Article

How 'natives' work: political judgement and cohesion through ritual interaction among ministers

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Abstract

How do political administrations sustain whatever kinds of cohesion they do, over their time in office? Although recent research emphasises institutions, sometimes institutions also weaken cohesion. Informal institutions are more important than formal ones in shaping styles of political judgement in governing administrations. But how can institutional processes explain both weakening and strengthening? This article develops a neo-Durkheimian theory. It proposes that informal institutions should be understood as operating through very particular kinds of practices, which are enacted in a limited number of basic kinds of ritual interaction order. The article innovates by showing how written ritual in government interacts with face-to-face ritual in cultivating styles both of thought and of emotions to sustain positive and negative feedback dynamics. The argument is illustrated by analysing negative rites of blame and accusation and positive rites of self-assertion during positive feedback in the individualistic interaction order in Harold Wilson's 1960s cabinet.

This theory development article presents a novel neo-Durkheimian institutional account of how informal institutional processes weaken but also sustain cohesion within political administrations, as they cultivate styles of political judgement. Relations between two registers of ritual interaction order are, it argues, critical. To illustrate (but not fully test) the argument, the article uses archival data to examine what some regard as a 'hard' case for neo-Durkheimian arguments – namely, an administration that was both institutionally individualistic and ideologically social democratic. The article addresses two linked questions.

First, how do political administrations sustain such cohesion as they do, over their time in office? Here, cohesion means social relations of whatever form, notwithstanding inevitable conflicts, allowing sufficient mutual reliance to sustain minimally effective collective action in governing. Maintaining cohesion is challenging. Throughout political history, administrations have lost cohesion, sometimes so seriously as to weaken their capacity to govern.

Second, how does cultivation of styles of political judgement by informal institutions (6, 2011, 2014a) shape capacities for cohesion? Research has shown that selective incentives for equilibria, emphasised by collective action theory, are insufficient without institutions sustaining commitment among actors to particular ways of organising (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013). Institutions providing material incentives are often formal, explicit ones. Yet, when selective incentives matter, informal institutions make this possible, by buttressing incentives' importance in ways that people are cultivated to think (Wildavsky, 1994). Although institutionalist research has shown informal institutions' general connection with cognition (Lowndes and Roberts 2013; Thornton *et al*, 2012), and styles of cohesion, exchange and power (Helmke and Levitsky, 2006; Farrell and Héritier, 2003), researchers have yet adequately to theorise precise institutional dynamics that cultivate particular styles of thought and judgement and how, in turn, these reinforce institutions or elicit countervailing processes to undermine cohesion.

Neo-Durkheimian institutional theory offers dynamics for explaining trajectories in which contrasting types of cohesion are sustained or may be lost. Moreover, it argues that particular institutional processes reinforce styles of thought which help both to sustain and to undermine forms of cohesion. Three Durkheimian elements underpin the argument. First, following Douglas (1982, 1992; Gross and Rayner, 1985; Hood, 1998), Durkheim's (1951) two dimensions of institutional variation – social regulation and social integration – are cross-tabulated to identify distinct elementary forms of cohesion. Second, Durkheim's (1995) central argument that all social organisation is fundamentally *ritual* in its causal mechanism is extended, using Goffman's (1967) and Collins's (2004) Durkheimian concept of ritual interaction orders in quotidian exchange. Third, contrary to the misconception that Durkheimian theory emphasises normative consensus, Durkheim (1957) argued that conflict is a ritually ordered process by which institutional pressures clash (Alexander, 1988). Thus the power of functional explanations for conflict can be retained while avoiding structural-functionalism (Douglas, 1986; 6, 2014b). A neo-Durkheimian conception of informal institutions as sets of practices enacted in ritual is developed and recast as ritual interaction order. In government, these practices are conducted through written exchanges as much as in face-to-face meetings, and so documentary sources must be examined to understand how cohesion is institutionally sustained.

Institutions and elementary forms

Neo-Durkheiman arguments distinguish two levels of institutional analysis. *Empirical* institutions vary vastly over history and geography. *Elementary* forms (Durkheim, 1995), by contrast, represent generic universal imperatives of institutional organisation which furnish basic structures for organising and disorganising in any setting (6, 2014b). They are rarely made explicit, unless practitioners adopt social scientific vocabularies.

Durkheim (1951) distinguished two basic organising imperatives – namely, social regulation, or the degree to which institutions constrain by roles, imperatives and constraints; and social

integration, or the degree to which institutions organise around bonds or membership in bounded groups. Douglas (1982) cross-tabulated these dimensions to define the neo-Durkheimian typology's well-known four elementary forms (Douglas, 1982; Thompson *et al*, 1990) – namely, hierarchical (strong regulation and integration, where inequality takes the form of superior and subaltern bound together in integrated rule-based status systems: 6, 2015a), individualistic (weak regulation and integration, where inequality takes the form of patrons and claques of clients only bound together by transactionally-driven exchange), isolate (strong regulation, weak integration, where inequality may be between structurally despotic figures, if any, and those in structural serf positions: 6, 2015b) and enclaved institutions (strong integration and weak external regulation, although regulation is generated voluntarily from within – Rayner, 1988 – where inequality is between members and non-members). In loose mixes or settlements or in conflict but in contrasting relative weights of which the theory enables comparative analysis, combinations of elementary forms will be found in most empirical settings, resulting from dynamic feedback processes whereby each form elicits counter-assertion from people reaching for other forms. Moreover, in hybrids, rhetoric cultivated by one form may be 'borrowed' to serve another the other's institutional imperatives (Thompson *et al*, 1990).

Thus, institutions motivate, bias and shape collective capabilities including those for cohesion. Durkheim's (1995) argument, though, was not simply that rites make bonds, but that they do so through cultivating cognition (cf. Durkheim and Mauss, 1963, 11). The neo-Durkheimian reformulation is that each form cultivates distinct *styles* of thought (Douglas, 1986) and judgement in political decisionmaking (6, 2011, 2014a). Styles describe the *manner* in which people think, irrespective of the content of their normative beliefs. They are exhibited in emotions cultivated, in stances adopted toward risk, toward past and future, consistency, structuring and linkage among categories such as fallback options considered in decisions, and other discourse which frame and bias decisionmaking (6, 2011). Styles are only as cognitively regulated and integrated as policy-makers are socially regulated and integrated (6, 2014a). For example, individualistic institutional

forms cultivate ways of coming to deals locally (within the cabinet, perhaps) and then of painting onto the wider world a deal-making style for resolving difficulties (with interest groups, for example). As forms are ritually reinforced, thought styles lead people to reproduce their institutional practices.

