VARIATIONS IN PRACTICE ADOPTION: THE ROLES OF CONSCIOUS REFLECTION AND DISCOURSE

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We argue that our understanding of practice adoption has been limited by the prevailing view that variations in adoption stem from consciously made decisions. We counter this position by arguing that a key—and neglected—aspect of the adoption process concerns the level of conscious engagement of those involved. In so doing, we theorize that there are two distinct institutional dimensions necessary for understanding how practice adoption takes place: acceptance and implementation. We develop these dimensions to provide a framework showing that different within-organization responses will be associated with differing levels of acceptance of the need to adopt a practice—the acceptance dimension—and differing levels of conscious reflection during implementation of the practice—the implementation dimension. We then unpack this framework to explain how variations in discourse play a determining role in how practice adoption unfolds. This reveals an interesting institutional paradox: the discursive characteristics that make a practice more easily accepted also reduce the conscious engagement needed for its implementation. We spend the balance of the article developing the implications of our theorizing for understanding the process of practice adoption.

Institutional theorists have long documented the manner in which field-level pressures shape organizational action (e.g., Hinings & Greenwood, 1988; Meyer, Scott, & Strang, 1987; Selznick, 1949; Tolbert & Zucker, 1983). However, while such pressures are certainly highly salient in determining organizational outcomes, most scholars agree that they are not fully deterministic (DiMaggio, 1988; Hirsch & Lounsbury, 1997; Oliver, 1991). In other words, even as legitimate practices—those behaviors, strategies, ideas, technologies, or structures (Strang & Soule, 1998) that have obtained a "'social fact' quality [that] renders them as the only conceivable, 'obvious,' or 'natural' way to conduct an organizational activity" (Oliver, 1991: 148)—

diffuse across a field, few, if any, are put into use unchanged (Ansari, Fiss, & Zajac, 2010; Czarniawska & Sevon, 1996; Strang & Soule, 1998; Zilber, 2006). While extant work has been important for overcoming the perception that organizations are passive receptors of legitimate ideas, our understanding of what happens *within* organizations when new practices are adopted remains in a distinctly nascent state. Indeed, as Suddaby, Elsbach, Greenwood, Meyer, and Zilber recently lamented, research continues to "focus on elaborating the independent variable—institutions—but pays little attention to elaborating the dependent variable—organizations. . . . The lack of explication of the organization and its relationship to the institutional environment thus presents another black box" (2010: 1239).

While direct research into how organizations implement legitimate practices remains scarce, existing explanations primarily attribute variation in their use to the purposeful adaptation by those implementing them (e.g., Ansari et al., 2010). Investigations of this sort have generally focused on the ways in which variation emerges

as a consequence of the decoupling of all or parts of a practice from the organization's formal and/or informal structure. There is no doubt that some practices are purposefully decoupled from day-to-day activities for legitimacy reasons (Meyer & Rowan, 1977) or because those adopting a practice believe that it lacks consistency with existing intraorganizational dynamics (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996). However, such explanations have been primarily concerned with factors that influence organization members in "accepting or rejecting institutionalized practices" (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996: 1032), and they provide little insight into why decoupling may occur for those legitimate practices that have obtained a taken-for-granted, "social fact" quality. That is, our understanding of why there is variation in the implementation of practices that are widely accepted as necessary and desirable remains particularly underdeveloped.

"Translation" studies of institutionalization have shed some light on practice implementation, arguing that change requires participants to be actively involved in the process (Czarniawska & Sevon, 1996; Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008). Yet in focusing on the conscious choices change participants make, these studies overlook a key insight from the early institutionalists: much behavior in organizations occurs with little conscious reflection on its continued appropriateness, *even when interests change* (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Zucker, 1977). We contend that it is the continued passive use of these established activities within organizations that explains why there is variation in the adoption of practices that are unquestioningly accepted as appropriate.

Our explanation centers on the argument that practice adoption is determined by two institutional dimensions: acceptance and implementation. In establishing these dimensions as separate, we are able to categorize within-organization responses to the adoption of new practices in a more nuanced and revealing way than has previously been the case. Most notably, by developing our understanding of the relationship between these dimensions, we are able to expose an interesting and important institutional paradox: the very thing that makes a practice more easily accepted also reduces the conscious reflection needed to implement it. In bringing this to the fore, we challenge the assumption that acceptance of a practice is indeed positively related to implementation. Rather, we contend that the discourse used to establish widespread acceptance of a practice actually suppresses the emergence of the discourse required to disrupt the passive transmission of established patterns of interaction within organizations. Without this, the conscious evaluation needed for implementation is unlikely to emerge. Therefore, our primary undertaking in this article is to expose and examine acceptance and implementation as two distinct dimensions that shape practice adoption. In so doing, we invert the common query of "why and how organizations adopt processes and structures for their meaning rather than their productive value" (Suddaby, 2010: 15) to question why and how organizations adopt processes and structures for their productive value but fail to realize their meaning.

PRACTICE ADOPTION

As we have noted, while there is broad acceptance of the idea that legitimate practices are rarely, if ever, implemented in organizations unchanged, there has been little examination into why a practice that embodies "a value that the people also accept" (Stinchcombe, 1997: 8) might not be implemented as intended. Rather, in keeping with Rogers' (1962) classic five-stage model of innovation diffusion, scholars have directed their attention to understanding factors that make a practice more or less likely to be accepted. The assumption is that if relevant actors accept the need to adopt a particular practice, implementation should occur nonproblematically. If a disconnect does exist between an organization's formal and informal structures, explanations primarily identify intentional decoupling spurred by a perceived misalignment with organizational (e.g., Meyer & Rowan, 1977) or individual (e.g., Greenwood & Hinings, 1996) interests as the reason. Yet if decoupling has occurred because organization members believe interests are unaligned or the value of the practice is in dispute, then the practice is not entirely legitimate (Stinchcombe, 1997). Thus, it appears that there is something missing from our understanding of why decoupling may occur.

The central logic underpinning our understanding of decoupling can be traced back to Meyer and Rowan's (1977) foundational argument that organizations frequently adopt prac-

tices for reasons of legitimacy, not just technical efficiency. In so doing, an organization may exhibit ceremonial conformity, choosing to intentionally decouple its formal structures and systems from day-to-day operations. According to Meyer and Rowan (1977), decoupling is a rational response to two organization-level problems. First, decoupling might occur if the practice being adopted is perceived to be in conflict with technical concerns for efficiency. Second, decoupling is possible when an organization is forced to conform to conflicting institutional pressures. These explanations quickly became widely accepted by institutionalists as explanations for why a disconnect may exist between an organization's formal and informal structure.

