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**PUTTING FRAMING IN PERSPECTIVE: A REVIEW OF FRAMING AND FRAME  
ANALYSIS ACROSS THE MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATIONAL LITERATURE**

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## **PUTTING FRAMING IN PERSPECTIVE: A REVIEW OF FRAMING AND FRAME ANALYSIS ACROSS THE MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATIONAL LITERATURE**

**Abstract.** There are few constructs that are as ubiquitous across traditions of management and organizational research, and indeed the social sciences more generally, as that of frame, or framing. The widespread popularity and use of the concept has led to rich streams of research, ranging from work in managerial cognition and decision-making to strategic and organizational change, and social movements and institutions. At the same time, the popularity of framing across these literatures has perhaps also come at a price. Indeed, it has meant that these streams of research have essentially developed along separate paths, despite the prospect and promise of a greater connection between them. In the present paper, our general aim is to consolidate and advance the current body of research on framing in the management and organizational literature. We do this by providing an extensive review of the key research traditions on framing across this literature, noting the salient contributions to date and highlighting potential areas for further theoretical development and research. Building on this review, we also elaborate on connections across traditions of research; we hope these will serve as pointers to instigate further research on framing processes across different levels of analysis.

Few theoretical constructs have such widespread traction in management and organizational theory as the construct of frame, or framing. Since the construct was first formulated by Burke (1937) and Bateson (1955/1972), and popularized by Goffman (1974), its range of application within the social sciences appears to have progressively expanded from scholarly traditions in, for example, linguistics and linguistic anthropology (e.g., Hymes, 1974); sociology and social-movement research (e.g., Snow & Benford, 1988); cognitive psychology and behavioural economics (e.g., Kahneman & Tversky, 1979); and journalism and mass-communication research (e.g., Scheufele, 1999). Similarly, within the broad area of management and organization theory, the framing construct has been extensively used, and stretched to encompass a whole range of cognitive, linguistic, and cultural processes within a variety of organizational and institutional contexts. Framing has been used, for example, to conceptualize and explain internal, self-conscious, and cognitive processes of individual sensemaking (e.g., Weick, 1995) as well as external, strategic processes of evoking meaning, in line with existing cultural categories of understanding and as a basis for mobilizing support and gaining legitimacy (e.g., Creed, Langstraat, & Scully, 2002).

This widespread use of the construct across these and other literatures testifies to the position of framing as a central construct within management and organization theory. Looking at recent literature (e.g., Kennedy & Fiss, 2009; Kaplan, 2008), we see that the interest in the construct and its use within management and organizational research seems not to be waning. At the same time, this spread may be seen to highlight a key theoretical challenge. That is, as we will outline in this paper, the meaning of the construct shifts between management and organizational literatures, in line with the research questions, theoretical traditions, and methods that are commonly used in each field. The upshot is that if we consider framing as a single umbrella construct across these literatures (Hirsch & Levin, 1999), it inevitably raises construct-clarity issues, and masks a variety of uses and theoretical definitions across each of these different research traditions.

Thus, one primary objective of this review is to document the various uses of the framing construct within and across areas of management and organization theory and research. Specifically, we review existing research on frames and framing in the micro

literature on managerial cognition and decision-making in organizations (e.g., Nutt, 1998; Hodgkinson, Bown, Maule, Glaister, & Pearman, 1999); in the meso literature on strategic framing and meaning construction within and across organized groups and social movements (e.g., Benford & Snow, 2000; Kaplan, 2008); and in the more macro-oriented neo-institutional literature on field-level frames and institutional change (e.g., Fligstein & McAdam, 2011, 2012; Rao, Monin, & Durand, 2003). At the micro level, framing research has mostly looked at the priming and activation of knowledge schemas, which then guide individual perceptions, inferences, and actions in context. Research at the meso level, in contrast, has for the most part focused on how – through language and symbolic gestures – strategic actors attempt to frame courses of actions and social identities in order to mobilize others to follow suit. Finally, neo-institutional research on framing concentrates on how broader cultural templates of understanding, as field-level frames, become institutionalized, and provide abstract scripts and rules for appropriate behaviours in particular social settings.

Table 1 below lists a number of the key research traditions on framing across levels of analysis. The table indicates the breadth of research traditions, with each tradition having spawned tremendously rich streams of research that continue to this day. In our review, we will first summarize existing research and findings in each tradition, also highlighting opportunities for further research. In the remainder of this paper, we will, in line with Table 1, discuss each research tradition in detail, before moving on to develop broader points that cut across these research traditions.

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The broader points that we develop in the paper include two formative suggestions that we believe will be of use to further research on framing across the management and organizational literature. First, much framing research reifies what are essentially dynamic and socially situated processes of meaning construction in terms of packaged outputs and relatively stable meaning systems (e.g., Kaplan, 2008; Oliver & Johnston, 2000; Polletta, 2006; Steinberg, 1998, 1999). To address this issue, we detail how

discursive framing and cognitive frames, or knowledge schemas, are separate concepts but are reciprocally and recursively interconnected in the construction of meaning in context. Making this distinction is important to marking the difference between instances where already available frames of reference or cognitive frames are *primed*, or activated, and instances where frame-based meanings are actively constructed by individuals in context. This distinction between *priming* and *framing* runs through each of the research traditions mentioned, and we highlight in the paper how researchers might make better use of it in their research.

Second, the research traditions referenced in Table 1 have essentially developed along separate paths, despite repeated calls for a closer connection (e.g., Fiss & Zajac, 2006; Weber & Glynn, 2006; Kennedy, 2008). For example, neo-institutional research has increasingly called for more detailed studies in the tradition of symbolic interactionism and interaction frames (e.g., Hallett, 2010; Powell & Colyvas, 2008) to ground the emergence and transformation of field-level frames at a macro level. It is only recently, however, that scholars have begun to link work on framing across these levels (e.g., Ansari, Wijen, & Gray, 2013; Kaplan, 2008; Fligstein & McAdam, 2012) in an attempt to build more elaborate models that embed individuals and groups within institutional contexts. To reflect on these recent developments and to build a tighter link between existing research traditions, we also explore the interconnections between framing and frames at various levels of analysis – from individuals to groups and organizations – and, in turn, to macro structures in institutional fields. In doing so, we aim to highlight linkages across research traditions and to lay out a roadmap for further multi-level research.

The paper comprises three main sections, reviewing research on framing at the micro, meso, and macro levels of analysis. Obviously, this neat separation is somewhat artificial, as some of the research that we highlight and review cuts across these levels. However, this split serves our purpose in first demonstrating the research and progress within each category, before we draw connections across these levels of analysis in the discussion section.

## **FRAME ANALYSIS AT THE MICRO LEVEL: COGNITION IN ACTION**

A first area of research where frames and framing have been extensively used is that on managerial cognition and individuals' decision-making in organizations. The use of the frame construct in this context dates back more than 50 years, to the original Carnegie line of research on decision-making in organizations (Cyert & March, 1963; March & Simon, 1958). This group of researchers referred to the importance of understanding individuals' "frames of reference" through which they screen and filter the environment (March & Simon, 1958). These frames, as simplified cognitive representations of the environment, ground perceptions so much so that "an individual's frame of reference serves just as much to validate perceptions as the perceptions do to validate the frame of reference" (March & Simon, 1958, p. 139). The binding nature of such a cognitive frame of reference is also the result of "reinforcement" via "in-group communication" with others in an organization, "most of whom have frames of reference similar to our own" (March & Simon, 1958, pp. 152–153).

The overriding assumption here is that individuals in organizations cognitively detect regularities in environments and compress them into much less detailed cognitive frames of reference, or schemas, that then guide their perceptions, inferences, and behaviour (Starbuck, 1983). This means, in turn, that when individuals in organizations activate a familiar frame of reference, this creates expectations about important aspects of their environment, which then makes their perception become reference-dependent. This line of thinking has been described as "top-down" or "theory-driven" (Walsh, 1995), in that a frame, abstracted from prior experience, is activated to guide the perception of cues and stimuli in real time – which may indeed be a dominant individual response in all but the most novel situations (Louis & Sutton, 1991; Gavetti & Levinthal, 2000). Defined in this way, the notion of frames of reference describes how cues are attributed to larger cognitive frames; how perception and behaviour become guided; why and how regularities are detected in experience as "givens"; and why there is, in fact, regularity in the way people construct an understanding of their environments (March & Simon, 1958; Starbuck, 1983).

### ***Cognitive frames and frames of reference***

Since the original Carnegie research, a significant body of work has been amassed in the management and organizational literature detailing the structure and basic operations

of cognitive frames of reference, as knowledge structures (e.g., Labianca, Gray, & Brass, 2000; Shrivastava & Mitroff, 1983; Benner & Tripsas, 2012; Starbuck, 1983; Walsh, 1995). Most of this work quite closely follows the original writings on cognitive frames in cognitive science (Minsky, 1975; Tannen, 1985; Barsalou & Hale, 1993), in which frames are defined as knowledge structures that help individuals to organize and interpret incoming perceptual information by fitting it into already-available cognitive representations from memory. Starbuck and Milliken (1988), for example, observed that managerial cognition involves attributing cues or stimuli to a cognitive frame (Starbuck & Milliken, 1988; Walsh, 1995), which enables them to “comprehend, understand, explain, attribute, extrapolate, and predict” (Starbuck & Milliken, 1988, p. 51).

The activity of matching stimuli or cues to available cognitive frames from memory highlights the retrospective nature of cognition (cf. Gavetti & Levinthal, 2000) as well as the subsequent effect of an activated frame on attention, interpretation, and experience (Benner & Tripsas, 2012). That is, once activated, frames impart organizing structure, and direct and guide interpretations. For example, the use of the “in-family” code by NASA managers during the launch of the Columbia space shuttle meant that risks and unexpected cues in the form of a burst of debris were incorrectly categorized as largely understood and under control (Ocasio, 2005). Activating a frame, as in this instance, creates expectations about important aspects of the context or circumstance by directing individuals to elaborate on the default or prototypical scenario in a manner suggested by the frame (cf. Tannen, 1979). Thus, individuals use cognitive frames, as part of their thinking and reasoning, to attend to certain aspects of their environment (Kaplan, 2008); to make inferences in context (Benner & Tripsas, 2012); to make default assumptions about unmentioned aspects (Weick, 1995); and to make predictions about the consequences of their actions (Starbuck & Milliken, 1988).

The general appeal of the construct of cognitive frame lies in its ability to account for all the “extra” information that individuals infer in context (Barsalou & Hale, 1993).

Because frames can be thought of as hypotheses about the sorts of events that may be encountered in a given scenario, a frame-based notion of cognition accounts for the fact that individuals develop expectations when a particular frame has been activated (cf.



Tannen, 1979, 1985). In fact, the original writings of Bateson (1955/1972) and Goffman (1974) on framing stress that in and through cognitive frames, human beings *live by inference*. Goffman (1974, p. 38) writes that “we can hardly glance at anything without applying a framework, thereby forming conjectures as to what occurred before and expectations as to what is likely to happen now”.

The inferential nature of cognitive frames has been a key feature of the management literature on sensemaking (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). While this literature includes a wide range of sociological, discursive, and ethnomethodological traditions (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014), frame-based inferences have been singled out as the cognitive basis of sensemaking (Weick, 1995). In the classic study of the Mann Gulch fire, for example, Weick (1993) describes how its labelling as a “10 o’clock fire” (Weick, 1993) activated an expectation about an outcome (namely, that the fire would be out by the following morning). As a reference point, this in turn led the firefighters to infer related elements as part of the same cognitive frame, including roles, tactics, and a sequence of actions. The activated parts of the frame are linked to other parts within the same frame through a relationship of conceptual contiguity, such as causes and effects, roles and actions, and actions and consequences. These kinds of contiguous links between the reference points that detail a larger frame provide, then, a basis for understanding the very substance and mechanism of sensemaking, or cognition in action (Weick, 1995; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). In other words, the links impose a configuration that “connects the dots” (Miller & Sardais, 2013). Sensemaking, as Weick (1995, pp. 109–111) defines it, involves a frame, a cue, and the relational connection made between them. “Less abstract words” designating and labelling specific cues, as reference points, are seen to point in a relational sense to “more abstract frames” (Weick, 1995, p. 110). The “basic unit of meaning”, in the words of Weick, is “cue + relation + frame” (Weick, 1995, p. 110). Weick (1995, p. 111) goes on to describe the process of sensemaking as follows:

“Frames tend to be past moments of socialization and cues tend to be present moments of experience. If a person can construct a relation between the two moments, meaning is created. This means that the content of sensemaking is to be found in the frames and categories that summarize past experience, in the cues and labels that snare specifics of present experience, and in the way these two settings of experience are connected.”