Conventional understandings of institutions yield weak explanations for of how cohesion and associated thought styles are sustained. Some traditions simply regard institutions as regularities sustained for as long as the balance of costs, risks and payoffs permit (Calvert, 1998). Yet this fails to account for their entrenchment, exteriority (Zucker, 1977) imperative authority (Levitsky, 1998) or their clustering in particular elementary forms. Many traditions define institutions as rules (e.g., North, 1990, 2; Ostrom, 1990, 23; March and Olsen, 1989, 22). But a rule is a statement, either accepted or rejected, that in specified conditions, categories of people may, must or may not perform particular actions. If we were to ascribe (presumably unconscious) beliefs about rules, or even well-formed concepts about their precise content, to everyone within a tacit institution, this would lead to an implausibly intellectualist picture of human thought and action (Garfinkel, 1967). People may have few, vague or even inaccurate beliefs about their practices. Moreover, they may be able, at least initially, tacitly to coordinate practices without sharing statements of rules. Often only when practices are settled do categories for describing them stabilise, and people share understanding of their use. Conventions for writing cabinet minutes, practices of address in parliament or cabinet, standards of civil service drafting, even professional ethics were all established informal practices with expectations and sanctions long before being codified, whether in response to challenge or anomaly. Prior general ideas do not necessarily explain specific ones. Formal statements such as rules, are often *ex post facto* rationalisations of things done for other causes. Although in some empirical institutions (e.g., legal practice or science at their best) we may use a commitment to a general idea or rule to prescribe action in a particular case, we more often invoke general ideas in justification, exculpation or sense-making after the fact.

Practices

Neo-Durkheimian institutional theory solves these difficulties by defining institutions, in their elementary forms, as structures of ritually ordered and stylised *practices* (6, 2007; 2011). But what are practices? Practice theorists distinguish between

- sets of skills in empirical fields (Bourdieu, 1990), such as Inuit practices of sailing a canoe or Lakeland herdwick sheep farming (cf. Shove *et al*, 2012) or Rhodes' (2011) 'politeness' and 'gossip' which characterise life across the senior civil service; and

- micro-level practices which are configured differently in particular empirical fields: these are sometimes called generic or dispersed practices (Schatzki, 1996, 91).

The present argument concerns a subset of generic practices – called *operations* – undertaken differently in each elementary form. It focuses particularly on those concerned with accusing and blaming, deference and bargaining.

Unlike skills in empirical fields, operations do not carry readily specifiable rule-like conditions for successful performance. Contrasting *styles* of using blame, accusation or deference are cultivated in governments, but more powerful machinery than rule sets is required to understand how styles sustain different kinds of cohesion and manners of thought.

Operations are defined, therefore, by their illocutionary forces (Austin, 1962; Searle 1969). By contrast with speech act theory, the neo-Durkheimian argument is that actors reconstruct meanings of performances with varying biases cultivated by the mix of elementary forms.

Operational practices are, therefore, (a) common, repeated illocutionary forces (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) (b) undertaken through types of physical actions or categories of sentences, (c) typically described in verb-phrases, (d) sufficiently entrenched and recognised to be institutionalised, (e) ritually enacted (f) and enacted differently, by prevailing degrees of social regulation and integration in specific informal institutions.

Operational practices are neither habits nor routines. Neither habits nor routines need have particular illocutionary force. Unlike routines, operational practices are not necessarily staged

procedures: they can be enacted quite differently under different institutions or conventions. Unlike habits they are rarely undertaken for their own sake. Moreover, operational practices need not be only about social order. Indeed, practices of blaming and accusing are stylised practices which can give rise to *dis*order (cf. Durkheim, 1995; Turner 1995). Organisational norms may specify when, where and why particular operational practices may or may not acceptably be deployed but operations are not themselves norms. Indeed, conflicting norms disagree precisely about which practices are acceptable in which circumstances. Norms tend to be justified by reference to substantive worldviews or ideologies but the focus of the present argument is on thought style in practices rather than on justifications (6, 2014a).

Ritual interaction order

Operational practices are, Durkheimian traditions argue, organised, combined, and stylised in *ritually* established behaviours that enact social organisation (Bell, 1997; 6, 2007, 41-2; 2011, 72-6). Blame, deference, confrontation, are conducted differently with different illocutionary forces in, for example, competitive individualistic orders and in enclaved settings, because ritual interaction order is driven by different institutionalised forms of informal relations (6, 2007). In the Durkheimian understanding of these practices as rites, people enact (literally, metonymically or imperatively) in microcosm the degree of weak or strong regulation and integration that sustains the practice and which enactment (if successful) reinforces.

Elementary forms of institutions consist in sets of stylised operational practices which ritually cultivate styles of thought (Douglas, 1986) and styles of feeling or emotion which sustain distinct forms of cohesion (6, 2003b, 2007). 'Collective effervescence' (Durkheim, 1995) is defined in neo-Durkheimian theory as the style of emotion cultivated in face-to-face ritual interaction that cultivates and recharges thought styles peculiar to the (mix of) elementary form(s) of social relations, reinforces the prevailing pattern of weak or strong social integration and regulation, channels conflict either destructively (Durkheim cites the 1789 French revolution) or

constructively and which cultivates styles of moral commitment appropriate to the form's imperatives (cf. Shilling and Mellor, 1998; Olaveson 2001). Defined thus, effervescence will exhibit different emotions in individualistic institutions from those shown in the enclaved setting which Durkheim (1995) examined. Emotions will be those of competitive rivalry and mutual blame, accusation and recrimination, anger when patrons feel betrayed, but also cooler ones of deal-making, individual aspiration and stoic commitment of clients to patrons. Individualistic effervescence in administrations therefore elicits both individualised conflict and emotions that help channel it for individualistic cohesion.

Observable practices simultaneously reinforce and undermine *both* social regulation and social integration. For example, some blame practices assert social regulation upon the blamed while disciplining them to remain within a strongly integrated zone of organisation; others exclude, by marking boundaries between blamers and blamed. Practices must therefore be distinguished by the mix of elementary forms in which they combine and conflict, or we mistake their causal significance.

The neo-Durkheimian thesis is that each elementary form of informal quotidian practices governing encounters, meetings, briefings, informal conversations, emails and text messages, constitutes a *ritual interaction order* stylising sets of operational practices (Goffman, 1967; Collins, 2004). These orders shape thought more powerfully than formal, prescribed, public ceremonial ritual events (Kertzer, 1988) such as parliamentary votes (Crewe, 2005) or the theatricalities of ministerial press conferences.

Among operational practices, Durkheim distinguished negative from positive rites. Negative rites enact prohibition or condemnation, requiring, for example, exclusion of people of prohibited status, or eschewing certain practices (Durkheim 1995, 303-4) by blaming, confronting or accusing, for example (Douglas, 1970, 1992; Hood, 2011). They matter because threats to break or violations relations are important dynamics within and between forms. Positive rites, on the other hand, enact commitment to, or respect for, or participation in actions, and the conjoining of people with

approved statuses (Durkheim 1995, 330). Goffman (1967) showed that the distinction between positive and negative rites organises everyday practices of etiquette, deference, demeanour and embarrassment in interaction orders into avoidance and involvement rituals. This article shows that these forms also organise institutional processes in policymaking.