Following this line of thought, Tolbert and Zucker (1983) found that the desire to overcome technical problems motivated early adopters of a practice, whereas later adopters were primarily motivated by the desire to appear legitimate (see also Westphal, Gulati, & Shortell, 1997). Although others found little evidence to support the notion that different such motivations adequately explain variation in adoption patterns (e.g., Kraatz & Zajac, 1996; Sherer & Lee, 2002), attempts to resolve this inconsistency have centered on the need to "more directly examine adoption motivations at different stages of a diffusion process" (Kennedy & Fiss, 2009: 899). As such, differences in motivations for adopting a practice have remained a relatively enduring explanation for why there are differences in how practices are used within organizations.

In another strand of institutional research examining how and why legitimate practices are altered as they are implemented in organizations, scholars have attempted to hold institutional pressures constant and instead have focused on understanding why some organizations realize radical change while others do not, despite being at a similar stage in the diffusion process (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996). This line of research has attributed differences in the use of a new practice to the presence of differing value commitments (Amis, Slack, & Hinings, 2002, 2004; Hinings & Greenwood, 1988), power dependencies (Covaleski & Dirsmith, 1988; DiMaggio, 1991; Oakes, Townley, & Cooper, 1998), interests (Edelman, 1992; Fox-Wolfgramm, Boal, & Hunt, 1998; Kellogg, 2009), and/or capacity for action (Zbaracki, 1998). Primarily, these studies have reported that these differences can

explain why some organizations make a "good faith effort to comply" with institutional changes while others adhere more symbolically (Edelman, 1992: 1567–1568).

While the above studies have provided useful insight into our understanding of why there is variation in how practices are adopted as they diffuse across a field, we argue that these studies address variation as a function of differing levels of *acceptance* of a practice. For these authors, an implicitly held assumption is that if a practice is accepted, then those accepting it will be willing and able to implement it. Yet variation in the use of a practice may also occur during the process in which organization members "attach meaning and value to social pressures exerted by their social environment" (Suddaby et al., 2010: 1239). That is, in addition to variation emerging from differing levels of acceptance, as mentioned above, variation may also be due to differences that occur during *implementation*—the process "during which new beliefs, new skills, and new collaborative routines are simultaneously developed" in an organization (Edmondson, Bohmer, & Pisano, 2001: 697). Research into the causes and consequences of such variations, while scarce, is beginning to emerge from institutional studies of translation (Czarniawska & Sevon, 1996).

Authors following in the translation tradition have shown how widely diffused practices are not ready made or unchangeable but are instead reconstituted as they are reproduced in new locations (e.g., Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996; Czarniawska & Sevon, 1996; Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008). As legitimate practices are introduced to new locations, actors formulate and reformulate practices that are viewed as "successful" while generally disregarding time- or location-specific components (Sahlin-Andersson, 1996; see also Zbaracki, 1998). More specifically, Zilber (2006) has pointed to the ways in which broad accounts are initially used to establish the relevance of a new practice but are subsequently reshaped over time to more precisely fit a local context. These authors have demonstrated that practices that diffuse widely are characterized by situated actors who continuously work at establishing deep connections between the specific situational and the more abstract ideational aspects of a practice (see also Creed, Scully, & Austin, 2002, and Strang, 2010).

While advancing our understanding of why there is variation in how abstract practices are implemented in specific instances, this body of work, by focusing on the active side of the translation process, has continued to reinforce the implicitly held assumption that implementation and acceptance are positively related, or even one and the same. That is, by attending to how practices are *actively* translated as they are put into use, these studies draw attention to how interests shape decision making about if and how a practice ought to be used in a specific instance. However, variation in the use of a practice may also occur because some established patterns of interaction inside an organization have become so taken for granted they are not recognized as inhibiting the implementation of the new practice. For example, in an examination of sixteen hospitals implementing a new technology for cardiac surgery, Edmondson et al. (2001) found that "low-level" implementers overlooked the need to challenge established hierarchical patterns of communication within the operating room. In contrast, "high-level" implementers identified that new patterns of communication were needed to fully implement the new surgical approach. In other words, it was not a carefully evaluated choice to maintain established interaction patterns that distinguished the low-level from the high-level implementers; rather, low-level implementers simply failed to recognize that their established interaction patterns needed to be altered.

Thus, while prior research has queried why variation occurs between adoption and subsequent implementation, in this article we suggest that a more fine-grained conception of the origins of this variation is needed. That is, we argue that in order to better understand how practices spread, we need to distinguish the variation that occurs within an organization between introduction and acceptance (the acceptance dimension) from the variation that occurs between acceptance and implementation (the implementation dimension). In drawing this distinction, we are able to shift attention to a previously unaddressed issue in understanding variations in practice adoption: change participants may approach implementation with differing levels of conscious reflection. This has significant implications for understanding how a new practice is adopted, as illustrated in Figure 1.

The acceptance dimension relates to whether an abstract practice that is diffusing across a field is more or less accepted by change participants in an adopting organization. This dimension is closely aligned with previous work in which scholars have examined the motivations behind adoption (e.g., Kennedy & Fiss, 2009; Tolbert & Zucker, 1983; Westphal et al., 1997). However, we suggest that rather than classifying motivations as economic or institutional—something that has been previously described as problematic (Kraatz & Zajac, 1996)—it may be more fruitful to ascertain whether those charged with adopting a practice believe doing so will improve the productive value of the organization. In this way we are able to distinguish those who are likely to more enthusiastically embrace

FIGURE 1
Within-Organization Responses to Practice Adoption

Acceptance of a practice

	High	Low
High	Change to the organization	Change to the practice
Low	Unintentional decoupling	Intentional decoupling

Level of conscious reflection during implementation

a practice (high levels of acceptance) from those who will be less supportive (low levels of acceptance).

The implementation dimension relates to whether those adopting a practice do so in a more or less conscious manner. Building on early institutional work examining the cognitive basis for transmission (e.g., Zucker, 1977), we suggest that the active involvement needed for effective implementation of a practice should not be presumed. Rather, the implementation dimension distinguishes those who are actively involved in the process (high levels of conscious involvement) from those who are less actively involved (low levels of conscious involvement).

