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# Narratives of Continuity and Change: Changing Logics and Institutional Work in the United States Army

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NARRATIVES OF CONTINUITY AND CHANGE: CHANGING LOGICS AND  
INSTITUTIONAL WORK IN THE UNITED STATES ARMY

by

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B.A., Thomas Edison State College, 2005

A thesis submitted to the  
Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
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Narratives of Continuity and Change: Changing Logics and Institutional Work in the  
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has been approved for the Department of Sociology

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Smith, Wade P. (M.A., Department of Sociology)

Narratives of Continuity and Change: Changing Logics and Institutional Work in the United States Army

Thesis directed by Assistant Professor Jennifer Bair

Institutional theorists have recently turned to the concept of institutional work to explain how the behavior of actors in organizational fields can establish, maintain, and transform the institutional logic that prevails in the field. In this paper I focus on the role of key actors in the process of changing field-level logics. Acknowledging that prior research efforts commonly study change ‘in the moment’ and leave relatively ignored the ongoing nature of the change process, I study the institutional work of key actors in the United States Army during a period of relative stability that follows the transition from a Cold War to a post-Cold War institutional logic. Analyzing a set of official stories provided by key actors in the U.S. Army, I expose the complex and contradictory nature of the institutional work that takes place after the logic that prevails in a given field is successfully replaced with a new logic. My findings support the contention that institutional work, and not the institutional logic that prevails, is responsible for the periods of relative stability that often follow successful change processes.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Citing Machiavelli, Rosen (1991:1) begins his analysis of twentieth-century military innovation and organizational change by suggesting that ““there is nothing more difficult to carry out, nor more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to handle, than to initiate a new order of things.”” With a relatively recent stream of research focused on the initiation of a ‘new order of things’ at the organizational field level (Dacin, Goodstein, and Scott 2002), many scholars have turned to the concept of institutional logics to explain how the structural, normative, and symbolic dimensions of organizational fields change (e.g., Greenwood and Suddaby 2006; Lounsbury 2007; Rao, Monin, and Durand 2003; Reay and Hinings 2005). Described succinctly as “the axial principles of organization and action” that prevail in a given societal sector (Thornton 2004:2), institutional logics “shape and create the rules of the game... in organizations” (Thornton and Ocasio 2008:112). Though highly influential in shaping and creating the ‘rules of the game,’ field-level logics do change. A key task of the institutional scholar, then, is to explore how the initiation of a new institutional logic, a new ‘order of things,’ is carried out and handled in a way that renders success less doubtful. With an explicit focus on the role of actors in creating, transforming, and maintaining the ‘orders of things’ that affect individual and collective behavior and beliefs, the concept of ‘institutional work’ (Lawrence and Suddaby 2006) provides the theoretical tools necessary for such explorations.

Described as “the efforts of individual and collective actors to cope with, keep up with, shore up, tear down, tinker with, transform, or create anew the institutional structures within which they live, work, and play,” the concept of institutional work suggests that actors engage in

deliberate action aimed at achieving specific goals (Lawrence, Suddaby, and Leca 2011:53). At the organizational field level, these goals are often to establish and maintain a symbolic and cultural order, an institutional logic, that pushes beliefs and behavior in desired and predictable ways. While much work has explored the outcomes or effects of such institutional work, scholars continue to note that less attention has been afforded the process (Greenwood, Suddaby, and Hinings 2002; Lawrence and Suddaby 2006; Suddaby 2010; Zilber 2006). My first primary aim in this article, then, is to expose the complex nature of the under-explored process of institutional work aimed at managing field-level logics.

Responding to criticisms of early neo-institutional theory which emphasized isomorphism, homogeneity, and stability in organizational fields (e.g., DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Meyer and Rowan 1977), Friedland and Alford (1991) introduced the concept of institutional logics to explain both stability and change. Specifically, the researchers suggest that the prevailing set of organizing principles in a given societal sector, though a powerful guide of thought, action, and identity, is “available to organizations and individuals to elaborate” (Friedland and Alford 1991:248). The idea that logics are open for elaboration suggests that individual and collective actors are not cultural dopes, but rather active participants in on-going institutional work whether reproducing, manipulating, reinterpreting, or transforming institutional logics. Though a relatively recent focus of inquiry, numerous studies have exposed the extent to which some organized actors “are interest-driven, aware, and calculative” (Greenwood and Suddaby 2006:29) in their efforts to have one institutional logic prevail over another. At times, such actors have been found to be interested in fundamentally altering the axial principles that guide an organizational field, in essence replacing a prior dominant logic with a new one (e.g., Misangyi, Weaver, and Elms 2008; Reay and Hinings 2005, 2009;

Suddaby and Greenwood 2005; Thornton 2004; Zilber 2002). Though such change efforts may be successful, Reay and Hinings (2005:377) pointedly observe that “although a new dominant logic may arise as part of a change process, the previously dominant logic will continue to be an important factor in the field.” Furthermore, the researchers suggest that “[k]ey actors within a field must *consistently* use their power... to manage the process of change for the field” (Reay and Hinings 2005:377, emphasis mine).

As ‘interest-driven, aware, and calculative,’ it is thus likely that organized actors do not act on a single occasion to establish one logic as dominant, but rather *consistently* manage the change process to prevent the prior dominant logic from reemerging as the primary guide of thought, action, and identity for the field. Research efforts to date, however, focus overwhelmingly on studying change-based institutional work during moments of distinct and observable change (Zilber 2006), leaving relatively unexplored the consistent and ongoing practices of institutional work that typify the change process. Understanding “[h]ow the field moves to a new equilibrium with an altered logic,” as Reay and Hinings (2005:352) suggest, “is critical to understanding the complete cycle of institutional change.” In a manner similar to Reay and Hinings (2005), then, my second primary aim in this article is to expose the complexities of the ongoing change-based institutional work that occurs even after a new institutional logic emerges as dominant in an organizational field.

To achieve these aims, I rely on the United States Army, a markedly ‘mature field’ (Greenwood and Suddaby 2006), as a site for investigation. Acknowledging that language generally, and rhetoric specifically, are emerging and promising avenues of inquiry for studies of institutional work (Suddaby 2010), I analyze the official stories provided in the field’s primary leadership manuals published in 1999 and 2006. Focusing on the ‘rhetorical strategies’ (Suddaby

and Greenwood 2005) employed in these narratives, I expose two core dynamics that, though contradictory, may characterize the complex institutional work that typifies the relatively settled periods organizational fields may experience following a successful change to the prevailing institutional logic.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### *Institutional Logics, Key Actors, and Field-Level Change*

As a level of analysis, organizational fields have been defined as “clusters of organizations and occupations whose boundaries, identities, and interactions are defined and stabilized by shared institutional logics” (Greenwood and Suddaby 2006:28). Institutional logics are defined as “the socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space, and provide meaning to their social reality” (Thornton and Ocasio 1999:804). Organizational fields are therefore defined and stabilized by structural, normative, and symbolic dimensions (Thornton and Ocasio 2008). Though these dimensions of social life are, in the words of Friedland and Alford (1991:248), “available to organizations and individuals to elaborate,” much of the research efforts to date fail to adequately consider how such elaborations take shape. The problem, Lounsbury (2007:289) suggests, is that the growing body of research exploring institutional logics tends to emphasize the stabilizing effects of logics themselves, “reinforcing notions of stability and institutionalization that harken back to early neoinstitutional formulations,” the precise limitation of institutional theory that the concept of institutional logics was introduced to overcome.