Among positive rites, Goffman (1967) emphasised deference, self-respect and respect for other individuals as persons. In total institutions such as asylums, he documented their attenuation among powerful and powerless people alike. But total institutions need not be so tyrannical. The intensity of ministerial life and the relentless hours of senior civil servants – recently re-emphasised by Rhodes (2011) – make the Westminster 'village' almost a total institution; only in the criterion of residence does the policymaking community fail Goffman's (1961) definition of an enclosed, tightly administered workplace cut off from ordinary life. But, despite dressings-down in whips' offices, and the abuse during Prime Minister's Questions, a positive cult of the individual is sustained by rites in many settings across Westminster and Whitehall. Figure 1 displays the structure of relationships between operational and empirical practices in positive and negative rites.

[Figure 1]

In hybrids, people may use vocabularies and categories drawn from one form's thought style, which is less strongly articulated in the mix. Such 'borrowed rhetoric' between elementary forms is significant, where the dominant form shapes uses to which practices are put more heavily than the one from which discourse is borrowed. In other cases, practices may be similar between forms, but not actually borrowed. For example, there may be active suppression of anomalies in isolate despotic cases and in enclaved forms: careful longitudinal analysis of dynamics is required to distinguish them (6, 2015b).

When they work successfully, rites of signing contracts, swearing oaths, taking vows and voting fix categories of duty and commitment among buyers and sellers, spouses, or electors and politicians (Durkheim 1957; 1995). Moreover, institutions not only fix particular categories, but establish strong or weak consistency within thought styles (Douglas, 1986). The same mechanisms

operate in *weakly* integrated forms (Goffman, 1959), as in the strongly integrated cases that Durkheim studied. Styles are ritually cultivated in the interaction order of daily business in meetings (Schwartzman, 1989; Peck *et al*, 2004), for example, among ministers and civil servants (6, 2011), as much as in acquaintances' casual conversations (Goffman, 1967).

Sometimes we can trace emergence or reinforcement of ways of using categories through negative and positive ritual practices over a set of conversations and meetings (6, 2011). The most significant categories thus fixed exhibit, in transposed form, the same degree of integration, internally and with other categories, as people performing the practices are informally institutionally integrated and regulated. Most work on quotidian ritual interaction orders examines how face-to-face settings generate emotional energy (Goffman, 1967; Collins, 2004). However, executive government is a setting in which much communication is done in writing (Heclo and Wildavsky, 1981). Memoranda, personal minutes, minutes of meetings, briefing notes, and speaking notes have long been recognised as genres of bureaucratic writing in Whitehall's domestic departments and the diplomatic service possesses its own baroque menu of communication genres. In the 1960s, a finely-honed sensibility was cultivated by which civil servants recognised polish and panache in drafting; a reputation for drafting a well-turned minute counted heavily for promotion. In the age of emails and social media, elegance may have given way to urgency (Rhodes, 2011). Yet the interaction order in the executive is still conducted and enacted in writing as much as in meetings. Face-to-face work still rests on prior exchange of written papers and results in minuted decisions. These documents are not merely records but interventions in a conversation, with their own rhetorical forms and, the case study will show, their own styles for engendering emotion, changing social relations and behavioural responses within institutional orderings. Few studies of organisations address ritual interaction orders displayed in such documents (Romm (Livermore) 1999 is a partial exception, but does not ground the argument in ritual forms). Perusing official files in The National Archives (TNA) (which are rich in informal notes which would today be emailed, as well as formal minutes) quickly demonstrates that face-to-face

communication has no monopoly on stirring and defusing emotion, building and demolishing status, or making and breaking solidarities. Drafting subtleties sustain analogous means of making bonds and fixing categories to those of deportment, gesture, facial expression and intonation in face-to-face communication. Nor is there endless innovation in written bureaucratic exchange: it is typically as ritually formulaic as politicians' conflicts in the House of Commons. The ritual interaction order of Whitehall's written communications contains and channels emotions, providing means both for their exacerbation and their calming.

The neo-Durkheimian argument predicts that written and face-to-face ritual interaction orders will show consistency in styles, dynamically reinforcing each other. This dynamic of mutual reinforcement during positive feedback is explored in the case study, where genres had been developed against the grain of the civil service's written ritual interaction order, reflecting the administration's competitive, accusatory, blame-ridden face-to-face ritual interaction order. Conversely, oral speech genres influenced the ritual style of written communication. Figure 2 shows the structure of expected cross-influence.

[Figure 2]

As rites, practices are repeated (Bell, 1997; Rothenbuhler, 1998). Repetition typically yields, not exact copies, but self-reinforcement, and more exaggerated radical forms (positive feedback), or else countervailing pressure (negative feedback) generating tension among practices or else accommodations or hybridity among elementary forms (6, 2003a). In either trajectory, the *series* of performances fixes categories: ritual repetition provides micro-foundations for feedback dynamics. Contrary to theories which assume positive feedback to be a stabilising force (Arthur 1994; Pierson 2004), the neo-Durkheimian argument is that amplification ultimately disorganises practices (Durkheim, 1951; 1984, Bk III) by throwing up disorganising anomalies, tensions or conflicts which, in turn, lead actors to react against the exaggerated disorganising form. The result is negative feedback or countervailing reaction among forms. Ritual operational practices of accusation, blame and reproof are causally central in negative feedback, because they initiate sanctioning practices

(Douglas, 1970; 1999). However, people can react against one elementary form only by reaching for others (Thompson *et al*, 1990). Unlike early cybernetic theory (Deutsch, 1963), feedback in neo-Durkheimian institutional dynamics produces, not information, but institutional pressure (Durkheim 1982). (Negative and positive rites do not map directly onto negative and positive feedback, because negative rites, at least, cross-tabulate positive and negative feedback. Discipline within and conflict among elementary forms are both conducted by negative rites.)

Causal process tracing (Bennett and Checkel, 2015) can examine qualitative data for evidence of theoretically expected mechanisms to explain the development and amplification of practices in face-to-face and written ritual interaction orders and their effects upon thought styles and collective capabilities for cohesion in administrations.

