perspectives. “Press releases” are defined here as any written or recorded discourse directed at members of the news media for the purpose of announcing something deemed as being newsworthy.

### **Research Design**

The following section begins by outlining the adopted research design used to empirically collect and analyze my dataset. Afterward, an overview of the *a priori* and emergent concepts that guided the collection and analysis stages of my research is provided.

### ***Data Collection***

Research was carried out using archival data about airline alliances available through *Factiva*, a business information and research tool which provides access to a wide range of media sources, including industry journals, major U.S. news publications and press releases, from over 200 countries. Data was collected surrounding all types of *passenger* alliances, including joint marketing, joint airport facilities and ground handling, access to destinations of other partners’ route networks through codesharing, IT systems sharing and development, and joint maintenance or purchasing operations

(Rhoades & Lush, 1997; Lazzarini, 2007). Data collection was restricted to passenger-centered alliances, at the exclusion of other alliances, such as cargo alliances, and other airline activities, such as the purchasing or upgrading of fleets/aircraft.

I reviewed entry and exit coverage in industry journals, including *Airline Business*, *Aviation Daily*, and *Air Transport World*; two press release archives, *Reuters News Wire*, and *Press Release Wire*; and major U.S. news journals, including *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Washington Post*.

### ***A Grounded Theory Approach***

The nature of this research content demands a design that allows for the investigation of MPAs in a natural setting. In order to analyze how industry participants (industry journals, the news media and press releases) author entry/exit stories, and thus perform boundary-work, I conducted a longitudinal, grounded theory approach study. Broadly, grounded theory is a data collection method through which theoretical constructs are derived from the qualitative analysis of data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Moreover, it is an organic process of theory emergence based on how well collected data fits various conceptual categories (Suddaby, 2006).

Grounded theory centers around two interpretative concepts. The first is *constant comparison*, in that data is collected and analyzed simultaneously; the second is *theoretical sampling*, in which decisions about what data should be collected next are determined by the theory which is being constructed (Suddaby, 2006). Theoretical sampling is an ongoing and reflexive process, wherein earlier questions are altered or

discarded until a point of “saturation” has been achieved; that is, the point in the research process when all the concepts are well defined and explained (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Several reasons exist for choosing to use grounded theory. First, this method of collection and analysis is suited for some questions more than others; for instance, when the focus of one’s research is on exploring the process by which actors construct meaning out of intersubjective experience (Suddady & Greenwood, 2005). In this study, my aim has been to determine how actors utilize entry/exit narratives to co-construct boundaries around and within Star Alliance. As such, grounded theory is an appropriate method. Second, a key element in grounded theory is “lifting” raw data to a conceptual level (Suddaby, 2006, , p.636). This process is achieved through constant comparison, where data collection and analysis synergize in the coalescence of definable, conceptual structures. My core objective throughout this study has always been to outline and elucidate boundary-work, rather than simply centering my analysis on the narratives in the global airline industry, *per se*. In other words, discourse analysis has been used meaningfully, but also as a springboard to collect and develop conceptual structures (boundary-work).

### ***Data Analysis***

Data were analyzed using the qualitative coding software program *NVivo*. The first stages of data collection resulted in a dataset comprised of 793 news media articles, 1,519 coded data chunks and four coding categories (refer to table 1 for full names). This dataset was eventually reduced to 116 articles and 153 coded data chunks, while the coding categories were expanded to five.



Data analysis occurred in three stages and is presented as such, with each stage being subdivided based on 1) the *research objective* governing that particular stage of coding and subsequently of analysis; 2) the *concepts* which guided the formation of that research objective, as well as the articulation of the coding categories used; and 3) the *categories* used while coding.

Stages 1, 2 and 3 of the coding process are presented sequentially for advanced clarity. It is important to note that delineating between the open and axial stages is done purely for this purpose. In actuality, the evolution in the concepts used, the subsequent coding categories obtained, and the overarching research objective all occurred at different rates, and should be read as such. Moreover, the transition from “open” to “axial, period 1”, and then from “axial, period 1” into “axial, period 2” was more gradual than is presented here.

Table 1		
<i>Summary of data analysis section</i>		
<i>Stage 1: Open coding period</i>	<i>Stage 2: Axial coding, period 1</i>	<i>Stage 3: Axial coding, period 2</i>
<p><i>Research objective:</i></p> <p>To explore some reasons listed in news media texts why airlines would enter or exit from Star Alliance.</p>	<p><i>Research objective:</i></p> <p>To explore how the field context, which connotes the availability of discursive resources at given points in time, informs the authorship of entry/exit narratives within the global airline industry.</p>	<p><i>Research objective:</i></p> <p>To explore how industry participants, in drawing from the field discourse and in writing collectively about airline entry/exit, utilize shared stories to create boundaries around and within MPAs</p>
<p><i>A priori concepts guiding this stage of research:</i></p> <p>1) Airline entry/exit</p>	<p><i>Intermediary concepts guiding this stage of research:</i></p> <p>1) Airline entry/exit 2) Boundaries 3) Time 4) Variability in the individual news sources</p>	<p><i>Emergent concepts guiding this stage of research:</i></p> <p>1) Actual versus potential airline entry/exit 2) Boundaries around versus boundaries within Star Alliance 3) Context versus root event</p>
<p><i>Coding categories:</i></p> <p>1) Airline entry 2) Airline exit 3) Reasons for airline entry/exit: motivations for entry/exit, external/environmental factors which enhance likelihood of entry/exit</p>	<p><i>Coding categories:</i></p> <p>1) Boundaries around Star Alliance 2) Boundaries within Star Alliance 3) Contextual concepts: Identity, Star Alliance size, organizational field, public benefits, reasons for airline entry/exit</p>	<p><i>Coding categories:</i></p> <p>1) Boundaries around Star Alliance 2) Boundaries within Star Alliance 3) Contextual concepts: a. Macro-level: external-obstacles which affect MPA performance, themes b. Meso-level: Star Alliance's identities, public benefits c. Micro-level: airline configuration, membership maintenance, reasons for airline entry/exit</p>

### *Stage 1: Open coding period*

An open and emergent approach was taken (Alvesson & Karreman, 2007) regarding the development of any initial research objectives. Operational questions such as, “What reasons are described by spectators for why airlines chose to enter into Star Alliance?”, and, “What benefits are offered to allied versus unallied airlines?” served as a basis for the initial collection and coding of data.

In proposing these initial questions, I attempted to pay careful attention to how texts grouped entry/exit reasoning, which I felt at the time, was an ideal way of extracting the context embedded within entry/exit texts—with these contextual elements serving as the primary symbolic resources used in the creation, maintenance and disruption of boundaries around Star Alliance, collectively, as well as around a smaller subset of its members. To this end, my first research objective was *to explore some reasons listed in news media texts for why airlines would enter or exit from Star Alliance*.

### *Coding categories during open-coding*

At this stage, I tried to maintain a large degree of flexibility and freedom to explore the topics of boundaries and social construction quite broadly. Accordingly, I explored the initial research question by analyzing the continuous influx of data and delineated blocks of it into thematic concepts which represented this data, in this raw state—a stage known as *open-coding* (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Two predominant categories were developed as a result of this open coding period. The first was “motivations/reasons for airline entry/exit”. Early examples of groupings which I constructed using this objective and related to airline entry, included

codesharing and the benefits accrued by members and passengers. Meanwhile, early examples of groupings related to exit, included unsuccessful partnerships between airlines and a failure to renew cooperation deals, or codesharing agreements. The second category developed was related to “external/environmental factors” which may impact the likelihood of either entry or exit from being considered or as occurring. An example of one contextual/environmental factor included the identity of the MPA, which may attract or repel candidates based on policies regarding membership flexibility and emphasis on equity/ownership or non-equity/cooperation. Whereas motivations was constructed from the entering/exiting airlines perspective, external factors focused on more macro-level issues which may, as a result, cause an airlines to gravitate towards or away from Star Alliance.

*Stage 2: Axial coding, period 1*

The initially broad research objective was eventually refined into a more complex one, which was driven by the development of further questions, such as, “How do symbolic resources in the field affect the development of texts written about airline entry/exit?”, “What are the commonalities inherent in multiple texts which allow spectators to construct similar narratives related to specific instances of airline entry/exit?”, and, “Do these commonalities change over time?”. Thus, my research objective began to shift toward the understanding of spectatorship, boundaries and temporality. Accordingly, during the middlemost portion of my coding and analysis my objective was to *explore how the field context, which connotes the availability of discursive resources at given points in time, informs the authorship of entry/exit narratives within the global airline industry.*

### Intermediate Concepts

The above research objective was notable in that it benchmarked an intermediary period in my data analysis, where I began to lift the raw data I had previously collected to a greater degree of conceptualization. This equated with moving away from airline entry/exit *per se* and increasingly towards boundaries, spectatorship and narratives. First, *boundaries* developed from the previous emphasis on *airline entry/exit*. Observing airline entry and exit was interpreted as delineating members from non-members. This delineation formed the original conception of how Star Alliance's boundaries could be constructed.

Second, the concepts of spectatorship and the construction of narratives were rooted in an added emphasis which I began to place on *time* and *source variability*. Time was measured in years and operationally defined as the sequencing of texts in relation to other texts and events (Leitch & Palmer, 2010). The concept served as an early tool for analyzing the construction and change in boundaries surrounding Star Alliance and its members. Source variability developed from the added emphasis I began to place on spectators. Prior to collecting any data, I had postulated that industry journals and U.S. news publications served as complimentary or dissonant sets of spectators, while press releases served to corroborate any details discussed by the two other industry participants. My assumption was that despite being coined as "industry participants" in their aggregate, each news source narrated the same airline entry/exit event to different audiences. For instance, industry journals are published with the intention of target marketing actors within the industry, such as airlines and regulators; U.S. news publications generally target members outside of the global airline industry; and press

releases target industry journals and U.S. news publications, among other news outlets. Each source, then, must author an account which appealed to their respected audience (Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008), resulting theoretically in each group highlighting certain contextual factors surrounding an instance of airline entry/exit, while downplaying others. Importantly, this focus on the differences in data sources was a rudimentary way of beginning to analyze the impact that authors have in shaping boundaries.

### Coding categories during stage 2

In seeking to lift my data, I began increasingly to refine raw ideas while relating them to one another, eventually transforming the data itself into discrete categories, a process known as *axial coding* (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The categories developed as a result were (1) boundaries around Star Alliance, (2) boundaries within Star Alliance, and (3) contextual categories.

Two elements were most heavily involved in the modification of my previous coding categories. First, boundaries became an increasing focus in my study, with airline entry/exit serving as the symbolic contents, or the substantive information used by authors to constitute boundaries around and within MPAs. Second and related to question 3, the general shift in focus toward understanding how entry/exit texts translated into spectator boundary-work required a set of *contextual* nodes to analyze. This evolution in coding enabled me to start thinking about the texts as narratives, authored with intent and motive (Brown, 2006) rather than simply as rote information display, with little active manipulation from a given author. In approaching texts as narratives, I began categorizing various contextual elements. Slowly *context* developed into a depository for manifest themes outlining the logics and commonalities in the way spectators appeared to

author boundaries. Furthermore, I began observing how these themes would ebb and flow over time, with certain early topics slowly disappearing later on; and later themes becoming dominant sources of agreement and disagreement between spectators.

### *Stage 3: Axial coding, period 2*

At its core, the coding process during stage 3 was primarily a reflexive iteration on the axial coding during stage 2. My primary goal during this period was to further collapse the “context” nodes of stage 2 into discrete categories. Additionally, I sought to focus a greater deal of my attentions on boundary-work through spectatorship, and subsequently, in directing efforts toward saturation, or the point in the research process when all concepts are well defined and explained (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Comparatively, context during stage 2 was understood as being derived from narratives, each of which housed themes that served as sources of commonality between spectators. Context during stage 3 however was informed increasingly by an understanding that themes were sources of collective agreement. I therefore moved away from individually authored narratives and toward shared stories. Accordingly, a final research objective was formulated, which was *to explore how spectators, in drawing from the field discourse and in writing collectively about airline entry/exit, co-author and construct shared stories to create boundaries around and within MPAs.*

### *Emergent Concepts*

Equally, this final research objective outlined a shift in the way that I conceptualized the *levels of analysis* involved in this study. Context during the second stage of coding served more as a black box concept and my subsequent understanding of boundary-work and spectatorship were only loosely defined and understood. During

stage 3 however, I began to more consciously separate root airline events from increasingly abstract and conceptual levels of context. When discussing “context” I refer to the distinction between an airline event from several factors which encapsulate, but which are also external to this event (Leitch & Palmer, 2010).

At the most micro of levels, I began to re-organize my data on *actual versus potential airline events*. Building from there, I began to distinguish these root events from two contextual levels. The first was a meso-level of analysis, and emphasized the symbolic *boundaries constructed around versus boundaries within MPAs*, in addition to how these boundaries change over time. The second was a macro-level of analysis, and centered largely on *contextual factors* such as a text’s audience, its author, as well as textual features of the narrative itself such as temporality (Heracleous & Marshak, 2004). This re-organization of “context” allowed me to more actively outline shared stories, at various levels.

### Coding categories during stage 3

In seeking to reach saturation, I began utilizing the aforementioned concepts as coordinates, which enabled me to find intersections of meaningful data within my dataset. Through this cross-pollination of coding categories I was able to catalogue data which addressed airline entry/exit and one of the available meso- and macro-level contextual categories. This stage of axial coding reduced my dataset from the previous 793 articles and 1,519 data chunks to 84 articles and 125 data chunks for boundaries around Star Alliance and 50 articles and 55 data chunks for boundaries within Star Alliance.



Following this period of cross-pollination, which involved using previous coding categories to help lift my data, I developed the above-mentioned three-tier framework for collecting my data. At the micro-level, I focused on the admittance of entering airlines, and the rejection of exiting members. At the meso-level, I began clustering MPA-level contextual concepts, such as “MPA identities” and “public benefits to passengers and members”. My focus became on better understanding Star Alliance, both as part of a larger form (Suddady & Greenwood, 2005) as well as individually, with regards to how each acquired and maintained legitimacy. Finally, at the macro-level I began incorporating field-level phenomena, such as “external pressures” related to commissions, governments and other regulative bodies, and “themes” which focused on points of agreement between spectators. Therefore, at this level of context emphasis was on the shared understanding surrounding MPA-related collaboration between airlines (micro-level) and MPAs (meso-level). Collectively, these three nodes represented saturation within my dataset, to the extent that they are discrete and have been “lifted” above the raw data that I’ve collected (Suddaby, 2006, p.636).

## Findings

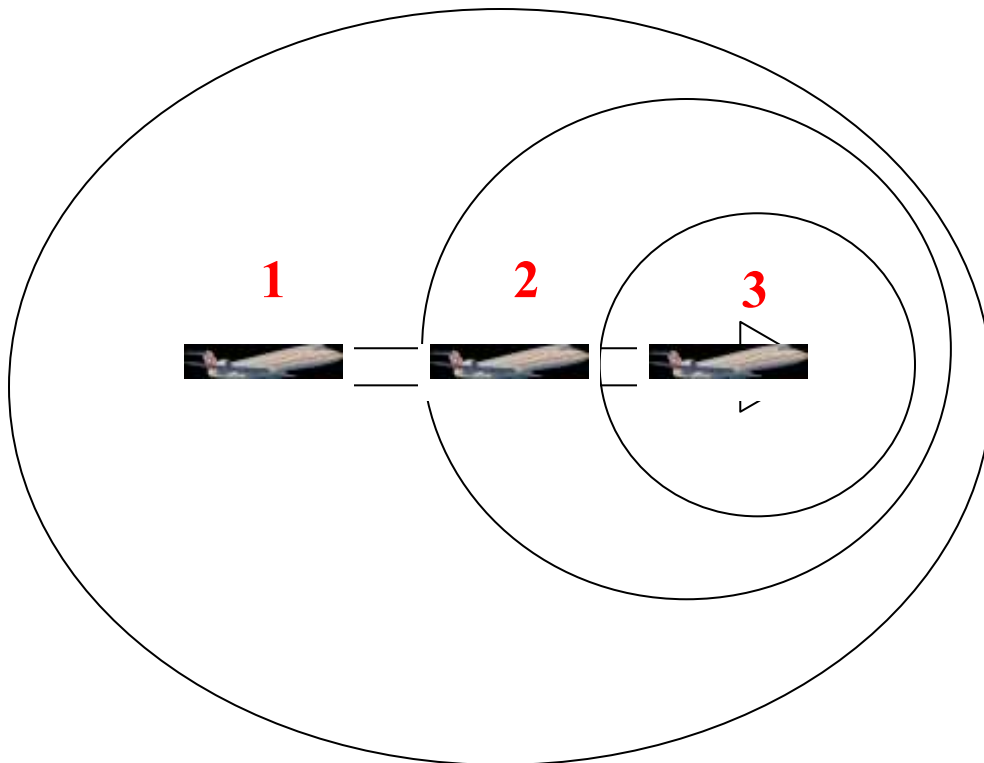
My findings are divided into three levels of analysis and four shared stories. At the micro-level, my focus was on detailing thematic content in my data at the manifest level—that is, how things were actually discussed in the data. Accordingly, I explored how (1) shared entry and (2) shared exit was constituted by spectators, as well as how airlines interacted with Star Alliance. Entering airlines were staged as following three differentiable periods of entry, defined through the socialization that an airline was discussed as undergoing, prior to their admittance into Star Alliance. Socialization is interpreted as a symbolic resource used by spectators to help contextualize a shared entry story, which emphasized the evolution of airline entry, over time, as it became discussed as increasingly necessary for Star Alliance. Exiting airlines were staged as following three phases of de-socialization prior to their exit from Star Alliance, serving to contextualize a shared exit story, the premise of which focused on the gradual shift from airline exit being used to stage intra-MPA cooperation to inter-MPA competition.