Granting primacy to logics themselves as the defining factor for stability and equilibrium in an organizational field, traditional approaches in institutional logic research implicitly assume that though periods of struggle, contestation, and change are observable, organizational fields are more aptly characterized by lengthier periods of stability in which the prevailing logic goes

unquestioned and unchallenged (Van Gestel and Hillebrand 2011). More recent efforts, however, conceive of fields as characterized by ongoing contestation and struggle, as actors are influenced by multiple, competing, and even coexisting logics (e.g., Lounsbury 2007; Lounsbury and Crumley 2007; Reay and Hinings 2005, 2009; Swan et al. 2010). While traditional approaches to institutional logic research focus on the powerful stabilizing effects of logics themselves, later conceptualizations of multiple, competing, and coexisting logics open the door for exploring the multiple and complex ways in which actors engage in institutional work, not only during moments of change, but during periods of relative stability as well. This latter approach suggests that any study of dominant logics at the field level must attend to the reality that observed periods of stability are not simply the result of solitary and all-powerful logics, but the result of continuous institutional work aimed at establishing, maintaining, and supporting the prevailing logic. Such institutional work is often the focus of attention for key actors who, simply stated, “hold power and take action” (Reay and Hinings 2005:354).

Noting that ‘power’ in highly structured societal sectors such as organizational fields is shaped by the logic of the field itself, Friedland and Alford (1991:254) assert that “[t]he institutional nature of power provides specific opportunities for not only reproduction, but transformation as well.” The structure of an organizational field itself, then, provides for a distribution of power making some actors central in shaping the structural, normative, and symbolic dimensions of the field, and others less central. As such, key actors are identified as individuals, groups of individuals, organizations, and groups of organizations that maintain the capacity to both reinforce and change the dominant institutional logic (Battilina 2006). When interested in implementing change, the key task for such actors is “to create an environment to successfully enact the claims of a new public theory” (Thornton and Ocasio 2008:115). As

‘interest-driven, aware, and calculative,’ it is likely that when managing such change key actors are aware of the reality that “[f]ield-level actors... do not *naturally* accept a new dominant logic” (Reay and Hinings 2005:352, emphasis mine), and are thus calculative in their efforts to “consistently use their power... to manage the process of change for the field” (p. 377). In essence, such actors are aware of the fact that “the previously dominant logic will continue to be an important factor in the field” (Reay and Hinings 2005:377), pushing beliefs, behavior, and identity in directions that align more closely with the prior dominant logic than with the new logic. I thus echo Reay and Hinings (2005) in suggesting that key actors engage in ongoing institutional work to manage the change process even after a new logic emerges as dominant.

Though this suggestion is not novel, the methodological decisions that guide much of the research on changing institutional logics leave relatively ignored the institutional work that occurs in the wake of successful change efforts. Researchers of field-level change often enter the field of study during, and focus their research efforts on, periods characterized by distinct and observable change, such as the emergence of a new structure or practice in the field (Zilber 2006). The ‘institutional story’ that creates and shapes organizational fields, however, is characterized by continuous, ongoing practices of institutional work (Suddaby 2010). To ignore or leave unexplored the complex actions that sustain the cultural and symbolic environment during relatively stable periods in which one logic prevails is to ignore an important chapter of the story. Accepting, then, that institutional work and not all-powerful logics themselves characterize relatively stable periods in which one logic observably prevails, to ignore the ways key actors engage in such institutional work hinders our ability to understand institutional logic change as a process. I thus explore here the institutional work of key actors aimed at stabilizing the prevailing logic of a field when, as has been recently suggested, “other logics remain in the

background, to be revived whenever the opportunity arises” (Van Gestel and Hillebrand 2011:246). To accomplish this, I focus on the role of language in the change process as such a focus has recently been suggested to be one of the most promising areas of emphasis in institutional theory generally, and studies of institutional work specifically (Suddaby 2010).

### *Rhetoric, Narrative, and the Change Process*

Incorporating the term ‘work,’ Lawrence and colleagues (2011:53) note that “institutional work... implies a connection between effort and a goal.” Described as “discourse calculated to influence an audience toward some end” (Gill and Whedbee 1997:157), rhetoric clearly represents one type of institutional work and has recently been taken up by institutional scholars and suggested to be an instrumental concept in understanding institutional change (e.g., Erkama and Vaara 2010; Green, Babb, and Alpaslan 2008; Green, Li, and Nohria 2009; Suddaby 2010; Suddaby and Greenwood 2005). As summed by Green and colleagues (2008:42), a rhetorical approach to organizational fields suggests that “rhetoric is an important social skill used... in the construction and competition of institutional logics.” Rhetoric, or persuasive language, is thus assumed to be a powerful mechanism available to key actors engaged in institutional work aimed at changing and stabilizing the prevailing logic of a field (Thornton and Ocasio 2008).

In their often cited work on language and legitimacy, Suddaby and Greenwood (2005) rely on observations of rhetoric to explain, at least in part, why some change efforts are successful while others are not. Following an analysis of change in a global accounting firm, their results suggest that rhetoric plays a key role in the manipulation of meaning systems, or institutional logics, providing the impetus for change. Similarly, Green and colleagues (2008) expose the extent to which persuasive language serves as a useful mechanism leveraged by key

actors during periods of change to justify certain logics and criticize others in an attempt to establish one logic as dominant. Works in this tradition show, then, the ways language generally and rhetoric specifically both “reflect and shape the institutional logics” that prevail in a field (Green et al. 2009:14). As exemplified in recent research (Erkama and Vaara 2010; Vaara and Tienari 2008), an emerging area of interest in these rhetorical aspects of institutional work is the role of narrative and storytelling in the change process.

Simply stated, “stories are never neutral” (Keyton 2005:90). While stories play a central role in organizational life in multiple and various ways (Brophy 2009), my interest here necessitates a focus on those accounts that are endorsed by key actors in a field. Providing “a managerially approved version of history” (Martin 2002:251), narratives receiving such support have observably been used to establish and maintain the cultural and symbolic environment desired by key actors (Alvesson 1996). Such “official stories,” Schank (1990:32) suggests, represent “the position of a group that has a message to sell and treats that message independently of the facts.” Official stories are therefore inherently rhetorical and serve as one mechanism available to key actors interested in the establishment and management of field-level logics. Official stories, as a “mode of symbolic structuring” (Mumby 1987:118), thus exemplify institutional work, as they serve the interests of key actors by endorsing certain structural, normative, and symbolic systems and devaluing others. The research question I explore here, then, is: Following a change in which a new institutional logic emerges as dominant in an organizational field, how do key actors employ narratives rhetorically as a mechanism of institutional work aimed at rendering the field stable?