To develop and illustrate the argument, this article examines relations among negative and positive rites in face-to-face and written ritual interaction orders in an individualistically ordered governing executive undergoing positive feedback to a degree which appeared to threaten its cohesion, but where individualistic institutions also then sustained recovery in cohesion. An individualistically ordered administration is chosen because sceptics would regard its dynamic as furnishing a 'hard case' for an institutional theory to explain. Analysis shows that dynamics in ritual interaction orders within an administration are highly consequential, even in a case where readers might not expect it to be, if they suppose that ritual is mainly a feature of hierarchical settings. The study shows that individualistic behaviour requires sustained collective institutional capability to stylise its peculiar negative and positive rites in ways that sustained and recovered cohesion while also enabling competition and conflict. It therefore helps to understand how channelling and containment of conflict and competition within individualistic ordering can actually sustain capacities for cohesion, even when initial appearances suggest a risk of breakdown. In the UK, by no means all administrations are individualistically ordered: for example, the Attlee administration was fairly strongly hierarchically ordered (6, in press). Dynamics and relations among individualistic ritual interaction orders examined here are not specific to British government. They arise in any

governing executive, in cabinet systems or among presidential advisers. In the US, for example, Kennedy's advisers were individualistically ordered (6, 2011) but Eisenhower's were not (Haney, 1997; Bowie, 2001). Formal constitutional rules, civil service practices, conventions and codes (e.g., those in '*Questions of procedure for ministers*': Baker, 2000) ensure that hierarchy is always articulated to some degree in any administration. However, against this enduring backdrop of hierarchical formal institutions, the two 1960s Labour administrations under Prime Minister Harold Wilson were heavily individualistic in informal institutions which ordered ministers' relations with each other and which stylised their political judgement (6, 2015b: *contra* Bale, 1999). Leading ministers engaged in intense competitive rivalries. Wilson himself was the most powerful patron, though constantly threatened by his 'crown princes' and their claques of clients. Indeed, individualistic ordering became more marked over the life of his second (1966-1970) administration. The wider party and the commons backbench contained important enclaved groups on the socialist left; some ministers operated in peripheral zones of isolate ordering; but most ministers and their advisers were individualistically ordered in claques of followers around a few powerful patrons. The article focuses on 1968-9 when positive feedback dynamics of self-reinforcement and radicalisation in competitive individualistic ordering were deepening. Examining a Labour administration is also valuable in refuting the common misunderstanding that neo-Durkheimian arguments expect left-leaning ideologies to be sustained only in enclaved social organisation. Because thought style matters independently of ideology, the case demonstrates that a social democratic worldview can be sustained in highly individualistic institutions, just as enclaved groups of monetarists have sustained that ideology with a sectarian thought style (6, 2011, 2014a, in press). The 1966-70 Labour administration provides especially fertile illustration of practices of blame, reproof and admonition in both written and face-to-face ritual interaction orders and of ways in which cohesion was sustained in spite of, and partly through conflicts cultivated under individualistic institutions.

Robust coding of variants in practices in a written ritual interaction order requires access to extensive documentary evidence. Analysis needs cases for which official papers are available, and where there are also abundant memoirs, biographies and historical research enabling robust coding of social organisation in government. While Freedom of Information requests can be used to obtain limited numbers of documents on recent cases, achieving adequate breadth depends on selecting cases for which evidence is available under the thirty-year rule for the release of documents to TNA. This article therefore draws upon an extensive comparative study of informal institutional ordering and political judgement in British administrations from the 1960s and early 1970s which uses just such a very wide range of sources. The article examines written ritual interaction order in Wilson's response to fracturing cabinet collective responsibility in autumn 1968 and then face-to-face ritual interaction action order in deepening tensions in spring 1969 among ministers over the proposed legislation to deal with unofficial strikes in ways that trades unions regarded as 'punitive' (Jenkins, 1970; Tyler, 2006).

Using historical cases furnishes richer data sets than interviews on contemporary ones. Because most of constitutional structures and political pressures faced by 1960s governments still dominate politics today, they are of continuing relevance.

Ministerial diaries and memoirs notoriously require care. Crossman's, Benn's and Castle's were written for subsequent publication. Because little (Benn, Castle) or no (Crossman) editing was done, each diary presents their author in a poor light as often as they show them acting well. Some entries can readily be suspected of exaggeration or self-deception. Following historians' practice, I therefore draw inferences about events only where diarists corroborate each other. But for present purposes, daily entries, often written in the heat of emotions generated by encounters described, also reveal the manner in which ministers used language in daily performance (6, 2015b, annexe for details of coding method used).

In the section on individualistic written interaction order, we find hierarchical rhetoric borrowed for purposes specified by individualistic informal ordering. In the section on face-to-

face interaction order, some months later when self-reinforcement in competitive rivalry had advanced and threatened cohesion, we see hierarchy attenuated and find innovation in written ritual interaction order to handle deepening conflict in the face to face order.

The case illustrates the theoretical argument well because, despite all this, the administration recovered by dint of individualistic deal-making among the most powerful patrons: enough capability remained in its informal institutions to avoid collapse and to channel conflict constructively. The government only narrowly lost the subsequent election, for quite other reasons.

Written ritual interaction order: blame, reproof and admonition practices

On 21st October, 1968, Harold Wilson sent his ministers an unprecedented personal minute (CAB 164/666. 21.10.68: citations in this format are to TNA files). Wilson, himself a constant leaker and off-the-record briefer, had frequently admonished his colleagues against leaking and briefing and for dropping unattributable hints of dissatisfaction with policy or his leadership. Reminders of collective cabinet responsibility were not novel. Yet nothing sent by any previous postwar premier shows a similar tone.

Wilson complained of a 'growing desire of certain Ministers to divide themselves into two distinct personalities, the one Ministerial and the other constituency M.P. or philosophical innovator. Ministers are Ministers and should never appear schizophrenic'. Warning his colleagues that they could not excuse themselves by claiming to speak in personal capacities, Wilson wrote 'Gurus should on the whole be confined to the Wolverhampton circuit'[1] and that 'private enterprise philosophising' and 'kite-flying' would have to be cleared with his office beforehand.

The minute was accompanied by an announcement that Judith Hart, the Paymaster-General, would be responsible for vetting speeches – a move that diarists Tony Benn (Postmaster-General)

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[1] Enoch Powell, sometimes derided as a 'guru', delivered his outrageous 'rivers of blood' speech in his Wolverhampton constituency earlier that year. The word 'circuit' may refer to that city's group of Methodist churches which, in the nineteenth century, had a reputation for extravagant evangelical preachers – something Wilson's Methodist upbringing would have taught him.

and Richard Crossman (Social Services Secretary) predicted correctly that ministers would not accept.

The immediate occasion for this acid remonstration was a constituency speech by Benn attacking the BBC. Suspecting Benn of timing it to upstage his own planned speech, Crossman appealed to Wilson to censure the Postmaster-General (Crossman, 1977, III, 228-234; Benn, 1988, 107-113). Crossman suspected Wilson of sympathising with or even authorising Benn's speech. Wilson may also have been concerned with a very critical, but unreported speech which Anthony Crosland (President of the Board of Trade) had made at a fringe meeting at the party's Blackpool conference three weeks before (Jefferys, 1999, 135-6).

