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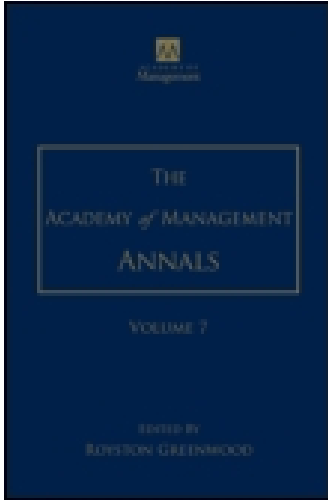
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The Many Faces of Culture:

Making Sense of 30 Years of Research on Culture in Organization Studies

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Abstract

The study of culture is on the rise; still, this popularity comes with the cost of increasing fragmentation, as definitions and conceptualizations proliferate. The objectives of this review are twofold: first, we set out to disentangle the multiple conceptual strands used to describe culture, and second, we examine how culture relates to other key constructs, particularly identity, institutions, and practices. To start, we build from extant work in sociology to identify and discuss five prominent ways in which culture has been theorized

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in the management literature—values, stories, frames, toolkits, and categories—and we organize these into a framework that hinges on values and toolkits as anchors. Second, we examine the relationship between culture and theorizations of identity, institutions, and practices in organization studies. We focus on these three dimensions because their vicinity with culture often leads to conceptual slippage, as debates in the extant literature document. Finally, we identify some avenues for further research and propose that culture should remain a “code of many colors” that envelops different theoretical perspectives.

Far from denying the play of freedom and human agency, the discipline of culture, by relieving us of the cognitive burden of inventing new solutions for every contingency, of having to make choices for every fork in our existential pathways, of having to decide anew the fundamental values that should inform our choices, and of having to make up the norms for organized living, enables us to create, in our social and individual beings, the wildest thoughts and feelings our imaginations allow and the selves we choose to actualize. The more, and the better, the collective constructions of culture work for us, the freer are we, as individuals, to be, to do, and to think as we please. (Patterson, 2014, pp. 22–23)

The concept of culture is central to organization studies. Whether studying an individual, an organization, or even a nation, scholars of organizations invoke culture to explain a variety of outcomes, reminding us that differences in actors’ behaviors are the result not only of chance or of individual character, but often of differences in culture. Without culture, we could not account for the values, beliefs, or practices that distinguish organizations (Schein, 1985, 1990; Weeks & Galunic, 2003), occupations (Barley, 1983; Glynn, 2000), or fields (Anteby, 2010) from others, nor for the skillful strategies of entrepreneurs that aim at persuading their audience (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001) and introducing change in their environment (Battilana, Leca, & Boxenbaum, 2009; Rao & Giorgi, 2006).

The centrality of culture in organization studies is reflected in the tremendous growth of the literature on the topic since the 1970s, from Schein’s (1985) work on the culture of corporations, Barley’s (1983) analysis of meaning construction in a funeral home, or Van Maanen’s (1975) ethnography of police work, up to the more recent study of culture as a toolkit (Swidler, 1986), deployed for storytelling (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001), identity construction (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006), or code-breaking (Rao, Monin, & Durand, 2003). After an initial surge of interest in the 1980s and 1990s, in recent years culture has experienced a renaissance (Weber & Dacin, 2011) with research that explores how actors can “use” culture to their advantage (Lounsbury &

Glynn, 2001; Molinsky, 2013), rather than simply follow its mandates and “be used” by culture (e.g. Glynn & Giorgi, 2013).

Yet, in spite of this renewed interest in culture—or perhaps because of it—research in organization theory has become increasingly fragmented, and with it, a proliferation of definitions and conceptualizations has emerged (Detert, Schroeder, & Mauriel, 2000; Glynn, Giorgi, & Lockwood, 2012). Weber and Dacin (2011, p. 282) observed that, “as it evolved, cultural analysis in organizations has become more diverse and anchored in a larger set of theoretical perspectives”. The term culture has been used to indicate a variety of phenomena, from a set of values that guide and constrain people in organizations (Schein, 1985), to stories used to garner resources (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001) or tools that actors can mix and match rather freely to suit their needs and interests (McPherson & Sauder, 2013; Weber, 2005). Furthermore, scholars have examined culture at various levels of analysis, ranging from individually held cultural resources (e.g. Molinsky, 2013) to socio-cultural values (e.g. Maurer, Bansal, & Crossan, 2011) held at the level of an industry or profession (Giorgi & Weber, *in press*), often without explicitly addressing its simultaneous manifestation as both a cognitive construction and an “objective” experience (Shore, 1991).

While this theoretical pluralism may suggest researchers’ enthusiasm for the topic, it also creates a challenge, as scholars try to make sense of the disparate perspectives subsumed under this single term. In this review, we seek to accomplish three objectives: first, to disentangle the multiple conceptual strands used to describe culture; second, to examine how culture relates to other key constructs, particularly identity, institutions, and practices; and finally, to offer suggestions for future research on culture.

To start, we build from extant work in sociology (Lamont & Small, 2008; Small, Harding, & Lamont, 2010) as we identify and discuss five prominent ways in which culture has been theorized in the management literature, that is, as values, stories, frames, toolkits, and categories. Although these conceptualizations are not mutually exclusive—and can be combined or used at different levels of analysis—they enable us to disentangle extant research. This is important because without a clear understanding of culture, we run the risk of “construct collapse” (Hirsch & Levin, 1999) as research continues to grow in multiple directions.

Second, we examine the relationship between culture and theorizations of identity, institutions, and practices in organization studies. We focus on these three dimensions because of the potential of conceptual slippage with culture, as debates in the extant literature document (e.g. Fiol, 1991; Hatch & Schultz, 1997, 2002; Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2004). Finally, we identify some avenues for further research. Rather than suggesting that research should coalesce into a single or coherent paradigm of culture, we propose that culture

should remain a “code of many colors” (Jelinek, Smircich, & Hirsch, 1983) that envelops different theoretical perspectives.

1. Theorizing Culture: Five Prominent Conceptualizations

Although culture has been conceptualized in numerous ways over the past 30 years (Glynn et al., 2012), our review of the relevant literature revealed five prominent models of culture used by organization scholars: as values, stories, frames, toolkits, and categories (Lamont & Small, 2008; Small et al., 2010). Table 1 summarizes these five models of culture, describing the dominant focus of each and citing selected scholarly works that make use of it. To more fully expose the distinctions—and enable comparisons—among these five conceptualizations, we discuss each in turn, focusing on: the core definition of culture; the theoretical origins; the outcomes associated with culture; and some critiques and limitations of the particular conceptualization.

In general, we view culture as a broad system anchored by values or overarching toolkits, within which categories, frames, and stories serve as cultural manifestations, which congeal, express, and diffuse commitments, ideas, and beliefs among actors. We elaborate this perspective further after we discuss each conceptualization of culture in the following section. Throughout, we draw from the work we consider prototypical of each perspective while acknowledging that the conceptualizations are not mutually exclusive. Our discussion moves away from the push toward a single “best” conceptualization (Hirsch & Levin, 1999; Pfeffer, 1993) and instead reveals the multi-dimensional nature of culture.

1.1. Culture as Values

1.1.1. Definition. A long-standing tradition in organization studies equates culture with “values” (Parsons & Shils, 1951), that is, what we prefer, hold dear, or desire (Barnard, 1938; Rohan, 2000; Schein, 1985). Values encompass desirable goals that direct behavior and “imbue it with meaning, defining what is good to attain and the ideal manner in which one should attain it” (Longest, Hitlin, & Vaisey, 2013, p. 1500). The conception of culture as values is probably the most well-known among scholars of organizations. Building from classic insights in sociology (Parsons, 1951; Weber, 1958) and anthropology (Geertz, 1973), this perspective emphasizes values as the driving force of action, and ultimately, of social structure. Culture is often conceptualized as a “web of meanings” (Geertz, 1973; Lamont & Small, 2008) that guides and constrains thinking and behaviors (Schein, 1990). A “real world” example of this approach is that of Enron. With its exclusive focus on making money, Enron’s culture fostered an intimidating, aggressive environment that made it acceptable, and even normal, for employees to

Table 1 Five Dominant Models of Culture

Culture as . . .	Definition	Dominant focus	Author(s), year of publication
Values	What we prefer, hold dear, or desire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis on constraint and predictability • “Web of meanings” or the “software” of organizations and nations • Stability and scriptedness as a source of organizational distinction or competitive advantage • Socialization, leadership, and rituals as mechanisms for perpetuating consistent cultural values 	<p>Barnard (1938), Parsons and Shils (1951), Geertz (1973), Pettigrew (1979), Hofstede (1980), Van Maanen and Barley (1984), Schein (1985), Barney (1986), Van Maanen (1991), Kunda (1992), Marcoulides and Heck (1993), Cameron and Quinn (1999), Rohan (2000), Vaisey (2009)</p>
Stories	Verbal or written narratives with causally linked sequences of events that have a beginning, a middle, and an end	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis on flexible transmission of ideas and meanings • Mechanism for constructing identity and conveying vision • Dynamism as key to influencing others to achieve favorable outcomes • Embedded in macro-cultural setting and influenced by proximate factors and audience 	<p>Mitroff and Kilmann (1976), Levi-Strauss (1979), Lyotard (1979), Martin, Feldman, Hatch, and Sitkin (1983), Somers and Gibson (1994), Lounsbury and Glynn (2001), Suddaby and Greenwood (2005), Martens, Jennings, and Jennings (2007), Bartel and Garud (2009), Vaara and Tienari (2011), Anteby and Mólnar (2012), Creed, DeJordy, and Lok (2014)</p>

Table 1 (Continued)

Culture as . . .	Definition	Dominant focus	Author(s), year of publication
Frames	Filters or brackets that delimit what we pay attention to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis on collective negotiation and definition of a situation • Ability to direct attention and define a situation as central to influencing meaning and actions • Reliant on resonance, narrative fidelity, and alignment with existing cultural codes 	Berger and Luckmann (1967), Goffman (1974), Snow and Benford (1988), Ganson and Modigliani (1989), Zerubavel (1991), McAdam (1994), Babb (1996), Benford and Snow (2000), Lounsbury, Ventresca, and Hirsch (2003), Rao et al. (2003), Rao and Giorgi (2006), Kaplan (2008), Polletta (2008), Leonardi (2011), Smets, Morris, and Greenwood (2012)
Toolkits	Sets or “grab bags” of stories, frames, categories, rituals, and practices that actors draw upon to make meaning or take action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis on flexibility and agentic use of culture • A cache or stock of ideas and practices that can be mixed and matched to achieve desired ends • Ability to pragmatically assemble bits of culture into action as a key skill for actors • Structure, context and experience influence how and “how much” culture is used 	Hannerz (1969), Bourdieu (1990), Swidler (1986), Sewell (1992), Lamont (2000), Lamont and Thévenot (2000), Lounsbury (2001), Swidler (2001a), Weber (2005), Weber, Heinze, and DeSoucey (2008), Tavory and Swidler (2009), Rindova, Dalpiaz, and Ravasi (2011), Canato, Ravasi, and Phillips (2013), McPherson and Sauder (2013), Seidel and O’Mahony (2014)

Table 1 (Continued)

Culture as . . .	Definition	Dominant focus	Author(s), year of publication
Categories	Social constructions or classifications that define and structure the conceptual distinctions between objects, people and practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Locates an entity within a broader system of meaning to delineate both sameness and distinctiveness to other category members • Answers the question, "What kind of thing is this?" • Enables judgments of value, legitimacy and normalcy through simplification of cognitive inputs • Sensemaking and sense-giving by actors and audiences as mechanisms for category construction and change 	Rosch and Mervis (1975), Cantor and Mischel (1979), Mervis and Rosch (1981), Bourdieu (1984), DiMaggio (1987), Lamont and Fournier (1992), Zuckerman (1999), Lamont and Molnar (2002), Lounsbury and Rao (2004), Hsu and Hannan (2005), Rao, Monin, and Durand (2005), Kennedy (2008), Navis and Glynn (2010), Navis and Glynn (2011), Wry, Lounsbury, and Jennings (2014)

cross ethical boundaries and systematically “rob Peter to pay Paul” (Sims & Brinkmann, 2003).