## CHAPTER III

### CASE STUDY: THE UNITED STATES ARMY

The description of organizational fields as “a community of organizations that partake of a common meaning system and whose participants interact more frequently and fatefully with one another than with actors outside the field” (Scott 1994:207) lends credence to the reality that fields are not defined geographically but in terms of functional and cultural connections (Scott et al. 2000). With the functional imperative of responding to threats posed to a society’s security (Huntington [1957] 1985), it has been observed that “combat lies at the heart of army culture as its *raison d’être*” and serves to shape the structural, cultural, and normative dimensions of army organizations (Winslow 2007:84). Viewed in such a way, the organizational field of the United States Army, the primary landpower arm of the armed forces that “exists to successfully fight and win the nation’s wars” (HQDA 1997:1-1), provides a useful setting for analysis as each component of the field shares a meaning system, or guiding institutional logic, that influences the material and symbolic realities of organizational life. With shared patterns of interactions, flows of information, governance systems, and organizational archetypes providing well-defined roles and organizational templates, all key aspects of organizational fields (Scott 2008), the U.S. Army is particularly amenable to field-level analysis as it represents a “mature field” in which such aspects of organizational life are highly stable and routinized (Greenwood and Suddaby 2006).

Accepting that ‘combat lies at the heart of army culture,’ one would expect that as the nature of combat changes, so too does the institutional logic that prevails. Scholars have taken note of a number of factors that have altered the nature of combat across time such as war experiences (Rosen 1991), changes in technology (Boot 2006), altered international relations

(Burk 1994), and shifting threats to the nation (Posen 1984). At times, factors such as these have been suggested to be so consequential as to play a role not just in instigating minor changes to the culture of military organizations, but in redefining military service more generally. As suggested in one Department of the Army field manual, “the Army often redefines what it means to be a Soldier” as a result of “fundamental changes in the Army’s... culture” (HQDA 2006a:12-4). Though change is “an ongoing and never-ending process of organizational life” (Van de Ven and Sun 2011:58), ‘fundamental changes’ to a field’s culture reflect a change in the guiding principles, or institutional logic, that shapes beliefs, behavior, and identity in the field. Though not relying on the language of institutional logics directly, military scholars have made just such an observation as they have identified distinct eras of military service in the United States in which each era fundamentally differs in a number of ways from the others.

Exploring “critical periods of transition in military organization” in which “ideas about how militaries should be organized and what they should do were fundamentally transformed,” Moskos and Burk (1994:142) identify both the beginning and end of the Cold War as watershed events. These events, the authors note, resulted in ‘fundamental changes’ to the material and symbolic dimensions of military organizations in the U.S. and many other nations. Influenced by multiple factors, to include an altered perception of the primary threat to national security, changes in economic organization, technological innovation, and other political, social, and cultural factors, Moskos and Burk (1994) provide a typology that distinguishes three eras of armed forces and armed force structure across the twentieth century: pre-Cold War, Cold War, and post-Cold War. In an edited volume dedicated to describing the differences between these three eras of armed forces in multiple countries, Moskos (2000) more recently applies this

typological analysis to the U.S. case specifically, detailing how a number of factors differ across the three eras (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** United States Armed Forces in Three Eras

	Pre-Cold War 1900–1945	Cold War 1945–1990	Post-Cold War Since 1990
Perceived Threat	Enemy invasion	Nuclear war	Subnational (e.g., ethnic violence, terrorism)
Force Structure	Mass army, conscription	Large professional army	Small professional army
Major Mission Definition	Defense of homeland	Support of alliance	New missions (e.g., peacekeeping, humanitarian)
Dominant Military Professional	Combat leader	Manager or technician	Soldier-statesman; soldier-scholar
Women’s Role	Separate corps or excluded	Partial integration	Full integration
Homosexuals in Military	Punished	Discharged	Accepted
Conscientious Objection	Limited or prohibited	Routinely permitted	Subsumed under civilian service

Source: Moskos (2000).

Prior to the end of World War II, a period in which enemy invasion was perceived to be the primary threat posed to U.S. national security, wars were characterized as wars of attrition which necessitated large militaries and supported systems of conscription to provide forces that could aggressively defend the U.S. against a potential invasion. The mass Army that characterizes this era valued soldiers and leaders who were “skilled in the arts of war” (Moskos 2000:19). In the years following the end of World War II, years characterized by technological advancements and a strengthening of the bifurcated Cold War world that emphasized international alliances, the primary perceived threat increasingly shifted from one characterized by potential invasion to one defined by new realities of nuclear war. Morris Janowitz ([1960]

1971:22), in his seminal work *The Professional Soldier*, notes that as this new era evolves “the military establishment becomes progressively dependent on more complex technology, the importance of the military manager increases... [and] he [or she] undermines the long-standing traditionalism of the military establishment,” as he or she comes to resemble his or her civilian counterpart to a significantly greater degree than in any previous era. As Segal and Segal (1983:161) note, military organization at this time “began to require personnel with skills that were also needed in the civilian economy,” as military and civilian personnel no longer “spent their time doing different things” (p. 160) to the degree that they had prior to World War II.

Just as the beginning of the Cold War resulted in fundamental changes to military organizations and redefinitions of what it meant to be a military service member, so too did the end of the Cold War. As Moskos, Williams, and Segal (2000:3) observe, “[i]t is incontestable that the demise of the Soviet Union has ushered in a new era in international relations and with it concomitant changes in the structure and culture of the armed forces.” Characterized by the hegemonic and impending war between world powers, the Cold War era was typified by a “big battle” concept of war and “[s]trategy, weaponry, training, and organization were directed to that end” (Sarkesian, Williams, and Bryant 1995:35). With the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the greatest perceived threat to national security assumed a different character as “subnational” and “nonmilitary” threats such as ethnic violence and terrorism have come to command the attention of U.S. armed forces (Moskos and Burk 1994). These new concerns and the primary missions that define the military under such conditions, “operations other than war” such as peacekeeping and humanitarian missions, call for relatively small, readily deployable professional forces prepared to engage in joint operations with reserve and international forces.

Such missions call for military personnel that are not only ‘skilled in the arts of war,’ but possess diplomatic skill as well (Moskos 2000).

In addition to these field-altering changes to military organization and individual identities, Moskos (2000) highlights in his typological analysis of U.S. military organizations that there has been a general trajectory of a U.S. military establishment characterized by one of exclusion or segregation to one of inclusion, integration, and acceptance. Women, for example, have been afforded increasingly greater roles in U.S. military organizations across the three eras. Excluded from service at the turn of the century and only allowed to serve in a separate corps prior to the Cold War era, it is notable that women experienced partial integration during the Cold War era and full, or near-full integration in the contemporary era. Similarly, homosexuals in the military, while punished in the pre-Cold War era, were discharged in the Cold War era and have experienced “increased toleration and acceptance” in the post-Cold War era (Moskos 2000:23). Furthermore, conscientious objectors, individuals who maintain a “firm, fixed, and sincere objection to war in any form” (Mirra 2006:199), were often not tolerated in the pre-Cold War era as many were court-martialed or forced to serve the nation in noncombatant roles ranging from service in the medical branch of the Army to being furloughed to harvest crops in areas of the U.S. that were experiencing labor shortages (Chambers 1993). In the contemporary post-Cold War era, however, conscientious objectors are subsumed. Soldiers in this later era are accepted as carriers of multiple and various beliefs and motives for service that may conflict with those of military action (Moskos 2000). The increased integration and acceptance of women, homosexuals, and conscientious objectors thus exposes a general trend in U.S. military organizations, which appear to be transitioning from generally discriminatory and exclusive

social spaces to spaces of integration, acceptance, and tolerance in line with broader social trends (Dandeker 1994; Dunivin 1994).