Wilson appears to have composed the minute himself, probably by dictating onto tape. It was written and despatched very quickly with few drafts; his private office had limited time to polish the prose.

Some background shows how intriguing the minute was. Most prime ministers dealt privately with errant ministers, rather than issuing a generally circulated minute: neither Benn nor Crosland was summoned for a dressing-down, although many premiers have sacked ministers for less. These two offenders survived Wilson's October reshuffle and were allowed the limelight of major legislation in 1969.

Moreover, as 'private enterprise forays' went in this administration, Benn's and Crosland's speeches were mild. In 1966-7, Wilson had relaxed whipping discipline over the backbenches, with predictably damaging results (Short, 1989). Wilson's 'crown princes' – George Brown (former Economic Affairs and then Foreign Secretary, now out of government), James Callaghan (Home Secretary), Roy Jenkins (Chancellor of the Exchequer) – went on leaking, kite-flying and briefing against their colleagues after the minute was issued; so did Crossman. In 1969, Callaghan showed even greater public disloyalty Benn or Crosland, without eliciting a similar minute.

The minute's performative, illocutionary work combined blame of persons unnamed, reproof for falling standards and admonition to better behaviour. On its face, its rhetoric appealed to

collectivity and loyalty and to assert the authority of the prime minister's office. In passages not quoted above, it described clearance procedures. But the language of hierarchical ordering was only borrowed. The informal context of ministerial organisation reminds us that much more was going on: discourse analysis of the text would miss the institutional dynamics. Wilson was not standing above the individualistic organisation of the cabinet to call it back to some lost hierarchical ordering, but engaging in operations as redolent of individualistic ordering as his ministers' freelance 'philosophising'. He was asserting his pre-eminence as a patron in an ordering of rival patrons. In reminding ministers of his efforts to cover for them in the Commons and the press, he underlined the individualistic 'general exchange' underpinning their relations, even as they fought out their rivalries.

Turning to the written interaction order, the minute displays more than hierarchical vocabularies of collectivity, clearance and authorisation. Ironic phrases about 'philosophising', 'thinking aloud', being 'schizophrenic', 'kite flying' and 'private enterprise' are the language of individualistic rivalry, competitive belittling and self-assertion. None could have come from the pen of Burke Trend, Cabinet Secretary and guardian during the 1960s of the true meaning of injunctions and phrases in '*Questions of Procedure for Ministers*'.

Choosing the weak instrument of a minute circulated to all ministers rather than individual dressings-down reflected his judgement of how much further he could push his fissiparous colleagues. Individualistic ordering borrowed rhetoric from hierarchical written ritual interaction order, but not its accountabilities. Wilson hoped that, together with the weak announcement of Hart's role, and the minute's unprecedented tone would signal enough toughness to indicate his continued determination but not so much as to break his fragile internal coalition.

Benn's and Crossman's diaries show that they read accurately the minute's tone, the choice of the politically weak Hart as speech-checker and the absence of individual dressings-down or a further reshuffle. They appreciated that they betokened no significant change in, but careful maintenance of the balance of individualistically ordered power within government.

Face-to-face ritual interaction order: accusation, assertion and warning practices

The following year's deep crisis in the administration's institutional ordering shows that the October minute failed in its express purpose. Yet it failed in a way that reinforced the highly individualistic ritual interaction order from which it sprang, by promoting positive feedback and ferociously competitive collective effervescence in recrimination. By June 1969, ministers' growing willingness to use the same blame practices, individual assertion and confrontational language that Wilson had done in October 1968, rocked his premiership. The battles over the *In place of strife* proposals for trades union law reform and, most controversially, to give ministers powers to order postponement of unofficial strikes for negotiations, to require ballots before official strikes and to impose settlements in inter-union disputes, are well documented (e.g., Jenkins, 1970; Tyler, 2006). Here, attention is given only to the way in which the face-to-face ritual interaction order through which conflict was conducted within the cabinet shaped the written interaction order.

An extraordinary confrontation occurred in full cabinet on 8th May 1969, after Callaghan had voted at the Party's National Executive Committee (NEC) for a motion condemning Castle's trades union law reform proposals, and Douglas Houghton (chair of the Parliamentary Labour Party) had mobilised the backbenches against the plan (PREM 13/2725. 7.5.69). In cabinet, Callaghan told Wilson brutally that the administration could not get a majority for a bill. This kind of overt pessimism is always a sensitive anomaly in individualistic institutions, because the ordering is sustained by exchanges based on optimistic expectations of material betterment as a result of strategic action. Here is Crossman's (1977, III, 480) account of the face-to-face ritual of confrontation:

'I finally got irritated with Callaghan and said, 'But look, we are not facing up to the real issue, which is that Douglas Houghton has lined himself up with people who are trying to get rid of the Prime Minister... He is prepared to see the Prime Minister go because he hopes to get another Prime Minister who will drop the Bill... [T]his is totally unrealistic and

it would not be credible unless was believed that there was somebody in the Cabinet who held the same view. I know and you know that Roy Jenkins and Barbara Castle are as deeply committed as the Prime Minister and there is no sense in suggesting that the Prime Minister could be got rid of. I detest these rats who are leaving our sinking ship to climb onto another sinking ship. We have got to sink or swim together.' At this point Callaghan said from the other side of the table, 'Not sink or swim, sink or sink,' and I said, 'Why can't you resign if you think like that? Get out, Jim, get out.' We had never had such a scene in Cabinet before (I was told later on that it was a phenomenally dramatic moment) and there was an awkward silence. Then Jim muttered, 'Of course, if my colleagues want me to resign I'm prepared to go if they insist on my going.' He had been punctured. He hadn't responded, he crawled and it was quite a moment.'

For once, Castle's (1984, 647) account confirms much of Crossman's. She added the ending: 'We all sat electrified till Harold intervened soothingly, 'We don't want you to go. We think you should stay and be convinced.' Nonetheless I could see he was secretly delighted.'

Revealingly, Crossman framed the issue not in ideological terms, but as a matter of individual power and challenge, and in emotional exhilaration of collective effervescence in its individualistic register. (In the debate about the *In place of strife* proposals, ideology provided at most a common background: Castle and Wilson disagreed with Crossman and other ministers not about the principle of state involvement in industrial relations, settled by the 1967 Donovan Commission, but how Labour could extend it without ruining relations with the union movement.) Importantly for understanding the nature of an interaction order in which such a confrontation can occur, but be talked down so that business can continue, Castle reports that Callaghan presented his report on the next item, Northern Ireland, 'unperturbed': despite the bitter confrontation, cohesion was maintained, albeit with difficulty.