At subsequent levels, I moved away from manifest data into the discussion of increasingly abstract interpretations of concepts based on and rooted in this manifest data. First, at the meso-level I explored (3) the shared story surrounding both Star Alliance and the MPA form, as each was presented as seeking and acquiring legitimacy. Legitimacy was connected to an adherence with normative and coercive isomorphic pressures. My approach has been to emphasize how the MPA interacted with and became positioned within the field. Second, at the macro-level I explored (4) the institutionalization of MPA-related collaboration within the field, which I've defined as all entry and exit of airlines into and from MPAs, as well as subsequent intra-MPA alliances formed during

an airline's tenure as a member. The emphasis was on studying how spectators framed collaboration within the field, as well as how the ensuing boundary-work they performed served to dramatize the emerging inter-MPA competition between oneworld, SkyTeam and Star Alliance, effectively validating collaboration within the field.

### Micro-level

#### *Shared story 1: Airline entry*



**Figure 1.** Anticipation (1), accommodation (2), and (3) integration into Star Alliance

### *Airline entry sequence*

At the micro-level of analysis, entering airlines were discussed within the context of their socialization into Star Alliance. Moving forward, organizational socialization is defined broadly as the process through which an individual actor acquires the social knowledge and skills necessary to assume a role within an organization (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). In describing an airline as being at various junctions in their socialization into Star Alliance, spectators framed airline entry as analogous to an airline passing through a sequence of three differentiable periods: non-membership, potential membership and membership.

### *Non-membership*

Airlines would often begin their entry into Star Alliance by being framed by spectators as *non-members* (which encompassed unallied airlines and airlines which were allied to another MPA, such as oneworld or SkyTeam), pre-actively *anticipating* rather than actively moving toward entry into Star Alliance. During this period of pre-activity, airlines were staged as being involved in a learning process, prior to their potential and/or eventual membership within Star Alliance. This learning process involved rehearsing for future membership, which was discussed as enabling non-members to most effectively enter into an MPA, as well as the role expectations that were associated with being a member airline:

“Though Star [Alliance] and Oneworld have not officially stated an interest in gaining a foothold in Korea, Asiana [Airlines] believes they will be tempted by Seoul's new international hub at Incheon, a possible gateway to China and Japan”

### Potential membership

Following a period of anticipation, spectators would often stage airlines as seeking entry into Star Alliance, which they accomplished by highlighting these actors' similarities with Star Alliance and its members. Similarity was tied to potentially entering airlines *accommodating* and adjusting any incongruencies in their operations (usually related to forming new codesharing alliances with current members, discontinuing alliances with non-members and restructuring their IT infrastructure) to approximate members. In contrast with the anticipation of non-members, accommodation was framed as active, enabling spectators to re-position an airline closer to its eventual role as a member within Star Alliance. To this end, airlines became constructed as *potential members*:

The Chinese flag carrier late in August took a major step towards joining the Star Alliance by agreeing a tie-up with one of its founding members, United Airlines... The signing of the agreement came nearly two months after Air China stopped codesharing with Northwest Airlines. The severing of ties with Northwest and the prompt switch of allegiance to United was viewed as a clear sign that Air China has chosen Star as its alliance of choice.

### Membership

Finally, airlines were staged as entering into Star Alliance, the emphasis of which centered on the *integration* of each airline as it acquired its *membership* role within the MPA. Spectators often highlighted an entering airline's contributions by detailing how its network expanded on Star Alliance's existing aggregated network, contributing to what spectators collectively constructed as "Star Alliance". This absorption of a member's resources into the collective identification of Star Alliance evoked the image of that airline mingling or blending with the other members of the MPA. Integration, as a final

period of airline socialization, was thus framed as membership by *osmosis*, or as the member becoming part of the ongoing social construction of Star Alliance:

Due to the limited overlap between Continental's and Star Alliance's networks, Star Alliance customers now have a choice of *19,500 daily flights serving some 1,071 airports in 171 countries*. The main network enhancements are taking place in North America, to and from Latin America, as well as across the North Atlantic and the Pacific.

Member integration/osmosis occurred in two steps. First, airlines were framed within the context of their immediate entry into Star Alliance. Spectators would often stage newly admitted members as involved in a negotiation with the MPA, a process which served to dramatize the criteria that each was framed as seeking in the other. Entering airlines were often discussed as bringing their networks with them, which spectators consistently framed as enhancing Star Alliance's global reach and improving the seamlessness of its network. In exchange, Star Alliance was described as increasing entering airlines' general operating profits and improving their cost-savings—the former was described as resulting through Star Alliance members' increased codesharing with one another, while the latter was described as resulting from the joint use of lounges, joint purchasing of equipment, etc.:

Air China Ltd. and Shanghai Airlines Co. have formally joined Star Alliance, a global airline alliance, in a long-expected step that should help sharpen their competitive edge and could provide easier access for travelers flying to and from the Chinese mainland..."*By joining with 17 other leading airlines, Air China and Shanghai Airlines enhance their abilities to compete, creating, for them, a 'win-win' situation,*" Air China Chairman Li Jiexiang said in a statement. "*They are better placed to service their customers with higher-value services.*"...In enlisting both carriers, Star Alliance has plugged a major hole in its global network with two of China's most robust airlines.

Second, member integration surrounded the articulation of each airline enacting their ongoing membership roles within Star Alliance (membership roles being defined as the state of adhering to patterns and practises particular to being positioned as a member airline within Star Alliance). Each member's common role was staged through their network contributions when entering. Additionally, entering members often also functioned as *contagions*, proliferating Star Alliance's global network through intra-MPA alliances. For instance, in immediate response to becoming a member within the MPA, LOT Polish Airlines was described as seeking to form a codesharing alliance with founding member United Airlines:

United and LOT Polish Airlines last week in Warsaw inked *a partnership deal that will include code-share flights starting next month...* The code share becomes effective the day LOT becomes an official member of the Star Alliance. The two carriers also signed a marketing agreement that will start soon.

### Role Spotighting

Following a period of membership osmosis, one of two things were presented as occurring: (1) the absorbed airline would become subsumed into the greater Star Alliance discourse; or (2) the absorbed airline would become subsumed *but* also occasionally dramatized through *role spotighting*, wherein spectators would highlight their presence during or following osmosis. Role spotighting was a notable resource for spectators for two reasons. First, whereas osmosis implies that membership integration and the subsequent adoption and enactment of an intra-MPA role was not apparently visible, dramatization of role spotighting enabled spectators to highlight and stage the occurrence of osmosis. Second, spectators would spotlight certain roles in order to

validate the integration process through the dramatization of the unity between members and the thoughtful expansion of Star Alliance following the admittance of an airline.

Role spotlighting was often framed through the social construction of status hierarchy amongst members; namely, through the contrast between founding versus non-founding and regional versus full membership. The roles enacted by founding members (Air Canada, Lufthansa, Scandinavian Airlines, Thai Airways International and United Airlines) were often more emphatically dramatized by spectators than non-founding members' roles. Founding members were occasionally framed as *anchors members* and as the MPA's *core*, suggesting that these airlines could be relied upon for support, stability and security.

Among founding members, Lufthansa and United Airlines were further constructed as *leading* the MPA, and as the principle contributors to the continued success of Star Alliance, suggesting that both members played a larger role in shaping Star Alliance than the other founding members. Accordingly, Lufthansa and United were often constructed as enacting the role of de facto *gatekeepers*, determining membership into, and out of the MPA. For instance, of the 24 airlines which entered and 1 which exited Star Alliance between 1997 and 2009 (a number which excludes the 5 founding members, and which excludes airlines exiting due to financial collapse), a combined 12 airline entry events (roughly 46%) were directly related to either Lufthansa and/or United forming or dissolving a systemic bilateral alliance with the airline in question. The remaining airline entries occurred either through other founding and non-founding members forming similar bilateral alliances with non-Star-Alliance-member airlines, or



through what spectators constructed as being collective Star Alliance initiatives, and not involving any one airline explicitly.

Notably, founding members generally, as well as Lufthansa and United more specifically, were often framed within the context of their cooperation and coordination with and of one another. Importantly, founding members' roles were spotlighted in order to dramatize the unity amongst members within Star Alliance.

The second hierarchical difference highlighted by spectators was between full and regional members. Broadly, the regional membership scheme, introduced in 2004, involved admitting smaller airlines into Star Alliance in order to add regional coverage to the MPA's network. The three airlines admitted under this label (Adria Airways, Blue1, and Croatia Airlines) were constructed as both similar and dissimilar to full members, contributing to their framing as *pseudo-members*.

Similarities were discussed within the context of both sets of airlines offering passengers Star Alliance benefits, such as Star lounges, frequent-flyer benefits and through check-in services. Dissimilarities were rooted in two major legal differences between each role. First, regional members had to be sponsored by full members, meaning that the former was subservient to the latter—Adria Airways and Croatia Airlines were sponsored by Lufthansa, and Blue1 was sponsored by SAS. This difference restricted regional members to regional portions of Star Alliance's network, preventing them from (1) expanding into global markets like full members; and (2) as displaying the autonomy identified with Star Alliance membership, especially regarding the formation of other intra-MPA bilateral agreements. Second, regional members were quickly and

easily integrated into Star Alliance, suggesting that they were not required to standardize their infrastructure in order to acquire their membership within Star Alliance.

Thus, the regional membership scheme was framed by spectators as a point of refinement in Star Alliance’s growth model. In being constructed as beginning to adopt a diverse portfolio of members, the MPA’s growth was thus validated by spectators to an extent, when they spotlighted the roles of regional members:

Irish Flag Carrier Aer Lingus has entered into discussions with Lufthansa regarding the possible entry of the Irish airline into the Star Alliance as an "Affiliate" rather than a full member. This would be the first such airline within Star to be accepted with this status...Jurgen Weber, Lufthansa's Chief Executive...has restated that there has to be a limit to the number of carriers who are full members of Star or the Alliance would be "in danger of becoming like the United Nations."

*Shared entry story*

Table 2		
<i>Shared story 1: Airline entry</i>		
Phases	1: pre-change (1997-2000)	2: post-change (2001-2009)
Construction of airline entry	(1) Entry as following a natural progression  (2) Entry as self-indulgent	(1) Entry as plugging white spots  (2) Entry as necessary

*1997-2000: Natural progression*

Early entry featured verbatim descriptions and quotations from internal stakeholders (CEOs and other key members within various airlines and/or Star Alliance) describing non-members forming bilateral or multilateral codesharing or equity alliances

with one or more member airlines. This basic collaborative form would later evolve into membership within Star Alliance, on the condition that there be a mutual interest (read: congruency) between both actors. Thus, the discussion of airline entry was initially dependent on 1) a non-member possessing one or several ties with a minimum of one existing member; and 2) the airline itself being congruent with Star Alliance.

That said, early entry discourse often lacked a formal understanding of what congruency between an entering airline and Star Alliance meant. Perhaps in light of this, much of the early discussion surrounding airline entry focused primarily on describing the formation of ties between non-member and member airlines, becoming quickly integrated into the vernacular of what an entering airline needed to do in order to become a member. To this end, early discussion of airline entry quickly coalesced, developing into a shared understanding, which culminated in the construction of airlines as *naturally progressing* into Star Alliance:

[Air New Zealand] has followed the established pattern for joining Star in negotiating alliances with leading members and the Lufthansa union will provide the critical leg of the founders' triangle...A Lufthansa spokesman said recently the "natural progression" to Star membership was to first become a bilateral partner and expand to multilateral partnership "if there is mutual interest among the alliance parties"

Thus, natural progression served as an initial discursive resource for spectators, enabling them to understand and construct actions that served to position airlines closer to Star Alliance (potential entry) or within its boundaries (entry). For instance and as the above quotation illustrates, discourse on the entry of member airlines was in its relative infancy, offering little discussion on the integration period that airline may have gone

through prior to their entry. Similarly, the accommodation process which spectators used to stage potentially entering airlines was also crudely understood, and discourse surrounding their potential membership offered very little explicit discussion of the adjustment period that they may have gone through prior to their entry. Spectators would often simply stage a potential member as following a natural progression, or more plainly, as desirable to Star Alliance:

Mexicana could join the alliance later, [United Airline's director in Mexico, Josue] Meza said..."The venture is still being perfected...and starting to pay off," Meza said. "I am sure in the future that Mexicana could be part of the alliance and would be in a good position to join."

Notably, natural progression served as a consistent method for displaying entry, and was never met with resistance or put into question. Furthermore, it may have become a discursive tool for spectators to jointly construct meaning, and thus a shared story, around airline entry, while emphasizing the cooperation between an airline and Star Alliance. This shared story was replete with natural progressing airlines, and became a pronounced antecedent which connected an airline's voyage from a non- or potential member status into its membership role within Star Alliance. Accordingly, the natural progression of entering airlines served to benchmark the early discourse on airline entry, and was effectively a prototype (and thus required further development) used to stage legitimate collaborations between airline and Star Alliance.

