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Chapter objectives

The relationship between individual action and social structure has been the subject of considerable discussion and debate in social theory. This chapter presents Anthony Giddens' proposal to reconcile the opposition between structure and agency. His *structuration theory* proposes to see structure and agency as mutually constitutive, as a duality: as inseparable as the two sides of a coin (cf. Craib, 1992). It is not just that structure influences human behaviour and that humans are capable of changing the social structures they inhabit; structure enables and constrains action while simultaneously being (re)constituted through action. Such an analysis of the dynamic relationship between individual action and social structure is a topic with important empirical implications. Structuration explains the motivations for actions, the choices – real and perceived – due to structural opportunities and constraints, and the interactions involved.

This chapter discusses:

- Giddens and the development of structuration theory: a prologue to the theory and its genesis
- Core aspects of structuration theory as formulated by Giddens and key developments in the field
- The relationship of structuration theory to other social and organizational theories and some of the major criticisms challenging the theory
- Implications and empirical applications of structuration for research in management and organization studies

Anthony Giddens

Anthony Giddens was born on January 18, 1938 in Edmonton, north London. He was the first member of his family to go to college and, in 1974, obtained his doctorate from the University of Cambridge. He began his working life at the University of Leicester and then worked for some ten years at Cambridge University before he was eventually promoted to a full professorship (Giddens & Pierson, 1998). From 1997 to 2003, he was Director of the London School of Economics. He is currently a Professor Emeritus at the latter institution and a Life Fellow of King's College, Cambridge. Giddens became a member of the House of Lords in June 2004, having received a life peerage as the Baron Giddens of Southgate. Giddens has had a significant

impact upon British politics as an advisor to the Blair government. He has received over a dozen honorary doctoral degrees from universities around the globe.

A widely cited and prolific social theorist, Giddens has covered a range of issues in his more than 30 books, 200 articles, essays and reviews. His work spans a variety of disciplines including psychology, linguistics, economics, cultural studies and politics, allowing him to comment on a wide range of issues and to introduce a number of theoretical models that help to explain key aspects of the development of societies at local, national and global levels of analysis. His greatest contribution has arguably been in social theory, through the development of structuration theory.

At the beginning of Giddens' career, Durkheim's *Rules of Sociological Method* was still considered one of the main bases for the examination of society. Having been a commentator on Marx, Weber and Durkheim in his initial writings, in *New Rules of Sociological Method*, originally published in 1976, Giddens turned a critical lens on the founding fathers of sociology and their conceptualizations of power. He believed that the orthodox consensus of the late 1960s and 1970s was being replaced by a variety of emergent perspectives, including critical theory, ethnomethodology, symbolic interactionism, post-structuralism and theories written in the tradition of hermeneutics and ordinary language philosophy. Giddens' critical reinterpretation of the classics is visible in the initial phase of his work.

Indeed, Giddens' academic work can be divided into three stages. In the first stage, he outlined a new role and vision for sociology that found expression in publications such as *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory* (1971) and *New Rules of Sociological Method* (1976). With *New Rules of Sociological Method*, the first stage flows seamlessly into the second. In this stage, he offered an analysis of the interplay of agency and structure with neither holding primacy, culminating in the formulation of structuration theory in works such as *Central Problems in Social Theory* (1979) and *The Constitution of Society* (1984). Books written in the third phase discuss the relationship between the self and society and how people gain a sense of their own identity, for example *The Consequences of Modernity* (1990), *Modernity and Self-Identity* (1991), *The Transformation of Intimacy* (1992), *Beyond Left and Right* (1994) and *The Third Way: the Renewal of Social Democracy* (1998). Structuration theory *per se* forms a relatively small part of his voluminous output but firmly established Giddens' reputation; it is the focus of this chapter.

Key concepts in structuration theory

A central problem in social theory is how to make sense of the opposition, or dualism, of agency and structure. Many people ordinarily experience that their activities are both constrained and enabled by social structures. Considering managerial action, for example, we must allow for agency while recognizing that it is enabled and constrained by, and constitutive of, structures such as organizational designs and institutional embeddedness. It becomes a theoretical problem for social theory, with relevance for organization and management theory, when the analyst postulates that humans have the capacity for sociologically meaningful autonomous action, because they have 'free will'; if so, how can their agency be constrained by structure if not by voluntary choice? Vice versa, if the analyst postulates that structure determines human behaviour, then the question arises, how can there be place

for agency? Both can be useful starting assumptions for explaining social phenomena, but they are not easily reconcilable in one theory. The 'paradox of embedded agency', for example, has been extensively discussed as a theoretical problem in the institutional entrepreneurship literature (Battilana, 2006; Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006). Structuration theory is one of several proposals in social theory to address this problem. Other articulations include Bourdieu's and Schatzki's theories of practice (Harvey & Maclean, this volume; Loscher, Spiller & Seidl, this volume), Archer's morphogenesis which is based on Bhaskar's critical realism (Mutch, this volume), and actor-network theory as advanced by Callon, Latour, Law and others (O'Doherty, this volume). In setting out Giddens' proposal, we outline his conceptualizations of duality, agency, structure and time-space, which are constitutive of structuration theory.