Whether responding to changing social values or changes to international relations and perceived threats to the nation, the beginning and end of the Cold War are often noted to be distinct turning points in which the cultural and normative dimensions of military service experienced significant change in the U.S. (e.g., Dandeker 1994; Moskos et al. 2000; Sarkesian et al. 1995). While “[t]he American Army has stressed *a* military ethic throughout its existence,” Schroeder (1996:2, emphasis mine) notes that what that military ethic is composed of and the individual values that support it have changed across time. For example, commitment, competence, candor, and courage were the four individual values endorsed by the U.S. Army from the late 1970s until 1994 when the Army added compassion to the list (Schroeder 1996). The addition of compassion notably comes shortly after the Army transitions from a force preparing for nuclear war to one whose primary missions include peacekeeping and humanitarian efforts. Shortly thereafter, in 1998, the Army revisited the individual values desired of Army soldiers and established the “seven core Army Values” of loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage (U.S. Army TRADOC 2011b). Acknowledging the role of international relations in shaping such changes, Trainor (2000:1) has gone so far as to suggest that “[d]ramatic changes in the international security environment” as a result of the end of the Cold War “have contributed to a shifting perception of military values and culture at a time when the basic military ethic, obedient and unselfish service to the state, is, perhaps, the only consistent principle remaining in the Post-Cold War military.”

Though the ongoing War on Terror has undoubtedly changed the face of the U.S. Army to a degree, it is notable that the transition experienced with the fall of the Soviet Union resulted

in a repackaging of the nation's wars the Army exists to fight and win by highlighting subnational and nonmilitary threats to include terrorism (Moskos 2000; Moskos and Burk 1994). Such an altered focus supported distinct and significant alterations to the field in support of such ends (Sarkesian et al. 1995) more than a decade before the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. As stated in a U.S. Army field manual published in 1999, "[s]ince the end of the Cold War, the international stage has become more confused. Threats to US national security may come from a number of quarters: regional instabilities, insurgencies, terrorism, and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction to name a few" (HQDA 1999:7-12). Such an emphasis in the field prior to the events of September 11, 2001 support the contention that the War on Terror did not result in altogether new structural and symbolic systems for the field, but rather "intensified [existing] concerns over specific threats such as international terrorism, asymmetric warfare, and weapons of mass destruction proliferation" (Fasana 2011:142). While Army organizations and service have experienced change as a result of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, those observed are thus representative of a fine-tuning and crystallization of an existing institutional logic as opposed to a distinctly new logic for the field. Just as Janowitz ([1960] 1971:xlix) suggests that "the impact of Vietnam on the military profession must be seen in the context of the military's gradual transformation since the end of World War II," so too must the influence of the War on Terror on the military profession be seen in the context of the military's gradual transformation since the end of the Cold War.

## CHAPTER IV

### DATA

Rendering the U.S. Army particularly agreeable with studies of field-level institutional work is the recognition that the management of field-level logics is of particular interest to the Army and has led to the establishment of an organizational entity that maintains the explicit goal of engaging in institutional work. As stated on the U.S. Army's Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) website, "TRADOC adopts the spirit and intention of *institutional adaptation* that will enable it to assist the Army in meeting its strategic focus" (U.S. Army TRADOC 2011a, emphasis mine). Products from this organization, then, are extremely insightful as they support explicit goals of institutional adaptation, or institutional work, at the organizational field level.

With my interest in the use of narrative accounts as a mechanism of institutional work, it is notable that the U.S. Army relies, to a great degree, on official stories. Medal of Honor citation narratives, for example, are often orally presented at the outset of training exercises and physical fitness tests as a source of inspiration; case studies provide the substance for a number of lessons at the U.S. Army War College (Stiehm 2002); and numerous vignettes provide exemplars of action and decision-making in the Army's most recent manual devoted to counterinsurgency operations (HQDA 2006b). Composing the data analyzed here are the "selected accounts of history" (HQDA 1990:9) provided in the Army's most recent leadership field manuals (FMs) produced by TRADOC and approved for public release (HQDA 1990, 1999, 2006a). The official stories incorporated in these manuals illustrate how various aspects of soldiering and leadership have enabled organizational success across time. The leadership FM is a resource that describes the foundation for thought and action for Army leaders at all levels of service to include Active,

Reserve, and National Guard soldiers as well as Department of the Army civilians, and serves as the foundational text in the development of required primary leadership courses.

The leadership manual is a particularly informative source of data for multiple reasons. First, it has been noted that leaders, specifically, “tended to be cautious about accepting... the dramatic changes that took place in 1990 and 1991” (Sarkesian et al. 1995:103). As ‘aware, and calculative,’ it is thus likely that key actors engage in change-based institutional work explicitly targeting this audience. Second, the leadership manual is acquiescent to the field-level changes discussed in the previous section. Produced in the formative years of the post-Cold War Army, the introduction to the 1990 version of the manual begins with the following paragraph:

The changing face of war poses special challenges for our Army. Because of the increasing complexity of the world environment, we must prepare to respond across the entire spectrum of conflict. Just as we have changed our doctrine, weapons, and force structure, so have our potential enemies. These changes have dramatically altered the characteristics and demands of modern conflict. More than ever, we need competent and confident soldiers, leaders, and units to meet these challenges. (HQDA 1990:vi)

The manual, which “establishes... the fundamental principles by which Army leaders act” (HQDA 1999:vii), thus both reflects changes to and serves to establish altered ‘fundamental principles’ that prevail in the field. In addition, the most recent leadership manuals, those produced in 1999 and 2006, incorporate multiple narrative accounts throughout the manual rendering them particularly useful in answering the research question I explore here. In total there are 77 narrative accounts (53 in 1999 and 24 in 2006) that are highlighted and separated from the non-narrative material of the manuals in call-out boxes.

