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Institutional biography and the institutionalization of a new organizational template: Building the global branded hotel chain

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ABSTRACT

This article expands understanding of how institutional biography informs institutional change by examining Conrad Hilton's role in building the global branded hotel chain (1946–1969). We show how an individual's institutional biography can play a pivotal role in their development as an institutional entrepreneur and the institutionalisation of a new organisational template. Biography, informed by the institutions individuals experience in their life trajectories, shapes the process by which an individual becomes an institutional entrepreneur; influencing the institutionalisation of a new template by enabling entrepreneurs to acquire a more central position within their field. Hilton's self-narrative became closely coupled with the 'grand narrative' of post-war U.S. capitalism. The Hilton case illustrates how institutional tensions, embracing national interests, corporate interests, and individual self-interest, can become distilled into the identity, choices, and ambitions – the personal biographical narrative – of individuals who play a formative role in the institutions they build, change, or disrupt.

KEYWORDS

Global branded hotel chain; institutional biography; institutional change; institutional entrepreneurship; international business; organisational template

Introduction

This article expands understanding of how institutional biography may inform institutional change by exploring how biography may influence the institutionalisation of a new organisational form. We address this issue through analysis of the role played by Conrad Hilton in creating the global branded hotel chain between 1946 and 1969. Our empirical case draws on the literature on institutional entrepreneurship and combines this with recent insights on institutional biography, informed by the institutions individuals traverse in their life course, to examine one of the earliest instances of rationalisation and diffusion of a common organisational template in the first wave of reconfiguring the global economy post World War II. Building on prior related research (Maclean et al., 2021b), we here focus, theoretically

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and empirically, on how institutional biography is implicated in the creation, diffusion and institutionalisation of the organisational templates underpinning globalisation.

Previous research on institutional entrepreneurship has wrestled with the puzzle of how institutional change occurs, given the tendency for institutions to become structurally embedded and self-reproducing (Hardy & Maguire, 2008; Holm, 1995; Leblebici et al., 1991). A significant challenge for institutional theory is that institutional change is impossible without the contribution of individuals (Suddaby, 2010). Recent work on the concept of 'inhabited institutions' has sought to overcome this difficulty by departing from a view of individuals and organisations as institutional constructions to offer fresh understanding of actors as inhabiting the institutions they seek to mould, change or maintain (Hallett, 2010; Hallett & Ventresca, 2006; Lawrence et al., 2011). From an inhabited institutions perspective, individuals and their social interactions move centre stage. Extant research has overlooked the motivations of individuals beyond the narrow confines of their organisational roles. The concept of 'institutional biography' is founded on the idea that individuals absorb the institutional structures they pass through in their life trajectories (Bertels & Lawrence, 2016). It builds on Viale and Suddaby's (2009) insight that individuals garner 'institutional portfolios' during their life course that afford varying levels of access to and influence over different institutions. This operationalises Bourdieu's (1990) notion of individual habitus as a microcosm of institutional or societal habitus, implying that different organisational blueprints stem in part from their founders' former life and career experiences assimilated during their life course (Suddaby & Viale, 2011; Tolbert et al., 2011).

What is striking when examining the role of Conrad Hilton in engaging with others in creating the template for the global branded hotel chain is the extensive use of his own biography for business and political goals. The Hilton case presents an opportunity to theorise the role of biography (either self-narrated or narrated by others) in the process of becoming an institutional entrepreneur. We therefore pose the following guiding research question: *how might institutional biography play a role in influencing the institutionalisation of a new organisational template?*

Scholarly interest in Hilton's role in building the global branded hotel chain has grown in recent years. Czyżewska's (2020, p. viii) account of the development of Hilton Hotels is written as a 'story of stories', focussing on selected international hotels to show that each 'had its own life and its own character'; each hotel deploying 'its foreignness as a differentiating factor' (Czyżewska & Roper, 2017, p. 219). Hotels have longstanding histories in numerous cultures globally (James et al., 2017) but their internationalisation did not occur until after 1945 (Quek, 2012). Drawing on Bourdieusian theory, Maclean et al. (2021b) explore the importance of the concept of the field of power in understanding the growth of the multinational hotel industry. Notably, they argue that the field of power is rarely a unified, abstract entity, as commonly conceived (Bourdieu, 1996; Maclean et al., 2015), but exists as assorted fields of power of divergent interests – differentiated *inter alia* by their inclination to attract international business (Jones, 2005).

Here, we expand understanding of how institutional biography may inform institutional change. We make a novel contribution to the field of institutional entrepreneurship by showing how the institutional biography of an individual can play a pivotal role in his or her development as an institutional entrepreneur and, relatedly, the institutionalisation of a new organisational template. Specifically, we integrate the concept of institutional biography, more familiar in organisational sociology (Hallett, 2010; Hallett & Ventresca, 2006), into

research on institutional entrepreneurship, and identify it as an enabling condition. We show how skilful leveraging of institutional biography can provide an opportunity for institutional entrepreneurs to promote a new organisational template by building a more central position in a field (Leblebici et al., 1991; Maguire et al., 2004). We make a second contribution by elucidating the strategies by which an individual entrepreneur might pursue institutional change. We observe that Hilton's institutional project entailed a logical extension of the expansion of U.S. economic and military interests following World War II. The successful expansion of the global branded hotel chain depended substantially on embedding an entrepreneurial project within the broader social mission of a powerful institutional actor commanding widespread legitimacy.

In the following section, we review the literature on institutional entrepreneurship, institutional biography, and inhabited institutionalism. The next section is methodological, explaining our research process, archival sources, and analytical methods. In our empirical section, we draw on rich archival material to examine the entrepreneurial processes of instilling operational logics, alliance building, and institutional biography that powered the expansion of Hilton International, marking a break with the institutional *status quo* in hotels (Battilana et al., 2009). We then discuss our findings and consider their implications for research on institutional entrepreneurship, reflecting on the limitations of our study and avenues for further research.

Institutional entrepreneurship and institutional biography

Institutional theory recognises that institutions are prone to become structurally embedded and self-reproducing, establishing parameters that condition behaviour over long periods (Hardy & Maguire, 2008). However, if people depend on institutions 'hammered out in the past' (Garud et al., 2002, p. 196), it is unclear how institutions change and evolve (Leblebici et al., 1991). DiMaggio (1988) suggests that institutional accounts overlook agency, ignoring the lived experience of actual individuals engaged in institution building (Bourdieu, 1990; Eisenstadt, 1980). He focuses on institutional entrepreneurship as a means of emphasising the role of agency in institutional change (Battilana et al., 2009; Garud et al., 2007). Others have since taken up the task of incorporating agency into the study of institutions. Greenwood and Suddaby (2006) note that individuals are incentivized to modify institutions they experience as constraining, recognising the role of individuals as sources of endogenous change. Institutional change is thus a purposeful accomplishment effected by reflexive actors dissatisfied with existing social arrangements (Wijen & Ansari, 2007). Despite these endeavours, institutional research has continued to focus attention on institutions rather than on the individuals inhabiting them who animate actual change (Lawrence et al., 2011).

DiMaggio's core insight recognises that 'some social actors are better at producing desired social outcomes than are others' (Fligstein, 1997, p. 398), leading Fligstein to enquire with respect to the formation of organisational fields 'how "games" get constructed in the first place' (p. 397). Agency, he suggests, involves institutional entrepreneurs in deploying social skills to promote changes to existing arrangements by assessing 'what kinds of action makes sense' (p.398). This entails the ability to relate imaginatively to the situations of others. We follow Greenwood and Suddaby (2006) in defining an institutional entrepreneur as an actor who envisions and seeks to construct novel institutions in pursuit of cherished interests (McGaughey, 2013). As an entrepreneur who established a branded

hotel chain in far-flung cities across the world, where he required the social skills 'to imaginatively identify with the states of others' (Fligstein, 1997, p. 398), Hilton appears to fit this description.

Fligstein's notion that social skills are a form of agency highlights how institutional entrepreneurs seek to induce cooperation in others to refashion or maintain institutional arrangements. Intrinsic to their success is their ability to relate their projects to the interests and pursuits of relevant actors (Maguire et al., 2004). Maclean et al. (2018) argue that astute political sensemaking is itself a vital social skill. It requires drawing on interpersonal skills to form coalitions and interact with diverse resource holders, including local authorities, dignitaries, and the government agencies with which they must build alliances (Xu et al., 2021), often in ambiguous contexts. This is especially apposite for institutional entrepreneurs engaging in nascent endeavours affected by the 'liabilities of newness' (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994, p. 663). In such contexts, the patronage of powerful actors, including the state, is valuable (Bucheli & Kim, 2014); revealing institutional creation as a collective political project designed to convert 'a novel artefact into a social fact' (Rao et al., 2000, p. 243).