1.1.2. Outcomes. Due in large part to its stability and scriptedness, the model of culture as values can make organizations homogenous internally but externally heterogeneous or distinct from other organizations; as a result, culture can generate positive outcomes or strategic advantage. Some scholars, for example, have described the particular set of values that characterize an organization (Simon, 1947) or a nation (Hofstede, 1980, 1997) as its “software”, to highlight how culture ensures uniformity and predictability of behaviors. Cultural values can also sort organizations into different “types”, such as Deal and Kennedy’s (1982) four prototypes: (1) work-hard, play-hard, (2) tough-guy macho, (3) process, and (4) bet-the-company culture. By providing distinction (Wiener, 1988), an organization’s culture can lend competitive advantage (e.g. Barney, 1986; Saffold III, 1988; Wilkins & Ouchi, 1983). Particular attributes of organizational culture can be useful predictors of organizational performance and effectiveness (Denison & Mishra, 1995), especially when there are high degrees of both internal cohesion and external fit with the environment (Arogyaswamy & Byles, 1987). The literature on culture as values also offers examples of its potentially nefarious consequences. For example, in his ethnography of the engineering division of a large high-tech corporation in the U.S.A., Kunda (1992) offers a critical analysis of corporate culture, focusing on managerial attempts to design and impose a culture that normatively controlled its employees (see also Van Maanen, 1991; Van Maanen & Barley, 1984).

1.1.3. Origins. If values are so consequential for organizational outcomes, where do they come from? Although scholars recognize that values can emerge from a variety of sources—from within the organization, external stakeholders, or the broader institutional environment—an important stream of research emphasizes the role of founders and executives in instilling their personal values into an organization’s culture (Barnard, 1938; Hambrick & Brandon, 1988; Simon, 1947).

Once organizational values are validated—mostly as a result of organizational survival—they become taken-for-granted assumptions (Meyerson & Martin, 1987; Schein, 1985; Selznick, 1957) which are transferred to newcomers via socialization (Van Maanen, 1978). Rituals, practices, artifacts, and traditions play a significant role in reproducing existing values and socializing others (Alexander, 2004; Schein, 1985; Trice & Beyer, 1984). For example, a recent analysis of formal dining rituals at Cambridge University suggests that the values of the British elite can be reproduced by perpetuating reverence and exclusivity through value-laden organizational practices (Di Domenico &

Phillips, 2009) without the need for top-down, explicit indoctrination (Dacin, Munir, & Tracey, 2010).

1.1.4. Critiques. Some scholars have questioned conceptualizing culture as a set of values uniformly shared within an organization (e.g. Gregory, 1983; Martin, 1992, 2002). Such questions arose from a diverse set of research studies, including: research on “fit” between individual and organizational values (e.g. Chatman, 1991; Chatman & Barsade, 1995; O’Reilly III, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991; Ostroff & Judge, 2007); research on job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover that demonstrated that not all organizational members subscribe to the same values; and research on competing values that illuminated the potentially fragmented nature of culture (Cameron & Quinn, 1999; Denison, 1990). Moreover, theorizing culture as a set of uniform values is challenged in current contexts of quick availability of information and more transparent forms of organizing (e.g. Cha & Edmondson, 2006; Gehman, Trevino, & Garud, 2013).

In addition, some scholars have also questioned the role of values as robust predictors of behavior. In her analysis of the culture of poverty (Lewis, 1966), Swidler (1986) argued that differences between the poor and the middle-class could not be attributed to differences in values, because there is considerable evidence of the widespread adoption of mainstream values among the poor (e.g. Edin & Kefalas, 2005; Small et al., 2010; Young, 2004). Instead, Swidler pointed to differences in culturally guided strategies of action that allow achievement of one’s goals. A recent resurgence of interest in the role of values (e.g. Hitlin & Vaisey, 2010; Vaisey, 2009) suggests a more complementary role of values in explaining differences in behaviors and outcomes among individuals, nations, or organizations.

1.2. *Culture as Stories*

1.2.1. Definition. Conceptualized as narratives with causally linked sequences of events that have a beginning, a middle, and an end (Small et al., 2010), culture consists of stories that convey ideas and meanings through verbal expression or written language. The study of culture as stories has a long tradition in the social sciences. Early anthropologists studied native and indigenous cultures by examining their myths and legends (e.g. Levi-Strauss, 1979; Malinowski, 1926); psychologists recognized that individuals used stories to make sense of their experiences (Bettelheim, 1976; Jung, 1968); and sociologists see stories as creating links across different aspects of our social world to construct a cohesive social reality (e.g. Somers & Gibson, 1994; see also Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993 for a similar argument from management scholars). Ideas about culture as stories also have an historic place in the management literature. For instance, building on early work on

organizational culture (e.g. Mitroff & Kilmann, 1976; Pettigrew, 1979), Weick (1979, 1995) recognized that the leader's or founder's vision is embedded in the organization through storytelling. More recently, scholars have emphasized stories as cultural mechanisms for boundary-spanning (Bartel & Garud, 2009) and resource acquisition (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001).

1.2.2. *Outcomes.* Stories are far more than static literary expressions. Stories provide accounts of how individuals view themselves in relation to others and are therefore central to how we construct social identities (Corley et al., 2006; Small et al., 2010) and organizational images (Beverland, 2005) that are seen by relevant others as legitimate (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005). Furthermore, actors rely on stories as tools of resource acquisition (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001; Martens et al., 2007), legitimization of nascent collective identities (Navis & Glynn, 2010; Wry, Lounsbury, & Glynn, 2011), contestation (Glynn & Lounsbury, 2005), and reproduction over time (Anteby & Molnár, 2012). Since stories help to translate ideas across departments in organizations (Bartel & Garud, 2009) and coordinate action in real time (Boje, 2001), stories can facilitate the introduction of institutional change (Sonenshein, 2010) and the implementation of complex mergers and acquisitions (Vaara & Monin, 2010; Vaara & Tienari, 2011). Stories are effective when they can integrate elements that resonate with a broad audience (Benford & Snow, 2000) or fit with wide-reaching cultural contexts and codes (Swidler, 2001a) to signal appropriate meanings to audiences.

1.2.3. *Origins.* Interdisciplinary research points to the existence of “master narratives” or “metanarratives” (Lyotard, 1979) that are commonly understood and reflected in stories across various organizations and contexts. Creed et al. (2014) observed that the religious metanarrative of redemption shaped the personal stories of the clergy in a range of institutional settings. Similarly, the metanarrative of the American myth of hard work and meritocracy is reflected in the stories that many organizations share on their websites and impart to employees (McAdam, 1994). Organizational stories also reflect more widely shared institutional values and norms (Martin et al., 1983), contextualizing a broad set of values in a range of settings; in firms, they “serve to encapsulate and entrench the values that are key to an organization's culture” (Meyer, 1995, p. 210).

Several factors come into play in story creation. Stories are often based on experience, history, and collective memory (Anteby & Molnár, 2012; Halbwachs, 1992; Suddaby, Foster, & Trank, 2010) and can serve as devices for sharing knowledge or memories with others. Harvard Business School cases are representative examples: building from real organizational experiences and histories, cases identify crucial decision-making moments that are meant to establish a shared understanding of business issues and solutions.

Scholars have also observed that not all actors are equally positioned in the creation and diffusion of stories. For example, firms' executives hold privileged positions when it comes to telling stories (D'Aveni & MacMillan, 1990; Hambrick & Finkelstein, 1987).

1.2.4. Critiques. Some aspects of this perspective remain unclear. Until recently, management scholars largely overlooked the idea that stories can be loosely coupled—and even conflict—with organizational reality, despite their claims to historical truth or objectivity (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). Researchers have begun to examine the relationship between organizational stories and historical accounts (Suddaby, Foster, & Mills, 2013). Although some work points to the malleability of organizational past (e.g. Anteby & Molnár, 2012), other work suggests that limits may exist that constrain actors' ability to “reimagine” the past through storytelling (e.g. Suddaby et al., 2010).

Although metanarratives exist at the macro-level of analysis, we expect more proximate factors to also affect the stories told in a particular instance or setting, yet they remain largely unaccounted for in extant research. Stories are strongly influenced by the context in which they are deployed (e.g. Swidler, 2001a). A large body of work has observed that national context is reflected in organizational and societal stories (e.g. Gibson & Zellmer-Bruhn, 2001; Hofstede, 1980). Related work (e.g. Fiss & Zajac, 2006; Zuckerman, 1999) also suggests that one's intended audience likely affects the stories that actors tell, such that stories are often crafted with such audience in mind (Weber & Dacin, 2011). Numerous other influences, including industry norms (Martin et al., 1983), institutional diffusion of practices (e.g. Glynn, Lockwood, & Raffaelli, *in press*), organizational identity (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006), and improvement initiatives (Canato et al., 2013), may also influence how actors use culture as stories.

1.3. *Culture as Frames*

1.3.1. Definition. Building on the social constructionist perspective (Berger & Luckmann, 1967), which stresses that we cannot objectively access reality, another stream of research approaches culture as a frame, that is, a “filter” (Lamont & Small, 2008), “bracket” (Zerubavel, 1991), or “picture frame” (Goffman, 1974), that delimits our attention. Framing involves processes of inclusion and exclusion; to frame is to select some aspects of perceived reality and make them more salient (Hallahan, 1999). By this act of separating what is in a frame from what is out of it, a frame defines a situation (Goffman, 1974).

