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Professions and Institutional Change: Towards an Institutionalist Sociology of the Professions

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ABSTRACT Beginning with this article, our special issue advances the understanding of the role of professions in processes of institutional change and through this it proposes a retheorization of contemporary professionalism. Using institutionalist lenses in professional settings, we highlight the relationship between professionalization and broader institutionalization projects. We start by critically reviewing existing approaches in the sociology of the professions, identifying a functionalist and a conflict-based approach. Then, we build on and further elaborate an institutionalist perspective on professional work. Such a perspective affirms the importance of studying professions as institutions and connecting professionalization to broader patterns of institutionalization; it highlights the role of professions and professionals as agents in the creation, maintenance, and disruption of institutions, and recognizes the importance of accommodating contemporary patterns of professionalization within the organizational context. We also illustrate how, empirically, the eight papers in this issue advance our understanding of professional agency in contemporary change and, theoretically, contribute to the reconceptualization of the study of professionalism. Finally, we briefly summarize our contribution and identify a series of directions for further research.

Keywords: institutional work, neo-institutional theory, professional services firms, sociology of the professions

INTRODUCTION

There is a growing awareness of the critical role that professions play in contemporary societies. Professionals and professional service firms are key advisors, analysts, defenders, and developers of the major institutions, such as markets, organizational forms, and business practices, that underpin our economies (Brint, 1994). Furthermore, professions are, themselves, institutions that, over the last 30 years, have experienced profound changes. Professional service firms are increasingly adopting both the logic (Brint, 1994; Faulconbridge and Muzio, 2009; Leicht and Fennell, 2008) and structures (Brock et al.,

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1999, 2007; Cooper et al., 1996) of business corporations. Professional identities are increasingly framed around logics of efficiency and commerce (Anderson-Gough et al., 1999; Goodrick and Reay, 2010) which have displaced traditional logics of ethics and public service (Brint, 1994; Suddaby et al., 2009). Professional firms now tend to be multidisciplinary (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005) and transnational (Brock et al., 2006; Suddaby et al., 2007), eroding the value of traditional institutions of self-regulation (Clementi, 2004) and making the professional service firm the primary site of professional control and regulation (Cooper and Robson, 2006). Professions are thus not only key mechanisms for, but also primary targets of institutional change. They act and are acted upon by a myriad of social, economic, technological, political, and legal forces. Yet the consequences of and mechanisms for these actions and changes are far from clear (Morgan and Quack, 2005).

When conceiving this special issue, we were very much concerned with the relationship between professions and institutions such as markets, organizational forms, and business practices, and specifically with the role of professional groups and professional organizations – broadly defined – in processes of institutional change. In this sense this project is grounded in Scott's (2008) seminal characterization of professions as Lords of the Dance, who choreograph the broad transformations reconfiguring contemporary political economic systems. As Scott (2008, p. 219) observes, 'the professions in modern society have assumed leading roles in the creation and tending of institutions. They are the preeminent institutional agents of our time'. Scott's merit is to bring the agency of the professions to the theoretical centre stage against a dominant tendency to set these within the context of broader processes of exogenous change (Abel, 1988; Brint, 1994; Broadbent et al., 1997; Brock et al., 1999; Cooper et al., 1996; Hanlon, 1999; Krause, 1996; Leicht and Fennell, 2001; Reed, 1996). However, whilst Scott also provides a tentative overview of the different mechanisms (coercitive, mimetic, and cognitive-cultural) through which this agency is exercised, the precise role of professionals and professional services firms in processes of institutional change remains under-theorized and under-examined. To this effect the papers in this special issue raise and seek to address a range of questions pertaining to the role of professionals as institutional agents. How do professionals develop their jurisdictions? What factors mediate or facilitate change in professional jurisdictions? How do changes to professional jurisdictions and practices reverberate through the broader institutional field and affect surrounding institutions? How does professional change connect to broader societal change? What strategies, processes, and practices do professions deploy to craft, maintain, or disrupt institutions?

This renewed attention for professional agency is facilitated by an agentic turn within neo-institutional theory. New concepts such as institutional entrepreneurship (Battilana et al., 2009; Dorado, 2005; Garud et al., 2002; Maguire et al., 2004) and institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence et al., 2009) have provided the basis for honing our attention on both the purposeful and the everyday mundane actions through which individual and collective actors – such as professionals and professions – attempt to disrupt, maintain, or create institutions. Professions, as carriers of normative, coercive, and mimetic pressures, have featured heavily in neo-institutional analyses (see Leicht and Fennell, 2001, 2008 for excellent summaries). Further, as argued in this volume, profes-

sions are, due to their role in broader societal changes, a natural testing ground for recent attempts to retheorize the 'interplay between actors, agency and institutions' (Lawrence et al., 2009, p. 3). This particular project is thus relevant not only to the study of contemporary professionalism but also to the development of recent theoretical debates within neo-institutional theory.

Moreover, whilst we are aware of substantial work that applies neo-institutional perspectives to professional settings, we have had little in the way of a systematic attempt to develop this into a new coherent approach to the study of the professions (but see Leicht and Fennell, 2008 for a notable exception). This is needed because, whilst reports of the death of the sociology of the professions as a relevant discipline (Gorman and Sandefur, 2011; Hall, 1983; Holmwood and Siltanen, 1994) are overstated (Macdonald and Ritzer, 1988), this field has lost part of its theoretical dynamism and explanatory power. The dominance of the conflict based paradigm (Freidson, 1970, 1986, 1994; Johnson, 1972; Larson, 1977), although extremely successful in overcoming the limitations of previous trait-based perspectives, has tended, with its focus on occupational dominance and monopoly, to obscure the broader role that professionals exercise in the construction, organization, and ordering of social life (Burrage and Torstendahl, 1990; Halliday, 1987; Halliday and Karpik, 1997; Johnson, 1993; Torstendahl and Burrage, 1990). Furthermore, traditional approaches in the sociology of the professions have not been able to fully cope with the shift of professional work to organizational settings and with the rise of the professional services firm as a key locus and vector of professionalization. In this context, existing theories have not been able to fully grapple with the evolution, hybridization, and co-penetration of occupational logics and with the transformation of practices as professional jurisdictions are reshaped by exogenous forces.