Duality

Not only do economists and other adherents of methodological individualism emphasize human intentionality and understanding in the construction of the social world, but phenomenological and interpretive social scientists do as well. Consequently, they believe that to explain social outcomes one needs to study individuals and their interactions. Other social scientists, working from structuralist and functionalist traditions, see unique aspects of the social world that cannot be explained merely by the actions of the sum of individuals present. They give ontological precedence to social structures, entertaining the view that collectives have properties of their own, and that structures determine human behaviour. Both ways of looking – setting aside the many ontological and epistemological differences within each – appeal to common sense and experience, yet they are difficult to reconcile theoretically. What is the place for agency if structure is dominant? What is structure if it cannot always be reduced to the outcome of aggregate human (inter)action?

Rather than finding a synthetic approach to reconciling the opposition between the two perspectives, structuration theory seeks to transcend it. Giddens proposed the concept of the 'duality of structure', in which 'structure is both the medium and the outcome of the reproduction of practices' (Giddens, 1979, p. 5) and structuration the process in which social structures and people's agency interact in mutually constituting ways. Structuration theory does not give primacy to either structure or agency, nor does it presuppose ontological priority of one over the other. As Giddens asserts,

> If interpretative sociologies are founded, as it were, upon an imperialism of subject, functionalism and structuralism propose an imperialism of the social object. One of my principal ambitions in the formulation of structuration theory is to put an end to each of these empire-building endeavours.
>
> (Giddens, 1984, p. 2)

Epistemologically, structuration signifies that human agents deal with a pre-existing, interpreted world, and simultaneously constitute that world through the meanings they assign it (Giddens, 1976). Social structures exist in the very moment they are reproduced by agents while social agents simultaneously constitute themselves as

such through structured action. Duality of structure means that both structure and agency are taken into consideration at the same time; structuration refers to giving attention to both past (as structural continuity) and present (as an avenue for innovation and change or, of course, structural reproduction) (Whittington, 2015). Structuration is the instant of the reproduction of agency and structure (Haugaard, 2002).

Agency

One foundational concept of structuration theory is agency: the extent to which social agents are capable of making a difference to everyday social affairs or courses of events, that is: their ability to do otherwise. Giddens ties this ability to the exercise of power. An agent ceases to be an agent when devoid of the ability to act otherwise. 'Agency concerns events of which an individual is the perpetrator, in the sense that the individual could, at any phase in a given sequence of conduct, have acted differently.' (Giddens, 1984, p. 9) This notion of agency is grounded in a set of assumptions about how and why agents can act. Giddens views agents as reflexive and capable beings rather than as the 'cultural dopes' that 'ensue from strong forms of structuralism' (Mutch, 2014, p. 588) or as 'structural dopes of even more stunning mediocrity' (Giddens, 1979, p. 52). Agents then are intentional, reflexive and, to a large extent, rational beings, who behave according to their knowledge or belief regarding their situation and the outcomes of their action (although action may have unintended consequences, sometimes very consequentially so!).

The treatment of agency in structuration theory rests on the premise that agents can have knowledge about what they do and their reasons for it, and about the structural context in which and upon which they act. They can apply this knowledge and exercise reflexivity in the production and reproduction of social practices. Social practices are generalized schemes that agents' employ in their 'doings' and that apply to an indeterminate range of social contexts. Agents use such knowledge to understand the grounds of their everyday life and in the continuation of day-to-day actions (Giddens, 1984).

Giddens supposes that agents' knowledgeability is related to two modes of consciousness: practical and discursive. Discursive consciousness implies the most explicit form of knowledge and is immediately available to the agent. It is, quite simply, the ability to articulate knowledge. The reflexivity of action through which individuals reflect, monitor and modify their action on an ongoing basis is the domain of discursive consciousness (Giddens, 1984). On the other hand, practical consciousness comprises tacit, unarticulated and taken-for-granted knowledge. It facilitates everyday exchanges among social agents; it is mutual knowledge. Albeit unarticulated, social agents have a great deal of knowledge about social life. The process through which they use mutual knowledge to understand the grounds of their everyday life, the continuation of day-to-day actions, is referred to as the rationalization of action.

Giddens also points out the basic relations between ontological security and mutual knowledge and how it leads to the routinized character of social life. Ontological security is the desire of social agents to maintain the cognitively ordered world of self and other. In attempting to maintain a high amount of ontological security, agents engage in routinized behaviour and shy away from radical deviations of the norm (Loyal, 2003). Here, it is necessary to distinguish practical consciousness from common sense, a distinction that Giddens suggests is largely analytical, 'that is to say,

common sense is mutual knowledge treated not as knowledge but as fallible belief' (Giddens, 1984, p. 336). Moreover, Giddens contends that the boundary between practical and discursive consciousness is fluid and permeable, and that 'there are only the differences between what can be said and what is characteristically simply done' (Giddens, 1984, p. 7).

Not all action is conscious. Unconscious action can be understood as stemming from repressed desires and cognition or partial refraction of these at practical and/or discursive modes of consciousness. When an agent takes some action that she cannot necessarily rationalize or articulate, the motivation and memories of that action remain unconscious. According to Giddens (2013, p. 6), 'reasons refer to the grounds of action, [whereas] motives refer to the wants which prompts it'. Although motives cannot always be articulated, reasons can be identified. Reasons may stem from practical consciousness, which can be rationalized and accounted for, and from discursive consciousness, which can always be articulated.

Although Giddens gives primacy to knowledgeability of agents, he argues that they are constrained in spatial dimensions, both laterally and vertically. 'Lateral' refers to different categories of social activities and 'vertical' to the stratified nature of society. That is, agents may be knowledgeable about particular categories of social life, at a particular hierarchical level, but constrained regarding others. Knowledgeability is also bounded, as action may have unanticipated, unintended and uncontrollable outcomes. Still, it is quite evident for Giddens, with his focus on practical consciousness, that the basic domain of social sciences is practices ordered through space and time, and not with either the agent or structure (Whittington, 2015). In many ways, social practice, as an ongoing series of practical activities, acts as a bridge between agency and structure.