Definitions of the situation can be quite powerful, as they transform meanings and define a range of acceptable behaviors (Zerubavel, 1991, p. 11). For

example, the frame of “seminar presentation” makes it normative for an individual, the presenter, to engage in most of the talking, while the same behavior would be considered less normative within the frame of a dinner party. In addition to frames that simply label a situation as, for example, a game, a joke, a threat, or an opportunity, more complex frames offer a broader world-view organized around three elements: problem, solutions, and motivation (Benford & Snow, 2000). Finally, higher level frames, such as the environmental frame or the pro-business frame, are ways of understanding “how the world works” (Small et al., 2010; Young, 2004). As such, frames have been compared to Kuhnian scientific paradigms, within which facts are interpreted and what counts as credible is socially constructed (Babb, 1996).

1.3.2. Outcomes. By simplifying the world and shaping the inferences people make about it, frames influence audience perceptions, interpretations, and evaluations, leading to a variety of outcomes. Frames can encapsulate a new strategic plan (Kaplan, 2008), vision of change (Rao & Giorgi, 2006), or policy orientation (Abolafia, 2004); define one’s membership in a category through the choice of certain ingredients (Rao et al., 2003), hobbies (Rivera, 2012), or manners (Bourdieu, 1984); shape the kind of resources we can draw upon in solving problems (Leonardi, 2011); or explain participation in a community project (Small, 2002), or an environmental initiative (Lounsbury et al., 2003).

Given the extensive evidence on the consequentiality of framing, a critical question is why some frames are effective at influencing their audience and others are not (Babb, 1996). Many studies broadly refer to “resonance” as an explanation (Benford & Snow, 2000; McAdam, 1986). Research on social movements has elaborated this idea, emphasizing the importance of: narrative fidelity, that is, the frame must draw on traditions, values, folktales that are already present in the culture of the audience; empirical credibility, that is, the frame must directly relate to people’s personal experiences; and experiential commensurability, that is, the social problems that the frame attempts to address must have penetrated the audience’s life (Babb, 1996).

1.3.3. Origins. Frames are never constructed from scratch, but draw on already existing cultural codes (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989, p. 2; McAdam, 1994, pp. 41–43; Snow & Benford, 1988, p. 204). New frames can result from bricolage by the founder of an organization or a movement that “edits” an existing frame (Weber & Glynn, 2006) or imports ideas from other domains (Rao & Giorgi, 2006). These combinations and re-combinations can also occur at the level of an institutional field in which multiple actors interact and negotiate framings (Lounsbury et al., 2003) that can be confirmed and reinforced (Kellogg, 2009; Strang & Meyer, 1993), eventually leading to a shared vocabulary and interpretive frame (Fay, Garrod, & Roberts, 2008).

Particularly important source of frames are master frames, larger ideological traditions, such as environmentalism, civil rights, or labor greenbackism (Babb, 1996), that offer ideas, traditions, and vocabularies that can be adapted and borrowed to fit one's particular vision or project.

1.3.4. Critiques. An important contribution can be made in examining the cause-and-effect relationship between framing and behavior, bringing attention to the constraints and possibilities set by frames' differences or similarities (Small, 2002, 2004). Still, we lack a dynamic view of how frames originate, evolve, and dissipate. Current literature tends to portray frames as relatively stable packages of meanings (Oliver & Johnston, 2000; Polletta, 2008; Steinberg, 1998, 1999) that can at most be pitted one against the other (e.g. Kaplan, 2008). A more processual view of framing that emphasizes its construction and re-construction in a given context (e.g. Smets et al., 2012) may shed some light as to whether frames tend to be more or less stable, and under what conditions.

1.4. Culture as Toolkits

1.4.1. Definition. The conceptualization of culture as a resource or "toolkit" (Swidler, 2001a) defines a set or "grab bag" (Kellogg, 2011, p. 483) of stories, frames, categories, rituals, and practices that people draw upon to construct strategies of action, which are defined as "persistent ways of ordering action through time" (Swidler, 1986, p. 273). Building on Hannerz's (1969) work on repertoires as a set of modes of action and meanings, Swidler (1986) introduced the term toolkit to explain how actors use cultural repertoires, that is, how culture is used in practice. Rather than a unified system of values or norms that unequivocally direct the way we think and act (Schein, 1985), much like a switchman that sets the direction for different trains by determining their tracks (Weber, 1946), a repertoire instead represents a cache or stock of ideas that we can mix and match to solve everyday problems.

Weber (2005, p. 228) argues that the toolkit model of culture applies not only at the individual level, but also at the organizational level; he notices that Swidler's toolkit view of culture resembles Lamont and Thévenot's (2000) notion of cultural repertoires, Bourdieu's (1990) habitus and cultural capital, and ideas associated with theories of practice (Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina, & von Savigny, 2001) because it brings together habits, styles, skills, and symbols. The metaphor of the toolkit shifts attention away from values as the driving force of behavior to bits and pieces of culture that can be differently assembled, opening up the possibility of a variety of outcomes, even given the same values. For instance, Swidler (1986) argues that Protestantism has not endured because values have remained consistent, but because action in many

spheres continues to be organized around moral “work” characteristic of Protestantism that in fact serves a diverse set of valued ends. In more recent work on the barriers to the use of condoms in Malawi, Tavory and Swidler (2009) show that people in Malawi value their health; however, in action, they draw on a repertoire of love that profoundly differs from that prevalent in the Western world.

Among the different conceptualizations of culture discussed in this paper, culture as a toolkit offers the most immediate connection with action. As Small et al. (2010, p. 16) observe,

the idea of repertoires of action is based on two premises: first, that people have a list or repertoire of strategies and actions in their minds (how to apply to college, how to fire a gun, how to wear a condom); second, that people are unlikely to engage in an action unless the strategy to perpetrate it is part of their repertoire.

In this approach, culture is not simply a set of proscriptions and prescriptions that concatenate to give meaning to action; rather, it is a necessary condition for action. Swidler (1986) suggests that aspirations, beliefs, and values are of little consequence if they are not backed up by skills, habits, and styles that allow people to translate them into practice.

1.4.2. Outcomes. Empirical evidence abounds on the potency of cultural toolkits. For example, Swidler (2001a) describes how people that draw from similar cultural repertoires employ them to make sense of and justify different life events, such as a divorce or a marriage. People also draw on different repertoires to confer worth to their social standing (Lamont, 2000), draw social boundaries and establish identities (Lamont & Thévenot, 2000), and justify new ideas and practices in political settings (Berezin, 1997).

In addition, toolkits can help people reach agreements in everyday life, coordinate their actions, and spur change. In their analysis of interactions in a drug court, McPherson and Sauder (2013) find that actors from different institutional and professional backgrounds draw on different toolkits, for example, from rehabilitation, punishment, or efficiency, to negotiate decisions in a drug court. In particular, each actor involved did not epitomize the repertoire associated with his or her profession, as might a social worker drawing on the repertoire of rehabilitation; rather, each professional employed a variety of tools in their interactions to make sense of each specific case. A shared toolkit can also help different members of a team coordinate their efforts in product innovation (Seidel & O’Mahony, 2014) or offer opportunities for questioning and altering traditional ways of evaluating products at the field level (Weber et al., 2008) and work practices in organizations (Davis, McAdam, Scott, & Zald, 2005; Dutton, Worline, Frost, & Lilius, 2006; Meyerson, 2003; Meyerson

& Scully, 1995; Morrill, Zald, & Rao, 2003; Scully & Segal, 2002; Zald, Morrill, & Rao, 2005).

While this research emphasizes the consequentiality of toolkits, Swidler (1986, 2001a) points out that how people use their toolkits depends on their life experiences and circumstances. In “settled” times, similar to periods of convergence or stability in an episodic model of change (Weick & Quinn, 1999), cultural resources tend to “harden into formulas” (Swidler, 2001a, p. 55) and lead to the deployment of standard strategies of actions. In “unsettled” times, which occur episodically during social upheaval (Swidler, 1986) or revolution (Gersick, 1991; Weick & Quinn, 1999), culture becomes more “visible” because the status quo is contested and existing strategies of action are called into question. For example, a common identity was not a significant issue for American women religious until the threat in 2008 of an apostolic visitation, which

represented a shock within the institution that generated negative emotions and a temporary unfreezing of the status quo. These negative emotions catalyzed women’s attention to their role within the Church [...]; the new cultural toolkit (which consisted of a new identity and participatory practices) resulted in a transformation of the original intentions of the Visitation. (Giorgi, Guider, & Bartunek, 2014, p. 289)

1.4.3. *Origins.* To understand where toolkits come from, attention first focused on their embeddedness in larger social fields. For example, pharmaceutical firms devise their strategies of action not *ex novo*, but by building on existing industry registers (Weber, 2005). Similarly, Ocasio and Joseph (2005) show that organizations change the corporate governance concepts in their repertoires to mirror changes in their environment. More recently, attention has turned to the transposability of cultural tools across domains as a source of toolkit change or expansion. Activists can create a new toolkit, or enrich an existing one, by importing tools from other cultural registers to fit their ends when the opportunity arises (Clemens & Cook, 1999; Sewell, 1992). For example, the Slow Food movement imported tools from the U.S. environmental movement to redefine good food and build support for its agenda (Rao & Giorgi, 2006). Similarly, Lounsbury (2001) demonstrated how university students borrowed tactics from the National Recycling Coalition that included developing particular measurement standards and encouraging people to reuse materials to promote recycling practices on their college campuses. Similarly, Zilber (2006) showed that high-tech Israeli companies used concepts from the Israeli political system in recruitment communications. Finally, Rindova et al. (2011) illustrated how Alessi, an Italian producer of household goods, transformed itself from a national

producer of steel kitchen tools into an internationally renowned producer of high-end kitchenware by incorporating into its toolkit new cultural resources from different registers, such as the domains of psychoanalysis and art.

1.4.4. Critiques. Although this research shows how certain actors can transform or enrich their toolkits, it tends to gloss over that “the correct use of [cultural] elements has to be learned and practiced” and that adoption of new ones “necessitate[s the] partial forgetting or repressing of existing elements” (Weber, 2005, p. 229). Certain conditions, such as “liminality” (e.g. Howard-Grenville, Golden-Biddle, Irwin, & Mao, 2011) or “unsettled times” (Swidler, 1986, 2001a) are more conducive than others to initiating change in one’s toolkit. For example, members of 3M enriched their repertoires in response to the coerced implementation of a new practice, Six Sigma, and its associated new language of efficiency and productivity (Canato et al., 2013). Still, some empirical evidence suggests that an organization’s repertoire and societal repertoires can reciprocally influence one another even in settled times (Harrison & Corley, 2011).

Furthermore, research suggests that people tend to select resources that resonate with their identity, enabling them “to be a certain kind of person” (Swidler, 2001a, p. 72) or a member of a social group (Lamont & Thévenot, 2000). As a result, repertoires may vary not only in the content of their elements, but also in the number and scope of their elements. Individuals with greater breadth in their identities—perhaps incorporating a range of work, occupational, societal or familial roles—may correspondingly be more familiar with, and skilled in, the use of a wider range of cultural tools. Thus, some actors may have greater horizons of possibility because they have a wider array of repertoires of action (Small et al., 2010).