Using these two dimensions to explain the different within-organization responses, we are able to elucidate the reasons for variations in practice adoption more fully than has previously been the case. The top left quadrant of Figure 1 is characterized by high levels of acceptance of the practice being adopted and high levels of conscious reflection during implementation. Change participants in this quadrant will be motivated to adhere to a prototypical version of the practice they are adopting, and their high levels of conscious reflection will lead them to actively search for organizational inconsistencies that can be rectified to align the organization with the new practice. We label the response defined in this quadrant as "change to the organization." For example, Forssell and Jansson (1996) observed that organizational change occurred in three Swedish public sector organizations adopting the legitimate new public management practice only after organization members actively realigned their established organizational activities to fit with the new practice being implemented.

The top right quadrant also denotes change participants who approach practice adoption with high levels of conscious reflection during implementation. However, their lack of acceptance of the value of the practice being adopted will result in their editing the practice to better fit their own or the organization's interests. Hence, while some changes may be made to the organization, much more emphasis will be placed on changing the practice to suit the established context within the organization. We label change participants' response in this quadrant as "change to the practice." For example, Frenkel (2005) found that a lack of Israeli support for the core ideas underpinning the scientific management and human resource models resulted in these models' being actively reinterpreted to be more in line with existing Israeli macrocultural beliefs. Over time, this active reinterpretation by the state, private employers, and labor unions led to significant differences in what using these practices meant in Israeli organizations.

The bottom right quadrant similarly refers to change participants who lack acceptance of the value of a practice being adopted. However, their lack of belief that adoption will improve the productive value of the organization, coupled with a passive approach to implementation, will result in their only adopting a practice ceremonially. Therefore, we label change participants' response in this quadrant as "intentional decoupling," since there is a lack of desire to integrate the practice into the day-to-day operations of the organization. For example, in a study of 2,700 hospitals implementing total quality management (TQM) in the United States, Westphal et al. (1997) argued that not believing that organizational efficiency benefits could be derived from adopting TQM led late adopters to implement a normatively accepted model for legitimacy reasons instead of actively reflecting on how the practice could be customized to make the organization more efficient.

Finally, change participants in the bottom left quadrant will also be passive in their approach to implementation, yet their response will be distinct from those in the bottom right quadrant because they believe that adoption of the new practice will improve the productive value of the organization. However, their passive approach to implementation will make it unlikely that they will conceive of which, if any, changes need to be made to the organization in order to effectively incorporate the new practice. We label the response in this quadrant as "unintentional decoupling" to reflect the fact that some elements of the organization may be unintentionally retained, preventing the practice from being fully integrated into the day-to-day work of the organization. For example, Townley, Cooper, and Oakes (2003) noticed that despite high initial acceptance for adopting a new planning practice by managers in a department of the Albertan government, their unreflective approach to implementation prevented them from

realizing the benefits they expected from adoption.

Focusing on the factors that shape the responses to practice adoption within an organization allows us to call attention to the response rather than its effect on the practice or the organization. Doing so is significant because theorizing what happens inside the organization reveals that decoupling may occur unintentionally, something that has been overlooked in previous studies of practice adoption. Further, knowing that unintentional decoupling is a possible response to adopting a practice provides insight into why a practice may be unquestioningly accepted as appropriate but still may not be adopted as intended. In line with this thinking, we draw particular attention to the bottom left quadrant of Figure 1, or those times when actors within an organization adopt a practice for its potential value but fail to recognize how their established patterns of interaction may prevent them from realizing this value. First, however, we address why the implementation dimension has been previously overlooked or conflated with the acceptance dimension in more recent institutional studies of practice adoption and diffusion. This is particularly noteworthy given that a central tenet of these studies is to explain those aspects of institutions that prevent actors from recognizing or acting in their own interests (DiMaggio, 1988). In uncovering why this has occurred, we identify a gap in existing institutional models that has prevented the development of a more complete theoretical understanding of how practice diffusion takes place.

WITHIN- AND ACROSS-FIRM DIFFUSION OF PRACTICES

Our understanding of how institutionalized practices are transmitted has been limited by the conflation of the time and space dimensions of practice diffusion. This has occurred because while early institutionalists primarily focused on cross-generational diffusion within the same organization (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Douglas, 1986; Schutz, 1962; Selznick, 1949; Zucker, 1977), later researchers focused on the movement of institutionalized practices from one organization to another. For example, investigations into how and why institutionalized practices, such as TQM (Kennedy & Fiss,

2009; Westphal et al., 1997), civil service reform (Tolbert & Zucker, 1983), and shareholder value orientation (Fiss & Zajac, 2004, 2006), were transmitted among organizations typify the more recent approach to institutional research. Yet since these studies built on early theoretical insights, without any effort to distinguish between types of transmission, a blind spot in our understanding of practice transmission was created. An outcome of this is that neoinstitutional studies of diffusion have given very little attention to the role that directly shared experiences play in the transmission of institutional practices. This omission has some significant implications for our understanding of practice adoption and diffusion.

Within-Firm Diffusion

In early institutional studies (e.g., Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Douglas, 1986; Schutz, 1962) researchers were primarily concerned with understanding why it was "sufficient for one person simply to tell another that this is how things are done" (Zucker, 1977: 726). The common argument was that "each individual . . . [was] motivated to comply because otherwise his actions and those of others in the system . . . [could] not be understood" (Zucker, 1977: 726). Thus, this passive form of transmission took place within an established system of meaning. In these studies directly shared experiences facilitated actors in transmitting habitualized actions, "behaviors that" had "been developed empirically and adopted by an actor or set of actors in order to solve recurring problems" (Tolbert & Zucker, 1996: 180). That is, once typified in their use (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Schutz, 1962), actions did not need to be further justified or explained to be passed on to a future generation because their meanings were already sedimented in the structures in use.

For these early theorists the passive side of transmission was emphasized by highlighting the minimal decision-making effort needed to initiate actions that had become institutionalized within the structures used by a population (Tolbert & Zucker, 1996). Their concern was with why these day-to-day interaction patterns could be so persistent despite no longer being in the interests of those using them (e.g., Zucker, 1977). Yet it was the presence, or ab-

sence, of directly shared experiences that provided a key distinction for understanding transmission. For example, Douglas noted that communities classify in different modes so that while new institutions may create new labels and names for people,

> the label alone does not cause ... [people] to change. . . . naming is only one set of inputs; it is on the surface of the classification process ... [A] community's self-knowledge and knowledge of the world must undergo change when the organization of work changes (1986: 101–102).