#### 2001-2009: Filling white spots

Eventually a supplemental subset of narratives began to build off this foundation, the nature of which centered on the congruency between an entering airline and Star Alliance. Spectators who wrote about congruency often highlighted the importance that

an entering airline's flight network played in determining its entry into the MPA; that it was a question of the airline's utility for Star Alliance as a whole, and not just the member (s) that it was allied with—an aspect which was lacking in the narratives centering on natural progression. This budding idea of what constituted a useful tie, and the clarification of how utility was connected with congruency came to a head circa 2001, when both of these terms became eventually known more colloquially as “white spot” or “white space” strategizing; that is, when an MPA fills, plugs, or erases a current “hole” or “gap” (countries or geographic regions in the world which the MPA and its members currently has no access to) in its network by admitting a non-member airline. This non-member is often presented as complimenting the existing network, and spectators regularly validated this strategy when network holes were discussed as being extensive:

“Air China is of particular interest to the airline group because of its extensive domestic network and rapidly improving airport infrastructure. The Star Alliance, which already flies into 18 Chinese airports, has long pursued a strategy aimed at filling in the "white spaces" on its network map, and China has been one of the biggest gaps”

The term “white spot” is derived from telecommunications jargon, and means “a place without coverage”<sup>1</sup>. More specifically, white spots are often related to traffic message channels, and suggest an unnecessary emptiness in a network which relays often imperative roadside information to motor vehicle drivers. In incorporating the term white spots into their discourse, spectators communicated a shift in logic regarding their understanding of airline entry, which began to frame the collaborations between an airline and Star Alliance as increasingly necessary. Filling white spots (which, with regards to collaboration between airline and MPA, still fundamentally consisted of

---

<sup>1</sup> Source: [http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/white\\_spot](http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/white_spot)

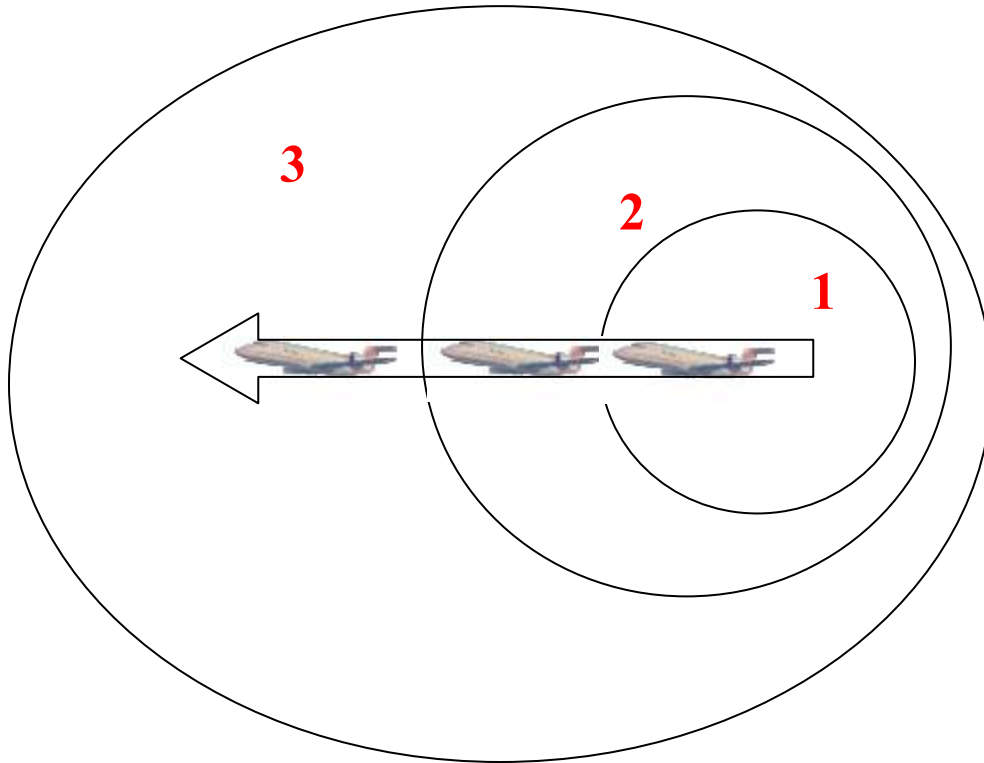
admitting airlines, much like the discourse circa 1997-2000 which emphasized natural progression) began being constructed as a means of making a network more whole and further, about improving the livelihood of those who utilized this network (i.e. passengers). Natural progression, in contrast, lacked this element of *necessity*, suggesting that MPA expansion through the collaboration of an airline as it naturally progresses into Star Alliance was discussed as comparatively self-indulgent.

That “filling” or “plugging” white spots became part of the vernacular (being used semi-regularly, even in 2009), suggested an added sophistication in the discourse on airline entry; and indeed, an evolution in the shared entry story. Rather than simply agreeing on the natural progression of airlines, spectators developed what appeared to be a system of principles which could distinguish between *which* bilateral alliances enabled non-members to pass into Star Alliance’s boundary—or more accurately, they constructed a shared understanding which could mirror the logic embedded within the practises of airlines and MPAs, and successfully embedded it within the narratives they wrote. This served to collectively validate the use of white spots strategies by MPAs to attract and induct non-member airlines as well to institutionalize the term “white spot” (which became a resource for re-positioning airlines as “natural progression” had been previously), embedding it in the vernacular on airline entry.

Therefore and in summary, the shared entry story, which was constructed in equal measure through the analysis of a seamless and constructed amalgamation (the shared story itself) as well as the constituent elements that comprised it (non-, potential and membership), was noted principally in having evolved over time. Early entry (1997-2000) was framed by spectators as a period of natural progression and focused on

bilateral airlines becoming integrated into an expanding MPA. To this end, spectators' construction of early entry centered near exclusively on the cooperation of members and the expansion of Star Alliance. Later entry (2001-2009), while still framed within the context of MPA expansion, was altered slightly to accommodate for collaboration (between airline and MPA) as being metaphorically analogous to the filling or plugging or white spots, holes in the MPA's network which prevent it from becoming whole. Interestingly, the evolution in the discourse surrounding airline entry suggests that the collaboration between airlines and MPAs was not adequate in its earlier state, and required a degree of change (which became reflected in the discourse surrounding it) in order for it to become constructed legitimately.

### *Shared story 2: Airline exit*



**Figure 2.** Membership (1), de-accommodation (2), and de-integration (3) from Star Alliance

#### *Airline exit sequence*

In contrast to the shared entry story, exiting airlines were discussed within the context of their de-socialization from Star Alliance. Member airlines (number 1 in figure 2) would often begin this de-socialization process by first being framed as actively seeking to exit the Star Alliance, while still being members within the MPA. Thus, exiting airlines were often first staged as *potential members*, with spectators discursively re-positioning these airlines further from the MPA (number 2 in figure 2), often in order to dramatize the differences or the incompatibility between these potential members and the remaining members comprising Star Alliance. Notably, potential members could



theoretically remain within Star Alliance, in spite of spectators' describing these members as actively seeking to exit the MPA. To this end and with regards to airline exit, potential membership was analogous to a member temporarily being staged as an outsider (as both a non-member and member simultaneously) in order to validate the congruency between an airline and its cohorts (as is the case with an airline being potentially and forcibly ejected from the MPA) or (as with the following quotation) to highlight a greater level of *congruence* between that airline and an airline (s) from another MPA:

*It is widely predicted that Air New Zealand will quit the alliance to move to rival OneWorld, if the deal with Qantas goes through...Qantas Airways announced Tuesday that it had held preliminary talks to buy over Air New Zealand, saying it wants to buy over the stakes held by Brierley Investments and Singapore Airlines...Air New Zealand has always been a thorn in the side for Qantas given that they are arch rivals... So Qantas basically wants to take over the kiwi carrier to dominate the entire Australian and New Zealand market.*

Following this period of de-accommodation, airlines were staged as exiting Star Alliance, with spectators often emphasizing the *de-integration* of each airline as it revoked its *membership* role within the MPA. De-integration was framed either within the context of an airline opting to exit the MPA of its own volition, or as failing to adhere to the criteria during the period of negotiation prior to entry. This latter scenario often resulted in the construction of the airline being *expelled* from the MPA:

The Star Alliance yesterday decided to remove the "old" Varig from the group, as the company no longer has a broad network to offer passengers flying on partner airlines...Because new Varig now has an operating certificate, old Varig will "no longer fulfill" the requirements for alliance membership. "In order to deliver the Star Alliance benefits, products and services to customers around the globe on a consistent basis, our member carriers work to certain standards and

processes," said Star CEO Jaan Albrecht. "Unfortunately, old Varig will no longer operate as a network airline and will therefore have to give up its membership in the alliance."

*Shared exit story*

Table 3			
<i>Shared story 2: Airline exit</i>			
Phases	1: pre-change (1997-1998)	2: metamorphosis (1999-2000)	3: post-change (2001-2009)
Construction of airline exit	(1) Exit and ensuring conflict is utilized to validate intra-MPA congruence or to dramatize intra-MPA incongruence	(1) Exit and conflict used to validate inter-MPA competition	

1997- Circa 2000: Cooperation between members

Spectators framed early airline exits by emphasizing the level of *congruence between two or more cooperating members of Star Alliance*. Prior to 2001, no airlines had actually exited Star Alliance. Therefore, the early shared story surrounding airline exit was crafted singularly through the re-positioning of airlines as potential members. An early symbolic resource utilized by spectators when they narrated exiting events surrounded *conflict*, either between a member within Star Alliance and another MPA (inter-MPA conflict), or between two or more members within Star Alliance (intra-MPA conflict). Moreover, spectators would often dramatize this conflict through the validation

of one of the opposing sides in the conflict. This served as a platform to outline differences between two or more current members, and touched on the idea of the degree of *congruency* between a potential member and the remaining portion of Star Alliance's network.

Thus, the early shared exit story was shaped through inter- and intra-conflict, and was utilized as a resource by spectators for staging intra-MPA cooperation and the congruence of members. Spectators often discussed inter-MPA conflict (as a source contributing to a member's re-positioning as a potential member) in order to highlight a high degree of congruency between a potential member airline and the remaining members within Star Alliance. A core example of this was in 1999, when founding member Air Canada was discussed as involuntarily being removed from Star Alliance by private equity firm Onex, and potentially forced into a partnership with Canadian Airlines and thereafter into oneworld. Various spectators, in outlining this event, highlighted the effectiveness of the collaborations between Air Canada and the other members within Star Alliance. In spotlighting the airline's role as a founding member and thus as leader within the MPA, spectators seemed to dramatize the congruency between Air Canada and Star Alliance rather than between Air Canada and Onex or oneworld (each of whom were framed as outsider threats). Air Canada, in eventually overcoming this threat and remaining within Star Alliance, was lauded by spectators, being discussed as a valuable asset, and worth protection. Therefore, early inter-MPA conflict served to highlight a degree of intra-MPA cooperation and member congruency between potential and current members.

In contrast, intra-MPA conflict in the early shared exit story was discussed in order to highlight a low degree of congruency between a potential member and the remaining members of Star Alliance. Incongruence was itself analogous to spectators claiming that a potential member was better off outside of the MPA; or rather, as their current collaborations with Star Alliance as being largely ineffective and as poor substitutes to other, more optimal ties with non-members. The argument is forwarded then, that conflict was utilized by spectators when they staged potential members as de-accommodating from Star Alliance, with incongruence serving to highlight the differences between a potential member and the remaining members of Star Alliance.

*Circa 2000: Metamorphosis of the shared exit story*

Circa 2000, an alteration was noted in the articulation and utilization of intra-MPA conflict. Thai Airways International, in this period, was being courted by Air France, a founding member of SkyTeam. Interestingly, spectators framed Thai as both incongruent with Star Alliance (the recent entry of Thai's rival Singapore Airlines, both of whom shared a similar flight network, put Thai's value into question) and as a source of competition between MPAs. The presence of competition in what had previously been a largely intra-MPA cooperation-based discourse suggested the beginnings of an evolution in the shared exit story. In other words, spectators began utilizing conflict in order to *both* dramatize intra-MPA congruence and to validate inter-MPA competition:

Air France, one of the founding members of the new alliance SkyTeam, is courting Thai Airways International to join the group...Several officials at Thai said it would be interesting for the carrier to consider Air France's offer in view of Singapore Airlines' participation in Star Alliance. The Thai officials' statement is not surprising, as the fare issue with SIA on the Bangkok-Singapore sector has not been resolved despite the fact that it is four months since SIA officially joined

Star...SIA and Singapore Changi Airport are seen as stiff competitors to Thai and Bangkok Airport...Air France has been trying to entice Thai with the offer of a Bangkok hub and SkyTeam's tag line - "Care more about you." *This claim would require a considerable effort to achieve as Star and oneworld have been advertising the slogan to premium travelers for more than two years...*[SkyTeam] are themselves forced to try to catch up in the alliance business as their major competitors continue to sign on partner carriers to fill the global slots in their networks.

### 2001-2009: Competition between MPAs

Circa 2001, spectators began to utilize conflict primarily to validate inter-MPA competition. For instance, Ansett Australia's exit in 2001, which was described by several spectators as being rooted primarily in financial collapse (and thus not tied to any competition between MPAs), was framed within the context of Air New Zealand's potential exiting of Star Alliance. The latter airline, which had been in a similar financial situation to the late Ansett, was regularly staged as combating rival oneworld member Qantas. To this end, both Ansett's actual exiting, and Air New Zealand's potential exiting, served as platform to validate an increasing amount of competition between MPAs. Similarly, Mexicana's exit in 2004 had been collectively constructed as motivated by a desire to join rival MPA oneworld:

Mexicana's codeshare with American [Airlines] represents a more fundamental shift. Mexicana has had a close alliance with United Airlines since 1997, but it ends on 31 March, the same day that Mexicana leaves the Star Alliance. Its codeshare with American starts two weeks later... Mexicana has not explained its decision to leave its alliance with United and Star... Mexicana's codeshare with American raises the prospect of Mexicana becoming a oneworld member.

Additionally, spectators began to more effectively articulate the de-integration process of exiting members, which was accomplished primarily through the incorporation

of white spot terminology into the discourse and vernacular used when discussing exiting airlines. Specifically, exiting members were discussed as creating holes in Star Alliance's network, and the de-integration of airlines was staged as resulting from a general level of incongruence between the exiting member and Star Alliance. Mexicana, for instance, was described as exiting Star Alliance due to a general desire to gain a greater deal of independence, an action which distanced it from the osmosis and interdependency generally constructed around member airlines. Moreover, VARIG's exit in 2007 was staged as occurring due to the airline being unable to continue its role as a white spot plug within Star Alliance, effectively resulting in its de-accommodation differences between itself, as lacking a function within the MPA, and subsequently the airline's de-integration from Star Alliance:

The Star Alliance yesterday decided to remove the "old" Varig from the group, as the company no longer has a broad network to offer passengers flying on partner airlines...Because new Varig now has an operating certificate, old Varig will "no longer fulfill" the requirements for alliance membership. "In order to deliver the Star Alliance benefits, products and services to customers around the globe on a consistent basis, our member carriers work to certain standards and processes," said Star CEO Jaan Albrecht. "Unfortunately, old Varig will no longer operate as a network airline and will therefore have to give up its membership in the alliance."

In summary, like the shared entry story, the shared exit story was noted principally as evolving over time. This shift resulted 1) from the greater emphasis on competition between MPAs rather than the previous emphasis on cooperation between member airlines; and 2) from a more sophisticated construction of the de-accommodation and de-integration exiting processes. Early exiting (1997-2000) was discussed by spectators within the context of congruency between two or more cooperating members.

Conflict served to dramatize this cooperation, as well as to validate one of the opposing sides in the conflict. Later exiting (2001-2009), while still framed by conflict, began to emphasize the competition between MPAs. Congruency meanwhile evolved into a concept used to discuss white spots, with incongruent airlines being those which are unable to remain as plugs within Star Alliance's network.

### Meso-level

#### *Shared story 3: Star Alliance's evolution into an established, enduring and legitimate organizational form*

Table 4			
<i>Shared story 3: Star Alliance's evolution into an established, enduring and legitimate organizational form</i>			
Phases	1: pre-change (1997-1998)	2: metamorphosis (1999-2000)	3: post-change (2001-2009)
Construction of Star Alliance	(1) Star Alliance as seeking to overcome its probationary status: (a) Skepticism toward passenger-benefits; (b) Skepticism toward capped growth patterns; (c) Validation of adherence to coercive isomorphic pressures	(1) Star Alliance as undergoing metamorphosis: (a) Validation of passenger-benefits (d) Increased emphasis on inter-MPA conflict and competition	(1) Star Alliance as acquiring an established, legitimate form status: (b) Validation of tempered growth patterns (e) Construction of MPA form (f) Validation of Star Alliance's size as a source

			of organizational competitive strength
--	--	--	---



At the meso-level of analysis, Star Alliance was discussed within the context of its evolution 1) as it acquired and maintained legitimacy; and 2) as it contributed to formation of an established organizational form within the field discourse. Airlines, which previously served as central actors during the construction of shared stories 1 and 2, served more as vehicles during shared story 3 (the shared Star Alliance story), utilized by spectators in order to dramatize and validate Star Alliance's attempts at legitimizing its practises, as well as its attempts becoming an enduring entity within the field.

*1997- Circa 1999: Star Alliance on probation*

The early shared Star Alliance story emphasized a dual dramatization of the MPA as it sought to acquire legitimacy within the field. Spectators predominantly expressed skepticism toward the MPA's practises, though a subset of narratives also discussed Star Alliance as conforming to and adhering with the field's normative and coercive pressures. To this end, the MPA was multi-authored, at least initially and with regards to the shared story constructed of it, as acquiring a probationary status. Thus, during its formative years, Star Alliance was staged as being on trial, wherein spectators would weigh the MPA's societal value against its societal costs, and thereafter validating Star Alliance through the general acceptance of its practises, thus discursively legitimizing it; or alternately, as continuing to resist and question its development, depriving the MPA of legitimacy.