Against this background, the papers collected in this volume participate in the development of an institutionalist perspective to the study of the professions, their work, and organization. This builds on existing attempts (Leicht and Fennell, 2008; Scott, 2008) to consolidate the copious literature that applies institutionalist lenses to professional settings and to begin to develop a distinct institutional approach to the study of the professions, as an alternative to the dominant functionalist and conflict based traditions. We begin by rapidly reviewing key perspectives in the sociology of the professions before considering the growing body of work that draws on neo-institutionalist concepts. We then sketch some key characteristics of a nascent institutionalist approach to the professions whilst also introducing and contextualizing the papers included in this special issue. We illustrate how, empirically, these papers advance our understanding of professional agency in contemporary change, and theoretically, how they contribute to the reconceptualization of the study of professionalism. As special issues often raise more questions than they address, we conclude with some directions for further research.

THE SOCIOLOGY OF THE PROFESSIONS: DOMINANT PARADIGMS

Early writing by sociologists (Carr-Saunders and Wilson, 1933; Durkheim, 1957; Parson, 1954) celebrates the functional role played by the professions as 'stabilising elements in society' and 'centres of resistance to crude forces which threaten steady and peaceful evolution' (Carr-Saunders and Wilson, 1933, p. 497). For these authors, the professions'

moral fibre stems from their ability to place fairness, knowledge, and altruism at the centre of society and government. These foundational studies inspired – through the 1950s and 1960s – a series of attempts to analyse and capture the key traits that distinguished the professions from other occupations (Etzioni, 1969; Goode, 1957; Greenwood, 1957; Hickson and Thomas, 1969). This spurned the production of a number of taxonomies; and whilst such attempts ultimately proved inconclusive (Millerson, 1964, p. 15), a consensus can be traced around a number of core characteristics such as: an esoteric and systematic knowledge base, a formal training programme, self-regulation, and a publicly spirited ethos. Yet, from the 1970s the dominant functionalist tradition came under attack for ignoring issues of power and privilege and indeed for being too close to the claims and interests of the professionals themselves (Freidson, 1970; Johnson, 1972; Larson, 1977).

An alternative conflict or power framework was developed around the realization that professionalism is not so much an inherent characteristic of an occupation, but a means of *organizing* and *controlling* an occupation; one which crucially empowers the producers vis-à-vis the consumers of a particular service (Johnson, 1972). This perspective places power or occupational dominance (Freidson, 1970) at the centre of studies of professionalism as professions are able to leverage their superior technical, political, and organizational resources to retain control over their own occupational labour markets, including 'the social and economic methods of organising the performance of [their own] work' (Freidson, 1970, p. 185). This is generally cast, in this literature, as the result of a conscious and systematic political project (Larson, 1977, p. xvii) designed to 'translate a scarce set of cultural and technical resources into a secure and institutionalised system of social and financial rewards'. At the heart of this project are processes of occupational closure (Murphy, 1988; Parkin, 1979) through which professions seek to maintain skill scarcity and maximize rewards 'by limiting access to privileges and opportunities to a restricted number of eligibles' (Parkin, 1979, p. 44). Against the ahistorical tendencies typical of earlier functionalist writings, this perspective views professionalization as a temporally and spatially contingent process (Burrage and Torstendahl, 1990) rooted in the power struggles between distinctive groups within a broader political economic order (Faulconbridge and Muzio, 2007). Yet somewhat paradoxically, this perspective with its emphasis on professional power, autonomy, and self regulation, also tends to abstract from the experiences of a few showcase professions such as nineteenth-century Anglo-Saxon law and medicine.

Indeed, traditional approaches within the sociology of the professions have struggled to deal with broader transformation in the institutional context of professionalism (but see Evetts, 2011 for a recent exception) and in particular with the shift of professional activity within the confines of increasingly large and complex organizations (Brock et al., 2007; Dacin et al., 2002; Hinings, 2005; Leicht and Fennell, 2008). The traditional assumption (Aronowitz, 1973; Burris, 1993; Leicht and Fennell, 2001; Oppenheimer, 1973;) has been that this would inevitably erode professionalism, as the new organizational context of work would at minimum expose professionals to managerial pressures and at worst recreate 'factory like conditions' (Oppenheimer, 1973, pp. 213–14), triggering processes of deprofessionalization and proletarianization. This reflects a tendency to treat professionalism, managerialism, and entrepreneurship not only as distinct but

also as opposing and mutually exclusive logics (Freidson, 2001; Raelin, 1991) whereby an increase in one would trigger a proportionate decrease in the other (Adler et al., 2008). Indeed, one of the contributions of existing institutional analyses of the professions is the recognition of the possibility of the coexistence, copenetration, sedimentation, and hybridization of different institutional, managerial, occupational, and organizational logics (Cooper et al., 1996; Goodrick and Reay, 2011; Hwang and Powell, 2009; Leicht and Fennell, 2001; Pinnington and Morris, 2003) to produce managerial (Brock et al., 1999, 2007; Cooper et al., 1996), neo-entrepreneurial (Leicht and Fennell, 2001), commercialized (Hanlon, 1998), or organizational (Faulconbridge and Muzio, 2008; Noordegraaf, 2011) forms of professionalism. More radically, others draw on critical management studies perspectives (Anderson-Gough et al., 1999; Dent and Whitehead, 2002; Evetts, 2006a; Fournier, 1999; Grey, 1998) to suggest a decoupling between professional rhetorics and practices; with professionalism being deployed as a performative discourse and disciplinary mechanism to manage and motivate individuals in a broad set of occupational contexts beyond the traditional professions. Paradoxically, in this context, appeals to professionalism are often deployed to enforce programmes of organizational change which may erode traditional professional traits such as autonomy and discretion (Evetts, 2003).

We also respond to another, related blind spot in dominant paradigms, namely their failure to account for how a majority of new professional occupations, such as management consultants, project managers, HRM specialists, or executive search practitioners, are born directly out of organizational contexts (Abbott, 1988; Fincham, 2006, 2012; Muzio et al., 2007, 2011; Reed, 1996). Dominant models of professionalization (Burrage et al., 1990) do not recognize the role of organizations as distinctive actors in such processes (Barley and Tolbert, 1991; Faulconbridge and Muzio, 2012). Yet these are ever more important sites 'where professional identities are mediated, formed and transformed' (Cooper and Robson, 2006, p. 416) and indeed 'those professional occupations that have more recently emerged . . . structure themselves so as to accommodate corporate patterns' (Dacin et al., 2002, p. 49). In this context it is not surprising that, over the years, a number of calls (Barely and Tolbert, 1991; Lounsbury and Ventresca, 2003; Muzio and Kirkpatrick, 2011; Noordegraaf, 2011) have advocated more attempts to reconnect the study of professional occupations with the study of organizations, so to 'revisit theories of professionalism, which did not fully anticipate the shift of professional work to the context of large organizations' (Suddaby et al., 2007, p. 25).