Finally, the most prevalent critique of the toolkit approach to culture concerns one of its central features, that is the flexibility (e.g. Rindova et al., 2011) that it affords to actors who can mix and match various cultural elements. While this flexibility is very useful in departing from a strict conceptualization of culture as an inescapable mold (Hofstede, 1980; Schein, 1985) and in understanding how people can use culture “to solve different kinds of problems” (Swidler, 1986, p. 273), it is less clear what predicts the selection of certain tools over others (Lamont, 1992) and what limits actors’ use of specific tools or repertoires. To the first point, Lamont and Thévenot (2000) suggest that opportunities and constraints influence this process of selection. We can speculate a similar role for cultural gatekeepers (Hirsch, 1972) in “editing” one’s cultural repertoire (Weber & Glynn, 2006). To the second point, on limits in the use of toolkits, a recent study conducted in hospital settings by Kellogg (2011) suggests that we need to look beyond culture and include political skills and resources to explain why, even when members of an

organization have access to the same cultural tools (such as frames, identities, and tactics), some use them to their advantage, and others fail to do so.

1.5. Culture as Categories

1.5.1. *Definition.* Categories define and structure the conceptual distinctions among entities such as objects, people, and practices. Categories are

social constructions that provide a supple “conceptual system” (Rosa, Porac, Runser-Spanjol, & Saxon, 1999, p. 64) that can be constructed and re-constructed, with regard to the realities that are encountered in the world (Mervis & Rosch, 1981) or the particular purposes that are pursued (Zuckerman, 1999). (Glynn & Navis, 2013, p. 1124)

They function to locate the entity in a broader system of meaning by clustering entities that are similar and differentiating them from those that are distinct. Through this classification of sameness and difference, categories furnish entities with identities by answering the question, “What kind of thing is it?” (Glynn & Abzug, 2002; Glynn & Navis, 2013).

Scholars have recognized the importance of grouping concepts and objects for centuries. Early scholars created categories using a particular definition (an approach attributed to Aristotle and subsequently critiqued by Quine, 1951 and others), and, later, family resemblance (Wittgenstein, 1953). However, management research on categories and categorization primarily traces its roots to work in psychology (Mervis & Rosch, 1981) and social psychology (Cantor & Mischel, 1979) that built upon research on prototypes (Rosch & Mervis, 1975). According to this perspective, various entities, ranging from people to objects to events, are grouped into categories based on their resemblance to a category exemplar or prototype (Mervis & Rosch, 1981). Contemporary management research on categorization also reflects insights from work in cultural sociology on boundaries and social identity (Bourdieu, 1984; Lamont & Molnár, 2002) as components of categorization processes (e.g. Kennedy, 2008). Thus, cultures are often rooted in categories that can systematically define groups, in terms of the similarities among members of a category and differences from those outside the category; therefore, we can think of category-based cultures such as nation-states (e.g. American), regions (e.g. Silicon Valley), industries (e.g. cultural industries), or occupations/professions (e.g. engineering).

1.5.2. *Outcomes.* Categories tend to emphasize sameness among category members and differences from non-members of the category (Glynn & Navis, 2013); they simplify cognitive processing for actors, defining inclusion (and exclusion), legitimacy (and illegitimacy), and normalcy (and deviance) of members in distinction to non-members. In doing so, categories enable

judgments of value, such that things that fall outside the established classification system tend to be overlooked or discounted. Market actors are subject to a “categorical imperative” that rewards conformity to categorical expectations with favorable stock valuations (Zuckerman, 1999), perceptions of legitimacy (Jensen, 2010), or entrée into new roles and markets (Zuckerman, Kim, Kalinda, & Rittmann, 2003). Categories are also closely related to market-based identities: for instance, categories inform identity claims made by new market entrants (e.g. Kennedy, 2008; Navis & Glynn, 2010), and facilitate legitimate distinctiveness (Navis & Glynn, 2011) by allowing acceptable variation in member identities (Wry et al., 2011). They also assist critics (Glynn & Lounsbury, 2005) and other audience members in assigning an identity to firms (Hsu & Hannan, 2005) to enable assessment.

Beyond facilitating established market exchanges, categories play a role in broader social processes, as well. Actors may use categories as points of reference for creating new collective identities (Rao et al., 2003) or markets (e.g. Weber et al., 2008). Elite French chefs, for instance, blended elements of classical and nouvelle cuisine, crossing the categorical boundaries that segregated the two cuisines to create new dishes that critics positively appraised (Rao et al., 2005). At the same time, categorization processes also result in creation and maintenance of boundaries that separate groups (Lamont & Molnár, 2002) at the social, cultural, and structural levels. Lamont (1992) and others have pointed to the wide-reaching social role that categories and boundaries play in distinguishing between those who are “worthy” and those not, based on a range of criteria, from morality, to cultural sophistication, to economic success (Lamont & Fournier, 1992). Focusing on these dynamics, DeSoucey (2010) examined protected national food-stuffs (e.g. French foie gras; Greek feta cheese) to show that boundaries based on morality, authenticity, and status are embedded in local contexts and central to the collective identities formed around symbols and geographies.

1.5.3. Origins. Although existing categories are often perceived as stable and objective (Durand & Paoletta, 2013), categories emerge through a process of social construction that establishes them as “real” and legitimate (Kennedy, 2008; Kennedy, Lo, & Lounsbury, 2010). Specifically, focal actors and audiences engage in mutual sensemaking and sense-giving whereby categories are created and legitimated (Navis & Glynn, 2010). Categories are also embedded in broader systems of classification and meaning, including institutional fields (Lounsbury & Rao, 2004) and socio-cultural systems (Bourdieu, 1984) that influence the structure, content, and emergence of categories (DiMaggio, 1987). Boundaries, both social (e.g. occupational, racial or ethnic distinctions) and symbolic, serve to partition categories, reflecting the cultural basis for categorical divisions (Lamont & Molnár, 2002; Small et al., 2010). For instance, Lamont (1992) drew from interview data to describe the use of values

and attitudes in categorizing and differentiating the upper middle-class from other social classes and to illuminate the nature of social class in modern U.S. and French society. Such research affirms that cultural work is required to change the boundaries and meanings of categories, as well as the broader classification scheme in which they are embedded.

Scholars have also pointed to the generative properties of categorization processes, suggesting that categories may be used as raw materials for constructing a favorable identity (e.g. Giorgi et al., 2014) or influencing audience assessments. From this vantage point, categories might be thought of as another kind of cultural toolkit: they furnish a repertoire of meanings that category members can appropriate (Glynn & Watkiss, 2012). More specifically, categories can be treated as groupings of cultural elements that are “public resources” that actors can selectively “pull down” (Weber & Dacin, 2011) in the service of constructing identities (e.g. Rindova et al., 2011), rendering them comprehensible and thus legitimate (e.g. Navis & Glynn, 2011). Rivera (2008) shows how Croatia drew boundaries of inclusion with Western European countries and at the same time distanced itself from its history in the Balkans to influence tourists’ perceptions of its desirability as a vacation destination. Categories can thus serve as the “raw material” for bricolage, category spanning, or identity formation for individuals as well as organizations or other social actors.

1.5.4. Critiques. In the management literature, conceptualizations of categories have tended to emphasize prototype theory. This narrower theorization has been critiqued as a “straightjacket of scholarship” by Durand and Paolella (2013, p. 1100), who argue for stretching our models to include alternative conceptualizations. They propose the following two: first, a “causal model” approach that relates members via causal chains, and second, a more ad-hoc “goal-based” approach in which categories are constructed, even temporarily, based on actors’ needs or goals, such as planning a birthday party or taking the family on vacation. In addition, Lakoff (1987) offers another perspective, that of radial categories, in which members are added via extensions that are conventional variations on a member or exemplar.

Scholars have also called for work that deepens knowledge on boundaries and boundary work, highlighting the relative dearth of work that explains the mechanisms underpinning category maintenance and change. For instance, Lamont and Molnár (2002) highlight promising opportunities for focusing on social identity, and Zietsma and Lawrence (2010) point to the need for a practice-based perspective on categories. Such work could address the shortcomings of a prototype-based theory of categories and reveal the mechanisms, the “cogs and wheels” (Davis & Marquis, 2005, p. 341), that enable categorization as a cultural process.

This brief overview of the definitions, outcomes, origins, and critiques of five major conceptualizations of culture—as values, stories, frames, toolkits, and categories—reveals how rich and diverse the study of culture has been in organization studies and in the related fields of sociology, psychology, anthropology, and the social sciences. We have discussed each of these five conceptualizations as if they were independent and clearly separable; however, in theory and in practice, they are not so distinctly different. For instance, culture can express foundational values through stories or frames, and culture can be understood through the frames and categories that actors place on the world around them. Although the five different approaches provide a fairly comprehensive map of the use of culture, we believe that they stand on unequal footing. More specifically, two ways of studying culture—as values and as toolkit—have served as “magnetic poles” around which most of the research in the field converges. Next, we examine the relationship among the five perspectives, anchoring on two approaches—culture as values and culture as a toolkit—to advance an integrative framework on culture.

2. Toward an Integrative Framework on Culture

Building on our review of the relevant literature on culture (in the preceding section), we now explore how the five approaches to culture we identified are interrelated, as reflected in the framework depicted in [Figure 1](#). We

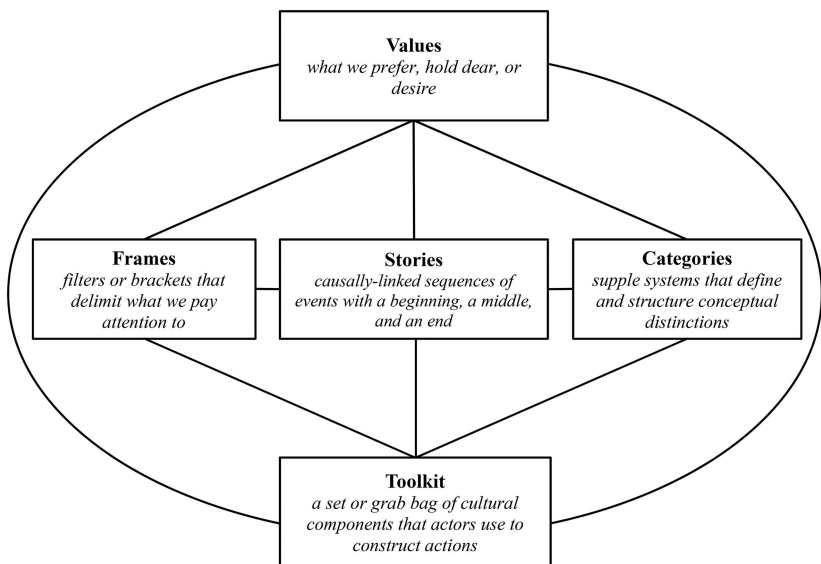


Figure 1 An Integrative Framework on Culture.

begin by discussing the two perspectives that function as anchors in our analyses, modeling culture as toolkits and as values.