In other words, these early authors were explicitly aware that this passive form of transmission only occurred within a population using structures in which particular institutionalized actions had already accrued; transmission among populations with no previous experience of using such structures was qualitatively different.

Across-Firm Diffusion

Later institutionalists built on the above understandings, but their examinations primarily looked at transmission that occurred from one organization to another. That is, they were concerned with how and why structures were apparently transmitted in a relatively homogeneous manner across space (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). This resulted in significant insights into how behaviors that had become habitualized in one context could be constructed into a socially recognizable collection of symbolic and material properties with some degree of consensus concerning their value (Tolbert & Zucker, 1996). This transmission of practices from one setting to another involved objectification, a process whereby a set of organizations is theorized as having some generic problem for which a particular practice is a solution. Crucially, however, this process does not require a presumption that all organizations in the set share a common array of experiences. For example, TQM was championed as being beneficial for "*all* U.S. organizations, like *all* Japanese organizations . . . [enabling] widespread diffusion of . . . [TQM] across thousands of disparate U.S. organizations during the 1980s and early 1990s" (Abrahamson & Fairchild, 1999: 708; emphasis added). Consequently, TQM was able to gain widespread acceptance among members of diverse organizations because the theorization

process "facilitates communication between strangers by providing a language that does not presume directly shared experience" (Strang & Meyer, 1993: 499).

This work has provided significant insight into factors that increase a practice's objective qualities, thus making it more acceptable to other populations having no previous experience with its use. However, for the early institutionalists it was the directly shared experiences that made an objective practice comprehensible to those on the receiving end of the transmission process, and these experiences were essential for the passive transmission of an institutionalized practice. The problem with not having, or accounting for, shared experience is demonstrated by Zbaracki (1998), who found that common TQM routines, such as statistical control processes, were left unimplemented because those responsible for using them lacked the experience to make the tools meaningful in their organizations. Thus, elimination of directly shared experiences from these more recent accounts of transmission have downplayed or ignored the difficulties that arise in making an abstract practice comprehensible when it is transmitted to a new location.

Translation scholars have reintroduced directly shared experiences as important for understanding how practices are transmitted (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996). Primarily, these scholars have demonstrated that when organizations implement a practice with which they have no direct experience, what they actually are implementing are rationalized myths or abstractions of what was done in organizations considered exemplary users of the practice (Sahlin-Andersson, 1996; Zilber, 2006). As actors put these abstractions into use, they translate them· "to fit their own wishes and the specific circumstances in which they operate" (Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008: 225). Thus, scholars have acknowledged the important role of directly shared experiences, but in focusing on how such experiences shape the conscious choices actors make when they are implementing a practice, these scholars have still overlooked a key insight provided by the early institutionalists: these experiences may also prevent them from acting in a manner that is aligned with the new practice. That is, if actors continue to passively use established patterns of interaction with little conscious reflection on the implications of doing so,

they will likely be prevented from fully realizing the consequences of their decision to adopt a practice.

In sum, the insights of the early institutionalists were transferred to later institutional explanations without adequate consideration of the role played by directly shared experiences in the transmission processes. Therefore, while there are many similarities in how within- and across-firm transmission of institutionalized activities occur, the differences identified above indicate that the acceptance dimension and implementation dimension are underpinned by distinct institutional forces that differently impact change participants' responses to practice adoption. That is, the institutional dynamics identified by scholars concerned with how and why practices are transmitted across organizations in a relatively homogeneous manner (e.g., Greenwood, Suddaby & Hinings, 2002) are different from those identified by scholars concerned with the unconscious replication of established patterns of interaction within an organization (e.g., Zucker, 1977). Thus, since the first set of institutional dynamics is concerned with how rationality becomes defined for a given population whereas the second is focused on why rational decision making may not emerge within a given population, we should consider both dimensions separately when examining practice adoption.

While in this section we have argued that the acceptance and implementation dimensions are distinct, in the next section we suggest that these two dimensions are also not positively correlated. Patterns of discourse in the institutionalization process reveal that the tendency to passively reproduce established patterns of interaction is greater when the new practice being adopted is taken for granted or legitimate. In other words, as adopters become more unquestioningly accepting of the need to adopt a practice, the discourse that managers use to justify adoption is more conceptual and therefore unlikely to be sufficient to disrupt the unconscious replication of established, habitually enacted patterns of interaction within an organization. By calling for renewed attention to the tendency for activities within organizations to be triggered in a relatively automatic and nonconscious fashion, we hope to reintegrate this pas-

sive explanation[1] of behavior in organizations with the more recent focus on interests and agency in institutional explanations of transmission. It is only through gaining an understanding of when both active and passive explanations of behavior are more and less appropriate that we will develop a more complete understanding of the transmission process.

We pursue this first by examining patterns of discourse associated with the acceptance dimension. Here we attend in particular to the ways in which discourse is used to establish not only the appropriateness of a practice but also similarities between the organization and other organizations that have already adopted the practice. We then move on to the implementation dimension and highlight how effective implementation requires discourse that can elaborate points of difference between the organization and the new practice. We conclude the section by considering the ways in which these two patterns of discourse interrelate and, in so doing, illuminate an important institutional paradox.

DISCOURSE AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ACCEPTANCE AND IMPLEMENTATION[2]

The Acceptance Dimension: Theorizing Similarities

In order for a practice to become accepted, it must first make sense (Green, 2004). Sense is made as individuals undertake an active justification process using both internal and external sources to persuade participants of the

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[1] To reiterate, the passive transmission we are highlighting here is that of the established patterns of interaction that have been built up within an organization over time, not that of the objectified practice that is being transmitted.

[2] *Discourse* has been used in a variety of ways across the social sciences. In this article we predominantly use the term "at close range.... [As such,] language use is here understood in relationship to the specific process and social context in which discourse is produced" (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000: 1133). This more micro, "small d" use of the term stands in contrast to macro Discourse approaches that refer to broader organizing themes. That said, in keeping with Alvesson and Karreman's (2000) conceptualization, we hold here that as discourse becomes more established and taken for granted, it can be more detached from its immediate context and longer-lasting in its effects.

value of adopting the practice (e.g., Birkinshaw, Hamel, & Mol, 2008; Green, 2004; Green, Li, & Nohria, 2009). These justifications are used to establish a practice as appropriate, but constructing them requires a significant and deliberate discursive effort.[3] Since managers are constantly engaged in discursive activities, such as gathering information, developing shared schema, and persuading individuals to engage in collective action (Green, 2004; Isabella, 1990; Mintzberg, 1973), their need to justify and make sense of new and unfamiliar practices directs attention to the need to be actively involved in the adoption of a new practice. During this process, "a manager hoping to justify the adoption of a new practice scans the commonly held assumptions or 'taken-for-granteds' of his or her audience to produce justifications that support his or her claim about the practice" (Green, 2004: 655-656). In other words, when a practice is relatively novel, managers are likely to have to engage in the creation of an organization-specific discursive campaign to obtain support for its adoption.