Structure

Conventionally, structure refers to anything that has relative endurance and has the effect of bringing order to the given set of 'things'. According to Giddens (2013), the functionalist understanding of structure is the patterning of social relations and phenomena, whereas the structuralist understanding of structure is that of underlying codes or ordered relations beneath the surface level of the society, which must be understood from their surface level manifestations. In any case, these conceptions of structure portray it as external to, independent of and posing constraints on human agency. Structures, thus seen, are primary constituents of social reality; they are ontologically 'real' – as opposed to Levi-Strauss' conceptualization of structure as a model, as a methodological device in the hands of a social scientist (Lizardo, 2010).

Giddens' conceptualization of structure is conventional in subscribing to an ontologically realist position – even if with Giddens, structures are 'virtual', persisting as 'memory traces' – but distinct in its insistence on the *duality* of the structure, highlighting how every act of social production is also an act of social reproduction, and how structure exists during the instant of this constitution. One way to understand the concept of structure, according to Giddens, is by the analogy of language and its relationship with speech. Just as language enables and constrains speech and speech reconstitutes language, so does structure provide the conditions and possibilities for social action.

Giddens amended the definition of structure from patterned social relations to the generative rules and resources underlying patterning. Rules in social life are generalizable procedures, often tacit, which are enacted and reproduced in social practices. They are both constitutive and regulative in nature (Loyal, 2003). Rules not only denote legislations but also less formal routines, habits, procedures and conventions (Whittington, 2015). Rules can be intensive or shallow, tacit or discursive, informal or formalized, and weakly or strongly sanctioned. In this characterization of rules, at one extreme there are rules that are constantly invoked in everyday life, such as the norms or conventions of taking turns in conversations, and at the other extreme, codified laws. A social agent does not need to articulate a rule discursively in order to know it, but she can know the rule tacitly in the form of practical consciousness. Giddens saw more influence on daily life of intensive, tacit, informal and weakly sanctioned rules, indicating that such rules have the potential to affect the very fabric of social life. This belies the commonly held assumption that abstract and codified laws exert greater influence upon the generality of social conduct.

Resources refer to the bases through which power is exercised. Giddens defines power as the transformative capacity of agents to make a difference in the social world. Giddens mentions two types of resources: authoritative and allocative. Authoritative resources grant power over subject–subject relations (people), whereas allocative resources grant power over subject–object relations (material objects). As Giddens mentions, the exercise of power is limited by the inherent desire of agents to invoke routinized patterns of life due to ontological security, by material constraints due to corporeality, and by sanctions and structural constraints which are pre-structured limitations on the possibility for action (Giddens, 1984).

Giddens analytically categorizes structure into structures of domination, signification and legitimation. Whereas rules refer to structures of signification and legitimation, resources refer to structures of domination. Structures of signification deal with the symbols that encode meanings and so shape perceptions, whereas structures of legitimation deal with the meaning of norms that govern social action (Mutch, 2014). Resources as structures of domination refer to power, both authoritative and allocative. Agency is enhanced by control over resources and is exercised through the following or rejection of rules (Whittington, 2015).

Giddens highlighted three different forms of interaction in which agency is performed: communication, power and sanctions. Giddens proposed that the properties of interaction are related to the properties of structure and the modalities of structuration. Structures and interactions are mediated by the modalities of interpretive schemes, facilities and norms. Modalities are the ways through which structural dimensions are expressed in interaction (Whittington, 2015). For example, when communicating (interaction), people draw on interpretive schemes (modality) that are linked to signification (structure). Similarly, the use of power (interaction) involves drawing upon facilities derived from allocative and authoritative resources (modality) that are linked to domination (structure). Finally, the application of sanction (interaction) draws on norms (modality) that are linked to legitimation (structure). Giddens argues that in actual social practices there are various degrees of combination of all three kinds of structure. In fact, Giddens emphasizes reciprocity between all of these properties of structure (Whittington, 2015).

Time-space

A final significant notion related to the theory of structuration is that of time-space. Giddens stated that social interaction occurs across time and space; it is contextual and situated. Further, to understand social interaction, it is important not only to understand the objects and persons present (presencing) but also those absent (absencing). In fact, during social encounters, there is an intersection of interacting agents according to their time-paths at different levels: one at the level of daily experience, one at the level of overall being and in relation to the institutional time (Loyal, 2003). These interactions occur in a definite spatial context, which can be further divided into regions that enclose a time-space providing more specific contexts to social interactions. This has been referred to as regionalization.

In the end, then, more precisely, structure refers to the structuring properties that provide the binding and continuity of time and space in patterned social relations, that is, in social systems (Giddens, 1979). Social systems exist in time-space, manifest themselves empirically and are constituted by social practices. Regular activities bring people together in social systems, which are reproduced over time through continued interaction. Social systems can exist at various levels and may even be somewhat overlapping and contradictory (Whittington, 2015). The participation of agents in different social systems and the inherent contradictions among them are germane to human agency and grant social agents some degree of agency. To study the structuration of a social system is to study the ways in which that system, via the application of general rules and resources, and in the context of unintended outcomes, is produced and reproduced in interaction.