Drawing on this particular definition, a range of studies have since looked at processes of sensemaking failure, given that the inferences and expectations associated with an activated cognitive frame break down in those instances. Such breakdown has also been described as “sensebreaking” (Pratt, 2000) or the “collapse” of sensemaking (Weick, 1993) – which, in effect, highlights the failure of the activated frame to guide inferences meaningfully in real time or, worse, its tendency to blind individuals to an alternative interpretation. For example, if emergent cues turn out to violate the normal expectations associated with an activated frame, it may lead to a meaning void, which in itself may stimulate individuals to recover or regain sense by shifting to an alternative framing (Weick, 1993; Levinthal & Rerup, 2006; Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010). Yet, individuals may, at the same time, have built up such a strong collective commitment to an activated frame through socialization and “in-group communication” (March & Simon, 1958, p. 152) that they might find it difficult to let it go (Weick, 1993, 1995). Illustrations of the latter process are found in classic cases of sensemaking failure, such as Weick’s re-analyses of Bhopal (1988, 2010) and Mann Gulch (1993), and Snook’s (2000) studies of a friendly-fire shooting in Iraq. In these cases, expressions such as “a factory that’s stopped”, a “10 o’clock fire”, and “hits there” had activated conventional scenarios of, respectively, a normal day in an inactive methyl isocyanate plant, routine fire-fighting, and surveillance tactics in a no-fly zone. Subsequent communication – as well as the actual movements of the plant operators, firefighters, and pilots involved – also confirmed, at least initially, the inference of these frames, although afterwards it appeared that their framing had not tallied with reality.

### ***Cognitive frames and change***

What these sensemaking studies demonstrate more generally is that while cognitive frames, as knowledge structures, are key resources for cognition (Starbuck, 1983; Walsh, 1995), they may also entrap individuals, and impede their ability to be reflective and mindful in context. Despite their advantages for information processing and meaning construction, frame-based systems of understanding have the primary problem that they may be overly brittle. The cognitive psychologist Wilensky (1986) criticizes frames for being rigid data structures that cannot accommodate events that are out of the ordinary. Indeed, the overreliance on a pre-existing cognitive frame has

been suggested as an important source of failure in the context of novel, unprecedented, or changing circumstances that require inferential flexibility and alternative conceptualizations (e.g., Levinthal & Rerup, 2006; Tripsas & Gavetti, 2000; Benner & Tripsas, 2012). The main issue here is that while frames have some adaptability in context, their inferential capacity is based on knowledge represented in the frame itself – and frames are, therefore, limited and limiting by their very nature.

Not surprisingly, a stream of management and organizational research has started to address ways in which individuals may change frames, or construct new cognitive frames altogether, in an attempt to overcome the rigidities of existing frames (Cornelissen & Clarke, 2010; Gavetti, Levinthal, & Rivkin, 2005). This trend mirrors current research in cognitive science, where the literature has traditionally been good at describing the structure and content of cognitive frames, but has, in the words of Turner (2001, p. 145), proved “nearly useless for explaining how a new schema can arise *before* it is manifest in our regular experience”. Attending to this process, Benner and Tripsas (2012) argue that it is often a real struggle for individuals to wrest themselves away from their prior cognitive frames (see also Dunbar, Garud, & Raghuram, 1996). In their study of how manufacturers from different industries (photography, consumer electronics, and computing) made sense of the evolution of digital cameras, Benner and Tripsas (2012) found that individuals analogically extended common expectations and assumptions that were prevalent in their existing industry to the new emerging market. The features that were introduced as part of digital cameras, for example, significantly reflected experience with proprietary technology in each of these three industries. Over time, however, manufacturers learned through direct experience about the new market, and the influence of their prior-industry affiliation declined.

In line with Benner and Tripsas (2012), analogical reasoning points to an obvious way in which individuals may come up with new ways of thinking about their environment. This may involve a comparison between a cognitive frame that individuals are familiar with and understand and another target frame that they are as yet unable to fully understand or explain, or are keen to revise, and where the analogy provides a potentially new framing, with new insights and inferences. Gavetti et al. (2005) highlight more formally the role that analogy plays in uncertain and novel contexts,

where individuals can usefully project models (or frames) from their own direct experience of or knowledge about another industry to their current industry in order to infer an alternative cognitive framing. Lovallo, Clarke, and Camerer (2012) extend the work of Gavetti et al. (2005), arguing that such projections may be significantly biased when focused on the most readily available comparisons that may highlight superficial rather than deep structural similarities between industries (see also Grégoire et al., 2012). Recent empirical studies suggest that such a bias may be offset through sufficient reflexivity among individuals about the applicability of a source or base frame (Gary, Wood, & Pillinger, 2012), and repeated, heterogeneous analogical comparisons, or thought trials (Kahl & Bingham, 2013; Lovallo et al., 2012).

Furthermore, current research also suggests that individuals may not only reason through analogy based on direct projections from a source to a target, but also more iteratively align, or blend, cognitive frames, or elements of such frames, to derive new inferences (Cornelissen & Clarke, 2010). For example, Glynn and Lounsbury (2005) describe how critics of symphony orchestras incorporated a market logic into the cultural-authenticity frame that they use for assessing the performance and value of orchestral productions. Yet, individuals may also blend entire cognitive frames, meaning that they align and subsequently integrate previously independent frames such as “provincial Indian” and “modern” art (Khaire & Wadhvani, 2010); “micro-credit” and “finance” (Battilana & Dorado, 2010); and “environmental auditing” and “financial reporting” (Etzion & Ferraro, 2010). In these instances, what often happens is that “structure and elements from the input mental frames are projected to a separate ‘blended’ mental space, ... and through completion and elaboration the blend develops a structure and set of inferences not provided by the inputs” (Cornelissen & Durand, 2012, p. 152). The result of such a blend, in other words, is a hybrid or more abstract frame that comprises elements and structure from each input frame, as well as often-unique meaning of its own through the further completion and elaboration of the blend, according to its emergent properties and logic (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002).

With current work documenting the contours of such analogical reasoning processes and their role in changing cognitive frames (Gary et al., 2012; Lovallo et al., 2012), a particularly fruitful area for further research, we believe, would be to explore varieties

of analogical reasoning and their applicability to different strategic scenarios and industry contexts. For example, in stable industry circumstances, a “local” and ready-to-hand comparison with a familiar organization or industry may lead to a useful projection that changes or updates a manager’s cognitive frame (Haunschild & Miner, 1997; Gavetti, 2012). Changing industry circumstances, on the other hand, may call for a more counter-factual form of analogical reasoning, where an individual actively tries to think of the difference or “break” from their prior cognitive frame as a basis for inferences or conjectures about market opportunities (cf. Benner & Tripsas, 2012). Further work could usefully detail the variety of analogical reasoning processes behind cognitive change (Gentner, Bowdle, Wolff, & Boronat, 2001), their attendant biases, and their applicability to various managerial and organizational contexts.

### ***Framing biases and effects***

While, as discussed, the benefits of the cognitive frame construct are clearly noted, our review of the literature also suggests that in recent years, research on managerial and organizational cognition has increasingly shifted its attention to other cognitive theories and constructs, such as mental models, schemas, and categories (Walsh, 1995; Kaplan, 2011). This shift mirrors developments in cognitive science <sup>1</sup>, and marks a turn in assumptions about cognition. Lakoff (1987) and Barsalou (1992) stress that a key characteristic of frames is that they contain relational conceptual information around idealized scenarios that link situations with actions and outcomes, or causes with effects<sup>2</sup>. This distinguishes frames from other cognitive constructs, such as categories

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<sup>1</sup> The trend itself may, in some senses, be driven less by explanatory value and more by historical and sociological shifts in scholarly attention and interests. For example, the original Carnegie work on frames of reference described the construct in terms of an image metaphor. A feature of image metaphors is that cognition is represented in *spatial* and *picture-like* terms (i.e., as a ‘picture frame’ with ‘reference points’) and involves operations such as *mirroring*, *filtering*, and *scanning* (March & Simon, 1958, pp. 152–153). When, for example, we refer to a manager ‘scanning’ the environment, or more precisely a picture of it, perception is compared to a beam scanner (cf. Sternberg, 1969, p. 440). The cognitive-science revolution from the 1950s, however, triggered a move away from image metaphors to alternative computational and connectionist metaphors for cognition (Bruner & Feldman, 1990) – indeed, March and Simon (1958) were also at the vanguard of this move, with their largely computational theory of information-processing and decision-making.

<sup>2</sup> On this specific point, the frame construct shares similarities with the construct of cognitive scripts (Schank & Abelson, 1977). The key idea involved in both frames and scripts is that our knowledge of events and situations is organized around *expectations* of key features and sequences in those situations (Tannen, 1979). Roger Schank, who initially worked with the concept of frames (as part of the frame-semantics tradition in linguistics), later on developed the notion of script-based systems of cognition, which has since also been employed in management and organizational research (Gioia & Poole, 1984)

that involve cognitive representations based on sets of attributes or features. Drawing on this distinction, Barsalou and Hale (1993, p. 99) even go as far as suggesting that, compared to frames, alternative cognitive constructs (such as categories) tend to “suffer critically in expressive power, failing to represent important structure in the physical world and human knowledge”. Management research on framing has, at the same time, continued along a more specific track, with research on “frames of reference” and “framing biases”, and their effects on managerial decision-making. This track of research draws on the work on framing in behavioural decision-making (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; Kahneman, 2011) under the guise of prospect theory, and the biases and heuristics research programme.

Current research on frames of reference (e.g., George, Chattopadhyay, Sitkin, & Barden, 2006; Henisz & Zelner, 2005; Miller & Sardais, 2013) suggest that in a decision-making or social-judgment scenario, individuals construct cognitive frames that compare it in detail to a relevant reference point, or baseline. In the context of behavioural decision-making, Kahneman, Knetsch, and Thaler (1986) provide empirical evidence that individuals assess the “fairness” of the prices or wages set by an organization of which they have no prior experience by comparing them to a prevailing price or wage level, as a reference point. This conceptualization is distinct from the original Carnegie line of thinking on frames of reference, in that it highlights how individuals subjectively frame an outcome or transaction in their mind relative to a reference point.

Within the management literature, Henisz and Zelner (2005) borrow this principle to argue theoretically that when faced with novel or emerging institutions, individuals will judge these institutions in the context of reference points of which the legitimacy is not in question. However, when comparison with other existing institutions on such grounds falters, and the novel institution cannot be matched to relevant benchmarks, Henisz and Zelner (2005) argue that individuals will find it generally hard to cognitively ascribe legitimacy to it. George et al. (2006) similarly extend this line of reasoning to an institutional context, arguing that the cognitive framing of environmental conditions in terms of possible gains or losses affects the responses of individual managers to those conditions. They directly draw on prospect theory and the threat-rigidity hypothesis (Sitkin & Pablo, 1992) in proposing that the actions of individual managers in terms of

complying – or not complying – with others in an industry directly follow from the way in which they have cognitively framed the situation as offering gains or losses in resources or control relative to their current reference point (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979).