Scott (2014) surmises that adept interaction with others matters more than technical expertise because it involves framing and directing agendas while convincing others they are in command of shared collaborative action. It implies a socialised view of actors that evokes a distributed form of collective agency whereby the efforts of individuals combine to effect change (Garud & Karnøe, 2003; Wijen & Ansari, 2007). Skilful interaction with others enhances allocative outcomes by influencing reward structures and is intrinsically political, eliciting the backing of disparate internal and external constituencies (Holm, 1995; Rao et al., 2000). Learning to interact skilfully with others in under-organized domains can enhance an actor's relative positioning within a new organisational field. Organisational fields serve as 'arenas of power relations' (Brint & Karabel, 1991, p. 355) in which actors endowed with superior resources occupy more favourable positions. Newer and less powerful players tend initially to occupy the periphery of a field, but with increased centrality their social positioning may improve alongside their ability to leverage vital resources (Leblebici et al., 1991; Maguire et al., 2004).

Institutional biography

Part of the problem with institutional theory, as implied above, is that institutional change cannot happen without individuals. Yet some actors appear to rise above their embedded social position whereas others fail to do so. New organisational forms are not the product of disembodied forces but take shape from the life and career histories of individuals who engage in their creation (Powell & Sandholtz, 2012). As Berger and Luckmann (1967, p. 82) acknowledge:

Individuals perform discrete institutionalized actions within the context of their biography. This biography is a reflected-upon whole in which the discrete actions are thought of, not as isolated events, but as related parts in a subjectively meaningful universe.

The notion of 'institutional biography' develops Viale and Suddabys' (2009) insight that individuals collect 'institutional portfolios' during their life history, assimilating the institutional structures they traverse during their life course, that accord disparate levels of access and influence to assorted institutions. Such an approach implies the study of individuals

located within the multiple institutions that, serially or in combination, define their lives, and which they strive to build, sustain, or unsettle (Lawrence et al., 2011). Exploring the emerging logic of Aboriginal distinctiveness within Canadian schools, for example, Bertels and Lawrence (2016) discover that institutional logics matter to people in organisations according to the degree to which these logics are already absorbed within their institutional biographies. In other words, the responses of individual actors depend partly on prior assimilation of a logic within their own personal biography (Powell & Colyvas, 2008). Institutional biographies blend with individual sensemaking processes to influence the type and scope of organisational activities in which actors participate. This highlights the nature of institutional biography as enabling or, alternatively, constraining:

Those biographies shape both their understandings of the situation and their willingness and ability to form coalitions to engage in influencing and authorizing more expansive action. The concept of institutional biography is consequently a political one. (Bertels & Lawrence, 2016, p. 369)

Allied to institutional biography is the notion of 'inhabited institutions', which takes a 'peopled' view of organisations and a socialised approach to the actors that animate them (Hallett & Ventresca, 2006). The concept of inhabited institutions highlights the micro-sociological underpinnings of institutional theory by populating institutions with 'people, their work activities, social interactions, and meaning-making processes' (Hallett, 2010, p. 52); emphasising the nature of organisations as social products born of social interactions. The virtue of inhabited institutionalism is that it closely couples macro and micro levels, viewing institutions and the social exchanges of the individuals and groups who inhabit them as interconnected and recursively linked. In this way, it pays due regard to others implicated in the process and to the contexts in which their creations emerge (Powell & Sandholtz, 2012).

The Hilton case provides an opportunity to explore the role of biography in shaping the process by which an individual becomes an institutional entrepreneur. Institutional biography focuses attention on systems of meaning incorporated within a personal narrative that authorise courses of action. Inhabited institutionalism adds to this by highlighting interaction in context; revealing institutional creation as the outcome of people acting collaboratively and conflictually in diverse cultural contexts to accomplish things together (Hallett & Ventresca, 2006).

Research methods

The methodology we employ in this study is that of historical organisation studies: organisational research that draws on historical sources, methods, and knowledge to explore, refine and develop theoretical ideas in the spirit of 'dual integrity', paying due regard to both history and organisation studies (Maclean et al., 2016, 2017, 2021a). Research of this nature aims to enhance understanding of the meaning and transformation of organisational phenomena by recognising that social realities are bounded by specific conjunctures and contexts (Decker et al., 2018; Rowlinson et al., 2014; Tennent, 2021). To study empirical cases over an extended duration permits the trajectory of a focal organisation to be examined more holistically than might otherwise be feasible, unfolding in its spatial-temporal context with the benefit of historical perspective (Perchard et al., 2017; Perchard & MacKenzie, 2021; Smith et al., 2021). Historical times can serve as deep institutional structures whose effects

may only be discernible over a protracted period (Heracleous & Barrett, 2001). In exploring the development of the branded hotel chain, we recognise the value of the 'long time span' (Braudel, 1980, p. 27), longitudinal research that benefits from an ample documentary trail when evolution may be more salient (Aldrich & Ruef, 2006).

We were attracted to the Hilton case as exemplifying a pioneering institutional entrepreneur involved in early-phase globalisation in the decades following World War II, in the first wave of reconfiguring the global economic order (Djelic, 1998). The early post-war years provide a specific conjuncture that resonates in national collective memories (Coraiola et al., 2021), when new logics – including the spread of U.S. capitalism and anti-communism – were at play. The Hilton case provides a fascinating example of the interplay between business, politics, biography, and context. We confirmed our choice on gaining access to Hilton's extensive business and personal records at the Hospitality Industry Archives (HIA) at the University of Houston.

Documentary sources

Making sense of archival materials demands an understanding of their provenance, affording insights into how and why particular sources were conserved (Lipartito, 2014). The HIA comprises the world's most extensive repository for the hospitality industry. Established in 1989 with a grant from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, the HIA collects, catalogues, and preserves documents and artefacts illuminating the history of the hospitality industry. At its core is the Hilton archive, containing the business and personal papers of Conrad Hilton once held at his personal office in Beverly Hills. Hilton International later deposited large numbers of other files in tranches. Since 2010, the archive has been housed in the Massad Family Library Research Centre. It consists of a diverse collection of organisational and personal records, letters, memos, photographs, film, and assorted memorabilia featuring material drawn from a variety of institutions, including Marriott International, Westin Hotels, Best Western International, the American Hotel & Lodging Association and individual hospitality leaders. Many records relate to famous hoteliers, doubtless because 'archivists favour donations they think investigators will actually use' (Hill, 1993, p. 17). That the Hilton Foundation was instrumental in creating the HIA is telling, pointing to the purposeful promotion of Hilton's life story even after his death.

Archives represent a vital but under-exploited research resource, especially when examining nascent industries, and contain untapped potential for theoretical development (Yates, 2014). The richness of the archival material upon which we draw permits exploration of Hilton's activities and the context in which they unfolded. His public speeches, personal and business papers and private letters provide a wealth of data conducive to exploring the links between micro-entrepreneurial dynamics and macro-cultural trends (Lawrence & Phillips, 2004). The evidentiary traces that institutional processes leave behind are necessarily selective. A degree of caution is warranted because archival materials are not always what they may appear to be, necessitating critical distance (Lipartito, 2014).

The Hilton archive is large, consisting of printed series of president's letters, annual reports and accounts, an assortment of photographs, transcripts of oral history interviews, and 345 boxes of business and personal papers containing approximately 4,500 folders, most comprising numerous documents. Lack of a comprehensive index means that extensive searching is required to collect documents relating to specific topics. Our search strategy, implemented

during two lengthy visits, entailed collecting data pertaining to the development of HHI/HIC from the incorporation of HHC in 1946 to 1969 when Hilton withdrew from day-to-day management of the business. [Table 1](#) classifies the types of documents by audience type, whether public or private. Public documents include annual reports and accounts, speeches, biographical narratives, and interview transcripts. Private records entail personal and business correspondence, including the personal letters of Conrad and his sons Nick, Barron and Eric Hilton, selected business papers, and documents pertaining to the TWA-HIC merger.

