Institutional theory and historical evidence: exploring the benefits and problems

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Overview

- Why bother?
- Forms of historical inquiry and evidence
- Explorations in practice: church governance
- Some local conclusions
- Broader implications
Why bother?

• Some interest (although constrained) in major journals
  – ‘Qualitative methods can get at temporal dynamics that quantitative research cannot.’ (Bansal and Corley, 2011, 235).
  – ‘scholars can both continue to search for general truths and give greater weight to temporal and spatial context’ (Pettigrew, 2011, 353).

• Some approaches (notably critical realism) stress history
Historical sociology

• Largely deductive
• Concepts extracted from contemporary theory and applied
    • Class authority and leadership
  – Wuthnow, *Communities of discourse: ideology and social structure in the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and European Socialism* (1989)
    • Production, selection and institutionalization of ideologies
    • Structuralist Marxism
Sociological history

• Largely inductive
• Priority of evidence

• Concepts to frame interpretation but scepticism
    • Stress on religion over class
    • Impact of the linguistic turn
Historical method

• Historical sociology
  – Largely secondary
  – Carter and oral history

• Sociological history
  – The privileging of the archive
  – But oral history as blurring

• Differences
  – History assumes theory – a style of writing
  – OT assumes evidence – but many of same issues
  – Oral history illustrates some of these
Explorations in practice: institutional logics and practice

• The puzzle: the relationship between religion and economic activity
  – Weber and belief: inconclusive debate
  – Institutionalism and the transfer of mundane practice
  – What are religious practices?

• Institutional logics
  – Combination of symbols and material practices (Friedland and Alford 1991)
  – Institutional orders possessing relative autonomy

• The lack of existing work – to the archives!
Types of practice

Theological belief

Organizational form
• Hierarchy (Catholicism)
• Local control (Congregationalist)

Liturgical practice
• Form and nature of sacraments
• Nature of performance (how do you pray?)

Governance practices (making it happen)
• Who does it? (local officers)
• How do we know they have done it? (accountability)
Investigating practice

- The survival of evidence
- Records for both content and form
- Comparative analysis:
  - Bingham, Nottinghamshire: 22/50
  - Garioch, Aberdeenshire: 10/13

Thoroton, Nottinghamshire, parish book, 1768-1907, PR1181

Sheffield November 2011
England: the broad structure

- Two churchwardens annually elected
- Limited involvement of incumbent
- Limited central oversight
- Maintenance of church fabric and discipline
- The annual vestry – few records survive
- Meeting in the pub

Screveton, Nottinghamshire

Sheffield November 2011
England: the detail

- Majority annual accounting (but variable dates)
- Limited transaction detail
- 52% of officers owed money at end of office
Scotland: the broad structure

- Kirk session of 4-6 elders in office for life
- Moderator (chair) is incumbent (minister)
- Registers subject to oversight by local body (presbytery)
- Maintenance of church discipline and poor relief
- Regular meetings recorded in detail
- Meeting in the church or the manse

Bourtie, Aberdeenshire
Scotland: the detail

- Half yearly accounting (June/December) in all parishes as minimum
- Full transaction details cross referred to minutes
- 4% balances negative at year end
Comparing transaction detail

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>England</th>
<th>Scotland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average transaction code</td>
<td>Quarter century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>1700-1724</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.52</td>
<td>1725-1749</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.45</td>
<td>1750-1774</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.61</td>
<td>1775-1799</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Implications: systemic versus personal authority

Scotland: detailed record keeping and monitoring
England: trust in character

John Henry Lorimer, The Ordination of Elders in a Scottish Kirk, 1891
Can this be transferred to economic domain?

• Several examples of Scottish competence in administration
  – Caribbean plantations
  – Indian government
  – Liverpool pubs

• A ‘culture of organization’?

• Taken for granted views of how one ‘does’ organization

• Proving the connections

• Recognise other factors:
  – Education
  – Legal system
  – Economic conditions and requirements
Broader implications

• For organization theory
  – Away from F. W. Taylor
  – Longer run shaping of economic activity
  – Danger of reading back

• For history
  – Unpacking organizations
  – Importance of form as well as content of evidence

• Writing analytical narratives (Archer)
References