Benn's (1988, 166) account of the meeting is superficially very different. He claims that the main confrontation was between himself and Wilson. Yet his version also personalises the challenge, turning a policy issue into one of individual leadership and rivalry. Significantly, Benn reports himself taking the opportunity to raise with Wilson his frustration with such aspects of the face-to-face ritual interaction order as use of ministerial titles in cabinet, which he found too redolent of hierarchy. Benn reports his intervention in the same sentence as he claims a personal achievement in besting Wilson ('I knocked Harold for six').

The diaries show that this Cabinet meeting represents just one peak in a trajectory toward increasingly heavy individualistic ordering, marked by clashes among the principal figures which occasionally erupted into rancour, confrontation and blame. Nothing comparable can be found in the inside accounts we possess of the Churchill, Eden, Macmillan, Douglas-Home or Heath cabinets (which also included many strong personalities).

After this meeting, backbench support for Castle's proposed legislation including its 'penal clauses', withered further. The trades union leadership refused to accept them. Cabinet ministers realised that the bill would not pass and even if it did, the confrontation with the unions might break the administration. Gambling on voters' continuing concern about unofficial strikes, Wilson decided himself to lead the talks with the Trades Union Congress (TUC), so increasing his own vulnerability. His so-called 'inner cabinet', the 'Management Committee', (from which Callaghan had been excluded, but not sacked as Home Secretary, after his vote at the NEC) met several times each week during June's intensive negotiations with the TUC.

Moreover, unprecedentedly, the trajectory in the face-to-face interaction order spilled into the written ritual interaction order. Michael Halls, Wilson's principal private secretary, developed a genre of blow-by-blow reporting to capture the emotional timbre of the face-to-face ritual interaction order. Most cabinet committee minutes, even during disagreements, are written in sparse, impersonal prose and points are not attributed to individual ministers. By contrast, the June 1969 Management Committee minutes, although not quite verbatim, report identify each

minister's contribution and use emotionally highly charged vocabulary to capture the ferocious clashes among individual ministers. No cabinet committee minutes from Macmillan's, Home's or Heath's administrations present comparably rancorous exchanges in so raw a style; memoirs and secondary studies show greater collegiality or at least resigned acceptance of authority in those administrations.

These minutes show that even with Callaghan and other irreconcilables absent, confrontation and very blunt warnings were becoming normal. Here we examine 17th June, the day before Wilson and Castle settled for the TUC's figleaf 'solemn and binding undertaking' to discipline member unions into resolving unofficial strikes. Crossman, now turning against the bill, is reported as warning Wilson against committing the Cabinet to legislation before the necessary soundings had been made of the T.U.C. and of the Parliamentary Labour Party' (PREM 13/2728. 17.6.69). He went on bluntly to warn that the TUC would reject the latest proposal outright. Describing bitter backbench opposition, Mellish, the Chief Whip, warned the prime minister about backbench discontent before his colleagues in a manner that in most administrations would have been reserved for private conversation. If, he said, the TUC rejected it, 'the government would not get the Bill through either by using the guillotine [a timetable control motion – P6] or by sending it 'upstairs' [to the House of Lords – P6]'. Wilson retorted by accusing Mellish of defeatism (as Crossman had accused Callaghan): 'The logic', Wilson is reported as arguing, 'of [Mellish's] argument now was that Government should always give in against pressure from the Party and the unions. This was in effect saying that T.U.C. should govern which would totally destroy the credibility of the government.' Crossman then launched a diatribe. He is minuted as 'desperately disappointed' in the government's rejection of the TUC proposal, and warning that the party would be 'bewildered' at the sight of a Labour government that 'decided to pick a quarrel with the T.U.C.' and then describe the TUC's plan as a forced concession, He concluded by warning, in a tone reminiscent of the very thing of which he had accused Callaghan in cabinet the previous month, that the administration faced 'disintegration or something worse'. The minutes put this last phrase

in direct speech, contrary to most Cabinet Office conventions of drafting minutes. Castle remonstrated with Crossman that if he had 'had his way earlier the Government would have achieved nothing. She and the Prime Minister were not 'hell bent' [verbatim in original] on destroying the Party', as, presumably, Crossman had accused Castle.

This meeting was as nothing to the ferocity of the cabinet meeting which followed immediately afterward, as described by Crossman's, Castle's and Benn's diaries and Jenkins' memoirs. The diarists report Peter Shore's dramatic defection from supporting the bill and Callaghan being 'smooth' (Castle, 1984, 673) and even 'oily' (Crossman, 1977, 521). Between cabinet meetings, Jenkins finally and regretfully abandoned the Bill's cause, recognising that his individual political interests now required him to distance himself: ~~he~~ Jenkins (1991, 272) described Castle receiving his news 'like St. Sebastian receiving another arrow'. At the second cabinet meeting of that day, Wilson, in Crossman's (1977, 523) account, rounded on his ministers, calling them 'soft... cowardly... lily-livered', and by turns demanding a decision and refusing one offered by Callaghan. Wilson, asserting the core dimensions of individualistic organisation as weakly integrated and regulated, insisted 'Barbara and I must not be tied down. We must be free to negotiate...' Crossman then reports himself having 'the most searing, awful, bloody row I have ever had with Harold'. Crossman reproached Wilson for his abuse of his ministers and attribution of motives and for 'wrecking and destroying the movement' (Crossman, 1977, 524). Whether he said or merely wanted to have said these things, we cannot be sure, because neither Castle nor Benn report them, but all accounts report embittered face-to-face confrontation. Yet Benn (1988, 187) identified the individualistic character of the disagreements when writing of the cabinet on 17th that it was about 'a problem of face'. He describes Castle and Wilson as 'extremely bitter', and Wilson's threatened resignation as a bluff. Crossman's account has the prime minister expressing personal spite against his disloyal ministers.

Again, no meetings of comparable emotional tenor can be found in the accounts of the altogether more strongly regulated and integrated administrations led by Macmillan, Home and

Heath. Yet in Wilson's administration, 17th June was no aberration. Rather, the enactment of brutal ritualised blame, reproach in deeply individualised, competitive collective effervescence, culminated from five years of rivalries, mistrust and manoeuvring between Wilson, his crown princes and their claques. Since 1966-7, even Wilson's clients increasingly sought autonomy from him. The face-to-face interaction order enacted the institutional ordering and elicited innovation in the written order; practices of blame, reproach, reproof and threat coalesced into a highly ritualised standoff. The meeting's emotional tenor exemplifies well the collective effervescence characteristic of an individualistic register rather than the enclaved register typically examined.

