cesses as articulations of power, we commend consideration of an approach that combines a (constructivist) ontology of “becoming” with an appreciation of these processes as political articulations (Willmott, 2005).

REFERENCES


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Discussing “Discourse and Institutions”: A Reply to Lok and Willmott

We welcome the comments of Professors Lok and Willmott on our recent paper proposing a discursive approach to institutional theory (Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2004). Our intention in writing the original article was to connect institutional theory to recent developments in social constructionism (e.g., Gergen, 1999) by reframing institutionalization processes from a discursive perspective. The roots of new institutional theory (in particular, Meyer & Rowan, 1977) lie in the work of two of the founding figures of social constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), and discourse analysis itself grows out of very similar philosophical perspective (see Phillips & Hardy, 2002). Therefore, it seemed to us that the exploration of discourse analysis as a new and interesting avenue for future institutional research was a useful and feasible project. In addition, we believed it could help overcome some of the problems institutional theory currently faces, particularly in terms of explaining processes of institutionalization and the nature of institutions.

Lok and Willmott raise two key issues. First, they question our definition of discourse and discuss the important difference between realism and social constructionism. Second, they argue that we have not gone far enough in our attempt to reconnect institutional theory with a more developed concern for power and politics. In the spirit of this dialogue section, we briefly expand and clarify our arguments in response to the constructive points raised by Lok and Willmott. We hope that these two pieces will help to clarify and augment some of the arguments in the original paper.

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM AND REALISM

Lok and Willmott make much of our distinction between realism and social constructionism.1 We argued, in our paper (Phillips et al., 2004), that much of the recent literature in institutional theory adopts a “realist” position, pos-

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1 Although Lok and Willmott use the term constructivism, we use social constructionism both here and in our original article. The term constructivism, with roots in developmental psychology (Piaget, 1954), describes an epistemological perspective that emphasizes the notion of people as active constructors, rather than passive receptors, of knowledge: “reality” from a constructivist perspective is constructed in people’s minds. Social constructionism builds on these ideas but emphasizes the social nature of reality—it is not constructed in people’s minds but in their social interaction, and especially in their linguistic interaction because of the enduring traces that this form of interaction is particularly capable of producing.
iting the social world as having an existence outside and independent of the meaningful linguistic activity through which it is constituted. In contrast, a social constructionist position suggests a social world that cannot be separated from the processes of social construction that constitute it. From this latter point of view, the social world has no existence outside of the processes of meaningful interaction through which social objects come to be: “Language and other forms of representation gain their meaning from the ways in which they are used in relationships” (Gergen, 1999: 48).

Lok and Willmott argue that while we espouse a social constructionist perspective, we do not live up to it in our writing. In fact, they go so far as to say that our “framework is dominated by a realist genre of investigation” (p. 477), symptomatic of which “is the absence of any indication of (reflexive) awareness of how the identification of actions, texts, and so forth is itself an articulation of specific (and contested) language games” (p. 478). The issue of what forms of writing are consistent with a social constructionist perspective is an important one, especially since social constructionist writing increasingly is being published in outlets, including the Academy of Management Review, that traditionally have been the domain of realist theory and research. At the heart of the issue is whether, when adopting a social constructionist perspective, one can make traditional sorts of theoretical claims regarding concepts and relationships between concepts. Lok and Willmott clearly think not.

We disagree. The adoption of a social constructionist position does not render us unable to theorize in a traditional academic fashion. Rather, it requires that the concepts and relationships we propose be consistent with an understanding of reality as socially constructed, and with the adoption of a particular intellectual position with respect to the process of theorizing, a position that Rorty (1989) calls “irony.”

Such a position suggests that while making theoretical claims regarding the status of concepts and the relationships between them, we know that our theories and concepts are simply social constructions of a particular kind, rather than “true” reflections of some external reality. Our theories, like all social constructions, make claims of various sorts to community standards of truthfulness that may be based on a range of different tests; our theoretical claims to truth are therefore as subject to this constraint as are any others: “For the constructionist, all claims to knowledge, truth, objectivity or insight are founded within communities of meaning making—including the claims of the constructionists themselves” (Gergen, 2001: 2). Adopting a social constructionist position need neither keep us from developing theory nor entail an overly onerous reflexive position in which the socially constructed status of our concepts and theories is noted at every turn. It simply means that we accept the nature of the knowledge we produce and the inescapable role of the practices of the community within which the knowledge was produced.

It is fair to say that we did little to acknowledge the status of our theory as part of a specific and contested language game. Doing so may well have added nuance to our discussion, so perhaps this was a mistake. This does not mean, however, that we engaged in a “realist” account of those concepts and their relationships.

Our treatment of these concepts explicitly frames them as socially constructed. We argue that discourse, texts, and institutions are produced in and through language, and, further, texts (including our article, Lok and Willmott’s comment, and this response) have meaning through their connections to other texts and effect to the extent they become used across situations and, so, embedded in discourse. As we suggested above, this issue goes well beyond the acceptability of our paper: social constructionist theory and research represent an important and growing stream of organization studies that will be well served by more systematic and in-depth theoretical formulations of key concepts and relationships.