Criticisms of structuration theory

Up until the early 1970s, most of sociology had paid scant attention to the relationship between agency and structure (ethnomethodology perhaps being an exception). Giddens' views on structuration addressed this neglect. Notwithstanding the significant contribution to social theory and the 'intrinsic power and value of structuration' (Stones, 2005, p. 4) evident in the ample empirical applications across disciplines, structuration theory has been the continual target of censure. Critique of the theory can be explained by inherent 'gaps and logical deficiencies' in the theory (Sewell, 1992, p. 5), but if one realizes that from the mid-1970s onward multiple articulations to solve the structure-agency problem where published in a short period of time, some of the intensity of the critique may have resulted from competition for recognition as the 'best' approach.

The criticism meted out to structuration theory can be divided into conceptual critique that targets the fundamental logic of the duality of structure and critique that emphasizes epistemological and methodological deficiencies in the theory. The latter critique can be related to the somewhat wilful sparseness with which Giddens treated structuration theory. The former can be attributed to Giddens' lack of specificity and his penchant for a more abstract rendering of concepts. The concept of duality itself has been severely challenged by, among others, Archer (1982; 1995), Hodgson (2007), Lizardo (2010) and Willmott (2000). Others attacked ambiguity in the notion of power (e.g. Callinicos, 1985) and the concept of time-space (e.g. Urry, 1991), while yet others criticized the overall lack of clarity and comprehensiveness of

structuration theory (e.g. Held & Thompson, 1989). Sewell (1992) and Stones (2005) are prominent examples of scholars who sought to salvage structuration theory by proposing ways to overcome its weaknesses and inconsistencies. In this section, we focus, first, on several points of conceptual critique, and then highlight some epistemological and methodological deficiencies.

Conceptual critique – agency

A majority of critics argues that structuration theory is ultimately subjectivist because its notion of duality remains tightly coupled with the voluntarist side of dualism; agency is dominant (Callinicos, 1985; Clegg, 1989). Callinicos (1985), for instance, emphasizes how Giddens' invocation of the agent's capacity to resist – rather than offering historical examinations of the variable conditions of action – privileges agency over structure. For these critics, structuration theory is not a theoretical improvement but a slight neglect of enduring structures over reflexive agency (Mutch, 2014).

Gane (1983) and Bertilsson (1984) argue that the precise meaning of agency, as Giddens uses it, is theoretically ambiguous because in some instances it refers to 'persons' but in other instances to 'dominant sets of practices' that require practical agency. In contrast, Archer (1995) distinguishes the differences between persons, agents and actors in a more nuanced manner (see Mutch, this volume). Giddens' stratified conception of agency has also been criticized on the grounds that it is disembodied from the analysis of social structures and fails to consider the lack of critical intent in the agent's knowledgeability, particularly when actions are undertaken in search of ontological security (Bertilsson, 1984).

The overall gist of the criticisms indicates that Giddens overemphasizes voluntarism. However, in many cases – if not in all – the critique tends to present Giddens as taking an extreme position by quoting him selectively. The argument that Giddens prioritizes agency all the time is somewhat debatable; in our reading, Giddens does not particularly deny the possibility of structural conditions constraining agency. Indeed, Giddens is circumspect in overestimating the ability of agents to act according to their own free will because, although agents always have the 'possibility to do otherwise', this transformative capacity depends on their position in the social world (Giddens, 1984).

Conceptual critique – structure

Just as various critics argued that the concept of agency is flawed, they also argue that there are flaws in the conceptualization of structure. According to Giddens, structure consists of rules and resources, and he categorizes them into interpretative and normative. Some critics (Thompson, 1989; Stones, 2005) find the definition of structure as rules and resources to be imprecise in the sense that Giddens fails to provide a clear and consistent account of rules. Further, what is involved in drawing upon structures remains vague (Stones, 2005).

Critiques point out the difficulty in substituting the conventional concept of social structure with rules and resources (Thompson, 1989; Stones, 2005). Structures are more complex than rules, and resources as rules serve to generate practices only in a very weak sense. The direction of causality and analytical priority of

one over the other has also been a contentious issue. Scholars in this vein argue that patterned social relations should have analytical priority over rules and resources to account for the differential capacities of agents and unequal distribution of power, which is so characteristic of social life. Giddens' notion of power, as the transformative capacity of agents, is exercised through the medium of resources which themselves seem to be structurally derived, but without an objective conception of structure this is rendered impossible (Clegg, 1989). Understanding power necessitates assumptions of certain structural conditions based on which the rules of differentiation are themselves derived (Stones, 2005). It is only then possible to categorize institutions and structural pressures acting upon agents that enable specific rules and resources to be drawn.

Giddens suggests that structures, as memory traces, are virtual and exist only at the moment of their instantiation. Ontologically, a structure that resides in a real, material artefact would seem clearly distinct from one that exists only when instantiated in the practices of social agents (Jones & Karsten, 2008; Lizardo, 2010). The notion of action, mediated by various modalities of structure, requires further clarification between virtual and visible social systems (Loyal, 2003). Sewell (1992) proposes that structures as rules and resources are not completely virtual but that 'rules' should instead be conceptualized as virtual schemas whereas 'resources', both authoritative and allocative, do indeed have objective existence. Much of the criticism regarding structure focuses on whether it is appropriate to conceptualize it as generative rules and resources and whether, by doing so, it can sufficiently facilitate the study of social structure and systems as such. The debate also stretches to the extent to which structure manifests materially, given that Giddens emphasizes its virtual nature. The ontological precedence of generative rules and resources or social conditions is also a matter of considerable debate. As will be seen in the next section on duality, the extent to which this sort of conceptualization of structure enables the study of causal relations between agency and structure has led to elaborate criticisms, and modifications in the theory of structuration.