*Early skepticism toward Star Alliance's attempts to seek legitimacy*

Early discourse surrounding Star Alliance appeared generally cautious of the benefits that it claimed to offer passengers. Spectators would occasionally express skepticism toward passenger-benefits through a critical assessment of how entering

airlines appeared to benefit immediately upon entry (via the added revenue accrued through codesharing alliances with other members), while initiatives placed to improve passenger traveling experiences (airport lounge access, frequent-flyer links, etc.) lagged:

Not all is clear-cut, despite the impression given by some members of Star that it is the greatest thing to happen to the industry since the dawn of the jet age. Great skepticism remains in the eyes of the passenger, while internal issues such as the impending privatisation of Thai Airways and the planned purchase of Ansett shares by Singapore Airlines, raise questions over the future of the grouping as a unified team...The main reason for passenger skepticism has so far been the fact that the Star Alliance is a boon for its airline members... [Meanwhile,] frustrating conditions continue to surround passenger privileges such as access to airport lounges.

More commonly, spectators were critical of Star Alliance's size and growth patterns, which were described as haphazard. Specifically, spectators framed the MPA as working toward a "critical mass", described as the maximum population size of the MPA. Discourse surrounding Star Alliance's growth highlighted a general lack of clarity and often resulted in the vague description of what was speculated to be the limits of the MPA. For instance, in 1997 the estimated critical mass of the Star Alliance was between 7-9 members; in 1998 that number increased to 10; and by 2000, then current CEO of Star Alliance, Jaan Albrecht, claimed that the MPA had nearly reached its completion in terms of the number of members, which had been 15 members at the time. In other words, the construction of Star Alliance's growth patterns was relegated to a brief presentation of a desired *maximum* number of members within the MPA. To this end, Star Alliance was constructed as masking its growth ambitions (rooted in the discussion of critical mass, the nature of which was in constant flux) through the emphasis that it did not wish to grow indefinitely.

Interestingly, a subset of narratives suggested that the “critical mass” initiative had been introduced in order to more effectively allocate and differentiate roles within the MPA through the articulation of an affiliate membership scheme (which would later be refined and utilized by Star Alliance under the term “regional membership”). This practise suggested an early understanding that Star Alliance would need to professionalize its practises in order to acquire and maintain legitimacy within the field.

Thus, the predominant skepticism embedded within the early shared Star Alliance story was rooted in a larger concern of the MPA’s professionalism within the field: the MPA claimed to be founded on the principles of improving the passenger-travel experience through a seamless flight network, but haphazard growth patterns and a general lack of benefits offered to passengers in the early goings discredited this claim. With that in mind, a subset of spectators also framed Star Alliance as seeking to professionalize its practises (affiliate membership scheme), and thus as beginning to adhere to *normative isomorphic pressures* rooted in spectator discourse. Offering benefits to passengers as well as offering a greater degree of thoughtfulness toward growth patterns all appeared (in being areas of complaint) to serve as foundations for this professionalization process, which could enable Star Alliance to overcome its probationary status.

#### *Early validation of Star Alliance’s attempts to seek legitimacy*

The largely skeptical construction of Star Alliance was counterbalanced, to some extent, by several narratives which discussed the MPA as seeking to legitimize itself, in spite of its initially haphazard growth patterns and lagging passenger-benefit practises. For instance, early discussion of Star Alliance’s admittance of (potential and/or actual)

airline members was often framed within the context of the MPA's adherence with the global airline industry's legal environment. This legal environment was represented by air transport commissions, governments and other regulative bodies, each of whom were constructed, in aggregate, as a countervailing force to Star Alliance, as well as subsequent MPAs—wherein the latter grouping had been driven to increase intra-MPA cooperation, the former was discussed as increasing inter-MPA competition and conflict.

The importance placed on the legal environment rested in this countervailing property. For instance, commissions (the European Commission, for example) were described regularly as dictating slot allocation at airports as well as awarding antitrust immunity to airlines. These sanctions permitted members within MPAs to set schedules and prices for flights, as well as to determine the flights they could process each day. Additionally, governments/nations/countries were noted for their control of open skies agreements (the liberalization of the rules and regulations between nations, with the objective of creating a free-market environment for the airline industry) and by consequence overflight agreements (the number of times airlines can fly through a given country).

The legal environment was thus a *coercive isomorphic pressure*, exerting itself onto Star Alliance, which was framed as entirely dependent on the approval of commissions, governments and other regulative bodies in order to function within the industry. Adherence to coercive pressures, while legally required, demonstrated equally a degree of willingness for Star Alliance to become an enduring and legitimate entity, as well as to play by the rules of the alliance game, admitting airlines through a stringent entry process.

Spectators would demonstrate Star Alliance's early adherence to coercive pressures by framing the MPA as playing by the rules of the game, with regards to entering airlines. In other words, Star Alliance was discussed as admitting airlines through a series of legally legitimated, and discursively agreed upon, steps. This manifested in spectators' discussion of airlines as naturally entering Star Alliance: that is, first as signing a memorandum of understanding, then forming one or several codesharing or equity alliances with members, and then being voted into the MPA, before finally, and publically, becoming an *official* member during the airline's inauguration ceremony. Natural progression, within the context of legal adherence, served as an effective method of admitting members. However, growth continued to appear as haphazard in spite of this, which suggested a need to evolve further professionalize the MPA's practises.

To summarize, while predominantly focused on the negative dramatization of Star Alliance growth and passenger-benefit practises, the early shared Star Alliance story also framed the MPA as willing to adapt these practises in order to seek legitimacy. This willingness was connected with Star Alliance's adherence with normative pressures and its conformity to coercive pressures, each of which had begun to shape the way the MPA was being constructed within the field discourse.

#### *Circa 1999-2000: Star Alliance's metamorphosis*

Circa 1999, spectators began to frame Star Alliance as undergoing a period of positively constructed change, culminating in the MPA eventually overcoming its probationary status. This transitional period was dramatized both through an increased emphasis on competition between MPAs in addition to the validation of Star Alliance's

passenger benefits. First, the formation of rival MPAs oneworld (founded in 1999) and SkyTeam (founded in 2000) contributed to a gradual emphasis on these MPAs as seeking to expand their ranks, in addition to competing with one another, often over similar geographic regions and/or airlines, and often resulting in conflict. During Star Alliance's metamorphosis, this conflict was dramatized through the potential exiting of Air Canada circa 1999 and Thai Airways International circa 2000, with the former involving a feud between Star Alliance and oneworld, and the latter between Star Alliance and SkyTeam, as described in the section of the shared exit stories. Importantly, this period of intense inter-MPA conflict enabled spectators to frame Star Alliance as beginning to evolve in order to combat the escalating threat from rivals oneworld and SkyTeam. This evolution was most pronounced in the MPA's construction as moving away from a "one size fits all", haphazard growth model into a more tempered and selective growth pattern. To this end, the MPA's metamorphosis served as a platform to dramatize a series of (potential exiting) events which served as a precursor to Star Alliance's attempts at altering its growth patterns.

Secondly, Star Alliance was staged as taking its first steps toward professionalization. Circa 2001, several narratives continued to criticize passenger benefits, though the nature of these complaints centered more on the general lack of homogeneity between member aircrafts (inconsistent in-flight amenities offered, number of seats per aircraft, quality of business class, etc.) and less on the actual benefits themselves. Thus, criticism was itself more digressive than in earlier narratives, and served to frame the overall discourse of passenger benefits as less skeptical, overall.

More commonly, passenger benefits were increasingly validated by spectators, suggesting a general acceptance of these benefits for passengers:

The Star Alliance's principal attribute is its focus on customer requirements. "*The pivotal element in the success of the Star Alliance is the degree to which it satisfies customer needs for network size, fast transfers, service and recognition of customer status,*" said Lufthansa Chairman and CEO Jurgen Weber. "*Network reach and range, and integration depth are, therefore, issues which will continue to occupy us in the Star Alliance.*"...Star Alliance customers can earn and fly off bonus miles anywhere in the route network. Integrated and harmonised products and processes have optimised customer service, making air travel more comfortable than ever before. Moreover, the Star Alliance offers more value for money. "Every Star airline is offering more than before through cooperation with other alliance partners. Synergies have led, for example, to attractive fares being offered by airlines alliances more often than otherwise in the market," Weber said.

#### *2001-2009: Star Alliance as representing an established, legitimate form*

Following this initial period of inter-MPA conflict, Star Alliance was staged as having evolved to accommodate this increasing level of competition. This evolution was noted in two principle areas, and jointly contributed to Star Alliance's acquisition and maintenance of legitimacy. First, Star Alliance was described increasingly as tempering its growth, which was constructed as having contributed to the MPA's professionalization and therefore its legitimization. Second, the growing rivalry between oneworld, SkyTeam and Star Alliance served as a platform to construct an MPA organizational *form*, as well as to frame Star Alliance within this "form discourse". This broader discourse developed into a discursive platform to socially compare and rank MPAs, therefore constructing Star Alliance's size as a source of organizational competitive strength.

### Tempered growth

Circa 2001, Star Alliance was described as gravitating toward a white spot strategy for airline admittance, which supplanted the previous haphazard growth pattern. Admitting airlines (and thus growth) was presented as necessary in order to be able to continuously compete with rivals oneworld and SkyTeam, as well as to improve the MPA's network reach and range in it to better serve passengers. In other words, the pursuit and the plugging of white spots developed into an objective which spectators constructed as representing the conditions and methods of an MPA's work within the field. This became the discursive foundation and source of legitimacy for MPAs' occupational autonomy, and thus a source of *professionalism* (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). To this end, white spot strategizing became a practise through which an MPA could effectuate its adherence with normative isomorphic pressures.

In particular, Star Alliance's growth patterns were discussed as tempered by its attempts at unifying its members and the premeditation it put into plugging its white spots. Circa 2001, spectators began featuring several initiatives at the MPA-level which served to *unify* MPA members. This served to contrast the micro-level unification of members as they were staged as becoming members through osmosis and as increasing intra-MPA ties through their roles as contagions. For instance, several sources confirmed that a proper management structure in 2001 was introduced to accommodate for the continued influx of members—at this point, the five-year-old MPA was comprised of 13 actual members, with three additional airlines (Asiana Airlines, LOT Polish Airlines and Spanair) joining in 2003. This event was presented as allowing Star Alliance's members to increase the level of their cooperation with one another:



As [CEO of Star Alliance, Jaan] Albrecht tries to juggle management of 15 airlines, he said the alliance has evolved and now has the structure to manage its growth...Even though Star's founders envisioned no more than a 10-airline team, Albrecht said the team has no limit on membership. *He warned, however, that Star will not "grow for growth's sake."*

Additionally, spectators described Star Alliance as seeking to integrate members which served more specialized roles within its ranks, staging the MPA as shedding its previously haphazard growth pattern in favour of a more *premeditative* method for admitting members, which they accomplished by dramatizing three points. First, spectators began highlighting particular "hot spots" regions of the world, which were designated as such for degree of competition or tumult surrounding oneworld, SkyTeam and/or Star Alliance's often mutual attempts to seek members within China and Africa circa 2001, Russia circa 2004, India circa 2005, etc. This suggested that MPAs (and Star Alliance particularly) had become predictable enough to effectively measure their geographic inclinations.

Second, spectators began discussing Star Alliance as demonstrating an increasing degree of foresight regarding which members could fill which holes; or rather, which targets would become recruited through the skirmishes at various hot spots. For example, Star Alliance was described circa 2002 as seeking an Asian partner to complete its global network, which came to fruition in 2007 with the dual-entry of Air China and Shanghai Airlines. This demonstrated a long-term orientation which previously had not been expressed by spectators. Similarly and circa 2004, airlines with a smaller degree of congruency with Star Alliance were integrated as associate or regional-specific, rather than full, members, suggesting added level of specificity to admitted members.

Third, Star Alliance was staged as increasingly discriminatory with regards to admitting airlines, which spectators dramatized through the MPA's conforming to the legal environment it had simply adhered with during its probationary period. In other words, Star Alliance was presented (1) as continuing to uphold the legal measures dictated by commissions, governments and other regulative bodies when it admitted members (adherence with the coercive isomorphic pressures); and (2) as expanding on this level of adherence with these coercive pressures through the manifestation and implementation of its own admittance standards.

As mentioned previously, the legal environment acted as a countervailing force during Star Alliance's probationary period, promoting competition within the field. Circa 2001, Star Alliance had internalized this sentiment, and was staged as *discriminately* admitting airlines in order to ensure the MPA's continued competition against rivals oneworld and SkyTeam, thus conforming to the coercive pressures manifest in the focus on competition rather than collusion within the field (noted predominantly in the shared exit story). Spectators described entering airlines as taking about a year prepare for and to meet with Star Alliance's entry standards, prior to their admittance into the MPA. As a consequence, spectators began to frame Star Alliance as admitting airlines who met with its own standards, which generally emphasized modifying IT systems into one compliant with Star Alliance standards; though occasionally, spectators would simply present an airline as follows:

Star Alliance has formally invited Air China to join its club. The pair have [sic] signed a memorandum of understanding for cooperation, *and* the airline will now be the subject of checks and procedures to ensure its place in the alliance.

*An established and enduring form*

Overall, Star Alliance's general goal of admitting new members hadn't changed, but the construction of its practises did. MPA growth more generally had become increasingly validated by spectators, who utilized conflict (as outlined previously in the shared exiting story) as a symbolic resource to dramatize the competition between MPAs. Additionally, MPAs were described as increasingly predictable, with regards to geographic hot spots. Finally, Star Alliance, oneworld and SkyTeam were framed as viable competitors and rivals. This added understanding of how the MPA operated, in addition to the common manner in which each MPA became constructed, suggested that spectators had develop a discourse on the MPA's *form*. As with Star Alliance, oneworld and SkyTeam were often staged as seeking to expand their ranks (though at a noticeably slower pace than Star Alliance), suggesting further that *size* was a relatively salient property of the MPA form. Furthermore, the ongoing competition between MPAs served to professionalize the MPA form.

Moreover, in regularly discussing MPAs through their growth patterns and their relative sizes, discourse surrounding the MPA form served as a fruitful avenue for socially comparing each MPA against a benchmark standard, effectively ranking them. Particularly, Star Alliance's level of premeditation (in addition to the increasing social comparison and ranking of MPAs) contributed to the MPA's size as an increasing source of organizational competitive strength. Furthermore, Star Alliance, for instance, was discussed regularly as the *largest, most powerful* MPA and as *the one to beat*. These terms suggest that MPAs were differentiated as well as ranked accordingly, suggesting

further commonality between oneworld, SkyTeam and Star Alliance had been mutually constituted by spectators, and thus that an MPA form had been constructed.

Additionally, various narratives occasionally dramatized how airlines can seek *shelter* within Star Alliance in order to escape much of the *alliance activity* within the field. More broadly, this activity centered on how MPAs had become a trend within the industry, and enabled allied members to improve their competitive advantage over unallied airlines—via increased intra-MPA cooperation, resulting in an expansion of each individual member’s flight network through its integration with the MPA’s global network and an improved, more seamless travel experience offered to passengers. Additionally, airlines were occasionally discussed as seeking shelter within MPAs, in order to help them *weather rough times* and *face ordeals* which may weaken them (usually being financial in nature). Furthermore, members were presented as being able to draw strength from Star Alliance, allowing the MPA, collectively, to be framed as demonstrating endurance or *fortitude*, increasing its desirability for airlines contemplating a position within Star Alliance:

Pundits say Star members continue to draw strength from the alliance. Indeed, in the midst of the worst-ever industry crisis now deepened by the war in Iraq and the onset of a mysterious respiratory syndrome in some major cities worldwide, global partnerships are as critical a component of airlines' strategies as ever...In an indication of how the arrangement can help financially weakened carriers, the beleaguered United has been able to largely maintain its presence in the transatlantic market. The Chicago carrier has been selling seats on Lufthansa flights to Europe on routes it has stopped flying or pared back.

In summary, the shared Star Alliance story was notable for evolving on two fronts. First, Star Alliance was discussed as evolving from an initially haphazard growth

pattern to one tempered through (1) an added level of premeditation and foresight that Star Alliance was presented as putting into filling its white spots; and (2) an increasing level of discrimination that the MPA was staged as demonstrating with regards to admitting airlines. This enabled the MPA to be constructed as having professionalized its practises and subsequently, as having acquired legitimacy. Second, Star Alliance's individual professionalism became nested in a larger discourse on the MPA form. The validation of the rivalry between MPAs served to professionalize and justify their existence within the industry. Therefore, Star Alliance was noted for being a forerunner to the establishment of the MPA form. Additionally, Star Alliance was characterized as an enduring player within that form discourse, through being characterized as possessing fortitude.