Data analysis and interpretation

Our study is exploratory, designed to trigger insights pertaining to the entrepreneurial processes at play in overcoming resistance to the global propagation of a new organisational template. We assumed an inductive, qualitative approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). We

Table 1. Documents from Hilton archive selected for analysis*.

Document class	Period	Type	Volume (total number of documents = 326)	Analytical value
LP & ARA, HHC series	1946-1967	Public	22 documents Mean = 25.4 print pages Total = 559 print pages	Source of operational and financial data, and publicly declared strategic information. <i>Source for Tables 2 and 3.</i>
LP & ARA, HIC series	1964-1966	Public	3 documents Mean = 21.3 print pages Total = 64 print pages	Source of operational and financial data, and publicly declared strategic information. <i>Source for Tables 2 and 3.</i>
CNH speeches	1950-1965	Public	62 documents Mean = 2,180 words Total = 135,160 words	Rich source of data on embedding hotels project within U.S. expansionism. <i>Source for Table 4.</i>
CNH biographical narratives (1954, 1964, 1969)	1954-1969	Public	3 documents Mean = 13 typed pages Total = 39 typed pages	Self-narratives used to promote acceptance and legitimisation of new organisational form.
Oral history interview transcripts	1984-1993	Public	2 documents Mean = 42 typed pages Total = 84 typed pages	Interviews contain details and opinions not available in other sources.
CNH personal and business correspondence	1948-1967	Private	137 documents Mean = 3.1 typed pages Total = 427 typed pages	Rich source of data on activities and protagonists in U.S. and host countries. <i>Source for Table 3.</i>
Selected HHC, HHI & HIC business papers	1946-1967	Private	55 documents Mean = 12.7 typed pages Total = 699 typed pages	Agendas, minutes and reports are rich source of data on strategy and decision-making. <i>Source for Table 3.</i>
Selected TWA-HIC merger documents	1966-1967	Private	5 documents Mean = 11.6 typed pages Total = 58 typed pages	Documents contain data on business arrangements for individual hotels. <i>Source for Table 3.</i>
Hotel openings (Athens, Cairo, Istanbul, London, Paris, Rome, Tehran)	1955-1967	Mixed	37 documents (printed & typed) Mean = 3.2 pages Total = 118 pages	Contain data on interpenetration of elites of various types from home and host countries.

*ARA = Annual Report and Accounts; CNH = Conrad Nicholson Hilton; HHC = Hilton Hotel Corporation; HHI = Hilton Hotels International; HIC = Hilton International Company; LP = Letter from President; TWA = Trans World Airlines.

classified all archival material collected according to its purpose and subject matter. Besides the basic operations of *sequencing* (ensuring events are enumerated in chronological order), *verifying* (checking one source against another), *patterning* (identifying continuities, discontinuities, and recurrent relations) and *reconstructing* (inferring logical relationships between actions and events), we created three structured datasets, each from multiple documents, as a basis for systematic analysis. First, by extracting data from HHC and HIC annual reports, we examined in detail the growth of the Hilton businesses at home and abroad (see [Table 2](#)). Second, we conducted an in-depth investigation of Hilton hotel development in Europe, the Middle East and Africa (EMEA), for which we had a rich collection of private correspondence and business papers. From these sources, we extracted data relating to hotel negotiations, costs, ownership, project development and key protagonists (see [Table 3](#)).

We also categorised and coded the 62 public speeches delivered by Hilton from 1950 to 1965. Two team members coded the data independently, resolving differences through debate. We began by categorising each speech by target audience and thematic content. We discerned five audience types regularly addressed in public speeches: businesspeople, hoteliers, mixed elites, young people, and religious groups. We then sought to identify recurrent arguments. What was striking about Hilton's speeches was that they appeared to contain a signature blend. He often drew on his own personal history, frequently spoke about hospitality, told stories about different civilisations, and made repeated reference to American values and anti-communism. This enabled us to distinguish between types of speech (political and non-political) and to recognise common themes.

We explored the frequency of the data underpinning these themes and sought to identify text segments from the speeches that best captured Hilton's argumentation. This led to our discerning five second-order arguments. First, the imperative of countering Soviet expansionism resonated with the Truman doctrine that the U.S. should assist democratic nations threatened by authoritarian forces (Merrill, 2006). Second, the argument in favour of U.S. aid to cash-strapped European nations chimed with the exhortation to Congress to back the European Recovery Programme (ERP) (Sanford, 1982). Third, the idea that U.S. firms should serve as the agents of economic development abroad endorsed U.S. foreign policy (Djelic, 1998; Magdoff, 1969). Two of Hilton's arguments, however, were more original. These were, fourth, hotel development might be a powerful weapon in combatting communism (Rosendorf, 2014); and fifth, defeating communism depended on nurturing belief in free enterprise and democracy. These five strands combined to make a consistent, distinctive line of argumentation which engendered two core aggregate themes, as outlined in [Table 4](#): that the primary lines of attack in the fight against communism were, first, economic and second, ideological (Gioia et al., 2013).

Table 2. Growth of Hilton Hotels, 1947–1967*.

Hotels and rooms	1947	1952	1957	1962	1967
Domestic hotels	8	12	24	27	43
Domestic rooms	8,193	12,360	23,543	26,195	32,398
International hotels	0	1	6	13	41
International rooms	0	307	2,285	5,280	14,556
All rooms	8,193	12,667	24,828	31,475	46,954
International as % of all rooms	–	2.4	9.2	16.8	31.0

*Owned or leased properties operated by Hilton. Excludes hotels operated under management contract and franchises issued by Hilton after 1965 under Statler Hilton Inn brand (20 with 4,820 rooms in 1967).

Table 3. Alliance building across boundaries in Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

Hotel	Opens	Rooms	Affiliated actor(s)	Business arrangements
Castellana Hilton, Spain	1953	338	Andreas Zalas, managing director of property developer Inmobiliaria El Carmen	Leased from private co.
Istanbul Hilton, Turkey	1955	440	Representatives of the Turkish government; Governor (Vali) of Istanbul; European Cooperation Agency	Leased from public body
Berlin Hilton, West Germany	1958	350	Dr Paul Hertz, Berlin Senator; Willy Brandt, politician and Mayor of Berlin; European Cooperation Agency	Leased from public body
Nile Hilton, Cairo, Egypt	1959	400	A.K. Naggar, shipping entrepreneur; Dr Mansour of Banque Misr	Leased from public body
Amsterdam Hilton, Holland	1962	275	General Hendrik Johan Kruls, military leader, civil administrator and businessman	Leased from private co.*
Royal Tehran Hilton, Iran	1963	300	Jafar Behbehani, Royal Estates Administrator, Pahlavi Foundation	Leased from public body
London Hilton, U.K.	1963	512	Charles Clore, entrepreneur; Jack Cotton, property developer	Leased from private co.*
Athens Hilton, Greece	1963	480	Apostolos Pezas, shipping entrepreneur; Stratis Andreadis, entrepreneur and owner-banker of the Ionian & Popular Bank	Leased from private co.
Rotterdam Hilton, Holland	1963	270	General Hendrik Johan Kruls, military leader, civil administrator and businessman	Leased from private co.*
Cavalieri Hilton, Rome, Italy	1963	400	Dr Aldo Samaritani, Director General, Soc. Generale Immobiliare	Leased from private co.
Tunis Hilton, Tunisia	1965	250	Representatives of the Tunisian government, Department of Tourism and Tunis planning authorities	Leased from public body
Tel Aviv Hilton, Israel	1965	424	Representatives of Israeli ministries of finance and tourism working with American Israel Basic Economic Cooperation (AMIBEC) group	Leased from private co.
Orly Hilton, Paris, France	1965	268	Alex Moscovitch, journalist and Paris councillor; Pierre Auerbach, Hilton appointed representative	Leased from Hilton majority owned co.
Paris Hilton, France	1967	500	Joseph Vaturi, property developer backed by Crédit Lyonnais	Leased from private co.*
Rabat Hilton, Morocco	1967	250	Moroccan Minister of Tourism and other government representatives	Leased from public body
Cyprus Hilton, Cyprus	1967	150	Cypriot Minister of Tourism and other government representatives	Leased from public body
Brussels Hilton, Belgium	1967	300	Representatives of Belgian government and banking and business communities	Managed for 100% owned Hilton co.
Malta Hilton, Malta	1967	200	Representatives of the Maltese government and tourism development authority	Managed for public body
Kuwait Hilton, Kuwait	1967	250	Representatives of Abdullah Al-Salim Al-Sabah, Emir of Kuwait	Managed for public body

*Minority equity participation by Hilton.