Conceptual critique – duality

Archer (1982) rejects Giddens' concept of duality. According to her, without sufficient differentiation between structural conditions and action, it is very easy to conflate the two, which then results in the loss of analytical value; if structure is inseparable from agency, it cannot be considered as autonomous, emergent, preexistent or causally influential in any sensible way. Thus, the notion of duality disregards the implicit temporality of the process; if structures only exist as memory traces and in the instantiation of practices, the temporality involved in the sequence of relations between structure and agency in the production and reproduction of society is neglected (Stones, 2005). Dismissing the separability and relative temporal autonomy of structure and agency, according to Archer (1982; 1995) and others (Barley & Tolbert, 1997; Thompson 1989; Clegg 1989), precludes any examination of their interplay, causal relationships and relative contribution to enabling and constraining change at any given time. For instance, the theory provides no explanation of how or when agency changes are reflected in structure and at what point agentic forces can be considered significant enough to effect changes in structure (Hodgson, 2007).

Stones (2005) develops the concept of duality in his proposal of 'strong structuration theory' by distinguishing four components in a 'quadripartite nature of structuration'. The four-fold nature of structuration comprises: external structures, internal structures, active agency and outcomes. External structures are conditions of action that the agent faces externally of which the agent may not be necessarily aware. Internal structures are internal to the agent and comprise what and how the agent 'knows' and are further divided into specific knowledge of external structures and general dispositions that are conjunctional. Whereas such specific knowledge relates to the agent's understanding of the external structures and the strategic possibilities to act within it, general dispositions roughly correspond to Bourdieu's (1977) 'habitus' and comprise the agent's schemas, discourses, world views, value commitments, moral and practical principles etc. The third component of the quadripartite nature of structuration, active agency refers to the ways through which an agent either routinely or strategically draws upon internal structures. Outcomes are the effect of an agent's actions on the internal and external structures, which either leads to their reproduction or transformation. In this way, Stones (2005) elaborates on the notion of Giddens' duality with a more nuanced version of structure that makes it more amenable to empirical research.

Epistemological and methodological deficiencies

The second criticism tied to structuration theory, that of a lack of clear methodological procedures, is now 'established wisdom' with Giddens consciously refraining from setting out guidelines for empirical research (den Hond et al., 2012, p. 240). Additionally, the application of structuration theory in empirical studies is hampered by the overall lack of operational definitions of structure and agency, the abstracted level of theorizing, and the very nature of the duality of structure and agency (den Hond et al., 2012; Sewell, 1992; Fuchs, 2001; Whittington, 2015). We attend to a more detailed examination of these criticisms.

At the epistemological level, criticism has been directed at Giddens' rejection to 'wield the methodological scalpel' (Giddens, 1984, p. xxx) and the absence of empirical examples in his work – notwithstanding the few studies Giddens uses to illustrate certain aspects of structuration theory, such as Willis' (1977) *Learning to Labour* (Giddens, 1984; Gregson, 1989). Concerning itself more with answering 'what is' rather than 'how to explain' questions (Lizardo, 2010, p. 658), structuration theory also has neglected to articulate a normative foundation, and is therefore limited as critical theory (Bernstein, 1983). The epistemological difficulty is that 'unless an institution exists prior to action it is difficult to understand how it can affect behaviour' and therefore empirical analysis needs a 'diachronic model of the structuration process' (Barley & Tolbert, 1997, p. 9) to overcome the problem of conflation of action and institution.

Giddens clearly had conceived of structuration theory at the meta-level encompassing a broader range of issues at the ontological level and had been less concerned with the specifics at the methodological and epistemological level. Archer suggests that structuration theory's popularity can be attributed to discontent with the 'old debate' of individualism versus collectivism, but she claims that two competing world views remain relevant given their different ontological conceptions and their distinct implications for practical social theorizing (Archer, 1995,

pp. 60–61). However, this explanation for structuration theory's acclaim may be too simplistic and is not borne out by the increasing currency commanded by structuration theory in empirical applications across disciplines. Overall, despite the poor definitional quality of structuration theory, it offers 'much insight into the basic properties and dynamics of human action, interaction, and organization' (Turner, 1986, p. 977) and its 'connection to empirical research is fundamentally important' (Gregson, 1989, p. 236).

Empirical application

Criticisms levied against the various theoretical constructs in structuration theory are belied by the numerous empirical applications in disciplines as varied as accounting, management and organization, political culture, geography, psychology, and technology and information systems (Stones, 2005). The theory's appealing notion of the transformative capacity of human agency finds expression in management and organization studies research that addresses issues of stability, change and process. Unsurprisingly, empirical application is not without its challenges. Firstly, Giddens himself did not explicate how structuration theory could inform empirical research. Instead, he proposed parsimony in applying structuration theory and recommended using the concepts only as 'sensitizing devices', thus consciously limiting 'forays into epistemology' in his own writing (Giddens, 1984, pp. 327, 288). Secondly, empirical operationalization is hampered by the development of key concepts that solely operate at a high level of abstraction (den Hond et al., 2012; Pozzebon & Pinsonneault, 2005; Sewell, 1992; Fuchs, 2001; Whittington, 2015). Responding to this issue, there have been some attempts at making structuration theory operational for empirical research (notably Stones, 2005).