Published in 1999, the leadership manual titled “Army Leadership: Be, Know, Do” states that “[t]he Army is a values-based institution” and suggests that the manual “establishes and clarifies those values” (HQDA 1999:viii). The stories that appear within the manual thus play an explicit role in establishing and clarifying the values that define the field. These narratives are well-positioned to answer the research question I posed above as they provide accounts of military history which Janowitz ([1960] 1971:224) notes “is often not mere reality... [but] rather an idealized interpretation of past events designed to inspire professionals.” As suggested in the FM, the accounts of military history included are not only intended to inspire those serving in leadership positions, but all field-level actors, as good leaders not only learn from these stories; “good leaders teach these stories” (HQDA 1999:1-19). As has been suggested in various cultural, organizational, and institutional contexts, stories such as these serve to socialize new members (Mishler 1995). Following Zilber’s (2002:237) contention that “the politics of socialization is part of the politics of institutionalization,” this collection of stories, as socializing artifacts, thus have unique properties that put them in a position to answer the research question I explore here.

## CHAPTER V

### RESEARCH METHODS

As an instrumental case study, one focused on the refinement of current theory (Stake 1998), my focus in analyzing the official stories and the context in which they emerged is to expose how the institutional work of key actors manifests in the U.S. Army leadership manuals. To accomplish this, I rely on a grounded theory approach which has been used elsewhere in studies of field-level change (Greenwood and Suddaby 2006). Underscoring the benefits of “theoretical sensitivity” to include disciplinary knowledge as well as personal experience with the case of interest, a grounded theory approach encourages the development of theory “through the continuing conversation with ‘the data’” (Strauss and Corbin 1998:174). To create such a conversation, I read and re-read the narratives while constantly relating the raw data to disciplinary research, exploring its integration into the non-narrative material of the FM, and examining the narratives with regard to my personal knowledge of and experience with the U.S. Army. Serving more than seven years as an enlisted soldier on active duty in the U.S. Army from 2000 to 2007, my time in service notably includes completion of the Army’s Primary Leadership Development Course in 2002 in which the curriculum was developed around the 1999 leadership FM, and service as a training support noncommissioned officer with TRADOC at the time of release of the 2006 version of the manual. With a focus on the context in which the raw data emerged, a grounded theory approach relying on such knowledge and experience is particularly useful in rhetorical analyses of institutional work as it has been argued that “[t]o understand the rhetoric and appreciate how it functions as political and persuasive discourse, we must understand the organizational context in which it was produced” (Symon 2008:79).

Following the example set by Greenwood and Suddaby (2006), I employed Berg's (1998) concepts of manifest and latent analyses. My initial readings of the narratives focused on the "*surface structure*" of the message (Berg 1998:226). This manifest content analysis enabled observations of key terms, phrases, and concepts that are physically present in the data. Revisiting the narratives with this manifest content in mind then allowed for a latent content analysis in which I focused on "the *deep structural* meaning conveyed by the message" (Berg 1998:226). As a process that is inherently interpretive, this latent analysis was enabled by a reading and re-reading of the narratives in tandem with searches for applicable scholarly sources and analyses of the non-narrative aspects of the FMs that provide an immediate context for the data. In addition, this latent analysis was supported by my intimate knowledge of and experience in the field. This process enabled sociological explanation as it allowed me to successfully "retool the context of investigation," the social world of the researcher, in an effort to adequately grasp and harness "the 'culture' that exists in the context of explanation" (Reed 2009:3), here the field of the United States Army.

As suggested by Greenwood and Suddaby (2006), the iterative process enabled by this 'continuing conversation with the data' strengthens the researcher's theoretical sensibilities, ultimately allowing for categories of interest to emerge and either solidify or die off. Supporting a strengthening and weakening of categories in this manner allowed me to avoid the dangers of a "rapid consolidation of categories" that plagues other forms of qualitative analysis (Phillips and Hardy 2002:74) and led to the identification of two core dynamics: blurring boundaries between eras guided by dissimilar institutional logics and building boundaries between these eras.

## CHAPTER VI

### CASE ANALYSIS

My analysis of the data suggests that during times of relative stability in which one logic prevails in a given organizational field, key actors are actively involved in practices of blurring boundaries between the current era and prior eras guided by dissimilar institutional logics, as well as building boundaries between these eras. While the blurring of these boundaries relies on narratives of continuity, the building of boundaries relies on narratives of change. In the subsections that follow I describe and provide examples of the rhetorical strategies employed that enable and support these contradictory practices.

#### *Blurring Boundaries: Narratives of Continuity*

In large part, the narratives I analyzed leverage “institutional vocabulary” (Suddaby and Greenwood 2005), meaningful words and texts, to present a somewhat seamless history in terms of the logic that serves the field. A number of the official stories provided in the leadership manuals emphasize the role the axial principles that serve the field in the present played in serving as the guide for thought, action, and identity in the past. Though the institutional logic that serves the field has observably differed across distinct eras, many of the narratives I analyzed emphasize continuity as if to suggest that the logic that serves the field in the present era is the logic that has served the field in all previous ones. These narratives of continuity effectively blur the boundaries that exist between eras guided by distinctly different institutional logics.

Perhaps the most transparent attempts at such efforts of “backward compatibility” (Misangyi et al. 2008) are the explicit suggestions made within and following a number of narrative accounts that make straightforward connections between key aspects of the post-Cold War logic and thought and action that occurred in the pre-Cold War and Cold War eras. For example, one narrative account describes the successes of a lieutenant who assumed command of a task force during the Korean War, the first major conflict in the Cold War era, and offers the following in conclusion: “Task Force Kingston succeeded in battle because of a competent young leader who inspired his people by demonstrating many attributes common to the Warrior Ethos and the Army Values that the Army currently espouses” (HQDA 2006a:4-11). Similarly, after detailing General of the Army (GA) Dwight D. Eisenhower’s decision-making process to launch the D-Day invasion during World War II, a pre-Cold War conflict, another account states that

GA Eisenhower, in command of the largest invasion force ever assembled and poised on the eve of battle that would decide the fate of millions of people, was guided by the same values and attributes that shaped the actions of the soldiers in the [previously provided] Desert Storm example. (HQDA 1999:2-20)

Examples such as these establish continuity between the core values and spirit that guide thought and action in the post-Cold War Army, the Army that experienced Desert Storm, and those axial principles that guided thought and action in the past. The current ‘Army Values’ which are suggested in the manual to be “a starting point for how [members] of the Army should think and act” (HQDA 1999:2-14) are thus suggested in these narratives to be the starting point for thought and action in the Cold War and pre-Cold War Armies, which espoused a distinctly different set of values. The World War II example referencing the decision to launch the D-Day

attack is remarkably powerful as the suggestion is not only that contemporary Army values have guided thought and action in the past, but that they are consistent with the axial principles that have influenced thought and action that occurred during the most important and pivotal moments faced by the field and the nation.