2.1. *Culture as Toolkits and Values*

Although early research emphasized the importance of culture in shaping actors' goals and ends, current research tends to think of culture as providing a set of means or "capacities" for problem-solving and action (Swidler, 1986, 2001a). Two main justifications account for this shift. First, many scholars have argued against the idea that cultures are "monolithic entities" (Harding, 2007, p. 345) that can uniformly instill values and norms in their members. Second, the explanatory power of values has been called into question as "many people [...] constantly act in violation of their values" (Lamont & Small, 2008, p. 95). Swidler (1986) provides a now classic example of how the adoption of certain values can only be weakly linked to outcomes: often the poor embrace middle-class values, such as a college education; however, they may fail to reach this goal because they lack the know-how, resources, or opportunities for continuing their schooling.

Despite this shift from values to toolkits or repertoire (Weber & Dacin, 2011), we want to avoid "the untenable ditching, with the bathwater of the Parsonian past, of foundational concepts such as values and norms that strike most scholars in other disciplines as simply preposterous" (Patterson, 2014, p. 2). For example, Vaisey (2010) notices that, although holding the value of a college education does not necessarily lead to this outcome for those without the skills to access an education, it still helps to explain the decision to continue one's schooling.

In a recent review of the field, Patterson (2014) relies on the metaphor of the blind people and the elephant to make sense of the different conceptualizations of culture that currently divide the field of cultural sociology; different researchers touching different parts of the same animal come to very different understandings of just what an elephant is. We think of culture more dynamically and offer an alternative metaphor, that of a swinging pendulum that moves between a value-based and a toolkit-based cultural model. For example, at a given point in time an organization may hold certain conceptions of desirable ends and practices; however, when the environment changes, an organization may need to mix and match from different toolkits and repertoires to make sense of its identity or update its business model (e.g. Tripsas & Gavetti, 2000). Research taking a longitudinal perspective could then reveal a series of shifts between the two manifestations.

Moreover, the two manifestations of culture—as values and as toolkits—each engender a unique type of commitment from actors, such that neither model has greater inherent permanence. Specifically, when culture is manifest as a set of values, it suggests an ideational commitment from actors; in this case,

the ideological underpinnings of culture are clear and can be articulated to guide subsequent action. Alternatively, the use of culture as a toolkit links culture intimately with action, such that actors signal their fidelity to a cultural strategy with a resource commitment that may influence subsequent decisions and commitments. Thus, although a toolkit perspective on culture is often used to argue for cultural transience or interchangeability, we suggest that the enactment of cultural strategies also gives culture significant staying power in a setting, similar to traditional ideas about the permanence of values-based cultural models. Furthermore, culture's value-based and action-based manifestations appear to be related, such that commitment to a strategy of action (in a toolkit perspective) affects subsequent ideological commitments (to a values-based perspective), which in turn influence later resource commitments, and so forth. Although such ideas are captured conceptually in the proposed framework, more research is needed to explain how and why the two kinds of cultural commitments relate to one another and to examine how actors might change or update existing cultural commitments.

Although this stylized framework is best understood at a single level of analysis, we recognize that culture is embedded in other institutional and social contexts that inform cultural content and structure. Accordingly, considering how broader cultural forces outside a single system (e.g. an organization) affect culture's orientation to values versus a toolkit is a valuable avenue for future work. We suggest that Swidler's (1986) distinction between settled and unsettled times might provide a fruitful starting point for linking contextual conditions with cultural form and function.

2.2. *Culture as Categories, Frames, and Stories*

Research viewing culture as categories, frames, and stories exposes fundamentally different aspects of how culture works, as it speaks to the mechanisms by which cultural meanings, causes, beliefs, and practices are encoded, transferred, and translated. Therefore, in our conceptual framework, we include categories, frames, and stories as cultural manifestations that operate within broader systems of culture as values or toolkits, expressing and diffusing commitments and beliefs among actors.

Based on research that highlights culture as simultaneously manifest in multiple ways (e.g. culture as both categories and stories, as theorized by Wry et al., 2011), we further suggest that these cultural mechanisms may operate independently or in conjunction with one another, that is, as supporting or countervailing forces that may bolster or mitigate one another's effects. As such, the use of each mechanism affects the manner in which others may be used, as we depict in our framework. Moreover, the extant literature implies that frames, stories, and categories may help to link culture as values and as a toolkit. For example, work on cultural entrepreneurship suggests that

stories may link ideational commitments at a firm's founding with subsequent resource commitments to enable enterprise development (e.g. Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001). Further research is needed to unpack the manners in which the proposed mechanisms are used, both independently and in concert, and to understand their relationship with the broader cultural forces operating in a system.

In future work, scholars would be especially well served to empirically examine culture in all its forms and to link its manifestations across or within firms. For instance, the e-commerce firm Amazon.com relies on a streamlined set of core values, such as "customer obsession", "invent and simplify", "think big", or "frugality", which inform its mission and business strategy. Still, these potentially contradicting values are not automatically or straightforwardly applied, but amplified or downplayed depending on the pressing needs of different situations. These cultural systems are put into practice in the organizational day-to-day operations with more tangible cultural manifestations, like efforts at strategic framing targeted at external stakeholders, for instance, and use of internal stories that reinforce core values and justify decision-making. Deeper examination of how the multiple forms of culture are productively used and mutually informed in companies such as Amazon.com could aid in developing a more complete understanding of culture's multi-faceted role in social interactions, organizations, and markets.

3. Moving Beyond Culture: Identity, Institutions, and Practices

Compounding the confusion wrought by the many conceptualizations of culture is the close relationship that culture has with concepts and processes central to other areas of research. Although cultural perspectives are widely used across management scholarship (e.g. social movements, international research), here we focus on three areas in which culture's role has been most evident and frequently debated: research at the cross-section of culture and identity (e.g. Corley et al., 2006), institutions (Pedersen & Dobbin, 2006; Scott, 2014), and practices (e.g. Jarzabkowski, 2004). In an effort to differentiate culture from these related constructs, we highlight extant work that speaks to the ways in which culture is seen to influence identity, institutions, and practices, teasing out its independent role, and we explain how culture is itself impacted by them. In doing so, we emphasize the distinctions made in current work between culture and related constructs and highlight ideas about the nature of the relationships they share. We also suggest manners in which research on culture and these related topics might complement or productively extend one another, highlighting the broad utility of a more developed cultural perspective to link these complementary streams of research.

3.1. *Culture and Identity*

Identity captures “who we are” and “what we do” as an organization (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Navis & Glynn, 2010); it tends to be seen in terms of a firm’s central, distinctive, and enduring (Albert & Whetten, 1985) or continuous (Gioia, Patvardhan, Hamilton, & Corley, 2013) characteristics or as a claim to a category of membership, positioning the organization in social space (e.g. as a bank and not a school). Identity also captures “who we are/who I am” at other levels of analysis, including at the individual and collective or group level (Ashforth, Rogers, & Corley, 2011).

Although most frequently examined at the organizational level of analysis, identity, and culture have long been linked at multiple levels of analysis, beginning with foundational work in our own and other fields (e.g. Selznick, 1957; Weber, 1946) and later developing more fully within the management literature (e.g. Hatch & Schultz, 2002). Although researchers have explored overlaps and complementarities of identity and culture, scholarship has also been marked with occasional confusion about the distinction between the two and the nature of their relationship, especially at the organizational level of analysis (Corley et al., 2006). In an effort to dispel some of this confusion, we draw on existing literature to summarize how identity (at various levels of analysis) plays a role in cultural processes and then examine the reverse, culture’s role in identity dynamics. We stress that, taken together, the literature points to a recursive, multi-level relationship between the two constructs, such that culture influences identity dynamics just as identity affects cultural processes (see Hatch & Schultz, 1997, 2002 for a more detailed theorization of this recursive relationship at the organizational level of analysis).

3.1.1. Identity’s effect on culture. A range of research speaks to identity as a factor in cultural processes, from the formation of organizational culture (e.g. Pettigrew, 1979) to cultural change through political resistance (Kellogg, 2011). Overall, the literature is permeated by the sense that identity, at multiple levels, serves as a point of reference in many cultural processes central to organizational life. Focused on identity at the individual level, Schein (1985) and other early scholars of organizational culture (e.g. Pettigrew, 1979) pointed to the role of the leader’s identity in creating an organization’s internal culture, suggesting that leaders’ identities and ideologies serve as the foundation for the broader cultural values and beliefs that span the organization. Extending the focus beyond organizational leaders, Fiol (1991) argued that employees’ contextual identities in organizations link the aspects of culture that are deep and meaning-related with those that are more surface-level, like everyday behaviors. Behavioral changes, she posited, do little to alter cultural norms and meanings in the absence of a relevant identity,

which links measurable actions to deeper systems of meaning and can create competitive advantage for the firm.

Many scholars have also focused more squarely at the organizational level of analysis, often arguing that organizational identity independently affects culture through its link with organizational meaning and action. For instance, Brickson (2005, 2007) demonstrated that organizations have identity orientations, that is, individualistic, relational, and collectivistic, that guide both their internal cultures and the manners in which they relate with external stakeholders. In an *Annals* article, Gioia et al. (2013, p. 176) also pointed to organizational identity as “the generative basis of culture” in firms, suggesting that identity precedes and guides the formation of organizational culture.

In addition, researchers have examined the link between identity and culture as a cross-level phenomenon, often focusing on broader collective identities as they affect localized cultural processes. Glynn (2000) showed that the professional identities of musicians and administrators, rather than a single organizational identity, guided the use of cultural symbols, stories, and frames by actors within the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra (see also Golden-Biddle & Rao, 1997). Along similar lines, Kellogg (2011) focused on medical residents in three hospital settings to show how they used alternative identities drawn from cultural repertoires outside a given organization—for instance, as “zombie interns” or “cheap labor”—to band together to create favorable organizational cultural changes. More broadly, referencing a collective identity that resonates with a range of audiences and participants helps to mobilize cultural resources and drives action in and around organizations (e.g. Benford & Snow, 2000; Gamson, 1992).

Finally, management research on categories points to culture and identity as nested. Scholars argue that cultural categories inform collective identities that shape the local use of culture by relevant actors. A particular market categorization—as a collective identity of sorts—guides the manner in which an organization puts culture to use by imposing normative constraints (e.g. Rao et al., 2005) and informing the cultural strategies seen as appropriate in a market setting (King & Whetten, 2008).

3.1.2. Culture’s effect on identity. As identity informs cultural processes, so too does culture influence identity. A central question for identity scholars asks, “Where do the elements of one’s identity come from?” Some research suggests that societal culture can provide the toolkit of materials for building identity at multiple levels of analysis. For instance, Rindova et al. (2011) showed how Alessi, a home goods company, drew from several broadly available cultural registers to redefine its organizational identity. Through multiple rounds of cultural repertoire enrichment whereby the firm integrated new concepts and practices from art, anthropology and more into its own “toolkit”, Alessi strategically expanded its internal culture and changed its identity.