A number of empirical studies provide further evidence consistent with this line of reasoning. In the context of managerial decision-making, Nutt (1998) looked at 352 decision events across public, private, and third-sector organizations, exploring whether and how the framing of a decision scenario triggered decisions from decision-makers and led to change within their organizations. His results indicate that decisions framed around performance shortfalls led to more concrete decisions that were successfully sustained over time, whereas “conflict, innovation and adaptive benchmarking claims were less successful” (Nutt, 1998, p. 206). The underlying explanation, it seems, is that where performance frames refer to a clear norm compared to the current situation, as a reference point (Nutt, 1998, p. 204), the other claims appear more ambiguous in terms of the rationale for action and potential outcomes (cf. Starbuck, 1983). As a result, decisions are less clear-cut – and more difficult to implement and sustain – within an organization.

While Nutt’s (1998) study covered a range of decision-making scenarios, Hodgkinson et al. (1999) undertook two experimental studies exploring more specifically whether the framing of a decision in terms of gains or losses affected decision-making. Their studies draw directly on prospect theory, which predicts that decision-makers are risk-averse when gains are highlighted, and risk-seeking when losses are highlighted, in otherwise-equivalent decision scenarios (Kahneman & Tversky, 1984). This framing effect, or framing bias, around the way in which the same decision scenario is presented has more recently been explained using the dual-process model of the brain. Framing a scenario in terms of either gains or losses naturally primes intuitive, associative, and largely automatic cognitive responses (i.e., system 1), as opposed to more deliberative and reasoned processes of thinking and reflection (i.e., system 2) (Kahneman, 2011).

Consistent with these predictions, Hodgkinson et al. (1999) specifically explored whether an intervention that forces individuals *a priori* to cognitively map out the decision scenario limits the effect of the framing bias. Their positive results are

consistent with the suggestion of Kahneman and Tversky (1984, p. 344) that decision-makers might limit the effect of the framing bias with procedures such as cognitive mapping “that will transform equivalent versions of any problem into the same canonical presentation”. Doing so will allow decision-makers to think about the parameters of the decision in a rational and unbiased manner (i.e., allowing them to activate system 2). A more recent study by Seo, Goldfarb, and Barrett (2010) extended the predictions associated with the framing effect by modelling how affect (pleasant or unpleasant emotion) interacts with framing biases in a longitudinal stock-investment simulation. They found that, in keeping with the framing effect, individuals made riskier investment decisions after experiencing losses, and were less likely to take risks after experiencing gains. However, their study also found that affect mediated these relationships; and that these framing tendencies decreased or even disappeared when individuals simultaneously experienced unpleasant feelings (leading to an avoidance of risk-taking) or pleasant feelings (leading to confident – and thus more risky – behaviours).

Outside these decision-making contexts, Bernerth and Walker (2012) empirically studied the role of frames of reference in justice assessments within organizations. In their experiments, they focused on how the activation of either individual or collective frames of reference influences perceptions of organizational justice, with individuals applying relevant reference points about justice for themselves and others to the overall judgment. They found that such reference points (i.e., justice for oneself or others), and the shifts between them, appear crucial in predicting justice assessments and their effects on, for example, individuals’ commitment to the organization and their intention to remain working there (Bernerth & Walker, 2012). Another recent study (Weber & Mayer, 2011) focuses on the framing of contracts in managing buyer–supplier relationships. This study empirically demonstrates that exchange partners intentionally frame contract goals as a “promotion”, and thus as a real gain relative to the current situation, to manage their relationships and the focal exchange between them, and in turn to mitigate against the likelihood of a contract being terminated.

### ***Equivalency and issue frames***



Extrapolating from these studies, we believe that research on frames of reference and framing effects has significant potential for research on the cognitive processes underpinning managerial decision-making and social judgments around trust, justice, and legitimacy, which involve a direct comparison of a target situation against a relevant benchmark. While the original behavioural research on frames of reference focused on utility, and thus largely on gains and losses (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979), the argument can fruitfully be extended to involve social referents such as legitimacy (Kennedy & Fiss, 2009) and social capital (Burt, 1997). Furthermore, we think that future research efforts may benefit from drawing a clearer distinction between equivalency or valence frames around gains and losses, and emphasis or issue frames, that highlight specific qualitative considerations such as trust, legitimacy, and performance (Chong & Druckman, 2007).

Equivalency frames trigger effects that occur when “different, but *logically equivalent*, phrases cause individuals to alter their preferences” (Tversky & Kahneman, 1987), such as “95% employment” versus “5% unemployment”. This typically involves “casting the same information in either a positive or negative light” (Druckman, 2004, p. 671). As such, equivalency frames employ materially identical descriptions that rationally should not matter, but that clearly do prime cognitive effects and affect decision-making (see, e.g., Hodgkinson et al., 1999; Neale & Bazerman, 1985). Emphasis or issue frames, in contrast, highlight a particular point of emphasis and, in so doing, make a particular set of interpretations salient (Entman, 1993). Compared to equivalency frames, emphasis or issue frames highlight qualitatively different yet potentially relevant considerations – such as, for example, seeing an instance as a business or ethical decision in the context of sanctions (Tenbrunsel & Messick, 1999), or considering the threat or opportunity posed by adopting an innovation in relation to technical efficacy or social legitimacy (Kennedy & Fiss, 2009).

In the latter context, both points of emphasis may be important in adoption decisions, yet unless technical efficacy logically entails greater or lesser social legitimacy, one cannot equate the two types of frames. The most that can be claimed is that these frames differentially affect adoption decisions. In fact, Kennedy and Fiss (2009) found that the opportunity for social-legitimacy gains influenced early adopters, whereas late

adopters were motivated by the threat of a loss in economic terms (technical efficacy) or in social terms (social legitimacy) compared to other organizations in their industry. Future research may benefit from clearly marking the difference in effects between equivalency or valence frames around losses or gains in resources – and thus economic utility (George et al., 2006) – and emphasis or issue-specific frames that highlight more qualitative considerations and a social logic around, for example, social legitimacy or trust (Kennedy & Fiss, 2009).

### ***Summary***

The large majority of studies at this micro level of cognition are primarily interested in priming effects, or accessing cognitive frames, rather than *framing* as the social construction of meaning. “Priming” refers to the activation of a cognitive frame as a knowledge structure, and the speed with which it is accessed, based on observable cues and perceptions (Sherman, Mackie, & Driscoll, 1990). Such priming may be conscious, on the basis of assigning a familiar and prototypical cue to a frame, but may also be unconscious and operating through intuitive associations that facilitate access to the frame (Epley & Gilovich, 1999). Classic and also more contemporary work on cognition in organizations (e.g., Hodgkinson et al., 1999; Kennedy & Fiss, 2009; March & Simon, 1958; Seo et al., 2010) focuses on the priming of cognitive frames in context and how it leads to assimilation effects in that the processing of the entire context becomes consistent with the prototypical content of the primed frame (Lombardi, Higgins, & Bargh, 1987).

The focus on the activation and effects of a given cognitive frame marks the difference between micro-level cognition research and meso- and macro-level sociological analyses that conceptualize framing as the active social construction and negotiation of frame-based meanings. In the latter sense, framing is seen as a broader construct, but may incorporate priming. For example, an act of framing in an utterance or message may prompt the retrieval of well-established cognitive frames, and may thus incorporate a priming effect. Yet, framing also points to how meaning is socially constructed or produced, rather than simply accessed (Tannen, 1985). Making this distinction underscores important differences between the activation of knowledge

schemas at the individual level and the way in which in social settings meanings are constructed and negotiated in and through interactive processes of communication.

### **MOVING OTHERS: FRAMING AND FRAMES IN ORGANIZATIONS AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS**

A second broad area of research where framing has been studied involves research on strategic change, on technological frames within organizations, and on the tactics and repertoires of action of social movements. This area of research involves a meso (or organizational) level of analysis, and focuses primarily on the construction and negotiation of meanings within organized groups. A key feature of such research (e.g., Morgan, Frost, & Pondy, 1983; Tannen, 1985) is that researchers operating at this level of analysis tend to conceptualize framing as a “bottom-up” process of meaning construction. Rather than assuming a “top-down” accessing of cognitive meaning, researchers tend to follow the tenets of the symbolic interactionist tradition of sociology (Blumer, 1971; Goffman, 1974), in which human behaviour is thought to result from how people interact, and use language and other symbols to create meaning.

In this tradition, cognitive meaning and symbolic language are intimately and dynamically connected with language, invoking alternative framings and with interactants trying to square the associated cognitive schemas (Tannen, 1985). In other words, language is seen not simply to prime a separate “internal” cognitive process, but as potentially formative of individual and collective meaning construction. Indeed, in these frame analyses, language and cognition are often seen as recursive: language, and thus acts of framing, make active use of the implied broader cognitive frames; and new frames in context are typically established through creative extensions and combinations in language.

Frames are accordingly defined as plastic “principles of organization which govern the subjective meanings we assign to social events” (Goffman, 1974, p. 11). They are interpretive principles of organizing and assigning meaning that are outcomes, or products, of social construction. Furthermore, frames are distinguished from acts of *framing*, which involve the ways in which individuals use language or other symbolic

gestures in context either to reinforce existing interpretive frames or to call new frames into being. Goffman (1974) famously defined framing in this respect as the active task of figuring out what is going on (that is, what frames apply), without which no utterance (or movement or gesture) could be interpreted. To use Bateson's (1955/1972) classic example, a monkey needs to know whether a push from another monkey (as a symbolic gesture) is intended within the frame of play or the frame of fighting.

### ***Strategic frames and strategic framing***

In other words, this interactive tradition focuses on how individuals and groups construct and negotiate meaning in interactions. As such, the focus lies on framing as interactional co-constructions, rather than considering frames as isolated and individual knowledge structures (Dewulf et al., 2009). This emphasis on social construction has, for example, led to an elaboration of micro-level research on cognitive frames to consider the collective construction of strategic frames within organizations (Huff, 1990; Gilbert, 2006; Kaplan, 2008; Nadkarni and Narayanan, 2007). A strategic frame is generally defined as referring to "a set of cause-effect understandings about industry boundaries, competitive rules, and strategy-environment relationships available to a group of related firms in an industry" (Nadkarni and Narayanan, 2007, p. 689). Such frames are socially constructed in interactions between managers of firms in the same industry, leading to a common cognitive understanding. Strategic frames have significant consequences for firms in that they bind organizations to a set of capabilities and a course of action, and blind them to alternative options (Benner & Tripsas, 2012), thus generally helping or hindering them from adapting to their environment, especially if this is undergoing a period of change (e.g., Kaplan, 2008).

Kaplan (2008) argues that a key limitation of prior research on strategic frames is its persistent focus on cognitive aspects and their consequences (Nadkarni & Narayanan, 2007; Gilbert, 2006). As a result, research often backgrounds the actual processes by which frames are socially constructed and negotiated. In response, Kaplan (2008) offers the framing contests model, which suggests that actors' framing in social interactions reflects their own political interests, as they strategically try to win over others in the organization to support a strategic direction or change. In her study of a communication-technology company, she found that "which interests became salient

depended on how actors framed the situation. Skilled social actors found frames that made others think that what was proposed was in their best interests" (Kaplan, 2008, p. 744). Framing, Kaplan suggests, is both symbolic and cognitive (Goffman, 1974); she noted that skilled actors used frames that deftly mediated between their own political interests and others' beliefs and expectations. This alignment between frames and interests led, in turn, to certain frames prevailing, because a majority of individuals in the organization judged them as resonant and legitimate (Kaplan, 2008). In her study, Kaplan (2008) favours a closer linkage to Goffman's (1974) initial work, and points to the importance of focusing on the interconnections between symbolic framing practices and the establishment of collective strategic frames.

Another literature – on the strategic framing of change – focuses specifically on these interconnections between framing in communication and interpretive frames of understanding. Within this literature, the construct of framing generally refers to the purposeful communication efforts of leaders or managers in shaping the frames of interpretation of others in an organization, so that they collectively accept and support a change (e.g., Bartunek, 1993; Garvin & Roberto, 2005; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Kotter, 1996; Mantere, Schildt, & Sillince, 2012). As Fiss and Zajac (2006, p. 1174) suggest, "by framing strategic change and thereby articulating a specific version of reality, organizations may secure both the understanding and support of key stakeholders for their new strategic orientation, because it shapes how people notice and interpret what is going on, influencing the strategic choices that they subsequently make".