**Macro-level**

***Shared story 4: The institutionalization of MPA-related collaboration***

Table 4			
<i>Shared story 4: The institutionalization of MPA-related collaboration</i>			
Phases	1: pre-change (1997-1998)	2: metamorphosis (1999-2000)	3: post-change (2001-2009)
Logics used to framed MPA-related collaboration	Dominant logics regards collaboration: 1- MPA-related collaboration as representing a new trend in the industry  2- MPA-related collaboration as discouraging competition	2- Early boundary-work and increasing emphasis on inter-MPA conflict	Dominant logic regarding collaboration: 1- MPA-related collaboration as an effective method for contributing to ongoing inter-MPA competition  2- Increased boundary-work

At the macro-level of analysis, the focus was on MPA dynamics embedded within the field discourse. *MPA dynamics* are discussed within the context of the evolution noted in the mutually constituted definition of collaboration between airlines and MPAs (MPA-related collaboration henceforth), held by spectators within the field (Lawrence, Phillips, & Hardy, 1999).

In studying MPA dynamics, I charted the change and evolution of institutional logics (*logics* henceforth), how these logics affect sensemaking within the field and how

it affects its members more generally (Lounsbury, 2007). Logics are defined as “the socially constructed historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, and provide meaning to their social reality” (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999, p. 804). Stated more plainly, logics are the schemas and scripts that a field’s participants hold in common (Owen-Smith & Powell, 2008). Of particular focus is on logics as framing *shared meaning*, and thus as contributing to spectators’ symbolic “subsistence”, allowing them to jointly constitute and reconstitute MPA-related collaboration within the field. Meaning is defined as what is signified in institutional structures and practises (Zilber, 2010). To this end, logics served to connect shared meaning (collaboration as good versus collaboration as bad) with action (airline entry/exit at the micro-level and MPA growth at the meso-level).

#### *1997-Circa 1999: Competing logics*

Circa 1997, two prevailing logics governed the way in which spectators multiauthored collaboration within the field discourse. MPA-related collaboration was framed either: 1) as representing a new *trend* in the industry, and thus as perpetuating competition, albeit in a different format; or 2) as encouraging *collusion* rather than competition between airlines. Proponents of the trend-logic discussed Star Alliance as a prototype, often staging the MPA as heralding a new direction in competition, supplanting the previous model of airline versus airline competition with an MPA versus MPA competition model. Furthermore, spectators who adopted this logic often validated Star Alliance on the merits of it catalyzing change in the industry:

*There is a trend towards global alliances, but this is the largest one to date...Many airlines have one-on-one agreements of varying types, but the Star alliance goes much further...Each airline expects to benefit from operating efficiencies ranging from common use of ground facilities to joint purchasing of everything from food and fuel to advertising.*

In contrast, proponents of the collusion-logic often dramatized the negative effects that Star Alliance, and subsequent MPAs, would have on the competition within the industry. Spectators conveyed this through choice language, which likened MPAs to *cartels*, as stumbling blocks in the evolution of the industry and as being in danger of becoming derailed, rather than as sources of competition. In other words, rooted in this logic was the assumption that MPAs were incongruent with how collaboration should be; namely, that collaboration should foster competitiveness rather than promote collusion:

*Although U.S. airlines tout partnerships with international carriers as a travelers' blessing, they have been anything but a boon for competition...Powerful partnerships like United-Lufthansa [Star Alliance] and Northwest Airlines-KLM [SkyTeam] have created easier international connections for international passengers...But the antitrust waivers have also given these partnerships such a big edge that competition has suffered.*

Spectators who adopted the collusion-logic embedded their narratives with a pronounced level of dissatisfaction and resistance. Discourse structured by this logic emphasized a wariness of the benefits that the MPA would offer passengers, of Star Alliance's admittance of airlines through natural progression, and of the MPA's haphazard growth patterns. What was lacking from the overall story was a level of inter-MPA *conflict*, which was beginning to take shape in the shared exit story, though its impacts on framing competition, as well as altering the shape of collaboration, was



limited (being utilized more to validate intra-MPA cooperation than to dramatize inter-MPA conflict).

*Circa 1999-2000: Logic coalescence and boundary-work*

Circa 1999, the field discourse became increasingly suffused with discussions of inter-MPA *conflict*. This coincided with two specific events. The first was the formation of oneworld and SkyTeam, as well as the subsequent tension between Star Alliance and each of these MPAs (as noted in the shared exit story and specifically, with Air Canada's potential exit in circa 1999 and Thai Airways International's potential exit in 2000). The second was related to the increasing frequency with which spectators began to construct Star Alliance's identity-position.

More particularly, spectators began performing boundary-work in an attempt to more effectively understand the external perimeters of MPAs, generally, as well as Star Alliance's symbolic boundaries, more specifically. They did this through a reliance on general or sports competition-specific terminology, which was both effective at highlighting the growing amount of conflict between MPAs, as well as loosely constructing symbolic boundaries around Star Alliance. For instance, when discussing Austrian Airlines' exit from now defunct Qualiflyer (a smaller global alliance which was founded in 1992 and ceased operations in 2002), one article described the airline's move into Star Alliance as creating a *schism* within the industry. Interestingly, this suggested that symbolic resources (in this case, the word "schism", which suggests a symbolic division between alliances) were being utilized as early as circa 1999 to demarcate Star Alliance from other entities in the field. Early constructions followed this looser format, wherein spectators would posit differences between MPAs, but appeared to lack a clearer

definitional agreement of what constituted the symbolic boundaries surrounding Star Alliance, as well as other MPAs:

*“Membership of competing alliances Star [Alliance] and oneworld is not set in stone”,* says Jean-Cyril Spinetta, Air France chairman and chief executive. "The European global landscape is far from having completed its changes," he says...*“You may have had airlines joining certain alliances at an early stage because they didn't have much choice, but they haven't necessarily joined the right alliance,”* says Ben Darnell, Delta's director of alliances...Changes in airline equity will affect the alliance landscape, he adds. The partners remain unconvinced, for example, of Singapore Airlines' Star commitment, particularly due to the time taken to become a full member and its recent equity purchase of Virgin, which is not keen to join Star.

The above passage, in which this particular author chose to highlight quotes from SkyTeam founding member Air France and Delta Air Lines, suggested a greater degree of permeability between MPAs than was ever the case—the list of members which exited from other MPAs and into Star Alliance, between the period of 1997-2009 is limited to 4 airlines, 3 of which became members: Austrian Airlines and Lauda Air in 2000, Canadian Airlines in 2001, which became assimilated into Air Canada and was thus never became an actual member of Star Alliance, and Continental Airlines in 2009. Though it missed the mark slightly with regards to effectively forecasting membership turnover and MPA-boundary permeability, it's important to note that early boundary-work served more generally as a primary catalyst for spectators to dramatize inter-MPA conflict, contributing to the shift in logics from the previously competing template (trend- versus collusion-logics) into a single, coalesced logic, re-constructing the shared meaning system manifest within the discourse on collaboration within the field.

*Circa 2001-2009: Dominant conflict logic*

Circa 2001, the increasing sophistication in boundary-work performed by spectators led to a greater overall emphasis on inter-MPA *conflict*. In order to highlight inter-MPA conflict, spectators would often incorporate sports competition terminology into their vernacular, utilizing these symbolic resources in order (1) to demarcate social boundaries around MPAs and (2) to validate the growing schisms between oneworld, SkyTeam and Star Alliance. For instance, the terms *rivals* and occasionally, *arch rivals* were introduced periodically when discussing two MPAs who were competing over a single airline. Furthermore, when that airline entered into an MPA, the winning MPA was discussed as having *prevailed*. Finally, airlines seeking to exit from one MPA to enter into another were occasionally constructed as *defectors*, suggesting that membership within one MPA imbued its members with unique, differentiable qualities, and that exiting that MPA to enter into another one somehow altered these properties in an airline. Collectively, these terms suggested that competition between clearly opposing factions, teams or, and perhaps most importantly, between increasingly definable organizational players within the field.

Moreover, the ongoing conflict between MPAs became known more colloquially as *MPA activity*, which was described as *frenetic*, and as *tussles*, conveying the sense that spectators constructed the field as a dynamic social arena. MPAs, in attracting and inducting airlines, focused on network supremacy, which would enable them to gain superiority over their rivals. Meanwhile, unallied airlines were constituted as *targets* or *plugs* more than allies, and the white spots they filled were noted for *sharpening the competitive edge* of MPAs:

*Two Chinese carriers -- Air China Ltd. and Shanghai Airlines Co. -- have formally joined Star Alliance, a global airline alliance, in a long-expected step that should help sharpen their competitive edge and could provide easier access for travelers flying to and from the Chinese mainland...In enlisting both carriers, Star Alliance has plugged a major hole in its global network with two of China's most robust airlines.*

Importantly, *conflict*, which was rooted in sports competition terminology, served to dramatize a fundamental shift in the way spectators multiauthored MPA-related collaboration within the field discourse. Previously, collaboration was constructed neutrally in discourses promoting a trend-logic, or was opposed in discourses promoting a collusion-logic. However, following a period of coalescence circa 1999-2000, various elements of each logic became synthesized into a more unanimous and dominant conflict-based logic (conflict-logic). Discourse framed by a conflict-logic often emphasized the necessity and premeditation that was rooted in filling white spots, with white spots being a method of growth which fostered inter-MPA competition. MPA growth had become essential to promoting and sustaining inter-MPA competition, and was therefore constructed positively:

*Airline service provides the necessary links for globalization, a trend that will not quit, and the Star Alliance will continue to grow, mature and become more efficient at serving the world travelers who are driving that trend, Star CEO Jaan Albrecht contends...Star will follow its pattern of growth, at least next year, as it brings US Airways into the fold as the newest member. "We are on schedule for Star implementation in spring 2004," said Bruce Ashby, US Airways' senior vice president for alliances...US Airways' participation in Star should increase competition in the transatlantic market, one of the most competitive marketplaces on the globe, and the most mature market in terms of airline alliances.*

## Discussion

### Core findings

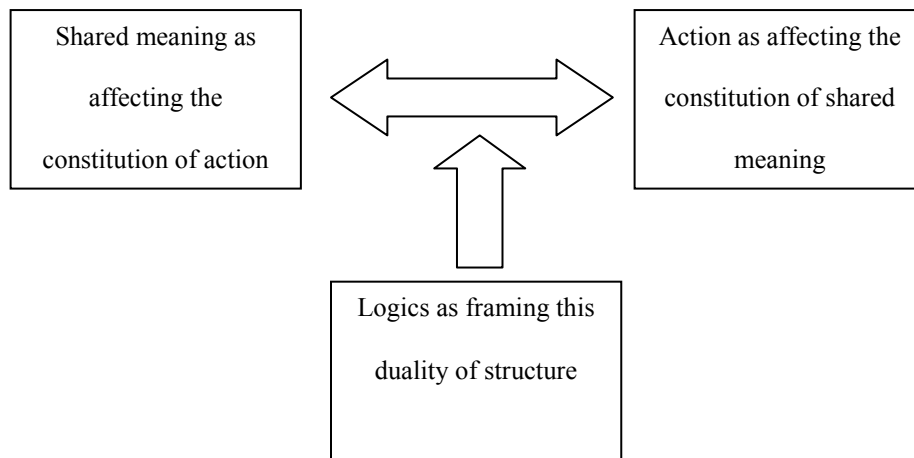
Throughout this study, I endeavoured to move toward the construction of MPAs as dynamic and complex (Kleymann, 2005; Lazzarini, 2007), building upon the current literature by exploring MPA evolution, which is currently understudied (Gudmundsson & Lechner, 2006). In order to approximate this objective, I tracked spectatorship over time to reveal how social structures change in conjunction with the boundaries drawn around MPAs and their members. Shared stories were argued to house these collectively institutionalized structures, which became symbolic resources for spectators to perform boundary-work and to identify and position MPAs and members within the field. In order to conceptually elaborate on this empirical illustration of MPA dynamics, I refer to the structuration framework (Giddens, 1979; 1984) for assessing the dualism reported between spectators and structures within the field.

### *The structuration of MPA-related collaboration*

*Structuration* is a theoretical framework first conceptualized by Anthony Giddens (1979;1984), and emphasizes continuity or transformation of structures and the reproduction of systems. According to Giddens, *systems* are the similar social practises or visible patterns that are reproduced across time and space by agents (Giddens, 1979; 1984; Moore, 2011). Examples include airline entry/exit and MPA growth. *Structures* meanwhile are resources used by agents (actors within the field which express agency) to bind practises to systems of meaning, which are continuously reproduced (Giddens,

1979; 1984). Examples include the symbolic resources used by spectators when they multi-author shared stories.

Structuration is intended to be a comprehensive framework (Busco, 2009, p.250). For the intentions of this study however, only Giddens' *duality of structure* (1984) is relevant for conceptual development. Institutional structures, in being bound to systems of shared meaning through author agency, contribute to the reproduced relations between actors, organized as regular social patterns. Agents' interaction with structures and systems lies at the base of this process of structuration, where systems are produced and reproduced across varying spans of time and space (Busco, 2009). Thus, agency and structure are at the same time medium and outcome of the practises they recursively organize within this duality of structure. Accordingly, actors are free to carry out actions which are simultaneously constrained in some directions and empowered in others, all the while constructing social structures, which are maintained and persist to the extent that actors are able to continuously produce and reproduce them.



**Figure 3.** The mutual constitution of MPA-related collaboration within the field discourse

Table 5			
<i>Structuration of MPA-related collaboration</i>			
Phases	1: pre-change (1997-1998)	2: metamorphosis (1999-2000)	3: post-change (2001-2009)
System	MPA-related collaboration as neutrally or negatively constructed by spectators	MPA-related collaboration as neutrally constructed by spectators	MPA-related collaboration as positively constructed by spectators
Micro-level structures	(1) Natural progression (2) Intra-MPA collaboration (3) Congruence	(3) Inter-MPA competition	(1) White spots (2) Inter-MPA competition
Meso-level structures	(1) Star Alliance's growth as haphazard	(1) Validation of passenger benefits	(1) Legitimization of Star Alliance (2) Professionalization of MPAs as representing a unique organizational form
Macro-level structures	(1) Trend and collusion logics	(2) Early boundary-work	(1) Conflict logic (2) Improved boundary-work

In this study, there was evidence of structuration in the ongoing interpretations of collaborative change (refer to table 5). Spectators contributed to this structuration process through the utilization of logics to collectively frame and connect shared meaning with organizational action (refer to figure 3), contributing to the institutionalization of MPA-related collaboration within the field discourse (refer to table 6 in the appendix section for more details). This is noted through the analysis of the interaction between institutional

structures (symbolic resources) and agents (spectators) which occurred at the field-level, as well as how each governing logic (s) adopted by spectators served to give form and shape to systems of shared meaning related to MPA-related collaborations within the field.

Structuration occurred in three differentiable phases. Spectators constituted MPA-related collaboration during phase 1 or *pre-change* (1997-circa 1998) through natural progression (entry), intra-MPA collaboration and congruence (exit). These resources, as *structures*, enabled spectators to more effectively re-position airlines within the field. However, given each of these resources relatively simple foci on cooperation, MPA-related collaboration as a *system* of shared meaning was often framed as a source of collusion and as negatively affecting competition within the industry. Subsequently, Star Alliance's growth was presented as largely self-indulgent and haphazard. That said, Star Alliance was also multi-authored as representing the first in a trend toward inter-MPA based competition, and was thus validated in spite of being presented as on probation. Similarly, Star Alliance was staged as seeking legitimacy through early attempts at adhering with coercive and normative pressures. Accordingly, spectators framed these micro- and meso- organizational actions neutrally or negatively, and imbued their logics with a sense of ambivalence (meaning), suggesting MPA-related collaboration required a degree of alteration or adaption prior to being validated in the field discourse.