Similarly, Vaara and Tienari (2011) argued that global, national, and regional culture informed storytelling used to construct identities that legitimated or resisted change during a cross-border merger. Such work lends support to suggestions to define “an organization’s identity [as] the aspect of culturally embedded sense-making that is [organizationally] self-focused” (Fiol, Hatch, & Golden-Biddle, 1998, p. 56; see also Corley et al., 2006; Hatch & Schultz, 1997, 2002 for similar arguments). Finally, Rao et al. (2003) suggested that similar dynamics affected professional identity; they showed how individual chefs in France crafted their professional identity as *nouvelle* or traditional by mixing-and-matching from existing cultural repertoires that dictated the choice of ingredients, the modality of preparation, and the presentation of food.

Shifts in societal culture also affect existing identities. For example, the Slow Food movement began in Italy in the 1980s as a gourmand movement that celebrated good food and conviviality; however, with its expansion in the U.S.A. in the 2000s and contact with the country’s strong environmental repertoire, the movement’s identity came to include concerns about the production of food, and not only its consumption (Rao & Giorgi, 2006). Furthermore, broader culture determines the appropriateness of certain individual identities over others. For example, Rivera (2012) showed how, in the selection processes used in elite consulting firms, candidates presenting a preferred identity through discussion of shared cultural pursuits received favorable hiring decisions.

Although scholars generally agree that culture affects identity, especially at the organizational level of analysis, researchers continue to debate how this relationship unfolds. Some scholars have suggested that organizational culture tends to support organizational identity stability and consistency over time. For instance, Ravasi and Schultz (2006) found that organizational culture supports consistent sensemaking and sense-giving among leaders and employees in the face of identity threats, enabling a durable organizational identity. Along similar lines, Anteby and Molnár (2012) showed that organizations can use and revise collective memory as a cultural mechanism for ensuring identity endurance within a firm. Alternatively, other scholars have pointed to culture as a potential source of organizational identity change. Rindova et al. (2011) showed that changes to organizational culture necessitated revision of identity claims by the organization, and a range of other work points to the role of cultural mechanisms, including rhetoric (Fiol, 2002) and framing (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) in processes of organizational identity change. These apparent contradictions in the literature point to the need for further empirical work that more fully explains how culture affects identity in organizations and to better explicate the mechanisms that engender both consistency and difference in the links between culture and identity at various levels of analysis. Moreover, they suggest the potential utility of a contingency-based approach to understanding the relationship between the two.

3.2. Culture and Institutions

Although in the view of some sociologists (Jepperson, 1991, p. 144) and nearly all economists (Tabellini, 2008), institutions differ from culture, we believe that institutions are thoroughly cultural, because they represent “more formal, structured” norms and conventions (Patterson, 2014, p. 10). According to institutional theorists, “institutions comprise regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive elements that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life” (Scott, 2014, p. 56), making culture a key component of institutions.

In general, management scholars of culture have not explicitly addressed the relationship between culture and institutions, perhaps because of their focus at the organizational level of analysis, studying culture as unique to a particular organization (e.g. Schein, 1985). However, the growing trend towards an open-system view of culture (Weber & Dacin, 2011) and away from the study of culture as a private meaning system of relatively isolated small groups (e.g. Geertz, 1973; Pettigrew, 1979), calls for better understanding the relationship between culture and institutions. This need has not gone unnoticed. Pedersen and Dobbin (2006) argued that culture and institutions are, in fact, two sides of the same theoretical coin, and in 2012 the *Journal of Management Inquiry* published a series of essays that encouraged trade at the boundaries of culture and institutional theory (e.g. Aten & Howard-Grenville, 2012). Next, we examine the manners in which culture and institutions influence one another in an effort to encourage continued work that spans and meaningfully contributes to both areas of work.

3.2.1. Institutions' effect on culture. In much of the extant research, institutions have been seen to direct and constrain the use of culture. Early institutional theorists often saw culture as directly linked with the institutional forces dominant in a setting (Zucker, 1977); embeddedness in an institutional field equipped organizations with similar sets of cultural values, norms, and justifications (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Friedland and Alford's (1991) recognition of the cultural aspects of institutions as societally grounded “logics” pushed culture to the fore in institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). According to Friedland and Alford, institutions shape interests and provide a context for meaning-making in addition to providing structural order: they directly influence cultural processes that unfold among and within organizations because they think for us (Douglas, 1986). These cultural-cognitive institutional components, together with normative and regulative elements (Scott, 2014) create a taken-for-granted reality that perpetuates existing cultural beliefs and practices.

In recent work, Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury (2012) advocated for further development of a view of culture as closely linked with societally grounded institutional realms. They pointed to the scholarly shift away from

an assumed cultural preference for rationality to one of more situated cultural beliefs, norms, and behaviors that reflect particular areas of life (for instance, family, state, or religion) and may, in some cases, be transposed across contexts. Illustrating the analytic utility of this perspective, McPherson and Sauder (2013) focused on how actors in a drug court drew from distinct cultural logics to negotiate decisions about various cases. Their work suggests that different institutional realms may provide flexible cultural justifications for various courses of action, bridging ideas from institutional theory and Swidler's (1986) notion of culture as a toolkit, and showing institutions' complex influence on culture in action.

Scholars of organizational culture have offered similar perspectives on how institutions influence culture. Martin et al. (1983) observed that although organizations claim to have distinctive organizational cultures, their cultural symbols and values (expressed in their study as stories) are isomorphic with those of other organizations in the same institutional field. As researchers of organizational culture, their finding was strikingly prescient and stood at odds with dominant perspectives of the time that pointed to organizational culture as an inimitable organizational advantage (e.g. Barney, 1986). In a more recent piece, Weber (2005) similarly argued that organizations create their own internal cultures by drawing on the cultural elements available in their national and institutional environments. For instance, as globalization has increased, the cultural toolkits of German and U.S. pharmaceutical firms have become more similar to one another (Weber, 2005), speaking to institutionally driven cultural similarity in organizations.

Finally, institutions affect culture not only by imposing stability, but also by prompting cultural change. For example, White and White (1965) showed that institutional change precipitated by the introduction of an art market in Paris influenced the acceptance of new ways of painting. Impressionism, they argued, emerged as a new style of painting as the dealer-critic system became institutionalized. Rao and Giorgi (2006) pointed to a similar process of institutional change prompting cultural evolution. They showed how institutional change involving the creation of alternative distribution networks for wine in the French region of Bordeaux and the emergence of a new market of wealthy consumers (beyond the British aristocracy) led to a profound cultural change in the consumption of wine and the evaluation of good wine.

3.2.2. *Culture's effect on institutions.* Although institutions have a profound effect on the cultural materials available and the manner in which they are used, culture also affects institutions, serving as a tool for both institutional change and maintenance. Actors may mobilize resources, including culture, to create new institutions or transform existing ones (Maguire, Hardy, & Lawrence, 2004) through a process of institutional entrepreneurship

(DiMaggio, 1988). For instance, diversity management was introduced in Denmark as a result of the efforts of a group of professionals who used cultural mechanisms to generate a vision for change based on North American practices (Boxenbaum & Battilana, 2005). Their efforts to reframe employee fairness precipitated institutional changes at the national level around management practices in Denmark.

Culture plays a particularly important role in institutional processes by enabling actors to influence relevant audiences. Lounsbury and Glynn (2001) elaborated the notion of cultural entrepreneurship, the process of storytelling whereby a new venture identity is created in pursuit of legitimacy and subsequent resource acquisition. Cultural entrepreneurs creatively combine entrepreneurial and institutional resources to convey novel ideas in a compelling and legitimate manner, enabling effective efforts to establish a new venture within an existing field (Martens et al., 2007) or to create an entirely new institution, such as the Paris Opera (Johnson, 2007). Related research also highlights the role of social movements in institution building, maintenance, and change (Rao, Morrill, & Zald, 2000). In social movements, actors make use of available cultural materials to promote institutional change by identifying and framing problems and motivating collective action (Benford & Snow, 2000). For instance, in the 1970s, elite French chefs exploited gaps in the dominant cultural code to claim new professional identities for themselves, changing the institution of French gastronomy through the introduction of *nouvelle cuisine* (Rao et al., 2003).

Culture is also central to efforts at guiding audience assessments and prompting action through symbolic management and sensemaking. For instance, field-level actors used cultural frames embedded in various economic and political structures to guide discourse and shape audience interests around globalization processes (Fiss & Hirsch, 2005). Depending on actors' social positions and interests, framing of globalization in media reports and press changed in valence, suggesting that interest-laden cultural frames, rather than objective facts, affected broader opinions about globalization. In addition to using verbal communication, symbolic adoption of structural or policy changes directs attention to influence others' opinions and assessments (Ocasio, 1997; Westphal & Zajac, 1998). For instance, Westphal and Zajac (1998) showed that symbolic adoption of governance mechanisms that conveyed management alignment with shareholder interests prompted favorable reactions in the stock market, regardless of whether such programs were actually implemented in firms.

Finally, cultural analysis is well suited for examining the micro-processes that underpin institutions, including "rituals, symbols, codes, and commitments" (Weber & Dacin, 2011, p. 9) that uphold or change existing institutional orders. A cultural perspective enables close examination of aspects of organizational and institutional life ranging from the use of technology

(Barley, 1986; Leonardi, 2011) to the enactment and guardianship of long-standing cultural traditions and rituals (Dacin & Dacin, 2008). Such work offers great promise for bridging micro-cultural and macro-institutional perspectives to unpack the lived experience of institutions and explain how such experience translates into institutional reproduction or change (Lawrence, Suddaby, & Leca, 2009).

3.3. *Culture and Practices*

Practices, or “how we do things”, also play an important role in cultural processes. Generally speaking, practices refer to routine activities that are largely unconscious and automatic (Swidler, 2001b). Although influential cultural sociologists, such as Bourdieu (1990), Giddens (1984), and Swidler (1986, 2001a, 2001b), saw culture and practices as closely linked and, in many cases, mutually constitutive, management research has generally treated culture and practices as silos (e.g. Feldman, 2000), or has subsumed practices within their conceptions of culture (e.g. Schein, 1985). Paraphrasing Whittington (2006), we believe that although scholars have long argued that an organization *has* a culture, culture is also something people *do*. We highlight work that examines the link between culture and practices to advocate for a middle-ground perspective that sees the two as theoretically related, but empirically distinct, enabling the study of how actions and meanings take shape and affect one another over time. We believe that although much recent work on culture has attended to conscious cognitive processes or strategic decisions in the use of culture, a focus on practices may help to better explain how and why culture influences a range of organizational processes, often without intentional planning or even conscious recognition by actors.