Furthermore, the conflict paradigm with its focus on power and collective mobility, struggles to go 'beyond monopoly' (Halliday, 1987) and capture the broader set of motivations besides self interest that guide professional action, so to account for the normative value of the professions (Dingwall, 2004; Evetts, 2006a, 2006b; Freidson, 2001; Saks, 1995) and their role in constructing, stabilizing, and governing our physical and social worlds. For example, focusing on the legal professions, critics (Halliday, 1987; Halliday and Karpik, 1997) emphasize the role of professionals in the broader rationalization of society, the management of public–private tensions, and the institutionalization and diffusion of political liberalism. Indeed, there are several calls (Evetts, 2003, 2006a, 2006b; Scott, 2008) to move beyond an overriding concern with monopoly and occupational dominance to develop more systematic attempts to account for how the

professions may retain normative value besides their privileged labour market position. Furthermore, whilst concepts like the 'professional project' emphasize the agency of professions in achieving market power and social standing (Larson, 1977), their wider role in building and transforming political, social, and economic institutions has received less direct attention in the mainstream sociology of the professions. Of course, socio-legal studies (Coffee, 2006; Dezalay and Garth, 1998, 2002; Quack, 2007; Suchman, 2000), critical accountants (Arnold, 2005; Barrett et al., 2005; Suddaby et al., 2007), as well as business historians (Kipping, 1999; McKenna, 2006) provide extensive examples of the role of lawyers, accountants, and consultants amongst other professions in spreading business practices and in building the legal and fiscal infrastructure that supports global capitalism. In particular, this body of work posits globalization and deregulation as forces that may be actively pursued and constructed through professional agency rather than as technological inevitabilities. Yet these contributions tend to be phenomenon-driven, in-depth case studies, which do not seek to abstract and theorize the mechanisms and techniques through which professions participate in and facilitate processes of institutional change. On the other hand, neo-institutionalism, through concepts such as normative isomorphism (DiMaggio, 1991; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983), institutional entrepreneurship, and institutional work has the conceptual tools and vocabulary to account for professional agency. However, it is only recently that we have seen explicit attempts (Hwang and Powell, 2009; Leicht and Fennell, 2008; Scott, 2008) to theorize the role of professionals as institutional carriers or agents. Unfortunately, these attempts have not yet benefited from the support of nuanced historical case studies. There is certainly a strong case for encouraging more dialogue between these different research traditions.

BUILDING AN INSTITUTIONALIST PERSPECTIVE OF THE PROFESSIONS

Our review of the sociology of professions and its current challenges, suggests a powerful, but still largely unarticulated role for adopting a neo-institutional lens to understand professions and processes of professional change. In the remainder of this article we thus begin to sketch out a framework for analysing professions through neo-institutional theory. This is articulated along three prominent themes, which, as developed in the individual contributions to our special issue, indicate how an institutionalist perspective can advance debates within the study of contemporary professionalism. These themes include the value of studying professions as institutions and of connecting processes of professionalization to broader patterns of institutionalization; the importance of professions and professionals as agents in the creation, maintenance, and disruption, of institutions; and the importance of the organizational context as a key actor and site in contemporary patterns of professionalization.

Professionalization and Institutionalization

The starting point for an institutional perspective on the professions requires a reflection on the relationship between the concepts of professionalization and institutionalization.

Their intimate association is implicit in some key works in the sociology of the professions. Johnson (1972) views professionalism as an institutionalized solution for managing the power asymmetries in consumer/producer exchanges. Larson (1977) documents how professionalization institutionalizes a link between expertise and collective mobility. Perhaps, most relevantly, Burrage et al. (1990) map out a conceptual model where professional projects are surrounded and constrained by the broader institutionalization projects pursued by other stakeholders including the nation state, the higher education establishment, and corporate clients. Thus, professionalization is a negotiated settlement which emerges from the interactions between different actors pursuing their own institutionalization projects (e.g. nation building or the development of public university system).

Building on this work, Suddaby and Viale (2011) argue for the concomitance of professionalization and institutionalization processes. In their words, 'professional projects carry with them projects of institutionalization' (p. 423). This reflects the centrality and pervasiveness of professions in contemporary societies, which imply that the unfolding and transformation of professionalization projects will cause systemic repercussions and affect the structure of the broader institutional fields they inhabit. In this sense changes to the professional project will 'reverberate through the field' (Suddaby and Viale, 2011, p. 426), affecting, modifying, and disrupting surrounding institutions. Indeed, in one example of this, attempts by engineers and lawyers to control the development of mining practices in California exercised a significant influence on the American legal system, the structure of the federal state, and the development of financial markets (Lefsrud and Suddaby, 2012). Similarly, in this special issue, Daudigeos (2013) makes an explicit connection between the health and safety turn in contemporary business practices and the professionalization project of occupational safety and health managers; whilst McCann et al. (2013) reveal how the professionalization project of British paramedics overlapped with broader institutional dynamics within the National Health Service, including the new public sector management agenda and the shift from a 'taking the patient to the hospital' to the 'taking the hospital to the patient' paradigm of ambulance care. Kipping and Kirkpatrick (2013) indicate how shifts in the population and nature of management consultancy work reverberated through this occupational field affecting established notions of professionalism and patterns of professionalization. Thus, as Suddaby and Viale (2011, p. 426) conclude, 'projects of professionalization and institutionalization occur simultaneously'. Indeed, Adler and Kwon (2013), in their conceptual model of professional diffusion/mutation, reinforce this point as they capture the interconnections between professional, organizational, and institutional level change.