As a practice diffuses across a field, the availability of such justifications increases as evidence accumulates from sources that are external, such as the business press, or internal, such as a member's previous experience (Birkinshaw et al., 2008; Green, 2004; Strang & Soule, 1998). This increased availability means that as practices become more widely used, managers do not have to continue to create their own discursive campaign from the ground up but, rather, can begin to draw upon others' experiences to assemble a justification that is appropriate for their own needs. Then, as a "practice becomes more widely diffused and accepted, the frequency and amount of justification should decrease" because "the more compelling and convincing a justification supporting a managerial practice is, the less the justification needs to be repeated or sustained in order to maintain the

practice" (Green, 2004: 656). For example, Green et al. (2009) found that as TQM became more legitimate, the arguments used to justify the practice became simpler. Thus, as legitimacy increases, a practice is more "easily communicated . . . [and] require[s] less local promotion . . . than a practice that is hard to understand" (Strang & Soule, 1998: 279). Over time, as a practice becomes increasingly widespread in its use, the accompanying discourse used to justify adoption can amount to little more than specifying a general organizational failing and suggesting how this practice will resolve that failing (Greenwood et al., 2002; Tolbert & Zucker, 1996). Consequently, as justifications for adopting a practice appear more rational and the practice becomes increasingly accepted as appropriate, there is less need to engage in local promotion of the practice to justify adoption. Rather, discursive efforts become more centered on emphasizing similarities between the adopting organization and others that have already utilized the practice.

Discourse justifying a practice becomes more persuasive through theorization, the process of formulating chains of cause and effect and specifying abstract categories to simplify and refine the practice's properties (Greenwood et al., 2002; Strang & Meyer, 1993). Moreover, since "rational mimicking requires prior and potential adopters [to] be understood as fundamentally similar, at least with respect to the practice at issue" (Strang & Meyer, 1993: 491), persuasive theorization processes create a perception of similarity by constructing an abstract social category that binds a group of organizations together. This perception of similarity is essential since it enables those constructing justifications for change to appeal to some common set of values when explaining why the practice should be adopted (Greenwood et al., 2002: 75). For example, widespread changes in the Canadian accounting profession were observed after the role of accountants was recast from purely examining financial data to becoming "business advisors in the broadest sense with diverse skills and services" (Greenwood et al., 2002: 64). Importantly, this particular change gained broad acceptance after those theorizing the change created an abstract category—"business advisors"—that was generic enough to appeal to the professional values held by both large and

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[3] It is perhaps appropriate to clarify our selection of the term *discourse* over another term popular among institutional scholars, *rhetoric*. Rhetoric constitutes the deliberate use of language to persuade others—in this case, to adopt a new practice. Discourse is a more general dialogic term that encompasses a broader range of language use, including rhetoric. For the sake of conceptual clarity, rather than use both terms, we only use "discourse" here but make clear when we are referring to language that is intended to be persuasive in nature.

small accounting firms in the field (Greenwood et al., 2002: 60).

In sum, the discourse associated with gaining acceptance for a practice is likely to emphasize its objectivity and exteriority by focusing on the conceptual aspects of the practice, because it is those ideas that appear unrelated to any specific situation that are more likely to be viewed as "social givens" and, thus, accepted unquestioningly (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Tolbert & Zucker, 1996). As such, a practice is more likely to be accepted when the discourse justifying it emphasizes the similarities of the adopting organization with others that have previously embraced the practice while abstracting away from points of potential difference. These characteristics are summarized in Table 1.

The Implementation Dimension: Elaborating Differences

In order for a practice to be implemented, change participants must make a deliberate effort to make sense of and build into the practice "certain interpretive schemes (rules reflecting knowledge of the work being automated), certain facilities (resources to accomplish that work), and certain norms (rules that define the organizationally sanctioned way of executing work)" (Orlikowski, 1992: 410). Thus, it is necessary to pay attention to "the attachment of meaning to events and the infusion of value into organizational processes and outcomes" (Suddaby et al., 2010: 18), because no practice or set of routines can be fully planned and articulated ahead of time (Feldman, 2000; Howard-Grenville, 2005; Orlikowski, 2000). Rather, while an institutionalized practice may consist of a set of material rules and symbolic constructions that are common across organizations, the discursive elements that consist of "the elaboration of purposes, positions, policies, and procedural

rules" (Meyer & Rowan, 1977: 343) are key to understanding the practice's meaning locally. It is this need for elaborating the details of how a practice should work in a particular location that requires a significant discursive effort from managers implementing the practice, even if there is no need to justify the practice locally.

Elaboration of an abstract practice is made locally meaningful through the identification and specification of how the practice should be used in a particular instance. This involves actively discussing the differences between the abstract practice and its use in a particular context (Czarniawska & Sevon, 1996; Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008; Strang, 2010). In this way change participants can identify those habitually enacted, established patterns of interaction that mask differing and even conflicting expectations among change participants (Yates & Orlikowski, 2002). For example, in examining the implementation of a product development practice, Orlikowski (2002) found that different geographic and functional subunits had trouble coordinating the use of the new practice until they identified that, and explained why, their established patterns of reporting in subunit-specific metrics were no longer appropriate. Thus, by articulating the limitations to using a series of local measures, change participants were able to develop a common unit of measurement—"Kilomanhours"—with the result that the new practice was integrated across the organization.