3.3.1. Practices’ effect on culture. In the literature on organizational culture, practices were initially seen as a component of a firm’s culture, one of the observable artifacts that Schein (1985) argued comprised the most superficial layer of culture. Recent research has extended this perspective, suggesting that practices, though embedded in a particular cultural setting, play a distinct role in cultural processes and warrant greater scholarly attention.

Practices can serve as a source of stability in organizations; they ground meanings and other, less taken-for-granted practices. Swidler (2001b) argued that rather than values or assumptions, certain practices, those that structure interaction and guide interpretation, anchor behavior and meaning-making. For instance, social practices related to wage-setting and remuneration, which structured interactions between workers and managers in factories in Britain and Germany prior to World War I, created differences in collective notions of wage labor between the two countries (Swidler, 2001b, citing Bier-nacki, 1995). Highlighting a similar relationship between practices and

meanings, Dacin et al. (2010) showed that formal dining rituals at Cambridge colleges helped to uphold class-based cultural differences that distinguished elite groups from others.

Practices direct attention and inform meaning-making in and around organizations. Kaplan (2011) focused on the use of PowerPoint as the dominant practice in strategy making to explore how legitimated technological practices anchored the organization's culture. Conceptualizing PowerPoint practices as a component of culture, "part of the machinery that produces strategic knowledge", Kaplan (p. 321) showed that practices using PowerPoint underpinned the knowledge production culture of the organization she studied. Practices external to organizations also have important cultural implications for firms. New valuation practices associated with the rise of TripAdvisor in the travel sector have changed audiences' and organizations' ideas about quality and legitimacy in the hotel industry, for example (Orlikowski & Scott, 2014). As practices for judging quality and value have shifted from critics to online crowds, hotel organizations have evolved to continuously update cultural practices and sensibilities to enable them to address changing demands.

In addition, practices can engender change more directly. Scholars have broadly acknowledged that practices may evolve in a manner that changes the organizational system in general (Feldman, 2000; Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011; Orlikowski, 1996). More recently, researchers have begun to explain how practices change organizational culture. For instance, at 3M, leaders required that employees adopt a range of Six Sigma practices, many of which had low cultural fit with existing organizational norms and values that emphasized innovation and flexibility. Over time, the Six Sigma changes were largely integrated into the organization's culture, even when leaders withdrew pressure to adopt them. Practice changes encouraged useful cognitive changes at 3M, creating a more flexible and productive organizational culture (Canato et al., 2013). In other cases, seemingly mundane practices, such as meetings, training, and everyday interactions, may encourage cultural change; Howard-Grenville et al. (2011) suggested that such practices create a liminal space in which familiar and unfamiliar elements can be recombined to alter the dominant organizational culture. Micro-level practices can also change culture more broadly as shared meanings shift through practice reproduction and modification. Establishing this link, Smets et al. (2012) argued that seemingly inconsequential changes to everyday practices could aggregate to bring about significant change to existing cultural logics, highlighting the independent role that practices play in facilitating cultural outcomes across levels of analysis.

3.2.2. *Culture's effect on practices.* Culture exists not simply in peoples' heads. Although much of the work on culture rightly associates it with

cognition (DiMaggio, 1997), culture also directs material practices and imbues them with particular meanings. Therefore, although both exogenous and endogenous practices can change the organization's culture, practices themselves are embedded in, and affected by, broader cultural systems, as well.

Classic sociological work on culture portrayed practices as culturally determined. Bourdieu (1977, 1990) argued that the cultural milieu in which a person is born and socialized, determined by one's social class, affects more than the development of a set of habits, but a "habitus" that is almost unconsciously maintained over time and is embodied in posture, habits, and accents. Importantly, such work points to the role of culturally embedded practices, rather than values, in upholding a stable socio-cultural system (e.g. Swidler, 1986) that, in turn, patterns cultural production and consumption. Extending these insights on practices as culturally embedded and socially conditioned, Becker (1982), DiMaggio (1987), Glynn (2000), and others pointed to the role of cultural taste and corresponding practices in market exchanges, particularly those around cultural products such as art and music. Their work highlights culture's influence on customer preferences and judgments of quality as embodied in practices characteristic of particular social positions.

In classic work on organizational culture, scholars also saw practices as strongly influenced by the cultural milieu in which actors were embedded. Different from the perspectives of sociologists such as Bourdieu (1990) and Swidler (1986), however, management scholars largely conceptualized practices as manifestations of deeply held values and assumptions shared by organization members. Van Maanen (1979), Schein (1985), and others encouraged the study of organizational practices as revealing of underlying cultural norms and beliefs. For example, Disneyland's strict management practices, including constant monitoring and "mystery shopping" employees, indicated a deep cultural mistrust between leaders and workers that belied the organization's façade of being the "happiest place on earth" (Van Maanen, 1991). Cameron and Quinn's (1999) competing values framework for analyzing organizational culture also saw practices as behavioral expressions of unobservable, implicit assumptions unique to an organization. They suggested that to assess organizational culture, managers examine the kinds of practices that characterize the organization, from those focused on employee development and management to those used to structure work activities (1999, pp. 30–31).

Recent research linking culture and practices has begun to point to a more iterative relationship, viewing the two as related but empirically distinct. Orlikowski's (2000) work on the implementation of Lotus Notes examined how and why end-users employ the software much differently than anticipated by the program's designers, ignoring the collaborative features central to the software. Practices, in this case, were influenced by a culture of skepticism surrounding technology; such beliefs were, in turn, reinforced when technology failed, such that culture and practices supported one another. Similarly,

Jarzabkowski and Wilson (2002) pointed to the role of an organization's cultural traits, which they saw as the myths and stories collectively held by organization members, in shaping the top management team's strategy-related procedures and routines. They argued that practices became a localized "habitus" (Bourdieu, 1990) seen as the accepted way to do things, such that culture and practices were closely linked.

More broadly, a number of practice theorists, including Jarzabkowski (2004, 2005, 2008), and Whittington (2006), have recently advocated for a structuration perspective (Giddens, 1984; Sewell, 1992) to link culture and practices. In our opinion, a structuration perspective, which accounts for both the stability of existing social arrangements and the potential for change and slippage, could be a fitting approach to better understanding how practices are both constituted by, and constitutive of, culture. Such work could offer nuance to existing research that connects practice and culture (Canato et al., 2013; Smets et al., 2012) and generate new opportunities for linking culture with important organizational processes and outcomes.

In conclusion, although scholars have pointed to the relationship between institutions and identity (e.g. Glynn, 2008), identity and practices (e.g. Whetten & Mackey, 2002), and practices and institutions (Lawrence et al., 2009; Raffaelli & Glynn, 2014), little research has addressed how the three are interrelated (for a recent exception, see Glynn et al., *in press*). A focus on the relationships between culture and identity, institutions, and practices not only points to culture's role in multiple scholarly realms, but also highlights the interconnections among identity, institutions and practices themselves. Our read of the literature points to culture as the "glue" that binds these other important constructs together, enabling collective meaning and action at multiple levels of analysis. Future research elaborating these constructs as well as the mechanisms that link them seems particularly important. We offer ideas for advancing this kind of work next.

4. Moving Forward: Future Directions for Research on Culture

As our review of the relevant literature revealed, management research on culture is characterized by "considerable variation in the types of concepts and arguments employed" (Scott, 1987, p. 493). We believe that much of the richness of cultural research is due to the theoretical and empirical pluralism employed by researchers. Rather than encouraging a single perspective (e.g. Pfeffer, 1993) on culture, we echo Scott's (1987, p. 493) suggestion that "further improvement and growth... is dependent upon analysts dealing more explicitly with these differences". We encourage future work that addresses and, to the extent possible, reconciles competing perspectives in the literature, accounting for overlaps and complementarities in existing work. Below, we discuss three especially promising, but underexplored avenues for research on culture that may enable such

synthesis: work that explores the changing nature of organizations, changing societal dynamics over time, and evolving measures for assessing culture. We believe that these three emerging areas may motivate future scholarship and be especially well suited for examination by scholars of culture.

4.1. *Changing Organizations*

The nature of organizations and organizing is rapidly changing, evidenced in the burgeoning work on hybrid organizations (e.g. Battilana & Dorado, 2010), innovative start-up firms (e.g. Wry et al., 2014), entrepreneurship (e.g. Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001), and more. Such changes challenge traditional assumptions of management researchers that were central to early work on culture (Weber & Dacin, 2011), including, for instance, the idea that a single organizational identity is linked with a consistent organizational culture (e.g. Hatch & Schultz, 2002) and that culture is relatively private and, in the case of organizations, sealed within a single firm (e.g. Schein, 1985). As these assumptions continue to be revised, culture scholars are presented with both opportunities and challenges for continued research. In particular, we see organizations' evolving forms (particularly through reliance on digital media), changing use of physical and material assets, and embeddedness in multiple geographic and social contexts as evolving aspects of organizations that might be fruitfully explored from a cultural perspective.

The advent of new forms of organizing—ranging from firms based around social media to “hybrid” social enterprises with dual missions (Battilana & Dorado, 2010)—raises important cultural questions and creates new opportunities to explore how symbolic aspects of organizations operate. Previous work suggested that leaders could draw from a strong, stable organizational culture to engage in sense-giving about threats to identity (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006) or organizational change (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). We know little, however, about the role that culture might play in these new kinds of organizations, which face quickly changing environmental demands, experience high employee turnover, and hinge on geographically dispersed labor; such forces may challenge the development of a cohesive organizational culture from the start. Similarly, although researchers traditionally separated culture in organizations from culture around organizations, emerging work points to the overlap between the two (e.g. Weber, 2005; Weber & Dacin, 2011). Ongoing research is needed to better explain how various kinds of organizations—from manufacturing firms to e-commerce organizations to art or music producers—manage their organizational boundaries to retain important cultural components but still remain relevant to key stakeholders. Such work seems especially important to many new organizational practices that rely on user-driven content (e.g. websites, apps) or otherwise foster close, interactive relationships with audiences (Hatch & Schultz, 2010).

Scholars might also continue to consider the role of physicality and materiality as cultural components of organizational life, especially as exchanges become more reliant on technology and the growth of a knowledge economy (Adler, 2001) accelerates. Early scholars pointed to artifacts as key components of organizational culture (e.g. Pettigrew, 1979; Schein, 1985), and recent work also emphasizes the importance of symbols and space in cultural processes (e.g. Glynn, 2000; Zilber, 2006). Future research might fruitfully explore further how the physical and material aspects of culture are implicated in processes unfolding in our increasingly digitized markets and organizations. Moreover, the resources exchanged by organizations—both material and otherwise—might be studied from a cultural vantage point, particularly as meaning-making shifts from a localized process to one that unfolds by way of social media and long-distance interactions. Such work could shed light on how culture, as a flexible resource (Swidler, 1986, 2001a) infuses physical materials with meaning and broader relevance (e.g. Rindova et al., 2011) or otherwise creates value in organizational exchanges (e.g. Ravasi, Rindova, & Dalpiaz, 2012).