**POWER AND INSTITUTIONS**

Another important issue Lok and Willmott raise concerns the role of power in processes of institutionalization; they claim that our aim is to reconnect institutional theory to a concern with power and politics, but we fail to provide a well-

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2 This is a subject that we have pursued at some length elsewhere (e.g., Hardy, Phillips, & Clegg, 2001; Phillips & Hardy, 2002).
developed conceptualization of power. This question of power is important—and we will return to it shortly. It is worth noting, however, that the quote offered by Lok and Willmott to describe our aims is from the second to the last paragraph of our article. There, as a concluding comment, we suggest that our “concern with ensuring that texts embed reconnects institutional theory to a concern with power and politics” (2004: 648), a much narrower claim than that attributed to us by Lok and Willmott, and in no way describing a primary aim of the article. In other words, reconnecting institutional theory to power and politics was not the aim of the article but, rather, a question of what needs to be done next.

This does not mean we think the links among power, discourse, and institutions are unimportant, simply that their exploration was not a primary aim of the article. The aim was to provide a foundation for further exploration of a discursive approach to institutional theory, one aspect of which is an increased opportunity to explore the dynamics of power and politics around the process of institutionalization. Although we did not, because of length restrictions, draw out the political implications of our arguments, our analysis of the processes of institutionalization is consistent with, and could be further elaborated through, an analysis of the power and politics of each stage.

CONCLUSIONS

While we welcome Lok and Willmott’s thought-provoking comments, we maintain that a discourse analytic approach provides an important avenue for the development of institutional theory, providing the necessary theoretical infrastructure to begin to understand the nature of institutionalization and the dynamics of power that frame institutional processes, including those of our own academic community. Where, perhaps, we diverge the most from Lok and Willmott is in terms of different choices about how best to use our agency within this community, and within the prevailing discourse, to further our intellectual agenda.

Lok and Willmott suggest that we have produced a “timid and ambivalent explication” (p. 479), implying that a more radical approach would be better. Of course, our arguments were shaped by prevailing discourses and genres that permeate our field—as are Lok and Willmott’s (cf. Hardy, Grant, Oswick, & Putnam, 2005). However, the paper has been published, our ideas are being consumed, and scholars such as Lok and Willmott are engaging with them and helping us develop them further. We consider this a success, and part of that success grows out of engaging with the community and working within the standards of discourse of that community.

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3 Indeed, they have been a long-standing concern of ours (e.g., Hardy & Phillips, 2004; Lawrence, Winn, & Jennings, 2001; Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2000).
Beyond Correspondence? Metaphor in Organization Theory

Recently, Cornelissen (2005) criticized comparison models of metaphor (e.g., Oswick, Keenoy, & Grant, 2002) and proposed a “domains-interaction” model. Drawing on work in cognitive science, his conceptualization suggests that the application of metaphor in organizational theorizing involves “the conjunction of whole semantic domains in which a correspondence between terms and concepts is constructed” (2005: 751). According to Cornelissen, there are three main stages to the domains-interaction model—namely, the development of a generic structure between a source domain (the metaphor) and a target domain (the organizational phenomena under consideration), the development and elaboration of a blend, and the emergence of new meaning. Cornelissen claims that, through a two-way interactive process, insights into both domains are produced and new meaning beyond that preexisting in either domain is generated. This account is favored over comparison models characterized as presenting a rather simplistic unidirectional process of transfer or carryover of properties from a metaphor to a particular organizational construct.

While Cornelissen makes a valuable contribution, we feel that he overemphasizes the utility and generalizability of his approach and inappropriately dismisses alternative explanations. In particular, he asserts that “current perspectives are flawed and misguided” (Cornelissen, 2005: 751). Here we contend that there are good reasons why the domains-interaction model does not have the universal applicability claimed and why it should not be perceived as the only viable approach to metaphor use in organization theory.

There are three main parts to this commentary. First, we explore the extent to which the correspondence approach represents a fundamental departure from conventional perspectives. Second, we examine the types and categories of metaphor that are utilized in organization theory and question whether the interaction model adequately accommodates this inherent diversity. Finally, we present a case for treating correspondence and comparison approaches as complementary rather than competing explanations of the role of metaphor in organizing and theory building.

BEYOND SIMILARITY AND FAMILIARITY?

Cornelissen is critical of comparison theorists for focusing on similarity. However, in developing his perspective, he indicates that the preliminary stage in the creation of a metaphor is what he refers to as the formation of a generic structure in which “the structures to be seen as parallel are found, and the correspondences between these structures are mapped” (2005: 758). How do the structures come to be seen as parallel? Although he is careful to use the word “parallel” rather than “comparison,” we would suggest that Cornelissen is employing the very same process of comparison of which he is so dismissive. How else can a “generic structure” be discerned other than through the initial identification of points of similarity? Ultimately, it would appear that the domains-interaction model fails to escape the grasp of similarity.

Cornelissen also criticizes the assertion that metaphors serve to make “the familiar more familiar” (Oswick et al., 2002: 295). Our underlying intention in making this comment was to suggest that the process of selecting a metaphor is not a neutral one insofar as an individual is, in our view, inclined to select a source domain that is thought to have resemblances to, or resonate with, the target domain onto which it is to be projected. In other words, a given metaphor is picked because it intuitively fits or has what has also been described as “the potential to produce vivid imagery” (Morgan, 1986: 12). Apart from a process of random word association, it is difficult to see how else one could select a metaphor. For example, the “machine metaphor” (Morgan, 1986) was selected as a way of seeing an organization because certain properties of machines were perceived to correspond to aspects of orga-
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