As we reflected on our archival material, recursively recycling between the case data and extant literature as explored in our literature review, we sought to discern the core entrepreneurial process at play. Some 'candidate' processes were discarded on the basis that they were insufficiently representative of what we felt was really going on. After several rounds, during which we refined our thinking (Berg, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994), we agreed on the core entrepreneurial processes that seemed to us most salient: namely, *instilling operational logics*, *alliance building* and, more unusually, *leveraging institutional biography*.

Early-phase globalisation required institutional changes in home and host countries. This entailed convincing stakeholders in the U.S. – especially shareholders, financiers, and politicians – that setting up operations abroad was desirable and legitimate. In host countries,

Table 4. Embedding a new institution into U.S. foreign policy.

Illustrative 1 st order quotations	2 nd order arguments	Aggregate themes
Communism is always at war. These evil men of the Kremlin are constantly feeling around the perimeter of their vast world, like a great spider – feeling, probing incessantly for military or political soft spots which will permit them to enmesh the world with their web of tyranny. (HIA, 1950b, p.4)	U.S. must confront Soviet expansionism <i>Frequency</i> =28/28 speeches	
We in America ... have inherited great wealth, economically, culturally, and spiritually. I think it is an obligation to share it. Some nations large and small have fallen among [communist] robbers, and there is a great danger of more of them falling ... what this world needs more than anything else today is an awareness of its unity. And I think a thousand years from now we will speak of our goodness as a nation just as we recall today the goodness of the man who helped another on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. (HIA, 1956a, p.2).	Delivering economic prosperity is crucial to resist threat of communist takeover in vulnerable nations <i>Frequency</i> =22/28 speeches	First line of attack in battle against communism is <i>economic</i>
I do not disparage our armament program ... I merely say that it is a defense and will not work as an offensive to destroy communism ... I say that a higher dividend is likely to follow from economic aid in Asia, Africa and the Middle East ... whether by western governments of western private capital. What I propose is bulldozers instead of tanks. I propose a much more generous sharing of our know-how in agriculture, technology, medicine and atomic energy. (HIA, 1956b, pp. 12–13).	Economic aid (capital and know-how) from government and private sector is potent means of fighting communism <i>Frequency</i> =22/28 speeches	
In a modest way ... we set up what we thought of as our own Marshall Plan. It might be thought of as an American challenge in key positions around the world to thwart the Soviet challenge of weaker nations ... What can we do to win in the Cold War? My belief is that through trade and travel we must circulate good men and women around the world ... meeting the men and women of every nation, telling them the story of free men and free enterprise ... No one is in a better position to achieve this than ourselves who steer so much of the travel and trade around the world. (HIA, 1961b, p. 1)	International hotels serve ideological as well as practical purpose, spreading U.S. capitalism <i>Frequency</i> =18/28 speeches	Second line of attack in battle against communism is <i>ideological</i>
If communism is to be defeated we must match it by another system of ideas ... We must share with our allies not just wealth but the secret of creating wealth ... a gigantic propaganda front must be carried on to channel truth to ... captive peoples either in shouts or whispers ... Americanism, but of the authentic kind, not the deification of men and machines, not an artificial thing, but the good warm faith on which our country was builded – the faith of our founding fathers. (HIA, 1952, p. 14)	Defeating communism depends on nurturing belief in free enterprise and democracy <i>Frequency</i> =27/28 speeches	

*Based on 28 political speeches delivered between 1950 and 1965.

it involved lowering resistance to access by suggesting that all parties shared cognate values and goals. *Instilling operational logics* involves creating the institutional conditions in which a new business model might flourish by instigating a frame that in time becomes institutionalised. Rules themselves are vital resources, and power accrues to those who can set them (Scott, 1987). Field structuration is thus a key step in the institutionalisation of an organisational form (DiMaggio, 1991), enabling first-movers to profit from early intervention (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994; Santos & Eisenhardt, 2009). We define instilling operational logics as *the process of instilling new or modified logics or common practices within a field that become institutionalised*, enabling a new organisational form to prosper.

Associated to this, *alliance building* concerns forming and exploiting relationships, building coalitions with others to induce change and realise a vision in different institutional contexts while maximising capital, power, and standing (Baumol & Strom, 2007). This recognises that the creation of a new organisational form is a political process requiring

collective agency that involves persuading key constituencies of its value (Rao et al., 2000), structuring relations of power. Alliance building is thus a *value-infused process of harnessing the support of key constituencies for a new organisational form*. Both these entrepreneurial processes are concerned with field shaping; fields, as mentioned, being ‘arenas of power relations’ in which alliances must be built (Brint & Karabel, 1991, p. 355).

Institutional biography implies that individuals carry with them self-narratives informed by earlier life and career experiences that influence their sensemaking and propensity to engage in specific activities (Bertels & Lawrence, 2016; Tolbert et al., 2011). The Hilton case, we suggest, exemplifies an especially active utilisation of institutional biography. Hence, institutional biography refers to *the active leveraging and promotion of biography to assist the institutionalisation of a new organisational form*. The leveraging of institutional biography infuses both the field-shaping entrepreneurial processes of instilling operational logics and alliance building, and in so doing assists in the institutionalisation of a new organisational form.

Building the global hotel industry

The post-war rise of the international hotel industry today features multi-chain, multi-brand organisations, such as Accor, Hilton Worldwide, InterContinental and Marriott International that compete across multiple market segments (Dunning & McQueen, 1981; Quek, 2012). Branded hotel chains were present in the U.S. and Europe prior to 1945, but their operations were small scale and contained within specific nations (Haynes, 1952; Rushmore & Baum, 2002). After the incorporation of first movers like Hilton (1946) and Sheraton (1947), the hotel business became increasingly concentrated and multinational (Contractor & Kundu, 1998). For Hilton, domestic and international growth co-evolved (see Table 2). At the time of its incorporation in 1946, HHC united nine associated but free-standing hotels (HIA, 1946). Listing on the NYSE leveraged the capital required to bring about Hilton’s vision of a global branded hotel chain united by common standards and made possible by improvements in transport and management practice. In 1948 HHI became a wholly owned subsidiary company of HHC (HIA, 1948).

The landmark Caribe Hilton opened to guests in Puerto Rico in December 1949. However, the coming years saw growth at home outstrip growth abroad. That same year Hilton bought his flagship hotel, the prestigious Waldorf Astoria in New York, and five years later acquired the 11 hotels comprising the Statler chain (HIA, 1954a). He prepared to open new hotels in under-provisioned cities, and in 1957 launched a novel chain of convenience hotels, Hilton Inns (HIA, 1958a). Domestic room capacity rose fourfold from 1947 to 1967. The growth pattern at HHI was entirely different, with slow growth in the early 1950s giving way to rapid growth in the early 1960s, culminating in the flotation of HHI as an independent company listed on the NYSE and renamed Hilton International in 1964 (HIC) (HIA, 1964a). Three years later, HIC merged with TWA to accomplish operational synergies (HIA, 1967), at which point it boasted almost as many hotels as HHC and one half of its room capacity.

Instilling operational logics

Establishing the branded hotel chain as a new institution after World War II depended crucially on priming the field to wider acceptance of the new organisational form. This entailed paving the way for the transfer of multiple business innovations, standards, and practices (Davé, 1984; Dunning & McQueen, 1981). HHI was one of two pioneers responsible for the

swift dissemination of the new organisational template, accompanied by InterContinental Hotel Corporation (ICH), part of Pan American World Airlines (Pan Am) established in 1947 to boost tourism in South America (Davé, 1984; Quek, 2012). There were evident similarities between the motivations and strategies of both companies. Both gained the support of the U.S. government, which saw that its foreign policy objectives might be advanced through private-sector participation in foreign development (Djelic, 1998; Hilton, 1957; Wharton, 2001): Pan Am/ICH in South America, and Hilton in Europe through the ERP or Marshall Plan (HIA, 1961a). This targeted no specific country but rather ‘hunger, poverty, desperation, and chaos’ in the words of General Marshall (Sanford, 1982, p. 1).

