New Directions for the Concept of the Institutional Script

Abstract: The concept of the script has been a constant companion of institutional thinking of organization. This nano-paper is devoted to unpack aspects that have often remained implicit, particularly the questions of how to define scripts and how scripts relate to institutions. To address these questions, the paper reviews both classical and more recent work in the field of organizational institutionalism regarding the definitions and uses of the concept of the script. This is followed by a discussion of commonalities and differences among the identified script concepts, particularly a more cognitive understanding common in the sociology of knowledge and a more behavioral understanding rooted in interactionist sociology. The paper goes beyond the enduring controversy of how consciously actors perform scripts by considering the prototypical and heuristic character of the script, as well as the question of how scripts are embodied and circulated. In the concluding remarks, we offer new directions for the deployment of the concept of the script in the field of organizational institutionalism, highlighting its potential as a device for the development of an empirical understanding of institutional persistence and change.

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