By June 1969, positive feedback had gone sufficiently far in individualistic ordering to have led to disorganisation, just as in the 1970s positive feedback in enclaving among British socialists and pro-European social democrats almost split the party. Yet the principal point about the crisis of 17th June 1969 was that, the next day, a deal was agreed with the TUC using a figleaf formula, Wilson negotiated determinedly to save his face and his threatened premiership; key barons such as Callaghan and Jenkins and Crossman accepted it; conflict within cabinet subsided; no minister was sacked and none resigned. Informal organisation did not collapse: rivalries continued, but the administration recovered. The following year, the administration went into the election confidently and lost only narrowly. Wilson survived as leader and become prime minister again in 1974. Practices of blame, confrontation and threat in fact *sustained* individualistic organisation, rather than undermining it. Nor were they simply vents or discharges, while the real business was conducted more coolly. Rather, these negative rites were the means of conducting the real business: had bilateral conversations been crucial, the diarists would have described them, because Crossman, Castle and Benn all did so when private talk was consequential. The drama enacted the institutions, and made continued organisation possible. For the positive rites and deal-making capabilities that Wilson sustained in talks with the TUC throughout May and June 1969's were the converse within individualistic ordering of the negative rites his cabinet enacted and by which conflicts were both conducted and contained. Framing work within administration as

individualistic, sustained capabilities to do the same with the trades unions. On the surface, the negative rites conducted conflict. But when understood in their full informal institutional setting, written minute and face-to-face accusation, bluff and confrontation reflected a strategy of containing conflict and sustaining individualistic organisation without breakdown. The individualistically ordered practices, in these two interaction orders, fixed categories about relations within the Labour movement, about political cohesion and about prime ministerial prestige in a competitive patronage order, and a process by which offsetting forces were negotiated within the cabinet and with the trades unions.

Conclusion

Understanding how practices work to sustain cohesion through conflict in government requires distinguishing elementary from empirical institutions. In positive feedback dynamics within and negative feedback processes among elementary forms, ritual performance of operational practices in both negative and positive rites shapes capacity for cohesion by cultivating thought style. It does so by cultivating collective effervescence, but in competitive and self-aggrandising ways in individualistic institutions unlike the communal bonding emotions it sustains in enclaves. Differences in emotional timbre of blame and recrimination practices reflect this. In executive government, ritual interaction order theory must be extended from face-to-face settings to written communication and to their interaction. The implicit agenda of the written ritual order, too, enacts social organisation to attenuate emotion and fix categories. In governing, written ritual is as fundamental as face-to-face performance: each interaction order depends on, spills over into and shapes the other. Thus, the article presents fresh micro-foundations for the causal process by which informal institutions shape judgement and cohesion.

The neo-Durkheimian institutional approach argues that institutionalised ritual practices stylise judgement, developing some capabilities for cohesion while causing others to atrophy. In

individualistic organisation, categories are cultivated of individual responsibility and liability, deal-making, individual prestige, and of transactional confrontations and accommodation as episodes in larger clusters of relationships. Capabilities of individual assertion and of ritualised confrontation are cultivated in individualistic ordering, but it also cultivates practices of talking down crises and of finding ways to paper over confrontation to sustain cooperative organisation. Pointing simply to preferences and constraints or to individual personalities cannot explain the trajectory of endangered and recovered cohesion.

Policymaking is a ritual process. The anthropologist Victor Turner (1974) argued that ritual practices can only be understood in their sequence in more or less institutionalised narrative structures: Figures 1 and 2 display the causal structure underpinning the narrative. Turner's studies examined sequences where outbreaks of enclaved effervescent organisation were reintegrated in hierarchical ordering, showing that confrontation did not merely vent frustrations, but sustained collective capabilities. After confrontation, new forms of learning, judgement and collaboration, albeit biased and offset by unlearning, were made possible. This article shows that the same is true in individualistic ordering. Practices of blame, confrontation and reproof in competitive individualistic ordering can generate positive feedback, even to the brink of disorganisation. Yet, when that dynamic is not pushed so far, these negative rites can elicit positive rites of deal-making and thereby cultivate capabilities for mutual adjustment, deal-making and collaboration as people learn about the limits of others' tolerances for regulation and integration within the prevailing ordering. The same could be shown for practices in mixes which show greater articulation of isolate, enclaved and hierarchical ordering. Thereby, in these elementary forms of ritual interaction order, operational practices sustain distinct kinds of cohesion and capabilities in governing.

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Together make up…

Leading people to enact…

Reinforces and radicalises institutions to yield…

Which in turn elicits…

Empirical process

Operational practice e.g., blaming

Operational practice e.g., rebutting

Operational practice e.g., suggesting compromise

Empirical practice e.g., conducting disagreement in cabinet

Informal institutions and ritual interaction order, e.g., predominantly a competitive individualistic ordering

More intense form of this ordering e.g., increasingly intense individualistic blame (negative rite), patron-client claque building (positive rite) and competition

Stabilisation from within the ordering e.g., individualistic deal-making, or pre-eminence of one patron

Alternatively, countervailing pressure, e.g., assertion of alternative ordering such as hierarchy or isolate ordering

Institutional process

Each carries particular illocutionary force

Exhibits particular weighted mix of four basic styles

Cultivates particular thought styles and feeling styles

Recursively produces positive feedback, distinct style of collective effervescence

Gives rise to internal institutional settlement or negative feedback, in either case defusing of collective effervescence