A vital means whereby Hilton sought to promote the new organisational form was by embedding his entrepreneurial project within the wider purpose of a powerful institutional actor: the U.S. government’s project for post-war reconstruction. There was a real sense in which Hilton’s business model not only resonated with the government’s foreign policy but actively lent it impetus. As Hilton explained: ‘In a modest way ... we set up what we thought of as our own Marshall Plan’ (HIA, 1961b, p. 1). He clarified:

a modern hotel chain can assist – in an unusual but important way – can assist Mr. Dulles [U.S. Secretary of State, 1953–59] in his foreign policy: can assist every country in which it operates, in its foreign relations with our own and other countries: can quietly and unobtrusively contribute to our national security. (HIA, 1954b, p. 3)

Building a global hotel chain emerges as an integral part of U.S. foreign aid:

The Hilton Hotel International program had its inception at the suggestion of our government. It was believed that our corporation could make a substantial contribution to the government’s program of foreign aid by establishing American-operated hotels in important world capitals. (HIA, 1956b, p. 5)

Establishing hotels in foreign cities might provide an education in hotel management, and reduce the need for aid, hence supporting a key plank of U.S. economic policy:

Part of our American economic policy is to help other countries of the free world to help themselves, by making available to them the technical assistance of American industry, thus helping their economies and reducing the need for money grants of one kind or another. The techniques of hotel administration developed in this country are part of this program. (HIA, 1954b, 4)

While HHI was clearly a profit-making enterprise, its ancillary purpose, Hilton claimed, lay in promoting American culture and values. In a speech entitled ‘blueprint for freedom’ (HIA, 1951a), he urged U.S. firms to propagate the American way of life, asserting ‘this is the year of ... blueprints, upon which will be builded the remainder of the century’ (HIA, 1956c, p. 1). As he explained:

We operate hotels abroad ... to make money for our stockholders... But I assure you that if money were all we were after, we could make it right here in this country with a few less headaches. However, we feel that if we really believe in what we are all saying about liberty, about communism, about happiness, that ... it is up to each of us, our organizations and our industries, to contribute to this objective with all the resources at our command. (HIA, 1956b, p. 5)

Hilton, like Pan Am, perceived that the rise of U.S. firms, improving U.S. standards of living and enhanced market accessibility were likely to play a role in encouraging tourism and travel. While instigating a new organisational template involved risk taking (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994), risks could be mitigated by securing host-country participation in local

companies formed to build and harvest rents from hotel properties (Davé, 1984; Dunning & McQueen, 1981).

Hilton's organisational template took shape in 1947 following an overture on the part of the Puerto Rican government, intent on opening a new hotel in San Juan to attract tourists. To overcome capital constraints, Hilton suggested that the Puerto Rico Industrial Development Company (PRIDCO) should construct the hotel to architectural and design standards prescribed by HHI but should retain ownership (Hilton, 1957). HHI would then lease the hotel from PRIDCO for 20 years in return for two-thirds of gross operating profit. HHI furnished the working capital to see the project through to completion and received one-third of gross profit in return for ongoing management services (HIA, 1958b).

The Caribe Hilton proved an immediate success and, crucially, represented a formula that Hilton could reproduce elsewhere (HIA, 1964b). Entrepreneurs who embark on pioneering endeavours often lack models to emulate because 'there are no established patterns or leaders to mimic' (Maguire et al., 2004, p. 659). Developing a template provided Hilton with a generative blueprint he could recursively reproduce to claim a new market space (Lanzara & Patriotta, 2007; Santos & Eisenhardt, 2009). Hilton's hotels were designed to stand out from the rest, meeting high standards and symbolising confidence in the new post-war economic and institutional order (Czyżewska, 2020; Wharton, 2001). Local partners benefitted from growing brand recognition, operational knowledge, management services including reservations and marketing, jobs, staff development, earnings from tourists and business travel, and enhanced local infrastructure (Porter, 2000). HHI benefitted by obtaining market access and revenue without having to outlay substantial capital, fostering the conditions for rapid growth on a global scale (Dunning & McQueen, 1981).

ICH, unlike HHI, lacked a clearly articulated and principled guiding vision. It was essentially a more pragmatic organisation that pursued growth in its chosen markets in support of the expanding Pan Am network (Davé, 1984). Nevertheless, ICH had discovered its own formula for growth, agreeing management contracts for new-build hotels in conjunction with local consortia, assuming an equity stake in owning companies when this proved necessary to reach agreement (Davé, 1984). HHI, conversely, stuck to its guns in only contracting for new hotels in prime city locations on a lease-and-operate profit-sharing basis. It was not until the late 1950s that the HHI executive managed to convince Hilton to agree management contracts when 'flexibility in the matter is absolutely indicated', although he cautioned that the 'basic pattern of our contract is by now pretty well known ... a management contract will no doubt meet with resistance and suspicion' (HIA, 1959a, p. 1). In time, the management contract model gained supremacy, as HHI and ICH grappled with newcomers like Sheraton in pursuit of deals (DeRoos, 2010); HHI being compelled to soften its no equity participation position to acquire operating rights in prime capital cities like Paris and London (HIA, 1963a; 1965a).

The tenacity with which HHI stuck to its guiding vision goes some way towards explaining its growth pattern between 1947 and 1967: slow at first before accelerating in the later 1950s and early 1960s. The prevailing conditions at home and in host countries also mattered. Hilton's management team and shareholders were conscious of the perils of international operations, particularly in war-torn Europe (Hilton, 1957; Magdoff, 1969). Curt Strand, a former HIC President, claimed that risk avoidance was deeply rooted among HHI top management, especially after the 1959 Cuban revolution when the company's assets were seized (HIA, 1992, 1993), Castro having failed to declare his communism beforehand (Czyżewska, 2020). It was only when early ventures proved successful that HHI felt comfortable moving

more rapidly. Securing access to international markets, however, was not plain sailing. Entry barriers of variable height needed to be overcome (Porter, 2000). Political resistance manifested itself as the refusal of permissions to operate, the issue of planning constraints, and the implementation of foreign exchange controls (HIA, 1950a; 1951b; 1954d; 1959b). Obstruction by competitors included attempts to deny market entry and impede access to resources, such as prized locations and finance (HIA, 1964c). A similar pattern emerged in the second wave of project development at HHI, the difference being that a higher degree of prosperity had now obtained, and national governments and investors were increasingly *au fait* with the novel organisational template and the advantages afforded by the Hilton brand (Porter, 2000). Welcoming U.S.-operated hotels that encouraged tourism and travel had become institutionalised.

Alliance building

Fundamental to the propagation of a novel organisational form on a global basis is acquiring access to markets and resources (Huntingdon, 1973). This depends on securing the buy-in of key organisational actors in host countries to develop the networks of relations needed to sustain the development of the new organisational form (Lawrence & Phillips, 2004). At the instigation of the European Cooperation Agency (ECA), responsible for implementing the ERP, Hilton visited Europe in 1948 to gauge the scope for constructing new hotels on the lease-and-operate profit-sharing basis introduced at the Caribe. Confronted with the destruction of many of Europe's capital cities, he nevertheless stated that with U.S. technical and financial backing Europe would recover (Hilton, 1957). Czyżewska (2020) notes that Madrid, London, and Istanbul proved particularly attractive. Madrid, although impoverished, was of interest for being non-communist; Istanbul signified a gateway to the East; while London offered prestige. A common template arose that was alert to the situations of others, irrespective of ethnicity, nationality, or creed (Fligstein, 2001). As Hilton put it:

I am eager to promote justice, unity, understanding and cooperation among Protestants, Catholics and Jews – happy to one day eliminate intergroup prejudices which disfigure our religious, social and political relations. (HIA, 1950b, 1)

He elaborated:

We have too long ignored Buddha, Confucius, Mohammed and the tribal beliefs of the Native Africans. The uncommitted third, the billion faceless men are standing up and demanding to be counted – and their faces are black and yellow and brown. (HIA, 1957, p. 7)

Domestically, Hilton was diligent in allying with functionaries, politicians, and business elites with a mutual interest in market opening (HIA, 1960a), since such individuals might exert local pressure to resolve any outstanding issues that arose. ECA officials and diplomats in Washington worked in tandem with local dignitaries in Berlin and Istanbul to bring projects to a successful conclusion (HIA, 1950c; Wharton, 2001). An analogous strategy of alliance building emerged in host nations. A vital means by which Hilton secured the buy-in of influential host-country actors was by drawing on wider meaning systems (Lawrence & Phillips, 2004). In this way, American history, democratic values, and belief in free enterprise were assimilated into the scripts Hilton drew on to build relationships, linking micro-level processes at local level to the broader institutional order (Powell & Colyvas, 2008). This required the nurturing of diplomatic skills:

We represent America, its culture, its faith and its history. We are aware of that, and when we go into a foreign country and put up a hotel, we bring not only our know-how, but part of America with us. We are ambassadors in the true sense of the word and we have got to act like ambassadors (HIA, 1954b, 5).