One reason why explicit elaboration of how an abstract practice may be differently enacted among different organizations, and among different subunits within organizations, resides in the way that change participants draw on their existing institutional constraints, plans, inherited traditions, expectations, and norms to inform their approach to using a new practice (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). Importantly, since directly shared experiences facilitate

TABLE 1
Discourse in Practice Diffusion

Discourse	Discourse for Acceptance	Discourse for Implementation
Purpose	To obtain widespread support for a practice	To stimulate consciousness for effective implementation
Characteristics	Abstract More conceptual Highlights similarities	Detailed More practical Highlights differences

change participants in drawing on existing norms out of habit (Yates & Orlikowski, 2002), effective implementation requires discourse that discriminates how use in one situation is more or less like use in another situation. For example, the "high-level" implementing organizations identified by Edmondson et al. (2001) were those that had change participants who were able to articulate how the patterns of communication used in the new surgical practice were distinct from the established patterns of communication in use in the hospital. Those hospitals in which this distinction was not made explicit continued to habitually draw upon established patterns with little conscious reflection on the implications of doing so.

In sum, discourse that facilitates effective implementation requires change participants to be conscious of how differences in particular situations might influence their use of an abstract practice while negotiating their own socially shared understanding of how it ought to work in a particular instance (Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Barley, 1986; Bartunek, 1984; Feldman, 2004; Isabella, 1990; Orlikowski, 2002). Without describing how a practice ought to work locally, a conscious evaluation of how established patterns of interaction are distinct from those needed to implement the abstract practice is highly unlikely to emerge. Thus, the discourse required for effective implementation is less conceptually and more practically oriented and requires wide participation by those affected (see Table 1).

Acceptance and Implementation: An Institutional Paradox

Calling attention to the discursive characteristics of language used during practice adoption highlights the problem of assuming that the acceptance and implementation dimensions are positively correlated, or even one and the same. It also illuminates a paradox: the discursive characteristics that foster acceptance of a practice are the same characteristics that suppress the emergence of the conscious reflection needed to implement the practice. We address this issue next.

While early adopters of a new practice may be actively involved in making sense of how the practice should work in their specific context, once accounts of the practice stabilize and community consensus is achieved, new adopters go from making sense of their use of the practice to relating stories of success based on others' use (Green et al., 2009). Thus, as a practice becomes more objectified and the discourse used to justify adoption becomes less deliberate, adopters are more likely to draw on the conceptualizations of others rather than to closely interrogate their own day-to-day realities during implementation (Zbaracki, 1998). This is problematic, because as change participants shift from making sense of the practice through direct perception to relying on conceptual categories developed by others, such conceptions become increasingly likely to be perceived "as if they were enduring, permanent, abstractions of things with inherent properties" (Weick & Sutcliff, 2006: 520).

The conceptual clarity gained from relying on categories developed by others enables a practice to become quickly agreed upon and accepted in work processes, but it also causes the implementation process to be informed by concepts developed elsewhere, rather than by what is happening locally. This occurs because when concepts inform action, cognitive processing is schema driven rather than stimulus driven and direct perceptions are grouped "into types, categories, stereotypes, and schemas that mobilize habitual action" (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006: 520), reducing the likelihood that a "rich awareness of discriminatory detail" will emerge during implementation (Weick et al., 2005: 88). An example of this is provided in Townley et al.'s (2003) analysis of the adoption of a new planning practice by Albertan civil servants. These authors observed that instead of each department customizing measurement systems to meet its own needs, as originally planned, departments in the Albertan government instead relied on abstract categorizations developed by other departments or expert authority figures. Townley et al. (2003) reasoned that this change in plans was due to the availability of predetermined categories that served as a form of linguistic shorthand and freed change participants from perceiving a need to actively engage in implementation.

This situation is further exacerbated by the way that in emphasizing the similarities between a prototypical version of the practice and the adopting organization, any perception of difference is even further suppressed. Thus, change participants in the adopting organiza-

tion are more likely to perceive tasks new to the organization as familiar and manageable. As Townley et al. (2003) observed, while implementation of the new planning practice constituted a radical change, adopters perceived that there would, in fact, be little difference in existing activities; one site manager explained: "Planning, gather[ing] the data and deciding where you are going to go. Tools of the jargon have changed but [it is] . . . basically the same process. . . . It hasn't changed" (cited in Townley et al., 2003: 1055).

Moreover, when adoption is informed by conceptual understandings developed elsewhere, unresolved problems can become quickly enmeshed in day-to-day activities (Tyre & Orlikowski, 1994), with any problems between existing and new operations either not being recognized or being viewed as normal and unproblematic characteristics of practice implementation. This occurs because the presence of preexisting labels and categories and the emphasis on similarities with other exemplary organizations enable deviations in use to be normalized (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006). As a consequence, established patterns of interaction within an organization are liable to be habitually reproduced, with little reflection on whether they are still appropriate. For example, during observations of the implementation of new software at a technology firm, Tyre and Orlikowski noticed that "78% of the users found ways to maintain their existing patterns of working" (1994: 108).

Accordingly, while existing explanations emphasize how using discourse based on abstract concepts serves to enhance the spread and acceptance of a practice (Greenwood et al., 2002; Strang & Meyer, 1993) and increases the costs of nonadoption (Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2004), consideration of the implementation dimension points to a potential boundary condition for this self-reinforcing process of institutionalization. As adoption discourse becomes increasingly based on conceptual understandings developed elsewhere, adopters increasingly focus their attention on the concepts being adopted rather than on what is happening locally. Yet without adopters engaging in a conscious evaluation of how their established patterns of interaction are distinct from the practice being adopted, there is little to prevent the continued habitual replication of these patterns of interaction, even when

they are at odds with the practice being adopted. When this occurs, use is decoupled from the day-to-day operations of the organization not because adopters lack acceptance in the value of the practice being adopted but, rather, because, unintentionally, the conceptual discourse that facilitates acceptance reduces conscious attention to what is happening in the present. Consequently, we contend that the discursive characteristics that precipitate the high levels of conscious reflection needed to implement a practice are less likely to emerge as the practice becomes more accepted unquestioningly.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Our purpose in this article has been to provide insight into why an organization would adopt a practice for its productive value but then fail to infuse the practice with meaning upon implementation. In this section we highlight the implications of our work for theory and practice. Our first contribution is to identify directly shared experiences as playing a defining role in the passive transmission of an institutionalized activity. This has allowed us to reintroduce a seminal contribution of the early institutionalists: behavior in organizations is often triggered in automatic and nonconscious ways. While these early theorists mostly attended to the diffusion of activities within an organization, this point is also important for understanding the diffusion of a practice across organizations because it provides insight into why conscious engagement, essential for effective implementation, may not emerge. Thus, in this article we shed light on factors that may impact the emergence of the consciousness required for the adoption of new practices when there are no directly shared experiences.