Going further, this leads us to the realization that professionalization is a subset or a particular flavour of the broader category of institutionalization insofar as it represents one of several ways to give order, structure, and meaning to a distinctive area of social and economic life (the production of expertise). Thus, the traditional liberal or collegial professionalism (Johnson, 1972) is only one of several possible solutions for the institutionalization of a particular activity with other outcomes including: corporate and meditative professionalism (Johnson, 1972), semi-professionalism (Etzioni, 1969), commodification and bureaucraticization (Abbott, 1991), managerialism and entrepreneurship (Freidson, 2001), and the various hybrids that exist. All of these, despite

significant differences, represent ways to infuse 'value beyond the technical requirements of the task at hand' (Selznick, 1957, p. 17), in short to institutionalize a specific activity (Abbott, 1991). Importantly, this process not only injects an element of order and predictability within social life but it confers to the particular way of doing so a natural and taken-for-granted character. In this context, professionalism with its emphasis on credentialized knowledge and occupational self-regulation, has been institutionalized as the taken for granted template for organizing and delivering expertise in modern societies (Freidson, 2001; Muzio et al., 2007; Reed, 1996). Accordingly, an institutionalist perspective should focus on the interrelation between professionalization and institutionalization as not only concomitant but also as intimately related and inseparable concepts. Moreover, whilst the professional project (Larson, 1977) has been a particularly fruitful conceptual device insofar as it uncovered the motivations behind professionalization and the self-interested agency of specific groups in accomplishing this, studying professionalism, explicitly, as an institution helps to identify its broader regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive dimensions (Scott, 2005). This approach should also provide a better explanation for the appeal, pervasiveness, and wider function of professionalism as an organizing principle in contemporary societies.

Professionals as Institutional Agents

Whilst our analysis illustrates the merits of studying professionalization as a form of institutionalization, a neo-institutionalist perspective is also well placed to move beyond monopoly and account for the normative value of professionalism. This stems from its recognition of the broader institutional role played by the professions in 'creating, testing, conveying, and applying cultural-cognitive, normative, and/or regulative frameworks that govern one or another social sphere' (Scott, 2008, p. 233). This institutional role, of course, includes but is not limited to, attempts to develop and control a particular occupational jurisdiction, as implicated by the notion of the professional project. However, beyond their attempts at collective upward mobility, professionals are the preeminent crafters of institutions, facilitating and regulating a broad range of human activities. Scott (2005, 2008) deploys his pillars of institutionalism framework to specify how this institutional role is exercised. According to this classification, professions act as cultural-cognitive agents providing the categories, principles, and conceptual tools that help to define and frame issues. As normative agents they provide the norms, standards, principles, and benchmarks that guide human actions in particular situations. Finally as regulative agents they participate in the drafting, implementation, and interpretation of the legally sanctionable rules and regulations through which coercive power is exercised. Of course, professions differ in terms of the type of authority on which they rely. Individuals within single professions may enact different roles as creative, carrier, or clinical professionals depending on whether they predominantly generate, diffuse, or apply knowledge.

Perhaps the best empirical application of adopting an institutional lens to study processes of professional change is illustrated by Scott et al.'s (2000) study of shifts in professional governance in health care in the San Francisco Bay area. Their longitudinal study tracks changes in each of the three pillars over five decades and reveals ongoing

pressure from non-professional organizations (government, insurance companies, and health maintenance organizations) that effectively dismantled the long-standing dominance of professional control in the field. This meticulous study effectively demonstrates the erosion of professional institutions in the US health-care system and their replacement by a much more fragmented amalgam of government and corporate controls. This study, in line with our previous point, also previews a new institutional approach to theorizing professions – i.e. by seeing them not as unique labour market shelters or conclaves of elite societal interests, but rather as but one of many forms of institutions struggling for jurisdiction and control over a social and economic sector.

Building on Scott's contributions, Suddaby and Viale (2011) and Lefsrud and Suddaby (2012) continue to sketch the dynamics and mechanisms through which professionals choreograph institutional change; thus linking changes in professional practice and organization to broader societal transformations. According to their model, the first way that professionals restructure institutions is by creating or opening up new spaces for their expertise. Examples range from the creation of new institutions such as international arbitration courts (Dezalay and Garth, 1998) and national museums (DiMaggio, 1991), to the development of new practices such as nouvelle cuisine (Rao et al., 2003), health and safety (Daudigeos, 2013), environmental audits (Hoffman, 1999), and corporate social responsibility. Second, professionals populate existing social spaces with new actors. This involves creating new corporate structures such as the multidisciplinary professional firm (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005), the large corporatized law firm (Empson et al., 2013), and the global IT-based management consulting firm (Kipping and Kirkpatrick, 2013), or redefining existing ones by facilitating shifts in logics (Fligstein, 1990; Thornton, 2002) and creating new professional roles (Baron et al., 1986; Daudigeos, 2013; Hoffman, 1999). Third, as professionals pursue their professionalization projects they re-draw the boundaries and the rules governing contiguous fields. Thus they create new occupations, subordinate others, institutionalize new practices, and redefine relational patterns and power hierarchies within a broader area of activity. Particularly relevant here is the vast body of literature (Arnold, 2005; Dezalay and Garth, 1998, 2002; Faulconbridge and Muzio, 2012; Fourcade, 2006; Morgan and Quack, 2005; Quack, 2007; Suddaby et al., 2007) documenting the role of professional services firms in building transnational governance regimes whilst simultaneously creating a global market for their expertise. This work illustrates how professional services firms actively seek to redraw in their favour existing institutional frameworks and rules at both the national and transnational level. This involves a process of 'creative destruction' (Fourcade, 2006) whereby professionals under the sponsorship of transnational institutions such as the WTO or IMF remodel local institutions in developing economies (Dezalay and Garth, 1998, 2002; Fourcade, 2006) along Anglo-Saxon principles, structures, and practices. Finally, professions confer social capital and sanction social order within a field, governing access to key positions in occupational and organizational hierarchies, as demonstrated by the over-representation of accountants on the boards of Anglo-Saxon firms (Coates, 1994; Fligstein, 1990).

An emerging concept within neo-institutional theory, which carries great potential for further understanding the role of professional agency in processes of change, is the notion of institutional work (Lawrence and Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence et al., 2009). Institutional

work relaxes two core assumptions of traditional institutional theory. First, it relaxes the assumption that individuals engaged in processes of institutional creation, maintenance, and change, are 'cultural dopes', completely unaware of their institutional environment. Thus, it introduces a degree of reflexivity for actors who participate in institutional practices. Second, it relaxes the assumption that actors embedded in institutional contexts lack agency. Rather, it draws from practice theory to suggest that actors who participate in routines and activities designed to create, change, or maintain institutions, not only adopt some degree of reflexivity about how their actions engage with their institutional environment, but also adopt a modicum of agency or active ability to introduce variation into institutionalized patterns of reproduction.