In a series of studies, Gioia and his colleagues highlight, for example, how the president of a US state university used clever metaphorical phrases and idioms (such as "world class") to initiate a change and to direct senior members of the university and other stakeholders in their own interpretations and ways of implementing the change (e.g., Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Gioia, Thomas, Clark, & Chittipeddi, 1994). Kellogg's (2009) recent study of the introduction of new practices in surgery teams within two US hospitals similarly demonstrates the role of framing tactics in gaining support for such reforms. In one of the two hospitals, as Kellogg (2009) documents, the changes were successfully implemented, but not in the other. The difference, according to Kellogg

(2009), was the way in which proponents, including senior managers, in the first hospital constructed “relational frames” that accommodated the legitimate concerns of opponents while demonstrating and justifying the efficacy of new task allocations and role behaviours.

A key emphasis in many of these studies is that individual managers, as skilled rhetoricians, are – through their strategic framing tactics – able to shape and direct the interpretations of organizational members and other stakeholders towards a new set of interpretive frames (e.g., Fiss & Zajac, 2006; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007; Mantere et al., 2012). Indeed, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that managers can skilfully use framing tools such as metaphors, catchphrases, slogans, contrast, spin, and stories (Cornelissen, Holt & Zundel, 2012; Fairhurst, 2010; Sonenshein, 2010) to influence the sensemaking of organizational members and stakeholders. At the same time, this emphasis effectively starts with the pragmatic skills – or “discursive ability” (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007) – of the manager in framing a message, but often neglects organizational members as active agents, instead casting them as speakers-in-waiting whose basic role is to respond (or not) to the manager’s speech and framed meanings (Bavelas, Coates, & Johnson, 2000). Framing also refers here, in a dual sense, to the (implicit) frame of understanding that is present in a manager’s message with a specific content, and simultaneously to the interpretive frames that are primed, and that may guide and ground others’ interpretations (Fiss & Zajac, 2006; Sonenshein, 2006, 2010).

This reading suggests that frames are often depicted as relatively stable modes of representation, grounded in broader cultural-belief systems, and able simply to be enlisted by strategically motivated actors as a salient and underlying “logic” in their speech to gain acceptance and support for an organizational change (Fiss & Zajac, 2006; Sonenshein, 2006, 2010). Such a view, however, may be seen as somewhat limited in its depiction of communication – and particularly of employees, who are cast as largely synchronizing frames provided to them within a particular organizational setting (Sonenshein, 2006, 2010). As mentioned, it also leads to an asymmetrical and linear model of social interaction and meaning construction, which privileges the intentions

and acts of the speaker over those of the listener, as opposed to seeing framing and meaning construction *as a joint activity* (Goffman, 1981; Tannen, 1985).

Chreim (2006) highlights in this respect the need for a more “balanced” view that acknowledges that employees may at times appropriate, and align themselves with, managerial frames – yet, in other instances, may openly contest such frames and resist a change. Based on her research in two federal banks in Canada, she makes the case for more micro-level and discursive research designs that explore at the level of speech and social interaction how managers and employees co-construct and negotiate alternative framings of a change (see also Kaplan, 2008).

### ***Technological frames in organizations***

A further literature where frames have been approached from a social-interaction perspective is the stream of research on technology frames. Orlikowski and Gash (1994, p. 178) originated the concept of technology frames to mark instances in which individuals in organizations make sense “not only of the nature and role of the technology itself, but the specific conditions, applications and consequences of that technology in particular contexts”. The initial concept drew heavily on the notion of cognitive frames, yet combined it with a sociological focus on how technological frames within and across users guide understanding of a technology, and affect patterns of implementation and use (Barrett, Heracleous, & Walsham, 2013; Kaplan & Tripsas, 2008; Leonardi, 2011). This body of work has since established that the initial stages of framing a technology are formative in the ongoing interpretive process by which individuals give meaning to the technology and develop a trajectory of use for it in a particular setting (e.g., Davidson, 2006; Kaplan & Tripsas, 2008). Leonardi (2011) demonstrates this pattern in a study of a new technological artefact called CrashLab, a computer simulation technology for predicting how the vehicle structure of a car responds in a crash. Engineers from different departments in the organization framed the technology in different ways, which in turn guided their framing of the overall problem they were addressing, and their search for solutions. The result is that each group embarked on a different innovation process, and searched for different solutions, but in a sense forgot their fundamental disagreement on the framing of the problem in

the first place: “Innovators are blind to the fact that others have constructed different problems they have” (Leonardi, 2011, p. 350).

A rich body of research also exists on the political contests that may ensue when different technological frames are in play across user groups within an organization (Barrett et al., 2013; Leonardi, 2011; Mazmanian, 2013). The guiding assumption here is that radically different patterns of technological implementation can arise when frames are incongruent between groups, and that a degree of congruence in frames within and across groups is important to align behaviour into similar patterns of use. Based on this assumption, Azad and Faraj (2008), for example, explored the process by which different actors and groups negotiated frames into an aligned “truce frame” around a new technology. Such alignment has been found to reduce ambiguity, to foster joint understanding, and to direct patterns of use.

Davidson (2006) provides a comprehensive overview of research on congruent technological frames, and their consequences for the effective adoption and use of technology. Her review anticipates the recent turn towards challenging the in-house assumption about the enabling role of congruence, or alignment, in technology implementation and use. Mazmanian (2013), for example, highlights how the use of mobile email devices was framed differently in two occupational groups, and how, in particular, a congruent frame within each group allowed for heterogeneous uses. In her study, individuals within the two groups shared broad assumptions about the technology but recognized the possibility of, and indeed allowed for, different uses.

A further challenge to the in-house assumption regarding congruent frames comes from work focusing on the structure and content of technological frames. Vaccaro, Brusoni, and Veloso (2011), for example, highlight the role of what they label as the “granularization” of a technological frame – in other words, the ability to decompose a framed problem into sub-components. Such granularization enables knowledge exchange and innovation within and across user groups, as groups are able to specialize in specific sub-components yet also understand how the components fit together as part of the broader architecture of the technological frame. Other studies (e.g., Van Burg, Berends, & Van Raaij, 2013) highlight the role of ambiguity – rather than strict congruence – in technological frames, this being crucial to knowledge exchange and



innovation. Such ambiguity creates a minimal level of agreement about what coordinated actions to take and in pursuit of what goals, yet leaves ample space for different actions and motivations (see also Donnellon, Gray, & Bougon, 1986).

Besides a focus on the structure and content of technological frames, further research would also benefit from a processual focus on how technological frames are constructed and evolve, and how in turn they shape and influence behaviours (Davidson, 2006; Kaplan & Tripsas, 2008). Davidson (2006) generally notes a lack of attention to studying frames as an ongoing and interpretive process, with the primary focus instead being on identifying and abstracting technological frames, and detailing their consequences. She states:

“A typical technological frame study identifies stakeholder groups, analyzes how frames influence organization members’ sensemaking, investigates incongruence in their frames, and assesses its consequences. Point-in-time snapshots of frames are used to analyze stakeholders’ interpretation and actions related to a new information technology. Orlikowski and Gash’s (1994) study illustrated this pattern, as do a number of subsequent technological frame studies. A more dynamic perspective of frame change as an ongoing interpretive process, triggered by a variety of organizational circumstances, could help move technological frame research beyond these well-established tenets of technological frame theory.” (Davidson, 2006, p. 30)

As in research on strategic frames, a focus on the cognitive aspects of technological frames, as knowledge structures, has created a bias that deflects attention away from a more processual and interactive focus on how frames are socially constructed and negotiated, and how – as a result of communication – they are reshaped and re-imagined over time.

### ***Framing and frames in social movements***

Frames and framing have also become a mainstay of research in the literature on social movements, at the intersections of political and organizational sociology. Framing emerged in this literature as a reaction to the historically strong emphasis in social-movement research on structural aspects of collective action. The notion of framing criticized these earlier approaches for “neglecting the problems of social construction” (Oliver & Johnston, 2000, p. 1). The social-movement literature on framing has since

expanded into a rich body of work, which, given its size and popularity, has also influenced the management and organizational literature, such as the work on strategic frames (Kaplan, 2008), organizational change (Kellogg, 2009), technological frames (Barrett et al., 2013), and institutional theory (Lounsbury, Ventresca, & Hirsch, 2003).

Similar to other traditions at the meso (or organizational) level, social-movement researchers borrowed Goffman's notion of "frames" as "schemata of interpretation" (Goffman, 1974, p. 21). In turn, these researchers started to focus on the processes through which frames are constructed by activists and, in effect, form linkages between the interpretations and beliefs of individual activists and those of entire activist movements, calling the latter "frame-alignment processes" (Benford & Snow, 2000; Snow, Burke Rochford, Worden, & Benford, 1986).

Such alignment processes are seen to hinge on three distinct-but-related tasks of framing: diagnostic framing, which defines the problem and assigns responsibility or blame to a person or an institution; prognostic framing, which suggests ways of addressing the problem with specific strategies and tactics; and motivational framing, which involves aspects of the frame that mobilizes individual activists into action (Snow & Benford, 1988, pp. 199–202; Benford, 1993b, p. 199; see also Fisher, 1997, p. 5). These three tasks together characterize the strategic nature of framing within a social-movement context, with the intent of gaining support from fellow activists, and from more neutral third parties, such as the media or general public. Consequently, the products of framing have been called "collective action frames" (Snow & Benford, 1988, p. 198) because they "not only perform an interpretive function in the sense of providing answers to the question, 'What is going on here?', but they also are decidedly more agentic and contentious in the sense of calling for action that problematizes and challenges existing authoritative views and framings of reality".

Benford and Snow (2000) identified four frame-alignment processes that activists and movements use to rally others around their cause: (a) bridging – the linking of two or more ideologically congruent but previously unconnected frames, regarding an issue or problem; (b) amplification – invigorating and emphasizing specific cultural values and beliefs as part of a frame; (c) extension – enlarging a frame's reach whereby activists and movements "extend the boundaries of their primary framework so as to encompass

interests or points of view that are incidental to its primary objectives but of considerable salience to potential adherents” (Snow et al., 1986, p. 472); and (d) transformation – which refers to a counter-factual framing and to “changing old understandings and meanings and/or generating new ones” (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 625). Snow et al. (1986, p. 473) draw on Goffman (1974), suggesting that when opportunities arise for a change in society, frame transformation may be apt and may find traction with various activists’ groups and third parties, and the general public.

While empirical studies indicate that movements quite often use the strategy of frame extension (Carroll & Ratner, 1996), such tactics also carry with them the risk of conflict and tension. In his study on the Austin Texas disarmament movement, Benford (1993a), for instance, demonstrated that attempts to extend the frame of the movement resulted in intra- and inter-movement disputes in relation to questions of efficiency, territory, and ideological purity. An important issue here is that frames, as claims of beliefs and values, connect directly to the identities of activists (Creed et al., 2002; Creed, DeJordy, & Lok, 2010). Indeed, frames and identities “may be intertwined and even mutually constitutive” (Creed et al., 2002, p. 480). This relationship constrains how frames can be used in strategic attempts to convince other audiences. The strong ties to the social identity of a movement may, for example, mean that activists resist an “assimilationist” strategy that stresses sameness between frames at a higher level of abstraction. Instead, they may prefer a strategy that emphasizes contrast from, and thus differences with, other activists and groups in order to solidify their own social identity and inner-group ties (Creed et al., 2002; Polletta & Jasper, 2001; Saguy & Ward, 2011).