Writing of empirical research, Giddens made an interesting comment when affirming the 'cultural, ethnographic or "anthropological"' element in all social research and the consequent double hermeneutics. The sociological researcher, attentive to agents' complex skills in the 'shifting contexts of time and space' (Giddens, 1984, pp. 284–286), seeks to explain what agents know about how to 'go on' in the daily activities of their social life, by inventing 'second-order' concepts. However, such 'second-order' concepts can also be appropriated in social life by agents as 'first-order' concepts. Translation and interpretation between sociological descriptions and the frames of meaning with which agents understand and orient their conduct is what Giddens referred to as 'double hermeneutics'. Giddens (2013) contended that all social research is characterized by such interplay of two frames of meaning, implicitly arguing how a strict separation of (the language of) social research and (that of) its object – as with Levi-Strauss, see above, and Bourdieu (1990), for example – may not be tenable.

Researchers of management and organization who share structuration theory's primary concern with social groups have adopted, albeit in varying degrees, the theory's concerns with dichotomist thinking (Pozzebon, 2004). In a review of application specific to this discipline, den Hond et al. (2012) found a majority of articles made only a passing reference to Giddens' work, employing it for definitional purposes, as a building block to alternative frameworks, or to emphasize and elaborate on aspects of agency and structure. They found closer engagement with structuration theory in some articles that applied in an in-depth fashion a small number of key concepts from the repertoire of structuration theory. Finally, they found a handful of articles that utilized

the theory's three main constructs of duality of structure, agents' knowledgeability, and time-space relations, adopting varying degrees of emphasis on each aspect. Others (Albano, Masino & Maggi, 2010) suggest that even when organizational scholars do not interpret consistently or build fully on structuration theory, they may still realize Giddens' main message: that theory be developed based on an epistemological view that allows the researcher to overcome the objectivist/subjectivist dilemma.

Organization studies and structuration theory

Paradoxically, this lack of clear epistemological and methodological guidelines may have allowed for a wider application of structuration theory in different contexts, accounting for its popularity in shaping a variety of empirical insights. In addition to the particular popularity of structuration theory in information technology and information systems research (reviewed in, for example, Pozzebon, 2004; Pozzebon & Pinsonneault, 2005; Jones & Karsten, 2008), empirical applications can also be seen in institutional research (Barley & Tolbert, 1997), strategy research (Pozzebon, 2004), strategy-as-practice (Whittington, 2015; Seidl & Whittington, 2014), power relations (Courpasson, 2000; Brocklehurst, 2001), and process research methodologies (Sminia, 2009). Complementary to den Hond et al. (2012), who categorized how core concepts of structuration theory were used in empirical studies, we now present examples of empirical work to illustrate how structuration theory has informed some areas in the field of management and organization studies.

Process studies

An especially promising area for management and organization scholars lies in the potential of structuration theory as a process-oriented theory, explaining change in and around organizations (Albano, Masino & Maggi, 2010; den Hond et al., 2012). Drawing simultaneously on the tenets of functionalism and phenomenology, Giddens tries to bridge the gap between deterministic, objective and static notions of structure, on the one hand, and voluntaristic, subjective and dynamic views, on the other, by positing two realms of social order (analogous to grammar and speech) and by focusing attention on points of intersection between the two realms. Since the very term 'structuration' denotes structure as a process that underscores the transformative capacity of human agency in effecting change, concepts such as scripts and routines can present viable process methodology routes (Sewell, 1992). However, capturing recursive relationships implicit in the notion that 'social structures are both constituted by human agency and at the same time are the very medium of this constitution' (Giddens, 1979, p. 121) can be challenging. In this regard, Langley (1999) suggests that temporal bracketing (breaking down into successive periods) can allow for analysis of such 'mutual shaping', although some authors argue that this could distort the 'duality of structure' itself (Jones, 1997; Pozzebon & Pinsonneault, 2005, p. 1361).

Organizational change has been conventionally conceived of as either passive adaptation to exogenous variables or an unpredictable phenomenon resulting from individual strategies and behaviours. Giddens' approach helps in explanation of organizational change by assimilating both the exogenous and individual antecedents in a common framework. Since structuration theory is a meta-theory, it

helps in providing a higher level of synthesis of ongoing human activities and enduring social structures (Orlikowski & Robey, 1991). One of the exemplary articles in this regard deals with how organizational structures change over time by applying a Giddensian approach (Ranson, Hinings & Greenwood, 1980; Albano, Masino & Maggi, 2010). Other authors such as Riley (1983) have also adopted structuration theory to study organizational culture and social change (Albano, Masino & Maggi, 2010).

Strategic management

Strategy is considered, at a macro level, an aggregate of actions, transactions, recipes, positions, designs, plans and interpretations. At the same time, strategy can only be empirically grounded in the discrete actions, decisions or routines of a variety of agents at the micro level. Clearly, the link between micro and macro is manifest in a structurationist view of strategy as a matter of ongoing social practices and power relations. The reciprocity between structure and action, so fundamental to structuration theory, has implications for alternative interpretations in the analysis of strategic choice. According to Pozzebon (2004, p. 254), Giddens' theory has more often been adopted as a broad framework (e.g. Coopey, Keegan & Emler, 1998), as a general premise incorporated into existing approaches (e.g. Lowe, 1998; Phillips, Lawrence & Hardy, 2000), or as an integrative theoretical tool (e.g. Child, 1997) than as the primary theoretical foundation in studying strategy and organizational change. She found that structuration has been used substantially to speak to topics such as strategic conversation (Westley, 1990), differentiation between intended and enacted strategy (Sarason, 1995), and strategy making as the ongoing socially structured action of many agents (Rouleau, 2005). From here, structuration has continued to influence strategy formation research (Sminia, 2009). In general, structuration theory has also been applied to analyse managerial work as the 'skilled accomplishment of agents and as an expression of the structural properties of systems of interaction' (Wilmott, 1987, cited in Albano, Masino & Maggi, 2010).