The notion of institutional work thus overcomes the heroic and hyper-muscular tone of the literature on institutional entrepreneurship (Suddaby and Viale, 2011), often by focusing attention on the mundane and everyday activities through which institutional reproduction and change occurs. The majority of the papers in our special issue contribute to this literature by providing outstanding examples of the institutional work used to reproduce or change various professions. So, for example, McCann et al. (2013) analyse the ways in which the working lives of paramedics serve to reproduce existing power differences between individual professionals and their employing organization. Empson et al. (2013) identify specific strategies of institutional work used in the dyadic interactions between professional partners and professional business managers as a means of shifting the traditional law firm partnership towards adopting a more commercial and corporate organizational form. Both papers reflect the degree of variation in reflexivity and agency in processes of institutional work. The McCann et al. (2013) paper represents an illustrative case in which both agency and reflexivity are somewhat muted, as opposed to the law firms in the Empson et al. study, where the actors are clearly more aware and exert more effort in their intention to promote or resist institutional change.

Elements of institutional work are also apparent in the study by Ramirez (2013), which, focusing on the organizational field level, analyses the mechanisms by which an accounting professional association maintains internal cohesion in a profession undergoing profound structural change. Ramirez concludes that the professional association engaged in processes of institutional work explicitly focused on preserving a shared sense of worth in the accountants' professional project. Malsch and Gendron (2013) adopt a similar perspective and conclusion in their field-level analysis of the rapid shift towards commercialism in the field of public accounting, by pointing out the explicit practices of institutional work designed to facilitate a shift in logics. In comparison to McCann et al. (2013) and Empson et al. (2013), we see in both Ramirez (2013) and Malsch and Gendron (2013) even higher degrees of institutional reflexivity and agency by the focal actors engaged in processes of institutional work.

Agentic institutional work is also clearly apparent in the study by Singh and Jayanti (2013) in the adoption of role enactment strategies as part of organizational attempts to control professional work. The forms of institutional work displayed here include internalizing pluralistic logics, institutionalizing the distinct roles embedded in these logics, and scripting goal-oriented role enactment plans. Thus, by focusing on the micro-level attempts by organizations to intervene and script the behaviour of their

employees, this paper potentially establishes an interesting connection between the growing research agenda on institutional work and the vast literature on identity work within professional contexts (Alvesson, 2001; Dent and Whitehead, 2002; Ibarra, 1999; Pratt et al., 2006). Perhaps the highest degree of reflexivity and agency in institutional work is represented in the study by Daudigeos (2013) who analyses the practices used by staff professionals in an organization trying to establish a new profession. The author identifies a number of key legitimacy building activities such as the development of strategic relationships and the use of unobtrusive influence tactics as extremely successful examples of institutional work in the context of the staging of a new professionalization project. Given the empirical context – i.e. the creation of a new institution – it is perhaps unsurprising that we see the most overt forms of agency and reflexivity in this case.

Finally, Adler and Kwon (2013) focus on a more nuanced element of institutional work in their exploration of the ways in which professionals and professional contexts mediate the diffusion of innovations. Even though they adopt the more traditional neo-institutional language of defocalized agency – i.e. professionalism is a 'factor' that 'mediates' diffusion – Adler and Kwon's examples betray the very active and reflexive role that professionals play in adopting or rejecting innovations that assist or impede their specific professional projects. As such, the Adler and Kwon (2013) contribution to this special issue offers the additional insight of demonstrating how institutional theory is in the process of shifting away from conceptualizing institutions as 'things' (i.e. mediating variables, professional contexts) and towards theorizing the multi-level processes by which institutions are created, enabled, and changed.

Overall, all the papers in this special issue can be seen to illustrate the potential of the concept of institutional work to capture the complex balance of reflexivity and agency involved in processes of professional change. To varying extents they all seem to contain within them an implicit hypothesis about the context within which actors engaged in processes of institutional work are more likely to be fully aware of and engaged in acts of institutional agency. When a new institution is in the process of being constructed, the taken-for-granted assumptions and normative values, which tend to mask both reflexivity and agency, are temporarily removed and, for a short period of time, actors engage directly and transparently in the task of institutional creation. When institutions are being changed, there appears to be a more limited degree of reflexivity and agency and, finally, when institutions are simply being maintained, both awareness and agency are somewhat muted. Thus, the concept of institutional work seems to be a particularly fruitful in advancing our understanding of the institutional role of professionals (Scott, 2008) and the shifting levels of agency and reflexivity this entails. Also, the context of professional work, with its mix between innovation and everyday application, provides a solid platform for theory building in this area, as it clearly illustrates both the strategic and mundane dimensions of agency.

The Organizational Context of Professionalization

As we remarked earlier, established theories have somewhat struggled to accommodate the shift of professional work to organizational contexts (Suddaby et al., 2007, 2009) and

in many cases professionals in organizations have been treated as evidence of deprofessionalization or simply as an 'aberration' (Barley and Tolbert, 1991, p. 1). The papers in this volume respond to recent calls to reconnect the study of professional occupations with the study of organizations (Barely and Tolbert, 1991; Lounsbury and Ventresca, 2003; Muzio and Kirkpatrick, 2011; Noordegraaf, 2011) and clearly reveal how the organization is the primary site and vehicle for professional action. In particular, whilst the increasing role of professional organizations as 'significant actors and sites for professional regulation' (Suddaby et al., 2007, p. 24) has undoubtedly exposed individual professionals to new sources of control and pressure (Ackroyd and Muzio, 2007; Cooper and Robson, 2006; Grey, 1998), professions increasingly derive their power, status, and capacity for institutional action from their ability to control key organizations in the contemporary political economy.