Other examples of narratives of continuity are less transparent, but no less meaningful for field-level actors. In 1997, the Army updated its doctrine on Army command and control and officially added the “central concept” of ‘commander’s intent’ to the Army landscape (HQDA 2005). As a response to the changing nature of combat, the Army introduced the concept to support strategic flexibility and individual initiative on the post-Cold War battlefield because the direct nature of command and control that prevailed and stymied action in previous eras had to change to meet the new demands of the post-Cold War era. The concept was introduced within a larger initiative to overcome limitations embedded in existing doctrine that was acknowledged to be “developed for a different time and a different problem” (Alberts, Garstka, and Stein 1999:71). Underscoring the importance that soldiers understand the purpose and endstate of the mission of commanders two echelons above their own position, new doctrine states that when faced with pressing battlefield decisions soldiers should act independently by “exercising disciplined initiative within the commander’s intent” (HQDA 2005:1-5). Though a relatively new conceptualization of battlefield command and control, the concept of commander’s intent and its associated ideas are woven into a number of narratives in the leadership FMs. While many of the narratives I analyzed make explicit mention of commander’s intent or the ‘disciplined initiative’ it fosters, the narrative account of Colonel (COL) Joshua L. Chamberlain at Gettysburg during the Civil War best exemplifies the blurring of boundaries.

Appearing in 1990 and both of the later versions of the FM that are the focus of my analysis, the narrative account of COL Chamberlain is notably altered to underscore the role the relatively novel concept of commander's intent played in successful action during the Civil War. In 1990, as the Army was beginning to reestablish itself in the aftermath of the Cold War, the narrative account of COL Chamberlain's actions emphasizes his providing orders to subordinate commanders. In total, there are eight references in the 1990 account to the direct orders provided by COL Chamberlain. The account provided in the 2006 version of the manual, an account of the same set of decisions and actions, only mentions two direct orders given by COL Chamberlain, highlighting instead more contemporary notions of commander's intent as the deciding factors for success.

In 1990, the narrative account suggests that COL "Chamberlain quickly gathered his company commanders and stressed the importance of their mission. He ordered them to move their units into a defensive line" (HQDA 1990:11). At the same point in the narrative, it is suggested in the 2006 version that "COL Chamberlain issued his intent and purpose for the mission to the assembled company commanders" (HQDA 2006a:2-5), a notable difference and direct insertion of commander's intent.

As the narrative continues, yet another stark contrast between the accounts is notable. Toward the end of the battle, the narrative appearing in 1990 suggests that COL Chamberlain quickly developed a plan in his mind and ordered the left flank to charge first, anchoring its right flank company in place. When the left half of the regiment was abreast of the right half, the entire regiment was to charge down and to the right – like a great swinging door – the right flank company firmly hinged on the 83d Pennsylvania Regiment. (HQDA 1990:13)

This part of the story provided in the 2006 FM is remarkably different and appears as follows:

COL Chamberlain assembled his commanders. He explained that the regiment's left wing would swing around 'like a barn door on a hinge' until it was even with the right wing. Then the entire regiment, bayonets fixed, would charge downhill, staying anchored to the 83d Pennsylvania on the right. The explanation was as simple as the situation was desperate. (HQDA 2006a:2-6)

According to the Army's manual *Operations*, the commander's intent "must be clearly and simply articulated" (HQDA 2001:2-17). It is noteworthy, then, that the narrative of this event that is provided to soldiers guided by the post-Cold War logic takes note of a 'simple' 'explanation' that highlights the uncomplicated analogy of battlefield actions to 'a barn door on a hinge' as opposed to the direct order that was described in 1990. Following the narrative in 2006, it is stated explicitly that the actions described were successful because COL Chamberlain "communicated his intent and led by example" (HQDA 2006a:2-6), the notion of intent and the key concepts associated with it being observably absent in 1990.

Emphasizing the role of 'commander's intent' in thought and action throughout the Army's long history supports the impression that strategic flexibility and individual initiative have always been at the heart of successful thought and action in the field. As Ross (1979:13) observes, such an impression is a false one as the U.S. Army, especially in the formative years of the nation, imitated the warfighting capabilities and doctrine of European nations, most notably France, that often emphasized "inflexible linear tactics... [that rely] upon harsh discipline and formalized evolutions." The notions of flexibility and initiative embedded in commander's intent are thus more contemporary notions of battlefield action that are supported by a post-Cold War institutional logic that upholds the following definition of leadership: "influencing people by

providing purpose, direction, and motivation” (HQDA 1999:1-4). The Army of earlier eras, an Army guided by a logic that perceived of leadership as “the art of influencing human behavior through ability to directly influence people and direct them toward a specific goal” as it was defined in 1948 (as cited in U.S. Army Service Center for the Armed Forces 1991:200) for example, would thus be more apt to valorize the direct orders given by COL Chamberlain as opposed to his explaining the mission’s intent and purpose.

Though lacking explicit connections such as those observed in the narrative accounts of Task Force Kingston or the decision-making process of GA Eisenhower, narrative accounts such as that of COL Chamberlain that explicitly emphasize ‘commander’s intent’ and ‘disciplined initiative’ serve, no less, as examples of backward compatibility. The contemporary set of seven Army values, the Warrior Ethos, commander’s intent, and other aspects of ‘institutional vocabulary’ that characterize the current era are suggested, via these narratives of continuity, to be axial principles that have served the field across its long history regardless of their being introduced and defined in a manner that distinctly serves the small professional force of the post-Cold War Army.

### *Building Boundaries: Narratives of Change*

Where narratives of continuity function rhetorically by blurring the boundaries between eras characterized by distinctly different institutional logics, narratives of change demonstrate institutional work as they serve to build these same boundaries. These narratives of change not only render distinct eras in the field visible, but meaningful as well. While some narratives rely on comparisons between Cold War or pre-Cold War structures and practices and those that typify the post-Cold War Army in order to render the boundaries identified meaningful, still others rely

on establishing a meta-narrative of progress and connecting change to broader social discourses. The examples below demonstrate how these rhetorical strategies succeed in building boundaries.

“[T]he replacement system that fed new soldiers into the line units” during World War II, one narrative notes,

was seriously flawed... and did tremendous harm to the soldiers and the Army.

Troops fresh from stateside posts were shuffled about in tent cities where they were just numbers. [First Lieutenant] George Wilson... remembers the results:

‘... these men had been on a rifle range only once; they had never thrown a grenade or fired a bazooka [antitank rocket], mortar or machine gun.’ (HQDA 1999:5-22)

Appearing in the FM shortly after the suggestion is made that the process of receiving and orienting new soldiers during combat “can literally mean life or death to new members and to the team” (HQDA 1999:5-20), this prior practice is suggested to not only have been ‘seriously flawed’ but objectively inferior to that embraced by the field in the post-Cold War era in which the narrative appears. Embedded within a discussion that outlines in detail the multi-stage team building process embraced by the post-Cold War Army, the immediate context of the narrative supports a clear distinction between prior and current replacement systems in which the former are inferior to those that characterize the latter.

When read in the larger field-level context of the Army, the narrative renders visible and distinct the differences between the mass Army of World War II that typifies the pre-Cold War era and the smaller professional Army that dominates the post-Cold War era. Troops, the narrative suggests, ‘were just numbers’ and are observed by First Lieutenant Wilson to have been untrained. Read from the perspective of the post-Cold War logic, such a force is

inconsistent with prevailing ideals that valorize technically proficient professional forces. Thus, not only are the eras and their guiding logics presented as different from one another, but likely to be judged, from the audience that likely embraces the post-Cold War logic, as inadequate.