The honing of diplomatic skills fostered ‘team play’ (HIA, 1958c; 1958d, 2). The value of teamwork was something Hilton (1957, pp. 117–118) had learned first-hand during active service in World War I:

The value of buddies was something you learned in the Army where your life depended on how well a hundred men carried out their assignments. In the army you were as good as your buddies. In Texas you were as good as your partners. Later, when I reached the rarefied air of Big Business, I learned to call them ‘associates’.

HHI/HIC established alliances to surmount obstacles and realise institutional change, assimilating subsidiaries, locating prime city sites, acquiring the necessary building permits, assembling financial consortia, drawing up agreements on apportioning profits, and obtaining import licences and foreign currency (HIA, 1963b). All required local cooperation and some required legal or regulatory changes (HIA, 1950a, 1951b, 1954d, 1959b).

Working hand-in-glove with host-country politicians enhanced reputational advantage while opening doors to local resources (Rindova et al., 2005). It proved relatively unproblematic to settle problems in countries where power was centralised. In Iran, for example, the Shah proffered a piece of land and allocated a senior functionary, Jafar Behbehanian, to facilitate the construction of the hotel (HIA, 1959c). Where power was less concentrated and cliques jockeyed for position, progress was protracted and faltering. In Italy, it required sustained pressure from American officials and Italy’s High Commissioner for Tourism, Pietro Romani, to break the deadlock in 1954 after four years of wrangling, with persistent impediments slowing completion until 1963 (HIA, 1954f).

In EMEA, which saw 19 HHI/HIC hotels opened from 1953 to 1967, responsiveness to local circumstances proved critical. Table 3 identifies key host-country actors and the business model and ownership structure agreed to operate the hotel. This reveals that Hilton managed to implement his favoured lease-and-operate template in most cases. The Hilton brand afforded reputational advantage, enhancing negotiating power with local elites (Rindova et al., 2006). This benefit lessened as new entrants like Sheraton penetrated the field (Davé, 1984). In most countries new hotels launched without the requirement for equity participation. Local ownership proved attractive because it gave host-country partners a secure long-term stake in the action. From the perspective of host governments, increased tourism and business travel contributed positively to local economies, bringing jobs, and improving the balance of payments (Behrman, 1971). From the perspective of host-country elites, it afforded them entrance to the nascent community of global capitalism while building confidence in the future.

Institutional biography

The public speeches delivered by Hilton attest to his skill in leveraging his own biography to assist the institutionalisation of the new organisational form (Bertels & Lawrence, 2016). A life, Denzin (1989, p. 9) argues, represents ‘a social text, a fictional, narrative production’. Hilton’s life story, as narrated by himself and others, depicted a man striving to improve the

world not just for his own benefit but also for others (Hilton, 1957). His self-narrative resonated with the values of key audiences while conveying selflessness to enhance his claims (Fligstein, 2001). He attributed his success in business to his Catholic upbringing and the qualities of hard work and self-reliance nurtured in a large family living on the New Mexican frontier (see Figure 1). When times were hard, the family would take in lodgers. In his

Career		Personal	
		1887	Born, New Mexico
		1899-1904	Attends boarding schools, New Mexico
Apprentice, family store	1904-1905	1905-1907	Attends high school, California
Employee, family lodging business	1907	1907-1909	Attends New Mexico School of Mines
Manager, family store	1909-1912		
Elected representative, lower house, New Mexico State Legislature	1912-1913		
Founder/Manager, New Mexico State Bank of San Antonio	1913-1917	1913-1917	Purposefully develops social skills (dancing, tennis, golf) and business networks
Lieutenant, US Army	1917-1919		
Moves to Texas, buys Mobley, and creates chain of 8 hotels incorporated as Hilton Hotels Inc in 1929	1919-1929		1 st marriage to Mary Barron; 3 sons: Nick (1926), Barron (1927) & Eric (1933)
Facing bankruptcy merged in 1932 with Southern National Hotels to create National Hotel Co (NHC) with ½ equity stake. Appointed General Manager	1930-1934	1925-1934	
Demerges from NHC owning 5 Texas hotels	1934		Establishes home and personal HQ in Beverly Hills, California, (purchasing Casa Encantada in 1950)
Expands through acquisitions in California, Texas & New Mexico	1934-1941	1941	2 nd marriage to Zsa Zsa Gabor; 1 daughter: Francesca (1947)
Acquires large hotels in Beverly Hills, Chicago, New York	1942-1946	1942-1946	
Incorporation and flotation of Hilton Hotels Corporation (HHC) on New York Stock Exchange	1946		
Incorporation of Hilton Hotels International (HHI) as subsidiary of HHC	1948		Features on the cover of <i>Time</i> magazine (and again in 1963)
Acquisition of Waldorf-Astoria, New York	1949	1949	
Purchase of Statler chain of 11 hotels	1954	1954	Hosts prayer breakfast with (golf partner) President Eisenhower
Launch of Carte Blanche credit card	1958	1957	Publishes autobiography <i>Be My Guest</i>
Launch of Hilton Inn Chain	1959	1959	Entertains Queen Elizabeth II in Chicago
HHI launched as independent company on New York Stock Exchange with Hilton as Chairman-CEO	1964		Reads his prayer "America on It Knees" on the Mike Douglas national TV show
Son Barron appointed CEO of HHC	1966		
HHI merged with Trans World Airlines (TWA)	1967	1967	
Quits as HHI CEO, remains non-executive chairman	1969	1969	Death of son Nick
		1976	3 rd marriage to Mary Frances Kelly
Remains chairman of HHC and HHI. In 1979 HHC and HHI had 195 and 75 hotels under management respectively.	1970-1979	1979	Dies aged 91, survived by 3 rd wife, 3 children and 10 grandchildren

Figure 1. Conrad Hilton Timeline (Events, Milestones, Stages).

autobiography, *Be My Guest*, Hilton describes the rudimentary operation he later styled ‘the first Hilton hotel’:

Carl [Hilton’s brother] and I met every train, at midnight, at three in the morning, at high noon. We hustled. We took morning calls to awaken sleepy travellers. We carried luggage and trunks and showcases. I opened the store at eight and closed it at six, for there was always a chance of selling a can of tomatoes and business had to go on. Gus [Hilton’s father] was ‘mein host’ and the ace glad hander of us all. Mother cooked. And cooked. And cooked. (Hilton, 1957, p. 61)

Hilton assiduously manicured his image as a Catholic patriot who believed in democracy, free enterprise, and the citizen’s right to own property. The story of the Good Samaritan, he suggested, should be renamed the ‘Good Hotelman’ (HIA, 1954c, p. 1). His autobiography positioned him at the heart of the epic ‘grand narrative’ of U.S. history. The accounts he purveyed drew on the myths of the wild frontier and the ‘American dream’ (Holt, 2004; Lawrence & Phillips, 2004), ‘the splendid give-and-take of our American business and way of life... initiated by Washington, Madison, Adams, Jefferson and the rest of those amazing men who knew so well what freedom meant’ (HIA, 1954b, p. 2). This same spirit of free enterprise, he asserted, infused the hotel business: ‘The same kind of daring and free enterprise which characterised our early America can be traced... through the life of our hotel industry’ (HIA, 1951c). Hotels could therefore play a key part in disseminating U.S.-style capitalism, exuding ‘the good warm faith upon which our country was builded – the faith of our founding fathers’ (HIA, 1952, pp. 4–5, 14). Hotels, he insisted, had a key role to play in supporting the U.S. government’s mission: ‘it will be the American hotelmen who will lead the way, who will pioneer a new circulation of men in commerce and ideas around the world’ (HIA, 1955a, p. 6). This represented for Hilton a ‘foreign policy for hotels’, the title of a speech given in 1956:

In a modest way, with real humility – and sometimes humiliation – Hilton International is trying to do something about this, even as far away as Djakarta in Indonesia, Bangkok in Thailand, and Bagdad in Iraq... Right now we’re building or have contract for hotels on every continent on earth. (HIA, 1956b, p. 5)

He depicted the U.S. government’s mission for post-war reconstruction as a powerful taskforce in which he and his associates must play their part:

You and I... belong to the largest, most powerful task-force in the history of the world, and unless we are accomplishing our own individual mission, we are jeopardizing the success of the whole campaign (HIA, 1954c, p. 8).