Circa 1999-2000, spectators began constituting MPA-related collaboration increasingly through inter-MPA competition and early boundary-work (structures), suggesting a period of transformation and the reproduction of MPA-related collaboration (the system of shared meaning). Inter-MPA competition and early boundary-work



enabled spectators to more effectively dramatize conflict between increasingly identifiable MPAs, suggesting further than Star Alliance and then newly formed oneworld and SkyTeam could be more effectively positioned within the field discourse. Around this time, spectators also began to validate Star Alliance's attempts at increasing its focus on passenger benefits, suggesting not only that the MPA was seeking to professionalize its practises (as noted circa 1997-1998), but that it also actively striving to achieve this goal. It appeared that the previous dramatization of Star Alliance's probationary status was linked to some extent with the MPA's actions toward altering its growth patterns and passengers benefits, which in turn contributed to the increasingly positive construction of the MPA during its period of metamorphosis (meaning).

Spectators constituted later MPA-related collaboration (circa 2001) through the use of white spots, inter-MPA competition, improved boundary-work, the growing discourse on the MPA form, and the legitimization of Star Alliance. As symbolic resources, these structures collectively contributed to the transformation of MPA-related collaborations as an imperative source of inter-MPA competition within the industry. Star Alliance's growth was thus framed as necessary, desirable and tempered by increasing levels of premeditation and discrimination with regards to admitting members. Later boundary-work was also more refined, and the subsequent development of an MPA-form discourse suggests that the actions of MPAs were more predictable, more definable and thus more effectively positioned within the field. Accordingly, the governing conflict-logic, which was dramatized principally through spectator boundary-work and further, which framed MPA-collaboration as normatively valued, as legally sanctioned and as

culturally adopted, highlighted a period in time when MPA-related collaborations were institutionalized within the field's shared meaning system, as well as its discourse.

*Spectators as agents and as performing boundary-work*

One of the principle ways in which spectators contributed to the structuration of meaning within the field discourse was through their expression of agency. As agents, spectators are embedded within the field they are reporting in. Spectators express agency through the enactment of their own roles as translators, editors, legitimators and arbiters within the field (Lamertz & Heugens, 2009). These roles, which require constant observation, evaluation and reproduction, enable spectators to maintain their relevancy in the eyes of their constituents (Durand & McGuire, 2005), who consume their narratives, thus legitimizing these agents' roles within the field. In continuing to persist within the field, spectators can contribute to the shape and form of the field they are located in through the multi-authorship of shared stories and the production and reproduction of structures. Moreover, the enactment of roles provides spectators with an outlet to position themselves meaningfully within the field discourse, providing a platform for symbolic exchange with one another (Lamertz & Heugens, 2009); and subsequently, to perform social and symbolic boundary-work (Lamont & Molnar, 2002).

First, in incorporating "white spot" and sports-competition terminology into the field vernacular, and thereafter making it applicable to audiences within the global airline industry, spectators are presented as *translating* (Lamertz & Heugens, 2009; Zilber, 2006) these symbolic resources into their articulations of airline and MPA actions. Second, in selectively dramatizing and validating organizational actions in order to increase or decrease their attractiveness in the eyes of selected audiences, spectators are

described in their capacity as *editors* (Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008). Third, in assessing Star Alliance's compliance with field-level normative and coercive isomorphic pressures, spectators are discussed as enacting their roles as *arbiters*, contributing to the construction of MPA-related collaboration as constrained by field-level demands to comply with explicit, specified standards (coercive pressures), and implicit, default expectation (normative pressures) (Lamertz & Heugens, 2009). Fourth, in multi-authoring a shared story surrounding the evolution that both Star Alliance and the MPA form have made with regards to the acquisition and maintenance of legitimacy, spectators are argued to have acted in their capacity as *legitimizers* (Durand & McGuire, 2005).

In exercising agency through the enactment of each of these four roles, spectators are presented as having utilized symbolic resources in their contributions to the institutionalization of discourse within the field (Phillips et al., 2004). This was accomplished in two capacities: (1) in the re-framing of how airlines and MPAs interact with one another through the articulation of clearer social differentiations between MPAs and members, resulting in the performance of *social boundary-work*; and (2) through the binding of institutional structures (symbolic resources) to systems of shared meaning (Giddens, 1984), noted in the logics governing the constitution of MPA-related collaboration, resulting in the performance of *symbolic boundary-work*.

Spectators performed social boundary-work through their enactment as translators and editors. In translating sport competition-terminology (notably: schisms, arch rivals, defectors, prevailing sides, tussles), over time spectators edited their texts in order to highlight the social differences between MPAs. Spectators also performed symbolic boundary-work through their enactment as translators, editors, arbiters and legitimizers.

In translating the term “white spots” into the field discourse, spectators contributed to the professional autonomy of the MPA as an organizational form. In acting as arbiters, spectators dramatized and validated Star Alliance’s adherence with normative and coercive pressures, contributing to the construction of the MPA’s growth as increasingly premeditative. Finally, in acting as legitimators, spectators framed Star Alliance the MPA organizational form as evolving into legitimate social entities. Thus, spectators edited their texts in order to highlight the evolution of meaning surrounding MPA-related collaboration.

Through symbolic and social boundary-work, spectators are argued to have affected the collective enactment of actors (spectators, airlines and MPAs) within the industry, and their constitution within the field. In other words, as spectators mediated the actions of airlines and MPAs in the industry (Lamertz & Heugens, 2009), actors came to better understand their collective enactment of the industry. At the micro-level, airline entry and exit served as a vehicle for spectators to draw boundaries. Boundary-work (Gieryn, 1983; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010) was rooted in the differentiable periods of entry and exit, related further to the socialization of entering airlines and the de-socialization of exiting members. In identifying these periods, spectators served to position airlines in relation to the MPAs they were entering into/exiting from. Identity was thus a mutable property of an airline’s relation to an MPA (Brown & Humphreys, 2006; Harrison, 2006).

At the same time, airline entry/exit between MPAs generated a dynamic through which my observations of spectatorship seemed to link micro-level interaction with meso-level interaction. The language used by spectators to account for airline entry/exit

shaped the meaning attributed to the legitimization of MPAs as an organizational form, as the drawing of social boundaries shapes the logic of airline interaction changed from the predominant emphasis on intra-MPA cooperation (1997-circa 2000) to inter-MPA competition (circa 2001). Accordingly, meaning (symbolic boundary) was shaped by an improved sophistication in how spectators constructed social boundaries over time (Abbott, 1995; Lamont & Molnar, 2002), leading to a clearer identification and positioning of airlines and MPAs, and thus contributing to the institutional change which occurred within the field discourse.

#### *Organizational forms and identity-positions*

In outlining airline- and MPA- identity-positioning, discussion can re-center briefly on organizational forms. Circa 2001, the reconstitution of meso-level industry dynamics, from the previously held “MPA-related collaboration as a source of intra-MPA collusion” into “MPA-related collaboration as a source of inter-MPA competition”, and the ensuing legitimization of the MPA as an organizational form contributed to a reshaping of identity positions for both airlines and MPAs within the field. Spectators began utilizing conflict as a resource to validate inter-MPA competition, which became a defining and default expectation used to frame the MPA as a unique form (Hsu & Hannah, 2005).

Spectators subsequently began to base their understandings surrounding airline entry/exit and MPA growth around a framework where MPA-related collaboration became taken-for-granted (Meyer & Rowan, 1977) within the field discourse: MPA growth was no longer contested outright and was instead presented as more necessary (with regards to the translation of white spot terminology) and tempered by an added

level of professionalism (with regards to Star Alliance's adherence with normative isomorphic pressures). Competition thus became a primary standard of membership within the form. In other words, the MPA-form developed into a discursive category through which spectators applied membership standards (Glynn & Navis, 2013; Hsu & Hannah, 2005). To this end, constructing a new organizational form became analogous to shaping a new field level identity (Wry, Lounsbury & Glynn, 2011; Hsu & Hannah, 2005); or a macro-level identity which encapsulated micro-level airline and meso-level MPA identity positioning.

Importantly, the identity positions of airlines and MPAs were affected by the legitimatization of the MPA as an organizational form. According to Glynn (2008, p.423), identity is "bricolaged" or cobbled together using institutional components available within an organization's institutional environment. These components are drawn from the prototypic characteristics which categorize the organizations within a particular form (Glynn & Navis, 2013). Prior to the formation of oneworld and SkyTeam (and thus prior to the formation of the MPA form) MPA-related collaboration was constructed negatively. This was because the prototypic features of the MPA in this period centered on intra-MPA cooperation.

However, the emergence of the MPA as an organizational form and the re-constitution of meaning surrounding MPA-related collaboration might have given rise to a new set of structures for spectators to symbolically position and identify airlines and MPAs. Previously accessed symbolic resources, such as natural progression, intra-MPA collaboration and congruence (older prototypic characteristics) were supplanted by the use of white spot and sports-competition terminology (newer prototypic characteristics),

suggesting that the re-interpretation by spectators surrounding the justifications of joining and exiting MPAs by individual airlines positioned them in a different social space, comprised of a new cultural, institutional meaning (Glynn, 2008). The act of MPAs becoming framed as members of an organizational form was thus linked with the alteration of identity positions for actors within the field. This re-positioning served to award these members with greater opportunities for MPA-related collaboration through spectator validation of airline entry/exit and MPA growth by spectators (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Owen-Smith & Powell, 2008).

### **Contributions**

MPAs are generally understudied within alliance literature (Lazzarini S. G., 2008). Even amongst researchers who study this topic, very few have analyzed alliance processes, stability and evolution (Gudmundsson & Lechner, 2006). Therefore, one of the contributions I have made in this study has made is with regards to utilizing the evolving literature on competing multipartner alliances (e.g. Lavie et al., 2007; Lazzarini, 2007; Lazzarini 2008) to outline how MPAs change over time. In order to accomplish this, I drew upon the concept of boundaries. Researchers who have studied boundaries within the global airline industry (Lazzarini, 2007) have focused principally on delineating current members in MPAs from non-members. For instance, Star Alliance is comprised of all publically announced airline members, minus any departures from the group. This approach to boundary-work, while practical, fails to convey the temporal and dynamic nature of membership within an MPA. That said, my research on boundary-work has incorporated a method whereby potential entrants, as well as potential non-members, can

be accounted for in considering the delineation of MPAs from one another, non-members from potential members, and members from potential members.

Moreover, my study draws attention to stories as valuable discursive tools for outlining the institutionalization of meaning within the field discourse. I've demonstrated how one way in which authors frame, validate, dramatize and legitimate the actions of other actors within the field is through the multi-authorship of stories (Zilber, 2007). Stories also serve as an important concept for articulating how text and context are interrelated to each other, enabling me to actively incorporate context into my study through the analysis of stories. This is important, as "context has, for the most part, been afforded a taken-for-granted status that is misplaced because of the diverse ways in which it may be defined and applied" (Leitch & Palmer, 2010. P.1194). In drawing more effectively on context, I have been able to capture the linkages between airline behaviour and a change in the logics (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999) deployed to make sense of and frame that behaviour through the multi-authorship of spectators over time. Furthermore, I have been able to outline how this change involved micro-level airline, meso-level MPA and macro-level field symbolic structures and meaning systems (Giddens, 1979; 1984). Finally, I've bridged the concepts of stories with the concept of spectators. Wry and colleagues (2011) have emphasized the general lack of research done to account for the role of intermediaries in shaping collective identity stories. My research, in drawing on spectatorship as a source of boundary-work, has contributed to plugging this gap.

Lastly, I contribute to the literature on organizational forms and collective identities by outlining several institutional factors which helped to shape the creation and legitimization of the MPA form. According to Hsu and Hannah (2005), organizational



forms are most effectively measured through the careful attention of evaluators and social codes. Evaluators are actors within a field which hold sway over an organization's identity and form. Codes meanwhile are sets of rules adopted by a group of evaluators which specify the features that an organization is expected to possess. At the same time, codes enable evaluators to jointly author *collective identities*, categorizing the in-group's core purpose and practises (Wry et al., 2011). In this study, I've highlighted how spectators, as evaluators, utilized particular structures (symbolic resources, or codes) while contributing to the constitution of MPAs as a unique organizational form. Moreover, I've outlined how the collective identity of the MPA form (as enabling competition between MPAs) became legitimized. This last point is worth stressing, as it builds off of previous research by Wry and colleagues, who encourage examining "the content and frequency of different types of stories, how these differ among group members, and how the temporal ordering of defining stories unfolds in varying contexts" (2011, p. 459).

### **Limitations**

This study is limited in several ways. First, the global airline industry has often been presented as largely idiosyncratic, potentially preventing my findings from being generalized into other contexts. For instance, international traffic within the industry is often presented as heavily regulated, which affects the formation, and thus the evolution of MPAs because airlines are not free to enter foreign countries through acquisition (Lazzarini S. G., 2008). That being said, I still believe that my study can serve as a guide for future research in other industries in which MPAs are present and viable strategic

options. For instance, Lavie, Lechner and Singh (2007) have previously explored the dynamics of heterogeneity in the benefits that members receive through their timing of entry in MPAs, in the Wi-Fi alliance industry. It would be interesting to see whether meaning surrounding MPA-related collaboration was similarly re-constituted in other industries.

Second, my dataset is limited to industry participants within the United States. Industry participants often engage in impression management and are prone to editorial bias, both intentionally and by cultural bias (Hoffman & Ocasio, 2001). Accordingly, this limitation may have affected the presentation of events related to airlines and MPAs, potentially skewing my dataset to reflect North American-centered logics.

Third, the data I collected predominantly covered airline entry and MPA growth, at the expense of airline exit. Accordingly, the data used when constructing the shared exiting story is limited to three actual exiting events (Ansett Australia in 2001, Mexicana in 2004 and VARIG in 2007), with the validity of this story being put into question. Future research may consider collecting and analyzing data on MPAs circa 2009 into the present, in the hopes of potentially charting another shift in the way MPA-related collaboration has been constituted within the field, thus potentially outlining another period of institutionalization within the global airline industry. Furthermore, between 2010 and 2013, another six airlines exited Star Alliance (Blue1 in 2012, British Midland International in 2012, Continental in 2012, Shanghai Airlines in 2010 and TACA Airlines in 2013), suggesting that discussion surrounding MPA evolution and growth could be further enriched by an added analysis on MPA restructuring and decline.

## **Conclusion**

As a commentary on airlines and MPAs, this study offers insight to practitioners affiliated with the global airline industry and dealing with media coverage. Particularly, my research has outlined one avenue through which organizations (such as MPAs) can craft identities from available cultural codes rooted in the identifying characteristics of their organizational forms (Glynn, 2008; Hsu & Hannah, 2005). Within the context of this study, the MPA form was discussed primarily as rooted in inter-MPA competition. Increasingly, Star Alliance was noted as incorporating the element of “growth” into its identity, which spectators discussed as a viable tactic for competing with oneworld and SkyTeam. Thus, in linking growth with inter-MPA competition, MPA-related collaboration served to validate Star Alliance by rendering its actions as comprehensible and thus legitimate (Glynn & Navis, 2013).

Accordingly, practitioners involved in public relations or legitimacy maintenance should be mindful of the cultural codes they use as resources for bricolage to shape and cobble together the presentation of their identities to the public. Doing so could effectively position their organizations within a favourable stream of their field’s discourse, legitimizing their actions and strengthening the uniqueness of their identities.

## References

- Abbott, A. (1995). Things of boundaries. *Social Research* , 62 (4): 857-882.
- Albers, S. (2010). Configurations of alliance governance systems . *Schmalenbach Business Review* , 62 (3): 204-233.
- Alvesson, M., & Karreman, D. (2007). Unraveling HRM: Identity, ceremony, and control in a management consulting firm. *Organization Science* , 18 (4): 711-723.
- Alvesson, M., & Karreman, D. (2000). Varieties of discourse: On the study of organizations through discourse analysis. *Human Relations* , 53: 1125-1149.
- Beckert, J. (2010). Institutional isomorphism revisited: Convergence and divergence in institutional change. *American Sociological Association* , 28: 150-168.
- Bourdieu, P. (1985). The social space and the genesis of groups. *Theory and Society* , 14 (6): 723-744.
- Brown, A. (2006). A narrative approach to collective identities. *Journal of Management Studies* , 43 (3): 731-754.
- Brown, A. D. (1997). Narcissism, identity, and legitimacy. *Academy of Management Review* , 22: 643-686.
- Brown, A., & Humphreys, M. (2006). Organizational identity and place: A discursive exploration of hegemony and resistance. *Journal of Management Studies* , 43 (2): 232-257.