A sizeable body of literature (Ackroyd, 1996; Faulconbridge and Muzio, 2008; Reed, 1996; Suddaby et al., 2009; Wallace, 1995) documents the ability of the professions to adapt to organizational life. Ackroyd (1996) comments on the importance for professions to accomplish dual closure, marrying occupational closure in the labour market with the control over specific spaces, tasks, and processes within their employing organizations. Similarly, Reed (1996) notes the emergence of new professionalization projects which unfold entirely within organizational boundaries and structures. These organizational professions, such as human resources managers, health and safety officers, or project managers, succeed by solving core problems for their employers and colonizing enclaves and key positions in the organizational hierarchies they inhabit. More recently (Faulconbridge and Muzio, 2008, p. 20), this concept has been extended to traditional liberal professions, such as law, where 'the traditional values, objectives and rewards connected with professionalization projects are increasingly achieved and secured through the support of appropriate organizational systems, structures and procedures'.

An institutionalist perspectives moves this agenda forward and, as argued by Suddaby and Viale (2011, p. 427), helps us to understand how 'not only have professionals adapted well to working in large bureaucracies, they also seem to have developed a schizophrenic ability to conform to the pressures of their employing organization while, simultaneously, using the resources and power of the organization to initiate profound social change at the level of the organizational field'. This emerges clearly from DiMaggio's (1991) account of how museum curators were able to reconfigure the structures and practices of their employing organizations in their favour and in the meantime redefine the logics of the museum as an institution. In a similar vein, Fligstein (1990) connects the rise of the M-form of business to the attempts of financial professionals to consolidate their power within organizations whilst, from a somewhat different perspective, Armstrong (1985) explains the predominance of financial control practices within British capitalism with reference to the professionalization project of employed accountants. Related to this theme, in this volume, Empson et al. (2013) indicate how accountancy and management professionals were able to use the growth of the corporatized law firms as an opportunity to extend their jurisdictions into a new occupational domain. Similar accounts exist with regard to the role of professionals in legitimizing and spreading human resource management (Baron et al.,

1986), corporate environmentalism (Hoffman, 1999), diversity management (Dobbin, 2009), and indeed health and safety practices (Daudigeos, 2013) though their organizations and in the broader institutional field. Of course, as McCann et al. (2013) remind us in their analysis of the professionalization project of paramedics, not all attempts succeed. Failure often emerges from the inability to control the key organizational resources, spaces, routines, and practices which frame their everyday work activities. Thus, throughout most of the papers in our special issue the organization emerges as a primary venue in the staging of competing professionalization projects and the redrawing of occupational boundaries (Muzio and Kirkpatrick, 2011).

Besides being sites of professionalization, organizations are also distinct actors in the institutionalization of the professions, as with their own activities they contribute to the negotiation of specific occupational settlements (Abbott, 1988). In particular, professional services firms may respond to different logics and understandings of professionalism from the professional associations that represent and regulate them (Cooper et al., 1996; Greenwood and Hinings, 1993) and may play an active role in seeking to institutionalize their own models of professionalism (Greenwood and Suddaby, 2006; Greenwood et al., 2002). This is something that has been neglected in traditional accounts in the sociology of the professions (for a few exceptions, see Faulconbridge and Muzio, 2012; Muzio et al., 2011), but which emerges clearly from a number of papers in this volume. Ramirez (2013), for instance, reveals how large firms were able to influence norms of professional practice and understandings of legitimacy in the broader accountancy field, with their own highly procedural and standardized approaches to auditing becoming models of 'best practice' for the industry. Similarly writing at the field level, both Malsch and Gendron (2013) and Kipping and Kirkpatrick (2013) indicate how organizations were able to reconfigure professional fields, increasing their status, legitimacy, and control over key material resources. In particular, Kipping and Kirkpatrick suggest that the strategies of large consultancy firms affected the policies of existing professional associations in the weekly institutionalized field of management consultancy, leading to the disruption of existing professional jurisdictions and to the hollowing out of established 'community' forms of professionalism. Focusing at the micro level, Singh and Jayanti's (2013) contribution to this volume is concerned with how organizations engage in institutional work as part of attempts to control professional workers in a context characterized by multiple and often conflicting logics. Organizations institutionalize and try to balance different logics and their associated normative assumptions in a number of distinct roles to be enacted in different situations; thus providing organizations with a way of managing conflicts between their own commercial objectives and the professional identities and fiduciary duties of their employees. Thus, Singh and Jayanti provide us with a clear example of how organizations, by intervening on individual practitioners, seek, not always successfully, to re-institutionalize professional projects in ways that can be reconciled with their own commercial objectives and practices. Taken together, the papers in this special issue indicate how the link between professionalization and broader patterns of institutionalization is mediated by the activities and opportunities provided by the organizational context.

Table I provides a brief overview of the eight papers.

Table I. Summaries of papers

Authors	*Key research questions*	*Key concepts and theory*	*Data/analytical methods and research setting*	*Key findings*
McCann et al.	How are professional projects enacted for blue-collar professionals?	Institutional theory and the sociology of professions	Ethnography Paramedics	Distinction between a formal and informal professionalization projects, which are enacted through everyday occupational activities. The impact of professionalization on the working lives of paramedics has been muted due to their limited power over the organizations that employ them
Empson et al.	What specific strategies and forms of institutional work do professionals engage in to accomplish change in a highly institutionalized context?	Institutional work	Semi structured interviews and secondary analysis (media sources) Large law firms	The importance of the dyadic relationship between senior professionals and professional managers, as a key mechanism of institutional work, in accomplishing processes of transformative change in highly institutionalized settings such as PSFS
Ramirez	How do processes of institutional change affect the internal cohesiveness of professional communities? How do professional associations establish/restore/maintain a natural order within a community and preserve a sense of professional cohesion?	Boltanski and Thevenot's 'Orders of Worth' Institutional work	Archival research integrated with semi-structured interviews Accountancy	Institutional change can disrupt professional fields by undermining the sense of common worth binding its members. Professional associations engage in processes of institutional work to preserve/restore a shared sense of worth and maintain their professional project
Malsch and Gendron	How can the work of Bourdieu account for patterns of institutional change in the public accounting field, characterized by the consolidation of commercialism?	Institutional theory and Bourdieusian sociology	Case study Accountancy	Change intertwines with stability in complex processes of institutional experimentation, whereby professions are simultaneously engaged in attempts to extend their jurisdiction through institutional innovation, while seeking to consolidate the traditional foundations of their jurisdictional legitimacy through institutional reproduction
Singh and Jayanti	How can a Logics-Roles-Action (LRA) framework help understanding how for-profit organizations engage in institutional work to control the work of professional workers?	Institutional logics, institutional work, Logics-Roles-Action (LRA) framework	Analysis of court transcripts and other archival material Pharmaceutical sales reps	Identification of four distinct role enactment strategies, and related subset of tactics deployed by sales professionals. Each strategy backfires, disrupting the institutional structures they intended to support
Daudigeos	How do staff professionals within organizations secure their ability to conduct institutional work? What is the basis of their power and legitimacy as institutional workers?	Institutional work	Semi-structured interviews and secondary data collection Health and Safety professional	Identification of two main categories of institutional work: relational legitimacy-building and unobtrusive influence tactics which are core to the institutionalization of this new profession
Kipping and Kirkpatrick	How do changes in the degree of regulation in a professional field affect the ability of professional firms in that field to successfully adopt changes	Contingency Theory and Institutional Theory	Historical/archival analysis Management consultancy	Identification of key differences in the structure and development of 'Traditional' and 'Neo' Psfs. In a weakly regulated field such as management consulting change reflects broader shifts in the population of firms
Adler and Kwon	What factors mediate the diffusion of new organizing practices in professional contexts?	Sociology of the professions	Conceptual analysis Primarily medicine but examples from multiple professions	Change, as exemplified by innovation diffusion, in professional contexts is a contested processes which is mediated by a series of interrelated professional, organizational, and field level considerations