A further important observation here is that the large majority of studies focus on the strategic use of frames to align activists and movements, and to influence important movement outcomes such as mobilization and resource acquisition (Markowitz, 2009; Oliver & Johnston, 2000; Polletta & Kai Ho, 2006; Snow et al., 1986). This strategic emphasis stands in contrast with the initially much broader definition of framing as meaning construction writ large (Benford & Snow, 2000; Oliver & Johnston, 2000). Benford and Snow initially defined framing as “an active processual phenomenon that implies agency and contention at the level of reality construction” (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 613). Yet, subsequent work has narrowed its gaze to framing dynamics within

contexts of political action, and largely conceptualizes framing as external, strategic processes of communication and persuasion aimed at gaining support and legitimacy. As a result, frames are often cast as strategic messages or accounts uttered by movement leaders who, with such language, tactically direct the movement's symbolic position along existing belief systems and cultural values, hoping it will chime with other activist groups and the general public. However, in the words of Oliver and Johnston (2000, p. 41), "when a collective action frame is recast as something that leaders must articulate so that it better 'markets the movement', the interactive negotiation of 'what's going on here' takes [a] back seat to a one-way, top-down process".

Benford (1997) highlights a number of other biases, as indicative of more general concerns with the way in which the literature has been developing. His comments are worth highlighting as these issues still persist, and as they resonate with similar observations in the context of the strategic frames, technological frames, and change literatures. Much framing research, he argues, suffers from a "neglect of empirical studies, a descriptive bias, static tendencies, and reification" (Benford, 1997, p. 423). His main concern is that social-movement researchers have moved away from a more processual approach to framing, and have instead focused on identifying and distilling frames across empirical settings. In response, he argues for more conceptual clarity and for the literature to move beyond "naming frames to studying framing processes analytically" (Benford, 1997, p. 423). A related point here is Benford's concern about a static tendency based on conflating framing (in language and other symbols) and frames, as a set of cognitively held beliefs and values. Failure to distinguish the dynamic interrelations between the two (Goffman, 1974, 1981) leads to the premise that meanings are not only lexically encoded in words and grammar (e.g., Coulson, 2001) but also pretty stable, or "static", across time and space. The resulting inference is that frames can be easily deduced from speeches and other texts, and that if social-movement activists want to mobilize others for their cause, they merely have to put "the right 'spin' on their issue to tap into fixed preconceptions" (Oliver & Johnston, 2000, p. 41). The underlying assumption here is that when particular activists mention a frame in their speech, this prompts others within and outside their movement to attribute intentions and to infer the right frame; this then creates an expectation that they will act

in line with the logic of the frame (Oliver & Johnston, 2000). When they subsequently do so, the presupposed effect is produced.

This static tendency in frame analysis is closely related to the concern about reification. The gist of this concern is that it reduces frames from socially situated processes of meaning construction to objective, disembodied, and stable interpretative schemas. This reification is, for example, noticeable in the “growing use of the concept of a master frame” (Oliver & Johnston, 2000, p. 4). Master frames are “enduring cultural themes” (Gamson, 1988, pp. 220, 227) that, as higher-order symbolic devices, can be appropriated by activists as a resource for more targeted activist frames. Snow and Benford (1992) emphasized the general use of such frames across contexts, given that they “are broad in terms of scope, functioning as a kind of master algorithm that colours and constrains the orientations and activities of other movements” (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 618).

Benford and Snow (2000, p. 619) pointed to nine master frames, including frames around notions of civil rights, choice, (in)justice, environmental justice, cultural pluralism, sexual terrorism, opposition, hegemony, and a return to democracy. The definition of these frames obviously implies a degree of abstraction and generalization, while much research since has indicated that political activists do not reproduce these master frames, or even necessarily enlist the associated cultural discourse in any consistent or structured manner (Fisher, 1997; Polletta, 2006; Polletta & Ho, 2006; Steinberg, 1998, 1999). For example, in her analysis of 1960s student sit-ins in America, protesting against racial segregation, Polletta (2006) observes that although the situation lent itself perfectly to an “injustice master frame” (Benford & Snow, 2000), “the injustices student writers describe were often vague” (2006, p. 39). However, the sit-ins mobilized thousands of people and without the direct use of a strategic master frame. Polletta goes on to suggest that in effect “movement scholars have devoted very little attention to the kinds of discursive processes that characterize fledgling movements, before formal organizations with carefully crafted recruitment pitches even exist” (2006, p. 35).

Polletta’s (2006) work suggests the need for a much stronger focus in social-movement research on the ongoing, interpretive processes of meaning construction over and

beyond any strategic “pitches” to outside audiences. Along with a few others (Oliver & Johnston, 2000), she observes that the preoccupation with strategic frames across contexts leads to an increasing disconnect from the ancestral tradition of frame analysis (Goffman, 1974). Oliver and Johnston conclude, in this respect, that “researchers building on Goffman’s work have developed an extensive body of empirical knowledge about how speech occurs, how cultural knowledge is used and how these interplay with interactional intentions and constraints; but this body of knowledge has not been utilized by social movement approaches to framing” (Oliver & Johnston, 2000, p. 3).

### ***Summary***

In reviewing these research streams at the meso level of analysis, we observe a rich body of work across a range of empirical contexts. This breadth very clearly demonstrates the versatility of the frame construct in studies of meaning construction at the organizational level. We also note a common tendency across these research streams to focus primarily on frames and their organizational consequences, ranging from the implementation of technology to the development of capabilities, and to the mobilization of activists. This tendency has a downside in that it leads to a focus on products and outcomes, rather than on processes of framing as meaning construction. Accordingly, it also blinds researchers to the active struggles and negotiations over meaning that take place before a frame might emerge and before the meaning of a collective group might contract around a frame (Kaplan, 2008; Davidson, 2006; Steinberg, 1998, 1999). Research on framing and frames at the meso, or organizational, level may thus benefit from further empirical research that more closely attends to framing as an ongoing *process* of meaning construction.

### **TAKEN-FOR-GRANTED REALITIES: FIELD-LEVEL FRAMES AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE**

At a macro level of analysis, the concept of frames and framing has been discussed in a variety of institutional contexts, including studies of the diffusion of new ideas and practices (e.g., Ansari, Fiss, & Zajac, 2010) and the creation and institutionalization of new markets (e.g., Weber, Heinze, & DeSoucey, 2008). The real strength of the framing construct for institutional theory is its dual character in capturing the

institutionalization of enduring meaning structures, and in providing a macro-structural underpinning for actors' motivations, cognitions, and discourse at a micro level. This dualism extends from foundational work (Burke, 1937; Bateson, 1955/1972; Goffman, 1974) that focused on how common cultural frames of reference are used by actors to define and label experiences in specific contexts. Such cultural frames allow them to impart meaning onto events and experiences and provide a cognitive "schema of interpretation" (Goffman, 1974, p. 21). As broader, culturally motivated templates for organizing experience, these frames in turn also provide the key ingredients for social and cultural change at a macro level in that they can be questioned, transplanted, and changed when actors apply them in context and collectively break with convention (Diehl & McFarland, 2010; Sewell, 1992).

### ***Frames and institutions***

Within structural institutional traditions (such as institutional logics), frames have, however, been traditionally accorded a derivative position. As feats of human sensemaking, they were largely seen to translate broader, societal-level logics (Beckert, 2010; Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012). Early definitions of institutional logics, for example, cast institutional logics as deeply ingrained societal beliefs and practices that are exogenous to actors and their framing (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Thornton & Ocasio, 1999). Yet, more recent work defines logics as "frames of reference that condition actors' choices for sensemaking, the vocabulary they use to motivate action and their sense of self and identity" (Thornton et al., 2012, p. 2).

In comparison, other more agentic cultural-cognitive traditions within neo-institutional theory consider frames as core to the very fabric of institutions (Beckert, 2010). As Scott (2003, p. 880) argues, framing is central to the cultural-cognitive aspect of institutions that "involves the creation of shared conceptions that constitute the nature of social reality and the frames through which meaning is made". Beckert (2010, p. 607) similarly notes that neo-institutional theory "emphasizes the role of cognitive frames and meaning structures as decisive for the explanation of economic outcomes by broadening the notion of institution; institutions are defined as inter-subjectively shared meanings and thereby become almost indistinguishable from cognitive frames".

In this vein, Borum (2004), and Weber and Glynn (2006), define the very “content” of institutions as taken-for-granted cognitive frames: latent meaning structures that organize social and cultural experience across a general area of activity (Goffman, 1974). These meaning structures order and stabilize power arrangements and interaction patterns (Lounsbury et al., 2003), and embody “structures of expectation” (Tannen, 1979, 1985) that prime individuals to elaborate on the typical roles and behavioural scripts associated with a particular frame (Borum, 2004; Weber & Glynn, 2006). As such, these taken-for-granted frames play an important role in determining the durability and regularity of meaning and experience typical of institutions, largely due to the way they structure expectations, and they cue role enactments and behaviours (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Douglas, 1986; Diehl & McFarland, 2010; Weber & Glynn, 2006).

In a well-known paper, Lounsbury et al. (2003) aim to span these different institutional traditions around frames and logics. They primarily criticize the notion of institutional logics as exogenous to actors and thus as “analytically removed from active struggles over meaning and resources” (Lounsbury et al., 2003, p. 72). In their paper, they coin the “intermediate concept” of the “field frame” “that has the durability and stickiness of an institutional logic, but akin to strategic framing, ... is endogenous to field actors and is subject to change and modification” (Lounsbury et al., 2003, p. 72). The utility of the field-frame construct is that it provides an approach to the paradox of “embedded agency” (Battilana, Leca, & Boxenbaum, 2009), which hinges on understanding human agency not as opposed to, but as a constituent of, macro-level structures (Sewell, 1992). As such, it allows institutional theorists to draw stronger and more direct relationships between, on the one hand, framing contests and struggles for meaning on the ground and, on the other, important macro-level social and economic outcomes, such as the emergence of new practices, organizational forms, and industries (Haveman & Rao, 1997; Rao et al., 2003; Navis & Glynn, 2010; Weber et al., 2008; Weber, Rao, & Thomas, 2009). One particular advantage is that the construct provides an analytical structure for understanding the process by which an initial set of framing practices evolves into a set of commonly held conventions (as a field frame), which in turn pave the way for new practices, organizational forms and market categories (Lounsbury et al., 2003; Rao, 1998; Weber et al., 2008; Jones, Maoret, Massa, & Svejenova, 2012). For example, Weber



et al. (2008) examined how advocates for grass-fed meat and dairy products enlisted, as part of their framing, broader cultural codes (e.g., “organic foods”) that defined and classified the new market, and distinguished it from industrial agriculture so as to motivate producers’ entry into the nascent market category.

This stream of research highlights the active struggles over meaning in which default frames are challenged and reconfigured, or transposed altogether with alternative framings, and where, as an outcome of such struggles, novel framings may potentially settle as field frames that form the basis for new practices, organizational forms, and market categories (Hirsch, 1986; Rao, 1998). Such field frames are temporary settlements, or agreed-upon conventions (Lounsbury et al., 2003), although occasionally they may evolve further into institutional frames: naturalized and taken-for-granted cognitive frames. In the following sections, we first focus on empirical studies of framing contests in institutional fields and the processes leading to broad settlements around field frames. We then discuss the processes and conditions associated with the transition of a field frame into a more widely held institutional frame.

### ***Framing struggles and settlements***

A vibrant line of contemporary institutional research focuses on how institutions and broader institutional fields are constructed, sustained, and altered in micro-political struggles over frames and their consequences (Armstrong, 2005; Powell & Colyvas, 2008). By an “institutional field”, we mean “those organizations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life: key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services or products” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 148). In these struggles, the framing of the one group is often rebutted or challenged by frames of other groups – a process referred to as “framing contests” (Ryan, 1991). Furthermore, these contests may intensify when fields go through critical periods of upheaval and change in which the previous frames and meanings are questioned, and in some cases are seen no longer to apply (Fligstein, 2001; Maguire, Hardy, & Lawrence, 2004; Meyer & Höllerer, 2010).