- Busco, C. (2009). Gidden's structuration theory and its implications for management accounting research. *Journal of Management & Governance* , 13: 249-260.
- Carlile, P. R. (2002). A pragmatic view of knowledge and boundaries: Boundary objects in new product development. *Organization Sciences* , 13 (4): 442-455.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of Qualitative Research 3e*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- DiMaggio, P., & Powell, W. W. (1983). The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields. *American Sociological Review* , 147-160.
- Durand, R., & McGuire, J. (2005). Legitimizing agencies in the face of selection: The case of AACSB. *Organization Studies* , 36 (2): 165-196.
- Emirbayer, M. (1997). Manifesto for a relational sociology. *American Journal of Sociology* , 18: 497-513.
- Friman, M. (2010). Understanding boundary work through discourse theory: Inter/disciplines and interdisciplinarity. *Science Studies* , 23 (2): 5-19.
- Gabriel, Y. (1995). The unmanaged organization: Stories, fantasies and subjectivity. *Organization Studies* , 16 (3): 477-501.
- Gawer, A., & Phillips, N. (2013). Institutional work as logics shift: The case of Intel's transformation to platform leader. *Organization Studies* , 0 (0): 1-37.

- Gergen, K. J., & Thatchenkery, T. J. (1996). Organization science as social construction: Postmodern potentials. *Journal of Applied Behavioural Science* , 32: 356-377.
- Giddens, A. (1979). *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure, and Contradiction in Social Analysis*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Giddens, A. (1984). *The Constitution of Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gieryn, T. F. (1983). Boundary-work and the demarcation of science from non-science: Strains and interests in the professional ideologies of scientists. *American Sociological Review*, 48 (6): 781-795.
- Glynn, M. A. (2008). 'Beyond Constraint: How institutions enable identities' in *The Sage handbook of organizational institutionalism*. Royston Greenwood, Christine Oliver, Kerstin Sahlin and Roy Suddaby (eds). London: Sage.
- Glynn, M. A., & Abzug, R. (2002). Institutionalizing identity: Symbolic isomorphism and organizational names. *Academy of Management Journal* , 45 (1): 267-280.
- Glynn, A. M., & Navis, C. (2013). Categories, identities, and cultural classification: Moving beyond a model of categorical constraint. *Management Studies*, 50 (6): 1124-1137.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books.
- Gomes-Casseres, B. (1994). Group versus group: How alliance networks compete. *Harvard Business Review* , 62-74.

- Gudmundsson, S. V., & Lechner, C. (2006). Multilateral airline alliances: Balancing strategic constraints and opportunities . *Journal of Air Transport Management* , 12: 153-158.
- Gulati, R., Sytch, M., & Mehrotra, P. (2008). Breaking up is never easy: Planning for an exit strategy in a strategic alliance. *California Management Review* , 50 (4): 147-163.
- Hardy, C., Lawrence, T. B., & Grant, D. (2005). Discourse and collaboration: The role of conversations and collective identity . *Academy of Management Review* , 1: 58-77.
- Harrison, R. (2006). From landlines to cell phones: Negotiating identity positions in new career contexts. *Journal of Employment Counseling* , 43: 18-30.
- Heracleous, L., & Marshak, R. J. (2004). Conceptualizing organizational discourse as situated symbolic action. *Human Relations* , 57 (10): 1285-1312.
- Heracleous, L., & Barrett, M. (2001). Organizational change as discourse: Communicative actions and deep structures in the context of information technology implementation. *Academy of Management Journal* , 44: 755-778.
- Hoffman, A. J., & Ocasio, W. (2001). Not all events are attended equally: Toward a middle-range theory of industry attention to external events. *Organization Science* , 12 (4): 414-434.
- Hsu, G., & Hannah, M. T. (2005). Identities, genres, and organizational forms. *Organization Science* , 16 (5): 474-490.

- King, B. G., & Whetten, D. A. (2008). Rethinking the relationship between reputation and legitimacy: A social actor conceptualization. *Corporate Reputation Review* , 11 (3): 192-207.
- Kleymann, B. (2005). The dynamics of multilateral allying: a process perspective on airline alliances. *Journal of Air Transport Management* , 11: 135-147.
- Lamertz, K., & Heugens, P. P. (2009). Institutional translation through spectatorship: Collective consumption and editing of symbolic organizational texts by firms and their audiences. *Organization Studies* , 30 (11): 1249-1279.
- Lamont, M., & Molnar, V. (2002). The study of boundaries in the social sciences. *Annual Review of Sociology* , 28: 167-195.
- Lavie, D., Lechner, C., & Singh, H. (2007). The performance implications of timing of entry and involvement in multipartner alliances. *Academy of Management Journal* , 50 (3): 578-604.
- Lawrence, T. B., Phillips, N., & Hardy, C. (1999). Watching whale-watching: A relational theory of organizational collaboration. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* , 35: 479-502.
- Lazarini, S. G. (2007). The impact of membership in competing alliance constellations: Evidence on the operational performance of global airlines. *Strategic Management Journal* , 28 (4): 345-367.
- Lazarini, S. G. (2008). The transition from alliance networks to multilateral alliances in the global airline industry. *Brazilian Administrative Review* , 5 (1): 19-36.



- Leitch, S., & Palmer, I. (2010). Analysing texts in context: Current practices and new protocols for critical discourse analysis in organization studies. *Journal of Management Studies* , 47 (6): 1194-1212.
- Meyer, J. W., & Rowan, B. (1977). Institutionalized organizations: Formal structure as myth and ceremony . *American Journal of Sociology* , 83: 340-363.
- Miller, G. (1994). Toward ethnographies of institutional discourse: Proposals and suggestions. *Journal of contemporary ethnography* , 23: 280-306.
- Mizruchi, M. S., & Fein, L. C. (1999). The social construction of organizational knowledge: A study of the uses of coercive, mimetic, and normative isomorphism. *Administrative Science Quarterly* , 44: 653-683.
- Moore, D. (2011). Structuration theory: The contribution of Norman Macintosh and its application to emissions trading. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting* , 22: 212-227.
- Nederhof, A. J., & Meijer, R. F. (1995). Development of bibliometric indicators for utility of research to users in society: Measurement of external knowledge transfer via publications in trade journals. *Scientometrics* , 32 (1): 37-48.
- Owen-Smith, J., & Powell, W. W. (2008). *'Networks and Institutions' in The Sage handbook of organizational institutionalism*. Royston Greenwood, Christine Oliver, Kerstin Sahlin and Roy Suddaby (eds). London: Sage.
- Phillips, N., & Brown, J. L. (1993). Analyzing communication in and around organizations: A critical hermeneutic approach. *Academy of Management Journal* , 36 (6): 1547-1576.

- Phillips, N., Lawrence, T. B., & Hardy, C. (2004). Discourse and institutions. *Academy of Management Review* , 29 (4): 635-652.
- Phillips, N., Lawrence, T. B., & Hardy, C. (2004). Discourse and institutions. *Academy of Management Review* , 29 (4): 635-652.
- Potter, J., & Wetherell, M. (1987). *Discourse and Social Psychology*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Rhoades, D. L., & Lush, H. (1997). A typology of strategic alliances in the airline industry: Propositions for stability and duration. *Journal of Air Transport Management* , 3 (3): 109-114.
- Sahlin, K., & Wedlin, L. (2008). 'Circulating ideas: Imitation, translation and editing' in *The Sage handbook of organizational institutionalism*. Royston Greenwood, Christine Oliver, Kerstin Sahlin and Roy Suddaby (eds). London: Sage.
- Schein, E. H. (1971). The individual, the organization, and the career: A conceptual scheme. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* , 7: 401-426.
- Scott, R. W. (2004). *Institutional theory: Contributing to a theoretical research program*. In Smith, K., G., & Hitt, M., A., (eds.), *Great minds in management: The process of theory development* (pp.1-47). Oxford UK: Oxford University Press.
- Sillince, J. A., & Brown, A. D. (2009). Multiple organizational identities and legitimacy: The rhetoric of police websites. *Human Relations* , 62 (12): 1829-1856.
- Smolka, A. L. (2005). The authoring of institutional practises: Discourse and modes of participation of subjects. *Culture Psychology* , 11: 359-376.

- Suchman, M. C. (1995). Managing legitimacy: Strategic and institutional approaches. *Academy of Management Review* , 20 (3): 571-610.
- Suddady, R., & Greenwood, R. (2005). Rhetorical strategies of legitimacy. *Administrative Science Quarterly* , 50: 35-67.
- Suddaby, R. (2006). From the editors: What grounded theory is not. *Academy of Management Journal* , 49 (4): 633-642.
- Suddady, R., & Greenwood, R. (2005). Rhetorical strategies of legitimacy . *Administrative Science Quarterly* , 50: 35-67.
- Thorton, P. H., & Ocasio, W. (1999). Institutional logics and the historical contingency of power in organizations: Executive succession in the higher education publishing industry, 1958-1990. *American Journal of Sociology* , 105: 801-843.
- Van Maaene, J. V., & Schein, E. H. (1979). Toward a theory of organizational socialization. In B.M. Staw (ed.). *Research in Organizational Behavior* , 1: 209-264. Greenwich: JAI Press.
- Wedlin, L. (2006). *Ranking business schools: Forming fields, identities and boundaries in international management education*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.
- Wry, T., Lounsbury, M., & Glynn, M. A. (2011). Legitimizing nascent collective identities: Coordinating cultural entrepreneurship. *Organization Science*, 22 (2): 449-463.

- Zeng, M., & Chen, X.-P. (2003). Achieving cooperation in multiparty alliances: A social dilemma approach to partnership management. *Academy of Management Review* , 28 (4): 587-605.
- Zilber, T. B. (2007). Stories and the discursive dynamics of institutional entrepreneurship: The case of Israeli high-tech after the bubble. *Organization Studies* , 28 (7): 1035-1054.
- Zilber, T. B. (2010). *The work of meanings in institutional processes and thinking in The Sage handbook of organizational institutionalism*. Greenwood, R., Oliver, C., Suddaby, R., & Sahlin, K., (eds.) , London: SAGE.
- Zilber, T. B. (2006). The work of the symbolic in institutional processes: Translations of rational myths in Israeli high tech. *Academy of Management Journal* , 49 (2): 281-303.

## Appendix

Table 6

*Coding Exert of the Institutionalization of MPA-related Collaboration*

Date	Text	Meaning of collaboration	Logic	Boundary-work	Dramatization	Interpretation
1997	<p>There is a <b>trend towards global alliances</b> (1), but this is the largest one to date...Many airlines have one-on-one agreements of varying types, but the Star alliance goes much further...Each airline expects to benefit from operating efficiencies ranging from common use of ground facilities to joint purchasing of everything from food and fuel to advertising (2).</p>		<p>Trend-logic: neutral construction of Star Alliance (1)</p>		<p>Dramatization: of differences between Star Alliance and existing alliance forms (2)</p>	<p>Early ambivalence toward MPA-related collaboration, airline entry/exit and MPA growth</p>
1997	<p><b>Air New Zealand has been positioning itself to join Star - a powerful and growing airline grouping</b> (1) founded by Lufthansa, United and Air Canada and now including Scandinavian Airline System, Brazil's Varig and Thai International - and a strong partnership with the German airline is vital for membership...<b>The airline has followed the established pattern for joining Star in negotiating alliances with leading members</b> and the Lufthansa union will provide the critical leg of the founders' triangle...A Lufthansa spokesman said recently the <b>"natural progression" to Star membership was to first become a bilateral partner and expand to multilateral partnership "if there is mutual interest among the alliance parties"</b> (3).</p>	<p>Collaboration: as rooted in a "natural progression" into Star Alliance (3)</p>	<p>Trend-logic: neutral construction of Star Alliance (1)</p>		<p>Validation: approval of entry into Star Alliance, which is described as "powerful and growing" (1)</p>	
1997	<p>Although U.S. airlines tout partnerships with international carriers as a travelers' blessing, they have been <b>anything but a boon for competition</b> (1)...Powerful partnerships like United-Lufthansa and Northwest Airlines-KLM have created easier international connections for international passengers...<b>But the antitrust waivers have also given these partnerships such a big edge that competition has suffered</b> (2).</p>	<p>Intra-MPA Collaboration: as negatively affecting competition</p>	<p>Collusion-logic: negative construction of Star Alliance (1)</p>			

2000	<p>Membership of competing alliances Star and oneworld is not set in stone (1), says Jean-Cyril Spinetta, Air France chairman and chief executive. "The European global landscape is far from having completed its changes," he says..."You may have had airlines joining certain alliances at an early stage because they didn't have much choice, but they haven't necessarily joined the right alliance," says Ben Darnell, Delta's director of alliances.</p>			<p>Early boundary-work: MPA boundary permeability (1)</p>		<p>Shift in tone regarding the construction of MPA-related collaboration; Greater emphasis on inter-MPA competition and validation of passenger benefits</p>
2000	<p>The Star Alliance's principal attribute is its focus on customer requirements. "The pivotal element in the success of the Star Alliance is the degree to which it satisfies customer needs for network size, fast transfers, service and recognition of customer status," said Lufthansa Chairman and CEO Jurgen Weber. "Network reach and range, and integration depth are, therefore, issues which will continue to occupy us in the Star Alliance." (1)...Star Alliance customers can earn and fly off bonus miles anywhere in the route network. Integrated and harmonised products and processes have optimised customer service, making air travel more comfortable than ever before. Moreover, the Star Alliance offers more value for money. "Every Star airline is offering more than before through cooperation with other alliance partners. Synergies have led, for example, to attractive fares being offered by airlines alliances more often than otherwise in the market," (2) Weber said...More than 500 lounges around the world are open to passengers. Among them is the Star Alliance lounge in Zurich, which the industry rates among the ten best in the world. At many of the world's airports, Star Alliance airlines have moved into the same terminal to shorten customers walking distances. Where possible, they park their aircraft close together to make transfers easier and more convenient for passengers.</p>	<p>Intra-MPA Collaboration: as positively affecting passenger-benefits (2)</p>			<p>Dramatization: evolution of focus on passenger-benefits, in contrast to earlier benefits, which lagged behind airline-benefits (1)</p>	
2000	<p>Air France, one of the founding members of the new alliance SkyTeam, is courting Thai Airways International to join the group...Several officials at Thai said it would be interesting for the carrier to consider Air France's offer in view of Singapore Airlines' participation in Star Alliance. <b>The Thai officials'</b></p>	<p>MPA-related collaboration neutrally constructed</p>			<p>Validate: inter-MPA competition (1); Dramatize: intra-MPA congruence (2);</p>	

	<p>statement is not surprising, as the fare issue with SIA on the Bangkok-Singapore sector has not been resolved despite the fact that it is four months since SIA officially joined Star...SIA and Singapore Changi Airport are seen as stiff competitors to Thai and Bangkok Airport (1)...Air France has been trying to entice Thai with the offer of a Bangkok hub and SkyTeam's tag line - "Care more about you." This claim would require a considerable effort to achieve as Star and oneworld have been advertising the slogan to premium travelers for more than two years... (2)[SkyTeam] are themselves forced to try to catch up in the alliance business as their major competitors continue to sign on partner carriers to fill the global slots in their networks.</p>					
2001	<p>And it is widely predicted that Air New Zealand will quit the alliance to move to rival OneWorld, if the deal with Qantas goes through (1)...Qantas Airways announced Tuesday that it had held preliminary talks to buy over Air New Zealand, saying it wants to buy over the stakes held by Brierley Investments and Singapore Airlines...Air New Zealand has always been a thorn in the side for Qantas given that they are arch rivals (2)... So Qantas basically wants to take over the kiwi carrier to dominate the entire Australian and New Zealand market.</p>	<p>MPA-related collaboration: as promoting inter-MPA competition (1)</p>	<p>Conflict logic: support of inter-MPA competition</p>	<p>Boundary-work: identity-positioning MPAs as rivals</p>	<p>Dramatization: sports competition terminology = "arch rival" (2)</p>	
2002	<p>As [CEO of Star Alliance, Jaan] Albrecht tries to juggle management of 15 airlines, he said the alliance has evolved and now has the structure to manage its growth (1). Star, which recently incorporated in Germany, describes itself as a project management company with 65 employees. Albrecht oversees three VPs -- commercial, products and services, as well as loyalty and marketing. Star also has human resources, finance and project management departments...Even though Star's founders envisioned no more than a 10-airline team, Albrecht said the team has no limit on membership. He warned, however, that Star will not "grow for growth's sake." (2)</p>	<p>Collaboration: as tempered by introduction of management system (1)</p>			<p>Dramatization: tempered growth (2)</p>	<p>Eventual institutionalization of Star Alliance within discourse; discussion of MPA form</p>
2003	<p>Airline service provides the necessary links for globalization, a trend that will not quit (1), and the Star Alliance will continue to grow, mature and become more</p>	<p>MPA-related collaboration: as premeditated and</p>			<p>Dramatization: Star Alliance as an enduring form within the field = "a trend</p>	