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This editorial introduction began with a brief overview of key approaches to the study of the professions and with a critique of the dominant power or conflict framework. This has been a very influential and successful school of thought in addressing the strong functionalist biases that dominated initial writings in this area and in providing us with an overarching framework for the analysis of professional work. Yet, increasingly, a number of long standing blind spots together with a series of new empirical developments have limited this framework's explanatory power and its ability to account for the realities of contemporary professionalism and its broader societal role. Critical issues, as identified in this introduction, include: a difficulty in dealing with the increasing organizational context of professional work; the fact that a focus on power and monopoly tends to obscure the broader normative value of professionalism; and a relative lack of attention for the discursive and performative aspects of professional work. Indeed, a long-standing if overstated debate (Gorman and Sandefur, 2011; Hall, 1983; Holmwood and Siltanen, 1994; Macdonald and Ritzer, 1988) on the health of the sociology of the professions as a distinct discipline conveys a clear sense of the need for theoretical renewal in this area.

Paradoxically, in parallel with these debates, interest in and writing on the professions, their work, and organization has increased significantly, with a growing proportion of such work taking place in newer disciplinary settings such as management, economic geography, and accountancy. In particular, there has been a growing body of literature adopting a neo-institutionalist perspective; and yet there has been less in the way of a systematic attempt to integrate, consolidate, and develop this into a new theoretical alternative to established perspectives in the sociology of the professions (Leicht and Fennell, 2008; Scott, 2008). The papers in this special issue, although theoretically heterodox, all contribute to this agenda and begin to sketch out a neo-institutionalist perspective to the study of professionalism. They do so by highlighting the intimate connections between professionalization and broader patterns of institutionalization. After all, professionalism as an institution, with its appeals to quality, social trusteeship and public interest, represents a clear example of an attempt to ascribe to a certain set of activities a particular normative value beyond their technical requirements. Thus, not only are these processes concomitant, as revealed in a number of our papers, but professionalization should be studied as a specific form of the broader category on institutionalization. This allows us to extend our analytical focus beyond the professional project and its self-interested motivations to capture how professionalization attempts contribute to the construction, ordering, and, in short, to the institutionalization of social life. Second, and related to this, our special issue captures the organizational dimension of contemporary professionalism, indicating not only how organizations (McCann et al., 2013; Singh and Jayanti, 2013) act, in the traditional sense, as potential sources of disruption, but also as sites (Daudigeos, 2013; Empson et al., 2013) and actors (Kipping and Kirkpatrick, 2013; Malsch and Gendron, 2013) within professionalization projects. Finally our papers develop Scott's (2008) seminal analysis of professional agency by providing us, through the application of the recent concept of institutional work (Lawrence et al., 2009), with a better framework and

vocabulary to understand the broader role of professions in processes of institutional change.

Perhaps the most important contribution of this volume, however, is that it formally connects research on professional organizations with its roots in the sociology of professions. For far too long, research on professional service firms occurred in apparent isolation from prior research in sociology. Why this occurred is a mystery. We in management studies have much to learn from our colleagues in sociology. Perhaps the most important lesson can be derived from Andrew Abbott's (1988) *The System of Professions*. This book revitalized a somewhat stale programme of research that had been mired in hair-splitting debates about how to define a profession, and instead encouraged researchers to think of professions as ecologies or systems rather than fixed entities. As editors for this special issue, we have encouraged our authors to view their empirical contexts through the lens of institutions. That is, we have prodded them to see professional projects as occurring hand-in-hand with broader institutional projects. Following Abbott (1988), however, we have also encouraged our authors to not view professions or institutions as objects, but rather to see them as processes – of simultaneous professionalization and institutionalization – and to identify the mechanisms by which these processes create, maintain, and change professions, organizations, and institutions.

The special issue had an ambitious range of objectives, both theoretical and empirical. Yet we publish this special issue with a sense of satisfaction. As elucidated in the preceding paragraphs, all of the papers contribute – on different levels and in different ways – to the special issue's objectives of advancing, both empirically and theoretically, our understanding of the role of professions in processes of institutional change. Furthermore, the papers here collected, provide the basis for a retheorization of contemporary professionalism. Having said this there are several topics, issues, and approaches that are left for further study. While all eight selected papers relate to some aspects of institutional work and change, there is still much to be learned about the role of professionals and professional service firms in creating, maintaining, or changing key capital market institutions. In particular, there is a need for more in-depth ethnographic studies of the role of the professions in the development of contemporary business practices, in the re-regulation of financial markets, and the unfolding of the recent financial crisis. Here, the mechanisms and processes through which professions are able to open up global markets, construct transnational governance regimes, and embark on transnational professionalization projects require further analysis. In this context, the multidisciplinary and transnational challenges associated with issues as diverse as sustainability, carbon trading, economic rebalancing, low fertility, and migration provide rich empirical settings for studying dynamics of inter-professional collaboration and competition within processes of institutional change. At the more micro-level, the relationships between institutional work and identity work are also an important direction for further research. This connects to the important body of work on the micro-foundations of institutions (Powell and Colyvas, 2008), asking questions of how shifts in institutional logics are enacted at the individual level, how professional projects carry projects of the 'self' as they construct, maintain, and disrupt individual identities, and how organizations seek to institutionalize appropriate professional roles and identities as part of their attempts to motivate and manage their workforces.