Meyer and Höllerer (2010), for example, demonstrate the intense framing contests over the introduction of shareholder value in Austria. They show that the framing of the

concept was filtered by the previous rules of the game (Fligstein, 2001), reflecting a continental European logic of stakeholder involvement in corporate governance. Their analysis also demonstrates how the former “fragile truce” (p. 1254) between corporate and political actors in the field became unsettled with the introduction of the concept. The field only resettled after a period of heated framing contests, when corporate actors – including corporations, analysts, and consultants – skilfully framed the concept as “only” a new management instrument, and used alternative labels that “claimed to serve shareholders and other stakeholders equally well – in the long run” (Meyer & Höllerer, 2010, p. 1258).

Such settlements, as in this example, may naturally result from repeated interactions (Ansari et al., 2013; Meyer & Höllerer, 2010) in that actors and groups in a field who are continually exposed to each other’s frame are more likely to alter their own interpretation to incorporate elements of the other frame (Donnellon & Gray, 1990; Pinkley & Northcraft, 1994). Yet, settlements may also stem from the strategic efforts of actors and movements who skillfully accommodate the frames of various actors and groups into their own framing, or present more abstract frames that span the frames of structurally disconnected actors and groups (Fligstein, 2001; Fligstein & McAdam, 2011). In so doing, these “cultural entrepreneurs” are able to form broader coalitions that may, in turn, marginalize alternative groups and framings, and trigger and enable a settlement around a new field frame (Ansari et al., 2013; Granqvist & Laurila, 2011; Maguire et al., 2004; Meyer & Höllerer, 2010). Fligstein (1997, 2001) conceptualizes this “social skill” of “cultural entrepreneurs” as follows:

“the basic problem for skilled social actors is to frame ‘stories’ that help induce cooperation from people in their group that appeal to their identity and interests, while at the same time using those same stories to frame actions against various opponents. This is the general problem of framing that Goffman identifies.” (Fligstein, 2001, p. 113).

The problem that Fligstein refers to here is one of mediating between various group interests and collective identities, and of bridging their views into a negotiated settlement between groups. To achieve this, he argues, skilled actors will seize opportunities, and draw on familiar language and cultural symbols in a particular setting, to “provide identities and cultural frames to motivate others to cooperate” (Fligstein, 2001, p. 106). They will, in other words, “take what the system gives” them

rather than attempting to “create entirely new systems of meaning” (Fligstein, 2001, p. 106). In a subsequently more elaborated account of the role of social skill in the negotiation of new settlements (Fligstein & McAdam, 2011, 2012), the concept is defined more broadly as a “highly developed capacity for reading people and environments”, the ability to “frame lines of action”, and the skill of persuading and “mobilizing people in the service of these action ‘frames’” (Fligstein & McAdam, 2011, p. 7).

In addition, the skill and ability to effect change in an institutional field may also depend on the specific discourse used by actors as part of their framing. To illustrate this point, Rao (1998) charted the historical emergence of consumer watchdog organizations as an organizational form, and the way in which the institutional template arose as a result of framing contests between different issue entrepreneurs and movements. The ascendant frame of impartial testing that provided the basis for the organizational form prevailed in large part because of the way in which the initial movement deftly aligned it with common societal discourses of science, objectivity, and professionalization.

In line with this example, further research may in particular benefit from studying discursive opportunity structures (McCammon, Sanders Muse, Newman, & Terrell, 2007; McCammon, 2013). Discursive opportunity structures refer to the opportunity provided by salient discourses that are alive and have momentum at a particular point in time. Koopman and Statham (1999), who introduced the construct, highlighted how using the right discourse at the right time may lead a frame to being seen as “sensible”, “realistic”, and “legitimate”. The notion of a discursive opportunity structure is also, in effect, the basis for the cultural resonance of a frame, which is often mentioned as a key mechanism for a frame to be effective in appealing to others and to mobilize them into action (Gamson & Lasch, 1983; Benford & Snow, 2000). Snow et al. (1986, p. 477) argue “that one of the key determinants of the differential success of framing efforts is variation in the degree of frame resonance, such that the higher the degree of frame resonance, the greater the probability that the framing effort will be relatively successful, all else being equal”.

Kellogg (2011) illustrates the principle of a discursive opportunity structure in her comparison between a successful case of change in the early 2000s and two earlier

failures in hospital reform in the 1970s and 1990s. She demonstrates that while the framing for the change at the behest of medical interns was possible from the 1970s, such arguments resonated and gained force only in the early 2000s, when the macro discourse in society had turned in that direction. Kellogg's (2011) analysis thus points to how the broader societal context beyond individuals and organizations can gradually (or even suddenly) present discursive opportunities (Fiss & Hirsch, 2005) – that is, opportunities for framing derived from salient discourses that are culturally significant at a particular point in time. The notion of a discursive opportunity structure offers a clear direction for further research, and one that potentially offsets the tautology that those who won framing contests simply employed the most resonant framings (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 626).

Furthermore, Armstrong (2005, p. 167) notes: "Whether or not a field 'locks in' may depend on whether actors and frames manage to come together before a particular window of opportunity closes." In terms of this "coming together" (Sgourev, 2013), we also think that future research may attend more systematically to the differences in political motivations and interests between individuals, groups, and organizations in an institutional field (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012, pp. 89–90; Rao & Kenney, 2008). Doing so may deepen our understanding of when and how the use of "compromise frames" (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012), "frame bridging" (Snow et al., 1986), or the construction of hybrid or "integrated frames" (Rao & Kenney, 2008) is possible, and the resultant frames are likely to stick over time. Rao and Kenney (2008) highlight, in this respect, the role of the power distribution between groups, and its effect on the possibility of blending the frames of various groups. They argue that the political interests of actors and groups matter in terms of how they exercise influence, and whether they are content with frames being blended into a "patchwork" (Rao & Kenney, 2008) or fully "integrated" into a hybrid or "compromise" frame (Fligstein & McAdam, 2011, 2012).

For those wishing to build on their work, it will be important here to move beyond the single cooperation–competition dichotomy that is present in most studies of framing struggles (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012; Rao & Kenney, 2008). That is, while actors and groups may, in some instances, opt for full-scale collaboration or competition, in many other instances they may be less assertive and simply try to shield their own framing

from external influence. Again, in other cases, actors may actively go out and mediate between the various political interests of other actors and groups, and “pool” sets of ideas and values into a compromise frame, as a basis for a possible new field settlement (Fligstein & McAdam, 2011, 2012). An important point here is that settlements may also emerge without a broadly supported compromise or consensus between actors and groups in a field. Ansari et al. (2013) demonstrate how the settlement of a “commons logic” regarding climate change involved political and corporate actors who did not adopt each other’s framing, or agree to a broadly consensual position. Instead, they settled on a minimal level of agreement between them and on a joint commitment to the need for action. In the words of Ansari et al. (2013), “The logics held by different actors need not be coincident, but they have to adjust their frames sufficiently to tip the scales toward the emergence of field frames that can eventually lead to the construction of a hybrid commons logic” (Ansari et al., 2013, p. 1032). The implication, we believe, for further research is to account for differences in motivations and political interests between actors and groups, as doing so seems important for explaining framing struggles and emerging settlements at the level of an institutional field.

### ***Framing, frames, and institutional change***

From a bottom-up, micro perspective on framing and institutional change, new frames – or rather framings – are first of all constructed and negotiated in interactions between actors in an institutional field (Lounsbury et al., 2003). Further interaction among them may then lead to the confirmation and reinforcement of shared interpretive schemas (Kellogg, 2009; Strang & Meyer, 1993). When this happens, the proposed interpretive frame extends beyond the individual and becomes part of the built up “common ground” between collectives of actors in an institutional field (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 75; Loewenstein, Ocasio, & Jones, 2012; Thornton et al., 2012). Common ground, or mutual knowledge, is the set of presuppositions that actors, as a result of their ongoing sensemaking and interaction with others, take to be true – and believe their partners also take to be true (Clark, 1996; Loewenstein et al., 2012).

This process of building up common ground assumes that when meaning is locally negotiated, a dominant representation, or frame, may propagate among a population of interacting agents until an entire community within an institutional field shares a

vocabulary and interpretive frame (Fay, Garrod & Roberts, 2008). When such a vocabulary and frame are widespread, the macro-level conventions at a communal level intersect with local contexts of interaction (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Goffman, 1974), so that pairs or groups of actors refer in their interactions to a shared frame that is salient and recurrent (Garrod & Doherty, 1994). It is important to stress that the process of building up common ground is an emergent process, and not a product of design. It is driven by, and results from, local communication processes in which interacting actors are themselves aware of the conventional status of existing frames and associated vocabularies. Actors may also resist a particular reframing or argue for alternative framings, effectively then undermining the establishment of common ground (Beckert, 2010).

Within this overall process, a provisional framing in a local setting evolves first into a common convention for a larger set of actors and groups – a “field frame” – and possibly further on into an “institutional frame” that is objectified and taken for granted across an institutional field (Douglas, 1986; Kahl & Bingham, 2013; Kennedy, 2008; Navis & Glynn, 2010). Powell and Colyvas (2008, p. 294) likened this overall process to a career-of-metaphor trajectory (cf. Bowdle & Gentner, 2005), where novel framings provide analogical or metaphorical templates, or interpretive devices, for sharing and organizing experiences. While these templates or devices are initially conscious, they may – over time and through repeated usage – evolve into naturalized, taken-for-granted institutional frames that “render some features of social life ‘objective’ but deflect attention to other aspects”. As such, they suggest that, following this logic, “one may regard institutionalization as making metaphor dead” (Powell & Colyvas, 2008, p. 294).

In line with Powell and Colyvas (2008), when a frame is first produced or encountered by actors in a particular context, both the words and the target context to which they are applied, as well as the original source of these terms, refer to specific concepts from different cultural domains. For example, when chefs, as the target, are framed as “creators” rather than “translators” of a cuisine (Rao et al., 2003), such a framing draws on cultural images of artistic creativity. The framing is then interpreted by aligning the target and source representations, and by importing further properties and inferences

from the source to the target. Considering chefs as “creators”, for example, was completed with further implications regarding the invention of new dishes and the improvisation with ingredients. A particular outcome of such an alignment is that the common relational structure that forms the interpretation will increase in salience relative to non-aligned or even contrasting aspects of the domains of cooking and creativity (Bowdle & Gentner, 2005). In the case of French chefs, this interpretation involved the relational structure that cast chefs in the role of creators who actively work with combinations of ingredients, and invent new dishes and menus.

The salience of such emerging interpretations in turn tightens the contiguous causal or relational links between parts of the frame, which can furthermore be reinforced through the repeated mention of the framing by actors and interest groups (Etzion & Ferraro, 2010; Rao et al., 2003). In fact, when the source terminology around creativity is repeatedly aligned with the targeted context of French cuisine, the highlighted relational structure may become conventionally associated with the target as an abstracted metaphorical category. The result of this process is that the abstracted category may become “cognitively embedded” as a schema of interpretation (Kahl & Bingham, 2013; Kennedy, 2008). In turn, this would mean that, for example, chefs would be commonly considered as an exemplar of the category of creative agents.

This process of conventionalization is characteristic, we argue, of the establishment of a field frame. When they first emerge, field frames are often still elaborated by actors as active metaphorical comparisons where they align the target context with the source domain and then interpret what it means, for example, for a chef to be a creator. Yet, once they are conventionalized, such frames become cognitively embedded as automatic categorizations; actors simply include the target context into the overarching abstract metaphoric, or analogical, category (Glucksberg, McGlone, & Manfredi, 1997). In the latter scenario, chefs are simply seen *as* creators; however, this categorization route requires a relatively strong degree of conventionalization, with the target context now automatically considered as a prototypical instance of the abstracted metaphorical category of “creative agents” (Glucksberg et al., 1997; Glucksberg, 2008; Gentner et al., 2001). The trajectory of frames may also not end here, as the evolution may continue until the metaphorical category has become fully naturalized, is considered as a taken-

for-granted or “given” institutional frame, and loses its connection with the original source domain in the process (Kennedy, 2008; Suchman, 1995; Zucker, 1983). A fully institutionalized frame is no longer actively recognized or processed as a metaphor. In short, the move from novel to conventional field frames will be accomplished via the abstraction and conventionalization of metaphorical categories. The subsequent move from field frames to institutional frames requires a wide diffusion across an institutional field and repeated instantiations of a frame, so that it becomes naturalized, and so that actors and groups in the field “forget” that it was originally a metaphor. This kind of “forgetting” and the subsequent reification of the frame as a category may take a significant period of the frame being applied, as was the case for French chefs, restaurant critics and diners (Rao et al., 2003).