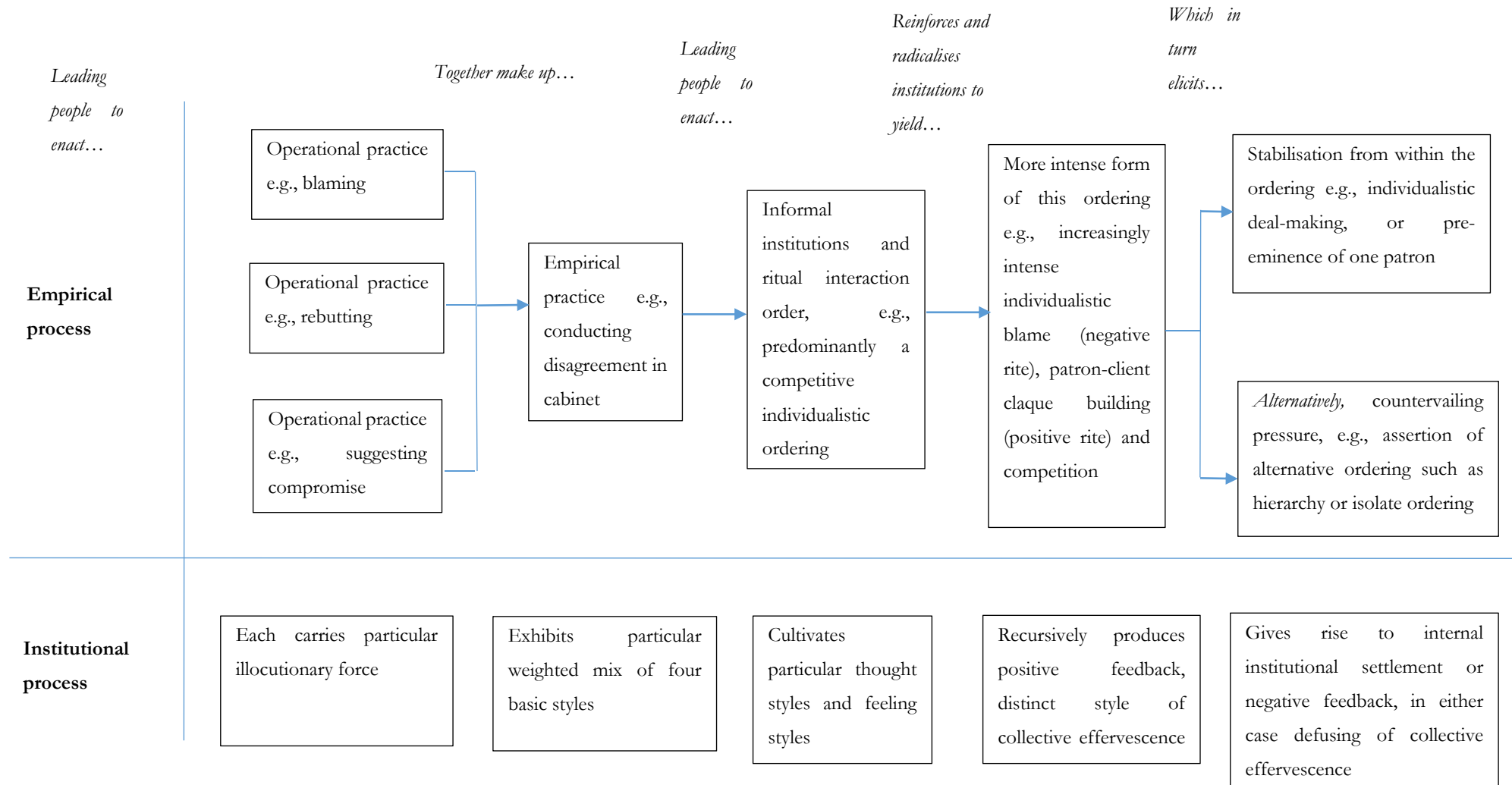**Figure 1: Micro-foundations of practices: empirical and institutional levels of analysis – neo-Durkheimian institutional theory**

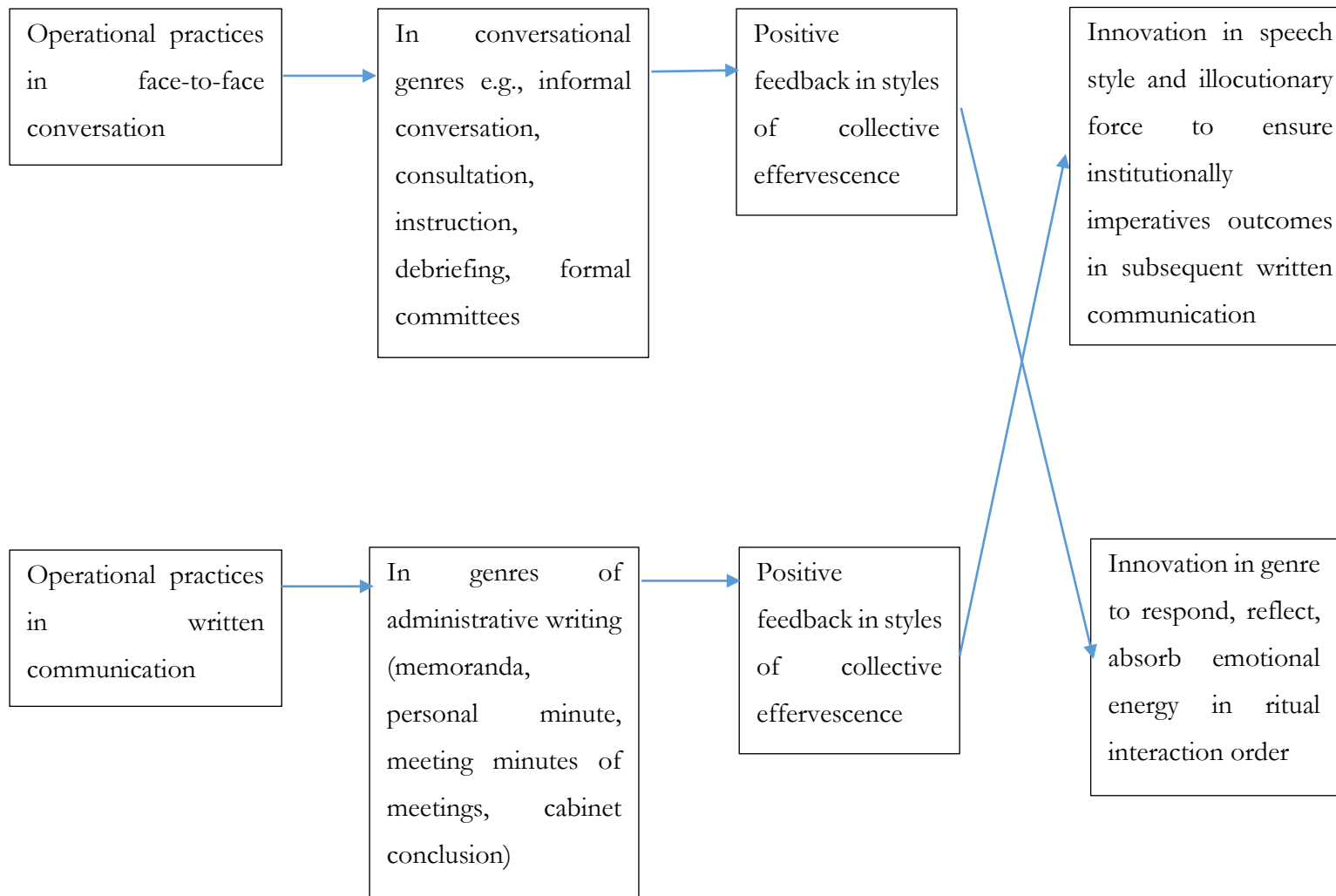| Operational practices in face-to-face conversation | In conversational genres e.g., informal conversation, consultation, instruction, debriefing, formal committees | Positive feedback in styles of collective effervescence | Innovation in speech style and illocutionary force to ensure institutionally imperatives outcomes in subsequent written communication |
| Operational practices in written communication | In genres of administrative writing (memoranda, personal minute, meeting minutes of meetings, cabinet conclusion) | Positive feedback in styles of collective effervescence | Innovation in genre to respond, reflect, absorb emotional energy in ritual interaction order |

Figure 2: Cross-influence of face to face and written ritual interaction orders in government – the neo-Durkheimian institutional framework