While this example, among others, enables direct comparisons of the axial principles of Army service that guide different eras, other narratives rely on the establishment of a meta-narrative of progress and connecting change to broader social discourses to render the boundaries between eras visible and meaningful. The following examples demonstrate these rhetorical strategies.

As the nation prepared for war in 1941, Congresswoman Edith Nourse Rogers is noted in one narrative account to have been a key contributor to not only American success in World War II, but a new and progressive Army that persisted after the war. “To meet growing needs,” the narrative states, Congresswoman Rogers

proposed creating a Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) of 25,000 women to fill administrative jobs, freeing men for service with combat units.

After the United States entered the war, it became clear that the effort was on target but needed further expansion. Consequently, Congresswoman Rogers introduced another bill for 150,000 additional WAAC women. Although the bill met stiff opposition in some congressional quarters, a version of it passed. Eventually the Women’s Army Corps was born and accepted as a major force multiplier.

Congresswoman Rogers’ vision of how to best satisfy the need for additional military personnel for a global war effort, significantly contributed to winning

WWII and opened the door for employing the tremendous capabilities of female Soldiers. (HQDA 2006a:12-4 – 12-5)

The narrative of Congresswoman Rogers' actions distinguishes the pre-Cold War Army of World War II, one characterized by the exclusion of women or one in which their involvement was limited to a separate corps, from the increasingly gender integrated Army of the Cold War and post-Cold War eras. Stating that the Women's Army Corps 'was *born* and *accepted* as a major force multiplier,' the narrative makes the boundaries between the pre-Cold War and later institutional logics clear. There is a definitive line that exists between an era that existed prior to the 'birth' of the Women's Army Corps and one that 'accepts' the contributions of women in Army service.

Furthermore, the narrative of Congresswoman Rogers' actions imply progress, as not only do the boundaries between eras exist, but the later logic that 'accepts' the integration of women is suggested to be progressively better than an era of exclusion because later logics not only enable the employment of female soldiers, but also realize 'the *tremendous capabilities*' that female soldiers have to offer that were absent from the field in prior eras. In addition to this relatively explicit declaration of progress, it is notable that the narrative is embedded in a broader social discourse of gender equality and integration. Appearing in 2006, the intended audience of this narrative is embedded within a social historical moment in which gender segregation and inequality is increasingly viewed as unacceptable and socially challenged. An Army which not only allows but accepts and embraces the tremendous capabilities of female soldiers is likely to be perceived by the intended audience as a progressive Army, as the employment of women in the armed forces corresponds with broader social changes regarding the role of women in society (Dandeker 1994).

In a similar manner, other examples of building boundaries engage in the establishment of a meta-narrative of progress via connections to broader social discourses of race and racial segregation. For example, the following narrative renders the boundary between the racially integrated post-Cold War Army and racially segregated Army of World War II visible and meaningful.

Of all the Medals of Honor awarded during World War II, none went to an African-American. In 1993, the Army contracted Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina, to research racial disparities in the selection of Medal of Honor recipients. As a result, the Army ultimately decided to recommend seven for the award.

Fifty-two years after they earned them, the medals were awarded along with the nation's silent apology for being ignored by the once-segregated Army. (HQDA 2006a:4-8)

The narrative continues to discuss the actions of Vernon J. Baker, the only one of the seven recipients alive to receive the medal at the time they were awarded. This introduction to his actions, however, clearly builds boundaries between eras of Army service as the Army is noted to be 'once-segregated.' Incorporating terms such as 'disparities' and acknowledging that the actions of many African-American soldiers were at the time unjustifiably 'ignored,' the narrative connects the differences in institutional logics to notions of discrimination and racism that are not accepted by the current logic and indeed warrant an apology towards those negatively impacted by this aspect of the prior logic. The change is thus progressive as the very use of the term apology implies an admission of guilt. Furthermore, the social historical moment in which the intended audience lives and the narrative appears is generally supportive of the idea

that racial segregation and discrimination are not something the field intends to be guilty of in the future.

Making such distinctions, these narratives of change render visible and meaningful the boundaries that exist between the post-Cold War era in which they appear and prior eras of Army service. Through these narratives, the axial principles that serve the post-Cold War Army are thus viewed as not only dissimilar from those that have served the field in the past, but progressively better than those that have served prior eras as well.

### *Blurring and Building Boundaries: Narratives of Continuity and Change*

Though the core dynamics I found are contradictory in nature, both blurring and building the distinct boundaries between eras, a few narrative accounts involve both the blurring and building of the same boundaries concomitantly. I provide here an example of one such narrative.

Drafted during World War I, Private (PVT) Alvin C. York is noted in one lengthy narrative account to have been a conscientious objector. After informing his commander of his objection to kill the enemy based on deeply held religious values, his battalion commander is noted to have

Sent PVT York home on leave to ponder and pray over the dilemma.

The battalion commander had promised to release York from the Army if he decided that he could not serve his country without sacrificing his integrity.

After two weeks of reflection and soul-searching, PVT York returned to his unit.

He had reconciled his personal values with those of the Army. PVT York's decision would have great consequences for both himself and his unit. (HQDA 2006a:8-4)

After returning to his unit and deploying in support of World War I, York is noted in the narrative to have engaged in heroic actions that resulted in his being promoted to sergeant and awarded the Medal of Honor, the nation's highest award for bravery. The discussion that follows the narrative account of PVT York's turmoil as a conscientious objector and actions that would support his being honored as a war hero both blurs and builds the boundaries that exist between the pre- and post-Cold War eras regarding the expected treatment of conscientious objectors.

"From a simply disciplinary perspective," the paragraph begins, PVT York's commanders

could easily have ordered Private York to do his duty under threat of courts martial, or they might even have assigned him a duty away from the fighting. Instead, these two leaders appropriately addressed the Soldier's ethical concerns... The climate the leaders created demonstrated that every person's beliefs were important and would be considered. (HQDA 2006a:8-4)

As this excerpt suggests, York's commanders 'could easily,' 'from a simply disciplinary perspective,' have threatened courts martial or forced reassignment, as the institutional logic that prevailed at that time supported such practices. This acknowledgment seemingly builds boundaries between the post-Cold War era that generally accepts conscientious objection and the relatively intolerant pre-Cold War logic that prevailed during World War I. As stated next, however, the commanders are suggested to have 'appropriately addressed' York's ethical concerns by establishing an environment in support of the notion 'that every person's beliefs [are] important and [will] be considered.' As discussed previously, however, such an environment is characteristic of the post-Cold War Army and not the pre-Cold War era in which the narrative takes place. By suggesting that the 'appropriate' actions regarding the treatment of

conscientious objectors during the pre-Cold War era was to be tolerant and accepting of such individuals, the narrative effectively blurs the boundaries that exist between the post-Cold War Army that embraces such an attitude and the pre-Cold War Army that was relatively intolerant. Though contradictory, these practices of blurring and building boundaries that appear both separately and in tandem appear to characterize the institutional work embedded in the official stories provided in the Army's leadership FMs.