	<p>efficient at serving the world travelers who are driving that trend, Star CEO Jaan Albrecht contends...According to the executive, Star and other alliances demonstrated their value by providing reliable services when acts of terror, the Iraqi war and the SARS epidemic dealt all airlines a series of hard economic blows. "Had we not had the depth of market penetration that global alliances offer, member airlines would have had to cut back their frequencies and destinations more severely than they have done over the past 24 months. And <b>many would be in even deeper trouble than they are today,</b>" (2) he said...In terms of growth, <b>Star personnel are conducting traffic trend surveys and scanning traveler feedback surveys</b> to determine where the alliance should attempt to expand in membership now that Mexicana may depart from the alliance. At this stage, the primary targets are airlines in China, the Indian subcontinent, the Mideast and Russia (3)...Star will follow its pattern of growth, at least next year, as it brings US Airways into the fold as the newest member.</p> <p>"We are on schedule for Star implementation in spring 2004," said Bruce Ashby, US Airways' senior vice president for alliances (4)...<b>US Airways' participation in Star should increase competition in the transatlantic market,</b> one of the most competitive marketplaces on the globe, and the most mature market in terms of airline alliances (5).</p>	<p>methodical; Star Alliance's growth presented as tempered (3)</p>			<p>that will not quit" (1); Validation: growth fortitude (2)</p>
2003	<p><b>Even so, pundits say Star members continue to draw strength from the alliance. Indeed, in the midst of the worst-ever industry crisis</b> (1) now deepened by the war in Iraq and the onset of a mysterious respiratory syndrome in some major cities worldwide, global partnerships are as critical a component of airlines' strategies as ever.</p>	<p>MPA-related collaboration as positive for the industry</p>			<p>Validation: MPA fortitude</p>
2006	<p>Star Alliance has formally invited Air China to join its <b>club</b> (1). <b>The pair have signed a memorandum of understanding for cooperation, and the airline will now be the subject of checks and procedures to ensure its place in the alliance</b> (2).</p>			<p>Boundary- work: sports terminology "club" (1)</p>	



2007	<p>Two Chinese carriers -- Air China Ltd. and Shanghai Airlines Co. -- have formally joined Star Alliance, a global airline alliance, in a long-expected step that should help sharpen their competitive edge and could provide easier access for travelers flying to and from the Chinese mainland (1)... "By joining with 17 other leading airlines, Air China and Shanghai Airlines enhance their abilities to compete, creating, for them, a 'win-win' situation," (2) Air China Chairman Li Jiaxiang said in a statement.</p>	<p>MPA-related collaboration: as mutually beneficial for members and MPAs "win-win" (2)</p>			<p>Validation: joining Star Alliance constructed as "sharpening the competitive edge" (1)</p>	
------	--	---	--	--	---	--

## Coding protocol

Table 7		
<i>Coding protocol during stage 1: Open coding period</i>		
Coding categories	Working definition	Coding example
1 - Instances of airline entry		
1.1 - Articles which discussed airlines actually entering into Star Alliance	Articles which explicitly mention an airline entering into Star Alliance	British Midland Tuesday confirmed it was entering the Star Alliance, which is led by Germany's Deutsche Lufthansa AG. Under the agreement, Lufthansa will acquire 20% of British Midland from another Star Alliance member, Scandinavian Airlines Systems, which held a 40% stake before the deal.
1.2 - Articles which discussed potentially entering into Star Alliance	Articles which elude to the potential or eventual entry of an airline into Star Alliance	Air New Zealand has <i>been positioning itself to join Star</i> - a powerful and growing airline grouping founded by Lufthansa, United and Air Canada....
2- Instances of airline exit		
2.1 - Articles which discussed airlines actually exiting from Star Alliance	Articles which explicitly mention an airline exiting from Star Alliance	The Star Alliance yesterday decided to remove the "old" Varig from the group, as the company no longer has a broad network to offer passengers flying on partner airlines...Because new Varig now has an operating certificate, old Varig will "no longer fulfil" the requirements for alliance membership.
2.2. - Articles which discussed potentially exiting from Star Alliance	Articles which elude to the potential or eventual exit of an airline from Star Alliance	Air Canada has responded to attempts to merge it with Canadian Airlines by introducing a shareholder rights plan to be activated in the event of any takeover bid. It is also aiming to delay a vote on the merger plan until 7 January. Both strategies are aimed at defeating moves by American Airlines and investment group Onex to take over the carrier...The Onex/American plan would see Air Canada exit the Star Alliance after being merged with Canadian, a founder member of the rival oneworld grouping and itself 33%-owned by the US major.

3 - Reasons for airline entry/exit		
<p>3.1 – Motivations for entry/exit</p>	<p>Articles contextualizing airline entry/exit, elaborating on the motives behind these practises from the perspective of the airlines, as well.</p>	<p>Two Chinese carriers -- Air China Ltd. and Shanghai Airlines Co. -- have formally joined Star Alliance, a global airline alliance, <i>in a long-expected step that should help sharpen their competitive edge and could provide easier access for travelers flying to and from the Chinese mainland...</i>"By joining with 17 other leading airlines, Air China and Shanghai Airlines enhance their abilities to compete, creating, for them, a 'win-win' situation," (2) Air China Chairman Li Jiexiang said in a statement. "They are better placed to service their customers with higher-value services."...In enlisting both carriers, Star Alliance has plugged a major hole in its global network with two of China's most robust airlines</p>
<p>3.2 – External/environmental factors which affect likelihood of either entry or exit from being considered or as occurring</p>	<p>Articles contextualizing airline entry/exit through an elaboration on factors external to the airline entering/exiting which appears to result in its gravitation toward or away from Star Alliance.</p>	<p>Clearly, Star has long been the alliance to beat... Star's lead billing is well justified. It is not only the oldest and largest of the <i>alliances but has proved remarkably durable</i>. So far, Star appears to have been the net beneficiary of the upheavals which have accompanied industry consolidation. In Europe, it had already lured Austrian Airlines away from Qualiflyer and won out in the bid to secure bmi British Midland.</p>

Table 8		
<i>Coding protocol during stage 2: Axial coding, period 1</i>		
Coding categories	Working definition	Coding example
<b>1- Boundaries around Star Alliance</b>		
1.1 - Articles which discuss an airline potentially or actually entering Star Alliance	Same as in previous coding protocol iteration	
1.2 - Articles which discuss an airline potentially or actually exiting Star Alliance	Same as in previous coding protocol iteration	
<b>2 – Boundaries within Star Alliance</b>		
2.1 - 2+ member alliances within Star Alliance	Articles which focus on intra-MPA alliances between 2+ members within Star.	
2.11 - Codesharing alliance	(1) Articles which discuss two member airlines forming a codesharing agreement with one another.	Air Canada said it will begin daily non-stop flights between Toronto and Munich starting June 5 in a joint venture with Deutsche Lufthansa...Air Canada said both it and Lufthansa, which are Star Alliance partners, will share operating costs and revenues equally.
2.12 - Computer reservation alliance	(2) Articles which discuss any electronic information system that allows members to coordinate operations within their airline with other members within the	All Nippon Airways plans to launch an <i>electronic ticketing link</i> with four additional Star Alliance partners for a total of 11 alliance airlines by the end of the month...ANA e-tickets were previously valid on seven other Star members: Air Canada, Air New Zealand, Asiana, Austrian Airlines, LOT Polish Airlines, Thai Airways and United. Starting yesterday, Singapore Airlines and BMI will join this list, and by the end of September, the planned addition of Lufthansa and Varig

	formed alliance.	will bring the total to 11 partners. Star Alliance has standardized e-ticket rules for member airlines, giving passengers the possibility to travel around the world on a single e-ticket using different member carriers.
2.13 - Equity alliance	(3) Articles which discuss two member airlines forming a codesharing agreement with one another	Singapore Airlines will not bid for the 10% stake to be offered to a strategic partner in Thai Airways' privatization exercise. Lufthansa, one of the founding members of Star Alliance, will bid as an individual carrier. The move was confirmed by Lufthansa CEO Juergen Weber at a news conference yesterday in Bangkok. Weber said that as part of the group's policy of sharing responsibility and investment SIA will not compete with Lufthansa in the bidding process.
2.2 - Founding versus non-founding members	Articles which any degree of differentiation between members and non-members, specifically with regards to roles that a founder would adopt that a non-founder would not	Global distribution provider Amadeus has been in talks with Star and the alliance's members...The original idea was that Star partners Air Canada, Lufthansa and United Airlines would spearhead the project, setting a template that other Star carriers could then join at a later date. Air Canada will not now be in this first group, leaving Lufthansa and United, Star's two largest carriers and respective leaders in Europe and North America, to take the lead.
<b>3- Contextual concepts</b>		
3.1 - Identity	Articles which seek to construct explicit identity claims surrounding Star Alliance, or surrounding the MPA form	
3.11 - Explicit identity claims	(1) Articles which construct Star Alliance's core identity, which serves to distinguish the MPA from other MPAs, and other organizational forms within the field discourse	Air New Zealand has been positioning itself to join Star - <i>a powerful and growing airline grouping</i> founded by Lufthansa, United and Air Canada and now including Scandinavian Airline System, Brazil's Varig and Thai International - and a strong partnership with the German airline is vital for membership.
3.12 - Rationale of MPA form	(2) Articles which focus on the emergence and	Airline service provides the necessary links for globalization, a trend that will not quit, and the Star Alliance will continue to grow, mature

	establishment of the MPA within the field and how that MPA is distinguished from other collaborative forms within the field.	and become more efficient at serving the world travelers who are driving that trend, Star CEO Jaan Albrecht contends.
3.2 - Star Alliance's size	Articles which discuss Star Alliance's perceptual 'critical mass': the maximum number of members which may exist as part of the alliance.	Irish Flag Carrier Aer Lingus has entered into discussions with Lufthansa regarding the possible entry of the Irish airline into the Star Alliance as an "Affiliate" rather than a full member. This would be the first such airline within Star to be accepted with this status...Jurgen Weber, Lufthansa's Chief Executive... <i>has restated that there has to be a limit to the number of carriers who are full members of Star or the Alliance would be "in danger of becoming like the United Nations."</i>
3.3 - Organizational field	Texts which recognize Star Alliance- and airline-activity as being a part of a larger arena of social action.	
3.31 - Geographic segmentation of field	(1) Article which emphasize how the field is segmented based on geography	In terms of growth, Star personnel are conducting traffic trend surveys and scanning traveler feedback surveys to determine where the alliance should attempt to expand in membership now that Mexicana may depart from the alliance. At this stage, the primary targets are airlines in China, the Indian subcontinent, the Mideast and Russia (3)...Star will follow its pattern of growth, at least next year, as it brings US Airways into the fold as the newest member.
3.32 - External obstacles which affect MPA performance	(2) External stakeholders which affect the performance of MPAs	Whatever its longer-term plans, Ansett's immediate aim is to start benefiting from membership of the Star Alliance - a key part of its restructuring (1, 2). Ansett is joining Star at the end of March, at the same time as its 50% owner, Air New Zealand...In a related move, <i>Ansett is seeking government approval for a new codesharing partnership with Japan's All Nippon Airways.</i>
3.33 - Themes	(3) Articles which emphasize common ways in which collaboration is constructed between Star	<i>The alliance race is in danger of spinning out of control and a correction is inevitable...Has the airline industry gone completely mad, we ask, or are the big carriers just determined to rub salt into the wounds of their already disgruntled politicians and regulators? ...The</i>

	Alliance and airlines	six carrier Star Alliance continued to add feathers to its bow as Singapore Airlines, Air New Zealand, Ansett and All Nippon Airways signed individual deals with leading Star members. While these four are not full members of the Star Alliance, they are already extending their links and some or all could join at a later stage.
3.4 - Public benefits	Articles which emphasize the benefits obtained through collaboration between airline and MPA	
3.41 - Public benefits for passengers	(1) Articles which emphasize how collaboration between an MPA and an airline positively affects passengers	All Nippon Airways (ANA) will join in October... Frequent-flyer programmes are linked, lounges are shared at many airports around the world; members code share in some markets; schedules have been coordinated to provide for smoother connections; and some passengers benefit stem from advance check-in and priority standby.
3.42 - Public benefits for members	(2) Articles which list the public benefits acquired through alliance membership	Austrian Airlines joins United and Lufthansa, and a couple of regional Star Alliance carriers, in transitioning to a new common IT platform (CITP) for the alliance... The alliance will be pushing use of the system to its members, so that all airlines in the group can lower their costs by sharing technology developments.
3.5 - Reasons for airline entry/exit	Same as in previous coding protocol iteration	

Table 9		
<i>Coding protocol during stage 3: Axial coding, period 2</i>		
Coding categories	Working definition	Coding example
1- Boundaries around Star Alliance		
1.1 - Articles which discuss an airline potentially or actually entering Star Alliance	Same as in previous coding protocol iteration	
1.3 - Articles which discuss an airline potentially or actually exiting Star Alliance	Same as in previous coding protocol iteration	
2 – Boundaries within Star Alliance		
2.1 - 2+ member alliances within Star Alliance	Same as in previous coding protocol iteration	
3- Context		
3.1 - Macro-level		
3.11 - External obstacles which affect MPA performance	(1) Same as in previous coding protocol iteration	
3.12 - Themes	(2) Same as in previous coding protocol iteration	
3.2 - Meso-level		
3.21 - Star Alliance's identities	(1) Articles which emphasize how Star Alliance, through the management of its	<i>Even so, pundits say Star members continue to draw strength from the alliance. Indeed, in the midst of the worst-ever industry crisis now deepened by the war in Iraq and the onset of a mysterious respiratory syndrome in some major cities worldwide, global partnerships are as</i>



	symbolic content, is able to appear viable and attractive to potential candidates and current member	critical a component of airlines' strategies as ever...In an indication of how the arrangement can help financially weakened carriers, the beleaguered United has been able to largely maintain its presence in the transatlantic market.
3.22- Public benefits	(2) Same as in previous coding protocol iteration	
3.3 - Micro-level		
3.31 - Airline configuration	(1) Previously "geographic segmentation of the field". Alteration of name reflects added emphasis on airlines as "plugs", filling white spots in Star Alliance's network.	The Star Alliance Chief Executives Board will decide whether to add its 20th member tomorrow when the board votes on inviting a carrier from India...Just as it did in China, Star may look at tapping a second partner in India for regional connections. <i>Star has been anxious to fill its "white spots" of China, Russia and India, which are major growth economies.</i>
3.32 - Membership maintenance	(2) Articles which discuss criteria required of airlines to become members and to maintain that membership status	The Star Alliance yesterday decided to remove the "old" Varig from the group, as the company <i>no longer has a broad network to offer passengers flying on partner airlines...</i> Because new Varig now has an operating certificate, old Varig will "no longer fulfil" the requirements for alliance membership. "In order to deliver the Star Alliance benefits, products and services to customers around the globe on a consistent basis, our member carriers work to certain standards and processes," said Star CEO Jaan Albrecht. <i>"Unfortunately, old Varig will no longer operate as a network airline and will therefore have to give up its membership in the alliance."</i>
3.33 - Reasons for airline entry/exit	(3) Same as in previous coding protocol iteration, though with a greater emphasis on the socialization and de-socialization processes	The airline has followed the established pattern for joining Star in negotiating alliances with leading members and the Lufthansa union will provide the critical leg of the founders' triangle...A Lufthansa spokesman said recently the <i>"natural progression" to Star membership was to first become a bilateral partner and expand to multilateral partnership "if there is mutual interest among the alliance parties"</i>