The account of this overall process provides, we think, a number of useful insights for further research. First, it spells out in greater detail how field frames emerge, become established, and lead to shifts in understanding. Second, it highlights the juncture between a conventional field frame and an institutional frame, where the turn to institutionalization hinges on its “naturalization” and taken-for-grantedness (Douglas, 1986; Beckert, 2010). The third insight is that over time, and as a result of framing, new categories of understanding might emerge and become institutionalized (cf. Douglas, 1986). The latter point hints at the potential for future research to draw stronger connections and closer linkages between the at-present largely separate research streams on frames and categories in institutional theory (Perretti, Negro, & Lomi, 2008; Navis & Glynn, 2010).

### ***Summary***

Framing and frames form an important foundation of neo-institutional theory (Scott, 2003), even if the interest in related constructs such as categories and logics has had the upper hand in recent years. For neo-institutional theory, the chief advantage is that frames present one of the few constructs that coherently connect macro cognitive schemas to local contexts of discursive interaction. In some senses, the construct collapses a rough distinction between micro and macro levels by seeing frames as virtual structures of meaning, present in day-to-day interactions, but not separate from such local contexts. “The difference, then, is between frames operating as the



background structure of shared reality on the one hand and as tools for strategic and creative behaviour on the other” (Diehl & McFarland, 2010, p. 1719).

In this section of the paper, we have reviewed the existing work on framing, field frames and institutional frames, and noted the crucial differences between these constructs. We have also used this review as a backdrop for broader theoretical reflections that coherently connect these constructs, systematize past research, and suggest a number of directions for further research.

## **DISCUSSION**

Framing and frames are key constructs in many areas of management and organizational research, ranging from research on individual cognition on the one hand to studies of broad societal and institutional changes on the other. In the previous sections of the paper, we have reviewed these various research traditions, spanning different levels of analysis. While varied, these research traditions share common ground in their intellectual lineage and in their common commitment to the premise that “human knowledge appears to be frames all the way down” (Barsalou & Hale, 1993, p. 131). At the same time, the vast influence of the framing construct across the management and organizational literature (and indeed across the social sciences) has arguably also come at a price. It has led to a “fractured paradigm” (Entman, 1993), where researchers have often highlighted cognition, and thus frames, as separate from discourse and action, or framing, or have collapsed both into the same construct. In other words, the spread of the construct across the management and organizational literature, as indeed elsewhere, has caused difficulties and problems around its clarity – and has often resulted in a singular and narrow focus at a particular level of analysis.

### ***Frame analysis: linking framing, interactive frames, and institutional frames***

However, the orientation of researchers and research traditions at one particular level of analysis may prevent them from understanding processes of framing more comprehensively, and from taking into account the mutual and reciprocal influences between language, cognition and culture. By highlighting these linkages, we aim to make the case for an enlarged conceptualization of framing that synthesizes the concept (Entman, 1993) and also offers a multi-level agenda for further research.

The cognitive linguist Fillmore (1975, 1982) offered such an integrated account of framing when he defined frames as structured semantic representations that are invoked by words and made salient in a context of speech. Such frames, he argued, are rooted in motivating background cultural knowledge and personal experience, which primes how such words are used in context (as framing) and prompt certain expectations in the minds of individuals (cf. Weber & Glynn, 2006). Fillmore argued that “nobody can really understand the meanings of the words in that domain who does not understand the social institutions or the structures of experience which they presuppose” (Fillmore 1982, p. 31). This also implies that the use of words, as acts of framing in context, is constrained and embedded in a broader institutional setting – an insight that most studies at the level of cognition have not addressed head on, despite well-known empirical cases of cognitive failure where the salience of institutional frames overruled deliberate thought (e.g., Weick, 1993; Benner & Tripsas, 2012). On the other hand, and despite such constraints, actors do have the ability, as creative agents, not only to reinforce such institutional background as part of their framing but also to reassemble words and thoughts to actively invoke a different type of frame and understanding (Goffman, 1974; Diehl & McFarland, 2010). Diehl and McFarland (2010) conceptualize this as a “lamination” on the institutional frame, and Weber and Glynn (2006) refer to the process as “editing” – to highlight how such a reframing is often grounded in, and made possible by, the prevailing institutional frame, akin to how creative writing builds on established genres and styles.

These metaphors provide rich imagery for the mutual and reciprocal directions of influence. Yet, they leave ample space for more detailed and systematic empirical examinations of when and how actors deviate from institutionalized frames, and of how their individual reasoning in context builds on but extends or challenges such frames. A recent example in this direction is a study of framing and account-giving by professional engineers and geoscientists working for large oil corporations and contractors in Alberta in Canada (Lefsrud & Meyer, 2012). This group of professionals framed and justified their employment and work by questioning details of the institutionalized frame of global warming as human-made, and by challenging the institution of science in general. Their counter-framing is at the same time also coherently connected to, and motivated by, personal biographical details and narratives on their own expertise and

worldview. Both sources of influence thus come together in what Lefsrud and Meyer (2012) refer to as “defensive institutional work”. Further research could follow this example and detail the sources of influence on framing in context, and specifically the openings and opportunities for alternative frames that are provided by personal biography, details of the institutional frame, or both (Creed et al., 2010).

A further set of linkages involves the relationship between an individual’s framing in context and interactively established group or collective action frames. In *Frame Analysis*, Goffman’s (1974) primary focus is on the experience of interaction and the shared frames that are constructed and agreed upon, and that make it inter-subjectively meaningful and understandable (1974, p. 127). Tannen (1985) refers to these types of socially constructed frames as “interactive frames”. In her study of paediatric examinations and consultations, she shows how such frames are not only constructed in interaction, but also reflect principles of interaction that are associated with the social identities of the participants. One of the paediatricians in this study talks fluently to her peers about the medical condition of a child, but struggles in her language (with frequent hesitations and circumlocutions) when she decides to bridge between “examination”, “consultation”, and “mother” frames in an attempt to reassure the mother. In comparison, there is very little similar research within the management and organizational literature that explores detailed social interactions of this kind, and how – and under what conditions – it leads to the establishment of joint interactive frames. Yet, without such detailed analysis at the level of interaction, management research risks tautology in focusing on abstract frames or abstracted qualities, such as the discursive skills or abilities of actors (which already presuppose an effect), rather than the interaction itself (Benford & Snow, 2000). There is also the additional issue that a closer focus on social interactions – and, specifically, on the discursive alignment between interactants – provides a base for more fine-grained conceptualizations of frame-alignment processes (Brummans et al., 2008; Dewulf & Bouwen, 2012) than the more abstract concepts of frame-bridging (Snow et al., 1986) and the notion of a compromise-frame (Fligstein & McAdam, 2011, 2012).

A final set of connections involves the link between interactive frames and field frames. It is generally assumed that field frames emerge on the back of repeated interactions

and negotiations over alternative framings (Ansari et al., 2013; Granqvist & Laurila, 2011; Maguire et al., 2004; Meyer & Höllerer, 2010). Prior research has also emphasized how the establishment of common ground (Loewenstein et al., 2012), or the settlement of joint meaning, is crucial for a new field frame to emerge and to form the basis for new practices, organizational forms, and markets (e.g., Rao, 1998, Lounsbury et al., 2003; Weber et al., 2008). Yet, surprisingly, very little research exists on how common ground is established in and through repeated interactions, with most research focusing simply on the institutional consequences of its emergence (Barley, 2008; Schneiberg & Clemens, 2006). Further research might therefore heedfully use the distinction between two basic kinds of common ground – personal and communal common ground (Clark, 1996) – which map onto the concepts of interactive and field frames. Personal common ground is built up by interacting actors in the course of communication or joint activity. When actors in an interaction need to make sense anew or need to bridge understanding, they have to build up personal common ground in a step-by-step manner, akin to interactive frames (Barley, 1986; Bechky, 2003). The conventions created as part of personal common ground during small-scale interactions (e.g., between pairs of actors, or between actors within small movements or groups) can in turn spread from one interaction to the next, leading to the emergence of cultural conventions in the form of field frames, or communal common ground, across actors in an institutional field (Garrod & Doherty, 1994; Fay et al., 2008).

Another area for further research that we wish to highlight involves the experiential grounding of frames in actual practices. This interconnection is important not only to better understanding the initiation, diffusion, and institutionalization of institutional change (Smets, Morris, & Greenwood, 2012), but also to offsetting an otherwise more narrow view of framing as a largely symbolic and cognitive process of meaning-making that stands apart from the practices and immediate experiences of individuals and groups. Yet, Goffman (1974) has already highlighted that for a frame to be considered as “natural” and taken for granted, it has to be anchored in the structures of individuals’ experience. Benford and Snow (2000) also argued that the appeal and resonance of frames for individuals derives in part from their being able to make connections to their own experience. The reason for this is that the linkage with practices “grounds” the otherwise symbolic and cognitive representation, and gives it credibility, which leads to

a coherent experience (Goffman, 1974). The grounding of a frame in experience occurs more specifically when frames align with specific behaviours or practices, which then anchor, in an experiential sense, the symbolic frame (Goffman, 1974; Glaser, Fiss, & Kennedy, 2011; Rao et al., 2003; Strang & Meyer, 1993).

Reay et al. (2013) illustrate the importance of such grounding in the diffusion and institutionalization of new practices in organizations. The implementation of practices depended not only on the frames that were used to describe the change, but also on individuals enacting and habitually performing such practices in line with the frame-based logic; the result was that their experiences of those practices and the overall frame were brought into alignment. In contrast, where the context of practice does not closely align with a frame, there is likely to be a lack of grounding, which arguably makes it more difficult for actors to understand and accept a particular framing and its implications. Such a challenge to the grounding of a frame may stem from commitments to existing practices and the structures of experience that these presuppose, so that actors are actively resisting the proposed framing and new practices (Hallett, 2010). It may also result from actors' frame-based experiences and expectations of practices not being met (Kahl & Bingham, 2013). Glaser et al. (2011), for example, report how the online advertising industry used financial-market analogies as frames to argue the case for new advertising services, and then in turn adapted patterns of activity so that these aligned better with the analogy-based frames.

### ***Expanding the methodological toolkit in frame analysis***

These opportunities for further research also come with a number of methodological implications. We will highlight what we consider to be the most prominent methodological issues, and offer a number of method suggestions for further research.

Before we make these suggestions, it is first of all important to highlight that the most common method of frame analysis involves thematic content analysis focused on the occurrence and co-occurrence of certain keywords or expressions in discourse produced by actors (e.g., Creed et al., 2002; Fiss & Hirsch, 2005; Rao, 1998). The general consequence of using this method has been that frame analyses have been focused less on the process of meaning construction “up close” (Davidson, 2006; Polletta, 2006; Steinberg, 1999) and more on the signifiers that compose a frame – the words, slogans,

catch phrases, and metaphors in a text that are considered as the direct vehicles of meaning, and as emblematic of underlying beliefs and understandings across time and space (Steinberg, 1998, 1999). Gamson and Lasch (1983, p. 399) and Creed et al. (2002) illustrate this focus with their suggestion of using a “signature matrix” for sorting the specific words, as idea elements, found in texts so as to distinguish the different unifying structures, or cognitive frames, that are presupposed to hold them together.

Schneiberg and Clemens (2006, p. 211) highlight a similar methodological tendency among neo-institutional researchers where the “common measurement strategy” is “to use actors’ discursive output as topics for analysis, that is, as documentation of cognitive frames, principles, or institutional logics”. One key challenge that they highlight is that “analysts must often extract models or infer meanings insofar as actors frequently reveal their frames, habits of mind, or assumptions only indirectly, through patterns of emphasis, by using but not articulating principles and classification schemes, or by leaving arguments unmade and alternatives unconsidered”. In particular, their concern involves the inferential shortcomings associated with keyword analyses of public discourse aimed at identifying “typical” frames, where in fact actors may not “‘mean what they say’ in the sense that discursive output does not flow directly from cognition” (Schneiberg & Clemens, 2006, p. 211).