Doing so required us to reframe DiMaggio and Powell's (1991) widely accepted distinction between the "old" and "new" institutionalism to create a multidimensional framework for understanding action inside organizations. That is, while DiMaggio and Powell highlighted the contribution of Selznick (1949, 1957) as epitomizing the more action-oriented "old" institutionalism, we also included work of other authors, such as Zucker (1977) and Berger and Luckmann (1967), to explicate some of the more structurally oriented features of this early work. This was necessary

because explanations underpinned by intentionality, as described by Selznick (1949, 1957), downplay how action inside organizations often takes place in an unreflective and taken-for-granted manner. Further, that a practice can become accepted unreflectively, identified by DiMaggio and Powell's (1991) "new" institutionalists, overlooks how these practices still need to be actively internalized or localized when they are being transmitted between populations with no directly shared experiences (Czarniawska & Sevon, 1996; Hirsch & Lounsbury, 1997; Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008). Thus, our second contribution is to demonstrate that there are two fundamentally different institutional dimensions that have profound implications for our understanding of how practice adoption takes place.

In drawing this distinction, we are able to show that different responses to adoption will be associated with differing levels of acceptance of the need to adopt a practice—the acceptance dimension—and differing levels of conscious reflection during implementation of it—the implementation dimension. Although previous work has considered these two dimensions as either synonymous or positively correlated, we challenge this assumption by teasing them apart and suggesting that implementation depends on understanding the level of change participants' consciousness of the need, rather than their "choice," to locally infuse a practice with meaning. Arguing that there are two dimensions impacting the trajectory of a practice's diffusion, we identify four possible responses to adopting a practice, as illustrated in Figure 1: change to the organization, change to the practice, intentional decoupling, and unintentional decoupling. Those factors that may result in a lack of consciousness of the need for change to the existing organization, and so may lead to unintentional decoupling, have particular importance here because of their general lack of consideration in previous studies of adoption and diffusion.

Patterns of discourse in the institutionalization process reveal that change participants may approach implementation in a less conscious manner for reasons that can be systematically predicted. When the discourse concerning adoption of a practice becomes simpler, more abstract, and focused on similarities, it creates a form of discursive closure. That is, as

the taken-for-granted and commonsense characteristics of a practice increase, acceptance and implementation of the practice are more likely to take place in a passive manner. This occurs not because an active choice was made by change participants to keep the practice at arm's length, as has been previously assumed (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Westphal & Zajac, 2001), but, rather, because the seemingly obvious and unquestioned need to adopt the practice results in change participants' underappreciating differences between existing operations and the abstract practice. Thus, our third contribution is to identify how variation in the use of legitimate practices may systematically emerge because as the discourse used to justify adoption of a practice becomes less deliberate, it is less likely to trigger the conscious effort and reflection needed for implementation.

This general lack of conscious reflection during implementation makes it easier for deviations from the prototypical version of a practice either to go unnoticed or to be normalized as characteristic of practice implementation (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006; Zucker, 1977). Therefore, our fourth contribution is a further understanding of why decoupling may occur in organizations. While decoupling previously has been seen as occurring when external pressures for change are inconsistent with internal goals (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Oliver, 1991), when top executives have the power to avoid pressures for change (Westphal & Zajac, 1994, 1998), or when there are factors that enhance awareness among powerful actors of the utility of decoupling (Westphal & Zajac, 2001), each of these explanations suggests that there is explicit choice involved. However, a lack of conscious reflection may also cause decoupling to occur unintentionally simply because a failure to identify ongoing use of existing patterns of interaction can drastically hinder practice implementation. For example, the habitual enactment of hierarchical communication patterns in an operating room (Edmondson et al., 2001) or the continued reliance of subunit-specific metrics in new product development (Orlikowski, 2002) points to how changes required to implement a new practice are often simply overlooked rather than intentionally avoided. This is a new explanation for why decoupling occurs that has significant implications for our understanding of

what happens inside organizations during the adoption of a legitimate practice.

That decoupling may occur unintentionally as well as intentionally also has implications for understanding the trajectory of a practice's diffusion. If a large number of organizations fail to consciously engage during implementation of a practice, widespread belief in the practice's value will begin to deteriorate. This occurs because, as Tolbert and Zucker assert,

> Even in the absence of direct opposition, sedimentation may be truncated gradually because of a lack of demonstrable results associated with a structure. A weak positive relation between a given structure and desired outcomes may be sufficient to affect the spread and maintenance of structures (1996: 184).

Thus, repeated unintentional decoupling is likely to lead to the devaluing of a practice and, hence, is likely to negatively influence the trajectory of its diffusion. This, our fifth contribution, is important because it provides insight into why an institutionalized practice may lose favor without having to discount that it has obtained a "social fact" quality (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Friedland & Alford, 1991; Goodrick & Salancik, 1996; Powell, 1991; Seo & Creed, 2002; Zucker, 1977). Further, this assertion could provide additional insight into the reasons for the reputational inflation and deflation of organizational practices identified by Abrahamson (1996).

Finally, we do not intend to suggest that unintentional decoupling is something that will inevitably occur among firms adopting a legitimate practice. Thus, our sixth contribution lies in our contention that there are specific actionable responses that managers can engage in to foster consciousness during the implementation of legitimate practices. In particular, by raising awareness of the tendency to oversimplify implementation of legitimate practices, we suggest that managers can construct a more deliberate discourse for adoption that encourages questioning those aspects of a practice that seem to be accepted unquestioningly. Further, by challenging what appears to be a commonsense solution to an organizational problem, managers can downplay the taken-for-granted aspects of a practice while emphasizing those components unique to a particular organization. This can be achieved by pointing to differences between the abstract practice and the adopting organization (Edmondson et al., 2001) or by framing unquestioned changes as noteworthy (Tyre & Orlikowski, 1994). Managers can also actively encourage consciousness in organizations by spending more time examining failures, observing day-to-day operations, resisting the urge to simplify assumptions, and drawing more heavily on local experts rather than relying on accepted industry wisdom (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001). The importance of local expertise in fostering effective implementation is echoed by Strang (2010), who showed that those practices that were effectively implemented by a global financial firm had been introduced or guided by someone from a benchmarked firm.