Known as ‘the man who bought the Waldorf’, Hilton enhanced his image through association with royalty, politicians, the Pope, and film stars (HIA, 1963c). He courted celebrity, located himself from 1941 in Beverly Hills, and married actress Zsa Zsa Gabor. As Curt Strand observed, he was an entrepreneurial deal maker rather than a hotelier, with a ‘genius for... knowing what would be good in the future’ and ‘a sense of the dramatic... for doing exciting things’ (HIA, 1993, p. 9). He entertained President Eisenhower and other political leaders at prayer breakfasts in Washington. He composed a prayer, *America on Its Knees*, which appeared in U.S. newspapers and magazines (HIA, 1954d), and read it aloud on national television, revealing his lighter side by demonstrating his favourite dance, the Varsovia (HIA, 1967). The story of his life was publicised in *Time* magazine and numerous other journals. To summarise, through the adept use of public relations, Hilton worked hard to distinguish himself

as a glamorous business leader at the helm of a successful U.S. organisation intent on transforming the international hotel business (Gamson, 1994); exemplifying in this way the 'social construction of reputation' (Rao, 1994, p. 29).

Many of the 62 speeches Hilton gave from 1950 to 1965 were similarly reprinted in newspapers. His overall discursive strategy was two-pronged, as articulated in Table 4. First, he asserted that new hotels boosted travel, trade, communication, and cooperation across national boundaries, serving as a force for economic integration, peace, and unity. Hilton's experience as a soldier had taught him the importance of peace (HIA, 1950b) while opening his eyes to a world of opportunity: 'I had come home from France... the same man, but changed. I had gained a vision of a wide, wide world beyond... my native state' (Hilton, 1957, p. 100). In consequence, 'world peace through international trade and travel' became the company's official strapline, reiterated not just in speeches but at well-publicised launch events for new hotels, helping to legitimise the new organisational form in the minds of influential third parties at home and abroad (Rao, 1994).

Second, Hilton stressed that the battle with communism was ideological in essence. Like the Catholic Church, he opposed communism as 'faithless' and as riding roughshod over individual liberties (Haynes, 1996; Heale, 1990; Rosendorf, 2014). Building a global hotel chain infused with American values therefore signified a 'brotherhood in industry' (HIA, 1956b, p. 7) that openly challenged communist doctrine:

Next year we open in Cairo, Havana and Montreal, the following in Berlin. I seriously say to you, gentlemen, that in our small way is our answer to Lenin and Communism... we refuse to accept the concept of the iron curtain, very sure that tomorrow or the next day there will be [Hilton International] flags in Prague, Warsaw, Shanghai, Moscow... (HIA, 1955b, pp. 3–4).

The above illustrations suggest that skilful leveraging of Hilton's own self-narrative served as a fundamental process of institutional creation (Green & Li, 2011; Munir & Phillips, 2005). This distinguished him as a visionary leader pursuing an honourable cause, while building credibility in hotels, tourism, and business travel. The upshot was to embed the profit motive within the wider mission of peace through international trade and travel, amplifying its legitimacy:

Although we are pleased with our profit potential, Hilton International is more than a profit-making enterprise. Our basic philosophy is World Peace through International Trade and Travel. We believe that free enterprise can contribute a great deal to the world by the pursuit of this ideal. (HIA, 1965b, p. 13)

Domestically, Hilton secured the buy-in of shareholders, directors, and political leaders for investment in international hotels in locations that might be deemed politically unstable. It is telling that significant funding was furnished by the ECA to construct Hilton hotels in Istanbul (\$2 million and 30% of cost) and Berlin (\$4.5 million and 65% of cost), as a bulwark against communism (HIA, 1950c; Wharton, 2001, p. 70). Istanbul was strategically situated, between East and West (Czyżewska, 2020). Hilton justified investing in precarious countries by emphasising that 'guns and planes' would not do the job:

Why have we signed contracts for hotels in every key spot, every danger spot in the Orient? Why Tokyo? Why Bangkok? Why the Nile Hilton in Cairo? Why? Because there is a job to be done there. And I tell you frankly, guns and planes will not get the job done. (HIA, 1956c, p. 7)

Establishing hotels in such locations, Hilton claimed, could open new markets to American products while assisting the spread of capitalism – to ‘develop their nations into vast new markets’ (HIA, 1959d, pp. 6–7):

If we carry out such a program with wisdom and tact, we shall not only help a nation to its feet, but we shall have made friends for American and the West, strengthened the Free World and opened new markets for American goods. (HIA, 1958e, pp. 9–10)

The main objective was to ‘conquer the world not by war but by peace’ (HIA, 1951c, p. 12), thereby ensuring ‘that our revolution spreads over the world, that our western spark ignites and lights the world of the Orient, Africa and Northern Europe’ (HIA, 1956b, pp. 13–14).

Hilton’s framing of the fight against communism as countering faithlessness was welcomed in assorted regimes. The Shah of Iran chose to partner with Hilton, for example, as did General Nasser of Egypt after overthrowing the monarchy in 1952. Emphasising a common threat, similar values, and the shared economic benefits that might accrue from tourism and travel helped to mitigate host-country unease at U.S. ascendancy on the world stage.

Discussion and conclusion

This article examines the relationship between institutional biography and institutional entrepreneurship from the perspective of the creation of the global branded hotel chain. It explores how biography (either self-narrated or narrated by others) may shape the process by which an individual becomes an institutional entrepreneur. The case highlights the link between U.S. foreign policy and tourism development, and how the Hilton hotel chain emerges as a core institution facilitating the spread of U.S.-style capitalism; becoming taken-for-granted as something every upcoming city should have (DiMaggio, 1991).

There are striking interlinkages between Hilton’s biography and the manner and presentation of his business’s development. The timeline provided in [Figure 1](#) delineates the evolution of Hilton’s career and personal life in parallel, revealing a blend of career and personal elements, and highlighting key milestones in the diffusion of his organisational template. Several aspects are noteworthy. The young Hilton’s apprenticeship in the family store gave him an early taste for business. The use of the family home as a lodging house for travellers sparked his subsequent interest in hotels. The Catholic values instilled in him *en famille* drove him to work hard, while colouring his view on communism. His early life spent on the New Mexican frontier, an ‘outpost of the Spanish Empire’ (HIA, 1953, p. 2), fetching travellers in transit from the nearby railway station, evokes the American pioneer parable, promoted in his speeches (Holt, 2004). His service as an elected representative in New Mexico informed his assumed role as statesman speaking in support of the U.S. government and its political project of post-war expansion. His period in the military in France taught him to rely on partners, and that there was a world to conquer. His career as a hotelier began on return from war when he noticed a local hotel, the Mobley, doing a roaring trade with guests hiring rooms in shifts. He bought it and used it to learn about running hotels. Coming close to bankruptcy during the Great Depression taught him to mitigate risks, which determined the type of organisational template he pursued. Finally, the death of his son, Nick, from suicide in 1969 coincided with his withdrawal from day-to-day management, suggesting that institutional biography can be constraining as well as enabling.

Importantly, Hilton's timeline reveals his purposeful repositioning of himself within his chosen field by developing social skills through golf, tennis, and dancing, counting President Eisenhower as a golf partner (HIA, 1954e). Active cultivation of celebrity, moving to Beverly Hills, courting of the media, royalty, and the Pope, and inviting Hollywood's glitterati to hotel openings – flown into hotel launches abroad on planes – all reveal Hilton reflexively working to improve his positioning and legitimate the new organisational template (Bourdieu, 1990). As Czyżewska (2020, p. 182) remarks, Hilton and his entourage knew how to 'throw a party' and win over the public. In other words, while informed by real-life events, Hilton's self-narrative was also socially constructed (Downing, 2005). Its perusal uncovers a 'complex, reflexive, and recursive relationship' between Hilton and the organisational form he institutionalised (Lawrence et al., 2011, p. 55). Its purposeful crafting, exemplified by regularly updated biographical notes distributed to the media (HIA, 1954f) went together with the development of the branded hotel chain (Rindova et al., 2006). This was facilitated through distributed and, at times, contested agency involving numerous actors at home and overseas, with whom he built relationships, and with whose concerns he associated his change project (Garud & Karnøe, 2003; Hoffman, 1999; Maguire et al., 2004). However, it was the active leveraging of Hilton's personal biography, set against a backdrop of American values, history, and belief in free enterprise, which buttressed the legitimacy of the new organisational form.