## CHAPTER VII

### DISCUSSION

I began this paper by arguing that in order to understand the process of changing institutional logics at the organizational field level researchers must attend to change-focused institutional work that occurs beyond any observable moment or period of change. Acknowledging that key actors in a field are ‘interest-driven, aware, and calculative’ in their efforts to enact change, it seems logical to suggest that such actors would consistently be engaged in efforts to overcome potential threats to successful change. Most notably, such actors must overcome the obstacles posed by the multiple, competing and coexisting logics that have recently been suggested to typify organizational fields (e.g., Lounsbury 2007; Lounsbury and Crumley 2007; Reay and Hinings 2005, 2009; Swan et al. 2010; Van Gestel and Hillebrand 2011).

Asking how key actors employ narratives rhetorically to achieve such aims, my analysis reveals that key actors in the U.S. Army engaged in contradictory practices of blurring and building boundaries between eras that are guided by dissimilar institutional logics. While the specific rhetorical strategies that I found in support of these practices may be unique to the organizational field I analyzed, the connections between my findings and prior literature lend credence to the notion that the core dynamics exposed will be evident in other contexts.

#### *Blurring Boundaries*

As occurs in all organizational fields, the U.S. Army “often redefines what it means to be a Soldier” based on “fundamental changes in the Army’s... culture” (HQDA 2006a:12-4). Such

redefinitions are difficult to carry out as they require field-level actors to embrace a new institutional logic, a new symbolic and normative order, that supports an altered member role identity ushering in new ways of thinking and acting (Goodrick and Reay 2010; Misangyi et al. 2008; Reay and Hinings 2005, 2009). Such changes to the logic of a field create a “sensegiving imperative” (Corley and Gioia 2004) on the part of central actors that support the change effort. Specifically, key actors feel compelled to use their power to manage the change process in a way that renders the emergent logic an acceptable guide for thought and action to actors in the field. As Reay and Hinings (2005) suggest, this use of power must be consistent and on-going even after the change has occurred if the change process is to be successful. The need for this consistent management of the process is made clear by the fact that “although a new dominant logic may arise as part of a change process, the previously dominant logic will continue to be an important factor in the field” (Reay and Hinings 2005:377).

Supporting their theoretical model of changing logics with prior literature, Misangyi and colleagues (2008) note that efforts of “backward compatibility” are necessary to combat the power of previously dominant logics. Specifically, the researchers suggest that references to history will be “idealistic, simple, and coherent, selectively highlighting desired features at the expense of the less desirable” (Misangyi et al. 2008:762). Similarly, Goodrick and Reay (2010) expose the extent to which successful ideational change does not require the delegitimation of prior dominant logics as has been suggested in the past, but may be enabled by the portrayal of the new order as essentially “implied in” the prior dominant form. As a novel contribution, my findings suggest that key actors engage in similar processes of backward compatibility during times of relative stability, thus supporting Reay and Hinings’ (2005) proposition that successful change requires the consistent use of power to manage the change process.

Relying on the rhetorical strategy of leveraging institutional vocabulary, key actors in the U.S. Army are capable of blurring the boundaries that exist between the post-Cold War era and prior eras guided by dissimilar logics. The body of literature referenced here suggests that such efforts are likely aimed at overcoming the potential threat posed by prior logics that may, if not adequately addressed, push thought, action, and identity in directions that do not align with those desired by key actors. Providing field-level actors with a resource, a collection of stories that presents the new logic as the field's long-standing logic, key actors are engaged in institutional work aimed at eliminating prior dominant logics, and ultimately their influence, altogether. This practice lends credence to the notion that a "cluster of narratives", as Mumby (1987:124) suggests, "might function to enable or constrain behavior within the context of certain ideological meaning formations."

### *Building Boundaries*

While the consistent management of the change process may call for key actors to engage in institutional work aimed at blurring the boundaries between eras guided by dissimilar logics, my findings suggest that key actors are equally interested in building these same boundaries. By rendering visible the boundaries that exist between current symbolic and material realities and those that have prevailed in the past, the narratives I analyzed make the period effects of guiding institutional logics for the field concrete. Furthermore, the rhetorical strategies of making comparisons across eras, establishing a meta-narrative of progress, and connecting change to broader social discourses renders such boundaries meaningful, as later eras and the institutional logics associated with them are perceived to be better than the logics that characterized the field in prior eras.

Prior research has exposed the extent to which changes in institutional logics are often resisted by actors in the field (e.g., Marquis and Lounsbury 2007; Townley 1997). Often, such efforts of resistance are manifest in adherence to prior dominant logics that are perceived to be comfortable, accepted, and well-understood by field-level actors (Fiss 2008; Lok 2010; Reay and Hinings 2005). Rendering prior logics distinctly different from and ultimately inferior to the current logic that prevails, key actors may engage in the building of boundaries to promote adherence to a discernibly ‘better’ institutional logic as compared to those that have prevailed in the past. Where the blurring of boundaries promotes compliance with the new prevailing logic via suggestions that this is not just ‘how we do things around here,’ but ‘how we’ve always done things around here,’ the building of boundaries promotes compliance with the new prevailing logic via suggestions that this is ‘how we should do things around here.’

## CHAPTER VIII

### CONCLUSIONS

My findings suggest that periods of relative stability in which an identifiable institutional logic prevails in an organizational field are characterized not by the power of the logic itself, but by ongoing and complex institutional work. Future efforts must focus more intently on the institutional work that takes place during such periods as opposed to assuming that institutional logics serve as the foundation for the observed condition of the field. In addition, researchers should search for and make use of other contexts in which change-based institutional work can be observed in moments of relative stability. Additionally, researchers should explore the degree to which the two core processes I identified – blurring and building boundaries – are found in other organizational contexts. Furthermore, research efforts focused on other contexts should seek to identify the specific rhetorical strategies deployed to blur and build boundaries, which may or may not be similar to the ones I describe here.

In closing, I acknowledge here some of the limitations of my study that I hope will open the door to future research efforts along similar lines of inquiry. First, it is notable that organizational fields are composed of a multitude of actors all with unique structural positions in the field. Focusing on the role of official stories and the key actors who produce them, my study only exposes one piece of the ‘institutional story.’ Future efforts will need to explore the institutional work of other actors and seek to better understand how they both shape and respond to the types of institutional work described here. As Alvesson and Willmott (2002:637) suggest, “it is naïve to assume that identity can be pushed in any direction without inertia, pain, resistance, and unintended consequences.” Future efforts must attend to the reality that “there are

as many narratives of a collective's identity as there are participants in it" (Brown 2006:738). In addition to this limited focus, it is noteworthy that the U.S. Army is a unique organizational field in many respects. To assume that observations amid what some consider a 'total institution' can be generalized to other organizational contexts may not be warranted. Researchers will thus need to approach similar lines of inquiry in other fields to identify when, how, and why similar and different processes take shape. Finally, it is noteworthy that the case study I present here relies on the analysis of only a single publication. Organizational fields, however, are notably intertextual as texts of various types relate to one another in unique and important ways. Future efforts must attend to such a reality. The case study I present here, however, opens the door to expanding our research efforts in these new and important directions.

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