Strang's (2010) ideas on "demand-side" adoption extend his previous work in this area. For example, David and Strang (2006) showed how industry consultants with specialized knowledge of TQM were able to alter the usual institutional trajectory of the practice by supplementing the generalized discourse used to describe the practice with technical discussions within practitioner and academic communities. Thus, "supply-side" changes in discourse can also be made to foster consciousness during implementation. As such, our work builds on the work of Strang and colleagues (David & Strang, 2006; Strang, 2010; Strang & Meyer, 1993), but in highlighting two distinct purposes underpinning the use of discourse, we are able to provide new insight into when and why certain types of discourse are more or less appropriate.

Future Research Directions

While there are several potentially fruitful avenues of research that stem from our theorizing, we suggest there are two that seem particularly well placed for advancing the ideas presented here. First, translation research has redirected attention to the importance of change participants' active engagement in the implementation process (Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008). Thus, our work seems to nicely build on this by pointing to those factors that make it unlikely that change participants will consciously engage in the implementation process. Future research could begin to assess the level of change participants' conscious involvement during implementation by examining patterns in the discourse used to direct implementation efforts. For example, if implementation discussions primarily contain

discourse repeating conceptual categories developed by others, this could serve as a good proxy for change participants' having low levels of conscious reflection during implementation. In contrast, if the discourse used to describe implementation is primarily related to situation-specific aspects of the organization, it could imply that there are high levels of conscious reflection in the implementation process. Acceptance of a practice could be ascertained by determining the levels to which change participants believe adoption will improve the productive value of the organization.

Such work would facilitate a fruitful empirical comparison of the acceptance and implementation dimensions, which would, in turn, further new insights into the adoption of practices in general and legitimate practices in particular. For example, Westphal et al. attributed the pattern of late adopters' being more likely to forgo customization of TQM to their trading "organizational efficiency benefits for legitimacy benefits" (1997: 389). In other words, a lack of customization is used as a proxy for late adopters' not believing or accepting that adoption will improve the productive value of their organization. However, if a practice is unquestioningly accepted as appropriate, a lack of customization may also indicate that these adopters saw little need to alter it during implementation (see, for example, Townley et al., 2003). Thus, by also considering the implementation dimension, we can unpack whether difficulties in adopting a practice are because change participants lack acceptance for the value of the practice or because they are oversimplifying implementation; this distinction is important since responding to each is quite different. For example, if change participants lack acceptance for the value of the practice being adopted, then highlighting abstract similarities, as is done in the theorization process, should facilitate its transfer (e.g., Ansari et al., 2010). However, if there is a lack of conscious involvement during implementation, then framing it as similar to the organization would only downplay the difficulties of implementation. As such, highlighting how a practice *lacks* fit with an organization's existing policies and procedures may be more effective in fostering high levels of conscious involvement during implementation than stressing similarities. Similarly, making changes to an organization's core may also be more likely to stimulate conscious

involvement during implementation than making changes to the periphery. Therefore, considering factors that shape the emergence of consciousness during implementation is likely to provide significantly different insights from those generated when only the level of acceptance of a practice is considered.

A second suggested line of research builds on the work of Fiss and colleagues (e.g., Ansari et al., 2010; Fiss, Kennedy, & Davis, in press; Fiss, & Zajac, 2006; Kennedy & Fiss, 2009) and their insight into those factors that shape if and why a practice is accepted. Although this work typically takes variation from some prototypical version of the practice as an indication of a lack of acceptance, our work offers an enticing additional opportunity for further exploration. That is, it would be useful to examine how variations in levels of acceptance and conscious engagement during adoption interrelate to affect organizational outcomes. For example, previous research has shown that late adopters may accept the productive value of the practice being adopted but frame the need for adoption as needing to avoid losses rather than realize gains. This framing, in turn, results in less extensive implementation because, it has been argued, change participants may decide to work less hard during implementation, "doing only enough to avoid the stigma of being out of step" with industry trends (Kennedy & Fiss, 2009: 904). However, if we consider the level of conscious reflection as being important here, less extensive implementation may also occur unintentionally if the framing of practice adoption directs attention to the conceptual categories of the practice and away from what is happening locally. While this explanation still provides insight into the same organizational outcome of less extensive implementation, the reasons underpinning the outcome are relevant because the strategies managers would select to overcome low levels of conscious reflection are considerably different from those they would select to overcome low levels of effort. Thus, addressing both of these dimensions in future research could shed new light on how we understand these variations.

Furthermore, since communication is a key factor underpinning the spread of innovations (Rogers, 1962), future research should more closely examine the role that language plays in both garnering acceptance and fostering con-

sciousness during adoption. Doing so may shed new light on studies of partial or incomplete implementation. For example, Fiss and Zajac (2006: 1188) uncovered an "ironic situation: those organizations that fervently proclaim[ed] their conformity to demands for strategic change . . . [were] in fact less likely to be the ones that actually implement[ed] structural changes, while those that . . . [did] implement such changes" framed the need to change in a manner that deviated from the "standard" model. Thus, future research could consider how the discourse for framing a change as deviating from a standard model fosters consciousness during implementation, in addition to enhancing acceptance by a diverse set of stakeholders. In other words, there are opportunities to further examine how the discourse in fostering acceptance and the discourse in fostering consciousness interact.

These ideas can be further extended by considering how implementation of a prototypical version of a well-theorized practice may result in differences in practice adoption. However, in drawing attention to two distinct dimensions of adoption, our work provides a framework for categorizing the reasons for and the extent of these differences. That is, intentional deviations from some prototypical version of a practice can now be distinguished from those deviations that are simply the result of differing local elaborations of the same abstract idea by examining patterns in the discourse for adoption. This understanding is important because intentionally deviating from some prototypical version of a practice will likely impact the trajectory of the practice's diffusion differently than will subtle within-organization changes that are intended to facilitate effective practice implementation.

Conclusion

The tendency for behavior within organizations to be triggered in automatic, nonconscious ways makes it clear that the active engagement needed to effectively implement a new practice should not be presumed. Moreover, examining patterns of discourse in the institutionalization process indicates that this tendency to passively follow established patterns of interaction within an organization increases when the practice being adopted is legitimate. Thus, variations in adoption patterns may stem from differing lev-

els of acceptance of a practice or differing levels of conscious engagement during implementation. This constitutes a quite different approach to established ways of understanding how practices spread. In exposing and developing this line of theoretical inquiry, we provide insight into institutional persistence and change, and we further open up the "black box" (Suddaby et al., 2010) of what happens in organizations during the process of institutionalization, something that remains in a nascent state.

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