Adopting an institutional lens to study professions also holds the promise of addressing core issues that remain unresolved in neo-institutional theory (Suddaby, 2010). What degree of reflexivity or awareness do actors have about institutional pressures? What degree of agency do actors bring to processes of institutional creation, maintenance, and change? Where are the exogenous triggers for institutional change? Many of these questions have already been asked in the context of professions (Abbott, 1988; Freidson, 1986; Macdonald, 1995). Adopting an institutional lens to theorize and study professions may help resolve many of these core epistemological challenges for institutional theory.

APPENDIX: EDITORS' NOTE

Publication of this Special Issue is the culmination of several years' work by the guest editors as well as several hundred colleagues – including the authors who submitted papers, reviewers who volunteered their time to provide feedback, and members of the *JMS* editorial and administrative teams who gave us support from our initial proposal to final formatting. This brief note provides some information on the process, and also serves as a 'thank you' to those who contributed to the Special Issue.

The Call was published in early 2010, with a deadline for submissions of 31 December that year. Eighty-five submissions were received. Out of these we chose 56 that seemed to best address the Call, and each of these was sent to three reviewers. Of those 56 manuscripts, only 12 were invited to submit revisions. After further revision and review stages, involving all three guest editors plus Joep Cornelissen and other members of the *JMS* editorial team, eight papers were selected for publication in this Special Issue – an acceptance rate 9.4 per cent. At all times we aimed to give constructive feedback to authors within 60 days of submission, and we achieved this objective in all but a few cases.

Throughout the process we recorded items like the national origin of authors, distribution of professions/occupations studies, and methodological approach of the papers. These data (detailed tables available from the guest editors) show a wide geographic distribution of authors from around the globe and a good variety of professions – featuring relatively large numbers in health care and in occupations other than the traditional professions. Over half the submissions (45) represented small-sample, qualitative methods. Less than one quarter (19) used quantitative empirical analysis. Not one empirical paper contained data from more than one occupation. We believe that future research on professional organizations should address these latter two approaches – quantitative and comparative/multi-occupation – and we are committed to fostering this work.

Finally, but most importantly, we are very grateful to the 158 scholars who served as reviewers for the special issue. Their names appear in Table II as a gesture of our appreciation. We are also deeply indebted to Joep Cornelissen and Bill Harley who were generous with their advice and time at all stages of the process, helping us assess and critique many papers (including all those published) along the way. Very many thanks are also extended to Jo Brudenell and Margaret Turner at the *JMS* office for their help and support throughout the process.

Table II. List of reviewers

Stephen Ackroyd
Paul Adler
Yair Aharoni
Mats Alvesson
Michael Barrett
Jennifer Bartlett
Jon Beaverstock
Frans Bevort
Emily Block
Ivy Bourgeault
Clea Bourne
Mehdi Boussebaa
Eva Boxenbaum
Gordon Boyce
Julia Brandl
Joe Broschak
Bernadette Bullinger
Nick Butler
Chris Carter
Peter Cebon
Jean Luc Cerdin.
Doren Chadee
David Chandler
Timothy Clark
Jeannette Colyvas
Simon Cooper
David Cooper
Mark Covaleski
Doug Creed
Barbara Czarniawska
Thibault Daudigeo
Alison Dean
David Deephouse
Rich DeJordy
Jean Louis Denis
Mike Dent
Robert Dingwall
Mark Dirsmith
Marie Laure Djelic
Silvia Dorado-Banacloche
Gili Drori
Sebastien Dubois
Mary Dunn
Lee Edwards
Tim Edwards
Jeffery Everett
Mark Exworthy
Mahoumed Ezzamel
Samantha Fairclough
Conor Farrington
James Faulconbridge
Ewan Ferlie
Robin Fincham
Tom Forbes
William Foster
Elin Funck
Yves Gendron
Elizabeth George
Maria Gondo
Fiona Anderson Gough
Ian Greener
Gerry Hanlon
Tim Hargrave
Kathryn Haynes
C. R. Hinings
Kristine Hirschkorn
Donald Hislop
Michael Hitt
Damian Hodgson
Keith Hoskin
Hokyu Huang
Guro Huby
Thomas Hutzschenreuter
Paula Hyde
Andrew Jones
Candace Jones
Deborah Jones
Beck Jorgensen
Dan Karraman
Ian Kirkpatrick
Peter Kjaer
Thomas Klatetzki
Ellen Kuhlmann
Savita Kumra
Liisa Kurunmaki
Ragnhild Kvalshaugen
Bernard Leca
Lianne Lefsrud
Federico Lega
Kevin Leicht
Charlotta Levay
Donald Light
Jaco Lok
Steve Maguire
Namrata Malhotra
Bertrand Malsch
Jose Carlos Marques
Leo McCann
Christopher McKenna
Stefan Meisiek
Andrea Mennicken
Fredrik Movitz
Monia Mtar
Frank Mueller
Mirko Noordegraaf
Eivor Oborn
William Ocasio
Ken Ogata
Amalya Oliver
Joe O'Mahoney
Anne Claire Pach
Gerardo Patriotta
Karen Patterson
Ashly Pinnington
Dionne Pohler
Rajshree Prakesh
Sigrid Quack
Revti Raman
Carlos Ramirez
Glen Edward Randall
Trish Reay
Terrie Reeves
Markus Reihlen
Maxine Robertson
Keith Robson
Mike Saks
Manjula Salimath
Heidi Houlberg Salmonsen
Rebecca Sandefur
Park Sangchan
Michael Sauder
Susan Segal-Horn
Prem N Sikka
John Sillince
Michael Smets
Hilary Sommerlad
Jesper Strandgaard
Andrew Sturdy
Jackie Swan
Simon Sweeney
Betina Szkudlarek
Yvette Tamineau
Jennifer Tomlinson
Rolf Torstendahl
Chris Quinn Trank
Stephane Tywoniak
Eero Vaara
Marc Ventresca
Patrick Vermeulen
Andrew von Nordenflycht
Justin Waring
Linda Wedlin
Andreas Werr
Melissa Wooten
Tyler Wry
Eyal Yaniv
Eric Zhao
Tammar Zilber

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