Structuration theory has clear relevance to strategy as practice scholars, with Whittington suggesting that Giddens is a practice theorist since 'for him, understanding people's activity is the central purpose of social analysis' (Whittington, 2015, p. 145). Specifically, Whittington submits that structuration theory has relevance in addressing issues of management control and managerial agency, 'whether and how structures can be used and modified by organizations and their members' (Whittington, 1992, pp. 697–698; den Hond et al., 2012). In addition, this emphasis on people's activity complements the increasing recognition of the role of individuals in the emergent micro-foundations stream of strategy research (Powell, Lovallo & Fox, 2011; Barney & Felin, 2013; den Hond et al., 2012). Structuration theory also complements calls to encourage strategy as practice and institutional theory to work together (Suddaby, Seidl & Lê, 2013; Vaara & Whittington, 2012) since 'to understand activity, we must attend to institutional embeddedness' (Whittington, 2015, p. 145).

Institutional theory

The association between institutional theory and structuration theory is apparent considering both regard institutionalization as a dynamic interactive process. Barley

and Tolbert (1997) advance the view that a fusion of the two theories could add to institutional theory since institutionalists have tended to neglect how institutions are reproduced and altered, an area that structuration theory addresses adeptly. Moreover, structuration theory can address problems of institutional determinism (Scott, 2014). Recognizing the lack of empirical direction in structuration theory as to how such study might be operationalized, Barley and Tolbert (1997) provide methodological guidelines for empirical study, but acknowledge that in choosing to focus on the identification and analysis of scripts as an expedient empirical option, they have somewhat relegated the emphasis on cognitive and interpretive frames. For strategy as practice researchers, Wittington (2015) suggests that not only does structuration theory offer the potential to improve understanding of the institutions in which strategy takes place, but indeed the theory demands a 'wide-angled analysis of institutions, as well as the microscopic study of praxis' (p. 146). Poole and Van de Ven (1989), in discussing how to deal with paradox, maintain that structuration theory offers a new conception of the structure–agency paradox, and thereby enables the development of new insights and theory building because it allows researchers to consider action and structure simultaneously.

Power

The relations between human agencies in institutionalized settings are fundamentally related to the dimensions of power. Structural theory emphasizes the transformative capacity of agents and power as defined by social relationships rather than being an attribute of an entity (den Hond et al., 2012). Several researchers have elaborated further on this idea. For instance, Leflaive (1996), building on structuration theory, proposed that instead of viewing power as a property of agents or originating due to unequal control of information, it should be seen as a collective organizational capacity. He argues that the process of surveillance is at the same time constituted and constitutive of organizations and agents have the capacity to both resist and change these processes. Based upon Giddens' conceptualization of power, Brocklehurst argues that working at home changes organizational relationships, including issues of control, because of the transformative capacity (i.e. power) of the employees to change the material and social world (Brocklehurst, 2001, p. 447). Courpasson (2000) uses structuration theory broadly to argue that organizations are governed both via centralized and entrepreneurial governance forms through structures of domination and as structures of legitimacy. It is quite clear that structuration theory has relevance to the issues of use of power in managerial control and agency and in setting up or modifying structures of domination (Whittington, 1992; den Hond et al., 2012).

Organizational routines

With the focus of practical consciousness and routinized nature of social life, structuration theory is quite compatible with the study of organizational routines, especially the relationship between structure and recurrent social practices. For instance, Giddens (1991) mentions that when structuration theory is used as an analytical tool, the researcher should focus on the analysis of 'recurrent social practices', assuming that structures exist in practice. Indeed, structuration theory has

been applied in the study of organizational routines to show them as a source of both stability and change. Organizational routines, for instance, have been referred to as 'generative systems' (Feldman, 2000). There are both ostensive and performative aspects to organizational routine following. In many cases, organizational routines are not just taken for granted but are performed by skilful agents. Indeed, for 'recurrent social practices' to be considered routine, agents should display some amount of knowledgeability of these practices (den Hond et al., 2012). When an agent reflexively selects from a menu of choices from the repertoire available, this has inherent possibilities for organizational change. Any kind of patterned activity in a situational context can be a source of both stability and change, as knowledgeable agents innovate on the available repertoire offered by routines.

Organizational intelligence and learning

Structuration theory can provide a more comprehensive view of organization intelligence including cognitive, behavioural and affective processes (Akgun, Byrne & Keskin, 2007). Organizational intelligence has been referred to as the organization's capacity to collect, process and interpret information to support decision-making and is also closely related to the organizational communication process (Feldman & March 1981). Scholars have investigated organizational learning (Berends, Boersma & Weggeman 2003), communication (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992), knowledge (Orlikowski, 2002) and discourse (Heracleous & Hendry, 2000). In this area, the first application of structuration theory is seen in the domain of information processing and technology, with it being subsequently applied to knowledge and learning in organizations. The application of structuration theory in the former (e.g. Yates & Orlikowski, 1992; DeSanctis & Poole, 1994) can be considered more substantial than the latter. Exceptions to this are the application of structuration theory in organizational learning by Hargadon and Fanelli (2002) and to organizational knowledge by Berends, Boersma and Weggeman (2003). There are some direct applications of structuration theory in the area of organizational intelligence (Akgun, Byrne and Keskin, 2007). Yates and Orlikowski (1992) illustrate how a structurational perspective can provide insight to the emergence of communication genres through the interaction of individual communicative actions and the institutionalized practices. This view suggests that discourse is composed of a duality of communicative actions (utterances) and deep structures (such as root metaphors, central themes or fundamental assumptions), interacting through the modality of agents' interpretive schemes (Heracleous & Barrett, 2001; Heracleous & Hendry, 2000).