In this context, one key methodological recommendation is to move closer to the action at a micro level, and to study the ongoing and interpretive processes of framing and meaning construction across actors and across time. Kaplan (2008) illustrates the potential of this methodological tactic by introducing micro-level ethnographic methods and symbolic interactionist analyses into strategy in order to revive and extend the otherwise “stale” analyses of strategic frames that say very little about how those frames were constructed in the first place. A similar methodological turn is evident in the symbolic interactionist re-imagining of macro institutional theory around the notion of “inhabited institutions” (Barley, 2008; Hallett, 2010; Bechky, 2011). In this emerging body of work, frame analysis is combined with ethnographic methods and interaction analysis to study local micro-processes of meaning construction as a way of deciphering how actors incorporate and make use of various institutional logics or broader societal discourses.

The advantage of these methods is that that they do not come with an analytical commitment to static, condensed packages of symbols and frames that are assumed to hold true across actors and across time. Instead, the methods provide a base for exploring how the contours of a frame, or rather a set of framings, are actually constructed and negotiated in context by actors while exchanging words or through other forms of symbolic interactions. These methods, in other words, provide a way around the reification of frames in past research (Benford, 1997; Kaplan, 2008; Davidson, 2006); they allow researchers to work around the issue that frame-based interpretations may not be directly “present” in a text or a set of signifiers (Bateson, 1955/1972), and have to be systematically inferred and intuited from the context studied. The guiding principle here is that when researchers use methods through which they immerse themselves in a context, they are better able to infer from words and expressions, as well as from other observations (of, say, imagery or symbolic gestures) (Meyer, Höllerer, Jancsary, & Van Leeuwen, 2013), the frames that are in play. This is similar to how, in general, qualitative and ethnographic researchers make inferences about the processes of meaning construction on the basis of an extended engagement in the field.

Methods associated with symbolic interactionism – such as conversation analysis, ethnomethodology, and interaction analysis – also allow researchers to focus on the actual processes and dynamics of framing and meaning construction in real time (Cornelissen, Mantere, & Vaara, 2014; Kaplan, 2008; Davidson, 2006). To give one example, Cornelissen et al. (2014) use interaction analysis to analyse the communication between police officers who were involved in a failed anti-terrorist operation, and which ultimately led them to shoot an innocent civilian. They demonstrate that natural expressions, seemingly innocuous but ultimately significant, such as the civilian being “worth a second look” and with “a good possible likeness” to the target of the operation, framed him as someone that “had to be stopped”. While the officers in the operation did not agree on a single framing of the civilian, they did come to share the assumptive ground that he had to be stopped. Goffman (1981) referred to such an alignment between frames in interaction as “footing”, which describes how, at the same time as participants frame events, they discursively and cognitively negotiate the common basis between such frames; this basis provides “an interpretive ‘footing’

that aligns schemas that participants to the interaction bring with them” (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 614; Goffman, 1974, 1981; Tannen, 1985). Methods such as interaction analysis have, as in this example, the analytical advantage that they help researchers draw out the dynamics of framing (Ansari et al., 2013), such as the notion of footing, rather than obliging them to commit themselves to the assumption that frames exist in discourse as separate and coherently bounded symbols or thoughts.

Besides a zooming-in on micro contexts of framing, we also believe that further frame analysis at a macro level can benefit from recent methodological advances that move beyond thematic content analysis. Traditional frame analyses, as mentioned, draw heavily on methods of thematic content analysis where symbolic and cognitive frames are identified and analysed based on a lexicon of coded keywords and catchphrases (Pennebaker, Francis, & Booth, 2001; Krippendorff, 2012). Researchers typically go through an iterative process of identifying such keywords and catchphrases, reading samples of discourse and scanning yet further samples to develop an increasingly refined lexicon of codes (Fiss & Hirsch, 2005; Weber, 2005). In this way, a number of clustered words and phrases are identified that thematically highlight a particular cognitive frame, or framing. Then based on the results of the content analysis, frames can be compared and positioned vis-à-vis each other based on their differences in emphasis, the mention of certain concepts, or other relevant overarching dimensions. Some studies reduce frames to single measures of similarity to, or difference from, one another; this allows for further analysis – such as multi-dimensional scaling, cluster analysis, or correspondence analysis (Meyer & Höllerer, 2010; Weber, 2005; Weber, Patel, & Heinze, 2013) – that map frames and actors’ relative positions. Yet, in virtually all frame-based content analyses, the focus has been squarely on keywords, and on clusters or associations between such keywords, at the level of a sentence or an entire text.

Very little use has been made to date of semantic-network analyses that focus instead on the grammatical or associational relationships between words and underlying concepts (Carley & Kaufer, 1993). This is conceptually and methodologically perhaps somewhat surprising, given that frames are typically conceptualized as idealized scenarios or scripts that link roles and situations with actions and outcomes (e.g.,



Fillmore, 1975; Goffman, 1974). Within linguistics, it is also increasingly recognized that language itself has a frame-like structure as a natural reflection of the ways in which we frame knowledge (Hudson, 1984). Frames are, for example, encoded in basic argument constructions that include a subject and an operative verb (Fillmore, 1982; Goldberg, 1995; see also Cornelissen & Clarke, 2010) – and, in certain grammatical constructions, with conjunctions (e.g., “and” and “unless”) and adverbs (e.g., “additionally”) that distinguish or connect concepts, and qualify their relationship (Fillmore, 1975; see also Weber et al., 2013).

Semantic-network analysis has the potential to account for such frame constructions in language. Yet, such analyses have been absent from management research, largely because of the relative ease of word and co-occurrence counts in computer-aided content analyses (Roberts, 1989). The coding of semantic networks is, in comparison, more difficult and time-consuming, due to the variety and complexity of natural language use in context. However, considerable progress has been made in corpus and computational linguistics, with the development of resources (such as FrameNet) and techniques for the semantic-network analysis of frames. For example, corpus-linguistic software packages such as WordSmith provide management and organizational researchers with a tool to manually code the semantic relationships and contents of words in a sentence, to detect clusters and patterns in word usage, and to calculate how often the sequence or combination of words occurs across a text. In this way, researchers can identify not only the broader frames that are constructed in and through language, but also the degree of *emphasis* placed on that frame in the context of the wider text (cf. Weber et al., 2013). Techniques for more automated forms of semantic-network analysis have also been developed in computational linguistics. Based on work on natural language processing, linguists have, for example, developed automatic syntactic parsers that assign words in expressions and sentences to grammatical categories, with a great degree of accuracy (Manning & Schütze, 1999). These parsing tools can be used as part of computer-aided content analyses; they have, for example, started to be used in content analyses of frames in political speech and media reporting (Van Atteveldt, Kleinnijenhuis, & Ruigrok et al., 2008). The potential of these methods and techniques is that they might give a fuller picture of how frames are constructed in language, compared to thematic content analyses alone. As such, they

might help in getting us a bit “closer” to discourse (Schneiberg & Clemens, 2006) in frame analysis.

### **Concluding comments**

Framing and frames form an important cornerstone of many areas of management and organizational research – even if, at times, the interest in related constructs (such as schemas or categories) has seemingly had the upper hand. In one sense, our paper has been an attempt to take stock of the current literature while further advancing and invigorating research into the role of framing across the micro, meso and macro levels of analysis in management and organization studies. In part, this motivation has been driven by a recognition of the analytical strength and versatility of the construct, as evidenced by the various research streams that it has spawned within management, and indeed across the social sciences. At the same time, this vast influence across areas of research has perhaps also come at a price. It has led to a “fractured paradigm” (Entman, 1993), with researchers typically adopting a singular and more narrow focus on the construct at a particular level of analysis.

A general consequence of bracketing the broader construct in this way is that it has deflected attention away from processes of framing as meaning construction to a focus on frames as stable symbols or thoughts, with many studies setting out to “name” frames and explore how they prime certain thoughts and behaviours (e.g., Benford, 1997; Schneiberg & Clemens, 2006). The focus, in other words, is on the effects of cognitive frames, once these are established, in structuring expectations and cueing behavioural responses. This is useful for explaining how default frames may impinge on actors, and may script their behaviour, but does not account for how such frames of reference emerge in the first place. The bracketing of the construct may thus have blinded researchers to the active struggles and negotiations over meaning that take place before a frame might emerge, and before the meaning of an organized group or indeed an entire institutional field might contract around a frame.

We point in the paper to specific research opportunities and methods that enable further research to progress beyond “naming frames”, and explore framing as dynamic processes of meaning construction within and across groups and organizations. To a large extent, these opportunities will also involve research designs and methods that

make stronger connections across levels of analysis, and consider the reciprocal influence between language, cognition, and culture. The methods that we have highlighted, ranging from interaction analysis to semantic-network analysis, are adept at this and allow for richer and more processual analyses of framing. Indeed, we hope that these methods will benefit researchers in realizing the highlighted opportunities and in advancing research on framing across a variety of organizational and institutional contexts.

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**Table 1: Frame constructs by levels of analysis**

<b>Construct</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Typical context of application</b>	<b>Illustrative references</b>
<i>Micro level</i>			
Cognitive frame	A knowledge structure that directs and guides information processing	A generic feature of cognition that applies to most (if not all) organizational contexts	Benner & Tripsas (2012); Walsh (1995); Weick (1995)
Frame of reference	a. A knowledge structure that directs and guides information processing  b. A baseline expectation or reference point that provides a basis for social judgments and decision-making	a. A generic feature of cognition that applies to most (if not all) organizational contexts  b. Specific to scenarios of decision-making and social judgments	a. March & Simon (1958); Starbuck (1983)  b. George et al. (2006); Hennis & Zelner (2005)
Framing effects	Effects of priming cognitive and behavioural responses based on the presentation and description of decision-making scenarios	Scenarios of decision-making and social judgments	Hodgkinson et al. (1999); Seo et al. (2010); Weber & Mayer (2011)
<i>Meso level</i>			
Strategic frame	A jointly constructed cognitive representation of firms in an industry, including assumptions of capabilities and bases of competition	Scenarios of strategic decision-making, often relating to the firm's capabilities	Nadkarni & Narayanan (2007); Gilbert (2006); Kaplan (2008)
Strategic framing	The use of rhetorical devices in communication to mobilize support and minimize resistance to a change	Episodes of strategic and organizational change, varying in scope and magnitude	Fiss & Zajac (2006); Kellogg (2009); Mantere et al. (2012)
Technological frame	A collectively constructed set of assumptions, knowledge and expectations regarding a technology and its uses and applications in organizations	Specific to the introduction, adoption and subsequent implementation of technology	Orlikowski & Gash (1994); Davidson (2002); Kaplan & Tripsas (2008)
Collective action frame	A jointly constructed group account of an injustice or common grievance that motivates and proposes a line of political action	Specific to contexts of political activism and social movements (but also analogously applied in organizational settings)	Benford & Snow (2000); Polletta & Kai Ho (2006); Steinberg (1998)

<i>Macro level</i>			
Field frame	A jointly constructed cultural template within an institutional field that, when it settles, provides the basis for socio-economic change	Integral part of cultural-cognitive analyses of institutional fields, and social and economic change	Lounsbury et al. (2003); Ansari et al. (2013)
Institutional frame	A naturalized and taken-for-granted cognitive frame that structures expectations and scripts behaviours in an institutional field	Integral part of cultural-cognitive analyses of institutional fields, and social and economic change	Borum (2004); Weber & Glynn (2006); Beckert (2010)
Frame contests/frame alignment	The assimilation or contrasting of cognitive frames between actors and movements within an institutional field	Specific to cultural-cognitive analyses of the negotiation and possible settlement of field-level frames	Benford & Snow (2000); Fligstein & McAdam (2012); Meyer & Höllerer (2010)