At the outset, we posed a guiding research question, enquiring how biography might influence the institutionalisation of a new organisational form. In answer, we suggest that the skilful leveraging of institutional biography – through the accumulation and exploitation of relevant institutional portfolios drawn from life and career experiences (Viale & Suddaby, 2009) – is an important means whereby institutional entrepreneurs develop and legitimise a new organisational form, thereby building a more central social position in the topography of the field (Anheier et al., 1995; Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006; Leblebici et al., 1991).

In explicating the entrepreneurial processes employed by Hilton in enacting his vision, three key processes proved critical: *instilling operational logics*, *alliance building*, and *institutional biography*. Regarding *instilling operational logics*, we have shown that Hilton, hemmed in by the priorities of a risk-averse board, conceived a new template of multinational hotel development, the profit-sharing lease-and-operate model, by uniting local ownership with global branding. It is worth emphasising that Hilton was one of the earliest institutional entrepreneurs to engage in processes of global diffusion of a rationalised management template. He varied his repertoire so that each hotel exhibited its national heritage while meeting specifications, combining U.S. and local architects and designers in common project teams (Drori et al., 2009; Wharton, 2001). With respect to *alliance building*, we have demonstrated how Hilton leveraged political power to build and diffuse the new institution through political manoeuvring and the bridging of interests between host-country actors and the Hilton chain; underscoring the 'multiplicity of actors that interactively produce change' (Lounsbury & Crumley, 2007, p. 993) (see Table 3).

The leveraging of *institutional biography* and, relatedly, Hilton's skilful linking of self-narrative with ideological and economic appeals, plays a formative, foundational role in the interaction between the entrepreneurial processes identified, infusing the other two. We have shown that Hilton's personal narrative and entrepreneurial ventures were mutually constitutive. Grey (1994, p. 481) argues that careers provide 'a vehicle for the self to become', linking 'past, present and future through the vector of the self'. Institutional biography, we suggest, takes this to a new plane. The institutional portfolios upon which Hilton drew were

crucial to his agency, such that his life and career were not merely a 'project of the self' (Grey, 1994), but one amplified on a global stage. Hilton's own past and life experiences influenced the kind of opportunities he pursued and his aptitude for courses of action, well before the incorporation of his first company (Bertels & Lawrence, 2016; Smith & Simeone, 2017). The concomitant emergence of a U.S.-government project provided a new 'grand narrative' with which he could identify, within which he embedded his vision of the branded hotel chain. The broader social mission of a powerful institutional actor served as a carrier for a profit-seeking opportunity. The institutional nesting of a new institution (the branded hotel chain) within the workings of an existing one (U.S. foreign policy) proved critical to its success, such that the new organisational form became a symbol of American economic imperialism and a core institution of global capitalism.

The Hilton case, set within the post-war business, political and ideological international landscape, expands understanding of economic recovery and stabilisation in the first wave of reconfiguring the global economic order after World War II. It reveals how the foundations were laid for global economic integration and the emergence of multinational enterprises as dominant economic actors (Djelic, 1998; Jones, 2005). Our study emphasises the role of institutional entrepreneurship in global integration. This draws attention not only to entrepreneurial processes but also to how individual actors respond to the institutional contexts in which these unfold (Scott, 2014). As Schumpeter (1947), the 'father' of the biographical approach in business history, asserts, different conjunctures elicit different types of creative response, emphasising historical context and its impact on entrepreneurial endeavour (Haveman et al., 2012; Wadhvani & Jones, 2014). Such conjunctures are not ready-made but are created by actors in parallel with institutional developments. The case reveals how actions and processes at the micro level of actors and firms can induce global structural change.

Institutional theorists have suggested that models for rational diffusion in business stemmed from the war effort (Baron et al., 1986, 1988). We show how Hilton extended the project of U.S. neo-liberalism by applying tactics and strategies that emerged from the war, such that Hilton's expansionary phases strongly mimicked U.S. reconstruction efforts in the early post-war years. Our analysis suggests that Hilton saw his personal entrepreneurial project as an extension of U.S. imperialism: acting as a statesman on behalf of government, bringing U.S. dollars into war-torn nations by setting up his 'own Marshall Plan' (HIA, 1961b, p. 1). The case provides a salient example of the emergence of neo-liberalism in business adapting quite naturally out of the war and ensuing reconstruction. Hindsight reveals how the wider adoption and dissemination of Hilton's business innovations went on to shape practices and policies within the contemporary hospitality industry; accounting within many nations for a large part of national income (Porter, 2000).

This study raises important questions about the generalisability of findings derived from archival-based research (Yates, 2014). In studying the finer details of a single case, we may miss the broader sweep of a comparative, industry-wide account that might determine more precisely the roles played by rival organisations and fellow travellers. A comparative study, involving further case examples, forms an agenda for future research. The Hilton case nevertheless satisfies Baumol and Strom (2007, p. 895) exhortation to choose 'examples spanning considerable periods of history and encompassing widely different cultures and geographic locations'. In revealing how the foundations were laid for international economic integration from the perspective of a global industry, our study adds to research that enhances

understanding of the evolution of the institutions of present-day capitalism (Davis & Marquis, 2005). We contribute to the literature on international business by taking account of the individuals and their biographies that animate the strategies that induce global institutional change.

Our core contribution to theory is to expand understanding of how institutional biography may enable, or constrain, institutional change. Social skill entails an understanding of social position in a field (Fligstein, 1997). We show that the astute leveraging of institutional biography can provide an important means whereby institutional entrepreneurs can advance an organisational template by building a more powerful social position in a field (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006; Leblebici et al., 1991; Maguire et al., 2004). While prior research has suggested that institutional biography is something that individuals passively reflect (Bertels & Lawrence, 2016; Hallett & Ventresca, 2006; Suddaby & Viale, 2011; Viale & Suddaby, 2009), our research implies a stronger, more overt affirmation of the concept, such that biography is actively promoted as a route to institutionalisation. Institutional theory is a crowded field, where the possibilities for conceptual novelty are becoming increasingly rare. Here, we address this challenge by advancing the concept of institutional biography. Suddaby et al. (2011) have enquired where the new theories of organisation will be found. One answer lies in the overlap between fields, through combining differing perspectives (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006). Historical organisation studies has itself benefitted from the possibilities created through the blending of two distinct disciplines (Maclean et al., 2016, 2017, 2021a). In integrating the concept of institutional biography, better known in organisational sociology (Hallett, 2010; Hallett & Ventresca, 2006), into analysis of institutional entrepreneurship, we spark fresh insight by highlighting the role of institutional biography as an enabling condition whereby entrepreneurs can improve their positioning within their chosen field.

We make a second contribution by illuminating the strategies by which an individual entrepreneur might pursue an institutional strategy of change. Institutional biography played a pivotal role in influencing how Hilton's personal narrative became closely associated with the 'grand narrative' of the post-war institutional order of U.S. capitalism (Tolbert et al., 2011). The institutional strategy for global expansion of a common template in the hotel industry entailed a logical extension of the expansion of U.S. economic and military interests following World War II. Realising this strategy involved embedding an entrepreneurial project within the wider project of a powerful institutional actor; leveraging one institution (foreign policy) to advance another one in an otherwise unrelated field (the branded hotel chain). Hilton's project went on to become a symbol of American economic imperialism and a core institution of global capitalism. Our second contribution is therefore to propose that institutional entrepreneurs cannot leverage another institutional project while remaining unaffected by it, in terms of their personal biography. They must become a symbol of that broader institutional project. The Hilton case provides a vivid illustration of how complex institutional tensions, in terms of national interests, corporate interests, and individual self-interest, can become distilled into the identity, choices and ambitions – the personal biographical narrative – of individuals who play a key role in the institutions they go on to shape, maintain or disrupt.

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