Finally, increasing emphasis on permeable organizational boundaries that enable exchange of cultural information and materials (e.g. Harrison & Corley, 2011) highlights the need for research that better accounts for the role of contextual factors in cultural processes. In the limited published research, context has been shown to exert a meaningful influence. For instance, DeSoucey (2010) demonstrated that the meanings attached to foods varied by geographic setting, and Vaara and Tienari (2011) revealed that the use of global, national, and regional narratives supported identities and interests in particular settings. However, broadly speaking, contextual embeddedness has been somewhat neglected in cultural studies in management, in spite of clear recognition that “culture’s influence varies by context” (Swidler, 2001a, p. 169). A closer examination of context and culture may allow for deeper exploration of how organizations manage the cultural resources at hand and appropriate cultural components (Rao & Giorgi, 2006), particularly those that may not be seen as authentically theirs (Rao et al., 2005). It also presents new opportunities for addressing broad questions on how firms manage competing or changing environmental demands (Greenwood, Raynard, Kodeih, Micelotta, & Lounsbury, 2011), a promising starting point for developing a needed cross-level perspective on cultural agency and constraint.

4.2. *Changing Societies*

Our interest in, and understanding of, culture has evolved as a result of significant societal changes that have occurred over time. In his historical overview of the concept of culture in organizational theory, Morrill (2008) observes that the emergence of the modern corporation, characterized by an emphasis on universal rationality and efficiency, led organizational researchers to view

culture as superfluous “noise”. It was an interest in human relations in the 1920s—and the accidental discovery of norms and sentiments on the shop floor—that brought to the fore the “constitutive effects of culture with respect to organizational members’ inner lives, the meanings they attribute to organizational life, and the construction and maintenance of instrumental social structures” (Morrill, 2008, p. 16).

With the gradual shift to an open-system view of culture as deeply embedded in broader social processes (Weber & Dacin, 2011), the need for work that accounts for the relationships between organizations and society has also grown. Research is therefore needed to understand not only how broad changes unfold within organizations, as discussed above, but also how socio-cultural changes proceed around and, in some cases, through firms.

Still, at present, little work explains how or why specific socio-cultural components are used within particular firms or are common across organizations in a setting, despite long-standing recognition that organizational culture is, at a minimum, informed by industry and societal culture (e.g. Martin et al., 1983; Weber, 2005). To address this gap in the literature and better account for the socio-cultural embeddedness of organizations, scholars might examine how broad socio-cultural understandings emerge and evolve (Davis, 2009; Hirsch & Bermiss, 2009) in ways that legitimate particular types of organizations and their use of certain kinds of symbolic resources (e.g. Fiss & Zajac, 2006). Related work might build from emerging perspectives on categorization (e.g. Glynn & Navis, 2013; Wry et al., 2014) to explore, for instance, the role of cultural resources, particularly those from a socio-cultural repertoire, in category formation and dissolution (Kennedy & Fiss, 2013) as well as category spanning or expansion (Durand & Paoletta, 2013). At a more micro level, culture scholars could focus on exploring practices and intra-organizational meaning systems, studying how exogenous cultural resources are integrated into a firm’s own toolkit (e.g. Canato et al., 2013). Such work could address important outstanding questions on the nature of cultural resources and the processes by which they are effectively put to use.

Research is also needed to examine organizations’ influence on broader socio-cultural dynamics. One interesting avenue for entrée is through deeper consideration of Swidler’s (1986) “settled” and “unsettled” times, which she argues enable the use of distinct cultural strategies. This notion, which has been largely unaccounted for in our management literature, might prove helpful in explaining the contingencies under which organizations not only engage in greater cultural activity, but also impact broader socio-cultural dynamics. Scholars have also paid surprisingly little attention to the role of the audience in cultural processes and, perhaps more importantly, the mechanisms by which organizations achieve cultural resonance and affect behaviors of external stakeholders.

In particular, research is needed to deepen understanding of how organizations, facing increasing calls for transparency and authenticity (Peterson, 2005), use cultural tools to prompt diverse audiences to support new ventures (e.g. Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001), or take part in broader social movements (e.g. Benford & Snow, 2000; Weber et al., 2008). Finally, scholars should also explore the limits of cultural agency and influence, developing new insights on topics such as cultural imprinting (e.g. Johnson, 2007) and the potential of cultural “path-dependence” in certain settings (Rindova et al., 2011, p. 413). These considerations seem to be especially consequential as organizations expand into new global markets and as firms emphasize their authentic place in such contexts.

Of course, answering outstanding questions on the relationship between culture in organizations and society raises new questions for scholarly consideration. In particular, if actors within and outside organizations affect a firm’s culture (Harrison & Corley, 2011), and if societal and organizational cultural resources are marked by significant overlap (Weber, 2005), does the argument still stand that organizations have a private, distinctive culture at all? Or is organizational culture simply a reflection of a local subset of public socio-cultural elements? Moreover, if culture is flexible and its constituent components somewhat interchangeable, why are some organizational actors more capable than others in deploying culture effectively? In exploring the boundaries of cultural systems and the limits to cultural flexibility—if, indeed, they exist at all—we believe research could make significant progress toward better explaining the changing interface between organizations and societies (Weber & Dacin, 2011) and reinforce the strategic value of cultural competence that has long been assumed in the management literature (e.g. Barney, 1986; Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001).

4.3. *Changing Empirical Measures*

A final impetus for future research relates to changes in the measures and methods available for studying culture. As research on culture progresses, we advocate for methodological pluralism (Lamont & Swidler, 2014) to facilitate development of multi-level, mechanisms-based insights on culture in management research. At the same time, we also echo Jepperson and Swidler (1994) in suggesting that questions of measurement are intimately connected with issues of conceptualization. The challenges of aligning theory and methods have long been discussed (e.g. Griswold, 1994; see also Rousseau, 1985 for a thoughtful discussion of multi-level analyses), and we believe it is as important now as ever to develop a body of work that thoughtfully accomplishes this objective. We therefore encourage future research that uses a range of methodological approaches, explores new data sources, and focuses on mid-range theorizing

with a mechanisms-based approach to usefully extend scholarly knowledge on culture.

Although scholars of culture have traditionally relied on interviews and observations, building on the anthropological roots of this research (Geertz, 1973), as well as Schein's (1985) foundational concerns for the non-visible, non-expressed components of culture, cultural analysis need not be limited to a single methodological approach (Lamont & Swidler, 2014). We encourage the use and integration of a variety of methods in future research. For instance, statistical analyses (e.g. Mohr, 1998) are now being used in increasingly sophisticated ways to show that the use of cultural materials changes over time (Weber, 2005) and that firms' integration of seemingly contradictory cultural materials influences valuation assessments in surprising ways (Wry et al., 2014). In a similar way, long-standing ethnographic research methods (e.g. Geertz, 1973) are being used in contemporary research to offer rich, multi-level insights on culture, including how cultural components are used flexibly by actors (McPherson & Sauder, 2013) and how firms effectively use multiple cultural representations to enable innovation (Seidel & O'Mahony, 2014).

Research using less traditional research methods for examining culture is creating a valued place in the literature, as well. Scholars are beginning to explore the utility of fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis (Ragin, 2000, 2014) for developing mid-range causal theories (Fiss, 2011) that may help to identify and explain membership in multiple cultural categories (e.g. Kennedy & Fiss, 2013) or other mixing of cultural materials. Furthermore, researchers are moving beyond the analysis of traditional discourse to include visual elements that can complement, extend, or even contradict accompanying texts (Giorgi & Glynn, *in press*). Finally, mixed-methods studies, which involve the "collection or analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study" and their subsequent integration (Creswell, 2003, p. 212) also hold great promise for culture research (for an empirical example, see Navis & Glynn, 2010).

Considering the wide range of research methods available for studying culture, we echo Lamont and Swidler in their statement that "There are no good and bad techniques of data collection; there are only good and bad questions, and perhaps stronger and weaker practitioners of each method" (2014, p. 154). We encourage scholars to play to their strengths in data collection and analysis while considering new techniques for better understanding the cultural phenomenon they seek to explain.

Changing organizational and societal dynamics (discussed above) have also led to the creation of new data sources that we believe culture researchers could fruitfully use. Perhaps most obvious is the proliferating use of social media and Web 2.0 technologies, including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Yelp, and others. Social media sources remain, to date, relatively unexplored and

unused in the management literature (however, see Kovács, Carroll, & Lehman, 2014; Orlikowski & Scott, 2014 for notable exceptions). Such outlets could serve as rich data sources, potentially capturing real-time processes by which collective meanings develop or shared understandings are established. Scholars might also consider new manifestations of existing types of cultural data. For example, although a rich collection of research has examined stories as culture (e.g. Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001) through a focus on company archives and print media (e.g. Anteby & Molnár, 2012), future research might explore company websites, webcasts, online photo galleries, or oral histories to deepen understanding of culture as stories in organizations. In taking full advantage of the abundance of data available from both traditional and newly developed sources, particularly through use of the internet, culture researchers could develop increasingly well rounded, robust empirical insights.

Finally, we encourage a focus on the mechanisms that enable cultural processes, as mentioned throughout our discussion of the five conceptualizations of culture, and as referenced in our framework (see Figure 1). Although scholars have recognized the nested nature of cultural phenomena and processes, there is a relative dearth of research adopting a mechanisms-based approach to theorizing and empirics (Davis & Marquis, 2005, see also; Davis, 2006; Hedström & Swedberg, 1998; Weber, 2006). Mechanisms-based theorizing addresses the question of *how* culture emerges and functions, explaining social phenomena to develop mid-range organizational theories rather than trying to predict universal outcomes.

Mechanisms describe “a set of interacting parts—an assembly of elements producing an effect not inherent in any one of them. A mechanism is not so much about ‘nuts and bolts’ as about ‘cogs and wheels’—the wheelwork or agency by which an effect is produced”. (Hernes, 1998, p. 74, quoted in Davis & Marquis, 2005, p. 336)

In this paper, we have explored the mechanisms that link cultural manifestations in organizational settings; moving forward, scholars might examine the mechanisms that underpin cultural agency in other settings or explore their change over time. Given the structurally and historically situated nature of culture (e.g. Swidler, 1986), a mechanisms-based approach seems well suited for use in explaining cultural phenomena within and around organizations as, together, we push an evolving cultural agenda forward.

5. Conclusions

We have drawn upon the relevant literatures, in management and the social sciences, to describe the current state-of-the-field on theorizing and researching culture. We discovered theoretical and empirical pluralism in how scholars have examined culture and, in particular, focused on five of the dominant

approaches, which alternatively view culture as values, stories, frames, toolkits, and categories. We discussed the definitions, outcomes, origins, and critiques associated with each and then tried to synthesize these approaches to culture, while preserving the integrity of each approach. We advocate for future research that appreciates these variations while exploring overlaps, synergies, or other potential points of contact. We advanced an integrated framework in the hope of spurring future research on culture.

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