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, structuration theory is not only relevant but also poses challenges to organization theory due to the lack of a detailed methodology and the usage of obscure and complex terms, possibly compounded by difficulties posed by Giddens' favoured ethnographic approach and time-consuming data collection (Whittington, 2015). Critics see structuration theory as a 'second-order theory … conceptualizing the general constituents of human society' (Gregson, 1989, p. 245), or as a meta-theory (Weaver & Gioia, 1994). Giddens expressed unhappiness about how his

concepts were employed in empirical research, arguing that structuration theory's concepts should be applied 'in a spare and critical fashion', and as sensitizing devices rather than *in toto* (Giddens, 1991, p. 213; Giddens, 1984). However, as Stones (2005) points out, Giddens' focus on ontology rather than on specifics does not preclude structuration theory from contributing to situated analyses. Indeed, the abstract level concepts in structuration theory may have inadvertently permitted a flexible approach to data, thus offering insights to a wider research field (Heracleous, 2013).

Thus, notwithstanding the limitations of structuration theory, and contrary to Gregson's (1989) assessment in consigning structuration theory to inconsequentiality due to its inability to inform empirical research, structuration theory has seen widespread practical application in management and organizational studies and holds promise for future research. Indeed, in his proposal for a stronger theory of structuration, Stones (2005, p. 8) suggests that structuration theory contains within it even greater 'untapped potential at the empirical, substantive level'. A point echoed in Pozzebon and Pinsonneault's (2005, p. 1354) assertion that organization theorists' application of structuration theory in empirical studies remains at a nascent stage with the potential to provide a powerful alternative to other 'dichotomous systems of logic'.

End-of-chapter exercises

1. What is the difference between dualism and duality?
2. (Regarding the duality of structure) What is the sociological meaning of a formal rule (law) that nobody observes any longer, or that has passed into oblivion? Of a norm or custom that has become obsolete?
3. How does knowledgeability relate to agency?
4. What are, in your view, the major criticisms of Giddens' outline of structuration? Why do you consider them important?
5. What is, in your opinion, the relevance and purchase of social theory for research? Should social theory be directly applicable in research? Or should it be considered as meta-theory, unfalsifiable by virtue of being meta-theory, but supportive of and a source of inspiration for research by explicating a point of view on society and social change?

Glossary

Agency The ability of people ('agents') to act upon the world; their capacity to make a difference.

Allocative resources Resources that grant control over subject–object relations (material objects).

Authoritative resources Resources that grant control over subject–subject relations (people).

Domination Structure resulting from or associated with control over allocative and authoritative resources that can stretch from relations regarded as authority where legitimacy is bestowed, to relations lacking legitimacy, tyranny.

Double hermeneutics The two-way, interpretive and dialectical relationship between social scientific knowledge and human practices (hermeneutics itself referring to interpretation or meaning making).

Dualism   Mutual exclusiveness of opposing concepts, such as agency *versus* structure, subject *versus* object, voluntarism *versus* determinism, and individual *versus* society.

Duality   Inseparability and mutual constitution of opposing concepts, such as agency/structure, subject/object, voluntarism/determinism and individual/society.

Interaction   The agent's activity within the social system, space and time; forms of interaction in which agency is performed include communication, the exercise of power and sanction.

Knowledgeability   Closely related to reflexivity, the capacity/ability of people to 'know' their place and condition in the social world (unconscious knowledge, practical knowledge and discursive knowledge).

Legitimation   Structure resulting from, or associated with, the norms that govern social action.

Modalities   The ways through which structural dimensions are expressed in action.

Power   The transformative capacity of agents to make a difference in the social world.

Reflexivity   Closely related to knowledgeability, the capacity/ability of people to 'reflect' on their place and condition in the social world.

Resources   The bases or vehicles through which power is exercised; distinction between allocative and authoritative resources.

Rules   Generalizable procedures, often tacit, which are enacted and reproduced in social practices; once deeply sedimented in time-space, they have become institutions.

Signification   Structure resulting from, or associated with, the symbols that encode meanings and so shape perceptions.

Strong structuration   A reinforced version of structuration theory put forth by Stones (2005); it encompasses 'ontology-in-situ' and involves both hermeneutics and structural analysis, with a view to overcoming the more abstract visualization of structure and agency in Giddens theory.

Structuration   The process in which social structures and people's agency interact in mutually constituting ways; the very instant of the reproduction of agency and structure.

Structure   The relatively stable and enduring elements in social life: Giddens distinguishes domination, signification and legitimation as different structures.

Time-space   Shorthand for the temporal and spatial extension of structures; their influence at a distance.

Unintended consequences   Just what they are: the unforeseen, unexpected, sometimes desired, but unintended outcomes of action.

Weak structuration   Giddens' formulation of structuration theory, and in opposition to Stones' (2005) reformulation of the theory labelled strong structuration.

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